

DEVELOPMENT OF VOCATIONAL TRAINING SYSTEMS FOR PATIENTS WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY IN POLAND

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SUMMARY

Background: The problem of employment of people with intellectual disabilities is present in many countries. The literature on this topic draws attention to the fact that the improvement of the situation in this area is conditioned by changes in government policies, practices of employers and adequate preparation to undertake professional duties by persons with intellectual disabilities.

Objective: The objective of this review was to explore the changes in vocational rehabilitation forms in Poland.

Results: As one of the ways to solve this problem since 1991 in Poland the so called Workshops of Vocational Therapy have been created. According to the regulations the Workshops were designed for adults with intellectual disabilities, aged over 16 years with a total incapacity of gaining an employment, for which occupational therapy was a form of social rehabilitation. The further step in this process was the establishment of Vocational Activation Centers, with which high hopes were associated. They were expected to be an intermediate link in the creation of career paths from rehabilitation forms ultimately to open labor market. In practice it turned out that the creation of these Centers in Poland has been too slow.

Conclusions: This raised the necessity to change the attitude from the concept of matching the participant to work and to the new environment, which frequently ends as a trauma, to the concept of matching jobs to people. New initiatives and new rehabilitation programs are developed based on this attitude.

Key words: intellectual disability - vocational rehabilitation - employment

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INTRODUCTION

The problem of employment of people with intellectual disabilities affects many countries. In the publications on this topic attention is drawn to the fact that improvements in this area are conditioned by changes in government policies, practices, attitudes of employers and adequate preparation to undertake professional duties by persons with intellectual disabilities (Lysaght 2012). Other factors important for solving this problem are: cooperation with families, creation of suitable transition programs for school leavers, and enabling people with disabilities to find directions for future jobs (Foley 2012). Attention is also paid to the varying situations encountered in the access to employment by people with disabilities living in rural and urban areas (Nicholson 2013). Some authors emphasize the role of the arts, for example. cinematographic works in popularizing the issue of independence and coping at work by people with intellectual disabilities (Fraser 2011). Also examples of specific people, who thanks to family and social support reached a high level of independence in functioning in family, social groups, as well as at work, are presented (Harr 2011). In the literature on the discussed topic the need to transition from an employment model in protected conditions to integrating people with disabilities into companies operating in the open labor market is emphasised (Rogan 2011).

In the present analysis we took advantage of the knowledge and experience gained during 20 years of working with people with moderate and severe intellectual disabilities in the Occupational Therapy Workshops of the Polish Association for Persons with Mental Handicap, Branch in Bytom.

Definition and prevalence of intellectual disability

Defining the term of mental retardation, or presently intellectual disability, always created and continues to create, enormous difficulties to scholars, because it is a very complex phenomenon due to the diversity of causes underlying it, multiple symptoms, and also it is difficult to predict its forecast. Mental retardation is not a disease entity but a group of disorders of varying etiology, clinical presentation and course. As mentioned above, a new, often interchangeably used term is "intellectual disability". The need to introduce new terminology is justified in the definition of disability adopted the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CASSIN 2006), and an attempt was made to move away from the terms, which were discriminatory and stigmatizing to people with disabilities. According to the Article 1 of the Convention "Persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory

impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others" (UN General Assembly 2006). Poland adopted and continues to apply the definition and degrees of "mental retardation" formulated by the World Health Organization in the "International Classification of Diseases", Tenth Edition (WHO 1992), hereinafter referred to as (ICD - 10), as well as by the American Psychiatric Association in the "Manual of Diagnosis and Statistics" Fourth Edition (APA 1994), hereinafter referred to as DSM - IV. According to DSM-IV, intellectual disability is referred to as: "Significantly subaverage intellectual functioning: an IQ of approximately 70 or below on an individually administered IQ test with onset before age 18 years and concurrent deficits or impairments in adaptive functioning". The newest edition of the APA Classification, DSM-5 gives a new definition: " Intellectual disability is a disorder with onset during the developmental period that include both intellectual and adaptive functioning deficits in conceptual, social and practical domains (APA 2014). Changes in the description of intellectual disability are expected also in the new version of the WHO Classification - ICD-11 (Bucci 2014).

Classification and prevalence of intellectual disability

According to the Report on Disability published by the World Health Organization in 2011, it is estimated that the worldwide number of people with all types of disabilities stands at around 1 billion or about 15.6% of the total population, of which 2.2% has serious difficulties in functioning (WHO 2011). In Poland, there is no precise data on the number of people with mental retardation. According to data from 2009 (GUS 2011), the number of persons with disabilities was 5.1 million, which represents 16% of the population aged 15 years and older. It is estimated that the percentage of the persons, who are intellectually disabled is: mild impairment 80%, moderate 12%, deep 7% profound 1% of cases (APA 1994).

People with intellectual disabilities in terms of their needs and capabilities of the functioning of the labour market

It is well known that work in everyone's life, including the disabled persons, is an especially appreciated value. It sets one's place in social hierarchy, it gives recognition and prestige in the case of people with disabilities, it gives self-fulfillment in the sense of independence and equal opportunities. Jobs can discover hidden talents and skills of these people, it compensates for limitations resulting from the disability, developing independent living skills and improving its quality, increases self-esteem, independence and creates the feeling of being needed.

Social determinants and the complex process of moving people with intellectual disabilities from isolation and inactivity to a dignified life, with the right of access to work

In the system prior to the regime change in our country, mental pathology was too embarrassing for the governments, which is why they pushed it to the margins of social life. People with intellectual disabilities were devoid of any form of life activity, acting in a social group, burdened with the highest number of myths and stereotypes, exposed to discrimination and stigmatization. The process of social change in the approach to the phenomenon of disability, both worldwide and in our circle of civilization was slow and it was made possible thanks to the decisions by the Assembly of the United Nations following major initiatives relating to human rights.

The document, which first addressed the issue of people with disabilities was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1971. It was the Declaration of the Rights of Mentally Retarded Persons (UN General Assembly 1971). Another documents was adopted in 1975 - the Declaration on the Rights of Disabled Persons (UN General Assembly 1975). An extremely important initiative of great importance for the whole community of people with disabilities was the Resolution of 1993, the Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities (United Nations 1993). However, the most awaited and crucial document of international law was the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, adopted by the Assembly of the United Nations (UN General Assembly 2007) pursuant to Resolution no. 61/106 and ratified in May 2008 by 74 countries out of 192 signatories of the UN members. On 6th September 2012 the Convention was ratified by Poland (Polish President 2006). The Convention is referred to as a groundbreaking international document on the rights of persons with disabilities, because it corresponds to modern standards in the approach to these people, treating them in a subjective way as far as possible. On the occasion of the adoption of the Convention, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan said significant words "for 650 million persons around the world living with disabilities, today promises to be the dawn of a new era" (Mrugalska 2008). The basic document guaranteeing the implementation of the rights and freedoms of persons with disabilities in Poland is Polish Constitution (Polish Parliament 1997).

Professional and social rehabilitation of people with intellectual disabilities and its legal basis

Political changes taking place in our country had an impact on the process of change in the approach to the phenomenon of disability. They proceeded on many levels and consisted in selecting a course of action,

formulating values and objectives. An important driving force behind the changes was to strengthen democratic values, including human rights as the foundation of social life. The result of these activities was the adoption of the May 9th, 1991 Act: (Polish Parliament 1991) and the Regulation of the Minister of Labour and Social Policy dated 8 September 1992 for the Occupational Therapy Workshop (Polish Government 1992) Pursuant to the above legislation the Occupational Therapy Workshops (OTW) were set up. They were funded by the State Fund for Rehabilitation for Persons with Disabilities (PFRON). They were designed for adults over 16 years of age, with a legally defined total incapacity to gainful employment, for whom occupational therapy is a form of social rehabilitation. This group included people with deep impairments, condemned to inactivity and life in isolation, in particular those who left education in special schools and schools of life, or often without any education, because of the then existing possibility of exemption from compulsory school attendance. Detailed guidelines contained the rules of creation, financing the activities of the OTW, indicate the purpose of the workshop as rehabilitation aiming at the general development of each participant, to improve one's personal resourcefulness, ability to adapt to the psychophysical and social functioning (social inclusion). The catalog also lists the tasks of development activities preparing the participants for jobs and the development of specialized and basic skills, allowing them to work, or receive training (Krysta 2015). "The Act missed its main premise. It was assumed that the OTW will lead to the creation of mainly Sheltered Workshops (SW). It was thought that there they would recruit people as future employees. Unfortunately, practice departed far from the guidelines. To this day workshops formed only 1.9 percent of participants employed in Protected Work Centers" (Stanisławski 2005).

In this situation, the initiative was taken over by non-governmental organizations, mostly affiliated to the Polish Association for Persons with Mental Handicap, which in a short time established a whole network of these institutions in various places. The Branch of the Association in Bytom realized its own project, which was based on the OTW Workshop placed in this city. The Occupational Therapy Workshop in Bytom was established in 1994 (Kowol 2012). Soon after its launch, the Workshop became a place, where people with intellectual disabilities (from Bytom and some neighboring counties) found their place in life among friendly people. Here they revealed their hidden talents, found great openness, fulfilled their need for friendship and the joy of staying in a place where they felt happy. The disabled came out of hiding, showed the public that they really live among us less fit and more clumsy, but real and very true, they have their own dreams and longings to sing, dance, paint, they give us everything that they do best. Huge openness and commitment not only of the OTW staff, but also the participants resulted

in discovering their interests and often surprising talents, which in turn determined the profile of the place, that allowed the participants to self-realize through various forms of activity and occupational therapy. The Workshop has different studios, mostly art studios, but also workshops with a professional profile such as joinery workshop, gardening and floristics, tailor weaving, ceramics, metalwork, stitching, household appliances, multimedia and graphic techniques, plastics and stained glass. In parallel with the occupational therapy conducted in the studios, the Workshop carried out tasks in the field of social rehabilitation, using all available forms of artistic creation, ranging from music therapy, dance therapy, theater, and even poetry. Under this form of social rehabilitation the Workshop organized artistic events (including so called "Autumn Meetings" suited to the cultural calendar of the city with the participation of teams from other regions of Poland), sporting events, leisure facilities, rehabilitation stays (Polish Government 2007). competitions, presentations, fairs, cinema, theater. Rehabilitation through art proved to be an irreplaceable form of integration into society. Extensive contacts with similar organizations not only in Poland but also abroad, including England, France, Germany, the Czech Republic were established. These contacts included the exchange of experiences, organizing conferences and mutual visits, trips with an interesting artistic program "Feast of Silesia" e.g. to France and Czech Republic (Krysta 2007). Thanks to the cooperation with the Silesian Dance Theatre for several years in a row, the OTW participants took part in the activities of dance therapy conducted by specialists from the United States. A fruitful cooperation with the British Organization MENCAP has been continued and it allowed for the inclusion of the OTW participants to the implementation of the English program "The Gateway Award" (Minczakiewicz 2009) supporting the rehabilitation and breaking down barriers in fulfilling social roles. The Workshop participants also benefit from other forms of rehabilitation including psychotherapy, rehabilitation, Snoezelen therapy in the Multi Sensory Room. These are some, presented in a nutshell, actions of the Occupational Therapy Workshops of the Branch in Bytom of the Polish Association for Persons with Mental Handicap. Thus the Occupational Therapy Workshop in Bytom implements a comprehensive vocational and social rehabilitation, giving its participants the possibility of comprehensive development and preparation for further rehabilitation with a view to taking employment.

Barriers in employment of persons with moderate and severe intellectual disabilities

After a few years of the Act of 9 May 1991, the Polish Parliament passed on 27 August 1997 the Act on vocational and social rehabilitation and employment of

persons with disabilities (Polish Parliament 1997), requiring from OTW's tasks far beyond their capabilities in terms of personnel, planning and organizational conditions. According to the art. 8 of the Act: "Vocational Rehabilitation aims to facilitate a disabled person to obtain and maintain suitable employment and career advancement by allowing the use of vocational guidance, vocational training and job placement." To meet the new challenges of the Board of the Polish Association for Persons with Mental Handicap took the decision to create a multi-disciplinary and comprehensive support for Occupational Therapy Workshops in professional activation of the participants, creating a facility under the name "Center for Career Guidance and Support for People with Intellectual Disabilities" (DZWONI) (Polish Parliament 2004, Kalita 2006). Such a facility, then one of three in Poland, was also created by the Branch of the Association in Bytom, which meant that there was a chance of referral to the labor market of the Workshop Participants who showed special aptitude to take up gainful employment. Initial activities included drawing up the lists of candidates for employment of the Workshop Participants. Those who received a positive assessment of the progress of rehabilitation in the Workshop were qualified for employment and further top rehabilitation. The second stage involved the cooperation of specialized staff of "DZWONI" Center in the search for jobs, applying, training, making conversations with employers and efforts to maintain work at a particular workplace. Of the 10 candidates with an indication to employment, only 7 participants found jobs out of a total number of 70 persons benefiting from rehabilitation in the Workshop. It was a signal that the open labor market is available only for few participants the OTW. The confirmation of our position was a comparative analysis of the research conducted in the years 1998 – 2005 and the development of the Report on the Audit of Occupational Therapy Workshops (PFRON 2007). The justification of such a low ratio of the employment of the participants of OTW's was sought in the absence of a coherent system adapted to their needs. The solution to this problem was expected in the creation of the Occupational Activation Centers (OAC) by the Polish Association for Persons with Mental Handicap. Already in 1995, the Main Board of the Association took the initiative to introduce the Law on professional rehabilitation with a possibility of creation of OAC's. These efforts were successfully completed and in January 2000 a new Regulation on it was published by Polish Ministry of Labour (Polish Government 2007). Introduction of the Law gave a possibility of creating professional activity establishments, aimed at launching new career paths of people with intellectual disabilities, enabling the candidates to pass through various stages of rehabilitation and voca-

tional activation in the following order: occupational therapy workshop, factory activity, a sheltered workshop and ultimately open labor market. In practice, it turned out that the creation of OAC's occurred too slowly in relation to the already operating OTW's. In the whole country the number of these facilities is 53, while the number of Occupational Therapy Workshops is 665 (Polish Government 2012). The Law on OAC's restricts the employment of people with moderate disability in total employment to 35%, this indicator covering not only the person with mental retardation, but also people with autism and mental illness (Article 29 of the Regulation). In addition, critics point out that the OAC's activity generates the cost of creating them inadequate for the quantity and quality of jobs being created. The solution of the adopted system of rehabilitation and employment of people with disabilities in Poland met with widespread criticism. "Many years of Polish experience in the practical implementation of social policy in the field of vocational activation of disabled people entitle to ask questions about the effectiveness of solutions or the so-called realities" (Barczyński 2008). "People with mental retardation are virtually nonexistent in the labor market in Poland" (Zakrzewska-Manterys 2007). "Two stereotypes rooted in the social consciousness still operate - the model of incapacity for work, according to which persons with intellectual disability are not able to work, and - a model of a standby duty in accordance with which persons with disabilities shall be deemed not ready to work and their readiness becomes just a theoretical slogan (Wapiennik 2006).

The system model of preparation to work of the participants of the Occupational Therapy Workshop of the Polish Association for Persons with Mental Handicap, Branch in Bytom

The weaknesses in the Polish system of rehabilitation and employment of people with intellectual disabilities necessitate the need to find innovative ways of solving this problem, using the best practices used in the European Union. As confirmed by our experience, Occupational Therapy Workshops offer their participants the possibility of the most meaningful activity, help to overcome disability resulting from functional limitations, revealing the creative potential participants, which may constitute a basis for their further promotion and training, and in consequence to undertake gainful employment. However, despite the significant progress and achievements, only a few participants take the job, and not always successfully. The search for new solutions forced us to move away from the inefficient system of employment according to the concept "of matching people to jobs" to the concept of "matching jobs to people" (Wapiennik 2007). Such an approach to the problem of

employment of people with special needs to access and remain in the labor market is confirmed by the Standard rules on the equalization of opportunities for persons with disabilities (United Nations 1993) especially in the Rule 7: "The aim should always be for persons with disabilities to obtain employment in the open labour market. For persons with disabilities whose needs cannot be met in open employment, small units of sheltered or supported employment may be an alternative". This concept was the basis for the development of the "Our Work" of the Bytom Branch of the Association, realized within the framework of Human Capital Operational Programme in the period from 2010 to 2011, which involved 40 participants of the Occupational Therapy Workshop (Krysta 2012). The innovative nature of the project was the preparation of the OTW participant to employment, which would create the possibility of experiencing a specific job, with all its consequences. For the needs of the project outside the Workshop a workplace was created, which was as a place of training, representing a continuation of the Workshop conducted in vocational rehabilitation. Of key importance at this stage was the individual support of a job coach, a professional instructor as well as a psychologist and guidance counselor (Krysta 2014). The argument justifying the adoption of the proposed project activities are lessons learned in the course of their occupational therapy in OTW, which show that, despite the intellectual limitations, depth and type of disability, these people are rich and have a vivid need to take simple jobs and the joy of sharing what they do best (Krysta 2013). Their abilities and talents in the form of a great variety of artistic works disclosed during the rehabilitation in the OTW amaze with their originality. This is an important argument to justify the need for them to create friendly workplaces adapted to their abilities and interests.

For the needs of the project there have been created positions to conduct training in work according to specific sectors:

Industry I

Handicraft in the stained glass and decorative art, artistic carpentry and metalwork, bookbinding and fancy stationery.

Industry II

Services in the maintenance of green areas, renovation and interior design. Trainings on the listed positions pursued 5 trainers working with 5 trainees, a psychologist and a counselor.

The effects of the project are:

- Gaining basic skills, improving their readiness to take up employment by the project participants.
- Mastering the specific activities tailored to the profile of the job.

- Mastering social skills such as: the approach to cooperation, understanding commands and care for their execution.
- Keeping a good pace of work, adherence to the systematic and increasing concentration on the job.
- Acquisition of compliance with the obligation habits of punctuality, diligence and responsibility for decisions.
- Motivation to continue working despite the setbacks.
- Breaking the existing social barriers and increase confidence in interpersonal relations.
- Changing the approach to the role and importance of work in human life.

CONCLUSIONS

The innovative nature of the project "Our Work" created for the participants a chance to test themselves in the role of an employee and participate in labor training conducted outside the studios of the OTW in a place, which became a real "work experience training ground". Each participant in the project felt safe during workouts, his/her self-esteem was restored and he/she was motivated to work to give him/her the highest possible level of preparedness to work at a given position. The implementation of the project created the possibility of their employment in accordance with their preparation. For people who worked on the position of Industry II - trade services, employment was provided in the maintenance – repair of facilities belonging to the city, as well as covering the needs of other institutions run by our Association, including Protected Housing, Education and Educational Rehabilitation, Occupational Therapy Workshops. For participants carrying out training in the industry position and stained glass and decorative art, employment was created in the artistic Gallery of disabled people named: "The Small Gallery of the Great Passion". Warm words about our Gallery were said by Remigiusz J. Kijak (2012) in his publication "Intellectual disability. Between the diagnosis and action": "The Small Gallery of the Great Passion", operating in Bytom is an example of an unusual initiative, where in the main street of the city a gallery is open every day, where intellectually disabled artists work. This facility is inscribed in the cultural landscape of the city and is a center of impact on the environment not only for the city but for the entire region, and its activity allowed to bring the huge potential and a remarkable work of intellectually disabled artists to the public.

Acknowledgements: None.

Conflict of interest: None to declare.

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