

## Ten principles of good practice in social work with people in adverse social situations

It often follows from the complaints I inquire into that people's adverse situations could be resolved with the use of the possibilities offered by social work. However, social work is often carried out insufficiently or not at all. The following ten principles aim to acquaint the social workers with my opinions on social work and my expectations from them. At the same time, it is necessary to understand that social work is not a job (or a profession) where enthusiasm and determination to help is enough to succeed. It also requires expertise, lifelong learning, and personal development on the part of social workers.

Being a social worker is a demanding work, underrated not only by our society, but oftentimes also by the clients themselves, and the employers. That is why I wish not only to express my expectations from the social workers, but also what I believe are the obligations of the State (or rather municipal authorities and the Labour Office) and other potential employers. I believe it is essential that social workers are provided with dignified and satisfactory working conditions, appropriate financial rewards, support and conditions for further education and personal growth, and with supervision or other forms of external support. I believe that one of the most important responsibilities is to support the social workers as professionals. When social workers are faced with a choice between the interests of their clients and their employer (whether apparent or hidden), the employer must respect the code of ethics of social workers and the basic principles of social work. In my opinion, it would significantly help the promotion, defence and protection of interests of social workers if there was a professional association as an organisation of professional self-government, or at least a uniform and consistent procedure on the part of the existing professional associations.

The following principles are aimed mainly on the activities of social workers employed by municipal authorities with extended competence and the social work they perform to find solutions to adverse social situations and contribute to social integration of people.<sup>1</sup> The principles also apply to social work performed by social workers employed by the Labour Office of the Czech Republic, the designated municipal authorities, and municipal authorities with extended competence when dealing with the situation of people in material need.<sup>2</sup>

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1 Act No. 108/2006 Coll., on social services, as amended.

2 Act No. 111/2006 Coll., on assistance in material need, as amended.

## **1. Guaranteed help**

Turning to social workers for help is often the last resort for people in adverse social situations. The social worker's mission is to help these people based on the situation or place where the problem has arisen. Everybody is entitled to a free basic social advice on the possibilities for dealing with, or avoiding, a difficult situation.

## **2. Pro-active approach**

Social workers themselves look for people in adverse social situations or actively respond to information suggesting that there is such a person. If stipulated by law, social workers inform each other that a certain person has found themselves, or might find themselves in an adverse social situation (e.g. removal of social benefits, loss of housing etc.).

## **3. Respect for the uniqueness and dignity of individuals**

Social workers respect the dignity and privacy of each of their clients, regardless of their origin, ethnic or racial background, skin colour, mother tongue, economic situation, age, medical condition, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion and political opinions. Information revealed to them by the clients is confidential and subject to mandatory confidentiality duty of social workers. Social workers accept their clients as they are, with their strengths and weaknesses. They assess the situation, but do not judge or condemn the clients.

## **4. Comprehensiveness**

Social workers address the client's situation comprehensively. They do not focus merely on the issue the client presents them with. In the course of social work, social workers guide the clients towards awareness of their own responsibility and ability to describe and recognise their overall social situation, including recognising the causes of their problems. They offer possible solutions to the clients' situation and point out the risks of not dealing with their problems. Social workers organise co-operation with other professionals participating in resolving the clients' situation (present solutions to clients' debts, provision of social services, welfare benefits, carrying out official matters, arranging housing, etc.).

## **5. Respect for the client's wishes**

It is always the clients who define their needs and wishes. At the same time, social workers guide them so that they are able to assess, on their own, how realistic their decisions and wishes are. Social workers support their clients, guide them and help them find solutions to their adverse social situation. They approach their clients in a way that does not make the clients feel that they cannot openly describe their feelings and wishes.

## **6. Improvement of the client's abilities**

Social workers lead their clients to be able, on their own or with the social workers' help, to suggest steps to resolve their adverse social situation. Social workers support and motivate their clients, and at the same time make sure that the clients follow the agreed steps in the long term. Social workers look for ways to motivate the clients, even if the clients do not actively co-operate.

## **7. Professional performance of social work**

Social workers make use of their expert knowledge while performing social work, and choose the

methods that correspond to the “best practice”. The employers must create adequate conditions to perform social work (particularly in the area of personal development which leads to the improvement of the quality of social work) and ensure sufficient support (supervision), which is necessary considering how demanding the work is.

#### **8. Social worker as the client’s defender**

Social workers also play the role of the defenders of clients’ interests, as the clients are usually in a weaker position. Social workers protect the client’s interests even when it can lead to a conflict with their employer’s interests (for example in case of paying rent for a municipal flat or provision of social benefits), or with their colleagues or public expectations.

#### **9. Social work in the client’s environment**

Social work involves the interaction of people and their social environment. That is why social workers pay attention to both the client and their environment. Social workers must stand against social prejudices, negotiate, explain and encourage society to contribute to the solution of the client’s situation, and positively influence society’s views on vulnerable groups of people; they need to do this especially in cases where it is not possible to influence the abilities and skills of the clients or the fact of their belonging to a vulnerable group (for example, a Roma person will always be Roma, a mentally challenged person will always be mentally challenged, and a person released from prison will always bear the “ex-convict” label). Social workers encourage their clients and strengthen their determination and abilities to actively defend their interests and rights.

#### **10. Keeping records**

Social workers should carefully keep records of their work with the clients in a hard-copy file (pursuant to Act No. 500/2004 Coll., Code of Administrative Procedure, as amended) and in the information system. This procedure allows to monitor the developments in the case, assess the effectiveness of the steps taken, look for the causes of potential failures and try to eliminate them, or to choose different steps and subsequently evaluate if the goals have been achieved. The documents are also irreplaceable when other social workers start working with the client. Careful record-keeping protects the social worker and the client in case of a dispute regarding the quality of social work.