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## ASSISTING THE FAMILY – NEW INNOVATIVE FOR SOCIAL SUPPORT FOR FAMILY

**Summary.** Author describes the functioning of the Social Services in Poland based on the bill about the family support and custody. First bill was introduced in 1989. It laid foundations for functioning of the social worker. Next one introduced a innovative, at least in Polish circumstances, institution of family assistant. The bill defines new profession, describes expectations that a person has to meet in order to become a family assistant. Thanks to this regulation new profession was created resulting in both increase of jobs available and improvement in the social support provide by the state.

**Keywords:** social politics, social work, support, family assistance, innovative profession, change of social attitude.

## ASYSTENT RODZINY – INNOWACJE DLA WSPARCIA SPOŁECZNEGO RODZINY

**Streszczenie.** Autorka omawia zasady funkcjonowania służb socjalnych w Polsce według ustawy o pomocy społecznej i o wspieraniu rodziny i systemie pieczy zastępczej. Pierwsza zaczęła obowiązywać po 1989 roku. Określiła wymogi dotyczące wykonywania zawodu pracownika socjalnego. Kolejna wprowadza innowacyjne na gruncie polskim rozwiązanie: instytucję asystenta rodziny. Akt prawny definiuje nowy zawód, określa, jakie wymogi są stawiane przed wykonującą go osobą. Dzięki regulacji powstaje nowy zawód socjalny, co zwiększa ofertę miejsc pracy oraz dostępność świadczenia pracy socjalnej rodzinom.

**Słowa kluczowe:** polityka społeczna, praca socjalna, wsparcie, asystentura rodziny, nowatorski zawód, zmiana postaw społecznych.

## 1. Introduction

In the field of social politics social work is a very specific service addressed to mainly social care clients by Social Services. Clients in the social work does indeed have a very broad meaning. They can mainly be, and quite often when it comes to practical side of social care are individuals, families and other groups. Among these a Clients can be also Institutions, communities and a whole society.

Social Services are institutions, organisations are coordinated groups that provide broadly described social help. Representatives of the social services are the social employees working for different social institutions inter alia social care centres, Regional Centres for Social Help, care homes and orphanages (in education) and probation officers and representatives of other institutions<sup>1</sup>. Given the growing role of social help in the sphere of social security, social work is often identified with social help. However its is social work that is (or rightly so should be) the most important service provided by Social Services within all social care institutions (but also in other fields) by qualified personnel - social care workers<sup>2</sup>.

## 2. Social care and Social worker- integral parts of social politics of democratic state

In the parliament act of social care (paragraph 8) social work has been described as an social activity conducted to help people and families in strengthening or rebuilding the abilities to function within the society by entering certain social roles and helping to create the conditions that might help it<sup>3</sup>.

Social work doesn't only assume necessity of the broad multi specialised approach, but it also takes a form of interdisciplinary character demanding a broad knowledge and skills from different fields of social life from social workers<sup>4</sup>.

In the act of social care there is a whole chapter dedicated to a social worker. Legislator obliged social workers to activate all persons seeking help and in order to improve theirs own circumstances and include them into a rhythm of social life again. Main goal of social work is to improve social functioning of individuals and, by providing means necessary to live as well as preventing all dysfunctional or pathological behaviours. Responsibility for implementing these ambitious stipulations lies solely with the social worker.

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<sup>1</sup> Trawkowska D.: *Portret współczesnego pracownika socjalnego*. Katowice 2006, s. 86.

<sup>2</sup> Ibidem, s. 87.

<sup>3</sup> Ustawa o pomocy społecznej z dnia 12 marca 2004 r., Dz.U. z dnia 7 lutego 2013 r.

<sup>4</sup> Chraściel K.: *Miejsce pracy socjalnej w systemie pomocy społecznej*. „Praca socjalna”, 2009, nr 1, s. 47.

Paragraph 116 described conditions that every aspiring social worker needs to meet. possible career routes Paragraph 119 provides a list of duties for the social workers and regulations for training are covered by a separate bill<sup>5</sup>. Despite of social work being mentioned as the most important function of social worker in the parliament act of Social Care, the model that dominated in the social help was a distributional one. Help was limited to providing financial means necessary for a survival.

### **3. Innovational model of cooperation with family - assisting the family**

In Institutions of social care since 2005 there are various innovative social work programmes that implement family assistants. Very often these programmes are being financed by EU funds, only minority of centres have decided to finance work of assistance from its own budgets or got additional funds from Ministry of Work and Social Politics. These actions went ahead of implementation of parliament act of supporting families and custody<sup>6</sup>. From 2011 a new programme design for families in jeopardy of being excluded or with upbringing issues was foreseen. In the age of rapid changes in the social tissue, increasing stratification resulting from still increasing inequality of incomes and lack of political will to implement changes that might curb these inequalities. The act about supporting families and custody is an essential in bringing gaps and preventing any potential problem or tragedies that such families might encounter. Family is the smallest but the most important element of Society.

In the preamble of the act from 9th of June 2011 we can read the following:

For the wellbeing of the children in need of special protection and support from adults, family environment, atmosphere of happiness love and understanding, concern about harmonious development and future life independence, to ensure protection of the rights and freedoms they are entitled to, for the wellbeing of the family, which is the basic cell of the society and a natural environment for development and prosperity off all its members especially including children, in the believe that efficient help for family undergoing difficulties in upbringing their offsprings and adequate protection of their rights is and help for them can be achieved by cooperation between all personnel and institutions and organisations working with children enacts the following...<sup>7</sup> The family assistant was introduced solely for the benefit of children and families. The bill describes in details his role responsibilities and domain of family assistant.

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<sup>5</sup> Rozporządzenie Ministra Pracy i Polityki Społecznej z dnia 17 kwietnia 2012r. Dz.U. z dnia 8 maja 2012 r.

<sup>6</sup> Ibidem, s. 8.

<sup>7</sup> Ustawa o wspieraniu rodziny i systemie pieczy zastępczej z dnia 11 czerwca 2011 roku.

Article 11 of the bill about help for the families and custody describes rules of conduct if a centre of social care is notified about a family undergoing difficulties in managing its basic functions. In this case a social worker is obliged to conduct a community interview, frames of which are set by the bill from 12 of March 2004 about social help. After conducting an interview Social worker has to analyse its findings. If findings suggest that family need an assistant Social worker then have to address the Head of Social Centre with the formal request to assign an assistant to the family. After receiving a request A Head of Centre does the following: 1) Assigns an assistant to the family or 2) Send the request to the council department responsible for organising cooperation with families to assign one or 3) Sends the request to any other entity that responsibility for social work was assigned to by a Council<sup>8</sup>.

Article 12 of above mentioned bill describes expectations in regards to professional qualifications of a family assistant: it's a person who:

1. has a degree in pedagogy, psychology, sociology, family science or social work or:
  - a. higher education degree in any subject and supplementary professional training in work with children or families and can produce a proof of at least one year work or apprentice in working with children or families,
  - b. or a post diploma studies including training depicted in article 3 and can show proof of working for at least a year with either children or families,
  - c. college degree an additional training covering work with children or families and at least 3 years of proven and documented work with children or families,
2. it's parental responsibility wasn't withdrawn, or parental responsibility wasn't limited or suspended,
3. pays aliments - in case where it was ordered by a court,
4. wasn't sentenced by a court order for a crime or a financial crime, tax evasion.

It is worth mentioning paragraph 1 as it opens up a new possibilities for occupational activation for persons that, from various reasons, do not have a degree in the social sciences field or any degree at all. If they are willing to undertake additional courses and are able to proof that they have relevant experience which can be obtained also by a voluntary work they can become family assistants. This is particularly beneficial in smaller communities as people who cannot find work in their initial profession but have predispositions and are willing to help needing and dysfunctional families. They can do so even without a relevant degree, this is a great help in the system where qualified social workers have to serve over 2000 citizens (those are the limits in the centres of social care, council institutions which are responsible for implementation of social politics of the state).

Family assistant is obliged to constantly develop his qualifications in the relations to work with children and families, especially by participating in training and self study. Family assistant conducts it's task in the place where family lives or where it's convenient for them.

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<sup>8</sup> Ibidem.

Article 15.1 Main task of the family assistant especially include:

1. Preparing and implementing the plan of cooperation with the family members and consulting a social worker assigned to the family.
2. Preparing a plan of a custody consulting a family members with accordance to a plan of custody of a Child placed in foster care.
3. Helping to improve a family material situation, by inter alia improving their household management skills.
4. Helping families in solving various social problems.
5. Helping families in solving psychological problems.
6. Helping families to solve problems with upbringing of their children.
7. Supporting all social activities of the families.
8. Motivating family members to improve their professional skills.
9. Helping in searching finding starting and keeping a job.
10. Motivating to participate in various groups for parents that will result in helping to shape and improve parental skills and psychosocial skills.
11. Supporting children especially by participating in the any psychoeducational activities.
12. Undertaking any actions that would prevent or stop any risk that might arise.
13. Conducting individual consultations in regards to upbringing with both parents and children.
14. Maintaining a records of work history with any given family.
15. Conducting regular assessments of family circumstances and submitting these to a relevant government entities.
16. Monitoring the family after the work have ended.
17. Preparing an opinion about family and it's members if requested by a Court.
18. Cooperation with all relevant government, council entities non governmental organisations and individuals specialising in improving children and families life.
19. Cooperations with interdisciplinary team and working group that are mentioned in article 9 a in a bill from 29th of July 2009 on counteracting violence within the families and any other entities that help is considered necessary.

In practise family assistant duties include:

- Frequent visits to the family environment and motivating to implementing previously agreed plan.
- Conducting various trainings like for example: budget training, hygiene training, looking after your personal appearance, cleaning the house, right communication or running a household in general.
- Conducting career training, help in creating CV job hunting and writing covering letters.
- Contacting other institutions like Courts, Police, Probation officer or pedagogue.
- Providing assistance during visits in various government offices and institutions.
- Help in finding and keeping the job.

- Help in writing various documents.
- Contacts with others specialist for examples lawyers.
- Informing about consumer rights, or the information about different institutions and support they can provide.

From the above One can see that the main role of the Family Assistant is to provide a support for the family enabling it to in the future function independently in the society. With the special emphasis on the upbringing and looking after the children, and this can be achieved by a close cooperation of the assistant with the family affected. The main reason why this solution is so efficient is that each assistant can only deal with went families at the time. This guarantees that any action taken by an assistant can have a real impact on family life.

#### 4. Ethical aspects of social work

Professional ethic is an accumulation of rules and norms that describes how a member of each profession should conduct himself<sup>9</sup>. Therefore Professional ethics enforces certain moral obligations connected directly to how given duties are executed. These norms and rules derive from both the values respected by the society as a whole and a history and a tradition of the profession.

According to Jan Szczepanski professional ethic is a conjunction of norms and rules deriving from a tradition of the profession, the spirit of national culture, and the basic ethical rules recognised by the whole society. Rules of professional ethics determine inner qualifications of individual and determine his conduct taking into consideration what is considered righteous and what unmoral. Professional ethics is therefore an assortment of moral rules that i characteristic and binding for a given professional group<sup>10</sup>.

Being ethical means being and a certain level where every decision is undertaken with a close consideration for obligations and outcomes that this decision might bring. Ethics starts where the moral dilemmas are not excluded<sup>11</sup>. Ethics in the role of social worker derive from a strong believe that he acts on behalf of the whole society to provide help an guidance for people going thought hardships and therefore he must always comply with rules and believes recognised by the democratic state. Common ground where the ethics of social work really comes to light is everyday work, where a social worker need to recognise not only the current conditions that are impacting the client but also understand the reasons which driven him to

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<sup>9</sup> Jedynak S. (red.): *Słownik etyczny*, Lublin 1990, s. 71.

<sup>10</sup> Rybaczyńska D.A., Olszak-Krzyżanowska B.: *Aksjologia pracy socjalnej- wybrane zagadnienia*, Katowice 1999, s. 78.

<sup>11</sup> Brągiel J.: *Wokół etyki zawodu pracownika socjalnego*, [w:] J. Brągiel, A. Kurcz (red.): *Wybrane problemy zawodu w okresie transformacji społecznej*, Opole 2002, s. 69.

a current state and finally chose the appropriate strategy, plan it and implement it. All of the afore mentioned decisions have ethical character as they impact values connected with implementation of goals of social work. This ethic is especially apparent when it comes to changing an attitude of the individual in regards to approach to life<sup>12</sup>. All actions undertaken by the social worker are impacting the way that an individual is treating certain values, if they are modified it enables him to adjust to his environment. This impacts the individual autonomy and independence an ethics in this case determines the depth of the change and inaugurations in other human being believes.

The values recognised by the social worker are an essential i dealing with above described dilemmas, also certain sensitivity permeated with a strong will to act righteously. This values provide a support and clear guidance in difficult circumstances and also enhance satisfactions from ones own action. And finally prevent risk that the decisions might be unethical<sup>13</sup>.

Currently the efforts are channelled to find a framework of cooperation with the family that would empower the family and motivate the clients so that they can come up with solutions on their own, also to motivate them to improve their nurturing skills, running households and finally being able to create a safe environment for their children<sup>14</sup>.

## 5. Conclusion

State policy is a crucial element of shaping society behaviours. New regulations implemented in this field have filled the gap in the support offer for families endangered by a exclusion due to financial burdens, pathologies or with upbringing problems. The ability to provide a comprehensive support offer (including broadly understood financial, material but mainly social work) in small villages, districts in the cities is the factor that enables a fast and long-lasting support. Efficient actions can result in changing behaviours in the families eradicating pathology, changing of habits (quite often a over dependancy on benefits a sense of entitlement and lack of any will to change ones circumstances). This can further result in changes within the whole communities, as a social worker can indeed influence a mental change in the society using his authority and moral values. This will empower the citizen society fully embracing generousities of the democracy, but remaining aware of it's right and obligations. Further benefit of the Bill about supporting the family and custody is the fact that it enables people without previous education or experience in this field chose the career path. These kind of solutions in a social sphere introduce a real quality change and in Polish circumstances can be really describe as innovative.

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<sup>12</sup> Ibidem, s.70.

<sup>13</sup> Ibidem, s.72

<sup>14</sup> Krasiejko I.: *Praca socjalna w praktyce asystenta rodziny. Przykład podejścia skoncentrowanego na rozwiązaniach*, Katowice 2011, s.8.

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## Omówienie

Autorka omawia zasady funkcjonowania służb socjalnych w Polsce, działających na podstawie dwóch ustaw: O pomocy społecznej i O wspieraniu rodziny i systemie pieczy zastępczej. Pierwsza z nich uregulowała funkcjonowanie instytucji wsparcia w Polsce po przemianach 1989 roku. Określiła wymogi dotyczące wykonywania zawodu pracownika socjalnego. Ze względu na obowiązujące regulacje wykwalifikowana kadra ma małe możliwości na pracę socjalną w terenie. Druga wprowadza innowacyjne rozwiązanie: instytucję asystenta rodziny. Akt prawny definiuje zawód i wskazuje, kto może stać się podopiecznym. Dzięki regulacji powstaje nowy zawód socjalny, co pozwala na zmniejszenie bezrobocia wśród osób o średnim lub wyższym wykształceniu, zwłaszcza w niewielkich miejscowościach, oraz zwiększa się dostępność pracy socjalnej dla rodziny i jej aktywizacji.