

Quality in Social Services

From the Perspective of Services Working with Homeless People

European Conference, Luxembourg City, 21st October 2011

Workshop 8: The role of skills and qualifications in ensuring quality of service delivery Afternoon Workshop Session: 14h45 – 16h30

ABSTRACT – Paolo Brusa

In December 2010 in a report on the “Quality assurance in the social care sector” published by CEDEFOP, the European Centre for Developing Vocational Training gaps in skills and qualifications of social workers were identified across the EU, particularly in the homeless sector. The aim of this workshop therefore is to discuss the necessary skill and qualifications sets as well as the content of the training modules that could potentially be developed as a result of cooperation at European level. At the workshop the interested parties could meet and exchange about this opportunity for the first time.

Key Questions:

1. What are the critical skills and qualifications needed to work in the homeless sector?

Working with people experiencing homelessness is primary an intervention of care, and it should be handled with care, starting to distinguish its basic elements.

The principal difference is between the setting, the offer and the disposable tools:

- > with setting we mean the place or type of surroundings where something is positioned or where an event takes place as its unique tool
 - > this means that everywhere an intervention takes place has its own setting, which might be a shelter, a park, a social service
- > with offer we mean the expression of readiness to do or give something if desired
 - > this comprehends everything that we do or give to our users, but only if it matches with their desires, aspirations and will
- > with tool we mean a device or implement used to carry out a particular function
 - > as our particular function is care-giving, the relation is the sole available tool

Without getting too deep in the theory of communication, it is clear that every professional has to know how the communication works, and most of all, what are the basic rules in the relational dynamics.

This is dramatically important because of the specific form of the relation of care, which is implicitly structured on two level:

1. the user, who is entitled to have some needs that require to be satisfied
2. the professional, who is supposed to have something to offer concerning the specific needs which are expressed by the user in that specific setting

In a such structured relationship, its given nature calls implicitly for dynamic of power.

Taking this brief notes as an introduction, it is self-evident that the more critical skills are bound to the inner nature of the relationship between the professional and the user, where one part is structurally supposed to have answers for the needs that the relational counterpart is entitled to bring in each specific setting.

2. What are the (most urgent) qualification needs of the personnel (in the different European countries)?

The most urgent qualification is the capacity to read what is going on within the relationship, which is a work of art. To develop such qualification, the personnel needs to:

- be aware of personnel relational given position
- take full responsibility for what it is happening since its position is structurally higher
- have the capacity to read within the lines of what it is going on with the user in a specific setting, and change position if the relational situation requires to

- handle with particular care all the power-trip that might happens, which are often implicit, and might appear in forms of seduction, manipulation, aggressiveness, recklessness, fixation to the rules, total and silent compliance ...
 - always doubt on his/her personal prejudices, in order to have them as a positive allied to deepen the significant of the relational dynamics and not as a predefined discrimination
 - remember that everyone is different, so each time is the first time, while previous knowledge represents useful point of confrontation to produce positive discrimination
 - learn to read the movements of all the actors as part of a dynamic process, where failure is not a value-driven meaning, but a peculiar stage that requires extra-care
 - learn the topological nature of the relation of care, which is perfectly shown by the Borromean Rings.
 - > in mathematics, quantum physic, various symbolism, logic and psychoanalysis, the Borromean rings consists of 3 topological circles which are linked to form a Brunnian link, meaning that every time one ring is removed, the other two remains unlinked.
 - > no one of these 3 rings, by the fact of being wrapped by another ring, is not itself wrapping another, which means that within the relationship, each dynamic which is not bound is binding, everything that is not brought to awareness and consciousness becomes an action.
 - > this is applicable to all representations at every level of our work, i.e. :
 - setting, offer, tools
 - personnel, user, institution
 - wellness, hardship, symptom
 - biography before homelessness, today needs, process of reinsertion
 - inclusion, exclusion, shelter
 - logical path in social policy, SSGIs offer, people biography
 - physical domain, legal domain, social domain
 - experience, skill, reality
- ...

3. What type(s) of training should be developed (in terms of feasibility, effectiveness, etc.)?

I've created and developed MultiPolis, a tool which is specifically designed to achieve such knowledge. MultiPolis is an educational role-play tool that allows the participants to experience themselves as personification of case studies, of various institutions or of general on-going situations.

I use MultiPolis in my training and supervision activity in various social services around Italy, as well as in workshops around Europe.

MultiPolis is a tool, which is based on the specific methodology of the guided role-play.

Starting from a given case-study, this methodology allows to get deeper in the relational dynamics, guiding participants to take the floor and learn by direct experience what is going on, what are the disparate levels operating, what are the various positions and what might be or happen from a different perspectives, what might be the divergent perceptions and conflicting significant that drives around.

As a translation of the holistic approach into pragmatic, MultiPolis supports paths to awareness-raising concerning the simple complexity of what stands around the dynamics in the relation of giving/taking care.

More details are available in the attached brochure. A detailed introduction to the use of MultiPolis, together with outputs of training sessions and feedback from participants are disposable on the dedicated website: www.multipolis.eu

4. Would the development of a special European training programme offered at university level make sense?

We all face a variety of considerations, meanings, prejudices, points of view, indications and recommendations when considering the necessary skills for personnel to work with people experiencing homelessness. This evidence seems to suggest that before considering the procedural level, the all issue is drawn as cultural



challenge. The basic of this challenge is the fact that personnel must be skilled in order to propose a professional intervention.

In my personal and implicitly limited experience, the personnel with long experience is not necessarily skilled, while younger personnel comes from high-level education, but is lacking direct experience.

University and service providers should promote the matching between the awareness learnt by experience, the knowledge learnt on books and the consciousness of what is going on within the relation-of-care.

As each of our user is an individual, as each situation is dissimilar, as each day we all are a bit different, the challenge is to consider not solely a training programme, but an on-going supervision. The combination of these three levels can support personnel, users, institutions to regain the inner sense of the work of taking and giving care to people experiencing homelessness.

In order to support this process, I am currently preparing MultiPolis to become part of an European project, to be submitted under LLP - Leonardo programme - call 2012.

In case of interest in developing a collaboration or for any more information, please feel free to contact me at: info@multipolis.eu

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