

# Social pedagogues and their involvement in residential social services

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**Abstract** The submitted article focuses on the possibilities of applicability of a social pedagogue in residential social services. In this context, we use the content analysis of current legislation in the Czech environment and Slovakia with subsequent comparison of selected legal regulations concerning partial competencies and requirements for the profession of a social pedagogue in social services. The text is supplemented by a case study from a specific organisation, where the requirements for the selection procedure of an employees were not only their competences in the field of social work but also in the field of middle management.

**Key words** Social Pedagogue, Residential Social Services, Current Legislation, Competencies

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Throughout life, each person gets into situations with which they cannot cope on their own and need advice or help. According to Klímová (1987, p. 11) “*such situations may occur:*

- *in day-to-day tasks imposed on the individual by the society they live in,*
- *in coping with various tasks in social groups whose member the individual becomes over time,*
- *in dealing with various personal issues that occur for various reasons over the course of the person’s individual development.”*

The ways of coping with these situations are different and depend on many factors and specific conditions the person lives in.

In problematic situations, seeking professional help seems like a logical solution. Counselling and the related process are not exactly defined. However, all the meanings of counselling have a common basis, namely the word “help”. This entails the relationship when the counsellor endeavours to support the client’s motivation and personal development, thus trying to improve the client’s overall internal condition.

Kohoutek (2008, p. 94) defines today’s counselling as “*communication, process and relationship in which one person (the counsellor) is trying, through their scientific and practical advice, serve, help or benefit, or be professionally useful to the person they are giving advice to.*”

## 2. CURRENT LEGISLATION THE CZECH REPUBLIC

The position of a social pedagogue is not explicitly defined in Czech laws.

By way of analogy, however, such definition may be based on Act No. 108/2006 Coll., on social services. This Act sets out the conditions for the provision of help and support to individuals in an adverse social situation through social services and care allowances, the conditions for issuing a license to provide social services, public administration in social services, inspection of how social services are provided, and the preconditions for the provision of social services. The Act further sets out the requirements for social workers active in social services or providing social work in accordance with special laws and regulations in situations of material need, in social and legal protection of children, in schools and school facilities, in medical facilities, prisons, and detention and asylum centres.

To get further legal grasp of the role of a social pedagogue, Act No. 563/2004 Coll., on teaching staff, may also be of some help. This legal act relates to teaching staff at schools and school facilities registered in the register of schools and school facilities. However, it also applies to teaching staff in facilities providing social services. Both these areas may offer a job to the social pedagogue; however, there is no mention of a social pedagogue as a specific role in the above-mentioned legal acts. In terms of human resources, the related regulations include Regulation of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport No. 317/2005 Coll., on further education of teaching staff, accreditation committees and the career system of teaching staff and Government Regulation No. 222/2010 Coll., on the catalogue of jobs in public services and public administration.

Additional relevant legislation includes the provisions of Section 16 and Section 21 (1,f), Section 116 and Section 121(1) of Act No. 561/2004 Coll., on preschool, elementary, secondary, higher vocational and other education; Regulation of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport No. 72/2005 Coll., on the provision of counselling services at schools and school counselling centres; and in Regulation of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport No. 27/2016 Coll., on education of students with special educational needs and of talented students.

### 3. CURRENT LEGISLATION IN SLOVAKIA

In Slovakia, the field of social pedagogy struggles with insufficient definition of key terms, priorities, competencies between social pedagogy and social work, and of the relationship to other fields of science; still, we can say that the Slovakian system is better in terms of how the position of a social pedagogue is anchored in relevant laws.

The Slovak Republic enacted Act No. 245/2008 Coll., on education and amendments to certain acts. In Section 130, this legal act states that the elements of educational counselling and prevention include the role of a social pedagogue at schools and school facilities.

Under Act No. 138/2019 Coll., on teaching and professional staff and amendments to certain acts, the social pedagogue is a professional staff member performing specialised activities as part of prevention, intervention and provision of counselling especially for children and students at risk of socially pathological phenomena, children and students from socially disadvantaged environment, and for individuals addicted to drugs or otherwise disadvantaged. The social pedagogue thus provides services in social education, pro-social and ethical behaviour support, and social-pedagogic diagnostics and counselling.

Regulation No. 1/2020 Coll., which sets out the qualification criteria and personal qualification requirements for individual categories of teaching and professional staff, focuses on a comprehensive definition of qualification requirements for the role of a social pedagogue.

Act No. 448/2008 Coll., on social services and amendment to Act No. 455/1991 Coll., on trade licensing (the Trade Licensing Act), requires that employers in services required by law, such as half-way homes, emergency housing facilities, and facilities for the elderly, employ a certain percentage of professional staff, which means also social pedagogues.

### 4. SOCIAL PEDAGOGUE AS A SOCIAL WORKER IN SOCIAL SERVICES

Based on the above, it should be noted that the role of a social pedagogue is not included in the job catalogue, and that graduates from Social Pedagogy meet the requirements for working as a social worker in accordance with the Social Services Act. The field of social pedagogy as such cannot be included in practice (Alinče, Tomší, 2010).

In the field of social services in the Czech Republic in general, by coming into effect of Act No. 108/2006 Coll., on social services and Implementing Regulation No. 505/2006 Coll., transformation of social work took place, which brought many significant changes of the current inadequate system of modern times.

Generally, the role of a social worker includes the obligation to provide support and care to the clients of the social service, to

provide basic social counselling, activation activities, therapeutic activities, and other services. In this case, it is again about meeting the quality standards for the social service being provided, especially with respect to individual clients and their needs. In this context, it is necessary for the social worker to get familiar with the quality standards as soon as possible, and in practice, take the standards as the motto and the key task of each social worker providing social services. It is always necessary to establish what target group the social service is provided to and what are the needs, possibilities, desires and wishes of clients.

In university study programmes, these activities can be found in different courses, such as adult education, free time education, and free time activities. The individual syllabi of such courses should be adjusted with regard to the target group of the social service being provided, the age and mental composition of the target group considering the acquisition of the necessary competencies. However, methodological training of a university graduate is not sufficient; given the variety of the offered social services, it is necessary to prepare oneself for a wide range of work duties also through gaining practical experience while studying.

Social workers' work duties include creation of conditions for the involvement of clients in the social process also outside the social care facility. In this activity, social workers should closely cooperate not only with the managers of the social service being provided and with other employees, but also with local government bodies, the relevant city or village councils, for example with their cultural departments and cultural and sports facilities within the city district as well as with social and interest organisations at the place where the social service is provided.

For social workers, solving clients' legal issues and social issues with a health impact is an equally important part of their work, in which they apply professional methods of social work, diagnosis, counselling, taking part in attending and/or meetings with administrative bodies and other institutions in the interest of the clients. In this respect, it should be noted that preparation for the above-mentioned activities is a continuous process taking place throughout university studies, starting from study of law, social work, and social policy to social and educational counselling. Students are well theoretically equipped with knowledge and competences to later work in the field. However, they sometimes encounter practical problems in their work which they are able to solve only with an increased effort and often only once they have consulted relevant experts. In this case as well, it might be good to combine theory and practice better, for example in the form of specialised seminars focused on potential problematic situations.

As every organisation, social service providers and facilities must maintain appropriate documentation. This follows not only from their legal obligation and obligations imposed on the provided social service by the establishing body but also from internal guidelines for social work and from the rules of the social service's organisation. This, among other things, includes administrative records on the users of the social service or personal records for individual planning of how the social service is going to be provided. All records are regularly reviewed, supplemented, and updated. And it is this keeping of social and administrative records of clients, ensuring of basic social agendas including standard documentation which constitutes another area of the work of a social worker in residential social services. However, this is not a simple clerical job but an activity requiring a good deal of ingenuity and personal input. This already applies to initial meetings with those interested in the service and in the subsequent social survey. It also includes keeping of personal and health files, documentation activities in collecting

and processing information and specialised documents for social work as part of the social worker's obligations and competences.

Other daily activities of social workers which follow from the need to ensure the operation of the organisation providing the residential service include the development of knowledge and information in the field of social-health care.

It is necessary to support the clients' integration into the community the client is entering: not only the initial contact with the staff of the social facility, but also with the client's roommates and other clients of the social service.

## 5. CASE STUDY – RESIDENTIAL SOCIAL SERVICE

A selection procedure has been set up for the role of a social worker – director's assistant. 4 people with higher or university education applied. The role of a "social worker – director's assistant" is not in the job catalogue, and this role has been created solely for the needs of a social service provider in one city. One of the applicants was hired as a social worker.

The reason for the split of the role was the need of the organisation's director to hire somebody with the competencies for social work and also with the middle management competencies to perform both administrative tasks and coordination and supervision of key staff, to manage and supervise cleaning, laundry and maintenance staff and physical therapists, and to take an active part in clients' activation (and monitor this activation), perform methodological activities in the area of meeting the needs of the elderly, keep records, perform individual planning, handle small complaints or suggestions for complaints, use and evaluate testing methods in patients with dementia, analyse the used quality indicators and take part in the organisation's conceptual activity.

A Social Pedagogy graduate was selected among the applicants. The reason for the selection was, besides the applicant's practical skills and professional experience stated in the CV, also theoretical knowledge of social policy, social work methods, psychology, social pedagogy, social educational work and counselling, adult education, application of psychometric methods, cultural and social anthropology and methods of problem-solving, which are all integral parts of knowledge in the field of independent social work in residential services and in communication with clients dependent on other people.

The employee was assigned a role of a social worker in accordance with the job catalogue, having a specific and also an individual job description. While the job description matched the role of a social worker, the specific activities were those of a director's assistant. Under Section 109 of the Social Services Act, social workers perform:

- specific specialised work including provision of standard documentation, act as a "key staff member" for clients who do not belong to the target group of the provided social service and for patients with dementia. Here, the profession of a social pedagogue replaces the expertise of a special education worker.
- basic social and legal counselling in the field of social work, provision of information to the clients of the service, counselling in cooperation with other institutions.

In this case, also the activities relating to the supervision of other staff's work duties, keeping of documentation for individual planning of the course of the provided social service, the staff's ability to obtain information about the client, review of planning, evaluation and, if applicable, re-evaluation of the plan, preparation

of concepts and strategies in case of several types of social services, and implementation of a system of quality of social work in accordance with quality standards were also important.

If the role of a social worker is connected with the role of an assistant of the social facility's director, the job description includes, besides the competencies of a social worker, also competencies and other tasks and obligations related to the performance of more important and demanding tasks, especially those of middle management, ensuring the organisation's operation, and communication with government bodies and non-government entities (municipal authorities, police, land registry office, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, companies, suppliers etc.). Also, for example, tasks related to the organisation of the work of staff providing direct care or of other service staff of the facility (cleaning, laundry, maintenance etc.) and keeping of relevant related records. The duties following from the job description often include solving of problems related to violations of work discipline by staff providing direct care, and problems stemming from relationships among different persons: among staff, among clients, and problems occurring between the social service staff and the clients.

Other obligations following from the role of a director's assistant related to the performance of administrative tasks (such as keeping of fire protection records and documentation on training and further education), coordination and supervision of key staff, communication with government and local government bodies in case of solving disputes and problems between these (local) government bodies and the organisation providing residential social service.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The issue of the applicability of the position of a social pedagogue in the Czech environment has been a long-discussed area. In recent years, there has been an effort to create a profesigram of a social pedagogue to legislate the given job position in the Czech environment as well. Legitimizing social pedagogy as a scientific and professional discipline would certainly contribute to effective interdisciplinary cooperation in a diverse environment. From this point of view, it can be stated that the Slovak legislation is very inspiring for the Czech Republic.

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