interdiac

Ethical Orientation on Social Work and Work with Young People

Guidelines for Practice and Training

INTRODUCTION

These guidelines have been produced by volunteers and workers engaged in work with young people in 10 countries in Central and Eastern Europe. They have been involved in writing and testing the Handbook, 'Make Change Yourselves….'[1] and in three follow up workshops on the implementation of the approach and methods which it advocates. The participants concluded that it is important to share the ethical criteria which, in their experience, underlie the working methods. However, we hope they will be useful to others in the field, whether or not they are using the interdiac Handbook! We have divided the guidelines into sections:

The first section is related to working practice and follows the main sections and ideas contained in the Handbook. The guidelines do not cover all aspects of working with people, but are those arising from this specific interdiac programme.

The second section which outlines some very important ethical guidelines which should be observed when using the interdiac manual and the methods it includes. The guidelines for the training model support the same values as can be found in the practice guidelines, but sharpen them for the benefit of those organising or participating in learning programmes.

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1 'Make Change Yourselves – Handbook for Empowering Young People in Everyday Life', 2011, Český Těšín, interdiac – order from the web site www.interdiac.eu publications

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SECTION ONE

– ETHICAL GUIDELINES FOR PRACTICE

1. MOTIVATION OF THE WORKER

In interdiac training we have found out that one of the most important questions for developing work with people is to explore and clarify a person's underlying motivation. This may come from their own experience, their identity, the influence of friends and significant people in life or from religion and spirituality. Other factors which may be very influential are experiences of poverty, migration, disability and discrimination. Furthermore, motivation may also be shaped by historical events in the society, for example political change, economic crisis or even civil unrest. Motivation is therefore clearly linked through biography, to certain core values and leads people to work which expresses those values.

There should also be a clear connection between a person's motivation and the aims and methods of their work. When these are consistent, their work is far more effective and there is less likelihood of loss of energy or burnout. The choice of working field and working methods are strongly influenced by basic motivation which is a fundamental resource.

Motivational factors, if understood and built on, create energy and resources for the work, but they also have a shadow side. The motivation to care may lead to co-dependence and the motivation to work for change may lead to a worker forgetting to work for the participation and empowerment of those for whom change is desired.

These factors also shape the expectations that workers (including volunteers) have of their work and when someone is engaged with an organisation which shares similar motivation and expectations to the workers then the situation is optimal. But very often there is a difference between the ways in which a person and an organisation understands their motivation and expectation and this can lead to difficulties if it is not clarified and addressed.

It follows that if a worker is clear about their motivation and how it connects to practice they will have a clearer idea how to build on the motivation of other people. The presence of people with different underlying motivation can be very useful in building a team, so long as there is sufficient commonality of overall vision.

2. KNOWING THE CONTEXT

A very important ethical consideration is how the worker analyses the context of their work. There is a danger of taking over analysis which is created by different power structures and which serves their interests and preconceptions. Even more common is the situation that a worker uncritically takes over the analysis of a situation which is prevalent in the majority society. This can be expressed in stereotypes about particular

groups which traps and devalues them. If as a worker, you have a negative view of the group you are working with which derives from the context it will usually be impossible to work with people for change.

These points are connected to the analysis of the context of the work and imply that it is important to start the analysis close to the everyday life and 'life-world' of the people. In fact it is even more effective to involve the people in developing their own analysis and reflection on their situation, grounded in their personal and collective stories. Being close to the life world is significantly linked to personal and professional values and the process of building from story to analysis may reveal significant aspects of knowledge which are not 'seen' by actors closer to the power structures. You can put this way: workers can also learn very much from people in the local context where they are situated because in a real sense these people are the best experts in knowing and surviving in that reality. Any intervention which aims to be empowering should reflect and build on this knowledge with people themselves.

In interdiac we have developed our work on the basis of the so-called ecological approach, which includes not only immediate relationships but also political, economic, social, cultural and religious structures as well as history, all of which impact everyday life of the specific group and which carry their own positive or negative values for the people. The approach to the work should then include methods which are appropriate for working with the specific group in context. Too often workers simply look for tools without clarifying which approach and method the tools are related to and whether the values incorporated in the tool fit to those of the chosen approach.

3. RESPECT

An important ethical basis for social and youth work is the way in which the relationship to another person is viewed. When you approach another person it is clear that he or she is different from you and the question of how you approach this 'difference' is one foundation, or maybe the basic foundation of an ethical stance. The other person already constitutes an ethical demand to be recognised as they are and not to be placed in any category of social, psychological or other frameworks. She or he has to be faced as another human being and recognised as such. This means that for example, in social and youth work no kind of racism, sexism or other discrimination can be accepted in thought or behaviour. The other person is a unique subject and social work has the responsibility to work with that person in a way which enhances their recognition and the recognition of their rights.

This translates into more than respect for and acceptance of difference ideas and cultures because it leads to ways of working with people that supports the participation of people and works for a society which accepts diversity. It also means that in work with individuals and groups, any expression by the individual or group

which is based in disrespect, non recognition or exclusion should be challenged. This is an important part of the work to eradicate discrimination.

This position is a basis on which to build an understanding of human dignity which respects local knowledge and practice as a basis for development and does not immediately assume that behaviour which does not meet 'accepted' norms of society or of a particular institution should be rejected.

4. ACCOUNTABILITY & RESPONSIBILITY

Social and youth workers have to be held accountable for their work. The most obvious case is where the worker has to give an account of their work to their management committee or employer. But if the emphasis is on empowerment and participation, the worker has to be primarily responsible to and accountable to those with whom they work! Of course workers have to take responsibility for their own decisions, but the wider context is also important. This demands a transparent approach in the developing and implementing the detailed steps of the work process rather than being satisfied with reporting 'after the event'.

The aim should be co-decision making and developing a culture where the participants are learning about and experiencing taking power, including developing the skills to ensure the long term sustainability of the action or project where appropriate. Particularly in working with young people this approach to the work will transfer to everyday life, by creating a kind of 'school for participation and responsibility'.

In wider terms, the social or youth worker has responsibility to ensure the involvement of any team members and especially of the participants. The worker cannot promote participation and responsibility without practicing it themselves! Social and youth workers should promote responsible behaviour of all involved in their work including participants and service users.

Responsibility includes the so-called duty of care for all the people involved and the safeguarding of people who as in any way vulnerable by having structures and processes in place which are transparent and into which all are given some basic induction. Safeguarding relates to the need to have policies which are clearly understood and followed by all participants whether workers, volunteers or a participant, concerning situations where there is a possibility that someone is being mistreated.

5. CONFIDENTIALITY

It goes without saying that in social and youth work all personal information gained about participants or service users is strictly speaking confidential. If any information gained through conversation or if information

is stored on media such as photos, videos or sound recording is required to be used, then permission is needed from the person concerned and in the case of a child, or adult with learning difficulties, the parents or the relevant legal representative. Even better would be also to involve the person or group in the development, control and use of the information.

Now that social media have become so widespread and are used in social and youth work, care should be taken that any personal material does not come into the public domain without the permission of the person or group and data protection laws and rules should be strictly followed.

In group work it is very important to make clear guidelines if confidentiality concerning the discussions in the group is an issue and no information or knowledge gained should be shared. On the other hand safeguarding procedures should be in place to deal with situations where there is suspicion that a person may for example, harm themselves or others. These procedures should be made available to everybody in the organisation and displayed.

6. BOUNDARIES

In professional and voluntary social and youth work the question of boundaries is important. There are three aspects to this:
 – The worker has to manage the boundary between personal life and work life or voluntary work carefully, especially if they are not based in a centre or programme with set physical or time boundaries. It is important to preserve personal space or else there is a danger of burn out.
 – In no case should a worker use violence (passive, psychological or physical) in their relationships and limits on sexual relations must be strictly observed. Organisations should have clear policies on this and the general question of sexual harassment and gender insensitive behaviour.
 – The worker has to strike a balance between the role as a worker and developing friendship with participants in a project. Striving for a 'horizontal' or dialogical approach is important but care should be taken with developing friendships with participants because, for example this can be misinterpreted or lead to allegations of favouritism.

7. COOPERATION & PARTNERSHIP

Social and youth work can be strengthened by working in partnerships with organisations which share similar approaches and values. Partnerships may mobilise new resources of expertise, finance and political

capability, to ensure more possibilities for enhancing the possibilities for the participants or service users. However, it is more difficult to ensure the participation of the users in partnership working because sometimes the partnership 'language and culture' is complex. Therefore care has to be taken if one of the goals is to involve young people or other participants in a partnership, or the experience may be alienating and disempowering. In any case, for a partnership to flourish it is helpful to have clear agreements about roles and responsibilities and also about communication and representation. In partnership working, the relationships should as far as possible be 'horizontal' with no dominant partner and clear procedural rules are a help in this respect. A specific aspect of this is the existence of some funding driven partnerships, where the donor or funder maybe dominant. Of course, care also has to be taken not to develop financial partnerships with bodies that will use the partnership to promote goods and services which are detrimental or damaging to the service users.

A related issue is that of networks. Networks have some of the same attributes as partnerships and may also be structured and long term. However they are usually based on organisations and groups with common interests and function for communication, learning and support as well as for common action. Networks, as partnerships, require transparency, openness and trust, but the reciprocal relationships in networking are more significant.

8. TRANSPARENCY & TRUST

The issues of transparency and trust have already been mentioned several times and both are essential to effective social and youth work. Work which is not transparent with respect to expectations, practical planning and of course relationships will not be effective. Transparency guards against manipulative behaviour and builds trust. Trust is also positively correlated with effective work and this should include openness about power structures and decision making. A special aspect of transparency is transparency about finance, about the source and application of money and about decision making about project finance. Accountability for the use of money also builds trust and effective work.

9. EVALUATION

If youth and social work is about empowerment, one very important element is evaluation. All parts of the work process should be evaluated as a way to improve people's commitment and participation. Workers also have to continually evaluate their work, the work of the team, including the young people or others they work

with themselves. Evaluation is not just about showing that a project was successful 'at the end' nor about collecting statistical outcomes. The main use of evaluation is in reflecting on the work process as it develops and improving it. Without evaluation, much important learning is lost! So evaluation is not just about 'success' or 'failure'. Furthermore it is important to learn from situations which become problematic so the problem can be avoided in the future and lessons are learnt and shared. A number of methods and tools are available for evaluation, including those developed by interdiac itself, such as the learning diary. In addition, personal and team supervision can assist with improving quality of work. Supervision and debriefing are useful methods to ensure quality of social youth work.

10. LIFE-LONG LEARNING

Whilst life-long learning does not at first sight seem to be a 'value' in the traditional sense it is strongly related to the view of social and youth work as a process of learning, or even of 'research' and developing new knowledge from 'bottom-up'. The most interesting aspect of this is the promotion of a professional approach which emphasises co-learning with young people and participants in developing new practices and new initiatives.

In this way, while the concept of life-long learning may also include developing new approaches, learning new skills and gaining new knowledge, the focus is on effective work not career and income advancement or even directly on employability!

Notes:

SECTION TWO

– ETHICAL GUIDANCE FOR USING

THE INTERDIAC HANDBOOK

The Ethical Guidance outlined in the first section of this paper has arisen from work on the Handbook and in this short section we outline some of the important ways in which these guidelines relate to using the interdiac Handbook.

1. MOTIVATION AND EXPECTATION

One of the keys to the effective running of the training process which is elaborated in the interdiac Handbook, whether it is used with workers (paid or voluntary) or young people and other service users themselves, is that participants are clear about their 'motivation'. The persons or group have to participate freely and be ready and open for new learning based on an experiential approach. Their expectations should be related to development of their work and not simply to picking up tools and methods. When the approach is used with groups of service users, workers or volunteers they have to be ready to share their biography as a basis for finding their future way.

2. CONFIDENTIALITY

Because the process depends on exploring biography and influences which shape people's approach to those they work with, then the participants in these kinds of learning process have to agree to a confidentiality rule. What is disclosed in the group work should on no account be shared outside the training group.

3. GROUND RULES

Clear ground rules should be established at the start of the process and confidentiality is one such rule. But it should also be agreed that whenever a person in the group process is asked to speak about something or clarify an issue that they do not want to be discussed or to share something they do not want to disclose, then they should not be pushed to respond or contribute on that topic. Other ground rules, which could be agreed in an open process with the group, should include switching off electronic devices and phones to avoid distraction and show respect.

4. POWER AND TRUST

A careful process of group building is needed in order to build trust. However there can be unforeseen problems when workers in a team, for example follow this process and the line manager is also present. Someone in a power position can misuse the information by a person who is 'lower down the organisation' than they are, to the detriment of that person. On the other hand when this issue is faced and addressed, such cross organisational training which may even involve service users can be very productive of new knowledge and practice.

5. SAFETY IN THE PROCESS

Participants should feel safe in the process and this means both that the group will be a safe space and the leader will prevent or react on any racist, sexist or other discriminatory remarks for example. To run the group as a safe place, also implies being ready to discuss such matters openly in the group and refer them outside if necessary.

On the other hand of course in the phase of the process which involves spending time 'on the spot' in a neighbourhood for example, then the participants should be briefed about appropriate behaviour and not exposed to any unnecessary or disproportionate personal risks, for example when walking in a neighbourhood.

CONCLUSION

We hope you find this statement useful in your work and training and invite you to send any comments on the text to the interdiac Head of Education as interdiac will continually reflect on the statement and update it according to requirements and feedback.

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Youth