

# THE PROPOSAL OF EDUCATION PROGRAMME OF COUNSELLORS FOR SOCIAL SERVICES USERS

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**Summary:** *The article informs about the conception of a new counselling service in the Czech Republic and about an educational system designed for workers of this service. It presents the outcomes of the authors' work because they participated in the creation of education as well as the counselling system for social services users. The authors propose an original and comprehensive conception of the educational programme fulfilling the accreditation requirements of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs.*

**Key words:** *People with disability, education, further education, counselling, Act No. 108/2006 on Social Services, prevention of social exclusion*

## **Instead of introduction**

A new system of social services has significantly changed the rules of social services provision in the Czech Republic. The change has affected users, providers and also incorporators of social services.

Act No. 108/2006 on Social Services differs considerably from other laws which are being adopted every year because it regulates and in future will regulate matters and relations of some hundreds of thousands inhabitants of the Czech Republic.

The position of incorporators, providers and users of social services has changed fundamentally in the frame of the new system. Incorporators of social services – we can also call them investors of social services – are most frequently the state, regions, municipalities and non-governmental non-profit organisations. The revolutionary change has concerned the position of providers of social services. The law introduced the principle of registration in social services – the providers are obliged to meet conditions and criteria (given by the Social Services Act) concerning the provision of social services.

Even more fundamental changes are related to users of social services (hereinafter referred to as users) – residents of the Czech Republic and other inhabit-

ants the Act relates to. Care benefit<sup>1</sup> – mostly understood to be a part of social services financing – is a fundamental factor in users' shift from a passive object of social care provision to a citizen actively participating in decisions about the content of social services. The position of a user has been changed not only by care benefit but also by other aspects. The change has been caused especially by the introduction of the contract for provision of social services which replaced the former decision of a public administration authority. Citizens used to request social services and a responsible authority used to decide in administrative proceedings whether the service will be provided or not. The system of waiting lists – which is definitely not an adequate type of social care – guaranteed to some degree equality of the applicants for social services.

Nowadays the conception of a contract of provision of social services being a legal and factual basis for relations between user and a provider guarantees (at least formally) better conditions for the users' active participation in definition of their needs and selection of adequate social services. One principle applies to contracts generally – the equal position of contracting parties. But this also means that the users must admit even greater responsibility for the consequences of their decisions and choices.

Personal experiences and legal conscience of the users are markedly different due to many reasons. Thousands of citizens may consider generally desired free choice as a stressful obligation connected with serious negotiation. An obligation they did not have to meet in the past.

Above mentioned reasons encouraged the National Council of People with Disability together with experts from the Research Centre of Integration of Disabled to create a new type of counselling service for the users – persons who are dependent to a greater or lesser degree on others' help. (Details on counselling service for the users can be found on the webpage: [www.poradn-aprouzivatele.cz](http://www.poradn-aprouzivatele.cz).)

A newly designated education curriculum is a part of the new counselling system. The workers are being prepared for practising their profession – a counsellor of social services users.

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<sup>1</sup> A new type of benefit – provided to persons or institutions that look after persons who cannot look after themselves.

### **The educational programme for counsellors for social services users**

The programme is aimed at comprehensive training and education needed for practising the profession of “a counsellor of social service users”. The counsellors practise professional social counselling connected with Act No. 108/2006 on Social Services, particularly the area of contracts between the users and the providers of services.

### **The target group and course participants**

The target group consists of the current workers in the position of counsellors for social services users and interested people with a background in social services, in non-profit making organisations joining seniors, citizens with disability etc. The primary goal of the education course is to prepare participants for practising the profession of counsellors. Social workers who want to broaden their knowledge and abilities are not excluded from participation in the course. It is possible to include representatives of the incorporators, providers and users of social services into the course.

### **The conception of the educational programme**

In the education programme are the participants enabled to learn the basics needed to know and understand:

- the current system of social services,
- the position and role of counselling workplace where the needs of the users are addressed,
- the use of data files concerning chosen areas of counselling,
- how to practise counselling while meeting the usual and special standards for quality in social services, including adequate communication competences,
- how to manage, organise and evaluate counselling.

The educational programme is arranged into a model timetable. The below introduced succession of lessons was created on the basis of practical verification. The organisers of the course have a certain freedom in sequencing the individual themes according to concrete educational needs of the course participants.

### **Goals of the educational programme:**

Achieve or possibly improve the participants' competences for practising counselling in the frame of social services in the Czech Republic.

Broaden participants' current experiences gained in the area of social services and during counselling.

Inform the participants about the latest experiences and principles of counselling process.

Broaden and improve the knowledge of forms of social services.

Inform in detail about the standards of quality in social services in connection with both the counsellors' own counselling and the services providers' activities.

Give the participants an opportunity to work individually on preparation of standards of quality in the new type of social service (counselling for social service users).

Broaden and improve the knowledge of current system of welfare benefits and their connection to social services.

Improve participants' knowledge of the typology of clients, methods and forms of work with clients.

Enable the participants to acquire sufficient knowledge of psychology, communication principles and management of interpersonal relationships.

Create an adequate degree of legal conscience and expert knowledge necessary for practising counselling – particularly in the area of contracts for provision of social services.

Enable the participants to acquire the knowledge of following themes: protection of the users' rights, protection of a person and data and application of gained knowledge.

Teach the participants to understand legislation concerning normative by-laws and their position in social services.

Enable the participants to know how to work with a group of users deprived of legal capacity and with their guardians.

Prepare the participants for their own professional publishing and monitoring activities in the area of social services mainly via creation of "counsellor of social services users' portfolio".

### **Methodological and educational aspects of the course:**

The authors suggest a certain number of consultation days but the emphasis is put on participants' individual learning. The study days should take the form of consultation of important issues, not of routine presentation by lecturers. The participants should have an access to a sufficient amount of study literature. It is recommended to use as many study text prepared especially for blended

study as possible. The practical and case study seminars are also included into the course – participants discuss cases they have experienced. It is supposed that participants already work in the position of counsellor and therefore they do not need a specially prepared practice.

The use of electronic consultations with lecturers or possibly a creation of an interactive webpage enabling participants' discussion and their guiding are expected. Participants must pass a final examination and present a written final work.

The presence of experts from all included fields of study is assumed. It is worth to choose lecturers who are experts on their field of study (layers, psychologists, social workers, etc.) and also have personal experience with social services.

The frame curriculum of the course

<b>Subjects</b>	<b>Amount of hours</b>
<b>General</b>	<b>94</b>
Introduction to the course	2
The position of social services users in the Czech Republic	4
Introduction to legislation	16
Introduction to social work	8
Introduction to psychology	16
Introduction to communication	16
Introduction to professional counselling	8
Welfare benefits	8
Social services	16
<b>Special</b>	<b>106</b>
Standards of quality in social services	16
Standards of quality in counselling for social services users	8
Contract of provision of social services	20
Methods of work with social service users	16
Problem solving, mediation	12
Normative by-laws	4
Legal capacity	4
Data protection	4
Case studies seminar	8
Burning issues of the profession	8
Seminar on written final work	4
Conclusion	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>200</b>

It is possible to adapt the above-mentioned frame curriculum – the content of the educational course – according to:

- participants' education,
- participants' job,
- burning issues of social services provision – according to experiences gained in the new system of social services.

### **Content of the course subjects**

#### *Introduction to course, The position of social services users in the Czech Republic*

Inform the participants about the conception of the educational course, its goals, study materials, requirements participants must fulfil etc. Introduction to the counselling system in social services, followed by the issue of persons with disadvantage in the social system of the Czech Republic.

#### *Introduction to social work*

Introduction to the issue of social work – development and settling of the discipline, types of social work and its methods etc. Inform about the social policy of the government and the social security scheme (their position in the legal system of the Czech Republic, three pillars of the social security scheme etc.) – all should be explained in the frame of social services counselling.

#### *Introduction to psychology*

Enable the participants to gain the knowledge about general, developmental and social psychology which are important for counselling practice. Concentration on psychology of personality, especially on types of personality and its development. Training of assertiveness to use it while counselling.

#### *Introduction to law*

Introduction to legislation, to the basic terminology of the discipline (law, legislation, morality, legal conscience, legal relations). Inform about the terminology connected with the civil law and the theory of legal acts. Contractual relations in the civil law. Present an overview of activities of public administration authorities in connection with social services.

#### *Social services*

The participants learn the principles and goals of social services and are informed about the basic types of social services – social counselling, care and prevention. They are also informed about forms of provision of social services

and basic activities connected with provision of social services. The lecturer analyses and explains the provisions of Act No. 108/2006 on Social Services connected to the individual types of social services and the position of inspection and incorporators resulting from the mentioned law.

#### *Introduction to communication*

Definition of the key issues connected with communication, introduction of communication modes and analysis of nonverbal communication. Information about extra linguistic and paralinguistic communication. Explanation of specific factors of communication – tactile aspects of communication, the use of gestures, etc. Introduction to augmentative and alternative communication in connection with counselling for persons with disability.

#### *Welfare benefits*

Introduction to basic terminology connected with the area of welfare benefits. Explanation of the following terms: minimum wage, subsistence level, state relief of the poor, help in poverty. Lecturer aims at disability compensations and issue of pensions – annuity insurance, types of pensions etc.

#### *Legal capacity*

Legal personality, capacity to enter into legal acts. Closer explanation of terms: restriction on capacity to legal acts and deprivation of legal capacity. Appointment of guardian and his/her actions, particularly those connected with Act No. 108/2006 on Social Services (completion of the contract of provision of social service).

#### *Data protection*

General and civil regulations concerning the issue of protection of person, particularly aimed at Act on Personal Data Protection. The analysis of potentially complicated situations that can happen to counsellors of users, potential sanctions in case of infraction of regulations.

#### *Normative by-laws*

Summary of normative by-laws. Explain in detail typical aspects, competence, creation, legal liability etc. of normative by-laws and their comparison with general legal rules.

### *Standards of quality in social services*

The definition of quality principles of social services and introduction to standards of quality in social services. The lecturer aims at the issue of the users' rights, possible infringement of their rights and legal measures in case of an infringement. Analysis of situations when a conflict of interests can appear. Techniques of negotiations with persons interested in social services. Workers in social services – their competences, hiring, introduction to job, management and evaluation. Practising the behaviour in case of emergency or critical situations or in case of complaint.

### *Standards of quality in counselling for social services users*

Discussion and creation of standards for quality in counselling for the users. Establishing goals and roles of counselling. Preparation of individual standards (from the point of view of counsellors) and discussion on standards and practical issues.

### *Contract of provision of social services*

Gaining knowledge of provisions of Act No. 108/2006 on Social Services and its implementing decree which concerns the contract of provision of social services and the users' rights. Focusing on the parts a contract is obliged to have. The analysis of existing contracts, searching their unlawful or disadvantageous parts, rewording contracts. Introduction of another provisions of Act and decree and possibilities of their integration into contracts. Formulation of "sample" provisions of individual contracts in practice. Discussion on formulations and their evaluation.

### *Methods of work with the social service users*

Information about methods of work commonly used in counselling practice and discussion of the most frequent errors which can occur in counselling. Aiming at the specifics of communication with the users who need special approach. Analysis of errors in interpersonal communication – narcissistic communication, schizoid communication, communication in stressful situations, etc.

### *Problem solving, mediation*

Information about types of conflicts and arguments in interpersonal communication. Introduction to different types of solving a conflict situation. Focusing

on the issue of aggression and assertive behaviour. Analyse in detail the mediation, its phases and aspects and its application during counselling session.

*Seminar on case studies*

Solving sample situations which can occur or have already occurred in the practice of users' counsellors.

*The burning issues of the profession*

Analysis and interpretation of sample situations that occurred in the practice of users' counsellors and which were related to implementation of Social Services Act. Interconnection of sample situations with above mentioned theoretical subjects.

*Seminar on final written work*

Information about requirements for the written final work – the so called “counsellors of social services users' portfolio”. Focusing on formal and content features of the work and types of research which should be used in the work.

*Conclusion*

Evaluation of the course and its outcomes. Increase the participants' awareness of their acquired knowledge and skills. Participants will have the opportunity to come up with suggestions and questions towards course organisers.

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