Social worker's role in supporting the young people who leave the protection system at 18 years old

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Abstract

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The year of 1989 marked a redirection of European community to Central and Eastern European countries in order to help them to realize how quickly a real Western democracy in the center of which are fundamental rights and freedoms of citizens. Romania is a country that has had the experience of transition from socialism to capitalism, the solutions "imported" to overcome the transition proved inoperative and the costs of the failure appeared: poverty and its polarization, social insecurity, discrimination and victimization of various groups' risk (women, children, elderly).

This research aims to identify and analyze some of the realities of the Romanian transition and report the risks to young people are exposed when they leaving the residential institutions at 18 years old. Poverty, poor housing conditions, unemployment, deteriorating situation of educational, increased drug use, increased crime, are just some of the consequences arising as a result of the failure of integration of this category of people in society. Transforming this problem in a matter of public interest may lead to facilitating the establishment of cooperative structure at the local level. For this the role of the social worker, that community facilitator, is crucial. He can play an active role both as an initiator / promoter of community practices and strategies to increase the chances for social inclusion of these young and as a coordinator of the coherent strategies to address the phenomenon, or the reference person among them. The success or failure of these social action programs is due largely to their supporting by of existing of cultural models.

Section: Sociology and Assistance of disadvantaged groups

According to *The National Conversation on Youth Development in the 21st Century:* Final Report,[1] „youth development is the natural process of growing up and developing one's capabilities, which is too important to be left to chance. Positive youth development occurs from an intentional process that promotes positive outcomes for youth by providing support, relationships, and opportunities. Youth development takes place in families, peer groups, schools, in neighborhoods and communities, and prepares youth to meet the challenges of adolescence and adulthood through coordinated, progressive research-based experiences that help them to become socially, morally, emotionally, physically, and intellectually competent".

Social work is one that supports the youth in need, especially those who have been long time under a form of special protection in order labor market integration and social reintegration.

For those working in the social care institutions the importance and significance of this step, the ritual passage to independent human life, are well known.

Young people have been under one form of special protection are facing similar problems of a larger segment of young people came of age. Their financial problems are similar to those of other young people whose families are unable to offer a starting point in an independent life. Homelessness is a major problem affecting a large segment of young people who were institutionalized and those who come from families with limited financial means. So, many of these people get into the street or those with disabilities, in medical-social institutions.

Employment is another issue faced by this segment of the population because often the qualification that they have do not represent the entrance ticket in the labor market. But apart from the labor market regulations (social safeguards of young labor, the tax system, etc.) which contribute to the existence of low rates of employment, there are some specific aspects of life in institutions that enhances risk associated with these problems.

The social worker must ensure that community efforts are turning to equalize opportunities for children in disadvantaged position compared to children raised in families, but also to identify practicable financial solutions and moral legitimacy to the structural problems that affect the future of young people.

Involvement and role of social worker is not limited to training „the equipping" adolescents with different abilities/skills and knowledge necessary for a independent social life outside of social institutions. The

social worker can play an active role both as an initiator/ promoter of practical and community strategies to increase the chances for social inclusion of young people from the placement centers and as coordinator of coherent strategies to address the phenomenon or as a person reference therein.

One of the most important aspects of social assistance service for preparing teenagers for independent life is offered their support in structuring desirable and realistic projects life. First of all, the young must be learn / helped to discover what he wants. This function performs normally family, even if often family contribution is not straightforward. In case of children in institutions, this family's function is performed by professionals in social work. So the main consequence of the positive support provided by these to teenagers in their own life project structure is shaping individual identity of the teenager.

An important role assumed by a social worker is to prepare young people for independent and autonomous life. What you need to take into account is that family environment, be it natural or a foster family, offers children the best education to obtain skills for an independent life. The social worker involved in educating of teenagers through educational programs, more or less formalized, while the family represents the natural frame of a normalized learning. Rewarding for performance is an ongoing process that provides a more valid mechanism to reinforce a positive behavior than the sentence, often the instrument most commonly used in formal learning [2].

Equipping the teenagers with skills for an independent life means we are interviewing them and assessing the level of these skills among of the teenagers from protection institutions. This approach is important not only because it provides a more complete picture of what able to can and know a young man capable of living on their own; it is important for the lead to the construction an instrument to assess the level of the adolescent social development, instrument that can be used and assess the progress / evolution of this [3].

K.A. Nollan, [4] talks to a classification of those skills necessary for independent life: tangible and intangible skills (**Table 1**).

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Table 1 - Skills classification

Tangible skills: skill for daily life, retention, acquiring and retaining for a job. The skill of type *I know what I do*	Intangible skills: this skills who are necessary to cultivation the interpersonal relationships and maintenance of the workplace:
- Money Management - Management of household - Ability to use vehicles, travel - Identification and use of recreation resources and the entertainment - Identify the interests and vocational skills.	- Ability to take decisions - Ability to solving problems - Ability of planning - Ability to communicate - Self-Esteem - Management of emotions and the negative feelings such as anger and despair.

Source: K.A. Nollan et al, Redy or Not: Assesing Youths' Preparedness for Independent Living in Child Welfare, nr. 2/2000, pp.159-177

In addition to various education programs that can be designed to compensate for weaknesses identified in teenager's skills for an independent life, life in the institution, for institutionalized children, plays an important role in acquisition of certain practices, skills, normal behavioral responses. As a result, an important role plays the organization of daily activities within the institutions. Even if the social worker has not always powers in relation to this aspect his role is to make proposals for the reorganization of activities to increase the level of skills necessary for an independent life. These activities involve washing dishes, shopping, self-care skills. Unfortunately they are thought, usually, to be a punishment, a burden and less of a natural part of everyday life, in that the individual may derive a satisfaction.

All these activities included in the programs and strategies are initiated to open the protection institution to community. The integration of the institution in community may have several consequences including: increased opportunities for social inclusion of the child/young person by providing a natural setting to learn social norms and values, community awareness on the problems that these children / young people face, increasing the community tolerance and responsibility for child / youth from placement centers.

In order to achieve these objectives, more strategies had proposed [2] as follows:

1. Building stable and dense relationships / networks relationships between adolescents and the families within the community and outside the

community. This objective can be achieved in different ways: resumption or stabilization of relations with the natural family, biological, where is possible, integration within foster families, is certainly a favorite solution for institutionalization, or other ways of developing close relationships with adults or families in the community or outside it, is the mentor's institution. To each child is finding a mentor, a person ready to provide emotional support and advice to children / young in case of decision, crisis or feelings of confusion. Another way of networking is that of the big brother - the institutionalized child / young finds an big brother from outside of the institution which can provides emotional support, and that of the sponsor model (abroad or country) that can anchor a network social who offers possibility a financial support even after they leaving the protection system.

2. Development / encourage of economic activities in the institution or like dependency of this. This objective can lead to increased of institution's revenue, may create a framework for learning of trades, or may be represent a job for holiday periods of teenagers, to supplement his income and to experience a new type of productive activity, they can lead to the development of ethic's work and a positive attitude towards work, can be represent a future job or to create an environment for exercising entrepreneurial skills.

3. Approach and social professional relations are very important for social integration of the individual. There is yet another important dimension of social life: community life: life in community. In addition to roles mentioned above, which has the centers open to community, mention the participation to different types of cultural activities, sports, civic, public or political meetings, inviting the community to participate in various artistic cultural events organized by children /young, all this leading to development of a sense of equality between them and other children / young people of their age.

Another role played by the social worker is to coordinate or precipitation of coherent strategy at Community level to address the problems faced by young people who leave the protection institutions.

An important aspect in discussing about the support who can be offered by social workers from social institution to young people who leave the protection institutions at 18 years old, is represented by multiple roles [5] that they can actually take it, namely the social broker, a facilitator, teacher, mediator and lawyer.

Problems faced by young people can not be solved within these institutions care therefore they will be outsourced. So the social worker may take the following activities:

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a) Identify all actors who may be involved in solving of a problem.
Fig. 1 - Social actors involved in intervention
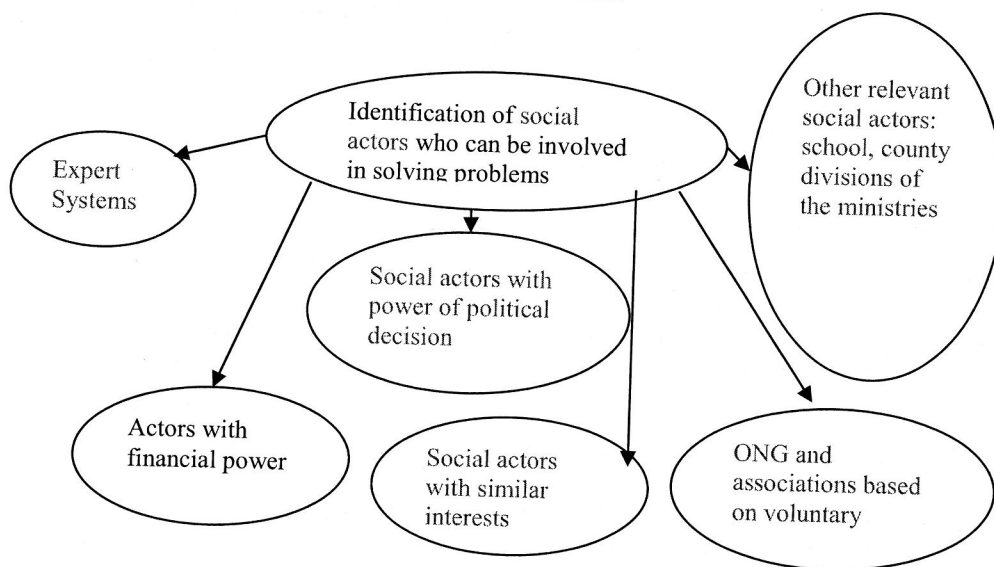
Source: Luana Pop, (2004). Social worker's role in supporting the young who leave the residential institutions at 18 years old, Book University Publishing, Bucharest, p. 75

b) Mobilization of resources that actually refers to the awareness of social actors, creation of motivational structures that can mobilize their action.

Fig.2 - Community Resources
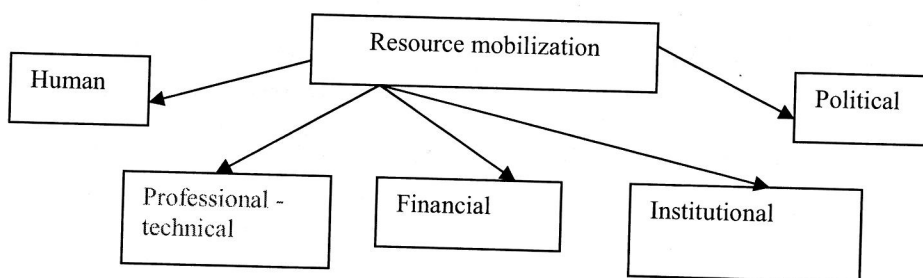
Source: Luana Pop, (2004). Social worker's role in supporting the young who leave the residential institutions at 18 years old, Book University Publishing, Bucharest, p. 76

c) Creation of a framework for cooperation / to initiate a stable cooperation networks focusing on the problem. Transformation of problem in a matter of public interest, that affect a wider population - in general young and their parents - leads to facilitating the creation of a local cooperative structures.

d) The initiation of public awareness campaigns in which to be directly involved the young people who need support.

In the absence of county-level services which have the role of community facilitator, the social worker from placement centers is taking over the role involving in this process experts, professionals and even volunteers. Intervention programs undertaken by the social protection system initiated as a response to the needs of the young who leave the protection systems should be *adapted* to the socio-economic status and the legislation and *individualized*. It is important that each social worker, especially those in the placement center, to be actively involved in finding pertinent solutions to help young people find a fixed employment and a house that would give conditions for a decent living, so that socio-economic integration to be done efficiently.

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