

THE CONTRIBUTION OF SWEDISH INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND CO-OPERATION AGENCY (SIDA) INTO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF *COMMUNITY SOCIAL SERVICES DEVELOPMENT PROJECT*

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In 1997 the Ministry of Social Security and Labour together with the World Bank and the Swedish International Development Agency started the implementation of Community Social Services' Development pilot project. The project's progress revealed several interesting aspects of international co-operation in the area of social work. I think they will be interesting to the social workers of our country.

This conclusion has been fostered by the echoes of project reaching us from abroad. Probably the most important event witnessing the project's international recognition was the award won at the Hanover World EXPO 2000 World Projects' Competition. The project was put on the list of the best European urban social policy innovation projects made by the European Council Social Assistance Committee. Executors of the project are invited to international conferences for the presentation of the project to international audience (Stockholm in 1999; Capetown, Oslo, Riga in 2000).

The project covers the municipalities of the towns of Vilnius and Šiauliai as well as the municipalities of the regions of Utena, Mol tai, Anykš iai, and Šven ionys. The purpose of the project is to create a system alternative to institutions offering expensive institutional social services. The project seeks to give cheaper noninstitutional social services to the biggest possible number of clients, and to create the chances for more effective use of existing or future possibilities. The project attempts to demonstrate a system of co-ordinated actions seeking to create favourable circumstances and conditions for the development of socially, economically and fiscally effective social service system. This is the basic advantage of the project.

Currently 14 day care centres and services offer various social services to people.

SIDA funds are used to assess the project and to

finance the programs for the improvement of professional qualifications in the area of social work. Stockholm University Social Work School is responsible for the effective and timely implementations of the said actions.

At the beginning of project's implementation specialists from Stockholm University together with the staff of Vilnius University Social Work Department carried out a Base line study of social service rendering situation at all municipalities involved in the project. This allowed us to define more precisely the contents and scope of activities of future open-type social service centres, social needs of the clients, and the directions for the improvement of social workers' qualifications. Half of the time given for the project's implementation being over, the Ministry of Social Security and Labour, the Project Co-ordination Group and Stockholm University carried out a Mid-term evaluation. It purposed to assess the agreement among actually achieved qualitative and quantitative indicators of projects' progress and the ones expected at the start of project's implementation. The results achieved showed that funds satisfied the expectations of all participants of the project: the comparison made by client groups indicated that services offered to mentally handicapped children by centres established in the course of projects' implementation were 2.5 times cheaper; to mentally handicapped adults – 2.1 cheaper; and services offered to old people were 10 times cheaper than the services rendered by institutional service institutions. Compared to the costs of municipal care homes, the rates of pilot centres are cheaper 1.5 times if clients stay there not longer than 6 months.

From the beginning of project's implementation in 1997 till June 1999 the number of clients increased from 146 to 1296, that is 8.8 times. 72 of them

avoided in this way institutionalisation. It should be mentioned that the rest of clients stayed at home: they either did not receive necessary services or the services provided were not adequate.

A survey of the opinion of clients attending centres revealed that only 0.4% of all respondents gave negative opinion about centres' activities. Answers such as "good" (46.7%), "very good" (23%) or "excellent" (16.9%) prevailed. No major differences among the clients of separate centres were observed. Services given by centres also received favourable opinions: only 3 persons out of 261 gave negative evaluations to services rendered by centres. The assessment of personnel qualifications revealed the absence of negative opinions. When evaluating this indicator, it is possible to state that the greater part of centre-attending clients, that is 86.6% ("good" 46.7% + "very good" 23% + "excellent" 16.9%) gave favourable evaluations to services rendered by centres.

As early as at the stage of the project's preparation Stockholm University paid special attention to the qualifications of personnel of newly-created centres. When assessing the experience of social workers' training in Lithuania, project creators prepared specialised training programs for every group of social workers based on their future target activities, the specific character of their institutions' activities, and on socio-demographic definitions of their clients. In total 4 qualification improvement programs were created, namely Special education and social work with mentally handicapped children and their families; Social services to elderly and mentally handicapped adults; Social rehabilitation of people with dependencies (alcoholics, drug addicts, prostitutes); Children's welfare courses. The programs were created with the active participation of Vilnius University Social Work Department. The duration of every program covers 10 weeks of training in Lithuania plus 3 weeks of training in Sweden. Program participants include 130 social workers from 6 municipalities. Program executors are social work professionals working at the said universities. According to the plan of project's implementation, every program had to be completed before the opening of a social service centre reflecting the theoretical and practical contents of the program for the improvement of professional qualification. To evaluate the contents of programs, all staff workers of

centres participating in training courses were surveyed. Negative opinion about the value of such training was given by 2.4% of respondents, while other respondents thought that the training was useful (36.1%) or very useful (24%). From the point of view of organisation, the absolute majority of respondents gave a very good evaluation to the training courses. The survey showed that it was owing to professional knowledge imparted by Swedes that the personnel of centres acquired excellent professional understanding of the goals of centres, differentiated evaluations of problems, and adequate methods for their solution. According to the heads of centres, courses made a tremendous influence on the personal motivation to future work with clients, and on the wish to further elaborate professional skills. The survey also revealed the opinion of social workers of other municipalities not involved in the project on the professional competence of centres' workers: 51% of respondents thought that the competence was much higher than in other social service institutions.

Activities related to the support provided by the Swedish Government (SIDA) are carried out within the framework of project implementation: regular supervision of functioning centres by Swedish specialists; workshops on various social work subjects; annual conferences on the project's accomplishments and implementation problems involving all social workers of Lithuania; creation of a computer program for the documentation of work with clients, and its introduction into the activities of already existing centres. All this secures positive quality of given services and necessary staff competence. Besides, this serves to demonstrate how it is possible to expect more effective use of funds for the needs of the most socially vulnerable residents of Lithuania in the transitory period leading to day care centres offering open-type services.

In 2000 the Ministry of Social Security and Labour created a new project. It purposes to further develop the experience of creation pilot centres with a stress laid on the perspective of social problems on an all-Lithuanian level. This project provides the creation of a system for the improvement of professional qualification of social workers of Lithuania, and the system of monitoring of social institutions. Experts from SIDA and World Bank have already approved this project.