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ACQUISITION OF COMPETENCIES FOR ADVOCACY IN SOCIAL WORK

Under Art. 3 of the Social Work Activity Act (NG 16/19) in the Republic of Croatia, representation, advocacy and empowerment are defined as the individual or group-oriented professional procedures in the social work activity. Representation, advocacy and empowerment are strategic processes of working with or on behalf of beneficiaries to achieve an equal position in society, the right to social services, or some other form of assistance that would not be available without them, which includes advocating for better social policy, better social legislation and social justice in society. Social workers can carry out different types of advocacy, such as legal and legislative advocacy, self-advocacy and advocacy systems. According to the principle of active participation, social workers represent clients' best interests. One of the essential principles on which advocacy is based is empowerment. In the integration of understanding of the legal framework and advocacy through the academic year 2020/2021 at the Graduate School of Social Work at the Faculty of Law in Osijek, the course "Social Welfare Systems and Advocacy" was delivered for the first time. The course aimed to provide to students' knowledge about different social welfare systems, critical analysis of these welfare systems, their evaluation and comparison with the social welfare system in the Republic of Croatia, and the acquisition of theoretical and practical knowledge and skills to represent clients' interests in social work. This paper represents the advocacy process in social work that students worked on during the lecture. In addition to the concepts of advocacy in social work, this paper will show students' self-assessment of acquired competencies for advocacy through education.

Keywords: advocacy in social work, empowerment, social justice, learning outcomes, competencies of social workers.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The global definition of social work of the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) states:

“Social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, empowerment and liberation of people. The principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility, and respect for diversity are keys to social work. Based on theories of social work, social sciences, humanities, and indigenous knowledge, social work engages people and structures in solving life’s challenges and improving well-being” (International Association of Schools of Social Work, 2014). Social work engages people and structures to improve people’s well-being at both the global and national levels. The Code of Ethics for Social Workers in Social Work (2014) of the Republic of Croatia states that social workers are obliged to assess carefully, following the profession’s rules, whose interest should be primarily represented in the performance of their professional duties. The vital role of social workers in public relations and their influence on political and legal arrangements is further emphasized. In this regard, social workers are obliged to publicly point out to practice and policy that deviates from the principles of social justice, discriminates against members of society based on their characteristics, prevents or hinders access to social resources and services.

One of the ways of promoting and enhancing the program of social justice in social work is advocacy. The word “advocacy” in the linguistic sense means to officially represent an individual or a group in a state institution, citizens in parliament, a party in court and to express a position; a different opinion (Birtić et al., 2012). The word advocacy is often used instead of the word representation, which in the Croatian language means “to fight for whom or what”, “to work in whose favour” (advocate for the rights of the weaker) (Birtić et al., 2012). In linguistic terms, representation and advocacy put the representatives or advocates in an active role. Still, the process of representation is the co-creation of relationships and processes between social workers and clients.

There are many definitions of advocacy in social work. According to Brkić (2010, p. 22), “advocacy is the process of planned and by social workers guided activities, which are designed and implemented in collaboration with clients, aimed at changing the circumstances that are frustrating or preventing them in meeting individual and collective needs, developing potential and taking control of one’s own life as much as possible.” The ultimate meaning of advocacy is that clients develop their potential to represent their interests authentically and make decisions that would ultimately be independent or less dependent on the social welfare system (Brkić, 2010, p. 23).

Advocacy is an element of social work that significantly distinguishes it from other helping professions (Cox et al., 2018, p.56). Therefore, during the formal education of future social workers, it is necessary to implement an educational program to acquire representation competencies.

To integrate and understand the legal framework and the representation process through the academic year 2020/2021 at the Graduate School of Social Work at the Faculty of Law in Osijek, a course entitled “Social Welfare Systems and Advocacy” was conducted for the

first time. According to the Curriculum of the Graduate School of Social Work for the academic year 2020/2021 (2020), the course aimed to enable students to acquire theoretical and practical knowledge and skills to represent clients in social work, to gain knowledge about different social welfare systems and undertake critical analysis, evaluation and comparison of these systems with the social welfare system in the Republic of Croatia. It was assumed that after completing the course, students would be able to:

1. Compare different social welfare systems;
2. Critically analyze and evaluate the social welfare system in the Republic of Croatia;
3. Explain the meaning and content of representation in social work;
4. Practically identify the goals of representation;
5. Select the most appropriate types, strategies and tactics to represent the target group whose interests they are to represent;
6. Explain professional and ethical dilemmas in the representation.

This paper presents the results of self-assessment of 56 students in terms of achieving the outcomes of the aforementioned course, after they have attended it.

It also aims to present the process of case advocacy from practical exercises modelled on Schneider and Loster (2001), described in the book *Social Work Advocacy: A new framework for action*, commenting on the possibility of using an empowerment approach in individual phases of advocacy.

2. REPRESENTATION AND/OR ADVOCACY IN SOCIAL WORK

According to Brown et al. (2015), there are currently two identities of social work: one that refers to working on cases through the provision of therapeutic services and another that focuses on social reform, social justice and community organization. Social workers need to understand policies that affect their clients, how to access resources and potential barriers to accessing resources for their clients (Brown et al., 2015). Although there are many articles on advocacy in social work, most of them focus on strategies and tactics for social workers working in particular environments and less on leading the advocacy process (Bliss, 2015, p.1). Based on the distinction between who controls the goals or outcomes of representation and who controls the means or process, Freddolino, Moxley, and Hyduk (2004) point out that legal advocacy, advocacy, social work, and social networking are essential for advocacy.

Schneider and Lester (2001) developed a universal definition of social work advocacy by emphasizing exclusivity and joint representation of beneficiaries and their interests to influence systematically the decision-making in an unjust and irresponsible system. They state that the specificity of advocacy lies in the efforts that social workers make to represent beneficiaries or to bring to the changes in decisions, especially those that involve controlling resources and thereby reduce or eliminate injustice.

According to Schneider and Lester (2001), the advocacy process takes place through a circular process consisting of data collection, defining goals and making a plan, identifying

decision-makers, forming a coalition, fundraising, defining messages, sending messages / implementing actions and monitoring and evaluations. The activities carried out in individual phases of the advocacy process will be explained in the case report below.

The advocacy model emphasises support to the empowerment of clients in the advocacy process. Over the last few decades, social workers have embraced empowerment as a key feature of the practice (Schneider and Lester, 2001).

In the context of advocacy, it refers to the ability of clients to influence decisions made about themselves, determine the best outcomes for themselves and make life-changing decisions themselves. According to Jugović and Brkić (2013, p. 102), social work through empowerment starts from the idea of “communicating understanding and the non-existence of absolute knowledge where the social worker is the one who has power and knows”.

In addition to empowerment theory, a competency-oriented approach is essential for acquiring knowledge and skills for advocacy. Competent social workers are expected to integrate professional values, understand the role of social work in different contexts, invest in the development of profession by participating in professional associations and help in the professional socialization of younger colleagues (Buljevac et al., 2020). The modern view of professional competencies is based on the triangle of knowledge, skills and values, where the personal attitude of experts towards the profession is important, as well as the personal dimensions that need to be strengthened (Drisko, 2014). In general, professional competencies are composed of interrelated competencies that can be defined at the generic level or explicitly defined in a particular work area (Buljevac et al., 2020). Buljevac et al. (2020) analysed the sources focused on the areas of professional competencies in the documents of professional organisations and pointed to eight areas of professional competencies of social workers, of which one area is an area of process competencies and seven areas dedicated to meta-competencies.

The competency-oriented approach makes it easier to align formal education with practice. According to the Council of the European Union (2017) recommendation, qualifications are a formal result of completing an educational program that guarantees learning outcomes. Learning outcomes describe what an individual knows and understands and what he or she is capable of, while competencies are a proven ability to use acquired skills. Thus, it is concluded that the framework of professional competencies serves as an agreed standard about what it means to be a social worker and what his or her social role should look like (Buljevac et al., 2020).

According to Brkić (2010), a social worker in the field of advocacy should be a pragmatic, action-oriented person who can be aware of his power in relation to clients to decide when and how to use it. Brkić (2010) also cites some generic characteristics of a social worker conducting advocacy: patient and optimistic, self-disciplined, one who is empowering, willing to compromise, one who can set priorities. The social worker conducting advocacy should also have specific knowledge of the legislative framework in working with the beneficiary, know social welfare systems and the political processes in the community. It is also essential that he has the skills of negotiation and lobbying and cooperation skills in public relations.

3. ACQUIRED COMPETENCIES FOR REPRESENTING STUDENTS OF THE FIRST GENERATION OF GRADUATE STUDIES IN SOCIAL WORK AT THE FACULTY OF LAW IN OSIJEK

After the implementation of the course “Social Welfare Systems and Advocacy” at the Graduate School of Social Work at the Faculty of Law in Osijek, 45 full-time and part-time students out of a total of 56 students completed a two-part questionnaire. In the first part, some questions examined students’ socio-demographic characteristics (age, gender, employment, manner/type of study). The second part of the survey questionnaire assesses students’ achieved learning outcomes defined by the earlier mentioned Implementation Plan through statements of agreement/disagreement. Students were thus assessed regarding the competencies related to knowledge of the scope of different systems, knowledge of goals, strategies and tactics for advocacy, ethical dilemmas that arise in the process and their characteristics. The assessment was conducted through the use of a Likert-type scale of 1 to 5 where 1 means “I do not agree at all” and 5 means “I totally agree”.

Most respondents have agreed that after the course they acquired the knowledge and skills to represent clients in social work. They have also agreed that through the practical exercises they were introduced to the skills of lobbying and negotiating in the advocacy process. According to Brkić (2010), these skills are essential because they do not occur spontaneously but as planned, and the process itself consists of preparation, implementation and evaluation. A total of 52.1% of respondents confirmed that they agree with the statement that they are familiar with the availability of services in the community, obligations, scope of work, organizational structure and decision-making in the advocacy of individual client groups. However, as many as 47.6% of them estimated that they are not ready to communicate with the media to represent clients and client groups although the media are an important ally to the representative in causing desired changes, and that it is important that the representative knows how to attract public opinion (Brkić, 2010). Here we see room for a more improved curriculum and for empowering students to involve the public media in implementing the advocacy process through formal education.

Students generally agree that they can critically analyse and evaluate and compare social welfare system in the Republic of Croatia. The most significant percentage of respondents, 98.9% of them, agrees that they can identify advocacy goals, select appropriate types, strategies and tactics for advocacy. As many as 82.2% of respondents estimates that they can explain professional and ethical dilemmas in advocacy after completing the course. It is imperative to know that 95.6% of respondents recognise the need to involve clients in advocacy, while 88.9% of them believe in positive changes.

According to Brkić (2010, p. 61), it is impossible to help without involving those we help. Partnership (cooperative relationship) with the client, according to Schneider and Lester (2001), and according to Brkić (2010, p. 62), is explained by the terms “exclusivity” and “reciprocity”. Exclusivity means that responsibility is central to the relationship between the beneficiary and the social worker, while reciprocity implies reciprocity and the sharing of responsibilities in the relationship. As soon as we are in a relationship, there is the responsibility of the other party, so once the relationship is established, the client is also responsible.

Also, the cooperative relationship is sustainable if we rely on the perspective of power by seeking the power and resources of clients, on the ethics of participation where no one has the last word, empowerment and involvement arising from respect for the human need to be responsible (Čačinović-Vogrinčić, 2006). In the self-assessment questionnaire, students assessed that they generally believed in positive change as an outcome of advocacy. By believing in change, the social worker becomes an important role model for the client through his or her personal example of composure and authenticity. Sometimes a person feels unprepared for the change, “lulled” into the current way of life and might be pessimistic regarding the chances for change. Through their own example, social workers show the client how self-confidence and self-control can influence the change desired to be instigated for the client’s benefit.

4. ADVOCACY OF SOCIAL JUSTICE

An integral part of social work is the principle of advocating for social justice. Advocating for social justice can play, for example, an essential role in children’s education (Nilsson et al., 2013). Social injustices (e.g. poverty, racism, insecure living environment, schools with poor performance) exist in a particular student population. They can affect students’ ability to work academically in school and reduce their commitment to school completion. In particular, the COVID-19 pandemic and online teaching created an unfair environment and impacted negatively availability of education in general which shall be guided by the motto of equal opportunities for all, as not all children have personal computers or online internet access. While delivering online classes in the course “Social Welfare Systems and Advocacy”, we witnessed that some students had difficulty attending classes due to the interruption of the Internet connection. Sanders and Scanlon (2021), in their paper “The Digital Divide Is a Human Rights Issue: Advancing Social Inclusion Through Social Work Advocacy”, stated that in line with the human rights approach to social work, the 2016 United Nations General Assembly proclaimed access to the Internet a basic human right. Social workers can thus engage in advocating for Internet access, in order to improve policies and programs to bridge the digital divide (Sandres and Scanlon, 2015). Throughout the recent pandemic it has become increasingly apparent that access to information and communication technology (ICT) and the broadband infrastructure that supports it are the necessary human rights that enable participation in today’s society. However, there is currently relatively little literature on social work which deals with the topic of policy advocacy for closing the digital divide (Kuilema 2012; Queiro-Tajalli et al. 2003, Sandres and Scanlon, 2021). The importance of advocating for access to electronic services becomes part of the commitment of social workers to social justice because social worker, unlike some other professions, cares about the client’s environment, which gives him the strength to represent the client. Below is an example of case representation focused on the fight for social justice in a non-digital environment of a mother with a child with disabilities.

5. EXAMPLE OF CASE REPRESENTATION

Graduate social work students represented the case according to the model of Schneider and Lester (2001, and according to Brkić 2010) and the process of representation through all phases of advocacy is shown below.³³³

5.1. Case description and data collection

Danijela is a single mother who has been unemployed for four years and lives in a rented apartment with her underage son diagnosed with Asperger syndrome (ADHD), who is attending the first grade of a primary school in accordance with a customized program and, yet has many difficulties in attending classes. The family refrains from exercising the right to a guaranteed minimum allowance in the monthly amount of up to HRK 800.00 and child allowance of HRK 375.00 monthly. The city of Osijek pays part of the utilities. The minor son has had no contact with his father for three years. The father lives in Germany and does not pay alimony for the son. In addition to dealing with unemployment, the owner is selling an apartment and Danijela is forced to move out of it. She fears that she will not find affordable accommodation that would meet her son's needs. She is afraid she will end up on the street and her son in a foster family.

As we called it for the purposes of this paper, the case of housing was a representation of a case where multiple violations of the rights of one parent (mother) and a child living with the mother were identified. In the first phase of data collection, Payne (1986, according to Brkić, 2010) listed the issues that could help the representative argue the reasons for representation. These are the following questions: Was the decision based on procedures? Were the regulations applied impartially? Were the legal norms in laws and bylaws correctly interpreted? Did the services use the available information? Are the arguments for making decisions logical? Is the decision based on discriminatory characteristics? Who made the decision? According to Art. 91 of the Family Law (2015, 2019), the parent cannot waive the right to parental care. Parents are obliged to discuss and communicate with the child about the individual contents of parental care according to his age and maturity. In this case, the father completely deviates from his duties, does not talk to the mother, and violates the provisions of Art. 92 of the Family Law (2015, 2019), and in terms of rights and duties to protect the child's personal rights such as health, development, care and protection, upbringing and education, establishing personal relationships, and determining the place of residence. It can be concluded that the father stepped down from his role as a parent. Since the child's parents do not live together, the father does not participate in the joint and consensual realisation of parental care in accordance with Art. 104 of the said Family Law. Also, in accordance with Art. 111 of the Family Law (2015, 2019), parents do not exchange information on maintaining the child's health and consistency in upbringing and information related to school and extracurricular activities.

³³³ In case representation client's identity is fully protected.

According to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), it has been established that the child's right to an adequate standard of living has been violated. According to Article 64 of the Constitution of the Republic of Croatia (1990, 1997, 1998, 2000, 2001, 2001,2010, 2010, 2014), parents are obliged to raise, support and educate their children and have the right and freedom to decide and raise their children independently. They are also responsible for ensuring the child's right to the full and harmonious development of his personality, which the child father in represented case is violating.

5.1.1. Options

1. According to Art. 1 para. 3 of the Ordinance on teaching assistants and professional communication intermediaries (NG 87/08, 68/18), a minor child has the right to a teaching assistant.

2. According to Art. 22 of the Law on Allowance (2001, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2011, 2012, 2015, 2018), there is no information to the mother about the possibility of exercising the right to an increased allowance for a child with a severe or severe disability.

3. According to Art. 46 of the Housing Act in assisted areas (2018, 2019), if an individual or family is left without a single housing unit conditional on housing in which he resides, he may be provided with the housing care in the area of application of this Act also if the beneficiary is as well entitled to housing and is the beneficiary of the right to a guaranteed minimum compensation. His rent is HRK 1.00 per square meter monthly for the duration of the established right to a guaranteed minimum compensation.

4. Under Art. 319 of the Family Law (2015, 2019), the Center for Social Welfare (CSW) is obliged to warn the parent of its duty to inform CSW if the alimony payer does not fulfil his obligation regularly and in whole, inform the parent about the child's right to temporary alimony and the possibility of criminal charges against a parent who does not pay maintenance within 15 days from the day of learning that the maintenance obligation is not fulfilled regularly and in full.

5.1.2. Reasons for advocacy

One of the reasons for advocacy is the ignorance of the beneficiary about the rights she can exercise through the social welfare system which relate to housing, ensuring the quality of life for her and her son, the rights of the child and financial assistance. Also, the services offered are limited, do not fully meet her and her son's needs and they concern financial status and living. Furthermore, the beneficiary does not know what is the amount of social assistance she can request for her son. He has specific difficulties and is attending school according to a customized program (ADHD, Asberger's syndrome).

In this first phase, development of process competencies focused on the assessment dimension is important for social work students who will conduct advocacy. According to Buljevac et al. (2015), in the assessment phase the competencies for collecting and integrating data from different sources and at the same time conducting field visits, direct interviews and meeting administrative requirements are generally emphasised. Suppose we

connect the theory of empowerment in the practice of advocacy in this particular case. In that case, it is clear to us that this mother has encountered structural obstacles that prevent her from accessing the social resources necessary for her and her son's overall health and well-being. According to Kletečki-Radović (2008, p. 220), "the theory of empowerment is not only interested in the process of empowerment, but also in the result that brings a change in a more significant approach to social resources and greater social power of disenfranchised individuals, groups or communities".

5.2. Defining goals

Answers to the following questions, which Reish considers necessary for advocacy (1990, according to Brkić, 2010), will help us define the advocacy goals.

Table 1: Questions to define goals

Question:	Answer:
What is the problem?	A mother with a child with difficulties has to move out in a month, and there is no possibility of paying rent in a new tenant apartment.
Since when do problems happen?	The problem is happening now. Three years ago her income was drastically reduced. Father of the child no longer contributes to his maintenance.
Who is responsible for the problem?	Parents; System;
Where does the problem manifest?	At home (inadequate space and relocation request), at school (inability to attend classes), in society (maternal unemployment and participation in the social welfare system).
How does the problem manifest itself?	Through the mother's fear that she would become homeless and have to bring her son to the CSW to provide him with temporary accommodation. Through a sense of helplessness.

Taking empowerment theory into account, when defining goals, it is important to assess who has control over social resources. A significant aspect of empowerment practice is working with disenfranchised clients to reduce or eliminate helplessness, which in this case is reflected in the fears of the client. Goals tell us what will change, when and how, and one of the techniques that can help us to reconcile possibilities and desired goals is the gap analysis (Goodstein, Nolan, & Pferiffer, 1993, and according to Brkić, 2010). The gap analysis consists of a process of identifying advocacy goals by finding answers to the following key questions:

Table 2: GAP analysis

Question:	Answer:
What is the current position of the client/group?	Danijela is unemployed, has low-income.
What will be her position if appropriate changes in the environment do occur?	The client will be integrated into the work system, the child will exercise the material and other rights provided by the Family Law.
What kind of change do we want to cause?	We want to empower the client to apply for rights for herself and the child and integrate her into the work system.
Determine the gap between the desired goals and the existing situation.	Impossibility of employment.
Define goals to fill the gap.	Creating a coalition with the Employment Bureau and involving the mother in the “ <i>Wish</i> ” program through retraining her to work with older people in the community.

5.2.1. Defining short-term goals

By Art. 3 of the Law on Social Work (2019), a social worker prepares and provides information relevant to the field of social work. The first goal is to inform Danijela about the possibility of exercising the rights provided by the city of Osijek, and refers to the right to compensation of housing costs that are recognized to the client of the right of guaranteed minimum compensation under Art. 30, para. 1 of the Law on Social Welfare (2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2017, 2019, 2020, 2020). The next step is to inform her about the possibility to apply for a free meal for students in primary schools, which is recognized to a student who is a member of the household of the beneficiary of the housing allowance. The goal is also to submit a request to secure a city apartment according to the Decision to rent city apartments from 2008. The next goal is to invite the father to the CSW to inform him about the obligation to support his minor child and warn him that a criminal complaint might be filed against him before the relevant institutions. If the father does not fulfil the provisions of Art. 319 of the Family Law, a criminal report will be filed against him, and a request will be submitted to the CSW for exercising the right to temporary maintenance for the child. From the short-term goals defined in this way, it is evident that they address the consequences, not the causes of the crisis situation and that they are realized over a short period of time which would last up to one month.

5.2.2. Defining medium-term goals

Furthermore, the goal of working with the client is to empower her to submit a request for repeated expertise under the provisions of Art. 3 of the Law on the Single Body of Expertise (2014, 2015), to determine the psychophysical condition of the child in exercising rights in the educational system, as well as exercising rights in other areas for a minor son to exercise the right to an increased child allowance and the right to a teaching assistant.

Given that in the Republic of Croatia it is possible to apply for exercising the right before three public bodies, depending on the type of procedure, it is necessary to contact the institution of the Croatian Pension Insurance Institute (CPII), the State Administration Office, SWC and the Croatian Health Insurance Institute (CHII). The procedure of providing expertise lasts about one year, by which time the realization of the rights and the fulfilment of medium-term goals are expected.

5.2.3. Defining long-term goals: (maintaining the desired condition)

1. Establishing the child's relationship with the father. The parent must care for the child's health and well-being and the child has the right to maintain personal relationship with both parents (Family Law, 2015, 2019).

2. Employment of the mother. The client must be employed to function independently and be integrated in the society and meet the needs of herself and her family. There is also the option of retraining Danijela, depending on her wishes and abilities, in order to facilitate her employment according to the needs of the labour market.

General goal: To realize the child's right to a standard of living appropriate to his physical, mental, moral and social development under Art. 26 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Recognition of the right to education following the child's needs according to the Convention on the Rights of the Child under Art. 28.

To set general (long-term) and specific (short-term and medium-term) goals in advocacy, it is necessary to create a cooperative relationship with the client, whereby contracting is based on joint goal setting with defining measurable outcomes and clear explanation of how goals are related to planned interventions in the real time-frame, which is a feature of general process competencies according to Buljevac et al. (2020).

5.3. Identifying decision-makers

In the described example, the decision-makers are the City of Osijek, the Center for Social Welfare Osijek, the Institute for Expertise, Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment of Persons with Disabilities, the Croatian Employment Service, the Croatian Pension Insurance Institute, the Croatian Institute for Public Health and the State Attorney. Therefore, in line with the competence-oriented approach, a critically structured approach and advocacy for human rights and social, economic and environmental justice is one of the meta-competencies that a social worker should have. The social workers thus should know the sources of social inequality and who the key decision-makers are. Furthermore, competent social workers are expected to keep abreast of political, economic, technological and environmental processes to spot the disruption of marginalized social groups on time.

5.4. Forming coalitions

Given that the stated goals require continuity in action, it is necessary to form a permanent coalition, which implies the existence of clear roles and responsibilities

between the coalition partners (Brkic, 2010). The coalition's purpose would be to inform the mother about the rights and duties that coalition members have and help her achieve her goals. Coalition members will meet twice a month to discuss the most important items and issues. During the other days, they will be in contact via mobile phone. The coalition coordinator is a social worker from the Department for Children, Youth, Marriage and Family of the Center for Social Welfare. This coalition must cooperate with the school, Croatian Employment Service (CES), Croatian Institute for Public Health (CIPH), the city, CPII and CHII. The decision-making process can take place through a communication in person or in a Zoom meeting.

5.5. Fundraising

The most important means for the coalition mentioned above are human resources, i.e. their knowledge and skills. For example, in the case of housing, the application is to be submitted from 1 January to 31 January of the current year to the competent state administration office in the county. The call is published on the website of the Central State Office (Law on Housing in Assisted Areas (NG 106/18, 98/19)). It is crucial to agree, for example, if the mother does not have the Internet, who will monitor the opening of the call and inform her, in which case it will be proposed that this can be an official from the Administrative Department of the City of Osijek.

5.6. Defining a message

The message is a clear and convincing statement of the goals of advocacy in which we explain what we want to change, why and how. Therefore, when composing and sending a message we must take into account the following questions: Who is the target group for which the message is intended, what ideas we want to communicate, what words we will use to ensure clarity and efficiency of the message, in what format we will send it and what is the best time to transfer it? For example, a message for representation in the case under analysis could suggest:

“A mother with a child with disabilities from the street is looking for an apartment!”

We are sending the message to the city of Osijek to exercise the right to housing, more precisely to the Administrative Department for Urbanism and Construction, Communal Housing, Transport and Environmental Protection, and local self-government and the Department for Housing. To enable the exercise of the rights of Danijela and her minor son, we will argue the message, with the consent of the client, with family history and support it with laws that indicate a violation of the rights of the client. The most efficient outcome will be a meeting with the competent persons in the mentioned institution since this option is the fastest and it is not necessary to wait long for an answer. In addition, we will send an email to have a written track of the steps taken. The best time to act is right away, as the mother needs to move out with the minor child and has no other option.

5.7. Sending messages/realization and action

Realization of actions includes informing the mother to apply for an apartment to the City of Osijek, referring the child for the expertise and psychological assessment and filing criminal charges against the father who does not participate and does not contribute to the maintenance, is not informed about the child's growth, development and upbringing. Given that the mother meets the conditions and criteria for determining the order of priority according to the Decision on renting apartments (2008) she has the right to apply. Then, if the tender is not announced within the required time, the representative should contact an authorized person to put the family on the priority list. After the mother has submitted a request to the CPII and the Center for Social Welfare, CSW further contacts the Institute for Expertise and then instructs the mother to take the child to the institution to conduct an expert examination with the child and determine the degree of damage, to determine the need for program and the amount of child allowance that can be increased up to HRK 831.50 (Act on Amendments to the Act on Child Allowance, OG 58/18). The Social Welfare Center also files a criminal complaint with the State Attorney's Office (in writing, orally or by other means) against a father who does not contribute to maintaining a minor child. The report should contain personal data about the perpetrator, all information about the event, citing an article in the law, evidence and facts that are known, personal data of the injured person and data about the person filing the criminal report if it was not anonymous.

5.8. Monitoring and evaluation

It is necessary to conduct monitoring and final evaluation to achieve the effectiveness of the intervention. Through monitoring, we check whether steps have been taken towards achieving the set goals, whether what is set is being done so that corrective measures can be designed and introduced, if necessary. In this way, we can answer the question about whether we are doing what we said we would do in closing the case?

In terms of evaluation, it can be carried out in the way presented by Berkowitz (1982, according to Brkić 2010) in seven key steps. We will first define the obligation to evaluate the planned steps and have feedback for further action. Then we will specifically identify the goals of advocacy related to finding accommodation for the mother and minor son, the child's contacts with the father, payment of alimony, exercising the right to adequate child allowance and employment of the mother. In the third step, it is essential to specify the purpose of the advocacy process, i.e. in this case, lead the family to the desired results, the mother's employment, father's involvement and do everything for the benefit and welfare of the child and ultimately lead to changes in family circumstances and independence. Indicators through which the outcomes could be monitored are a contract for renting a city apartment, a call for expertise, the results of expertise, evidence of active job search or proof of enrollment for retraining. Indicators are proof of meeting goals. After all, the results will be analysed and conclusions and recommendations will be made, which will be used in further practice.

6. INSTEAD OF A CONCLUSION

When social workers defend or represent others to ensure social justice, they challenge the people and special interest groups in power to exercise their authority to help and benefit those who are less powerful. However, the representation procedure is impossible without knowledge of legal regulations and their application, as seen in the presented example of case representation.

Students of the first generation of the Graduate School of Social Work at the Faculty of Law in Osijek assessed that they agree that client representation is vital in working with clients and assessed that after completing the course “Social Welfare Systems and Representation“ they have generally acquired knowledge and skills to lead the advocacy process. However, students assess that they do not have specific knowledge and skills in terms of cooperation and public relations. In further developing a learning program on advocacy in social work, new technologies could be introduced through exercises in the advocacy process and thus enter into public relations, increasing students’ sense of competence to work with the media and in practice. This form is consistent with advocacy advocates such as Brawley (1997) and Brueggemann (2006). They were the first to notice the importance of teaching students how to engage in advocacy through media and technologies that are close to them and that they use in their daily communication.

Also, students should be continuously encouraged to think critically and distinguish between personal and professional boundaries so that the advocacy process does not turn into a personal struggle of the social worker. To do their job effectively, social workers who represent and apply empowerment methods in social work practice must first identify and analyze their sources of power at the personal, professional and institutional level to which they belong (Kletečki-Radović, 2008). Empowerment practices mean equipping clients with resources to take responsibility and take action to make changes. To implement it through advocacy, social workers themselves must be “equipped” with specific knowledge, skills and traits that they continue to upgrade after formal education.

As this is the first generation of social work students at the the School of Social Work at the Faculty of Law in Osijek which acquires competencies for representation within formal education, we have yet to follow how they will apply them in working with clients in social work.

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