

Heidelberg Declaration

Occupational Policy of the DBSH

Society and social work have altered in recent years. Societies around the world are faced with state budget deficits as a consequence of a neoliberal economic and political culture that is taking hold of all social spheres. The mounting debts of public authorities meanwhile restrict their political options available for social welfare, public education and training, and for fighting social ills.

On the one hand this leads to reductions or cuts in state transfer payments, and on the other to aspirations on the part of public authorities to regard social services as a mere commodity and buy them in as cheaply as possible.

For social workers this not only means staff reductions, higher and denser workloads, and a loss of income, but also a change in their work's concerns: where helping others to help themselves took pride of place before, control tasks and restrictive/bureaucratic specifications now proliferate. Policies meanwhile try to push for a deskilling in their deployment by way of an increasing specialization, segregation and "manualization" of tasks. Universities of applied science, in particular, tend to adapt to the market orientation brought about by this trend towards economization. Since the start of the Bologna process, at the latest, social work curricula have become ever more differentiated. Shortened and specialized courses are on the one hand aimed at ensuring the commissioning of reference sciences and their competences in the teaching process, and on the other designed to offer tailor-made courses for areas of social action that have been politically defined from outside the subject area. This means that an appreciation of the overall context and structural factors of social problems is being lost, along with an independent professional understanding of social work and its practices.

Given this background, the DBSH (German Professional Association for Social Work) wishes to engender a discussion that is aimed at two objectives.

1. Social work deals with social issues from a holistic perspective. It is hence essential to search for its common traits irrespective of specializations. This perspective also needs to be reflected in a generalistic training.

2. It must be made clear that no undermining of professionalism will be accepted in social work. We are the experts for all things social! What our professionalism consists of, and the resulting demands for the profession, society, policies, universities and responsible institutions, makes up the contents of this paper.

The DBSH is therewith contributing to the broad discussion with respect to ensuring professionalism in social work and its adequate funding. As a professional organization it is meanwhile taking a stand that is not informed by political or higher education policy

considerations and/or the interests of responsible bodies, but sets its sights on the development of the profession as a whole instead.

1. The “social aspect“ as a unique characteristic of qualified social work

Asked what social work professionals are responsible for, the answer can only be: “...for all things social“. This means that the field of their profession opens up wherever social problems arise, and wherever people are confronted with them. The unique characteristic of being an “expert for all things social“ meanwhile hinges on the definition of the term “social“, on the professional viewpoint of qualified social workers, and on their job-related everyday routines.¹

In the sphere of action of social work, the term “social“ is strongly linked to rifts in society. As a human rights profession, social work is focussed on social justice and equal opportunities, on participation and on maintaining human dignity. Further social themes from a socio-pedagogic tradition are education and training. And that irrespective of the circumstances of the children and adolescents concerned, even if a strong tradition of working with children and adolescents from families in precarious circumstances is recognizable.

The social aspect takes centre stage in social work and determines its tasks. According to the professional association’s job description, the key objective of social work resides in ensuring “that people, and in particular the disadvantaged, groups, communities and organizations are increasingly able to decide over their lives and coexistence themselves, within the meaning of the constitution and UN Convention on Human Rights, and able to master them in relationships that are informed by solidarity. The profession’s activities are aimed at the avoidance, discovery and overcoming of social problems, also by means of preventive measures.“²

The principles of personhood, subsidiarity and solidarity are fundamental backgrounds for action. Assistance is focussed on a holistic approach, i.e. one that takes the entire personality into account. A person isn’t divisible. The key concepts are justice, brotherliness/sisterliness (solidarity) and the partaking in and preservation of creation and its ecologic foundations, as well as equality and freedom.

Social work is based on the profession’s ethical foundations, constitutional precepts with regard to democracy and the social state, the European Convention on Human Rights based on western-occidental traditions, as well as humanism and the achievements of labour movements in the fight for social justice. It pays heed to the UN Charta and rights anchored in international human rights treaties, in particular for the prevention of human rights

¹ Oxforddictionaries.com offers the following definition of the term social, amongst others: “relating to society or its organization“
The term refers to the mutual relations between people in families, neighbourhoods, communities and states, as well as the fashioning of these relationships.

More on the discussion of the social aspects of social work can be found in: Scheu and Autrata, 2011

² Deutscher Berufsverband für Soziale Arbeit, Berufsbild für Sozialarbeiter/-innen und Sozialpädagogen/-pädagoginnen (2009).

violations. By virtue of its membership in the IFSW the DBSH is also taking part in the concerted international effort for protecting human rights.

2. Fields of tension – analysis and demands

2.1 Society

Analysis

Social work has always been a part of society with a special mission. On the one hand, the profession has therefore always been dependent on society, and still is. And on the other hand social work is also at odds with it. This is an immanent feature of social work, based on the respectively different worlds of experience, perceptions and definitions of its mission provided. This tension is generated by the profession's own definition as a "human rights profession" that takes a stand as an advocate for the social inclusion of the disadvantaged and those excluded from it. As a result, conflicts arise time and again between the fundamental ethical orientation of social work and the demands of economic and private interests and the bodies which represent them in society.

Social work has traditionally always mediated between individuals and groups of people. On the one side are those who are unable to cope in and with society, who fail to meet society's requirements, those who can only manage their daily life badly, if at all, or who deliberately oppose societal norms. And on the other side one finds the parts of society that have the power to define these societal norms and gain the approval of all those who are able to master them and hence share in the attendant betterments. Social work is the intermediary between society and those who cause problems or suffer in it. In the past, society used to commission social work as an intermediary in its attempt to maintain social cohesion. But in the course of the neoliberal transitions of the last twenty years, the mandate of its political initiators has also slowly changed. At the root of these changes lie economic upheavals that can be summarized under the heading of "globalization" and the attendant ascendancy of the financial sector.

The processes of global economic change have discredited the idea of the welfare state and led to changes in social policy throughout Europe. The state is increasingly withdrawing from welfare-related tasks, treating all those driven into precarious employment or life situations by the turbulences of economic deregulation as the sole repository of the problem. The economy favours a weak state and the forces of the market, which are meant to regulate everything.

On an individual level, competition, success and business principles become the guidelines of action. This is attended by an increasing privatization of the responsibility for overcoming life crises.

As is evidenced by the financial crisis, the uncontrolled power of global finance is putting states and societies at risk. The political decision-making is unreflectedly bowing to the demands of capital and increasingly determined by captains of industry, scientists and other players of a neoliberal creed. As a consequence of their concept of “more personal responsibility and less state“, governmental regulation mechanisms for the economy and social standards are increasingly being eroded. In the end, the state is to take on the role of a mere “night watchman“ who refrains from interfering with events.

This has led to drastic changes in social work, and still does. Society’s mandate for social work is defined under purely economic aspects to a greater extent than ever before. Social services are increasingly regarded as a cost factor. Virtually all European welfare states are seeing spiralling requirements for the provision of social services, whilst the workers are continually forced to accept cuts in their real wages. The “Taylorization“ of social work and its restriction to normative tasks are both increasing at the same time. This means that the previous fields of social work are being segmented into individual (performance) descriptive and calculable units of work. The term “tailored services“ and ascendancy of “case management“ fit right into this picture. The client is no longer being “supported“, but treated as a customer who is availing him- or herself of individual services and/or whose problematic situation is being managed. The side-lining of a large part of the clientele is accepted in the process.

This purely economic thinking misconstrues what social work must and could do. The withdrawal of social services and welfare state benefits, and the erosion of quality in education and training, lead to a further exacerbation and solidification of the social injustice in the country.³ This ultimately serves to deprive social work of its potentials for balancing out societal interests, along with its contributions to the representation of social and political rights.

Demands

The DBSH advocates the empowerment of political decision-making vis-a-vis the economy and calls for a state that remains capable of action in terms of social policy.⁴ The elimination of degrading circumstances, improvement of the quality of life, and promotion of sharing and inclusion can only be successful if social work is governed by a framework and standards that enable professional action irrespective of current fiscal discussions and decisions.

The DBHS demands a state that meets the definition of the welfare state anchored in constitutional law and provides the means required for preventing and eliminating social ills. Social services must be accessible for everyone who needs them, and enforceable as an individual right. Integration in the labour market must not be decisive for the provision of assistance, which is instead based on human dignity and people’s needs and potentials.

³ See also the current study by the *Paritätische* association: Bericht zur regionalen Armutsentwicklung - 2011, <http://www.der-paritaetische.de/armutsbericht2011>

⁴ See also the DBSH’s “Saarbrücken Declaration“

The quantitative and qualitative diminishment of social services in the community and of transfer payments must be stopped. As the main payers of social services, local authorities must be enabled to raise the funds required for them. It is no longer acceptable that exactly those local authorities with the lowest tax revenues and largest share of low-income citizenry are at the same time required to raise the greatest funds for social welfare.

Social work needs leeway for action and the possibility of involving the entire social sphere in its activities. The compartmentalized division of tasks into so many “tailored services“, or provision of assistance in accordance with standardized handbooks and/or computer programs, is not a sustainable solution.

These demands can only be asserted by political means. Social work must be re-politicized. Social work as a profession with expertise for all things social can and must develop the political potential and courage for public outrage and scandalization.⁵

2.2. Training

Analysis

The Bologna process and its attendant changes in the curricula and degrees have led to a growing number of additional courses of study in the educational institutions over and beyond their heretofore existing federal variety. The competition between these educational institutions has meanwhile brought confusion to the training market for social work.⁶

The debate on a generalistic orientation vs. task-related specialization is moving to the forefront of the discussion on the practical and scientific foundations of social work in reality. The basic stock of social work and social work science is currently being called into question by an increasingly technocratic understanding. The segmentation of tasks or activities in the social services is promoted and/or facilitated by a specialization of bachelor courses. In the process, the risk of losing the profession’s unity and regard for the overall context, as well as a shared understanding of social practice, is carelessly accepted.

References made by the protagonists of this development to the commissioning landscape often only serve to veil the competition in the training market and attendant struggle for status amongst polytechnics, universities, and lecturers in the various (relevant) scientific disciplines.

Whereas from the perspective of the DBSH, any specialization in the training may only take place in the form of a master degree that follows the successful completion of a generalistic bachelor course.

⁵ See also Hessel (2011)

⁶ A DBSH study clearly documents the differentiation and overcomplexity of the training segment. Today “106 universities are offering a sum total of 236 training courses with 45 different degrees in the area of social work.“ (DBSH 2008)

The experiences of the DBSH have demonstrated that the practical parts of the training have strongly declined in the courses of study over the years, and most of all in the wake of academic reforms within the framework of the Bologna process. This is not least of all evidenced by the discontinuation of the probationary year and the course-related reduction in the respective curricula's practical stages. Where the accreditation is concerned, universities now mostly take their cues from the qualification framework for social work which, in contrast to the previous study framework regulations, shows a corresponding reduction of practical phases, for example including the 100 day rule for gaining accreditation.

In addition to this the training is still being shaped by reference scientists from outside the field. Lecturers from practical areas of social work and in particular lecturers with the corresponding scientific references remain in a minority position. The consequence being that qualified social workers are still largely trained by teachers who come from other professions (e.g. medicine, law, management, art and media, sociology, psychology) and fail to formulate a specific social work approach to their reference knowledge. It is instead being assumed that social work will automatically generate itself in the individual application of various scientific frames of reference. The struggle for a shared scientific and professional understanding is meanwhile still ongoing in the university sector.

But the efforts in recent decades to establish a science of social work have also already led to achievements that we expressly welcome and acknowledge. These need to be followed up by structural and educational support in order to continue, as early as in the training situation, the underpinning of this line of work as a profession that requires a strong scientific discipline of social work.

The modularization and shortening of studies in the absence of a consistent nationwide agreement on fundamental study contents, the increase in school studies and attendant reduction of practical elements to a mere minimum of 100 days, and the cancellation of the one-year accreditation period put the quality of university courses at risk and render the transfer of theory into practice and entry into the profession more difficult in structural terms.

In contrast to the intentions of "Bologna", it has moreover never been as difficult as today to gain academic qualifications abroad and have them recognized here.

Demands

A generalistic course of study forms the basis of the profession. Specialization then follows with a master course. Besides a generalized master degree, the master courses in social work should also be able to provide for advanced, practical (directors of youth and social welfare offices and agencies) and research-oriented master degrees with the corresponding focus areas (e.g. early childhood pedagogy, child and youth psychotherapy, evaluation, human rights, social management, supervision, youth welfare).⁷

⁷ See brochure "Generalistisches Studium" – Forderungen des DBSH zur Ausbildung und Qualitätssicherung in der Sozialen Arbeit

The transfer between theory and practice must be strengthened. This calls for a greater willingness on the part of practitioners to engage with the theories of social work and get involved in the theoretical discussion from a practice-informed stance. This simultaneously means that their everyday work must always be put on a theoretical footing. Social workers are expressly invited to aim for a scientific career (master degree, doctorate, etc.) within the reference area of the social work profession.

Social work course contents are more than the sum of individual reference sciences. In the appointment of lecturers we hence call for a greater consideration of individuals who have studied social work and can look back on the corresponding practical experience. Lecturers for other professions are meanwhile invited to mediate social work approaches to their reference knowledge.

Lecturers and scientists are expressly called upon to cooperate with the practitioners to a greater extent than heretofore, to open up to current issues in the profession, and to start researching the profession in the field. Universities meanwhile ought to communicate the corresponding themes in their teachings (such as, for example, working conditions, remuneration, professional associations, unions, organizational issues for social services, etc.).

Educational institutions and scientists are in particular called upon to cultivate an awareness of current societal developments and their meaning for practical social work, to provide the corresponding research, and to take a public stand that is based on expertise in the science of social work.

The options available for doctorates in social work should be expanded to improve the situation in research, but also to enable the targeted recruitment of own career entrants for practice and teaching. Polytechnics must be granted an independent right to confer doctorates.

The practice of social work must gain a greater influence on science, research and curricula. To do this, practitioners need to be directly integrated in the teaching process. Corresponding lectureships need to be tendered in greater number and for better payment. Representatives of the practice of social work who have concrete and current practical experience must be included in the accreditation commissions.

The transition from studying social work to its occupational practice must be professionally supported and reflected in cooperation with science and teaching. An accreditation internship and/or traineeship that extends to one year as a minimum and is followed by an exam which is independent from the universities is essential during and/or after social work courses of study. This training stage must be linked with a legally protected state accreditation that serves as a basis for recruitment in the spheres of action of social work.⁸

⁸ See also brochure "Generalistisches Studium" – Forderungen des DBSH zur Ausbildung und Qualitätssicherung in der Sozialen Arbeit - 2. Säule "Berufseinmündungsjahr"

2.3. Occupation – Profession

Analysis

The widely increasing influence of economic principles leads to a growing heteronomy of occupational social work that must be regarded as a de-professionalization. A modern service mentality creates technocratic conditions that hamper assistance. The focus must be on ensuring and preserving what actually constitutes social work, i.e. considering every individual who seeks help as unique, and integrating the key competence fields such as strategic, methodical, social law, personnel management and socio-pedagogic competences in the assistance provided.⁹

Where the discussion of subject-related political issues is concerned, political decision-makers as a rule tend to rely on the employing entities. And it is becoming ever more obvious that the latter are increasingly submitting to political economic requirements and specifications in the course of the economization of social work. The actual requirements and needs in representing the interests of members of our society who are threatened by exclusion recede behind this. The employing bodies have by now reached a stage where they are frequently only interested in securing and expanding their market share in social services. Fewer and fewer non-statutory welfare agencies nowadays even try to master the balancing act between civil society engagement and a commercial enterprise. The social economy (non-statutory welfare) is increasingly turning into an extension of politics that are exclusively geared to capital in economic terms.

The occupational practice and its specific demands are often not present enough on a subject-related political level. Practitioners must take a stand for representing the interests of their clients, as well as their own. At this moment in time, numerous attempts are discernible to improve one's personal situation over and beyond the vocational frame of reference by taking on specializations such as therapist, youth welfare worker, consultant, etc.

Those employed in social work are placed in the field of tension between professional ethics and professionalism on the one side and employment contract requirements and the interests of responsible bodies on the other.¹⁰ The typical occupational fields of social work are increasingly being opened up for other professional groups or graduates. Nobody seems to question the fact any longer that social workers or social education workers are considered to be replaceable by "other colleagues" who perform the corresponding activities based on their equivalent skills and experience. The profession will remain powerless vis-a-vis this development as long as it fails to manage to organize itself correspondingly. A similar development would be unthinkable in the case of physicians, lawyers, teachers, etc.

Qualified social work professionals have in recent years in turn increasingly been deployed in areas that were previously the reserve of other degrees, or which are incompatible with the ethical principles of social work in practice. This demonstrates that the competences mediated in professional social work studies also enable for other activities. But we need to

⁹ See also key competences of the DBSH - <http://www.dbsh.de/html/schluessel.html>

¹⁰ See the definitions of social work by the IFSW and DBSH

take into account that not everything a qualified member of the profession does (or has to do) on the job is social work.

Many skilled employees largely define their professional identity by way of their current job, and not by way of their diploma. A growing number of these skilled employees meanwhile maintain a critical distance to their own profession. They dissociate themselves from social work by defining themselves as consultants, youth workers, therapists, debt advisors, legal custodians, etc. Their studies and diplomas do not automatically instil an exclusive notion of being a social worker, and of therefore performing a special job that deserves protection (under EU law).

There appear to be interest groups within and outside of social work who benefit from its segmentation. Individual areas of activity are meant to be turned into independent professions. In the absence of careful monitoring, social work will be increasingly split up into various areas.

The differentiation from everyday non-professional assistance relationships (such as, for example, voluntary work, active citizenship, neighbourly or amicable help, etc.) is not as clear-cut as in other academic professions (e.g. lawyers, psychologists). That this should be the case is also attributable to the profession and its representatives who have neglected to develop the professional aspect of social work on the inside and communicate it to the outside.

Caring is something every citizen should and can do in this country. But people in life crises or social difficulties should be able to feel confident that they are being provided with competent advice by skilled social work personnel. The latter are in possession of effective concepts and methods that are essential in this line of work. In the process, voluntary workers can provide supplementary support with their competences. But they are no substitute for a professional social worker's counsel.

In Germany, the remuneration of skilled professionals in social work ranges at the bottom end of professions with academic qualifications. The term "social" is apparently still misunderstood as meaning that skilled staff in social work are called upon to donate a part of their payment as a voluntary contribution to society, so to speak.

Demands

The DBSH supports the courage to resist the demands and interventions of parties outside the profession who impose an unprofessional demeanour on qualified social work professionals. This includes the courage to discuss and make public problematic developments in social work on a local level.

Occupational practice is based on the profession's ethics. The DBSH has already provided essential preparatory work for this in consideration of international developments.¹¹ Professional ethics for social work in the German-speaking region are currently being

¹¹ See the DBSH's professional ethics

elaborated in cooperation with partners. The ethical principles of the profession are being updated/perpetuated at the same time.

Social work needs to claim a more powerful position. This calls for a further development of the standards for professional social work, and their communication to the inside and outside.

While a cooperative partnership must be maintained with the training side, the profession also needs to elaborate a position of its own that is based on its own self-understanding and self-awareness, and champion that.

Only a strong trade association can boost the prestige of social work as a profession. This applies to its definition as much as its greater appreciation in politics and society.

The profession must pay heed to the link between sociopolitical restrictions in the monetary range of services (reduction of transfer payments, workfare, undermining of legal entitlements, etc.) and cuts in the funding of social services. There must be no sociopolitical abstinence of the profession. It is therefore called upon to create spaces for joint political action with its clientele.

The profession needs a greater political and vocational awareness.

The job titles of social worker, social education worker and remedial teacher need to be legally protected in combination with state accreditation and the attendant accreditation year/internship, defined as a prerequisite for entering the profession.

In addition to this there is a need for a quality assurance system which helps to ensure professional standards. The attendant requirements (supervision, continuing training, ethical obligations, etc.) need to be monitored by way of a professional register such as the one already set up by the DBSH. Entry in the register in turn serves as a basis for continuing employment.

The protection of the job title, the regulations for entering the profession and the quality assurance need to be aggregated in a law that regulates the profession.

The theory is a genuine concern of the polytechnics and universities. The social workers of the future will need a sound theoretical background for their day-to-day job. But at the same time their employers and recruiters will need to assume greater responsibility for their introduction to the professional world than heretofore. The criteria for this need to be derived from the practice of social work, in cooperation with the universities.

We would suggest the establishment of a round table including all vocationally relevant groups and the DBSH and the latter's development into an umbrella organization, in order to counteract the fragmentation of the profession and integrate small, specialized lobby and vocational groups correspondingly.

We need an institution or organization in Germany that formulates and develops clear definitions with the involvement of qualified professionals as well as expert-defined standards (theory and practice) for the core of professional social work which can serve as a basis for a law that regulates the profession, and/or a professional register.

The practice of social work is not only represented by the employers alone. A trade association represents all skilled professionals irrespective of the factual constraints applicable to enterprises in the social economy. Only with a strong vocational and trade union organization will qualified social work professionals be able to claim and enforce subject-related issues and demands in collective bargaining processes (remuneration, working conditions).

Social work professionals continue to be underpaid in comparison with other academic university qualifications. We demand a befitting remuneration that is commensurate with their training, social significance and responsibility.

2.4. Responsible bodies

Analysis

The practitioners are largely forced to meet the specifications defined by funding bodies from an economic perspective. The social services overseen by the public administration or charitable welfare organizations are embedded in free-market structures and a competition with other providers in the social economy. This leads to a growing influence of business-oriented, technocratic thinking.

With salaries and wages representing up to 90 % of all expenditure in the social field, the latter has turned into a lucrative “profit market“ where considerable revenues can be generated by lowering labour costs. The state is meanwhile stepping up the economic pressure for the institutions by only refinancing positions in parts. The institutions in turn abet this development by opting out of collective labour agreements, instead of demanding comprehensive refinancing.

In this market-driven dynamic, maintaining and expanding one’s own social enterprise is given top priority, irrespective of whether the respective assistance actually meets the essential needs of those seeking it, and whether it is sustainably effective.

With over a million employees, the non-statutory welfare sector makes up around four percent of all jobs liable for social insurance contributions. If the public administration and other non-profit institutions providing social services are counted in, this number would rise to ca. 1.6 million jobs. The number of those employed outside these employment relationships is estimated at ca. 600,000. The non-profit sector has so far failed to use this “employment power“ for sparking off a competition with the new providers regarding the quality assurance and standards. Instead, the respective institutions usually looked for individual ways of improving their own competitive positioning.

Another problem is the proliferation of project financing and attendant fixed-term labour contracts. This most of all concerns new entrants to the profession. Project work can be meaningful to try out new approaches, but should not be terminated without replacement if it is successful. Social work needs sustainability. Many short-term projects are mere poster children for their providers.

Demands

Competition between various providers in the social field for the operation of tendered social services is unavoidable under EU law and can even be meaningful as long as the corresponding adjusting screws are specified. This would call for a “re-sharpening“ of the way personnel costs are settled. In their calls for proposals, the public funding bodies concerned would need to include binding specifications ensuring observance of collective labour agreements applicable to the personnel to be deployed, the required qualifications,

and the respective staff-to-client ratio. These outlays would then need to be invoiced by the providers on a cost basis.

Putting all social services where this is theoretically conceivable out for tender is meanwhile not meaningful. Primary services (such as the general social service ASD in Germany) that decide on further-reaching assistance offers must be provided with the personnel required to establish individual assistance needs by way of socio-pedagogic diagnostics, and to jointly monitor the effect of the services procured with those seeking the assistance.

Also to be critically scrutinized is the tendering of services such as the socio-pedagogic support for families. The involvement of external social service providers principally only makes sense where they can provide a better and more plural quality in their work, or where a special demand situation applies under the principle of subsidiarity. The balance between sovereign action and subsidiarity also needs to be critically examined in the meantime.

When putting social services out for tender, there is a need to ensure that this tendering is linked to an obligation to engage in the social sphere within a network which includes other offers of assistance, in order to prevent multiple structures. Opt-out clauses are at the same time needed to ensure that the freedom of those seeking assistance to choose a suitable assistance offer and provider is maintained.

The invitation and obligation to take part in supervision must be made a binding requirement in all calls for proposals.

We demand that the growing orientation of social services towards business criteria and their evaluation by means of them, as well as the attendant documentation requirements, whose meaningfulness declines in inverse proportion to the time consumed, be replaced by a process-related evaluation system for their achievements. This on the one side includes the need to define individual time windows for the expected effect of the assistance, in line with the assistance needs, and on the other side the need for an evaluation of the measures in dialogue with all the agencies involved in them. Where the assistance needs prevent this approach, effect-oriented control instruments must be applied that favour providers with a good effect quality.

The assistance offers in the area of prevention which have been systematically reduced in recent years (for example the open youth work, employment promotion, family education, youth career support programmes, etc.) must be vitalized immediately to restore the communities to a position where they are able to act preventively in their own dynamics.

Future project funding (especially on a federal and Länder level) must attach greater importance to ensuring the sustainability of projects. This does not preclude the funding of innovative projects for trying out new solution options and styles of work.

2.5. Social work professionals / Qualified employees in social work

Analysis

To be named as the tasks of social work professionals are: “Providing support to people in difficult social situations by way of personal and environment-related assistance, in order to render them capable (again) of acting within their lifeworld (e.g. by means of psychosocial help, training, education, and assistance securing their material livelihood), supporting individuals and groups in overcoming restricted living conditions so that they can deal with their conflicts and represent their interests themselves, exertion of influence on the socio-geographic development of living conditions as part of district- and community-related work, in order to expand the residents’ opportunities in life by joint responsibility and co-determination and improve the residential structures and infrastructure in the respective community, advising and supporting the employees of companies and contributing to an organizational and personnel policy in companies that meets the social, health-related and psychological needs of these employees, contributing to a comprehensive advancement of the health-related, social and cultural partaking of the clients and employees of institutions within the social and health infrastructure, enabling access to the various public social service offers available, and their use, as well as management and optimization of their effectiveness by contributing to the social planning and exerting an influence on directives, ordinances and laws, and further the development of local resources, for example by recruiting, advising, supporting and training voluntary and/or honorary colleagues, strengthening citizenship and/or citizen’s involvement (amongst others by activating and promoting self-help, supporting self-organization), and finally promoting the cooperation of all persons and organizations involved in the assistance process (networking and collaboration).“¹²

Qualified employees in the social work profession are enabled to carry out these tasks by a generalistic basic course of study as well as further and advanced training, and their professional practice. They are equipped with specialist knowledge, methods and tools that are expanded by lifelong learning based on practical experience as well as continuing and/or advanced training. Their occupational activities are focussed on people in their interrelationships, and the problems arising from these relations. Social work is not only concerned with legal, psychological or medical problems, but also with social problem situations and their causes. The daily engagement with social problems and knowledge of their backgrounds and of differentiated assistance methods make these qualified professionals experts for all things social.

The profession, whose occupational activities are aimed at promoting solidarity and which also depends on the solidarity within society, is at this moment in time unfortunately unable to act in a spirit of solidarity for itself or its own trade. Cautious estimates imply that only ca. 10 % of all social work professionals are currently organized in vocational groups and/or

¹² See the IFSW / DBSH definition of social work

unions. At the same time there are many affiliations of qualified personnel in the profession, e.g. working groups or initiatives, whose activities are mostly concerned with a specialized area or field of work. An influential representation of practitioners can only be provided to a limited extent within a voluntary framework. Only a strong trade organization that is equipped with the required financial means can meet the exacting requirements of its own professional group, and bolster the latter's assertiveness in politics and society.

Demands

Our professional group must put up greater joint resistance to the developments described in this statement, and stand up for the profession to a greater extent than heretofore. We are the experts for all things social! It is this awareness which we need to buttress every day by means of competent sociopolitical, subject-related, job policy and trade union work.

Social work professionals are called upon to step up their involvement in the development of their city and community wherever it has implications for the social situation of the population or professionalism of social work. The objective consists of improving the social situation and/or preventing deteriorations whilst fighting the social exclusion of groups and individuals in a preventive manner. This also implies a break with previous competence models: housing construction, urban renewal, town planning, social planning, traffic planning and economic planning – all these are policy areas that also shape social life. Social work professionals are called upon to play a greater part in them as experts.

We need to endow social work with the importance it deserves. It is essential to put a stop to the diktat of business in the social sector.

The DBHS advocates a target- and success-oriented professional practice. This also includes clear agreements on the targets with the clientele and a corresponding transparency of the services vis-a-vis society and politics.

What is required are independent bodies (for example by way of a law that regulates the profession, a professional register or a trade association) that serve as a point of contact and follow up on possible client complaints, ensure their resolution, and thereby help to assure and improve the quality of the social work.

The quality of social work professionals as an expert, e.g. in criminal cases, must be consolidated. The practice of only inviting the expert opinion of lecturers with a background in one of the reference sciences of social work is unsatisfactory. This involves a need for practitioners who obtain additional qualifications, however.

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