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## ***Voluntary work as an innovative approach to social work***

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Political and social transitions in Poland and economic and financial crisis today were accompanied by unfavourable phenomena which affected a considerable part of the society. Increasing unemployment, the lack of professional stability, reduction in material status in a number of families and even poverty have caused that a number of people threatened with social exclusion. This causes inability to participate in a variety of forms of activity, helplessness, susceptibility to violence and attempts against human dignity (according to the definition by the UN) [Młyński, 2008: 5].

Social deprivation as a life status connected with unsatisfied need, with particular focus on the needs on an economic level, have caused growing demand on social support services. Social poverty, which is particularly noticeable in democratic societies, is inseparably connected with social work, which is a part of the system of social support.

Social work deals with interactions between humans and the social environment which affects the ability of meeting life commitments, minimization of distress and realization of the needs and aspirations. It is a process of a specific mediation between the entities and societies, which makes them be able to satisfy their life-related needs [Olubiński, 2004: 21]. The Social Work Act of 2004 points to fundamental goals of social work.

The rescuing goal is focused on ensuring fundamental living conditions to people who are devoid of them, for either objective or subjective reasons. The compensation goal focuses on meeting individual needs of humans, who, due to their health status and reduced level of psychophysical abilities, cannot do this on their own. The protective goal consists in minimization of a negative effect of the factors which cannot be changed; the promotion goal is achieved through solving problems and difficulties among people and groups in order for them to reach higher quality of life. Social work must be characterized by a fast and proper diagnosis of the environment the entities live, personal contact with customers, flexibility and short time of decision making. Social workers initiate activities required for normalization of family situations, promote self-help activities and maintain contact with institution which support families. In practice, support for people excluded and threatened with exclusions focuses mainly on satisfying their fundamental needs through cash support and social work. These activities frequently do not motivate for independent activity, which leads to an increase in demanding attitudes and being dependent on social support. Voluntary work faces these challenges in social support centres, which, if professionally organized, are a supplementation of social work, because they allow for activation of both the people in need and local communities. Volunteers who look after the customers in social support centres prevent their marginalization and make others realize the potential of each person in overcoming difficulties.

### **Short Historical Outline of the Idea of Charity and Voluntary Work in Poland**

In Poland, social support and help resulted mainly from a specific national situation, martyrdom, strong effect of Christian religion and, in recent years, social and political enslavement. This support was predominantly based on activities taken by voluntary workers. Their essential role fell on the periods of Partition of Poland, World War I and II and the period of the People's Republic of Poland [Kromolnicka, 2005: 48]. Poland has a

long and very rich tradition of development of philanthropy and charity, both in social and cultural aspect and the aspect of organization in terms of social support based on activation of people to transform environments they live in [Encyklopedia, 2008: 219].

In 966, with adoption of Christianity, Poland became substantially affected by the influence of the Western Christian culture, which was a new element in Polish conditions since the previous support was based on solidarity of families, whereas the mercy towards other people provided the basis for being a good Christian [Zasada-Chorab, 2004: 33]. In Poland, charity activities were performed by churches, parishes, religious brotherhoods, which were aimed at support for the poorest in order to achieve their goals; among other things, they run the hospitals. Those days the hospitals were a place of mercy and charity, they performed functions of shelters for pilgrims, poor people and children, and hospices for terminally ill people: remedial and therapeutic functions were treated marginally. With the course of time, the Church performed its charity activities through caring for those in need and creation of religious orders of men or women for these purposes [Skidmore, Thackeray, 1996: 42].

Development of nobles' democracy in Poland was conducive to formation of new social ideas. A. F. Modrzewski argued that the state should intervene in social affairs, education, culture and, first and foremost, in Church's affairs [Kwieciński, Śliwerski, 2005: 110], because it was the Church which took care for the people who suffered from poverty. Parishes were obliged to take register of the poor, orphans and other people who experienced social oppression [Leś, 2001: 23]. The brotherhoods supported from the funds collected from membership contributions or charity fund-raising also emerged.

The 16th and a half of the 17th century saw a deep economic crisis in the Republic of Poland, caused by a numerous wars with Swedes and Tatars, who ravaged the cities and villages. The extent of war damages was every serious for Polish nation. The pauperization of the society, developing beggary, poverty and rising demand for charity support were observed

[Kępski, 2002: 44]. Social activities in Poland were focused on social care and educational activities of the Catholic Church, philanthropic brotherhoods and religious communities. The support was joined the state, which consisted in financing food for those in serious need. This support also involved Polish nobles, monarchs, representatives of middle class and clergy.

The 18th century marked the period of the Age of Enlightenment, when philanthropy became a state problem. The Church and its charity character was criticized, it was blamed for development of beggary and improper use of hospitals. The attempts were made to create a supervising authority to manage public charity. The reforms were aimed at ordering of financial situation in charity institutions and definition of the principles of giving support, introduction of secular management in hospitals and coordination of philanthropic activities, and preventing beggary. A change in the doctrines of philanthropy was observed, which was caused by economic transitions and the demand for labour and providing the member of the societies with opportunities to earn money. Economic revival and work obligation was an instrument of the authorities for fighting the poverty. The forced labour institutions and philanthropic workshops also emerged those days.

During the period of Partition of Poland, when Poland's independence was lost, the Poles, in order not to lose their national identity, took a variety of conspiracy activities towards protecting the value of the lost homeland. Philanthropic activities were performed according to the principles imposed by the invading countries. The scope of the activities by social associations was reduced. Almost all the established institutions were forced to act in conspiracy.

The outbreak of World War I caused aroused faith in reclaimed independence through self-organization and social solidarity. On the other hand, war activities in the area of Poland caused high mortality, of which 50% was children below 15 year of age and significant destruction of the country and removal of a number of social care institutions. This caused

that new initiatives of support for the victims of war were implemented. One of the first forms of support was the proclamation by the Bishop Adam Stefan Sapieha in 1914. His appeal was responded by the establishment of Biskupi Komitet Pomocy dla Dotkniętych Klęską Wojny (the Bishop's Support Committee for the War-Stricken People). The support came from a variety of charity organizations. The second important institution in Poland was Centralny Komitet Obywatelski (the Central Citizens' Committee), which performed a custodial function and run shelters for adults and children unable to exist independently. In 1915, the function of the Committee was taken by philanthropic and social care organization, Rada Główna Opiekuńcza (the Central Social Care Council).

After regaining the independence, the support was provided in particular to orphan children by charity organizations, diocese committees of the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church and private persons. One of the first organizations was established in 1918, Główny Komitet Powracających do Kraju (Central Committee for the People Returning to Poland), followed by the establishment of another philanthropic organizations, e.g. Towarzystwo Opieki nad Dziećmi Katolickimi (the Society for Care for Catholic Children) or Caritas association. In the course of organization of the state, the authorities took over some competencies of social organizations, which caused the change in philanthropic functions. After implementation of the Social Support Act in 1923, foundations and associations performed supplementary functions in terms of social care, educational, curative and cultural activities and, from 1919, the activities of the associations were regulated by Tymczasowy Dekret o Stowarzyszeniach (the Temporary Decree of the Associations) [Leś, 2001: 64].

During the interwar period, philanthropic activities were also performed by a number of secular and religious organizations such as catholic charity associations, societies of Mosaic and Evangelical religions, religious orders, brotherhoods of mercy and non-habit orders and a number of other organizations which had survived from the period of Partition of Poland.

During World War II, all the social organizations of the Second Polish Republic were prohibited by the invader; however the Catholic Church, cloisters, orders and their charity organizations e.g. Caritas demonstrated invaluable self-organization and solidarity, taking over the charity, philanthropic and conspiracy activities. The forms of social self-defence and self-help included the underground activities in the form of secret education and patronage care, which proved a significant devotion of the Polish nation. Due to the social role played by these activities during the period of occupation; the attention should be also paid to Główna Rada Opiekuńcza (the Central Social Care Council), established by Germans to replace Polish organizations, whose goal was to represent the interests of Polish social organizations. The invaluable role was also played by the Polish Red Cross, Catholic Church, Związek Spółdzielni Spożywców RP „Społem” (Association of Consumers’ Cooperative Społem), owners of private enterprises and individual who protected the people of culture and art [[www.wolnotariat.org.pl/\(7.03.2011\)](http://www.wolnotariat.org.pl/(7.03.2011))].

The first months after the World War II was completed saw a significant demand for social support. Social activity of the people who survived the economic crisis and regaining the independence was so significant that a number of secular and religious organizations were re-established and the press was reborn in very short time. The eighties of the recent century marked a turning point in structural and political transitions in Poland. NSZZ Solidarność was established, which stimulated the society to philanthropic activities, and social organizations were reborn. Revival of Polish society to be active made the authorities fear that they would lose the control of the reality. The year 1981 brought a slowdown and disabled voluntary activities.

Martial law in Poland caused that social activities were moved to conspiracy. However, economic crisis and pauperization of the society in the eighties forced the authorities to raise tolerance for secular and religious social organizations.

A considerable role was played by the Catholic Church, which became the shelter for Solidarity underground and the target of charity support from a variety of donors and institutions from a number of foreign countries.

In the period of democratic transformation, the revival of charity and philanthropy was observed. Poles established a variety of associations, organizations and foundations, recognized by the state.

The term voluntary work started to be used in Poland in the seventies of the 20th century. This form of social work was introduced by young people connected with the Oaza (Oasis) youth association in Catholic Church and students, educators and sociologists. They started individual work with children from orphanages and pathological families. Their activities consisted in helping them doing homework, managing leisure time or spending holiday together. Since 1984, an organization which recruits voluntary workers in the developing countries has been very active. This organization is closely related to the United Nations Volunteers (UNV), which is the UN's programme.

Recent decade has seen a significant development of voluntary work in Poland. It is focused today within non-governmental organizations with 3 million volunteers, of which 65% include students, 20% are pensioners and 15% are people who work ([www.wolnotariat.org.pl](http://www.wolnotariat.org.pl) / (7.03.2011)). Young people also work in other organizations and movements which are not included in the statistics and help children, the disabled, the ill and the poor.

Therefore, development of voluntary work fell on the period of rapid economic transitions, the period of globalization and modernization of the world. In this situation, a number of people are unable to adapt to new reality, they feel apprehensive and seek support and help.

### **Social Services based on Voluntary Work with the Example of Selected Institution**

Under new political conditions, social care centres were quickly re-established and found their way towards implementation of voluntary work ideas and including them in their statutory activity. This was facilitated by the Act of 24 April 2003 on public utility activities and voluntary work.

Full-time social worker today would be unable to meet the needs of the society without a crowd of voluntary workers. Activity of voluntary workers is noticeable in all domains of social life: it is not limited to charity or support activities. Their commitment and competencies will be used in the areas of social support, culture, ecology, recreation, public safety, education and teaching. Voluntary workers often perform the work which others are not willing to do, e.g. they work in hospices. It is impossible not to notice and not to appreciate the role they perform and it is difficult to find a social institution or social care and educational centre which would not be helped by voluntary workers [Kromolnicka, 2005: 95 and further].

The support from voluntary workers consists in their supplementary activities; they support and extend the activities of social workers. Volunteers contribute to social work with their new ideas, unconventional forms of work and implement innovative solutions to the system of social work. An asset for voluntary work is that they are not attached to routine activities, they respond spontaneously and authentically. Voluntary workers, through their activities, reduce the dependence of an entity on state social support, stimulate cooperation and support during crises or raise faith among the people who are looked after in their own abilities. The role of voluntary workers in working with dysfunctional families is invaluable. Mutual trust makes them become confidants and advisors, which is not always possible for full-time social workers. Through considerably extended contact with customers, a voluntary worker sees a specific difficulties and complexity of their problems, weaknesses, dissimilarities and inter-

ests. Voluntary workers, who have this knowledge, might suggest the customers a variety of forms of activities in community centres, common rooms, day care centres, schools and clubs. They facilitate contacts and help during entering into cooperation, discovering positive factors in the environment and sources of changes, development of knowledge, skills and self-assuredness; they are responsible for environmental education [Kromolnicka, 2005: 97].

Support from voluntary workers is indispensable in implementation of social contracts. Social workers define the problems to be solved with customers, whereas voluntary workers can verify them, assess throughout the period of contracts, notify the problems and difficulties which arise and, if possible, help solve them. After agreement with social workers, they can correct methodical mistakes, maladjustment of tasks to actual abilities or competencies of a customer at individual stages in realization of the contract. Voluntary workers help others through performing a variety of functions and tasks in local communities, social care centres, family houses, hospitals, orphanages and they use a variety of forms of support of compensational, preventive and rescuing activities. Volunteer work is necessary for all local communities, with particular focus on activities performed in the afternoon, on weekends or holiday among children and young people. They suggest a variety of useful forms of spending the leisure time, help develop interests and show new perspectives. Supporting young people is not mere reacting and support in crisis situation they found themselves in, but also opening up opportunities for finding their own passions, interests and showing the areas which might be the field of personal activeness. Volunteers perform an invaluable role in hospitals, hospices, shelters for the homeless, social support centres; a number of institutions rest their activities exclusively on voluntary work. The year 2011 was named the European Year of Voluntary Work.

In the institution included in the study, i.e. Miejski Ośrodek Pomocy Społecznej (City's Social Support Centre), ca. 70 workers are employed, including mainly young people who are school or university students aged

15 to 25 (ca. 40%), ca. 30% are the people aged 26-40 years, with secondary or university education level. Over half of the volunteers are single people, unmarried or divorced, 30% of them are professionally active, and the remaining part of these people are supported by the families of pensioners or retired. They assessed their material status as satisfactory or good. Among the motivations for working voluntarily, they mention the need for gaining professional experience (ca. 30%), the need for helping others (ca. 30%), being unemployed, the lack of other occupations and boredom (20%), the need for requital for previous support and hoping that their support will be given in return by others (ca. 20%).

Activities by voluntary workers focus in particular on:

- helping others in doing homework at the student's homes or in common rooms, the programme of Pogotowie Lekcyjne (Homework Emergency)
- administrative and office work in social care and family services divisions
- care for the ill at their homes e.g. shopping, cleaning, reading newspapers, walking with the customers
- helping social workers in day care centres to perform cleaning work, organization of occupational and physical therapy, organization of events
- organization of day camps, sport and recreation events or cultural and educational events for children and adults.

The volunteers cooperate with social workers who diagnose the needs of the customers and are coordinators and supervisors of all the activities.

In the centre described in the present study, a programme of *Wolontariat w Ośrodku Pomocy Społecznej* (Voluntary Work in Social Care Centre) has been implemented since 2003. The aim of the programme is to satisfy the needs of the families with educational deficiencies, people physically challenged and the elderly who are the customers in these centres and to stimulate local social activities.

Volunteers who take part in the program are supported by a supervisor from the division of social care and a group of specialists for voluntary work, guided by a coordinator. The support provided by these people in difficult situations is aimed at prevention and, in consequence, abandoning the work by the volunteers.

An important objective of MOPS (City's Social Care Centres) is to create a model of support for families, the disabled and the elderly in solving their problems. The model is based on cooperation of individual systems which function in the area of support activities. The systems are represented by a range of non-governmental organizations, institutions of local level, social workers and volunteers. This allows for a complex support and acceleration of the process of gaining self-independence and limitation of the dysfunctions.

After familiarizing with the situation of the people and families subjected to support granted by the Centre, the needs for volunteer work were identified in particular in the following environments:

- broken, dysfunctional and educationally deficient families,
- families of solitary people, the disabled and the people who are provided care services,
- customers in day care centre.

The programme was implemented in stages.

The first stage (September – November 2003) focused on the first group of volunteers (ca. 10-15 people) who work in favour of the families which are educationally deficient. The volunteers were responsible for:

- showing the methods of proper care of children,
- keeping households,
- doing homework,
- training of social abilities and pointing to the demanded behavioural patterns,
- movement and relax games for hyperactive children,
- care for children when parents take part in therapies and support groups,

on voluntary work are organized in secondary schools, universities and a variety of organizations.

The candidates are selected by means of an interview based on a questionnaire. In final phase of the meeting, a coordinator and a volunteer make arrangements concerning the time and the scope of support and duties. After analysis of the data, the coordinator makes final choice and the candidate is informed about the decision.

The people qualified to the programme are initially trained by the coordinator. The trainings concern the problems of organization and the specific nature of voluntary work, the scope of activities performed by the Centre and selected customers.

After agreement between the involved parties, the coordinator introduces a volunteer to the environment; they familiarize with customers' expectations. The coordinator, customer and volunteer define the time and the scope of work, and the way the corrections can be made in these factors.

As a result of these activities, volunteers and customers enter into contacts and the first independent volunteers' visit in the environment is organized.

The first contract is typically concluded for a period of month, which is necessary to become acquainted with each other and to familiarize with the details of the work. After a month, either party can withdraw from further cooperation.

A volunteer who participates in the programme obtains a list of the literature on the problems they will have to cope with. Apart from self-learning, they are also provided opportunities for conventional methods of education, i.e. lectures and trainings.

Volunteer course in the form of lectures covers theoretical and practical domains, whereas trainings are focused on case studies.

Trainings for the staff typically concern improvement in cooperation with volunteers who work in favour of the customers of the Centre.

A key for a long-term cooperation with volunteers is to stimulate the sense of self-esteem, being important and dedicated to mission connected with their work. The City's Social Care Centre uses the remuneration through mission. This means that volunteers are supposed to perform socially useful task and their efforts are compensated by a corresponding 'psychological gratification' used by a coordinator. This gratification is realized through interpersonal contacts with volunteers and sense of being a member of a group.

It has also become a tradition to organize solemn meetings on the International Volunteer Worker Day (5 December) and granting small gifts and diplomas.

Coordinators sometimes contact customers in order to familiarize with cooperation of the parties, with particular focus on:

- whether a voluntary worker performs all the duties of the contract,
- whether a customer and a volunteer entered into a positive contact,
- whether a customer is satisfied with the services,
- customer expectations of further activities.

The coordinator also talks with a volunteer about achievements, problems, expectations and plans. Changes in the scope of the duties are possible through contact with the coordinator.

Coordinators also fill out the customer contact forms and volunteer contact forms. The forms are used to record each contact with these people, the needs, suggestions and problems. They are a documentation of the performed work.

As results from the interviews with volunteers, the most of them are satisfied with the work they do (ca. 70%) and emphasize the opportunities for self-realization through helping others and opportunities of meeting other people.

In summary, Wolontariat programme stands the test as an innovative form of social work and provides mutual benefits of this type of activity.

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