INVOLVEMENT AND THE EMPOWERMENT OF USERS DURING THE FIELD PLACEMENTS OF SOCIAL WORK STUDENTS

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SUMMARY

The article presents the results of an evaluative research conducted in 2005, related to field placements of second year social work students as seen from the social service user perspective. The aim of this evaluative research was to gain insight into the perception of the field placement programme from the perspective of service users as well as to include them in the process of programme evaluation, thus opening additional possibilities of the cooperative creation of the programme. The objective was to discover how social service users - experience experts, perceive the field placement programme. More precisely, the objective was to gain insight into the users' motivation for the participation in the programme, into their perception of the content and the course of the placement as well as into their recommendations for the improvement of the programme.

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The results reveal the social service users' perception of their role in the education of social workers but they also show that the users „have already been included" in the process due to the fact that they represent the most relevant source of information regarding themselves and their needs. The results are binding for the teachers since the users' right to inclusion means they have the right to equal position in negotiations, agreements and interventions as well as equal possibility of analysis from their own perspective. In that sense, authors suggest certain guidelines based on the research results which they used in further cooperative creation of the field placement programme and education of social workers in general.

INTRODUCTION

In the last decades the modern social work theory and practice puts the emphasis on the concept of empowerment and including users in the decision-making process related to their lives. The empowerment, as a method in social work, can fulfil the user needs at several levels. At the level of an individual, empowerment strengthens and supports the user's personal power, at the interpersonal level, acquiring personal power leads to an increased capability of the user to influence other people, whereas at the institutional level the prerequisites for a stronger community as well as the possibility to influence the political power are created (Payne, 2005.).

The empowerment underlines the individual choice and the greater control over the user's choices, which considerably changes the role of the social worker and other professionals included in the user's life. Their relationship is marked with a shift in the redistribution of power from the professional toward the user. Among different current approaches, the practice of empowerment in social work has resulted in the inclusion of the user in the quality assessment of the intervention plan, the programme, the services offered to the user, the institutions as well as organisations in which the users are gathered. Today the user evaluation is an integral part of intervention programmes or projects in both process and outcome evaluation.

However, the inclusion of users in the programme preparation, creation and realization at the level of the provision of services or »products« for users represents a fairly new dimension of reflection and action in Croatia, at least as far as social work and related professions are concerned. According to the authors' experience in relation to the inclusion of users in the education of professionals to which they will turn for help, the University of Zagreb, as well as other regional universities, are still quite closed and mostly not inclined to dialogue neither with the users nor with other participants in the education process such as representatives of professionals, student representatives and representatives of the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare and the Ministry of Science, Education and Sports. This attitude is most frequently rationalized by means of arguments such as »distortion of scientific, academic discourse« if the users were to be included in the decision-making process in education. One should note that the experience is the exclusive source of these findings,

since there are no scientific or professional papers in the South-East Europe covering the subject of inclusion of users in the education of professionals in related fields. Therefore, this paper will present one of the pioneer examples of inclusion of users in field placements of social work students.

SOME THEORETICAL NOTIONS OF THE EMPOWERMENT PROCESS

There are numerous definitions determining the content, purpose and principles of the empowerment process. Since the inclusion of users in the education process of professionals (Beresford et al., 2006.) can have significant empowering effects for both the users themselves and for other participants in the process, we will briefly present certain common features of current notions of the empowerment process as stated by Rappaport (1987., in Perkins and Zimmerman, 1995.), Zimmerman et al. (1992., in Perkins and Zimmerman, 1995.), Arai (1997.b), Payne (1997., 2005.) and Gutiérrez, Parsons and Cox (2003.).

According to these authors, the common feature of the mentioned theoretical foundations of the empowerment process is the fact that it is a deliberate, planned process in the community the purpose of which is to enable individuals or groups a more efficient access to the community's resources, better control over their own lives and greater inclusion in the life of the community in general.

Certain authors (Rappaport, 1987. and Zimmerman et al., 1992. in Perkins and Zimmerman, 1995.) mention the importance of critical understanding of the environment by individuals and groups in the empowerment process. Others (Payne, 1997., 2005., Gutiérrez, Parsons and Cox, 2003.) focus more on the importance of transferring the power from the environment to the individual, i.e. group. The transfer of power is understood as the action taken from the point of view of the power, which according to Saleebey (1997., in Čačinović Vogrinčić et al., 2007.: 9) means the following: »Practicing from a strength orientation means this - everything you do as a social worker will be predicated, in some way, on helping to discover and embellish, explore and exploit clients' strength and resources in the service of assisting them to achieve their goals, realize their dreams and shed the irons of their own inhibitions and misgivings. The formula is simple: mobilize clients' strengths (talent, knowledge, capacities) in the service of achieving their goals and visions and the clients will have a better quality of life on their terms«.

 The ultimate purpose of the empowerment process is attaining a better feeling of personal security, better social and political equality, greater inclusion in the community life and, generally, the promotion of social justice.

Having in mind the context of student field placements in which the research, results of which will be presented in the paper, took place, we consider that the empowerment features, as described by Christine Labonte (1995., in Arai, 1997.b) reflect best the need for

harmonization in the field of empowerment at individual and structural level. Elaborating on the importance of personal change and the development of personal resources, as well as greater change within groups and communities, Labonte considers that it is not possible to achieve personal empowerment if change does not occur at other social levels as well. In that sense, empowerment objectives are multiple: from individual empowerment, through small group or community empowerment to global political actions. The author emphasizes the importance of a holistic approach to empowerment due to the interconnection of psychological, social and economic aspects of life and the influence of these aspects on health in general and on the wellbeing of each individual.

STUDENT FIELD PLACEMENTS AND THE USER PERSPECTIVE

The second year social work students are for the first time, during their study, included in continuous field placements. They are organized in a way that the students regularly meet users during a semester, within certain offered fields, social welfare institutions and civil society associations (Urbanc and Kletečki Radović, 2004.)[4]. Their meetings can be described as "socializations" and they are supposed to fulfil certain specific tasks related to field placement objectives which depend on wishes and needs of both the user and the student. In that sense, it is not possible to talk about the user initiative, since the framework of the field placement has been set. The field placement in the duration of 60 hours is supervised[5] and includes certain associations and institutions in Zagreb. It is restricted to the duration of one semester.

The user perspective in such a planned field placement consists of participation of so called service users – experience experts who, for a long time, have been participating in the creation and the realization of field placements with the second year social work students in the form of informal partnership with the Department of Social Work. In the beginning of the 1990s, Ksenija Napan, a former teacher at the Department of Social Work and a coordinator of the field placement, reflected upon new modalities of the field placement realization which would be based on the users' informedness on the programme, their voluntary participation and support of their initiatives related to the content and the dynamics of contact with social work students. The basic assumption, at that time a starting point in

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[4] *Due to changes in the curriculum of the Department of Social Work that took place in 2005, the field placement in the duration of 60 hours which was until then organized in the 3rd and 4th semester now takes place only in the 4th semester whereas the number of hours is left unchanged.*

[5] *The supervision of student field placements is organized at the faculty in groups of five to eight students and is led by supervisors – collaborators of the Department of Social Work, Faculty of Law, University of Zagreb, or teachers at the Department, not engaged as field instructors or examiners. During a semester, each group participates in five to six supervision meetings, each in the duration of two hours.*

collaboration with representatives of associations of persons with disability, was that the user's „first hand" experience represents a valuable resource of experiential and theoretical knowledge for future social workers. The introduction of the concept of field placement with the participation of service users – experience experts was motivated by the dissatisfaction of users with the work and the attitude of social workers in their day-to-day practice. In the direct contact with the service users of the mentioned associations it was often said that the service users are the most relevant source of information on their own needs and the ways to fulfil them but this aspect has often been neglected. On the other hand, social workers, although with „the best intentions" to help, offer ready-made solutions too fast, without a possibility of cooperative creation of solutions and the effort to analyse the situation from the point of view of the service user, his/her family, partner etc. This dissatisfaction with the relationship and its effects resulted in the dialogue on the objectives and ways of carrying out these field placements intended for the second year social work students.

The service users expressed the wish for the future social workers to have a chance to visit their homes and families, spend some time with them participating in various ways in their everyday activities and experience their needs and ways they are fulfilled as well as things that are made impossible or very difficult for them. The question of the nature of these obstacles and of the social workers' professional role in removing these obstacles was also raised. In relation to the mentioned issues, the field placement objectives have been defined in order to gain a deeper insight and critical thinking of the following:

- individual user's quality of life
- the way in which the users and their families fulfill their everyday needs
- specific issues and obstacles regularly encountered in performing their daily activities
- possibilities and resources of the individual, the family and the environment in overcoming these obstacles
- the role and expectations from the social worker from the perspective of the service user.

In every association or institution, the service users independently decide if they are willing to take part in the programme of the field placement, i.e. meetings with a student during a semester, as well as if they wish to stay in that relationship. They also independently decide on the content and the dynamics of meetings. In this context, at the level of the content, the field placement can be described as »socialization« and during the process, depending on the development of the relationship between the student and the user and their mutual expectations, certain specific tasks are defined (Vizek Vidović and Vlahović Štetić, 2007.). For example, the student and the user can work on the cooperative creation and implementation of the plan for an evening out of a user with disability, living in a building which is not adapted for persons with disability. Besides the main goal, the student and the user set a number of smaller goals trying to overcome the obstacles and discover

resources in solving problems while achieving these smaller goals (organizing activities needed for the entrance to the building to be adapted for persons with disability, organizing neighbour's help, sending petitions, exploring the ways of fulfilling the right to organized transportation, contact with the local social welfare centre etc.). In other words, although the content is similar to »socialization« which is largely shaped by the interests, needs and possibilities of both the user and the student, there is a series of tasks in the framework of which the student perceives, analyzes and reflects on the case. The objectives defined in this way are limited to basic skills needed for working with individuals and to development of communication skills and do not refer to the realization of the whole helping process or the empowerment process as a social work method. The objectives of the field placement are adapted to the student's acquisition of first experiences in the work with the users as they face fears and expectations in building a relationship with the user, build a close relationship but yet have to learn how to keep a professional distance, develop relationships and should learn how to form realistic expectations in the relationship with the user and end the formal relationship with him.

Besides focusing on educational goals, set by the users and the coordinator of the field placement, there are also so called »social« goals which are related to direct or indirect enhancement of the user's quality of life. They are often related to finding alternatives for broadening the scope of leisure activities as well as for broadening the social network, since the majority of users have great problems with mobility and most public spaces and grounds in Zagreb are not yet adapted to the standards enabling persons with disability autonomous mobility. In this case, leisure activities, i.e. the content of the student-user meeting, are a means of achieving the higher objective which is to help the service user to participate in the activities not directly related to the persons with disability or in organizations gathering and organizing activities for that target group.

Participating in leisure activities intended for regular population, as opposed to the activities in which the users participate solely within associations and clubs gathering persons with disability, represent an important factor in the process of individual empowerment and they are a basis for anti-discriminatory social work practice. The anti-discriminatory practice is understood as a series of interventions, decisions, measures and, generally, politics which directly or indirectly influence the alignment of the status of minorities (in relation to their sex, race, beliefs, religion or other features such as for example the disability) (Urbanc, 2006.). The user participation in such »exterior activities« is a chance for self-determination, making personal choices and capacity building (Allen, 1991.; Coleman and IsoAhola, 1993., in Arai, 1997.a). The research results suggest that leisure activities represent an important path to inclusion of persons with disability in the life of a community as well as to the development of social relations (Hutchison and McGill, 1992.; Pedlar, 1992., in Arai, 1997.a). For many users – experience experts, in their own words, participation in realization of field placements with social work students opens new challenges in finding a way out of long-lasting social

isolation or a kind of social »ghetto« and a possibility of spending time outside their usual environment, such as their family or their institution that is association.

The field placements of social work students have been continually evaluated (Urbanc and Družić, 1999.; Urbanc, Družić, Ljubotina and Kregar, 2002.). The students themselves participate in the evaluation, and since the academic year 2003/2004 the service users have been included as well. According to Zaviršek, Zorn and Videmšek (2002.), the user perspective is best reflected if users have control over what has been happening to them, in the framework of a programme or a service, if they receive a reliable information which will help them reach a decision easily (the issue of an informed consent) and if their decision will not in any way jeopardize or weaken their position. The inclusion of users in the role of active co-creators of the field placement programme at the level of content, process and relationships, besides empowering the users contributes to the respect for the current standards in the education of social workers. It also helps students receive authentic message about the importance of including and maintaining the user perspective from the first contact with practical work (Kletečki Radović, 2008.).

THE PRACTICE OF INCLUSION AND EMPOWERMENT PROCESS

To include means to have an equal position for negotiations, agreements and interventions as well as an equal possibility of analysis from one's own perspective. However, the level of users' inclusion (in this case in the teaching process) can span from the so called (1) manipulative level, where the users are not informed and they do not possess the understanding of the meaning and the course of the teaching process and serve as "decoration", 2) tokenism level, where the user is asked to express his/her opinion but the user himself/herself does not know to which extent he/she can be personal and critical in describing certain experience and what the consequences of such actions are, (3) the level of informed consent of the user to participate; (4) the level of common initiative of the user and the teacher and finally (5) the level at which the users take initiative whereby the teachers are invited to participate but they are not in charge of implementing the ideas (Urbanc, 2008.).

Croft and Beresford (1994., in Payne, 1997.) consider that inclusion is a very important approach since people whish and have the right to participate in the decision making process and in the procedures which regard them. The inclusion of users reflects the key values of social work. A greater responsibility leads towards more efficient services and helps in attaining social work objectives (Alphonse et al., 2008.). In the last ten years, in the creation of the concept of field placement for social work students as an „inclusive" not an „exclusive" programme, the remarks made by the users dissatisfied with their experience with social workers have been encouraging since their expertise for their own difficulties and direct user experience have not been taken into account.

At the theoretical level, Croft and Beresford (1994., in Payne, 1997.) considers that the practice of inclusion of users consists of four elements:

1. **Empowerment** – enables the users to make decisions on the issues concerning their lives and presents a challenge to repression;
2. **Control** – includes defining personal needs and influences decision making and planning;
3. **Power -** "equips"the users with personal resources for taking over the power, for example by gathering information, the development of trust, self-esteem, self-confidence, expectations, knowledge and skills;
4. **Resources** – organization of services by activation of resources in the community in a way that they become open for the inclusion of users.

The mentioned elements of the inclusion practice interact in the relationship of students, as direct users of education services and members of associations as indirect users of professional services, and thus reflect on the creation of the field work and the course within which it is organized. The circular relationship and interaction of the elements of the inclusion practice, curriculum of the study programme and the users are shown in the Figure 1.

Figure 1.

Relationship of the elements of involvement practice in the framework of field placement and education of social work students
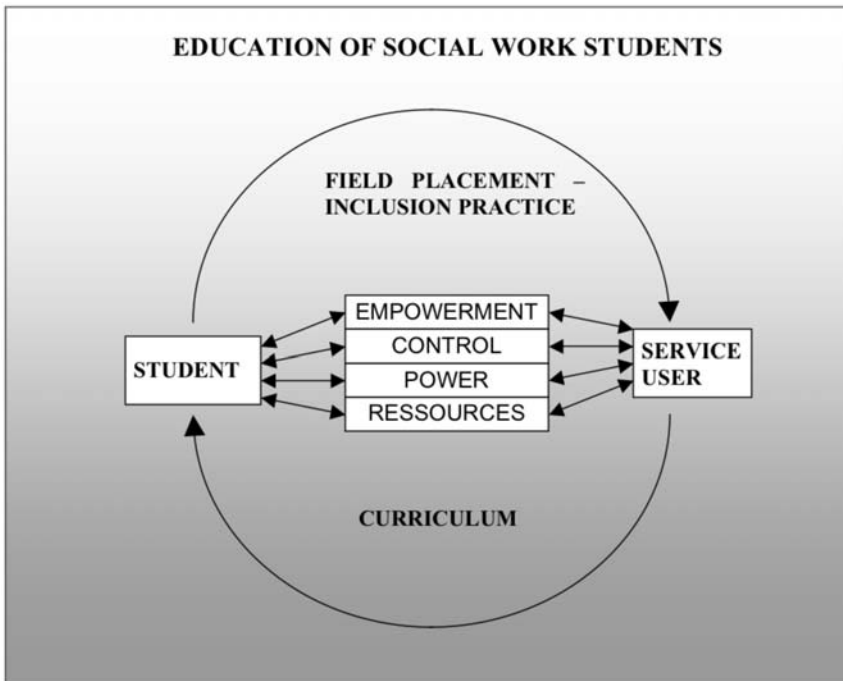
According to the mentioned authors, the experience of users in the framework of field placements reveals lack of one or more inclusion elements. The users' experience with students was often reduced to: (1) their feeling of helplessness and passivity due to lack of empowerment elements; (2) the feeling that *...someone came to learn something on them...*, which reveals the lack of control over the content and the process; (3) the understanding that the students were coming with previously defined tasks and contents they should complete, and the users were expected to adapt, which reveals a significantly asymmetric distribution of power in the field placement context, lack of informeness, absence of dialogue and sometimes even absence of the user's informed consent as well as (4) lack of feedback from the academic community, and consequently lack of change related to the inclusion of users.

The analysis of the literature on inclusion and empowerment was the basis in the change of conceptualization of field placements in the sense of introduction and promotion of basic principles of empowerment (Rose, 1990., in Payne, 1997.): (1) contextualism, (2) empowerment and (3) participation.

In the framework of social work students' field placements, **contextualism** means that the focus is placed on the user's understanding of social work and competences which, according to him/her, a social worker should possess in order for that help to be acceptable, or at least more acceptable, in the context in which the user lives. The introduction of contextualism enabled the development of a dialogue based on the users' reality. In that dialogue, the user can express himself/herself, elaborate and reflect on his feelings, understanding of life, of the social worker's role, of his own difficulties and strengths. When the student knows the context of the user's life, he will form an idea about the reasons and the need for a cooperative creation of solutions and help with the user, as opposed to frequent »jumping into conclusions« and suggesting »the best possible solutions from the professional perspective«.

In the framework of social work students' field placements, **empowerment** meant not only that the student supports the user in finding existing possibilities and resources within the environment in order to fulfill his needs, but also that this process takes place mutually, i.e. that the user provides support to the student in his professional development, transferring his personal user experience as well as the possibilities of fulfilling the needs from a certain perspective and in a certain context. The students learn first-hand and see the practical application of social work theoretical concepts and consequently construct the foundations for an empowerment practice in their future professional environment.

The purpose of the participation principle is to diminish the users' feeling of isolation, by connecting them to the »rest of the world«. Moreover, cooperative behaviour also relates to cooperative decision-making regarding the content and the processes within the field placement as well as to the co-creation of the relationship between the user and the

student. During orientation meetings, which precede the student participation in the field placement and which are attended by the representatives of users, the teachers and the students, the possibilities of the application of these principles are continuously analyzed and co-created to be included in the practice during individual meetings of students and users afterwards.

Furthermore, although all the participants in the student field placements wish to attain the level of common initiative of users and teachers in creation and realization of the placement, (Urbanc, 2008), only a small portion of the content and the process can be recognized as a common initiative whereas the major part of the users' inclusion in this programme is still at the level of users' informed consent. The inclusion of users at the level of the process evaluation, i.e. the assessment of their satisfaction with the programme, opens a possibility for their inclusion in the evaluation of field placement outcomes but also in the evaluation of the outcomes of the course programmes related to the field placements as well as in the role of the programme co-creator, which would truly represent a level of common initiative of users and teachers - a goal to be attained in future education programmes for social workers.

RESEARCH PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

The paper will present the results of an evaluative research conducted in 2005., related to field placements of second year students from the user perspective. The purpose of this evaluative research was to gain insight into the perception of the programme of field placements from the user perspective as well as to include the users in the process of programme evaluation in order to open additional possibilities of the cooperative creation of the programme.

The aim of the research was to gain insight into the way the users, i.e. experience experts, perceive the field placement programme. A more specific objective was to gain insight into the users' motivation for the participation in the programme, their perception of the content and the course of the placement as well as into their suggestions for the improvement of the programme. A long-term research objective was to open the dialogue on a continuous formal cooperation of the study programme and the users' associations as well as a permanent inclusion of users in different forms of evaluations.

In relation to the above mentioned issues, the following research questions were formulated:
(1)   Which are the users' motives for their inclusion in the field placements?
(2)   What is the content of the student-user meetings?
(3)   How do the users experience the field placement?
(4)   What are the users' suggestions for the improvements in the field placements?

METHODOLOGY

RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

The sample of the participants in the research was formed according to the position of the users included in the field placement programme of the second year social work students in the framework of the course Social Work with an Individual. It is an accidental sample of adult persons and children with disability, members of the civil society associations or institutions which gather and care about individuals with special difficulties and who got involved in the field placement programme of their own free will. Out of the total number of seventy users included in the field placement programme of the second year students in the framework of the course Social Work with an Individual, fifty-six users participated in the written evaluation. The participation in the evaluation was based on voluntary and informed decision of the user on the purpose of the research. The participants were guaranteed anonymity and the possibility to withdraw from the research.

The following associations participate in the cooperative creation and realization of the described field placement programme: Association for Persons with Learning Difficulties »Squirrel«, Society of Physically Disabled, Association of the Blind Zagreb, Society of People with Cerebral Palsy and Poliomyelitis, Multiple Sclerosis Society of Zagreb, Muscular Dystrophy Patients Association, Croatian Association for the Deafblind »Touch«. Besides the civil society associations, two social welfare institutions were also included in the field placement programme, Special Hospital for Children with Neurodevelopmetal Disorders »Goljak« and Children and Youth Centre for Education »Gornje Prekrižje«.

The evaluation included thirty female and twenty-six male users, aged from eight to eighty-five. The following is the age span of the users: twenty-five users up to the age of eighteen, twelve users aged from nineteen to thirty, five users aged from thirty-one to forty, eight users aged from forty-one to sixty and six users aged from sixty-one to eighty-five.

As far as their affiliation to different associations of the people with disability and social welfare institutions, the majority of users were children placed in the Special Hospital for Children with Neurodevelopmetal Disorders »Goljak« (thirteen of them) and children from the Children and Youth Centre for Education »Gornje Prekrižje« (nine of them); nine users came from Muscular Dystrophy Patients Association, six users from the Association of the Blind Zagreb; five users were members of the Society of Physically Disabled; four users from each the Cerebral Palsy and Poliomyelitis Association and the Association for Persons with Learning Difficulties »Squirrel« and three users came from each of the two associations: Croatian Association for the Deafblind »Touch« and Multiple Sclerosis Society of Zagreb.

As far as the duration of the participation in the field placement programme is concerned, the majority of the users have been included in the programme for one or two years (thirty eight participants), nine participants have been included in the programme three or four years and ten of them five or more years. The users were well motivated and involved

and they probably had a positive attitude toward the programme and the students with whom they were spending their leisure time (since one third of the users have participated in the programme for three or more years) and whose inclusion in the evaluation was based on their own free choice.

DATA COLLECTION

The data were collected in the framework of a comprehensive, final evaluation of the student field placement programme in the second year of study at the Department of Social Work, during the academic year 2004/2005. All second year students who took part in the field placement within the course »Social Work with an Individual«[6] participated in the evaluation, as well as the users included in the field placement programme related to that course. Since the field placement related to the course »Social Work with an Individual« is organized in a way that one student develops a relationship and socializes with one user, seventy users participated in the programme.

The aim of the research procedure and the users' inclusion in the evaluation was to empower the users and to increase their power in defining their own needs related to the participation in the field placement programme (Sohng, 2003.; Parsons, 2003.; Kletečki Radović, 2008.).

In order to gather data, an evaluative questionnaire was drawn up especially for the users. In the process of structuring the questionnaire the comprehensibility and clarity of questions was given a special consideration having in mind type of disability of users and heterogeneity of the participants in relation to their age (the youngest user was eight years old, and the oldest one eighty-five). The evaluative questionnaire included fourteen items, out of which four referred to basic socio-demographic characteristics and the remaining ten open questions referred the assessment of the student placement, satisfaction with the participation in the programme, especially in relation to a positive or a negative experience during the participation, as well as to recommendations and suggestions for improvement of the programme of student field placement.

The gathering of data by means of a questionnaire was selected due to heterogeneity of the participants and the aim to include in the evaluation every user – experience expert who wished to be included regardless of his age, level of education, specific ways of communication and the type and the seriousness of disability. The questionnaire with

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[6] *Second-year students can select if they wish to participate in the field placement within the course Social Work with an Individual or Social Work with the Family. We are mentioning here the number of seventy students who participated in the field placement within the course Social Work with an Individual in the academic year 2004./2005., which represented a half of the total number of students enrolled in the second year in that academic year.*

open questions is one of the possible methods of data gathering in qualitative methodology (Mesec, 1998.), although less structured methods such as interviews or focus groups are more frequently used in the field. Namely, after socialization with students during their placements it was discovered that the users, when providing oral feedback on the contact with the student restrain from mentioning negative experience or unfulfilled expectations from the meetings, worrying about the note that the student will receive and about the loss of the possibility to participate again in the field placement. Having in mind that the sample was double positive, the use of a questionnaire with open questions as a data gathering method enabled a distance between the service user and the researcher as well as anonymity and accessibility for every user.

After detailed instructions about filling in the evaluative questionnaire received from the teachers at the faculty, every student handed to his user the evaluative questionnaire, a letter and an envelope. The student personally informed the user on the purpose and the objective of evaluation, on the modality of filling in the questionnaire, his/her role, anonymity and free participation in evaluation. Each user also received a letter where the mentioned conditions are stated once again and where the user was thanked for his effort and time. In the user evaluation the role of the student was to deliver materials and not to help the user to fill in the questionnaire. The user had to fill in the questionnaire within a certain time limit (most frequently a week) with a help of a family member, an employee or a volunteer in the association or institution or another person of his choice (except students and coordinators of the field placement programme), if he needed any help. The users put anonymous evaluative questionnaire in the envelope and sent it to the faculty, by mail or by means of students as deliverers.

DATA PROCESSING: QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

The data were processed by means of qualitative analysis of the answers to open questions in the questionnaire. The research of real problems with which people are faced is the principle of qualitative analysis which takes into account individual's opinions, needs and his understanding of the reality and his own life (Koller - Trbović and Žižak, 2008.). The purpose of the use of a qualitative approach was to summarize and structure as well as to understand and interpret empirical data (Mesec, 1998.; Padgett, 1998.) without departing from the language, i.e. expressions and notions by which the users define the experience of participation in the field placement programme.

After data collection, empirical material was organized, coding units were set and relevant notions and categories from each open question item were chosen and defined. In order to organize and interpret the gathered data, the procedure of open coding was used (Mesec, 1998.; Kletečki Radović and Kregar Orešković, 2005; Sladović Franz, Kregar Orešković and Vejmelka, 2007.), consisting of six steps:

1.   in each answer, important parts of the text and user's statements were underlined;
2.   for each answer, underlined parts of the texts and statements (coding units) were written down;
3.   the first-order notions were assigned to the coding units (summarization or the first-order codes)
4.   consolidation of the first-order notions into common categories (second-order codes)
5.   consolidation of categories based on the following aspects
       a) motives of the user participation in the field placement programme
       b) content of the student-user meetings
       c) user perception of the field placement
       d) users' suggestions for the improvement of the programme
6.   analysis of the meaning of categories.

The data analysis, i.e. the procedure of organizing empirical material and forming coding categories (up to the fourth step) was made independently by two researchers. This procedure was followed by a comparison and mutual interpretation, discussion and harmonization of generated notions with the aim of achieving consensus when forming the final categories. Finally defined categories were combined and associated by consensus in four fields formed in accordance with research questions (the fifth step).

The Table 1 shows an example of organizing the notions depending on their level of abstraction as well as code notions of the first and the second order defined by consensus.

Table 1.
Excerpt from organizing notions according to their level of abstraction
The participants' answers to the question: »What has motivated you to participate in the field placement programme?[7]«

Participants' statements – coding units	First-order notions – summarization	Second-order notions – categories
Due to my disabled status, I am partly blind and deaf... (1)	Blindness and deafness	Disability
...blindness...(3)	Blindness	
...a disabled person...(7)	Physical disability	
...I have a severe physical handicap ...(49)	Mental retardation	
...mental retardation...(54)		

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[7] Numbers in brackets refer to individual participants in the evaluation.

Table 1. continue.

Participants' statements – coding units	First-order notions – summarization	Second-order notions – categories
...I need every kind of social help (1) ... I wanted to help in the education, and I hope I managed to introduce at least those two students to a life with a disability (7) I would like people with whom I collaborate in my life to have a better education (10) …a help to students so they can have a better insight into the disability…(39)	A need for help and support A help to students in their education	Providing and receiving help
...a need for socialization (3) I was motivated most by the fact that I could go out and talk with someone without bothering a parent or calling friends who live in other parts of the city (4) ... socialization with different people ...(6) Because of socialization and conversation with different people (9) I was motivated by the socialization with students ...(8) Socialization and meeting different people (11) I like young people and that is why I wanted to meet them (13) I like going for a walk and downtown ...(29) ...child's socialization ...(39) A wish for socialization ...(45) Socialization and fun (55)	Socialization Conversation and socialization with someone outside of the family Socialization with students Meeting new people Fun Going out	Expanding the social network
Loneliness (blindness)...(3) Loneliness and helplessness ...(44) I live alone (49)	Loneliness Helplessness The single life	Loneliness
I realized it was nice (16) Because I realized it was something nice (26) I was motivated by a wonderful company in all our sections (56)	Positive previous experience	Previous experience

Table 1. continue.

Participants' statements – coding units	First-order notions – summarization	Second-order notions – categories
...I was advised by a social worker from the association (2) The Association (of Physically Disabled) asked me if I wanted to participate in that programme ...(5) ...I was asked by Ms ... from the Association ...(13) The social worker included children (22) The social worker recommended ...(25) A recommendation from my association (47) ... it was recommended by a professional from the association (54)	Recommendation by the association Recommendation by an expert	Recommenda-tions

RESEARCH RESULTS

We will present the results of a qualitative analysis of gathered empirical data in relation to the research questions.

1. INCENTIVE AND MOTIVATION FOR THE USER INCLUSION IN THE FIELD PLACEMENT PROGRAMME

The aim of the question »What has motivated you to participate in the field placement programme?« was to gain insight into the users' motivation for the inclusion in the field placement programme. Their answers were analyzed according to the previously described procedure.

The incentives mentioned by the users for their inclusion in the field placement are the following: disability, previous experience and recommendations based on contacts with professionals or associations. Moreover, the analysis of the determined category reveals the following motives for participation: loneliness, expanding the social network and providing help.

In the evaluation six adult participants stated that the disability was one of the main incentives for participation in the programme: Due to my disabled status, I am partly blind and deaf... (1); ...blindness... (3); ...a disabled person... (7); ...I have a severe physical handicap ... (49). It is important to underline that the users joined an association because of their special status or disability or a certain condition resulted in their placement in one of the institutions (for example in the Special Hospital for Children with Neurodevelopmetal Disorders »Goljak« or the Centre for Education »Gornje Prekrižje«.). However, the results reveal that the disability

was not the main incentive for the inclusion in the field placement programme, although it was the main criterion for their affiliation to a certain association/institution. As regards other categories revealed by the data analysis, we can say that disability is a prerequisite and an incentive for participation, whereas the motives for joining the programme revealed by the analysis are a result of characteristics of a life with a disability.

Since for many users, the number of social contacts or evenings out are reduced due to the fact that the environment is not adapted to their disability, the contact with students represents a possibility for the fulfilment of the need to belong and love as well. It is also an efficient strategy in the fight against social isolation. Four users were moved to join in the field by their feeling of loneliness, which is very common in disabled persons: ...loneliness and blindness ... (3); Loneliness and helplessness ... (44); I live alone ... (49). At the same time, the motives for participation are related to expanding the social network outside the family or employees of the institution, and they are mentioned by nineteen users: ...a need for socialization (3); I was motivated most by the fact that I could go out and talk with someone without bothering a parent or calling friends who live in other parts of the city (4); ...socialization with different people ... (6); Because of socialization and conversation with different people (9); I was motivated by the socialization with students... (8); Socialization and meeting different people (11); I like young people and that is why I wanted to meet them (13); ...child's socialization... (39); Socialization and fun (55); I like going for a walk and downtown... (29).

Furthermore, twelve users state the need for different forms of help: ...I need every kind of social help... (1); To help my child; ...so the child accepts the life with all the flaws and difficulties (6); but they also want to provide help to students where they see a chance for this process to be mutual as well as for a chance to learn: I wanted to help in the education, and I hope I managed to introduce at least those two students to a life with a disability (7); I would like people with whom I collaborate to have a better education (10); … a help to students so they can have a better insight into the disability… (39).

Among the incentives for participation, an important role is played by a positive previous experience and/or a recommendation by a professional, i.e. the director of the association, mentioned by fifteen users: ...I realized it was nice... (16); Because I realized it was something nice... (26); I was motivated by a wonderful company in all our sections... (56); The social worker included the children... (22); The social worker recommended... (25); A recommendation from my association (47); ...it was recommended by a professional from the association... (54).

2. CONTENT OF THE MEETINGS IN THE FRAMEWORK OF FIELD PLACEMENTS

The aim of the question »Please, shortly describe your meetings and the location where they took place.« was to gain better insight into the most frequent content and the

location of the meetings. In the description of the content, four categories were revealed which partially also include the answer to the question on the location of the meetings: forty-five users mentioned the fact that they most frequently went out (for a walk, to a cinema, theatre, concert, ZOO, shops, Zagreb Fair, sightseeing, pizza place); seventeen users stated the conversation (on the user's needs, different topics, problems of the persons with disability); twenty of them mentioned help in running some errands (help in grocery shopping, help in learning, cleaning, going to a doctor's appointment, help with getting a child more independent) and games and fun, stated by fifteen users (social games, cards, chess, billiard, drawing, music, sporting games, reading). The category of games and fun as well as help in learning are mentioned mostly by the children in Special Hospital for Children with Neurodevelopmetal Disorders »Goljak« and Children and Youth Centre for Education »Gornje Prekrižje«. Out of the total of twenty-five children who participated in the research, twenty-two of them were placed in these two institutions.

According to the answers collected from thirty participants, the meetings most frequently took place outside of their home or institutions (downtown, in a coffee shop, pastry shop, nature, places where cultural or economic events take place), whereas other twenty-six users stated that they met the students mainly in their own home (a house or an apartment) or in the institution where the user is placed (»Goljak«, »Gornje Prekrižje«, daily centre of the »Caritas« home).

The users most often spent their time with the student outside of the home or the institution, which is also one of the »social« objectives of the field placement (forty-five of them): …walking through a park and going for a coffee when the weather became nicer (4); … out in the nature (6); …we would go to a cinema (10); …we went to a cinema or to Zagreb Fair (15); …the meetings took place all over the city, we went sightseeing to see monuments, churches, pastry shops, coffee shops, concerts, theatres (45); …going for a coffee, to the movies and theatre (48); …they (author's note: the child and the student) went alone to the ZOO (54).

A smaller number of users, i. e. seven of them, socialized with the student only in their home or association, due to the inability to leave the home: …the meetings took place in my home because I am not mobile alone outside (1); …they took place in my home (8); …unfortunately, due to my health condition, only in my apartment (49); …they took place in the room... (40).

In answering this question, some users also described the atmosphere of the meetings. All descriptions reflected positive experience and the following categories related to the atmosphere of the meetings were revealed: pleasant: we talked and it was nice (10); …the company was pleasant… (52); an excellent atmosphere: ...the meetings were always held in an excellent atmosphere (4); …the meetings were excellent (43); …the meetings were very communicative, nice and friendly… (44); …excellent… (51); a friendly atmosphere: ...the meetings were mostly friendly (8); …the meetings were amicable and both of us were pleased (9); a family atmosphere: …in a family atmosphere... (5).

3. PERCEPTION OF THE FIELD PLACEMENT FROM THE USER PERSPECTIVE

The insight into the users' perception of the field placement was gained by means of questions related to their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the meetings and by means of description of aspects of the meetings with students which were especially positive or negative for them. The question »With what aspect were you satisfied the most, what did you appreciate?«, revealed four categories related to the following contents: company for socialization (fifteen users)**:** …We could really talk about many things and it was nice to socialize with the student (7); …I liked that I had someone to talk to and the time passed by more quickly (8); …A good communication, that I had a chance to meet and socialize with a nice girl (13);…I am satisfied with the conversation because it was meaningful and interesting (14); …we talked (16);…I was satisfied because we talked about everything (41); …A lot of nice conversations (44); going out (six users)**:** … That we went for a walk (16); …I liked when we went out for a walk (19); …when we went to the park (31); …when we went to a pastry shop (33); participation in the student's education (three users):…I am glad that I helped him to see the life of a disabled person (10); …helping with a student task (16); and general satisfaction (nineteen users): Everything was great (55); …I liked everything and it was wonderful (56); …I liked everything, absolutely everything (50); …All the work (42);…Everything was good (18); I liked everything and I was satisfied (5); …I was satisfied every time, I don't have any complaints (4).

Other categories were related to the student and they were defined in the following way: student's personality (ten users)**:** What I liked about the student is that she is open for communication and nice (4); …the student is very nice… (7); …cheerful and optimist character of my student (38); …especially the fact that the student is very open (43); …her friendliness…(44); …I liked the fact that the student was interested in the subject of our conversation very much, she was an excellent and mature interlocutor (49); …Persistency of the student to get from L. what was planned and she always succeeded in it (54); the attitude of the student toward the user (eleven users)**:** I am completely satisfied with a nice, open relationship that I had with the student who understands me in everything (1); …I liked that the relationship was very productive, friendly and warm in comparison to the life around us (6); …that the student understood me (9);…I liked friendly company (10); …I liked everything, especially the fact that the student was very open (43); and respect of the time and agreement of the meeting (four users)**: ...**the student was on time and we would agree on the meeting before ... (3).

The answers to the question »With which aspects were you dissatisfied?« showed that out of fifty-six users, fifty of them did not express any dissatisfaction explaining it in the following way: ...it does not exist in the work with students (6); …I really cannot state anything dissatisfying (7); …everything was OK (10); …there was no reason for dissatisfaction (11); …I have no objections (13).

Six users expressed their dissatisfaction by the fact that the student did not fulfil his obligations: I am dissatisfied by the first student because she did not come regularly, she came a few times and never called again (8); by the student's personality… she was always angry (19); …he doesn't know if he will stay (25); …that we did not go out and she promised (32); by the behavior of the children in the group (author's note: when the student was visiting a child in an institution): ...I did not like when the children fought. The student was good. (31); impossible to socialize with the same student for a longer period of time: …a year passes by quickly, and later we cannot get the same student, because our children have difficulties with accepting changes, if someone suits them (54).

It is clear that the categories containing the users' negative attitude relate to the student (character, failing to fulfill the obligations) and to the organization of the placement (for example inability of the student to take the child out of the group, within the institution which impedes the relationship as well as the fact that it is not possible for the same student to socialize with the same user the following year), whereas the categories reflecting the satisfaction mainly relate to the content and the student's personality.

The evaluation of satisfaction by the socialization with students on the scale from one to five resulted in the following: one user graded the socialization with the grade "1" ("fail") and one with the grade "3" ("good"). Six users graded their level of satisfaction with the grade "4" ("very good") and forty–four of them with the grade "5" ("excellent"). Four participants did not give a grade to express their satisfaction with socialization.

A particular insight into the perception of the field placement from the user perspective was gained by questioning about some positive or negative aspects that were important for the users. Answers to the question "Describe what was particularly good, lively, nice and interesting during your meetings with the student." revealed that the following categories played an important role in the positive attitude**:** talk: …every meeting was interesting because it included talking about the activities of the previous week, and it was especially lively when we talked about memories from the childhood (4); …everything, conversations …(6); …I liked long and really pleasant conversations very much (7); …that I could talk about all the subjects (13); …generally, the conversation and the subjects we talked about (46); …our conversations, which were mostly casual (48); relationship and atmosphere**:** …our conversations took place in a very cordial and friendly atmosphere and I am completely satisfied with everything and very grateful (1); a friendly relationship (6); …she bought me a sandwich and a juice, two puddings and a chocolate (32); …when he gave me a CD (33); …watching the two of them get along very well and how L. got to love her as a person (54); student's personality: …punctuality, good manners, she would bring cakes in the holiday season (3); …harmonization and understanding of students for the needs of the disabled and the help of the students to understand the communication (9); …the person is lively, nice, likes to talk and is very pleasant (14); …the student always managed to cheer me up, to make me laugh (48); …the student was interested in his future profession (49); going

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out**:** …everything, especially the walks (15); …while we were in the park (22); …I liked going out a lot (25); …when we went to a pastry shop to eat cakes (30); …we went out to a playground and we played, ran and went to the student's home (31); …when we went for a walk (34); …going out for a walk, because I am semi-mobile and I have a vision impairment, to the park and nice conversations (44); company and socialization**:** …I am a person with a double handicap and I am very happy when someone spends some time with me or when something happens to me (2); …it was nice and lively socializing in a conversation, social games and it is good when you have another person's opinion on something (8); …and at home we played social games and listened to the music (10).

To the question "Describe what was especially embarrassing, sad, unpleasant or disappointing during the meetings with the student." fifty-three users did not mention any embarrassing, sad or disappointing situation: …there were no embarrassing situations (42); …nothing (43); …I have no objections (13); …there were no unpleasant moments (10). This lack of negative experience can perhaps be explained by the fear of certain users that, if they express their negative emotions, they will harm the student or lower his grade or that they will jeopardize the continuation of the programme since they often answered this question emphasizing at the same time the importance of participation in the programme:…don't cancel the programme! (39); …if it stays this way, it will be great (40); …everything was great... (53).

Three users expressed their dissatisfaction: behaviour of a group of children (author's note: when a student visited the child in the institution)… one boy fell and the others did too... (31); and the student's personality …she was angry when I made a mistake when writing, she would ask me if I was normal! (19); …we didn't meet outside of home (38).

These categories based on the specific aspects of the user dissatisfaction overlap with the previous ones related to the dissatisfaction with field placements in general and are related to the student's personality or organizational aspects (the group preventing the individual work with the user).

In answering the question related to the recommendation of the programme: "Would you recommend your friends to get involved in the programme of socialization with a student?", only three users would not recommend it to their friends and the rest of fifty-three participants were positive about the recommendation.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT OF FIELD PLACEMENTS

As far as recommendations for improvement of field placements are concerned, on the basis of the analysis of empirical data the following categories related to the content of placements (fifteen users) were formed: going out more frequently ... singing, socializing even more, going downtown, more frequent walks (18); …to go for a walk more frequently, to go

out more often (20); …to take me to the main square so I can watch skaters and bikes (22); the organization of short excursions: … enjoying the nature even more (25); …more games and going to the nature (29); …organizing short excursions (52); and the following related to the increase in the volume of the field placement (eleven users)**:** more hours …more frequent visits (43); …it's a pity that there is not more time for meetings (48); and a larger number of students …perhaps only that more students are involved in one socialization (14); …that there are more students who would socialize with us (15).

The third category is related to the education of social workers (six users), i.e. the purpose of field placements (meeting persons with disability and getting acquainted with their needs): …I think that every social worker should be acquainted with the needs and the way of life of persons with disability because they are important to us. Their judgement is important (10); …I think that this modality of practical course is excellent (7); the responsibility: …you should know how to be a social worker and how to take over the responsibility (5); … I would like to continue the cooperation in the work with the students (44); and the intrinsic motivation for participating in the placement: …I would recommend the students to come to the practice out of their own wish, and not out of obligation, because then I know that the person comes to see me because he likes his future profession (11).

The last category related to the recommendations for the improvement of the programme includes compliments to the programme (sixteen users): invaluable experience: …it's an invaluable experience (50); …I would recommend it to all users…(54); Having in mind your restraints, I am fully satisfied and I have no suggestions (1);…I am satisfied for now with the way it is (6);…it should stay this way and it will be great (40); I would like to meet more students, it was wonderful (56); … it is important to all the users, especially to the blind, those with vision impairment, the deaf like I am (3); …don't cancel the programme (39); as well as messages of encouragement and support: Keep on like this, be included in the work with people in need (50); …Be brave and good luck (51); …Continue with the meetings (55); …To enable for the cooperation to continue… (54); … I am still available (12).

Overview of the categories in relation to formulated research questions:

1.   Incentives and motivation for inclusion in the field placement programme
    - Disability
    - Providing help
    - Loneliness
    - Expanding the social network
    - (Positive) previous experience
    - Recommendations based on the contacts with professionals or associations

2.   Content of the meetings in the framework of field placements
   - Going out
    - Conversation

- Help in running some errands
- Games and fun
- Location of the meetings: outside of the house or institution, in the user's home
- Atmosphere during the meetings: pleasant, excellent, friendly, family

3. Perception of the field placement from the user perspective
   o Satisfaction:
      - Company for socialization and conversation
      - Going out
      - Participation in students' education
      - General satisfaction
      - Student's personality
      - Student's attitude towards the user
      - Respect of the time and the agreement of the meeting
   o Dissatisfaction:
      - Failure to fulfil the obligations
      - Student's personality
      - Inability to socialize with the same student for a longer period
   o Specific experience (the point that they underline as particularly positive in the programme):
      - Conversation
      - Relationship and atmosphere
      - Student's personality
      - Going out
      - Company and socialization

4. Recommendations for improvement of field placements relate to:
   - Content of the placements: going out more frequently and organizing short excursions
   - Increase in the volume of placements: more hours and more students
   - Importance of such a programme in the education of future social workers: the student gets acquainted with specific needs of disabled persons, develops responsibility and intrinsic motivation for taking part in the placement
   - Compliments to the programme

DISCUSSION

The categories obtained by means of the qualitative analysis are schematically shown on the basis of their interconnection with Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1967., 1970., in Fulgosi, 1990).

Figure 2:
A diagram on the incentives and motives for inclusion in the field placement programme and relation between the categories
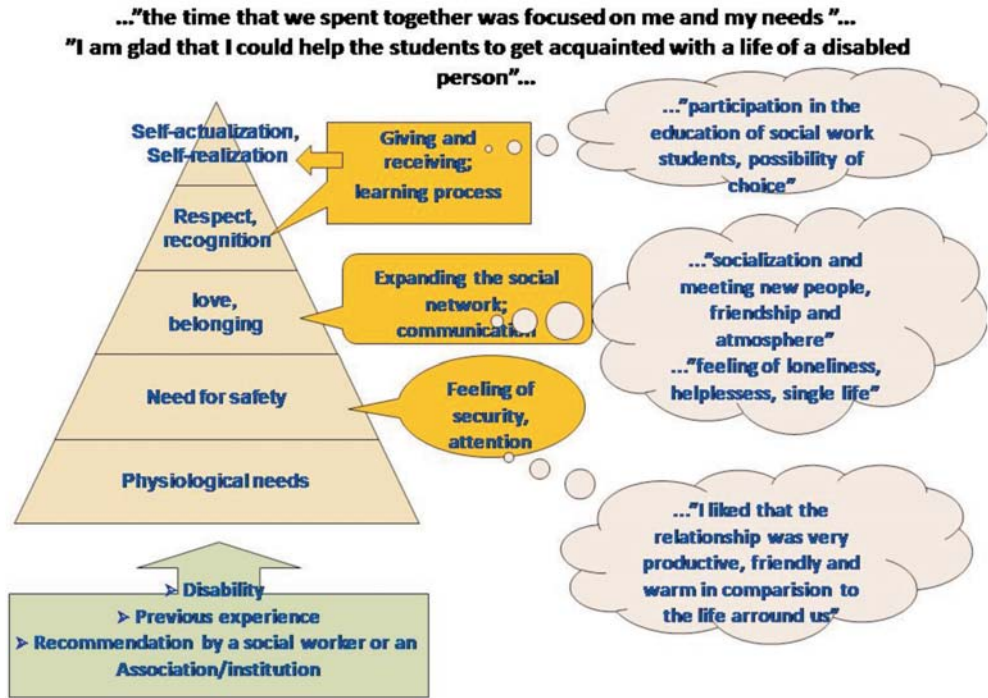
The results of the qualitative analysis of the answers provided by the participants of the study suggest that, although the disability is the common feature of all the users participating in the field placement programme, it actually presents a starting point for users' motivation. It includes reduction of the feeling of loneliness, expansion of the social network and a need for providing help. The mentioned incentives and motives are shown in a pyramid and each particular need is connected to the categories formed on the basis of the participants' statements and it is illustrated by their statements (Figure 2). From the participants' statements it can be concluded that the users most frequently mention such motives as socialization and loneliness, which is a consequence of the fact that they have difficulties in fulfilling their need for love and belonging.

However, the users perceive the field placement programme as an opportunity for multiple fulfilments of their needs stated in the pyramid: from the need for security, belonging and respect to the need for self-actualization. The users state the feeling of security and the need for attention which are at the bottom of the hierarchy related to growth motives (Fulgosi, 1990.) as an impetus for inclusion and participation in the programme. The socialization and the relationship with the student enable them to expand their social

network and to have a quality communication. In the hierarchy of needs it is reflected as a search for a relationship with other people based on commitment, development of the feeling of belonging and avoidance of social isolation and rejection. Fulgosi (1990.) states that the failure to fulfil the need for love and belonging can have serious consequences for the individual, but for the society as well, like social non-adaptation and pathological forms of behaviour. Furthermore, the results suggest that the users stress a great importance of receiving and providing help to students in the learning process, which reflects the need for respect through acknowledgment and feeling of being valuable. The fact that someone recognizes the users as experience experts and that such an experience can be useful if they transfer it to the students can strengthen and keep their feeling of being valuable. Finally, the users look for a challenge and a possibility of making a choice and the common decision-making in that process is important to them. The participation in the students' education enables the users to additionally develop their potential and expand the possibility of self-fulfilment and self-actualization. The need for self-actualization is placed on the top of the hierarchy of needs and its fulfilment suggests that the users use their specific experience and knowledge in order to enrich and expand their own experience and complete the realization of their possibilities and capabilities. The need for receiving and providing help to students represents users' altruist motives. According to Karylowsky (1982.) it includes endocentric altruism, in which the attention is focused on another person, but exocentric altruism as well, which is motivated by a wish to improve another person and reflects a user need to improve and maintain the student's welfare. In that way, the inclusion of users in the student's education becomes a source of empowerment, increases the power and the control over personal choices and the experience of the user disability and increases the user resources (figure 1.).

As far as the content of field placements is concerned, the important points are going out, conversation, games and a concrete help in fulfilling some everyday needs outside of the user's home or institution, in the house or the institution, in a pleasant atmosphere which assumes even the features of intimacy, i.e. a friendly or a family relationship. In other words, even from the point of view of the content, we can say that the formed categories overlap with the needs pyramid.

The analysis of the influence of experience on the general and specific satisfaction with the field placement revealed the importance of the categories related to the content (going out, conversation, general satisfaction and participation in the education of future social workers) as well as the categories related to the student's personality and mutual relationship. The participants who expressed their general or specific dissatisfaction with the programme mentioned also the student's personality (his/her anger, failure to fulfil the obligations or promises) or organizational aspects of the placement.

The categories related to user recommendations and comments (going out, conversations, excursions, more time spent together, student education) also reveal the fact that

the users experience the field placement programme as a possibility of multiple fulfilment of the needs included in the pyramid (from the need for safety, belonging and respect to the self-actualization need).

The categories obtained in this research also suggest that all four elements mentioned in the literature, i.e. empowerment, control, power and resources (Croft and Beresford, 1994., in Payne, 1997.), have a contribution in the practice of involvement and the empowerment process. Therefore, it is possible to perceive the categories through a proposed relation of elements of the practice of inclusion in the framework of field placements and the education of social work students (Figure 1). The categories related to the content of student-user meetings (going out, conversation, help) and the choice of the location (outside the home or institution or inside the institution) encompass the users' comments on the way the meeting takes place (in the atmosphere of personal involvement, pleasant, friendly atmosphere) as well. We can assume that common decision-making on the content and the processes within field placements and the possible user initiative, for example in relation to the decision on where the meeting will take place and what the content will be, empower the users who in their everyday lives have a very limited opportunity for taking decisions. However, we can assume that the exchange of experience, gaining knowledge on the user needs and the development of the relationship with the user also increases the students' power in the educational process.

The relationship of trust and mutual exchange can lead to the organization of services or activation of resources in the community in a way that the user takes more advantage of the resources available to him. For example, owing to help in overcoming construction obstacles the users with disability were visiting cultural events more often and one user, empowered by conversations with the student decided to deal with certain personal issues and with the help of the student he gathered his family, developed a strategy and initiated making the decisions on the family inheritance. The data on mentioned examples is based on the supervision and the students' notes. It can, thus, be concluded that the user supports the student in his professional development, by transferring his personal user experience to him and giving him insight into the fulfilment of needs from his own, user, perspective. Moreover, based on the results we can assume that the students support their users in finding existing possibilities and resources from the environment in order to fulfil their needs and thus directly learn and experience in practice theoretical concepts of social work.

The categories related to the perception of the field placement from the user perspective reaffirm the realization of empowerment process. It is reflected by the content of the categories which relates to satisfaction with meetings and outings, which reduce the feeling of loneliness and user's isolation, as well as by the category of participation in the education of students, content of which reflects the relationship of reciprocity in learning.

The categories related to the perception of dissatisfaction and recommendations for the improvement of field placements reveal challenges and obstacles to the inclusion and users' empowerment process. Although the comments revealing the appraisal to the

programme prevail, comments revealing dissatisfaction are important as guidelines for future plans and requirements of field placements and for the preparation of students for the work with service users.

As it was already mentioned, student field placements are supervised, and regular supervision meetings take place at the Department of Social Work during the semester. During these meetings, the students can express their difficulties and achievements in the relationship with service users, problematize on them, receive support and learn from the process. However, the first encounter with the social work practice is sometimes a chance for the student to quit the profession or decide to take a year off. In that case, the supervisor, the student and the coordinator of field placements try to end the relationship between the student and the user in a responsible and ethical manner and for the student to receive and give final feedback, using the supervision. Sometimes the relationship is ended by a sudden leave of the student, which leaves the feeling of incompleteness and dissatisfaction on both sides recognized by the users in this context as a student's failure to keep his promise, to fulfil the obligations or anger. The role of the teacher, coordinator of field placements and supervisor is to problematize such situations during classes, preparation for placements and supervision meetings. The experience showed that by the introduction of regular continuous supervision such „interrupted relations" become very rare or they can be foreseen, since the supervision takes place in small groups, and they can be dealt with in such a way that both the student and the user (and the supervision group as well) learn something from it.

Dissatisfaction of individual users was reflected in the fact that it was not possible to »keep« the same student during two or more years. This organizational aspect is related to the curriculum of the study programme and the diversity of »fields« that the student should encounter during his education. Therefore, every academic year he/she participates in field placements within a different course and has to fulfil different educational objectives. Although all the users are informed about the course, dynamics and duration of a field place-ment, based on which they give their informed consent on the participation, the separation at the end of the semester is often difficult and painful for both sides, since both sides are personally very much involved. Sometimes »couples« decide to continue the contact in the form of informal meetings and they stay in contact by occasional visits, telephone calls, correspondence, greeting cards and similar. There are no formal data on this aspect since the follow-up of student field placements does not continue after the end of the semester. However, at the beginning of a new cycle we learn from the users that they are still in contact with previous students. It should be underlined that in arrangement with the student and the user, it is important to conclude formal, professional and educational experience and end a student-user relationship. Only then, based on the mutual consent of both parties, it is possible to redefine the relationship and continue informal socialization. This protocol also enables the prevention of the user's unclear expectations towards the student which can result in »unfulfilled obligations and promises«.

Encouragement messages about the continuation of the programme seem especially important as well as appraisals which undoubtedly speak about the fact that this experience is invaluable in the creation and realization of a field placement.

CONCLUSION

The results suggest that our service users involved in the student field placements are experts on the issues in relation to education of future professionals – social workers, issues which directly concern them and on which they should have a certain level of influence. The users' statements on certain aspects of dissatisfaction overlap with certain »weak points« assessed by the coordinator of the programme, namely the need for continuous supervised follow-up and support to students as well as insufficient number of placement hours. These results are binding for the teachers as well, because the user's right to inclusion means the right to an equal position in negotiations, agreements and interventions as well as equal opportunities as far as analysis from one's own perspective is concerned.

The empowerment and inclusion are life-long processes of positive changes in a psychological wellbeing of an individual (self-respect and self-understanding), develop-ment of meaningful social relationships (friendships, informal and formal support) as well as the search for positive experience through leisure time, work or other domains of life. However, it should be underlined that empowerment and inclusion are not services which can be provided and there is not a point in time when it can be determined that a person is empowered (Lord, 1991., in Arai, 1997.b; Lowes and Hullat, 2005.). These processes last and change if they take place in favourable conditions. One of the tasks of social workers is to work on the realization and preservation of these conditions, and the teacher's role is to qualify them during their study and life-long learning programmes. As a result, the role of the social worker is constantly changing together with the empowerment process unique for each individual. The students learn about that notion in the first place from their users who, through their role of experience experts, provide them a »first-hand« insight into these changes (Robson et al., 2006.; Beresford et al., 2006.).

During the last fifteen years, many service users have decided to continually participate in the field placement programme and some of them have been in the programme since 1993. They describe themselves as »professional users" and they say that they have «raised many generations of students». These statements clearly illustrate the way in which the users perceive their role in the education of social workers, but also the fact that the service users are »already included«. Namely, they have always been included in the programme since they represent the most relevant source of information on themselves and on their needs. The role of professional helpers is to recognize that inclusion, as well as the value of the process of reciprocal learning from the service users and with them. These considerations were confirmed by the results of this research which were included in the future cooperative creation of the field placement programme and education of social workers in general.

We are aware of the fact that the participants of our research were service users who are highly motivated for participation in the field placement programme and have a positive attitude towards the students and their education. Therefore, the research results should be interpreted in the light of such a selected sample. However, besides the obtained results, this research presents an important learning experience in the sense of opening a dialogue with service users, reflection on modalities of mutual involvement of users, students and teachers and problematization of placement objectives and contents. This experience is an encouragement for some new ideas and initiatives related to organization and implementation of field placements. One of such initiatives involves the introduction of two-day orientation meetings, based on the results of this research. The orientation meetings preceded field placements so that the users and their organisations can present themselves to students, both students and users can express their expectations and present the evaluation results and experiences from the past semester. The special attention was given to obstacles and difficulties as well as to the examples of good practice based on the evaluation of the previous semester.

During the last three years, a special attention has been placed on final group meetings of service users, students, field instructors in associations/institutions and representatives of the study programme. In the process of preparation for field placements, field instructors and representatives of associations and institutions are informed on current changes of the study programme, details of the executive plan and other relevant issues. Furthermore, meetings of students, users and a field instructor for each association/institutions are also organized in order for the participants to agree on certain contents and the time that the student will pass in that association/institution (besides the direct contact with the service user). In that way, the students are included in current events within the association (actions, events, excursions, round tables, panels) and they participate in broader sense in the lives of their users. The regular meetings of supervisors of are introduced as well with the aim of exchange of experiences, information and mutual support.

Since the academic year 2004./2005., students have had the opportunity to form their expectations from the field placement, not only by receiving information from their teachers, but also from the data received in the described evaluative research, based on the user perspective. The field placement programme evaluation had crucial implications for the future development of user evaluation in the framework of field placements. As an outcome of this evaluation, several additional activities were also realized in the following semester: (1) focus groups were conducted with service users, (2) focus groups were conducted with students, (3) the role of service users in the education of students was researched and articulated; the prerequisites for a partnership between users and the faculty were created, whereby the first step was to conduct interviews with teachers and (4) a regional conference *Service Users as Experience Experts in Social Work Education and Research* was organized in 2008 at the Department of Social Work. The conference was the first step in the senzibilization of

the academic community for the possibility of inclusion of end-users in the preparation and changes to the curriculum of the social work study programme.

Although in this paper we have not dealt with the results of the student evaluation of field placements, based on the experience from the supervision and insight into student diaries, we can conclude that the students have a positive attitude toward the inclusion of service users in different segments of field placement preparation and implementation and together with field placement coordinators, supervisors and field instructors they learn how to "include" and "be included". In that way, all the participants of field placements, regardless of their roles, at the same time become students and teachers, the fact which sends a message on the importance of lifelong learning. However, new problems arise which were not present before, new questions are open on inclusion and participation of users in the creation of the overall curriculum and the need to elaborate on the future development of evaluative research of the user perspective in the education of students. On the basis of the mentioned considerations, it can be concluded that by opening a dialogue on inclusion, all participants become more sensitive to mutual needs and perspectives: teachers and students become more sensitive to the service user perspective and the users to the perspective of the academic community and future professionals.

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