

The Mission and Principles of Work of Social Rehabilitation and Sociotherapy Centers for Children and Adolescents

The Polish system of social rehabilitation and sociotherapy centers for children and adolescents is based on outdated theoretical, organizational and methodological concepts from the mid-twentieth century. Therefore, it is neither suitable for modern pedagogical solutions nor the dynamic cultural and social changes of which we are witnesses. Attempts at its top-down modifications over the last 25 years boiled down to fragmentary formal-legal and organization corrections – forced either by more general legislative changes or extraordinary incidents noticed by the media – and they were not systematic in nature, nor did they introduce changes to the philosophy of the functioning of such centers. Therefore, they did not concern the substantive mission or methods of educational work with charges. The essence of this work still consists in adapting charges to life in the center, and the “educational” tool is either a system of regulation penalties and rewards, or arbitrarily designed and forced activities of a sociotechnical character. This “forced” adaptation to rigid regulation rules or participation in compulsory sociotherapy classes in the center, combined with the reduction of outside social contacts, carries a twofold impact: it teaches charges conformism within the framework of so-called institutional socialization and deprives them of skills and competences to function in an open environment. During their stay in social rehabilitation and sociotherapy centers, the charges acquire identity parameters

that can be defined as parameters of “the charge’s identity” and not “the identity of a young person” (adolescent). After leaving the center, they are not able to function in the commonly accepted life and social roles, because during their stay there they are not socialized to these roles (the role of the boy or girl, boy friend or girl friend, man or woman, husband or wife, father or mother, employee, young citizen, etc.). There are also sharp disparities and differences noticeable of infrastructural, organizational and methodical nature between individual centers. Therefore, there is an urgent need to define both their new substantive role as well as the basic standards in these areas, so that a model arises which is adequate to the needs and expectations of today’s society, consistent with the assumptions of pedagogical sciences.

The mission and role of social rehabilitation and sociotherapy centers is to prepare young people for independent, creative and responsible life in a non-institutional environment. The infrastructure of the facility, its organizational system and educational and specialist methods of work used should be subordinated to this purpose. A way to achieve this effect is to introduce an institutional philosophy focused on the process of permanent empowerment of charges through the development of their potentials (talents, aptitudes, abilities, interests, skills, competencies, etc.) from the very beginning of their stay in the center, in place of the current process of the wide scope of caring for them and regulatory “control” of their behavior or subjecting them to sociotherapeutic impacts. The basic method of work should be diagnosing potentials and on this basis deepen and widen them methodologically based on the process of non-institutional socialization. This process should be subordinated to the conditions of the infrastructure, the organizational system and methods of educating work. On the one hand this requires a far-reaching opening of the centers to the non-institutional environment, on the other – changing the formula of methodological work, the essence of which should be striving to support the cognitive and creative development of charges (their potentials understood as abilities, aptitude, talents, skills and competences) and implementing them in non-institutional social contacts by permanently providing and organizing positive “learning situations” in an open environment.

Social rehabilitation and sociotherapy centers for children and adolescents should take into account the following basic principles of upbringing, educational and specialist work:

- 1) the principle of respect for the dignity of the charge- actions focused on respecting the superior, inalienable, absolute value assigned to every human being for the reason that he is a human being;
- 2) the principle of respecting the rights of the charge – actions focused on respecting the Convention on Children’s Rights, as well as universal human rights;
- 3) the principle of privacy of the charge;

- 4) the principle of friendly communication with the charge – activities in which charges, teachers and other staff are in constant relations to provide information, agree on solutions, openness of courts and decisions that respect the dignity and value of every human being;
- 5) the principle of supporting the creative activity of the charge – actions focused on executing the model of education based on supporting and creating activity of the charge, on mobilizing them to act, on developing interests, hobbies, supporting sport and artistic activities, as well as through the introduction of pedagogical innovations;
- 6) the principle of responsibility of the charge for their actions – actions that build personality dispositions of the charge to bear the consequences for their actions and responsibility towards someone, something or for something;
- 7) the principle of cooperation based on understanding the developmental needs of the charge;
- 8) the principle of co-responsibility of all employees of the center for the development of potentials of the charge;
- 9) the principle of creative upbringing and educational activities – the principle of improving the conditions and organization of the center in order to support the development of potentials of the charge by taking steps towards the development of infrastructure of the center, raising funds for the improvement of organizational and administrative solutions;
- 10) the principle of openness of upbringing, educational and specialist activities;
- 11) the principle of openness towards the non-institutional environment – the center cooperates with institutions of the local environment, it is open to voluntary and professional social support, it cooperates with NGOs, local leaders and others, with various institutions: religious, business, scientific, etc.

The said rules should be subordinated to both the methods of upbringing and educational work, as well as the organizational and infrastructural system of the center.

The immediate need to implement a modern mission (rules and standards), which is adequate to the needs of society as well as compliant with modern pedagogical concepts, for social rehabilitation centers, stems not only from the unsatisfactory state of their functioning, but above all it is an expression of responsibility of the “adult world” for the “children’s world” and the inalienable duty of efforts to improve the condition of the young generation of Poles.

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