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## **Open Market Vocational Activation of Intellectually Handicapped People in the Light of Research**

During the process of socialization intellectually handicapped people are supported through alternative projects and undertakings, the essence of which is to acquire and improve the skills steered on the process of maximum adaptation.

Vocational activation of intellectually handicapped people can be perceived as acquiring skills and competences that condition their functioning as employees, fully or partially adapted to carrying out their duties in the workplace and the environment of co-workers. It is a fundamental role, because as far as handicapped people are concerned it can have influence on:

- acquiring self-dependence
- identification with social groups
- independence in the local environment.

The process of vocational activation is specific in that it is integrated with rehabilitation, correction and compensation of handicapped people during their earlier stages of life. It can be assumed that the process of acquiring these skills is conditioned by effective rehabilitation, both passive and active. The analyses that are being made have proved that accepting particular social roles gives rise to difficulties, the source of which is both in the psychophysical and somatic state, and in the quality of previous socializing experiences. Intellectual disability points out to the level of changes and individual adaptation possibilities in the closest environment. Presently, we are experiencing the collapse of the idea of vocational activation as the consequence of the niche formed after the indiscriminate liquidation of sheltered workshops. It also turns out that the workshops of vocational therapy as a formula of social and vocational rehabilitation has not fully filled the gap in vocational activation of the handicapped.

Presently we are dealing with an alternative solution, which is introducing intellectually disabled people into the open job market. The programmes which are being implemented as part of the European Union funds are to be an attempt at both modifying and finding solutions to problems in local communities. It is also thought to be another stage of

mature social integration, where handicapped people must, at least partly, function independently. During the research it was agreed that the programme is to be implemented in three stages:

**Stage I: preparatory** – includes vocational internship and cyclical instruction for people diagnosed as moderately and considerably handicapped. On this stage, the rehabilitation includes:

- introduction into the vocational role, including workplace orientation
- familiarizing with the duties and schedules of vocational duties
- introduction into a vocational group, including contacts with employers and competent workers,
- communication trainings and workshops, interpersonal trainings, self-presentations.

**Stage II: adaptive** - includes a few months' traineeships on the open job market. It is, to some extent, a verification of the previous stage, where a handicapped person functions independently in the vocational environment. The work-coach, who supervises this stage, is really important here. First of all he supports the handicapped in their workplace. This stage concentrates on intensive adaptation to the vocational role.

**Stage III: fundamental** – working independently on the open job market; independent functioning in the vocational role, including vocational duties and contacts.

Research analyses that have been made on the basis of survey investigations of groups of people involved in programmes promoting employment of people diagnosed with moderate and considerable intellectual disability. The survey was conducted on a group of 40 parents and 30 grown-up handicapped people attending workshops of vocational therapy for a few years. They could be potential recipients of programmes promoting introduction into the open job market. The other group consisted of 22 employers interested in the introduction of this kind of employment in their companies. Some of those employers already employ slightly handicapped people. The last group included randomized employees of companies organizing vocational traineeship for slightly and moderately handicapped students from special schools.

The survey shows that parents are interested in the implementation of the programme. However, their attitude towards it is ambivalent at the same time. Reluctance and distance towards changes were observed, since the parents perceive their child's present situation as standardized and well-ordered. The survey shows that educational stages and rehabilitation of their children involve determination and commitment on the part of other family members. Many parents pointed out that to place an adult child in workshops means countless endeavours and months spent quing for vacancy. The perspective of leaving the workshops

and meeting a new challenge often surpasses the parent's real perception of the problem. The survey confirmed essential dependence between the declaration of changes and the parents' age and education. The older the parent and the lower the level of their education, the fewer number of declarations of their adult children's participation in the programmes of vocational activation. The justification was based on the lack of unambiguous guarantees that this direction of changes would be promoted, continued and consistently put into practice. Some parents fear that their child might be overloaded with duties, and only one in five parents on the survey was convinced that their child was able to engage themselves in occupational activities and fulfill them cyclically.

This is supplemented by thinking about a child functioning in a completely new environment. Until now the majority of them belonged to different groups of handicapped people, and activation on the open job market involves entering and functioning within groups of healthy people. Such a solution arouses numerous questions and controversies about tolerance and understanding of the problems experienced by handicapped people. The fears were most often observed among the parents whose children had an intellectual disability coupled with behavioral disorders. The research on the problems of tolerance (A. Ostrowska 1993, p.97; T. Witkowski 1994, p.13 ) fully confirms the legitimacy of such reference towards the problem of acceptance and tolerance towards handicapped people in relations with healthy people. It is worth noting down that over a ten-year period the consciousness of the society changed only very slightly. The analysis of the opinions of workers who are currently in contact with the handicapped through vocational practices proves the existence of stereotypes and prejudices.

Potential employers expressed similar fears, pointing out that their employees were not prepared to be confronted with such a complex problem. Many of them doubt whether everyday intercourse with intellectually handicapped people itself will solve the problem. While making the analysis of the research on tolerance, it can be declared that preparatory measures should include trainings, workshops and instruction aimed at establishing attitudes that make it possible to understand and study the situation basing on professional knowledge how handicapped people function in the working environment. This is essential, because one in every two employees is apprehensive that employing handicapped people will result in redundancy. The research shows the relationship between the level of qualifications and the perception of activating the handicapped as a real threat. More threatened are the people whose duties at work require fewer skills and preparation. Simultaneously, it is being pointed out that this might be caused not only by the real judgment, but also by the profits and

privileges for employers who employ handicapped people. The employers themselves look at these problems with reserve. They think that there are no real guarantees in this matter and they consider the existing procedures of profiting from tax deductions as unclear and imperfect. They also have a negative opinion of the officials' knowledge and level of information, and the way these problems have been presented and discussed.

Handicapped respondents, mainly participants of the workshops, are a disorientated and lost group. Many of them do not understand the idea of the open job market. On one hand we deal here with the transfer of parental attitudes themselves, but on the other - the lack of ability to handle the new situation by a handicapped person. An essential correlation between the degree and nature of the disability, and the perception of vocational activation has been noticed. The research shows that the smaller the ability to function independently, the smaller the interest to undertake work outside workshops. I think that this is a classic example of retreat and distance as a consequence of reluctance to changes and perfected passivity. In some of the respondents anxiety reactions were observed, because they associated vocational activation with the necessity to leave the workshops. As the law reads (Art.9, par.1 and 2), the aim of rehabilitation of the handicapped is full participation in social life, which is realized through "the development of personal resourcefulness and stimulation of social activity", and "the development of independent performance of social roles". The research confirms that the responding young people actively participate in training the skill of social behaviour aimed at: (cf. Report on the Survey of Workshops of Active Manual Therapy, 2006 p.55)

- training the skill of social communication
- economic training
- training how to solve problems
- sexual education training
- preparing to undertake work

In the light of analyses that have been made, it seems that trainings that prepare for entering the open job market must be aimed at assuming the vocational role, i.e. acquiring the competences and skills conditioning survival and acceptance by healthy people in the working environment. As the report of the State Rehabilitation Fund for Handicapped People shows, only 737 out of 15967 persons attending workshops are able to take up a job on the open market (Report on the Survey of Workshops of Active Manual Therapy, 2006, p.59).

The survey conducted allows to formulate conclusions that make it possible to work out effective procedures that would influence the efficiency of vocational activation of people with intellectual disability:

1. It is essential to work out a course of workshop classes for all groups engaged in the problem of vocational activation, which will create a proper perspective of understanding and judging the problem in question.
2. The development of skills and competences in handicapped people which are indispensable to enter and appear on the open job market should include earlier stages of education, revalidation and rehabilitation, which in this way increases individual chances for vocational activity, in particular the Workshops of Active Manual Therapy.
3. It is a necessity to create the data bases in local environments, which will facilitate reaching handicapped people, and gathering information indispensable for the introduction onto the open job market.
4. It is legitimate to promote this form of support for intellectually handicapped people because it can have a positive influence on staying in social circles, counteracting social isolation and delaying the moment of transition into being fully dependent on social care.
5. It also seems legitimate to undertake initiatives that promote employing people with intellectual disability in the private sector, with simultaneous guarantees of advantages and profits for employers.

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