

Czech experience – Case studies from the Rapid-Rehousing Program

Case 1 – Ms Z.

Ms Z. used to live in a standard flat until the owner of the apartment wanted to pay two rentals at once. She lost her home three years ago. She moved out with adult children to a flat where the owner chooses inadequate rent, regularly turns off electricity, the heating works only two hours a day, and tenants are exposed to everyday chicane. The children of Ms. Z. moved away soon, and she gradually became an activist who, along with other tenants, struggle to keep the owner in compliance with the laws. This led her to work with IQ Roma Service, which is engaged in social work in the Rapid Re-Housing project in Brno. Even though Ms. Z. did not solve her housing situation she has become a peer consultant. In her work she uses the knowledge of the environment, in which families with children in housing distress live, knows their way of thinking, which is influenced by the lack of faith in the change and/or the lack of faith in the stability of change, hence increase the risk of losing the housing, if it is acquired. Mrs. Z. has got the experience of how the loss of housing negatively affects other aspects of life and could be a beginning of the chain of other problems. She feels her own need to help families with children in the RRH project to keep their living. Ms. Z. works with clients both in direct interaction with a social worker and by agreement also separately. In two specific families where the social worker has been unable to make a long-term relationship with a family at risk of losing housing (due to not paying the rent), Ms. Z. has helped change the situation, and families have signed up to debt plans to pay the rent, even though they have had to significantly reduce their spending on other living needs. In other cases, thanks to the client's contact with Ms. Z, she managed to open topics that the clients did not, for various reasons, direct to deal with their social worker.

Ms. Z. participated, along with other members of the team, in training how to use method of motivational interviews (MI) with clients. At work, however, she is still using informal techniques based on her life experience and leaves the MI tools to a social worker.

She is currently attending a course which is a prerequisite for funding her work from national donation tools for the provision of social services and is therefore necessary for long-term prospects of her work in this area. We assume that Ms. Z. will continue to use her experience at work and the formal training will help her to be effective. We now consider it is important for her to improve the work with her life story, to learn continual reflection of the development and progress of the interview with the client, and to use appropriate examples of her experience at the right time. It will show up whether formal education and the use of social work tools does not overlap the use of their own experience. Nevertheless, we believe that both competences should be mutually reinforcing.

Case 2- Ms. D,

Ms. D. began to work for IQ Roma Service at a preschool club where she helped with child upbringing. After a few months she became a peer consultant in a family support program in the same organization. Here she quickly gained the ability to work independently with clients and during team meetings gave a completely different view of the situation in families and the strategies of solving the identified problems. Paradoxically, these skills have not been accepted unconditionally positive in the team of social workers.

Peer consultant's self-contained contacts with clients were questioned because of risk of a non-professional approach in the sensitive area of child protection and the observations from the families' environment communicated by the Ms. D. at the team meetings. The hypothesis and suggested plans of Ms. D. were not unconditionally accepted as relevant from the professional workers due to lay

language and lack of professional reflections – there was expectance that peer worker should not only convey her understanding the situation, but communicate it in proper terms, so using her lay language was not acceptable. Gradually, both difficulties (de facto the teams' incompetence to work with the peer consultant) were managed and overcame. The peer consultants' involvement was positive not only for improving the outcomes in the collaboration with clients, but also for changing communication within the team and improving the self-reflection of the team as such.

Then Ms. D. was offered to become a peer consultant in the RRH project. In spite of the excellent abilities she had developed in her previous engagement, she was unable to work in project team. The reason was that she had not resolved her inadequate housing situation. With her three minors, she has been living in shelters for several years, she has often moved and despite her efforts she has not been able to find standard and stable housing (primarily because of discrimination in the housing market, which disadvantages Roma, single mothers and families with more children). She perceived the lottery (selection scheme for the RRH project) as unfair. Instead she preferred the principle of deservingness. Finally she rejected the fundamental idea of the project and some of the housing first principles.

After exiting the RRH project, she was willing to share her experience of domestic violence voluntarily, and in two cases her interview with clients was crucial to their decision-making on the steps to end domestic violence in their families.

She had the motivation and general desire to help. She was also experienced and aware of importance of the supportive assistance. She was able to help in individual cases, but she doubt the principles of the project and so refused to collaborate closely.