

Summary

“Visio vahvasta aikuissosiaalityöstä” (A Vision of Powerful Adult Social Work) was a practice research project carried out by Praksis, the Unit for Social Work Education and Research, in 2010–2011. The development themes included a survey of social workers’ clientele, pair work, group social work and a community-oriented approach to work. These themes arose from social workers’ common discussions and job social work development needs at the City of Helsinki Social Services Department’s Western Social Service Centre. The project was driven by the need to develop adult social work in changing task structures.

On the basis of common development efforts, social workers created a common vision for powerful social work in the future, including recommendations and suggestions for the continued development of adult social work. The starting points for powerful adult social work are client-oriented approach and client empowerment. The vision aims at social work having the opportunity to concentrate on empowering change process together with the client.

The survey of social workers’ clientele set out to determine who adult social work clients are and how their needs are met. The social workers filled in a questionnaire about the situation of each client they met in May and June 2010 (N=327). According to the results, adult social work mainly concentrates on three themes: unemployment, homelessness and financial support. The themes can be seen in the factors behind the clients’ situations, in the societal matters defining them and in the direction of social work. A better familiarity with the clientele creates opportunities for systematic and preventive work as well as for developing working methods and directing them to the necessary aspects of client work. The clients’ resources should be better identified and utilised in systematic work.

The development of pair work analysed the work community’s common opinion on working in pairs. All social workers took part in a pair work trial period in autumn 2010. The social workers had group discussions on pair work that were recorded and analysed, and they were also interviewed on the subject. As a working method, pair work enables a reflective and dialogic approach to adult social work. A framework was developed as a tool for reflecting on pair work and used to analyse the formation of co-operation relationships, the client’s situation, objectives and prospects for collaboration. The focus of reflecting is on resources, successes and opportunities. Pair work and the sharing of work are also a resource for employees, increasing well-being at work.

An experiment of group social work was developed in 2011. The working methods used in the “Elämäni kuvat” (Photos of My Life) social work groups were photography and analysis of personal life situations and objectives with the help of photos. The intention was to find new ways to implement social work and increasing the effectiveness of the work by encouraging client

activity. The clients considered group social work an interesting and important new working method, and the use of photographs introduced new dimensions in the interaction between social workers and clients. Group social work supported the clients' resources and provided them with a significant amount of peer support.

The community-oriented approach to work was analysed by means of a group discussion between social workers and a written survey in spring 2011. The creation of regional analyses was also started during the project, combining, for example, regional statistics and residents' needs as material for the regional development of social work. The community-oriented approach can be applied in individual and group work at the social service centre or in regional work. Challenges and support needs in applying the new approaches to work include a lack of resources, insufficient familiarity with the working methods, organisational structure, adopting the new work orientation and emphasising individual responsibility in the service system. The work community's purpose is to continue communal discussions on the development of community-based social work.

The development of the adult social work has tried to broaden the perspective from the individual based client work to the societal level, to allow the social work to affect also to the structural problems.
