CONFERENCING WITH ADULTS

Family group conference to (re-)activate social networks of long-time social assistance recipients

Background
Family group Conference (FGC) as a participatory process of collaborative planning and decision making of service users and their [extended] social network is thus far predominantly used in the context of child welfare and within a legal framework of child protection. Only recently FGC has been geared towards adults, eg. homeless people or victims of domestic violence. To our knowledge, FGC hasn’t yet been implemented in the context of long-time social assistance recipients enrolled in vocational training and/or taking part in non-profit, socioeconomic projects (in Europe), which makes this project innovative.

Aim of the project
The presented pilot project, funded by the European Social Fund and the Austrian Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs & Consumer Protection, aims at implementing the concept of FGC in the context of adult long-term social assistance recipients as a means to enable occupational integration, to democratize help and welfare as well as to strengthen social inclusion. On the basis of a good practice study on FGC for adults as well as stakeholder interviews with social workers in the field of non-profit employment projects and recruiters of the public employment service, we’ve established a framework for the implementation of FGC with the afore mentioned users. Building on these findings we’ve elaborated a training course for social workers initiating or coordinating conferences in the course of the pilot project, which will evaluated both ex ante and ex post.

Results & Conclusion
Though the project is still ongoing, first results strongly indicate possibilities to adapt referrals and formal requirements to contexts beyond child welfare in accord with established FGC quality standards. Users declare troubles in finding a job or keep it for a longer time, difficulties such as little mobility in rural areas, lack of public child care and physical and/or mental vulnerability. Furthermore FGC emphasizes Human rights such as the right to social security (art.22), standard of living (art. 25) and the right to participate in cultural life (art.27). Both the Charta of fundamental rights and the anti-discrimination directives of the European Union can be incorporated in decision-making processes. Evaluation could show new partnerships, stronger networks, creative solutions, better mental conditions as well as flexible acting and sustainability.

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