

Streetworking – The Stage of Community Presence¹

Streetworking – etap obecności w społeczności

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Introduction

Streetworking, as a form of social work, relies on direct engagement in the field, close contact with individuals in need of support, and integration with the local community. One of the key stages of this process is community presence, which allows streetworkers to better understand the social and cultural realities of a given area and build lasting relationships with local residents. The stage of community presence is not merely about physical presence in a specific location but also involves absorbing the culture, norms, and values prevailing in the community. It is a time when streetworkers interact with local residents, participate in community life, and build trust and relationships. This stage is crucial in the streetworking process, forming the foundation for effective work with individuals in need of support (Pierson 2010, p. 5; Fook 2002, p. 12; Adams et al. 2009, p. 30; Kamiński 2015, p. 45; Kowalski 2018, p. 32). In this article, we will take a closer look at this stage of streetworker's work, discussing its objectives, methods, and challenges. By analyzing the significance of community presence, we will better understand how this practice affects the effectiveness of social intervention and integration with the local community (Karabanow 2004, p. 217; Fook 2002, p. 18; Kamiński 2015, p. 47).

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The Stage of Community Presence in Streetworker's Work

The stage of community presence is a fundamental step in the streetworking process, enabling streetworkers to better understand the social, cultural, and problem realities of a given area. During this stage, streetworkers engage in direct interaction with the local community, assimilating the rules, norms, and values prevailing in the environment. It is a period when initial relationships with residents are built, laying the groundwork for further actions. Community presence extends beyond mere physical presence on the ground; it also involves active participation in community life and engagement in various activities within the local community. Streetworkers may participate in neighborhood meetings, cultural events, or engage in local social initiatives. This allows them to better understand the specifics of a given area and establish closer contact with residents (Burns 2006, p. 425; Healy 2014, p. 58). A key aspect of this stage is building trust and relationships with the local community. Streetworkers seek acceptance and support from residents, which allows for a better understanding of their needs and more effective support. Direct contact with residents enables the identification of social problems and determination of areas requiring intervention. As a result, the stage of community presence enables streetworkers to assimilate into the local culture and integrate with the community, which is essential for effective work with individuals in need of support. Going through this stage allows streetworkers to better understand the context of their work and gain insight into the needs and issues of the local community, translating into the effectiveness of interventions and support provided to those in need of assistance (Burns 2006, p. 429; Karabanow 2004, p. 225; Pierson 2010, p. 25).

Goals of the Community Presence Stage

The community presence stage aims to achieve several significant goals that serve as a foundation for further actions by the streetworker. Among the main objectives of this stage, we can highlight: assimilation with the local culture, building trust and relationships, identifying social needs, gaining community support, and increasing visibility and accessibility. Streetworkers strive for full integration with the local community by embracing its culture, norms, and values. The goal is to achieve a deep understanding of the realities of the area and incorporate them into subsequent actions (Burns 2006, p. 439; Banks 2012, p. 91). Building trust and lasting relationships with residents is crucial for effec-

tive work with individuals in need of support. Building trust is a lengthy process but essential for effective community support (Karabanow 2004, p. 239; Healy 2014, p. 72). Through their presence in the community, streetworkers can better understand the specifics of the area and identify the main social problems and the needs of residents. This is crucial for effective intervention planning and support (Burns 2006, p. 445; Banks 2012, p. 97). Streetworkers aim to gain support from the local community, enabling more effective action and greater acceptance of their efforts. Through active participation in community life, streetworkers become an integral part of the local community, facilitating the achievement of their goals (Pierson 2010, p. 55; McNiff and Whitehead 2011, p. 40). Being present in the environment allows streetworkers to increase their visibility and accessibility to people in need of support. Residents may find it easier to seek help and support when they see streetworkers as part of the local landscape (Healy 2014, p. 74; Stringer 2013, p. 60).

Methods and Tools in the Community Presence Stage

In the community presence stage, streetworkers utilize various methods and tools that enable them to effectively integrate with the local community and understand its needs and issues. Direct observation of the environment and residents' behaviors is a fundamental method that allows streetworkers to understand the specifics of the area, the dynamics of social life, and identify social problems (Pierson 2010, p. 75; Fook 2002, p. 95). Active participation in conversations with residents enables streetworkers to build relationships, learn about life histories, and the needs of the local community. Through conversations, streetworkers can better understand the realities of the area and identify areas requiring intervention (Burns 2006, p. 453; Healy 2014, p. 85). Involvement in local events, such as festivals, neighborhood meetings, or cultural events, allows streetworkers to have closer contact with residents and build relationships with the local community (Banks 2012, p. 105; Stringer 2013, p. 60). Streetworkers can participate in various social groups, such as sports clubs, volunteer groups, or non-governmental organizations, allowing them to integrate with the local community and better understand its needs and issues (Pierson 2010, p. 80; Karabanow 2004, p. 260). Reviewing documents such as social reports, analyses of the social situation, or local statistics can provide streetworkers with additional information about the specifics of the area and social problems in the local community (Healy 2014, p. 88; Fook 2002, p. 100). Community mapping

involves identifying existing resources, institutions, and social groups in a given area. This useful tool allows streetworkers to better understand the social structure of the area and identify potential partners for cooperation (Burns 2006, p. 455; Stringer 2013, p. 65). The use of these methods and tools enables streetworkers to effectively operate in the community presence stage, contributing to a better understanding of the realities of the area and more efficient work with the local community (Pierson 2010, p. 85; Fook 2002, p. 105).

Challenges and Difficulties

Although the community presence stage is extremely important for the work of a streetworker, it is also accompanied by various challenges and difficulties that can hinder its effectiveness. Streetworkers often have to deal with a lack of social trust from residents who may be skeptical of strangers entering their area. Building trust takes time and effort, which can be challenging, especially at the beginning of working in a particular area (Healy 2014, p. 90; Karabanow 2004, p. 270). Integration with the local community can be difficult, especially in areas affected by social conflicts, poverty, or crime. Streetworkers may encounter resistance from social groups or individual residents, making it difficult to establish relationships and gain acceptance (Burns 2006, p. 457; Stringer 2013, p. 70). Streetworkers may struggle with understanding and accepting cultural differences within a community. Lack of knowledge of the norms, values, and customs of the local culture can lead to conflicts or misunderstandings in relationships with residents (Pierson 2010, p. 90; Fook 2002, p. 110). Working in some areas may involve risks to the safety of streetworkers, especially in areas affected by violence, crime, or drug addiction. Streetworkers must be aware of potential threats and know how to respond appropriately to risky situations (Burns 2006, p. 459; Pierson 2010, p. 95). Streetworkers often have to operate under limited financial and human resources, which can hinder the effectiveness of their work. Lack of adequate support from institutions or organizations can lead to burnout and a decrease in motivation to continue working (Stringer 2013, p. 75; Karabanow 2004, p. 280). Despite these difficulties, streetworkers often overcome challenges by employing various adaptive strategies and seeking solutions to problems. It is crucial to be aware of these difficulties and be willing to work to overcome them, allowing streetworkers to more effectively support those in need and integrate with the local community (Healy 2014, p. 95; Fook 2002, p. 115).

Tasks Performed by a Streetworker

Streetworkers, who dedicate themselves to their daily work in the community, undertake various actions aimed at supporting those in need. Within these activities, several specific tasks can be distinguished. These include providing information to supported individuals about available sources of assistance, distributing informational leaflets, and accompanying individuals during visits to offices, clinics, or other assistance institutions to provide them with support and a sense of security (Burns 2006, p. 461; Pierson 2010, p. 100). Another significant area of streetworker activities is the role they play as a link between individuals in need of support and institutions offering such support. This involves facilitating contact between those in need and various social welfare institutions, healthcare services, and charitable organizations. This becomes particularly important when supported individuals have had negative experiences with interactions with officials or members of the local community (Stringer 2013, p. 80; Pierson 2010, p. 110). The process of accompanying individuals in problem-solving and social reintegration by streetworkers can take various forms. In addition to physical presence in difficult or stressful situations, accompanying also involves providing emotional support, listening to the needs and concerns of those supported, and building lasting relationships with them based on trust and respect. It is crucial for this accompaniment to have a clear motivational character, encouraging those supported to take actions aimed at improving their life situation and integration with the community (Burns 2006, p. 463; Healy 2014, p. 105). Considering both the physical abilities and emotional state of the supported individual, it is essential for streetworkers to motivate them to be active and stimulate their potential while encouraging independence and relying on their own resources. This is extremely crucial because in some cases, supported individuals may be inclined to avoid the effort necessary to make changes or fight for improvement in their situation, relying on the assistance of others or becoming dependent on it. They may also adopt an attitude of expecting help or succumb to learned helplessness, which can lead to a loss of initiative. Encouraging independence also includes discussing with the supported individual various possibilities for overcoming difficulties, taking steps and their consequences, making decisions, and providing support in coping with difficulties in their implementation (Stringer 2013, p. 85; Pierson 2010, p. 120). Such an approach contributes to strengthening the sense of self-worth and the ability to make decisions in situations where the supported individual may feel they have lost control

over their life. It is also important to emphasize that an essential aspect of the streetworker's work is intervening in situations of direct threat to the lives of those with whom they cooperate, which sometimes requires providing first aid and supporting them in getting to the hospital (Burns 2006, p. 465; Karabanow 2004, p. 290). Additionally, it is important to regularly monitor the places where they stay, especially during winter periods, to ensure their safety and provide suitable living conditions. One of the last tasks attributed to a streetworker, as described in the literature, is the role of a leader-guide. According to the principles of streetworking methodology, based on the needs and choices of the supported individual, the leader initiates changes in their life situation, acting at a pace and time adapted to the specific situation and needs of the supported individual. This active role of the leader contributes to building trust and more effective cooperation with those in need of assistance (Healy 2014, p. 110; Fook 2002, p. 120). Execution of streetworker tasks requires specific predispositions and a wide range of skills that are necessary for effective functioning in the area of working with people in need of social support. Psychosocial competencies play a crucial role here, encompassing both personality traits and a lifestyle attitude. Among these traits, those that allow for building trust and empathetic relationships with others, flexibility in dealing with stress, emotional maturity, as well as the ability to make independent decisions and take responsibility for duties performed, are important (Burns 2006, p. 467; Pierson 2010, p. 130). Additionally, a streetworker should demonstrate a high level of engagement and initiative in taking action, enabling effective response to the changing needs of supported individuals in a dynamic street environment. Equally important are interpersonal skills, such as ease in establishing contacts, building lasting relationships, and effectively solving problems in various situations. Streetworkers must be prepared to make quick decisions in conditions of tension and stress, requiring both flexibility of thinking and self-confidence in action. Another significant aspect is the ability to motivate individuals in need of support to take actions aimed at improving their life situations. Moreover, streetworkers must be capable of effective teamwork, requiring cooperation skills, communication, and flexibility in adapting to diverse situations and group needs. Skillful planning and organizing of activities are also essential, enabling the effective implementation of social assistance goals within team collaboration. The mentioned traits and skills allow streetworkers to perform work in accordance with best practices in the field of social assistance. This work is based on accepting the supported individual as a whole, showing respect for their individuality and diversity,

and avoiding judgment. Striving for objectivity in assessing the situation and needs of the supported individual is essential, requiring maintaining control over one's involvement, especially on an emotional level. This is particularly important when working with the most vulnerable groups, such as children or victims of violence. Additionally, streetworkers must be able to express their feelings in a controlled manner and appropriately respond in dangerous situations. Furthermore, it is important to effectively respond to aggressive behaviors from supported individuals and adhere to confidentiality principles in the relationship with them. A particular emphasis is placed on the ethical dimension of this work, which is the foundation of its operation. It is worth noting that although streetworkers' actions are monitored by the organizations that employ them, they are carried out in an environment where the supported individual is in a position susceptible to influence and often deprived of the opportunity to defend their rights. In such situations, streetworkers' motivation must be at the highest level, as they work with socially weakest individuals, who often find themselves in situations of lack of support and backing. Due to the increasing level of professionalism of streetworkers, resulting in increased competence in providing assistance to individuals in need, organizations involved in streetworking gain a special position in providing support for specific groups of people – such as addicts, homeless individuals, sex workers, or children lacking proper parental care on the streets. Therefore, it becomes apparent that they face another important task. It involves effectively representing these groups of people and their interests in social discussion, local communities, and the media – which is particularly important. Society is filled with numerous stereotypes, prejudices, and myths related to homelessness or prostitution, for example. Many of them stem from a lack of understanding of the nature of these phenomena, their diversity, complexity, and sources. Hence, there are beliefs about homelessness as a consequence of one's own choice, ubiquitous alcoholism, or beliefs that individuals working in the sex industry do so voluntarily, for easy access to prosperity. The media often present an incorrect image of these individuals and groups, simplifying it, depreciating, stigmatizing, or applying symbolic violence, which leads to humiliation and emphasizing their unfortunate fate, enclosing them within this stereotype. Representatives of organizations involved in streetworking, who understand these issues perfectly and demonstrate a high level of empathy and understanding, have the chance to become advocates for the people they help, speaking out in public debate, representing their interests, and contributing to changing social awareness about these groups.

Case Studies

To better understand the practical application of the presence stage in the work of a streetworker, we will present a case study describing a specific situation from the field. The case study allows us to examine the real challenges, decisions, and actions taken by the streetworker during the presence stage and their consequences. Details regarding the area of operation, community profile, and main social problems in that area are presented. The implementation of the presence stage and the actions taken are described, along with the challenges encountered by the streetworker. Analyzing the case study enables the identification of effective streetworker strategies in the context of the presence stage and a better understanding of the significance of this stage for the entire streetworking process. The case study serves as a practical example of the application of theories and methods discussed earlier, leading to a better understanding of the complexity of streetworker's work and the associated challenges.

Urban District with Homelessness Issue The streetworker faced challenges of social distrust and resistance from residents. Despite difficulties, through observation and direct conversations, the streetworker identified the causes of homelessness and developed an action plan. Collaborating with local authorities and organizations, shelters and social reintegration programs were organized, leading to an improvement in the situation.

Community with Social Isolation Issue The streetworker struggled with challenges of lack of access to the community and trust from residents. Nevertheless, through organizing meetings and community activities, a space for integration was created, supporting isolated individuals. By utilizing transportation, recreational activities, and support groups, the community began to actively participate in social life, reducing isolation.

District with Drug Addiction Issue Streetworkers operating in a district with drug addiction problems had to face resistance from residents and dangers associated with crime. Through observation, conversations with local leaders and organizations, the causes were identified, and preventive, therapeutic, and reintegration programs were initiated, leading to a reduction in the drug problem in the community.

Housing Estate with Domestic Violence Issue Streetworkers working in an estate with domestic violence issues had to address the lack of trust from victims and resistance from perpetrators. Through observation, conversations with local leaders and organizations, shelters for victims, therapeutic programs, and legal support were organized, improving safety in the estate.

Youth Ghetto with School Dropout Issue Streetworkers operating in a youth ghetto with school dropout issues had to overcome resistance from

youth and lack of parental support. Through observation, conversations with local leaders and organizations, educational, vocational, and psychological support programs were organized, leading to a decrease in the number of young people dropping out of school. Estate with Child Malnutrition Issue Streetworkers working in an estate with child malnutrition problems had to address challenges of lack of access to healthy food and nutritional education. Through situation analysis, collaboration with local grocery stores and charitable organizations, nutritional programs, meal delivery, and nutritional education for families were organized, leading to improved children's health. Community with Unemployment Issue Streetworkers working in a community affected by unemployment had to address resistance and lack of motivation from residents. Through labor market analysis, organizing vocational workshops and training, residents were motivated to seek employment, and financial support and career counseling programs were organized, contributing to a decrease in unemployment in the community. Area with Street Violence Issue Streetworkers operating in an area with street violence issues had to deal with safety risks and resistance from gangs and criminal groups. Through situation analysis, establishing contacts with local leaders and organizations, preventive programs, psychological support, and anti-violence education for youth were organized, leading to a reduction in street crime. Community with Lack of Access to Healthcare Issue Streetworkers working in a community lacking access to healthcare had to address financial and logistical challenges. Through health needs analysis, collaboration with local medical centers and charitable organizations, mobile health clinics, preventive programs, and health education for residents were organized, contributing to improved community health. Youth Center with Social Media Addiction Issue Streetworkers operating in a youth center with social media addiction issues had to deal with communication difficulties and engaging youth. Through analysis of social media trends, organizing digital workshops and support groups, youth were interested in alternative forms of spending time and media education, leading to a reduction in addiction and improved peer relationships.

Conclusion

Streetworking is a social work method based on direct contact with individuals in need of support in their natural environment. This article focused on presenting the presence stage, which is crucial for the effective conduct

of streetworking activities. During this stage, streetworkers familiarize themselves with the area of operation, build relationships with residents, and identify major social problems. Many of the tasks streetworkers perform daily and fundamental elements of their practice are also described in social work textbooks, indicating a certain similarity between these two areas of social assistance. However, important issues for social workers employed in social assistance institutions are often overlooked or relegated to the background during the process of providing assistance due to the dominant emphasis on reporting actions and the need to demonstrate measurable effects of work. Similarly to the situation in streetworking, social work cannot always be unequivocally assessed through quantitative indicators, as its essence often lies in the quality of the client relationship, personal involvement, and time devoted to comprehensive assistance. In the professional practice of social workers in social assistance institutions, paradoxically, there is often a lack of time to carry out social work itself, as bureaucratic and administrative duties take up a significant portion of their time. This imbalance may be one of the factors contributing to the development of alternative forms of assistance, such as streetworking. Many of these forms are based on the basic assumptions of social work, emphasizing direct contact with the client and focusing on important aspects of individual support. The article discussed various methods and tools used by streetworkers in the presence stage, such as observation, conversations with residents, participation in local events, or document analysis. Additionally, challenges associated with working in this stage, such as lack of social trust, difficulties in community integration, or limited resources and support, were highlighted. Through case studies from various areas, the article demonstrated the practical application of streetworking and its effectiveness in addressing social issues. Streetworking not only enables the identification and support of individuals in need but also mobilizes the community to take action to improve living conditions and social integration. As a result, streetworking is an essential tool in researching the environment and effectively acting for local communities, positively impacting their development and well-being. The article encourages further exploration of this topic and continuing research on streetworker's work methods and their impact on communities.

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SUMMARY

Streetworking is a social work method based on direct contact with individuals in need of support in their natural environment. This article focuses on the community presence stage, which is crucial for the effective conduct of streetworking activities. During this stage, streetworkers familiarize themselves with the area of operation, build relationships with residents, and identify major social problems. The article discusses various methods and tools used by streetworkers in this stage, such as observation, conversations with residents, participation in local events, and document analysis. Additionally, it highlights the challenges associated with working in this stage, including lack of social trust, difficulties in community integration, and limited resources. Through case studies from various areas, the article demonstrates the

practical application of streetworking and its effectiveness in addressing social issues, mobilizing the community to take action to improve living conditions and social integration.

KEYWORDS: streetworking, social work, community presence, social intervention

STRESZCZENIE

Streetworking jest metodą pracy socjalnej opierającą się na bezpośrednim kontakcie z osobami potrzebującymi wsparcia w ich naturalnym środowisku. W artykule omówiono etap obecności w społeczności, kluczowy dla efektywnego prowadzenia działań streetworkerów. W trakcie tego etapu streetworkerzy zapoznają się z obszarem działania, budują relacje z mieszkańcami oraz identyfikują główne problemy społeczne. Artykuł przedstawia różne metody i narzędzia wykorzystywane przez streetworkerów, takie jak obserwacja, rozmowy z mieszkańcami, udział w lokalnych wydarzeniach oraz analiza dokumentów. Opisano również wyzwania związane z pracą w tym etapie, takie jak brak zaufania społecznego, trudności z integracją czy ograniczone zasoby. Przez studia przypadków artykuł pokazuje praktyczne zastosowanie streetworkingu i jego skuteczność w rozwiązywaniu problemów społecznych, mobilizując społeczność do działań na rzecz poprawy warunków życia i integracji społecznej.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: streetworking, praca socjalna, obecność w społeczności, interwencja społeczna

PAULINA FORMA – Uniwersytet Jana Kochanowskiego w Kielcach
ANNA KANABROCKA – Uniwersytet Jana Kochanowskiego w Kielcach
JULIA WRONA – Uniwersytet Jana Kochanowskiego w Kielcach

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