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# Streetworking – Introduction/Engagement Stage in the Local Community[1]

Streetworking – etap wprowadzenia i zaangażowania w lokalną społeczność

## Introduction

Streetworking, as a form of social work, plays a crucial role in reaching out to individuals in need of support in their natural environment. Its essence lies not only in responding to specific social problems but also in actively engaging in the lives of local communities and building lasting relationships with residents. This article focuses on one of the key stages of a streetworker's work – the stage of familiarization and introduction in the local community.

During this stage, streetworkers are tasked with delving into the specificity and needs of the community they work with. Through observation, conversations with residents, and participation in local events, they seek to understand the dynamics of the community, build trust, and identify the main problems and challenges it faces. In this way, they become an integral part of the local social ecosystem and can more effectively respond to the needs of their clients. In the following part of the article, various aspects of this key stage of a streetworker's work will be discussed. The tools and strategies used during the familiarization with the local environment, challenges encountered during relationship building and integration, as well as examples of practices that prove to be particularly effective in this field, will be analyzed. By discussing these issues, the importance of the familiarization stage for the effective

work of streetworkers is emphasized, and inspiration for further research and practices in this field is provided.

Development of Streetworking

The history of streetworking dates back to a time when people endeavored to assist others in challenging situations often overlooked by official structures. However, the term "streetworking" began to gain prominence in the second half of the 20th century, especially in the context of working with youth in difficult urban conditions. The first streetworkers appeared on American streets in the 1920s, responding to growing social problems and the need to support young people. At that time, due to the economic crisis, society found itself in a difficult situation, resulting in disruptive changes in its functioning. There was an increase in street crime, and dangerous youth gangs emerged, intimidating residents and engaging in various forms of crime.

Streetworkers, undertaking their mission, ventured into these environments to help young people break away from criminal groups and support their reintegration into society. Their work was not only exceptionally challenging but also dangerous, especially in the context of escalating violence and social tensions associated with the economic crisis. However, despite these challenges, streetworkers tirelessly made efforts to reach out to those in need and offer support. In the 1950s and 1960s, street work also developed in European countries such as the Netherlands, Germany, the United Kingdom, France, and Scandinavia. In these regions, urban environments were affected by various social pathologies, including drug addiction and prostitution, which required intervention.

Jane Addams, an American sociologist, was one of the key figures in the development of streetworking. In the late 19th century, she founded Hull House in Chicago, the first settlement house, and actively worked for those in need, including through street work (Addams 1961, pp. 45–50). In Europe in the 1970s and 1980s, streetworking began to develop particularly in cities where problems related to homelessness, drugs, and social marginalization emerged. NGOs and volunteers began to actively work on the streets, offering assistance in various forms, from psychological support to providing food and medical care.

Streetworking, as a method of social assistance, has its roots in the activities of individuals such as Father Jan Bosco and Father Guy Gilbert, who di-

rectly engaged in working with youth on the streets. Direct contact with young people on the street, understanding their situation, and motivating them for change remained crucial (Deegan 1988, pp. 54–59). Listing projects, it is worth noting that many initiatives emerged in response to specific social needs. An example is the "Mobile Kinder – und Jugendarbeit" founded in Hamburg in the early 1980s, which targeted children and young people, offering them various forms of support and active engagement in social life. On the other hand, the Berlin project "Hydra," established in the same period, was specifically aimed at prostitutes, often minors, who found themselves in particularly difficult situations. This project not only offered material and psychological support but also sought to facilitate these individuals' abandonment of this dangerous occupation and their social reintegration.

In Poland, although streetworking has been known for some time, it spread much later than in other countries. Such activities, conducted among children and young people, have their roots in the work of pioneers such as Janusz Korczak and Kazimierz Lisiecki, who through their attitude and commitment proved that social support should be available to everyone, regardless of circumstances or social status (Korczak 1967, pp. 120–125). By the late 1970s, Marek Kotański founded MoNaR – a series of initiatives and facilities aimed at supporting drug-dependent individuals. MoNaR's street therapists served as non-institutional consultation points where drug-dependent individuals could seek help and support, including motivation for treatment in residential facilities (Kotański 1994, pp. 88–95). From the mid-1990s, the Pedagogy and Social Animation Group Praga Północ (gPaS Praga Północ) actively engaged in working with children and youth on the streets. By promoting innovative street pedagogy, it sought to reach out to those who needed support the most, providing assistance and hope to those often overlooked by traditional social support institutions. It is also worth mentioning the actions of the Krakow branch of MoNaR, which in 1996 introduced an innovative street program for drug-dependent individuals. This program was based on the idea of harm reduction and HIV prevention, aiming to reduce the negative consequences of drug use by providing appropriate assistance and education.

Thanks to the development of streetworking, various working methods have emerged depending on local needs and conditions. Streetworkers often operate on the edge of the law, trying to reach people who avoid official institutions. Their work is based on trust and empathy, aiming not only to provide short-term assistance but also long-term support, striving for social reintegration and preventing further problems. Today, streetworking is a widely used

practice worldwide, especially in large cities where social problems are particularly visible. It is not only a form of assistance for the homeless or drug-dependent individuals but also an essential tool for working with youth at risk of social marginalization and elderly individuals who may be excluded from social care. Streetworking plays an important role in building more open and supportive societies for all its members.

## Streetworking and Social Work

The key values of streetworking, such as an individual approach, respect for the decisions of those supported, and providing support in their environment, are also the essence of social work. The social assistance system in Poland often fails to meet the expectations of the homeless or those engaged in prostitution, especially those who avoid contact with social workers, feeling misunderstood or unwanted by them. Many of these individuals are unable to meet institutional requirements or assistance agreements, leading to further social exclusion. As a result, they are left to fend for themselves, relying solely on private support (Leszczynska-Rejchert 2010, pp. 102–108).

Streetworkers, specialists in street work, focus primarily on helping the homeless, drug or alcohol addicts, prostitutes, and street children. These groups are particularly affected by social exclusion, as they are not only deprived of basic goods and social services but also often avoid contact with local communities. Many of them have also been rejected by traditional social assistance institutions, such as homeless shelters or rehabilitation centers. Streetworking, or street work, is therefore a crucial tool for social intervention, enabling reaching out to people beyond standard institutions and offering them support in their natural living environment. Social work is a combination of theory and practice, based on active participation in the community, observation, and appropriate responses to changing conditions. For social workers, characteristics such as dynamism and flexibility are crucial. One of the most challenging areas of social assistance in Poland is supporting marginalized individuals, especially the homeless, addicts, sex workers, and street children and youth. Streetworkers play a crucial role in these areas. Despite the long existence of various social assistance facilities in the country, strong institutionalization, bureaucratic complexities, and limitations in seeking new support methods are observed. As a result, gaps have emerged, mainly filled by non-governmental organizations, leveraging both professional work and the

support of numerous volunteers who add energy, commitment, creativity, and a propensity for innovative solutions to social workers (Kaminski, Leszczynska 2005, pp. 122–126).

## Streetworking as a Method of Social Work

Streetworking is one of the most effective methods of social intervention, especially when it comes to reaching people in difficult life situations. In this chapter, the definition of streetworking, its main goals, and its significance for local communities are examined. Streetworking can be defined as a form of social intervention that involves direct contact with people in need of support in their natural environment. Streetworkers operate on the streets, in public places, and in local communities, seeking to establish contact with homeless individuals, addicts, elderly people, youth, or other groups in need of assistance.

The main goal of streetworking is to provide support to marginalized and socially excluded individuals and promote their active participation in society. Streetworkers strive to build trust, identify the needs of people in difficult situations, and provide them with necessary assistance and support to help them achieve a better quality of life. Streetworking plays a significant role in local communities as it allows reaching people whose problems are often overlooked or ignored. Through direct contact with residents, streetworkers can better understand the specifics of a given community, its needs, and challenges. As a result, they can more effectively respond to social problems, mobilize the community to action, and promote social integration. In conclusion, streetworking is an extremely important method of social work that enables direct support and intervention in the lives of those in need and active engagement in local communities. By building trust, identifying needs, and implementing concrete actions, streetworkers contribute to improving the living conditions of the most vulnerable individuals and strengthening local communities.

## Description of the Local Environment Familiarization Stage

The stage of familiarizing oneself with the local environment is a crucial element of a streetworker's work, as it enables a better understanding of the specificities of a given community and the identification of its main problems and challenges. In this chapter, the processes and actions undertaken by streetwork-

ers during this stage and the significance it holds for effective social intervention are discussed.

The first step in the process of familiarizing oneself with the local environment is conducting a social, economic, and cultural analysis of the area. Streetworkers strive to delve into the community's structure, understand its history, traditions, and specific challenges it faces. Establishing contacts with the residents of the local community is another important element. Streetworkers engage in conversations with residents, listen to their stories, concerns, and needs. They create a space for open communication and building trust, which allows for a better understanding of the situation and the identification of specific problems.

Streetworkers actively participate in the life of the local community, attending local events, meetings, and social initiatives. This gives them the opportunity to better understand the residents and their needs, as well as to build relationships and social engagement. During the stage of familiarizing oneself with the local environment, streetworkers seek to identify the main social problems facing the community. They analyze various areas of social life, such as homelessness, addiction, domestic violence, or social exclusion, to better understand the specificity of the problems and possible intervention methods. In this way, the stage of familiarizing oneself with the local environment forms the foundation of effective streetworker's work, enabling a better understanding of the community, identification of needs, and more effective response to social problems. It also allows for building trust and relationships with residents, which is crucial for subsequent intervention actions.

## Building Relationships and Trust

During the work of a streetworker, building relationships and trust with residents of the local community is a multidimensional process that requires time, commitment, and empathy. Effective relationship building not only facilitates the identification of community needs but also enables streetworkers to effectively intervene and support those in need. In this chapter, various aspects of this process and the strategies streetworkers use to build relationships and trust effectively are discussed.

Active listening is the foundation of effective relationship building. Streetworkers seek to understand the perspectives, experiences, and needs of residents through empathetic and open listening. During conversations with those

in need of support, they emphasize showing interest and attentive listening, which allows for building trust and a better understanding of the situation. Streetworkers place great emphasis on empathy and understanding for the situations in which community members find themselves. They strive to identify the emotions and experiences of the individuals they work with, which allows for building bonds based on mutual understanding and support. Compassion and understanding are key elements of effective relationship building. Streetworkers take a holistic approach to their work, considering all aspects of a person's life. In addition to understanding specific social problems they face, they also seek to understand other areas of life, such as family relationships, health, or financial situation. This approach allows for a more comprehensive intervention and support, addressing all the needs of the individual. Streetworkers strive to create a space where residents feel safe and accepted. They create an atmosphere of openness and trust, where residents can freely express their needs and problems. Creating such a space is crucial for effectively building relationships and trust.

Building relationships and trust form the foundation of effective streetworker's work, enabling a better understanding of community needs and effective response to social problems. It is also a key element of effective support for those in need, based on trust, empathy, and understanding.

## Integration in the Local Community

The integration of streetworkers into the local community is a complex process that requires active engagement and building relationships based on trust and mutual respect. In this chapter, various aspects of this process and the strategies streetworkers use to effectively integrate into the local community are discussed. The consistent presence of streetworkers in places where residents gather is a key element of integration into the local community. Streetworkers actively participate in community life by visiting streets, squares, community centers, or parks. Regular meetings with residents, conversations, and joint activities allow for building relationships and a better understanding of the specificities of a given community.

Streetworkers establish partnerships with local community leaders, such as spiritual leaders, representatives of non-governmental organizations, or other social activists. This collaboration enables a better understanding of the community structure and the identification of its needs. Local leaders often act as

intermediaries between streetworkers and residents, facilitating the building of relationships and trust. Streetworkers engage the local community in decision-making processes and action implementation. They organize meetings, social consultations, or workshops where residents have the opportunity to express their opinions, ideas, and needs. The active participation of residents in decision-making processes makes them feel more engaged and responsible for their communities, which fosters the building of social bonds. Streetworkers develop their cultural competence to better understand the cultural diversity of the communities they work with. They respect cultural, linguistic, and religious differences, which allows for building trust and relationships based on mutual respect. Understanding and respecting cultural diversity are crucial for effective integration into the local community.

The effective integration of streetworkers into the local community enables a better understanding of community needs and more effective responses to social problems. Building relationships, collaborating with local leaders, engaging the community, and developing cultural competence are key elements of this process that contribute to building social bonds and strengthening local communities.

## The Effectiveness of Streetworking Social Intervention

Evaluating the effectiveness of streetworking social intervention can involve various methods and tools. Quantitative methods, such as analyzing statistical data regarding changes in the behavior of the local community, can be effective in determining the overall impact of streetworker actions. Conversely, qualitative methods, such as interviews with intervention participants, can provide more detailed information about the experiences and perceptions of individuals receiving support. Indicators of the effectiveness of streetworking social intervention can be diverse and depend on the specific context of the intervention. These indicators may include changes in the level of social trust, an increase in social activity within the local community, improvements in the quality of life for homeless or addicted individuals, or a reduction in crime rates.

Examples of achievements in streetworking social intervention can be diverse and depend on the specific context of operation. They may include successes in the social reintegration of homeless individuals, assistance in accessing health or psychological services, or supporting addicted individuals in the

recovery and return to healthy social life process. Despite numerous positive effects, streetworking also faces many challenges and limitations. These challenges may include difficulties in building trusted relationships with supported individuals, a lack of sufficient financial resources, time or logistical constraints, or the necessity of working in challenging environmental conditions.

A crucial element in evaluating the effectiveness of streetworking is the continuation of research and monitoring of intervention effects. Regular assessment of effectiveness allows for identifying weaknesses in actions and adjusting intervention strategies to meet the changing needs of the local community. A thorough analysis of the effectiveness of streetworking social intervention requires the use of various methods and tools, taking into account both positive effects and challenges that may arise. Through continuous monitoring and evaluation, streetworking can provide significant support to local communities, contributing to improving their quality of life and strengthening social bonds.

Case Studies

- Support for Elderly Individuals Living in Isolation

The streetworker focused on supporting elderly individuals who lived alone and suffered from social isolation. The challenge was to establish contact with elderly individuals who often avoided social interaction and were wary of strangers. The streetworker regularly visited elderly people in their homes, offering them companionship, conversation, and emotional support. Through patience, empathy, and dedication, he gradually gained their trust and built relationships based on respect and understanding. The successes included gradually building trust and relationships based on respect and understanding, improving the well-being and quality of life of elderly individuals by providing them with companionship and emotional support, and referring individuals in need to appropriate institutions and organizations providing support for the elderly.

- Support for Disabled Individuals

The streetworker undertook actions to support disabled individuals who often faced social exclusion and lacked access to basic services. The challenge was to adapt to the individual needs and situations of disabled individuals and provide them with access to necessary services and support. The streetworker regularly organized educational meetings, vocational workshops, and assistance in finding suitable employment or therapeutic activities for disabled

individuals. Successes included improving the quality of life and well-being of disabled individuals by providing them with access to necessary services and support, supporting disabled individuals in the process of social and vocational integration, and increasing social awareness of the needs and challenges of disabled individuals and promoting social inclusion.

- Support for Homeless Individuals

The streetworker focused on supporting homeless individuals in a city affected by homelessness. The challenge was to establish contact with homeless individuals, who could be distrustful of strangers and often changed their places of stay. The streetworker regularly visited places frequented by homeless people, offering them meals, clothing, blankets, and emotional support. Through a consistent approach and dedication, he gradually gained their trust and built relationships based on respect and understanding. Successes included gradually building trust and relationships based on respect and understanding, assisting in providing basic needs such as food, clothing, and shelter for homeless individuals, and referring individuals in need to appropriate institutions and organizations providing support for the homeless.

- Support for Young People in Difficult Life Situations

The streetworker undertook actions to support young people who were in difficult life situations, such as being victims of domestic violence, having drug problems, or dropping out of education. The challenge was to reach out to these individuals and convince them to seek help. The streetworker regularly organized group meetings, therapeutic sessions, and individual conversations, offering emotional support and assistance in finding solutions to their problems. Successes included providing emotional support and problem-solving assistance for young people in difficult life situations, referring individuals in need to appropriate institutions and organizations providing support for youth in difficult situations, and promoting positive behavior patterns and supporting the development of life and social skills.

- Support for Individuals After Leaving Prison

The streetworker focused on supporting individuals after leaving prison, who had difficulties in social and vocational reintegration. The challenge was to provide support in adapting to life after leaving prison and help in finding employment and stabilizing their lives. The streetworker regularly organized group meetings, vocational workshops, and individual conversations, offering

emotional support and practical advice. Successes included assisting in social and vocational reintegration for individuals after leaving prison, providing emotional support and practical assistance in finding employment and stabilizing life, and referring individuals in need to appropriate institutions and organizations providing support for former prisoners.

Analysis of these cases shows that streetworking can be an effective form of social intervention in various areas, bringing positive effects for those in need of support. In each case, flexible approach, empathy, and commitment to building relationships based on respect and understanding are important.

## Conclusions

The article dedicated to the stage of familiarization and introduction of the streetworker in the local environment focuses on key aspects of this important phase of social work. Streetworking is not limited to reacting to specific social problems but involves actively engaging in the life of the local community and building lasting relationships with its members. In this context, the stage of getting to know the local environment becomes immensely important. Streetworkers utilize various methods, such as observation, direct conversations with residents, and participation in local events, to better understand the dynamics of the community while simultaneously building trust and identifying the most pressing problems and challenges. Integration into the local environment allows them to become an integral part of this social ecosystem and respond more effectively to the needs of their clients. In the further part of the article, tools, strategies, and challenges that streetworkers may encounter in the process of familiarizing themselves with the surroundings are analyzed. Additionally, examples of practices that have proven particularly effective in this field are presented. This article emphasizes the crucial role of the stage of familiarizing oneself with the local environment for the effective work of a streetworker and encourages further research and improvement of practices in this field to better support those in need in their natural surroundings.

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## SUMMARY

Streetworking is a form of social work aimed at directly supporting individuals in need within their natural environment. The article discusses the introduction and engagement stage of the streetworker in the local community, highlighting the importance of building trust, identifying needs, and effective social intervention. Streetworkers use various methods, such as observation, direct conversations with residents, and participation in local events, to better understand the dynamics of the community. Integration into the local environment allows streetworkers to become an integral part of this social ecosystem and respond more effectively to the needs of their clients.

KEYWORDS: streetworking, social work, local community, social integration

## STRESZCZENIE

Streetworking to forma pracy socjalnej, której celem jest bezpośrednie wsparcie osób potrzebujących w ich naturalnym środowisku. Artykuł omawia etap wprowadzenia i zaangażowania streetworkera w lokalną społeczność, podkreślając znaczenie budowania zaufania, identyfikacji potrzeb oraz efektywnej interwencji społecznej. Streetworkerzy stosują różne metody, takie jak obserwacja, bezpośrednie rozmowy

z mieszkańcami oraz uczestnictwo w lokalnych wydarzeniach, aby lepiej zrozumieć specyfikę danej społeczności. Integracja w lokalnym środowisku pozwala streetworkerom stać się integralną częścią tego ekosystemu społecznego i skuteczniej odpowiadać na potrzeby swoich klientów.

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