

Streetworking – Building Relationships Stage ¹

Streetworking – etap budowania relacji

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Introduction

Streetworking is a method of social work involving direct action to support individuals in need within their natural living environment. It is an intervention approach that entails actively engaging with social issues and building relationships with the individuals targeted for assistance. Unlike traditional forms of social aid, streetworking focuses on reaching out to individuals in difficult life situations through direct contact on the streets, in public places, and wherever people in need gather. The primary goal is to establish a rapport with the community, understand their unique challenges, and provide tailored support that addresses their specific needs. This method relies heavily on the streetworker's ability to build trust and create meaningful connections with individuals who might be wary of traditional social services.

The Essence of the Relationship-Building Stage in Streetworking

In the context of streetworking, building interpersonal relationships is an integral part of effective social assistance. Direct contact and relationship-building with individuals in need are crucial for understanding their life situations, needs, and aspirations. Through personal contact, streetworkers can better understand the life context and surroundings

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of individuals, enabling them to tailor the assistance offered to specific needs. The mutual trust built during the relationship-building process forms the foundation for further cooperation. Individuals in need often open up only when they feel safe and accepted by the streetworker. Therefore, building these relationships requires time, patience, and the ability to empathetically listen and understand the other person (Banks 2012, pp. 48–75).

Moreover, direct contact with individuals in need allows streetworkers to better identify hidden problems and adjust assistance strategies to the individual needs and capabilities of each person. It is during the relationship-building process that the sources of problems can be identified and solutions developed collaboratively. This stage is essential for the effectiveness of streetworkers, as it enables them to offer more personalized and impactful support (Trotter 2015, pp. 78–101). By understanding the intricacies of each individual's situation, streetworkers can advocate more effectively and work towards sustainable solutions that address the root causes of their challenges.

Methods of Contacting and Building Relationships

One of the key methods of contacting and building relationships in streetworking is systematic observation of the environment. Streetworkers spend time on the streets and in public places, analyzing social dynamics and identifying individuals who may need support. Observation allows for understanding the social structure, relationships between people, and identification of areas where the most significant social problems occur (Ferguson 2009, pp. 95–112). Additionally, environmental observation enables streetworkers to tailor their actions to the specific needs of the community. Based on the gathered information, they can plan interventions and initiate assistance activities that are most appropriate and effective in a given social context.

Direct conversations with individuals in need of support are also a crucial element of building interpersonal relationships in streetworking. Streetworkers engage in dialogue with residents, listening to their life stories, problems, and needs. This face-to-face meeting allows for building trust and demonstrating authenticity and commitment to help (Fook 2016, pp. 123–145). During conversations, streetworkers not only offer support and advice but also encourage sharing experiences and feelings. This enables them to better understand the life situation of the individual and tailor the assistance offered to their needs and capabilities.

Participation in local events and community activities is another effective method of contacting and building relationships in streetworking. Streetworkers engage in the life of the local community by participating in meetings, festivals, or charity events. This enables them to get to know residents better and build relationships based on mutual trust and respect (Thompson 2015, pp. 66–92). Participation in local events allows streetworkers to naturally integrate into the community and show that they are available and ready to help. It is also an opportunity to demonstrate sensitivity to the community's needs and effectively reach out to individuals who may need support but are not actively seeking it.

Challenges in Building Interpersonal Relationships

One of the main challenges streetworkers face in building interpersonal relationships is a lack of trust in the community. Individuals in need of support may often be skeptical of strangers, including those offering help. Reasons for such behavior can vary, including negative experiences with institutions or difficulties trusting unfamiliar people (Hawkins 2017, pp. 61–82). Streetworkers must overcome this lack of trust, which requires time, patience, and consistent action. Building trust through authenticity, consistency, and integrity in actions is essential. The ability to listen and empathize also plays a crucial role in understanding the concerns and needs of the individuals they work with.

Another challenge is effective communication with individuals experiencing difficult life situations. These individuals may often be overwhelmed by stress, fear, or shame, making it challenging to openly express their needs and feelings. Streetworkers must be able to communicate effectively with individuals in various emotional states, maintaining empathy and understanding (Payne 2014, pp. 114–136). It is essential for communication to be based on respect and acceptance, providing individuals in difficult situations with space to express themselves and their feelings. Streetworkers should demonstrate empathy and sensitivity to the needs of others, allowing for the building of relationships based on trust and understanding.

Overcoming cultural and social barriers is another significant challenge, especially when working in diverse communities. Streetworkers may encounter different norms, values, and cultural expectations that can hinder building relationships with individuals belonging to other social groups. Overcoming these

barriers requires knowledge and respect for cultural diversity and the ability to adapt to different social contexts (Larkin 2009, pp. 153–178). Streetworkers should be able to communicate with individuals from different life and cultural experiences, respecting their values and traditions. This allows for building relationships based on mutual respect and understanding, which is crucial for effective social assistance.

Effective Practices for Building Interpersonal Relationships in Streetworking

Effective practices for building interpersonal relationships in streetworking include various strategies and tools that have been proven successful in different contexts. One of the key elements of effectively building interpersonal relationships is successful interactions with individuals in need of support. Examples of successful interactions may include situations where streetworkers successfully establish contact with individuals in difficult life situations and gain their trust. This could be a moment when the person in need of support decides to openly share their problems and needs, feeling understood and supported by the streetworker (Healy 2011, pp. 87–105).

Examples of successful interactions may also include situations where streetworkers effectively assist individuals in need in solving specific problems or providing them with necessary support. It is important for streetworkers to demonstrate empathy, respect, and readiness to listen and support during these interactions, which allows for building lasting relationships based on trust. Communication and empathy tools are crucial in this process. Streetworkers should be able to actively listen, show interest, and understanding towards the situations and needs of the individuals they encounter. Communication based on empathy allows for better understanding of the other person and building relationships based on mutual respect and understanding (Thompson 2015, pp. 66–92).

Building trust through consistency and honesty in action is another key element. Streetworkers should be credible and predictable in their actions, which allows for building trust in the local community and among individuals in need of support. Consistency in action also means keeping promises and fulfilling commitments to the individuals streetworkers collaborate with. Honesty and transparency are crucial for building trust, so streetworkers should be open and sincere in their relationships with individuals in need of support and the local community. This allows for building lasting relationships based on mutu-

al respect and understanding, which is crucial for effective social assistance in streetworking (Banks 2012, pp. 48–75).

Case Studies

Legal and Social Counseling: Legal and social counseling was provided to a young mother who was struggling with childcare issues. Help was given in obtaining legal advice and directing her to appropriate institutions that could assist her in resolving her childcare problems. This assistance provided her with the necessary resources to navigate her legal challenges and find solutions that improved her situation (Healy 2011, pp. 87–105).

Support in Addiction Rehabilitation: Persuasion was employed to encourage a person struggling with substance addiction to undergo rehabilitation therapy. Support was provided throughout the rehabilitation process, enabling them to return to a healthy life. This intervention played a significant role in their recovery journey (Fook 2016, pp. 123–145).

Organization of Group Meetings: A series of meetings for homeless individuals in the local community was organized. Participants shared their experiences and concerns, while emotional support and practical advice were provided. These meetings created a supportive environment where participants felt heard and valued, fostering a sense of community (Thompson 2015, pp. 66–92).

Life Skills Workshops: Workshops for unemployed individuals, teaching basic job search skills, were conducted. Individual assistance was provided to participants in preparing resumes and cover letters. These workshops equipped participants with essential skills, boosting their confidence and increasing their employability (Trotter 2015, pp. 78–101).

Meeting Basic Needs: Food and clothing were provided to homeless individuals, along with conversations and emotional support. Understanding the needs of homeless individuals and offering them material assistance as well as emotional support was crucial in helping them regain stability and self-confidence (Hawkins 2017, pp. 61–82).

Direct Street Patrols: During nighttime patrols, an individual in emotional crisis was encountered. Listening to their story for a long time, offering support, and reassurance. This immediate intervention helped de-escalate the crisis and provided the individual with much-needed emotional support (Banks 2012, pp. 48–75).

Assistance in Obtaining Identity Documents: Helping a homeless person retrieve identity documents, accompanying them through formalities, and providing necessary information. This assistance was vital in enabling them to access essential services and opportunities (Healy 2011, pp. 87–105).

Mediating Access to Medical Help: Assisting a person with health problems in scheduling a doctor's appointment, accompanying them to the meeting, and supporting communication with the doctor. This support ensured they received appropriate medical care and felt supported throughout the process (Ferguson 2009, pp. 95–112).

Support in Finding Shelter: Assisting homeless individuals in finding temporary shelter by contacting local facilities and providing information about available options. This intervention provided immediate relief and helped them find a safe place to stay (Fook 2016, pp. 123–145).

Facilitating Access to Education: Providing support to a young person in accessing education by assisting in filling out application forms, providing information about available educational programs, and motivating them to continue their studies. This intervention played a significant role in supporting their educational aspirations and future opportunities (Hawkins 2017, pp. 61–82).

Support in Coping with Mental Health Problems: Providing assistance to a person with mental health problems, accompanying them to a therapist's visit, listening to their concerns, and providing emotional support in difficult times. This support was essential in helping them navigate their mental health challenges and find appropriate care (Banks 2012, pp. 48–75).

Conclusions

The phase of building relationships in the work of a streetworker is extremely important for the effectiveness of social interventions in the local community. Through establishing relationships and interacting with individuals in need of support, streetworkers not only identify their needs but also build trust and enable effective responses to social problems. It is through solid interpersonal relationships that effective support and mobilization for change in the beneficiaries' life situations become possible (Payne 2014, pp. 114–136).

Research on effective communication strategies and relationship-building between streetworkers and individuals in need of support remains crucial. Contemporary society poses new challenges for social workers, making it important to investigate innovative communication tools such as social media or

online platforms that can increase access to support and facilitate interactions (Larkin 2009, pp. 153–178). Each local community has its unique characteristics and challenges. Further research on diverse social and cultural contexts is necessary to understand which intervention strategies are most effective in different environments. It is also important to consider cultural and social perspectives in designing support programs.

The development of technology, including mobile applications or telemedicine platforms, opens up new possibilities for streetworker's work. Research on the use of modern technological tools in fieldwork may bring benefits in terms of effectiveness and efficiency of actions, but also requires consideration of potential challenges related to privacy, accessibility, and digital literacy of beneficiaries (Thompson 2015, pp. 66–92). Effective streetworker's work requires collaboration with various institutions and social organizations. Further research on best practices in collaboration and integration of social services can contribute to increasing the effectiveness of assistance actions and improving coordination and resource utilization.

In the context of changing social and economic needs, it is important to research sustainable assistance strategies that not only respond to current needs but also promote long-term social changes. Further research on prevention programs, mental health promotion, and social inclusion can contribute to the development of more holistic and effective support strategies for those in need (Banks 2012, pp. 48–75). All these research areas can contribute to the further development of streetworking as an effective form of social assistance and enable a better understanding and response to the needs of the most socially excluded individuals.

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SUMMARY

Streetworking is a method of social work involving direct action to support individuals in need within their natural living environment. A key element of streetworking is building interpersonal relationships, which facilitates a better understanding of the life situations, needs, and aspirations of those in need. Through trust and acceptance in the local community, streetworkers can more effectively carry out assistance activities and integrate into the environment. The article examines methods of contacting and building relationships, challenges associated with this process, and effective practices in streetworking.

KEYWORDS: streetworking, relationship building, social work, social integration

STRESZCZENIE

Streetworking to metoda pracy socjalnej polegająca na bezpośrednim działaniu wspierającym osoby potrzebujące w ich naturalnym środowisku życia. Kluczowym elementem streetworkingu jest budowanie relacji interpersonalnych, co umożliwia lepsze zrozumienie sytuacji życiowej, potrzeb i aspiracji osób potrzebujących. Dzięki zaufaniu i akceptacji w lokalnej społeczności, streetworkerzy mogą skuteczniej realizować działania pomocowe i integrować się z otoczeniem. Artykuł analizuje metody kontaktu i budowania relacji, wyzwania związane z tym procesem oraz skuteczne praktyki w streetworkingu.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: streetworking, budowanie relacji, praca socjalna, integracja społeczna

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