

# Guidelines for Empowerment and Active citizenship for people with fewer opportunities





## EMPOWERMENT

3

### INTRODUCTION

4

### CONSCIENTISATION

Ability to control oneself and to take action - related to cognitive abilities. Being aware of one's abilities and limits. Understanding, knowing how to interpret the context in which we find ourselves.

11

### REINFORCEMENT

Developing the practical level. Personal guidance, helping the person to make choices. Critical awareness: choosing and taking responsibility for one's choices.

20

### TAKE ACTION

Taking responsibility for the consequences of one's choice.

29

### ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP

Becoming an actor in one's life allows one to become an active citizen.

39

### GLOSSARY

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# INTRODUCTION

## **Why the GuideLines?**

The guidelines for “Active Citizenship and the promotion of social rights in the more fragile groups” goals are the identification and development of good practices and educational tools, in order to promote paths of active citizenship and social inclusion, through the enhancement of individual Empowerment.

Pathways focused on the improvement of Empowerment and the promotion of Active Citizenship in the more fragile individuals, allow the reinforcement of the individual’s autonomy, the recognition of their identity, the ability to activate processes of change and existential planning.

The Guidelines are a development of methodologies, practices and tools of educational work, which can train and improve the competences and soft skills of social workers in their daily work.

## **GuideLines: what are they?**

They are an innovative, agile and practical theoretical-experiential product developed by the caregivers who took part in the Erasmus+ project 2019-1-IT02-KA204-062559, and are based on the collective reprocessing of their professional skills, theoretical knowledge and study visit experienced during the international project.

## **Who are the GuideLines for?**

They are addressed to all social workers and are intended to be both a training tool and a practical resource geared toward supporting people in socially fragile situations to improve their living conditions.

## **Why are they important?**

Through the identification of innovative practices and non-formal educational methodologies, the caregivers of the Voice project sought to give a practical response to the new needs for participation and social inclusion expressed by the more fragile social groups.

## **How are they structured?**

They are organized into two sections: the first one is dedicated to Empowerment processes and the second one is dedicated to the promotion of Active Citizenship.

Within the section dedicated to the development of Empowerment in fragile people, three interconnected phases have been identified: the first is defined as “Conscientization”, characterized by listening to and recognizing the expressed and unexpressed needs of the beneficiaries. The second one is defined as “Reinforcement”: social workers are engaged in developing and reinforcing knowledge and skills of fragile people. The third one is defined as “Action”: actions that enable people to reach a higher level of awareness while making choices. This allows them to develop their decision making skills.

The second section (development of actions towards Active Citizenship pathways) is focused on explaining methods of work and local projects, to promote individual empowerment and active participation, and meanwhile make target groups aware of their social rights.



# CONSCIENTISATION

“Conscientisation” has been defined as the process by which people come to a better understanding of the socio-cultural reality that shapes their existence on the one hand, and their capacity to transform that reality on the other. It involves praxis, understood as the dialectical relationship between action and reflection.

– Paulo Freire





The principle of “conscientisation” was addressed in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century by the educator Paulo FREIRE, in his approach to the education system and his concept of education. According to him, the individual goes beyond the stage of awareness of their environment and sociocultural interactions, which he describes as “naive consciousness”, to develop a “critical consciousness”<sup>1</sup>, i.e., the ability to act and play a role in this society. This principle can be applied to the field of social action, more precisely in assisting people in vulnerable situations, for whom this work towards critical consciousness, carried out in support of social workers, represents a key step towards active emancipation.

Thus, the role of social workers is to establish an environment in which the people they support can develop this critical consciousness. A significant work of assessment and conditioning, as described below, is therefore necessary.

## 1. EVALUATION

In social intervention, it is important to distinguish 3 concepts of evaluation, which are:

**The need** - a “demand born of a feeling of lack, of deprivation of something necessary for organic life, or of a feeling of deprivation that leads one to desire what they believe they lack”<sup>2</sup>. The need is not always explicit. For the psycho-sociologist Yann Le Bossé, the need is often defined unilaterally.

**The request** - “the act of making it known that something is desired”<sup>3</sup>. A request implies an actor, someone who makes the request. Thus, the request of the person being assisted is considered as the starting point of the support, and occupies a predominant place in the work of professionals in the social sector. The professional must therefore bring out an unexpressed request.

**The problem** - presented as a “difficulty that puts you in a painful, constraining, annoying situation”<sup>4</sup>. According to Yann Le Bossé, a difficulty is not a problem: it is a reality with which one must learn to cope.

1 <https://www.cairn.info/revue-carrefours-de-l-education-2001-2-page-56.htm>

2 Larousse French dictionary

3 ibid

4 ibid



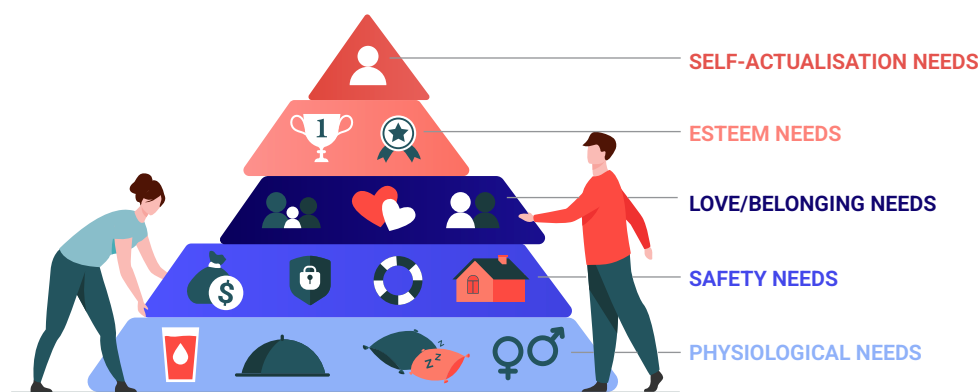
Each of these concepts requires an adapted action according to the history of the person assisted, their level of vulnerability and their state of mind. An assessment of the condition and environment of the person being assisted is therefore carried out by the social worker, in order to propose appropriate means of intervention.

CONCEPT	INTERVENTION	OBJECTIVE
A need	We offer a service	To satisfy
A request	We give an answer	To follow up on
A problem	We develop solutions	To solve

Thus, when it is a matter of satisfying a request or responding to a need, the social worker and the person being assisted are in a “helping relationship”<sup>5</sup> dynamic, whereas in the context of solving a problem or difficulty, this dynamic evolves, with the user contributing to the development of solutions.

## 2. CONDITIONING: MEETING PRIMARY NEEDS

The social worker ensures that the optimal conditions are in place for the emergence of critical consciousness in the client. One of the conditions is to satisfy the primary needs as presented by Maslow in his hierarchy of needs. In the context of social action, the physiological and safety dimensions correspond to what Paulo FREIRE calls naive consciousness. These are indispensable stages in the path towards conscientisation.



<sup>5</sup> (Social policies/Social action/Social work facing the metropolitan institution: a review of issues for a prospective, FORS-Recherche sociale—Didier Vanoni/Pauline Kertudo—19-9-2014).



## Case studies

### Raising awareness—focus on women victims of violence (France)

As a result, in order to meet the primary needs of users, the French association France Horizon has opened a day centre. This facility is open from Monday to Friday, from 9 a.m. to 5.30 p.m. It provides people in precarious situations a safe space to rest and eat, thanks to a hot meal served at lunchtime. Showers, toilets and washing machines are available. The professionals provide reception, security and entertainment. In case of need, the social workers can also assess the family situation and find the structure that best suits their needs. For example, they can refer pregnant women to the maternity ward of the university hospital, or to schools for children's schooling. They are also responsible for helping people to obtain their rights (CSS [social health insurance], CAF [social security], etc.).

## 3. THE SOCIAL WORKER: AN AGENT OF CONSCIENTISATION

The social worker's "primary vocation is to help a person, a family or a group of people to have access to the rights that society confers on them, and to create or recreate social links"<sup>6</sup>. Their main missions are to help the people they assist to become independent, to promote their integration into society and their individual and collective development.

The social worker will thus intervene at different levels to recreate social links and accompany the user in their socialisation process.

There is a double meaning to the concept of conscientisation. When it comes to social intervention, the social worker is firstly an agent of conscientisation: they help, through verbal and non-verbal communication, to raise the user's awareness, then gradually bring them back into contact with the reality of society, and finally accompany them in their efforts to re-socialise. In fact, people in very precarious situations are in a situation of total renunciation of their rights and their place in society, and they have little or no idea of the tools that can be used to ensure their well-being, both within themselves and in their environment.

Secondly, as an agent of conscientisation, the social worker will endeavour to awaken the user's "critical consciousness" by providing them with the support and means necessary for the development of their reflection and their active involvement in society. The educator will be in an assisting and not a substituting approach, they will give back to the person their place as a player capable of thinking and deciding.

<sup>6</sup> Economic, Social and Environmental Council, Changes in society and social work, 2000.



### 3.1. Helping people to become aware of their resources and limits

By means of interviews, questionnaires and recurrent exchanges, the social worker will gather the person's views, address the problems and assess the difficulties in overcoming them. This stage allows for the assessment of the situation, which is essential for defining the objectives of the assistance and establishing a relationship of mutual trust with the user. The assistance is not presented as a substitute option but as a temporary support, in order to help the person to mobilise and to become aware of their potential.

For some users, the weight of culture and education is an obstacle to their development. A woman who has never had the opportunity to express an opinion will thus be in difficulty the first time she is required to make decisions or her own choices. The migrant population, despite having travelled many kilometres to flee their country, often finds themselves at a loss or in difficulty in making the journey to the capital to begin their asylum procedure.

The social worker must be able to adapt to the situation of the person, anticipate their requests, attitudes or reactions to complex or difficult situations, taking into account the rate of assimilation of the information transmitted.

#### Case studies

##### **Raising awareness—focus on women victims of violence (France)**

The social worker guides, supports and works with the person. It is important that the person adheres to the support, that they are an actor of change. In some cases, the person will not be ready to make the change, especially women victims of violence who live in fear for themselves and/or their children.

Domestic violence can take several forms, more or less visible to the victim's entourage, and there are four types of violence:

- Psychological violence (harassment, insults, threats)
- Physical violence (assault and battery)
- Sexual violence (rape, touching)
- Economic violence (deprivation of financial resources and maintenance of dependence).



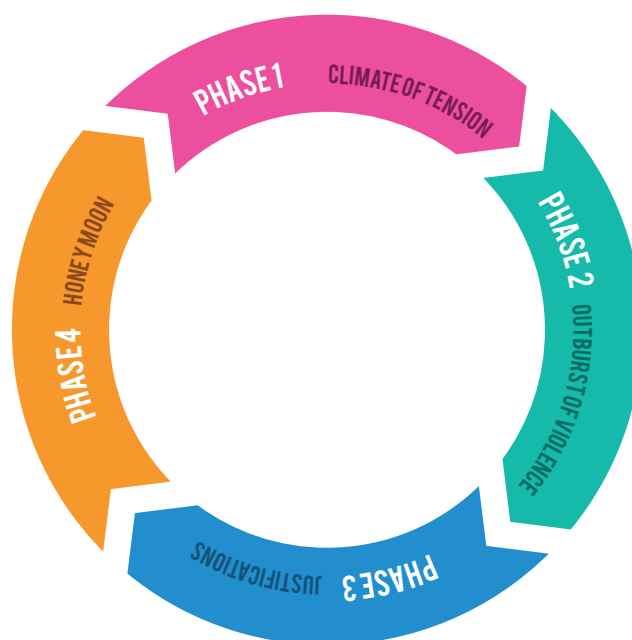


Diagram of the cycle of violence (Solidarité femmes [women solidarity] Loire-Atlantique)

Women victims of violence are confronted with fear, isolation and guilt. The violence is not always continuous, but can be cyclical, alternating episodes of respite and episodes of violence.

It is essential to create the conditions around the woman so that she can express herself freely and be heard. It is common for family and friends to play down the facts. Freeing oneself from the grip of an abusive partner can be a long process, and often takes place in stages. In some situations, it will take a triggering element, a few weeks, months or years later, for the separation from the spouse to take place. Fear for the children is one of those triggers.

During the interviews, the professional will collect the facts without judgement. They will set out the legal framework and remind people that violence is punishable by law. The choice of vocabulary will also be very important. It will be necessary to indicate to the woman her status as a victim and the presence of an aggressor. Naming this status is essential, as it is a recognition for the woman and for society. Then information will be given about filing a complaint (or a log) and the issues involved in this process. The woman will know that she can be assisted.

Often, women minimise violent episodes committed by their partner by finding excuses. And there are returns to the home. The professional will work so that they experience this moment as a step in the separation process, and not just as a step backwards.

The professional's main tool will be the relationship of trust that they have created with the person. Except in cases of imminent danger, the professional must give the victim time to make progress; they are there to help them become aware of their status as victims and of



the spouse's control. They provide information on the possibilities of shelter, pending a firm decision to leave the partner.

In France, there are specific organisations for the care of women victims of violence, with or without children. Victims sometimes have to move from one town or department to another to get away from the violent partner and be safe.

In addition to individual support, women victims of violence can be invited to discussion groups. By talking to women from different backgrounds, they realise that they are not alone. They will be able to meet other victims of domestic violence, some of whom have left their violent spouse for some time, others who have just done so, and others who are still living with their spouse. The aim of these groups is to break the isolation, to free up speech, while creating solidarity between women.

Domestic violence affects all social categories and all age groups.

### Helping to regain self-esteem through peer appreciation and recognition (Italy)

In Italy, the association CARITAS supports homeless people through the "House first" model, in which the house is the centre of the project. This model radically changes the way of working and the relationship with the beneficiary. Indeed, 30% of the support will be dedicated to the ability to live in the house. 70% of the support will be dedicated to the ability to adapt to the new environment (creation of social links, budget control, ability to create neighbourhood relations, mediation, etc.). The person being assisted will be able to take part in discussion groups with peers, to share their experience. A professional will be present during these times, but only as a mediator. For example, they will help people to speak out. The professionals note that these bodies are very much invested in by the people who can find resources among their peers, share their experiences and find solutions together. It is also very rewarding for former residents to come back and talk about their experiences and pass on knowledge based on their own experiences.

The same applies to the programme that helps women who are victims of prostitution. The women live in groups of four in two houses. The social workers can see the solidarity between the women. The fact that they have gone through the same experience brings them together.

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# REINFORCEMENT



Soft skills are defined in the glossary in the appendix



This conscientisation phase is followed by the reinforcement of knowledge and skills. This stage also includes the consolidation of self-esteem, so that the user can move towards an “active” role, i.e., being able to react and take action.

Claire Jouffray, a former social worker who is now a social work trainer, identified different forms of requests in her work “Développement du pouvoir d’agir des personnes et des collectifs”: initial requests and non-explicit requests<sup>[2]</sup>. Initial requests are those expressed by the user during their meeting with a social worker, and non-explicit requests would be those not directly expressed by the user but which the social worker must bring to light. Thus, the valorisation and reinforcement of competences through know-how and interpersonal skills contribute to the self-esteem of the users. This reinforcement phase, which is essential in the empowerment process, has led to the development and improvement of tools and means deployed in social assistance, as follows:

## 1. PROMOTING SELF-ESTEEM

“The need for recognition and validation is clearly a fundamental human need”, Florence Stinglhamber<sup>7</sup>,

Self-confidence is above all about knowing oneself, believing in one’s potential and abilities. A person’s experiences contribute to the construction of self-esteem. The user being supported often has a complex and painful life history. Their precarious situation, whatever the cause, has often damaged their self-image and self-esteem. The lack of self-confidence is a major brake and an obstacle to taking action. The challenge is therefore to initiate a change in the person so that they can believe in their abilities.

According to the psychotherapist Isabelle Filliozat, there are four overlapping stages in the construction of self-confidence from childhood onwards:

THE 4 DIMENSIONS OF SELF-CONFIDENCE	INTERVENTION OF THE SOCIAL WORKER
<b>1. The feeling of inner security</b> Being reassured and protected by physical contact, encouraging words	Through body language from the very first contact/ exchange with the user. The social worker establishes a state of benevolence and a climate of trust throughout the period of support.
<b>2. Self-confidence</b> Trusting one’s own sensations, emotions, feelings and thoughts.	Through communication techniques and active listening, the social worker will help the user to become aware of their feelings/reactions and value their thoughts.
<b>3. Confidence in one’s skills</b> Allowing oneself to bend, fall and get up again on one’s own, being respected, acquiring skills.	Through objectives to be achieved on a daily basis, discuss together the problems and actions that can be put in place, etc.
<b>4. Relational confidence</b> Understanding one’s emotions, learning to speak up, communicating one’s position.	By teaching them to identify feelings and emotions for themselves and for others, helping them to express their positions and points of view, ensuring recognition by others.

<sup>7</sup> Professor of organisational and human resources psychology at UCL\*.



This work towards the development of self-confidence is carried out through different techniques and tools used by social workers, such as individual interviews, discussion groups and group workshops.

## 1.1. Intervention method and tools used by professionals

### a. The Individual Interview

Communication is the basis of all relationships. In social support, it is essential. It must be transparent, honest and clear. It is about creating a relationship of trust between the social worker and the user.

In many organisations, social workers offer individual interviews to the persons they assist. These face-to-face meetings have very different objectives, depending on the client and the issues raised. However, the interview techniques used all aim to enhance the value of the person being supported.

During individual interviews, this valorisation is most often indirect. The social worker, through specific communication techniques which are developed below, gradually leads the person to an awareness of their skills and qualities.

#### › The use of active listening by social workers

The aim here is to create a context that favours exchange and the emergence of a relationship of trust.

Active listening enables to hear beyond the words formulated. This implies being fully available during an interview, but also in less structured moments. In his book, *On Becoming a Person: A Therapist's View of Psychotherapy*, Carl Rogers states that "The more the subject sees (in the listener) a true or authentic being, empathetic, bearing unconditional respect, the more he will move away from a static, fixed, unfeeling, impersonal mode of functioning, and the more he will move towards a kind of functioning marked by a fluid, changing, and fully accepting experience of nuanced personal feelings."<sup>8</sup>

Whether it is in the context of a formal or informal exchange, active listening will lead the user to talk about their personal experiences and to address subjects that they would probably not have mentioned. Active listening also allows us to take in all the verbal and non-verbal information and thus to define an adapted support. Emblematic of this process is the sentence of a user during a meeting with an educator "I would never want to sleep outside in this cold again." With this simple sentence, the social worker understands that there has been a street experience and that the person is perhaps ready to talk about it.

<sup>8</sup> Carl Rogers, *Le Développement de la personne (On Becoming a Person: A Therapist's View of Psychotherapy)*, p. 49, Dunod-InterEditions, 2005.



### › Support and verbal recognition

The social worker systematically acknowledges the user's effort, regardless of the area concerned. For example, a banal and ordinary action such as arriving on time for an appointment or maintaining one's home may require a great deal of effort and energy from the user. It is therefore a matter of passing on compliments received about them and complimenting them socially.

By being observant and caring, the social worker can verbally attest to the progress of the user, who then feels recognised for their hard skills and can thus develop their interpersonal skills.

As mentioned above, it is also through the eyes of others that the self-image is built. It is very rewarding for a person to know that they are appreciated outside the relationship they have with the social worker. This adds objectivity and reinforces the counsellor's discourse. In this way, they are not the only ones to appreciate an effort, to notice progress.

In the support provided to migrant families by the French association France Horizon, social workers use verbalisation during their individual interviews. They may praise the efforts of a user who manages to go beyond their limits or impose constraints on themselves in order to keep an appointment. They can also congratulate families who have managed to solve a problem on their own, or compliment a person who has taken special care with their clothes, hairstyle or hygiene.

### › Encouraging, Supporting, Reassuring

By encouraging and supporting a person in the implementation of a project or the development of an idea, the social worker conveys a sense of personal effectiveness. Mutual trust is a lever that empowers the person and this is highlighted in the words of one user: "I can trust myself, because the other person trusts me and tells me that I can do it."

### b. The organisation of discussion groups

In collective representations, "discussion groups" refer to therapeutic groups in which participants are placed in a circle and take turns to talk about their problems. It is true that our research indicates that focus groups originated in the medical field, particularly in the field of mental health. Today, the benefits of the group are increasingly being invoked in social intervention. Christiane GIHR BOUCLET, a psychotherapist, published an article in 2012 entitled "The discussion group, a space for recognition: from the damaged link to the reconstituted link"<sup>9</sup>, in which she identifies the group as the vector for "learning a repairing link of sharing and exchange [...] at the crossroads between the intra-subjective and the intersubjective, between the social and the intra-psychic"<sup>10</sup>. The discussion groups make it possible to move from a state of introspection, identification and knowledge of one's difficulties to a more relational approach, consisting of having the capacity to verbalise one's difficulties.

<sup>9</sup> "The discussion group, a space for recognition: from the damaged link to the reconstituted link", Christiane GIHR BOUCLET, psychotherapist—Gestalt magazine in 2012  
<sup>10</sup> <https://www.cairn.info/revue-gestalt-2012-1-page-113.htm>. Gestalt magazine (No. 41), pages 113 to 126



During our stay in Jerez de la Frontera, the organisation Projecto Hombre presented its service for preventing the dangers of digital and new technologies. The discussion group is one of the areas in which they work with the target group. The social workers run discussion groups on different themes, particularly video game addiction. Speakers, mostly young people between 15 and 24 years old, talk in these discussion groups. They talk about their stories and the means they used to get out of their addiction. We had the chance to meet one of these young people, who used to talk in the discussion groups. During our meeting, he expressly stated that his participation in these groups was rewarding for him. He understood the importance of this and saw the usefulness of his account for other young people in their identification process.

### **c. Group workshops**

Discussion groups are collective bodies in which individuals meet to discuss the same issue.

However, collective workshops differ from discussion groups in that they are a means of developing the user's skills.

Thus, during collective workshops, people assisted by a social worker meet to work on a common project such as cooking a meal, a manual activity, a sewing workshop, etc. In social work, the workshop is a tool, a pretext for working on many objectives, in particular the valorisation of the person.

An article written by Céline Lepeltier, published in March 2011 in the magazine *Vie Sociale* No. 3 and entitled "Empowerment in 'kitchen workshops', between issues and practice", describes how kitchen workshops become tools for social intervention and the role they play in the development of empowerment. According to her, "cooking workshops tend towards the valorisation of people, and favour the development of knowledge while creating bonds...".

### **Case study**

The CASA dell'ANGELO is a centre for minors that welcomes children placed by the Tribunale per i minorenni (juvenile court). This centre offers a collective workshop on wood. The child will make a product (key ring, puzzle, coaster...). This production is a concrete material element that allows the child to become aware that they have abilities, that they can undertake and produce something for themselves. They also realise the trust placed in them by the supervisors, who let them handle dangerous tools.

The group dimension, in terms of personal valorisation, is particularly important in these workshops. Thus, we observe the presence of witnesses to the success of the person being supported, who is thus valued through the eyes of their peers. In addition, the workshop participants help each other to carry out certain tasks.

In the CASA dell'ANGELO wood workshop, the activity leader explains that when a young person is in difficulty, it is often someone else who comes to help and unblocks the situation. The young person who has provided the solution is therefore all the more valued.





In these workshops, the social worker takes the place of the facilitator and is responsible for the smooth running of the workshop. In a less direct way, they ensure that each participant is valued individually and collectively by using the verbalisation methods described above. The social worker, through their observation and analysis skills, suggests a workshop adapted to the skills of the person being supported, in order to enhance their value and not to place them in a situation of failure. In other countries, professionals use group workshops to enable people to strengthen their skills. The supervisors of the Spanish association HOGAR DE LA SALLE offer group workshops to the regularised foreign minors they receive. Indeed, the young people very often plan to return to school or to find a professional training. In former classrooms, the structure has also set up workshops in line with the wishes of the young people (construction, hairdressing, catering). The skills, “hard skills” and “interpersonal skills”, which are the pillars of Empowerment, are thus expressed through role-playing.

## 2. USERS’ “HARD SKILLS” AND “INTERPERSONAL SKILLS”

Before working on strengthening skills and competences, it is necessary to identify them. When we refer to the notion of competences, we are including the three inseparable processes in human beings: knowledge, hard skills and interpersonal skills. Knowledge refers to the knowledge acquired during schooling through learning, “hard skills” refers to the knowledge acquired through experience, practice in a field, and “interpersonal skills” refers to a person’s behaviour, attitude and values, including relational qualities.<sup>11</sup> Each person possesses these three competences, but they identify themselves in a singular way. Education and compulsory schooling have given every citizen access to knowledge, regardless of social class. “hard skills” and “interpersonal skills” evolve over the course of one’s life. Everyone will strive to develop the latter two in both the social and professional spheres. Therefore, for precarious and marginalised people, each everyday life action [going to the doctor, shopping, arriving on time for an appointment, introducing oneself, managing a budget] requires the development and reinforcement of hard skills and interpersonal skills. Very often, highlighting these everyday skills helps to boost self-esteem (“You are capable of”).

### 2.1. Intervention method and tools used by professionals

In socio-educational support, professionals use different tools to support the persons they assist in strengthening their skills. As mentioned above, individual interviews and discussion groups are used to enhance the value of people. These same tools are used to identify and strengthen the various knowledge of the individuals. However, it is important to underline and highlight the observation skills developed by social workers to detect the verbal and non-verbal language of the user and to adapt their speech, attitude and support to the user’s behaviour.

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.welcometothejungle.com/fr/articles/savoir-savoir-etre-savoir-faire-le-trio-gagnant-entreprise>. Consulted on 24/02/2022





## a. Observation

Philippe GABERAN, a renowned specialised educator and author of numerous works in the field of educational sciences, refers in his book “Les cent mots pour être éducateur, dictionnaire pratique du quotidien” (A hundred words to be an educator, a practical dictionary of everyday life) to observation as “one of the educator’s very first skills”. Indeed, observation is a fundamental skill developed by the educator but also by all social workers, from the very beginning. The author adds that “through close and careful observation, the educator is able to detect attitudes, gestures or words that announce a change”.

In their practice, social workers observe the verbal and non-verbal and analyse them, in order to provide an adequate response.

In the work of the educator, observation is part of the practice and is an indispensable tool for the assistance of the most precarious.

For example, during the interviews, we should note certain attitudes that suggest fatigue (tense facial features, yawning, difficulty in understanding, incoherent speech, crying). We can then ask the person about the reasons for this fatigue and propose an action plan to help them. As part of the reinforcement of different skills, the social worker uses their observation skills to assess and evaluate the user’s behaviour during an interview (interpersonal skills) and/or their knowledge of the French administrative system (hard skills).

## 3. REINFORCING KNOWLEDGE OF INSTITUTIONAL PARTNERS

Whatever the field in which social workers work (disability, child protection, social and professional integration of excluded people, etc.), they are confronted with a public that has little or no knowledge of the workings of institutions, but also of their rights and duties as citizens.

### 3.1. Increasing the knowledge of users for access to rights

Social work makes it possible to create a link and act as a bridge between the user and the aid structures. This means that the primary role of the social worker is to provide users with all the information concerning their rights in various fields such as legal, health and/or socio-professional. Without this guidance and support, people in vulnerable situations, with little or no knowledge of the social system, will be kept in a situation of distress.

“Working together” is a common practice in the field of social support, which is all the more necessary in a society that is undergoing successive changes, leaving little room for true social integration.

Each professional has his or her own qualification and field of intervention. Thus, an educator will not have the same skills as a job counsellor or a nurse. Partnership is therefore becoming an essential tool for the overall social support of individuals or families, particularly those who have several problems of different kinds (legal, health, parenthood, housing, etc.). This partnership may be between professionals within the association responsible for social support, or external, depending on the difficulties raised. For example, in the area of the rights of women victims of domestic violence, professionals



can seek help or advice from organisations that deal specifically with women victims of violence, or as in the case of unaccompanied minors, advice, particularly of a legal nature, can be sought from associations that deal with this issue.

### Case study

Another example of a partnership between associations and institutions is the “Casa de la Mujer” (“Women’s House”), located in Jerez de la Frontera in Andalusia, where the town council provides a facility to receive women victims of violence, without appointment. They can come there to seek information on their rights, be guided and accompanied to other services if they wish to go to court, leave their home or receive support to rebuild their lives. This type of partnership exists in many other Andalusian cities, which have as their main missions the protection and prevention of violence against women and the fight for women’s rights.

To take up Maslow’s pyramid and his theory of needs presented above, the strengthening phase in the Empowerment process allows the user to acquire the means and skills to access levels 3-4 of the pyramid, namely the need for belonging and the need for self-esteem. The role of the social worker in the support provided is essential to bring the user towards integration and social emancipation.

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# TAKE ACTION

“Autonomy is based on the capacity of the person to make choices, to assimilate their own decisions, to feel responsible for their actions, to know how to position themselves in relation to the social order, to be coherent with their values, to identify the rules and laws that they respect and to be aware of why they respect them”.

– Edgar Morin





The last stage of the empowerment journey is linked to the user's ability to take action. This stage seals the achievement of self-actualisation towards social fulfilment, the last level of Maslow's pyramid.

## 1. TAKING ACTION

Thus, taking action is a key stage in the development of a person's autonomy, as this stage requires the ability to make one's own choices, and results in decision-making.

Alan Rowe and Richard Luecke<sup>12</sup> propose a definition of decision-making that can be summarised as follows:



Decision-making thus involves several stages, as Rowe and Luecke explain: "A poorly framed question may never be answered. On the other hand, if you have framed a problem well, you are halfway to the solution." They add that "the search for alternatives is essential to decision-making. [...] Without alternatives, there is no real choice." Making a decision or taking responsibility for one's choices is a difficult action in itself, and even more so for the user who suffers from a lack of confidence or who doubts their competence. This often leads to a delegation of decision-making to the support worker. In the long term, this subordinate state becomes an automatic for the user, who is unable to take action. In order to reverse this trend, the social worker uses several techniques and tools throughout the assistance towards self-esteem and self-development.

<sup>12</sup> "The essentials of Decision Making" Alan Rowe and Richard Luecke, 2017



### 1.1. Intervention method and tools

The social worker<sup>13</sup> helps the person to analyse/diagnose the problem. To do so, they must succeed in creating a relationship of trust in order to have a constructive exchange. This implies the use of several skills, such as active listening or rephrasing of information in order to ensure the same level of understanding of the situation and the problems. It is essential that the professional has sociocultural and multicultural awareness combined with empathy to be able to accompany the person correctly.

When this problem and/or objective definition work is done, the social worker will lead the person to evaluate the possibilities, solutions or “alternatives”, to analyse their capacities and to know their environment. This work has already been initiated in the reinforcement part, but it may sometimes be necessary to review the person’s previously identified abilities, in order to make the link with the diagnosed problem. At this stage, the professional may need to clarify, simplify or popularise the problem and the person’s abilities. They must therefore be able to provide communication adapted to each person. The professional must have problem-solving skills to be able to guide the person.

The assisted person will develop their ability to make choices taking into account their capacities, their rights and duties, their environment and the society in which they live.

#### a. The individualised project

The individualised project is the first tool needed to accompany this process towards emancipation. Presented in the form of a questionnaire, it aims to define, together with the person, the areas of support to be worked on. It is used in all areas of social intervention: childhood, employment, access to housing, budget, health, etc. In the individualised project, the actions to be carried out are named with a deadline and the means to achieve them. The social worker must ensure that precise and achievable objectives are defined with the person.

This tool is used throughout the period of assistance, to discuss the actions implemented by the person, and the positive and negative points of the action taken.

#### Case study

##### “Shelter for women victims of domestic violence” Spain

For example, at the association Casa de la Mujer in Jerez de la Frontera, a woman who has been the victim of domestic violence is sheltered for three days when she leaves the marital home. During these three days, the social worker explains the person’s rights (regarding resources, separation procedure, child custody, etc.) and the next possible steps according to their situation. The person may be offered to leave the area where she lives, to move into safe

<sup>13</sup> Soft skills are defined in the glossary in the appendix



accommodation, to go and live with family...

On average, women who are victims of domestic violence make seven return trips before leaving home. This fact must therefore be integrated by the professional into the departure process. At the end of the three-day shelter period, the women decide whether or not to return to the marital home. This period of isolation allows the woman to feel protected, which is essential for an informed and reasoned **decision-making**.

### “French office for Immigration and Integration” France

Another example is that the asylum seeker has the choice of accepting or refusing accommodation offered by the French Office for Immigration and Integration (OFII). Refusal of this referral results in the loss of their rights to the Material Reception Conditions (CMA), which cover the asylum allowance, referral to accommodation structures and assistance from a social worker. If referral is refused, the person is therefore deprived of rights to resources, accommodation and support.

In this case, it is essential that the assisted person be aware of the consequences of their choice: they will have to take **responsibility** for their decision and for the consequences of it. In such situations, the role of the social worker is to explain to the family their rights and the consequences.

In these examples, the social worker’s task is to put the person back at the centre of the decisions by questioning them and encouraging them to think. For decision-making, time is a parameter to be taken into account. However, obstacles can be observed in the support for decision-making. For example, for migrants, the **language barrier** may imply an objective dependency relationship with the social worker. For this group, the intervention of an interpreter may be necessary.

The professional’s intervention with the person comes from a request from their management or funders. The professional’s mission must not influence the person’s decision-making. They must show **impartiality and objectivity** between the person’s objective and what they have been asked to do. They must be careful to be as **neutral** as possible in their guidance. This also applies to their personal opinions and values, which must not interfere with the person’s decision-making. Women who are victims of domestic violence can thus return home with their partner without the professional passing judgement or interfering with this choice.

Support in decision-making is a process that can be repeated several times before the person is able to decide for themselves. The professional must therefore be aware that the decision-making phase takes time.



## 2. Putting into action:

The social worker will have an important role to play in guiding the person into action, taking into consideration their abilities but also their disabilities.

This requires empathy, socio-cultural awareness, active listening skills and confidence in the other person's abilities. There is a notion of respect for the dignity of the person, which includes taking into account their history, their relationships, their possible difficulties in projecting themselves and in carrying out their projects. The action must be achievable and therefore thought through and designed for this purpose. The professional's ability to take the initiative will be the determining factor. The person must not be exposed to the limits of their abilities or placed in a situation of impossibility, in order to avoid putting them in difficulty, or even in a situation of failure.

The professional therefore expects this reflection or exchange to develop their critical thinking skills, autonomy and personal confidence.

Following this action, the professional must carry out a systematic reflection with the person being assisted on the effects of this action and the lessons learned.

The difficulties encountered during the action should not be seen as an obstacle, but rather as the highlighting of a difficulty that had not been identified before. The professional must then lead the person being assisted to reflect on this difficulty and the solutions to overcome it. This work therefore leads to the definition of a new action that allows the difficulty to be overcome in order to return to the initial action. This is not a failure but a development.

This reflection, which comes from the person being assisted, will enable the action to be repeated or a new one to be introduced.

This will lead to a feeling of achievement, success or fulfilment. The person, valued in this action, will thus move towards the beginning of emancipation.

### 2.1. Intervention methods and tools

To implement this reflection, the professional will be able to use two intervention techniques: the individual interview and/or the collective workshop. The professional will be able to rely on the individualised project to prepare the interview grid and the themes developed during the collective workshops. It may be useful to repeat the interviews or group workshops several times to move forward at the person's pace and allow time for reflection and analysis between each meeting.

#### Case study

The main objective of the CARITAS Centre in Italy is to support homeless people in finding housing. Having noted the limitations of the traditional support system, this association chose to adopt the "House in first" model, where the house is at the centre of the project. This model radically changes the way of working and the relationship with the beneficiary. 30% of the support is dedicated to the ability



to live in the home, while 70% of the support is dedicated to the ability to adapt to the new environment. It is the putting into action of people that is at the heart of the support. The professional has a role of support but also of intermediary. They develop or enhance the skills of the person being supported, such as the creation of social links, budget management and the ability to create neighbourhood relationships. They also demonstrate mediation skills.

To be more concrete, after having taken the time to discuss with the person being assisted their social, listening and relationship-building skills, the professional leads this person to introduce themselves to their neighbourhood in order to initiate a contact and thus create a relationship.

The religious congregation Hogar La Salle in Jerez de la Frontera, Spain, offers different services to a range of regularised young migrant men aged between 18 and 20. In particular, it has an accommodation centre and a training centre, which is interesting for illustrating the implementation of the empowerment process.

This centre has rooms with all the equipment required for learning a trade. The young people are thus put in a situation with specific interpersonal skills and hard skills, enhancing the personal and professional skills they have already acquired, and helping them to develop new ones. The trainer must show flexibility and sociocultural awareness by adapting their approach to each trainee, according to their history and the skills they have already acquired. Active listening and exchanges between the trainer and the trainee build confidence, which is essential for developing the rest of the training course. The professional must also put forward their leadership skills to lead the group towards a common goal that generates solidarity. They are able to manage the emotions and stress of each individual so that the trainees can turn them into a personal strength. In this case, the young person develops their skills in relation to themselves and to the group. They begin to identify their place in a group and develop social skills such as self-confidence, self-assurance, taking initiative and teamwork. Beyond these latter skills, they develop or identify professional skills already acquired, such as the ability to learn how to learn, creativity, time management, organisation and above all teamwork. Putting the skills into action is at the heart of the training and therefore enables the young person to value and apply their skills, to develop their critical thinking and to find the resources to evolve.

However, the professional must be vigilant about the stability of this putting into action. A failure may indeed lead to negative effects, incapacity or devaluation. Similarly, although the question of time is important, it must not lead to too much time being taken, with the risk that the action will be postponed or even abandoned.

The professional must ensure that they have enough time to encourage this exchange, to avoid being overwhelmed by their workload and their desire to move quickly in the support. Indeed, if the person is put into action in an exercise that they do not master or have not been able to prepare for, as in CARITAS, this can lead to





a failure to connect with the neighbourhood and thus to the isolation of the person. This is how a person's disabilities must be taken into consideration, and identified through active listening.

The professional plays an important role in listening, building confidence and valuing the young person so that they do not become demoralised in the event of facing difficulties in their learning, but on the contrary are able to rely on their network.

Throughout their assistance, the professional will work on the emancipation of the person in the different areas of daily life: autonomy, professional, social, physical, psychological, etc. The professional is required to provide information on the steps to be taken to find a job, housing, access to care, etc. They adapt to the person's skills and adjust their practice according to their abilities. For example, they may invite the person to go to an administration themselves to find out about a procedure. If the person needs to be reassured, they can review with them the information they need to request. By carrying out these actions alone, the person will become increasingly autonomous, gain confidence and thus emancipate.

### **3. Emancipation:**

Emancipation is the final stage in the process of empowerment of the person. This process enables the individual to develop their understanding of the world and their decision-making capacity. More precisely, it is about freeing oneself from an authority, a power or a hold.

Promoting the emancipation of others must be done with the words of the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire in mind: "Nobody liberates anybody else, and nobody liberates themselves all alone. People liberate themselves in fellowship with each other." (Pedagogy of the Oppressed, 1974). It is therefore necessary to be able to act personally and collectively on one's environment and to be able to modify the social relations of domination in a more equitable way.

This process enables the people supported to change their view of themselves and of society, to develop their capacity to give an opinion, to share their experiences and their skills and potential by taking part in collective actions.

According to the National Council for Policies to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion in France, "[...] the term 'participation' refers to attempts to give individuals a role in decision-making affecting a community. At the level of policy implementation, the term 'participation' refers to taking part in collective action. For people experiencing poverty or social exclusion, participation is an opportunity to give their opinion, to make their living conditions known, to share their experience."

**Intervention method and tools**

The different stages of empowerment developed by the professional lead the person to emancipate themselves until they become autonomous. The role of the social worker is to continue to be present but in a more distant way. The social worker will support, guide and let the person take a more active role in their daily life.

The professional must show leadership, organisational and time



management skills in their role as a support worker. However, it is necessary that they accept to share the power of decision and responsibility, to recognise the knowledge of each person so that the people being assisted can express their views and communicate their needs. Facilitating groups or individual interviews is an essential skill for the professional to be able to guide people, while allowing them to express themselves freely.

## Case studies

### The Social Life Council

The Social Life Council (CVS for Conseil de la Vie Sociale)

In France, the Social Life Council (CVS) or users' rights of expression is a form of participation of the person in order to guarantee their rights and their participation in the functioning of the establishment (Law of 2 January 2002 renovating the social and medico-social action, then decree n°2004-287 of 25 March 2004). This collegiate body, which must function democratically, must be held once a quarter.

An idea box can also be made available to enable people to make proposals outside the CVS body. This is a different way of communicating which may be suitable for people who are not comfortable speaking in a group.

In the same way, a grievance book should be placed at the reception of each establishment to allow people to express themselves.

In France, the (collective) accommodation centre for asylum seekers proposes a weekly Social Life Council where the subjects brought up are as much the responsibility of the social workers as of the people accommodated. It is a place of exchange and expression where people participate in the life of the centre and can make proposals for the group. It is within this framework that they will be able to develop skills as public speaking, open-mindedness and tolerance, self-assurance, and self-confidence.

Support and accommodation facilities for women victims of violence are a perfect example of facilities working towards emancipation. Indeed, the women in their care have often lost all confidence in themselves. Contacting an organisation specialising in domestic violence is the first step in a process that can lead to emancipation. In particular, women are offered the opportunity to meet at the day centre where they are protected, where they benefit from active listening and where they are valued. Discussion groups are set up to help them gain self-confidence and trust in others, and to learn about their strengths and weaknesses, leading to self-awareness. Some women will return to their home but this is sometimes a stage before they can bounce back and make informed choices. The work carried out jointly by professionals, discussion groups and psychologists help women to free themselves from this hold. Thanks to their recovered or developed critical thinking, some women are able to talk about their past experience. They can address other women, professionals,



students and actively participate in awareness campaigns on domestic violence.

The Social Life Council remains a mandatory tool in France (law 2002/2) which can be set up by institutions without consultation with the people being assisted. However, care must be taken not to use the public as an instrument, with the sole aim of complying with the law. The social worker must ensure that the group expresses itself in a benevolent manner and that everyone expresses their ideas freely, without judgement.

In the context of the emancipation of the person, care must be taken not to give them too many responsibilities. Indeed, even if the person is in the process of developing their skills and self-confidence, not everything is a matter of skills and willpower, and the professional must be aware of the person's inherent limitations. Therefore, the professional must keep in mind the person's journey of support and the process of emancipation.

Emancipation leads the person to free themselves from society and to have a better understanding of their place in it. This approach therefore enables the person to be active and to anticipate their daily life and their place in society, thus initiating and embodying the concept of active citizenship.



# ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP



Soft skills are defined in the glossary in the appendix



## ACTIVE PARTICIPATION IN THE COMMUNITY

Active citizenship is often promoted through participation in groups and networks in order to increase impact and effectiveness. The individual, who wants to engage and help the society in which they live, is often aware that alone they would have less impact. Active citizenship is about wanting to participate in the improvement of society, not only for oneself but also for others or for the group. Working together preserves the aspirations of the individual and the group. This can take the form of various actions such as petitions, demonstrations, but also simply voting democratically, paying taxes or volunteering. It reminds us that we belong to a community, it “urges people to engage with the world around them”<sup>14</sup>. Collective action allows for a pooling of ideas and skills that can lead to greater efficiency in achieving the desired goal.

### **1. Promoting social/territorial/institutional networks: Informal or formal groups, a tool for emancipation towards active citizenship**

The creation or organisation of formal or informal groups to discuss common experiences is a form of active participation in society. It allows people to interact with others, to emancipate themselves and to develop confidence in themselves and in others. In recent years, experience has been emphasised as opposed to education, knowledge or predispositions of individuals. As the sociologist François DUBET explains, “In a social ensemble that can no longer be defined by its cultural and functional homogeneity, by its central conflicts and by equally central social movements, the players and institutions are no longer reducible to a single logic, to a role and to a cultural programming of behaviours.”<sup>15</sup>

Thus, the group’s role is to offer the people being assisted a space of trust and freedom, a place of expression and exchange that can contribute to their integration and independence towards emancipation.

#### **1.1. Representing your group**

Networks and communities are created naturally or not, often thanks to or because of common traits or characteristics. These may be opinions, cultural customs, physical traits, activities, etc. Coming together is a way to make oneself visible in society, to fight against the sometimes felt feeling of being excluded or invisible. In this case, the objective is to highlight these points of convergence, to make them known and to make the voices of these individuals constituting the group heard.

<sup>14</sup> Citoyenneté active (Active citizenship), Tom HAWTHORN, <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/fr>.  
<sup>15</sup> François Dubet: *Sociologie de l'expérience* (Sociology of experience), Paris, Seuil, 1995



It is often through political opinions or societal differences that representativeness is carried. It constitutes a “right to be represented” as Sieyès refers to it in his pamphlet *What is the Third Estate?* The individual is, before being part of a society or a population, a unique and original subject who has an individual right to expression, action and participation. The co-construction of a common speech between people allows the group and the individuals to emancipate themselves.

It is important to act in order to allow the user to emancipate themselves, to act in order to create networks or to get closer to groups that can represent them at different levels: political, societal, professional, etc.

### 1.2. Intervention method and tools

The professional must guide the user by giving them the opportunity to find out as much as possible about their rights, and must be open-minded and patient, listen and empathise, while being attentive to the behaviour and language used. Professionals also need to be adaptable, flexible and organised to deal with this aspect of support. To encourage active participation, the professional may go as far as organising workshops to bring together members of a group, or direct the user to existing groups. The aim is to give users full access to a privileged and protected communication space, to acquire intellectual curiosity, open-mindedness but above all an ability to communicate emotionally, in clarity, security and serenity. The group will then become a means for the user to act confidently and to acquire knowledge and skills; such as speaking and confronting different opinions or points of view.

### Case studies

➤ The discussion group is a tool frequently used by professionals across Europe. This is the case, for example, of the “Projecto Hombre” association in Spain, which works on a support programme for minors. The professionals house and assist mainly young teenagers who have serious problems with addictive behaviour and behavioural disorders. This association has set up discussion groups to help its users.

➤ Similarly, as part of its “FACE ô Femmes” programme, the FACE association in France sets up discussion groups for the users it supports. The aim of the association is to enable a group of women (job seekers from disadvantaged neighbourhoods) to break out of their isolation and regain their self-confidence through the group effect. Workshops are set up so that these women can share their experiences, rebuild their lives by helping each other with their professional projects, and take charge of their lives.



➤ The NGO “Defence for Children” in Italy organises discussion groups and encourages the participation of children in the drafting of laws on minors’ rights. Groups of children are formed to analyse and understand the elements that determine rights violations. Children are then trained to develop awareness and acquire knowledge and skills in the area of law. Finally, round table discussions are organised with judges and representatives of the Italian state. Children have the opportunity to express their views on the drafting of laws that directly affect them. They join together to ensure that their voices are heard and their views taken into account.

### 1.3. Acting as a group to promote social change

“...belief that there are spillover effects between social engagement and political participation: citizens who are integrated and engaged in a civil society organisation will—sooner or later—also become involved in political affairs.”<sup>16</sup>

Widmaier Benedikt

Discrimination and intolerance are often based on a lack of knowledge of the Other or their culture. The group enables the sharing and pooling of knowledge and information to ensure communication and external dissemination, in order to change thinking. The group encourages collective reflection and action, a better commitment and a stronger involvement in society.

Involvement in society can also take a political form. It can be about respecting rights and duties such as voting or paying taxes, as well as the right to strike or to stand for election; the individual contributes to the life of society and participates in social cohesion<sup>17</sup>.

### 1.4. Intervention method and tools

Social workers need to be **creative and convincing** in order to get the user to step forward and take initiatives. Professionals can raise users’ awareness of certain societal causes to encourage them to take action, through themed meetings or activities (poster-making, workshops, etc.) organised to stimulate their interest.

The professional, in a benevolent and detached manner, enables the user to develop **communication skills, a spirit of synthesis and a propensity to put the subjects discussed into perspective**. They can themselves develop skills in the understanding of communication tools. They must give priority to spaces where people can express themselves and have access to them.

<sup>16</sup> Widmaier Benedikt, “Chapter 8. Active citizenship 3.0/2020: youth participation and social capital after post-democracy” In: Council of Europe editions, Points de vue sur la jeunesse (Views on youth) - Volume 1. 2020 – Quelles perspectives ? (Which perspectives?) Strasbourg, Council of Europe, “Hors collection”, 2014, p. 131-147. DOI: 10.3917/europ.coll.2015.01.0131 URL: <https://www.cairn.info/---page-131.htm>

<sup>17</sup> Citoyenneté active (Active citizenship), Tom HAWTHORN, <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/fr>.



## Case studies

- This professional work is notably highlighted by the Italian association “Nuovi Profili”, created in 2008 by young Italians who did not recognise themselves in the hackneyed concept of “second generation” and the prejudices attached to it. The association’s intention is to make itself known in order to highlight the cultural plurality of our contemporary societies. The association fights against all forms of discrimination, promotes cultural exchanges for mutual enrichment and constructive coexistence. Multilingualism is encouraged, as well as the construction of a critical consciousness. The association tries to act through a cultural and educational centre in Genoa, where various linguistic, didactic, cultural services and activities are offered. It also intervenes in children’s classes to promote equality and peace and to fight against discrimination due to ignorance.
- The French association “Benenova”, created by volunteers and professionals, allows everyone to participate in volunteer actions in their area. Its objective is to connect individuals wishing to volunteer with associations in need. On its online site, it proposes “offers” of group actions for different localities in France, to which users can sign up, giving time and energy to the community according to their aspirations.
- Many French institutions have also set up joint projects with citizens. The city of Angers, for example, allocates a “participatory budget” each year to citizens who wish to do so. The inhabitants of Angers can submit ideas for the territory’s layout, which are then debated, developed and voted on by the inhabitants. They are involved throughout this process and also in the development and implementation of the projects.

The groups are a way of encouraging the active participation of users in society in order to improve things and the world in which they live<sup>18</sup>. Participation in the life of society can mean involvement in the associative network (civil society) but also involvement in public life (political commitment), and thus becoming an active citizen.

<sup>18</sup> Citoyenneté active (Active citizenship), Tom HAWTHORN, <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/fr>.





## 2. Promoting participation in the design, development and management of projects. Empowerment and active citizenship: participation and project development

As mentioned above, we have been able to develop the concept of ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP in all its forms, and in particular how it produces its effects by relying on existing networks.

In this last part, we shall present the steps and means that can be used by people who are emerging from their fragile or vulnerable condition to intervene in society in a disinterested manner, in a real process of active citizenship.

Bjenk Ellefsen, Jacques Hamel and Maxime Wilkins, in their article “Citizenship and the right to citizenship of young people”, describe citizenship as “the issue of the link that binds every citizen to the political association of which they are a member and by means of which they realise the ‘good life<sup>19</sup>’ that is dear to them and in which they recognise themselves in all respects”.<sup>20</sup>

This article sheds light on the process that encourages an individual who is sufficiently fulfilled to create citizen-oriented projects.

How can social workers, through their practices and tools, act as project “incubators”? Indeed, we observe that social workers carry out, through their daily missions, a whole work of confidence building, valorisation and awareness of the condition and the potential of the assisted users. Consciously or not, this work has an effect on the future citizens in the process of integration, in terms of their possible feeling of belonging, their aspirations and even their actions.

### 2.1. Promoting the concept of active citizenship—1st phase: participation tool and project development

Citizenship is foremost the notion of collective awareness, general will and mutual association.<sup>21</sup>

#### B. ELLEFSEN, J. HAMEL and M. WILKINS

The social worker helps the development and fulfilment of the person, through their involvement in a local socio-educational relationship and within a given time frame. This work is mostly part of the **educational project**. The aim of the project is to help the person to change their vision of themselves and to help them to picture themselves in the future, to evolve and to gain confidence. The notion of project therefore has a central place in the intervention of social workers. The social worker and the person being assisted meet on a regular basis to evaluate the objectives of the project. The person being assisted is then a witness to and a player in their own journey. Moreover, the project allows the social worker to build up a legitimacy of intervention.

<sup>19</sup>The “good life” gives the community its *raison d’être* and confers on everyone its right to citizenship. This expression is understood, literally, as the right to perform the actions, to enjoy the privileges reserved for members of the community.

<sup>20</sup> B. ELLEFSEN, J. HAMEL and M. WILKINS: *La citoyenneté et le droit de cité des jeunes* (Citizenship and the right to citizenship of young people), article in *Sociologie et Société*, autumn 1999, p. 90  
<sup>21</sup> *ibid*



In sociology, the term “project” was used in the 1970s to highlight the notion of action in sociological theories which were then dominated by questions of social determinism which weighed on individuals. Authors such as M. Crozier or A. Touraine have sought to reinstate a place for the **initiatives of actors**: individual or collective. From then on, the question is how to enable the actors to escape from a certain fatalism regarding the social system, which is often fraught with symbolic violence, and to develop a plan of action and thus become aware that there are possibilities for action which are often unexploited.

The issue of symbolic violence is developed by the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. He suggests that relations of social domination are integrated by the dominated classes as soon as socialisation or integration begins, as part of social reproduction. Social workers, by virtue of their training, may be aware of these societal realities and may seek, by informing users as much as possible about their rights, to provide them with the “keys” to position themselves in all strata of their lives in an informed manner. This process can enable users to become aware of the social determinisms at work in their situation and try to extricate themselves from them. In practice, the aim is to provide information on rights, to develop the project with the person being assisted, taking into account their own issues, and to encourage them to participate and activate their project in a positive way. How does this relate to active citizenship? In this respect, **participation** is a key and indispensable dimension of what constitutes active citizenship.

### 2.1.1. Intervention method and tools

In sociology, participation refers to attempts to give individuals a role in decision-making that affects a community. At the level of policy implementation, the term “participation” refers to taking part in collective action. For people experiencing poverty or social exclusion, participation is an opportunity to give their opinion, to make their living conditions known, to share their experience. And for professionals, it can lead to an improvement of policies and laws, by being as close as possible to the needs and expectations of the population concerned. The role of social workers, in order to bring about the participation of the people they assist, would be in this context to be able to **give users the time to understand the subjects** on which they could be consulted or associated, and to offer them **support** on the subjects over which they have no control. It would therefore be a question of being able to produce a different temporality, far removed from the emergency or crisis situation.

The first step is to prepare the assisted group while taking into consideration their needs and abilities to carry out the project. Then, in a second step, it is necessary to create spaces conducive to the development of the project. This would give the group the opportunity to be informed, to become aware and to feel involved. It is essential to generate interaction and debate while remaining an informal space.



## Case study

➤ The Departmental Child and Family Centre (CDEF for “Centre Départemental Enfance et Famille”) of Loire-Atlantique in France benefited from a major rehabilitation programme from 2015. The first phase of rehabilitation initiated by the Loire Atlantique department was to involve children, social workers, technical staff and night watchmen in the design of the premises. Together with the educators and the children, they created workshops to understand the problems and to create resource and playful spaces that were as close as possible to the needs of each person in the CDEF. The views of the children were heard and taken into account, as were the needs of the educators: to be able to work in a way that respects the privacy of the people being received, while guaranteeing the need for security and ensuring the smooth running of the services. These very children, although damaged by their experiences, will be the citizens of tomorrow. A space has been built so that they can feel like subjects before anything else. Jean-Jacques Rousseau in the 18th century: “No one can be happy unless they enjoy their own esteem.” Julie or the New Heloise 1761

### Identified obstacles

In the light of this illustration, the risks for social workers would be to “do things in their place”, to place themselves in the position of experts and to think they know best, thus ignoring the clear-sightedness and lucidity that users often show towards them.

### Additional recommendations

It is important that the person being assisted be able to develop their **creativity** and be aware that they are able to intervene and reflect on different subjects, alone or in a group. This participation helps to develop **self-confidence** and **empathy** towards others.

## 2.2. Increased participation in project development: 2<sup>nd</sup> phase

Political association requires the sharing of the good in the form of a common will, not to say values capable of binding individuals together so that citizenship forms the body and the political institutions through it. Indeed, the social cohesion generated by citizenship emanates from projects and values shared by citizens<sup>22</sup>.

### 2.2.1. Intervention method and tools

Building the legitimacy of the social worker to intervene with the target group

Social workers build legitimacy of action with respect to the legislative and institutional framework, but also because the user recognises their right to intervene with them. In relation to professional ethics, the legitimacy of intervention is a privileged tool in the framework of a quality aid relationship. Nourished by trust, accuracy, reciprocity and

22 B. ELLEFSEN, J. HAMEL and M. WILKINS: La citoyenneté et le droit de cité des jeunes (Citizenship and the right to citizenship of young people), article in Sociologie et Société, autumn 1999, p. 90  
B. ELLEFSEN, J. HAMEL and M. WILKINS



respect, it can lead to an individual's progress at a specific moment in their life.

According to P. GABERAN, the educational relationship is defined as follows: "it is not a process of repair and normalisation of the individual but it (the educational relationship) is a time, a space at the same time unstable and secure within which a person required for their competences helps another to pass from living to existing [...]; the educational relationship first teaches to accept oneself such as they are (the person) in order to become what they want to be, instead of transforming themselves into what others, parents, institutions, society, would like them to be."<sup>23</sup>

This method of intervention is jointly built thanks to the commitment of the social workers and the cooperation of the people being assisted. The latter must be encouraged by a secure and stimulating environment, in order to allow users to develop their abilities to carry out their projects. In addition, it will be necessary to set time benchmarks in order to monitor the different stages of the project and to value what has already been achieved.

### Case study

- The Cali Programme ("gypsy woman") is one of the many actions offered by the Secretariado Gitano (Gypsy Secretariat) of the municipality of Jerez de la Frontera, in Andalusia (Spain). This association aims to promote the identity of gypsy women within Spanish society. All the social actions of this association use empowerment as a privileged tool to support a particularly stigmatised community. The action carried out with gypsy women is a work of self-esteem, before considering entering the labour market. This is achieved by involving the women in workshops focusing on empowerment. The support work focuses on the issue of fears and difficulties encountered in everyday life. The Cali programme tries to provide answers and reassurance, as some participants think that doing certain activities will make them lose their gypsy identity. Therefore, there is, in fact, an important work of introspection on identity, and awareness of the central role in the family system. The programme provides spaces for segregated debates in order to guarantee respect for each person's opinions and experience, and to work towards greater "employability", thus encouraging the participation of the beneficiaries in events to promote their gypsy identity. This includes actions aimed at bringing about changes in organisations, systems and policies in order to remove obstacles that prevent the socio-economic promotion of gypsy women, the defence of their right to non-discrimination or access to their full rights as citizens, as well as awareness-raising and advocacy

<sup>23</sup> GABERAN P. - La relation éducative (The Educational relationship) – Ed. Erès 2010, p.14



activities, and the training of professionals.<sup>24</sup>

The aim of this work is to develop critical thinking, assertiveness and autonomy of the participants based on “peer support<sup>25</sup>”. They will also be made aware of multicultural issues.

### Identified obstacles

For this group, there is a strong risk of not being able to extract themselves from the social determinisms at work, as the power and influence of the community is so strong. There is therefore a risk of failure.

## 2.3. The outcome of the active citizenship process: the realisation of social projects

The mission of the social worker is to lead the user to find the way to emancipation. The individual has evolved within several spheres of socialisation: the family, the peer group, the social and professional integration. Supported to become fully aware of their possibilities of action, the user should be able to exchange, to raise awareness, to practice advocacy, to create groups or associations, hoping to have an impact on society.

At the end of this process, the service users were able to practice developing skills such as taking initiative, being aware of common/group work and also autonomy. The outcome of this process would be to consider oneself as a full citizen, with rights but also with a role to play and responsibilities to assume. At this stage of the empowerment process, the skills required of social workers are different.

### 2.3.1. Intervention method and tools

Local social development (LSD) is an intervention tool on a territory that social workers can use in an empowerment approach. Its objective is to simultaneously mobilise the players (citizens and/or beneficiaries, elected social workers, partners such as urban planning companies, institutions) and the resources of a territory. It aims at a positive social evolution and above all the global and individual improvement of the living conditions of inhabitants. As a modern response to the breakdown of social ties, the LSD is a way of approaching the issue of social cohesion with regard to the knowledge that social actors have of their “habitat”. It is an **innovative tool** for implementing a coordinated and solidarity-based project. It aims to achieve a **lasting change** in the situation of the inhabitants, and even social promotion. It proposes to restore people’s power over their own lives and their environment.

The social workers will thus work together with the users to revitalise the existing situation, affirming a collective ambition by coordinating the social, economic and cultural dimensions in order to encourage a bottom-up approach towards local policies and elected

<sup>24</sup> Cali - Fundación Secretariado Gitano ([gitanos.org](http://gitanos.org))

<sup>25</sup> [https://www.gouvernement.fr/sites/default/files/contenu/piece-jointe/2016/09/note\\_pair\\_aidance.pdf](https://www.gouvernement.fr/sites/default/files/contenu/piece-jointe/2016/09/note_pair_aidance.pdf)



representatives, directly associated with the project.

For the workers, this is an alternative method of intervention because it differs from the approach proposed in the so-called classic care facilities, where the institution relies on the support contract, for example. The social workers will have to leave their professional habits to “go towards”, to develop a facilitating and accessible communication, combining proximity and good knowledge of the territory.

### Case study

➤ The institution “Madre Coraje”, in Jerez de la Frontera (Spain) was created in 1991 by Antonio Gomez. “Madre Coraje” is an apolitical NGO with no religious affiliation. It has about 1,200 volunteers and a hundred employees. The site consists of a former sugar industry warehouse and communal gardens.

The association has adopted the adage of Anglo-Saxon NGOs: Think Globally, Act Locally. “Madre Coraje” thus offers two types of action. First, humanitarian actions in Peru and Mozambique, based on the principles of sustainable development. The projects must be replicable and are evaluated according to concrete indicators: expenses, costs, job creation, ethics and eco-responsibility. Projects are considered in their entirety, before the idea that they can be transposed elsewhere.

Other projects focus on economic mutual aid, through the production and sale of products grown and made in an artisanal way, promoting the inclusion of vulnerable people, especially those with reduced mobility. All available resources are put to use: knowledge, creativity, ingenuity. Indeed, the virtual absence of subsidies develops ingenuity based on the valorisation of the existing or the waste, as opposed to mass overconsumption, whose damaging effects are noted every day by the actors.

The project is very accomplished, global because everything is thought out in a virtuous logic to avoid waste and exploitation. There is no question of profit.

The Andalusian NGO is part of a civic, innovative, benevolent and ecological approach, aiming for self-sufficiency. It is interesting to note that the relationships are horizontal, without hierarchy, and that decisions are taken collegially. Moreover, the NGO has political weight and lobbies in response to requests from politicians (with a significant balance of power in the political bodies of Jerez, i.e., 1,300 associative actors for 200,000 inhabitants).

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## Soft skills

- Critical thinking : forming one's own opinion from different sources and questioning the information
- Autonomy : ability to act freely / independence of decision
- Problem solving : analyzing a situation and finding an appropriate solution
- Team work : working in a group where one helps and cooperates
- Organization and time management: ability to manage work time according to objectives and tasks to be accomplished
- Creativity and innovation : having original ideas and implementing them
- Assertiveness : accepting constructive criticism of proposed ideas
- Networking and public relation / Réseautage et relations publiques : rely on your external network to seek information but also to communicate
- Compétence Digitale /ICT competence : having skills in the use of computer and digital equipment.
- Flexibility : adapting one's posture, listening and communication to the person in front of one
- Initiative taking : proposing actions and reflections in a pro-active/ anticipated manner.
- Learning to learn : ability to integrate new learning
- Public speaking : being able to express oneself clearly in front of a group
- Open minded and tolerance : understanding that people have ideas or experiences that may be different from ours
- Conflict management: ability to manage conflicting emotions and opinions in a group of individuals.
- Socio cultural awareness - multicultural awareness: knowing, integrating and dealing with cultural and social differences of each individual
- Decision making: ability to make choices



- Communication and active listening: ability to hear and understand an individual through verbal and non-verbal communication and to make an adapted decision
- Stress management: ability to manage one's emotions and those of others
- Confidence in oneself and others : believing in one's abilities and those of others.
- Leadership : being able to guide a group towards a common goal
- Responsibility : making decisions and assuming the consequences
- Empathy : ability to put oneself in the place of the other and to feel his experience
- Self awareness : knowing one's strengths and weaknesses in order to move forward





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