

HOOD - Homeless's Open Dialogue

Intellectual Output 1

Phase 2 | Analysis of existing practices and research

Investigation Grid

December 2021

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Dissemination level	Partnership

About the investigation grid

This investigation grid was developed within the frame of the [HOOD – Homeless’s Open Dialogue](#) project, co-financed by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Commission. The project involved five countries – Portugal, Italy, Denmark, Greece and Spain – and has been jointly developed by six organisations - Ufficio Pio (IT), Sant Joan de Déu (ES), Projekt Udenfor (DK) and Klimaka (GR), as operative partners; CESIS (PT) and UNITO (IT) as scientific partners and FEANTSA, Fio.PSD and HOGAR SÍ, as associated partners. The project aimed at promoting the importance of early intervention and at developing a new methodology based on the [Dialogic Practices](#) and on the [Enabling Co-planning Approach](#) in the work developed with people who recently became homeless.

Traditional professional culture tends to consider that professionals should control the process so that it develops exactly as planned. In this professional culture, contingencies, changes, uncertainties are disturbing factors. Instead, according to the [Enabling Co-planning](#) the opening of spaces without predefined answers, the happening of things that were not planned, the rethinking and changing of his/her path by the person are welcomed elements. They are all part of the process of meaning remaking that the professional have to promote, not to hinder.

Within the scope of [Dialogic Practices](#) and of the [Enabling Co-planning Approach](#), the power is reallocated in the helping relationship: the person in need has the power over the direction of intervention and social workers become tools for sustaining it. In each dialogic activity, the discourse’s object (the problem, the need, the intervention...) is defined not by a unique voice, but a multiplicity of voices. They are in an equal relationship with each other: none of them can give the real, ultimate, and true account of the event or the situation. Indeed, each needs the others to shape the meaning of what is happening.

In this framework, the power is redistributed: the dynamic whereby the social worker defines the best path for the person and expects him/her loyalty to this proposal is removed. An effective power redistribution also ends the opportunities of defining strategic alliances aimed at changing what the other sees, thinks, and does, but it opens up space for building authentic relationships. At the same time, when the social worker is freed from all the evaluating tools based on the assumption that he/she owned a clearer definition of the situation, he/she will need the real engagement of all the people involved. Moreover, giving up the evaluation, finding out new ways to define the life pathway is needed.

Considering the fact that early intervention aims at promoting empowerment, it is necessary that the professional adopts a dialogic position: they will no longer assume that they know better both as far as the goal is concerned as to how to get there and will adopt a position not of orientation but support. Only in this way, will the person be sustained in imagining their desired future, which will be developed slowly in their minds when an authentic space (of aims, things to do) appears empty without this imagined future.

The setting and other operative details have a meaning in power terms. To promote the powers sharing described, professionals must become aware of these meanings and, if possible, try to eliminate or change power elements present in their daily work setting and organisational practices. This grid wants to sustain professionals that provide support to the people who recently become homeless to this end. This tool focuses on the organisation’s power elements in line with the principle of the [Enabling Co-planning methodology](#).

For more information about the project and a better understanding of the Hood methodologies please visit the website <https://hoodproject.org/>.

Here we propose a grid to help you focus on some potential elements of power in your social work. Our aim is not that all organisations should change the elements of power we have identified, but that a reflection on them should be born and deepened in all social services. An organisation may decide to keep one or more elements of power, but with a greater awareness of them.

Organisations' power element	
QUESTIONS	COMMENTS
Do you use a uniform or other symbols from your organisation?	<i>Symbol can play a part in the interaction between you and the beneficiary. Sometimes a uniform or a logo on the door can imply already which "roles" are in play.</i> Every interaction is an opportunity to build a trustworthy relationship. Pay attention to not allow that uniforms and other symbols keep persons away.
In outreach work, do you stand when you meet people sitting or laying down?	<i>Physical posture can create a distance and a hierarchy in the interaction.</i> When outreaching the person, consider yourself as a guest entering someone's house, respecting the person's own rules, habits and personal characteristics.
The beneficiary has your phone number or can access an easy way to keep in touch with you?	<i>Entry and contact barriers keep the person away from social services.</i> Finding solutions to facilitate his/her access and contact could promote a trusting relationship and turn services into real resources for people in trouble.
When you meet the beneficiary, is there a desk between you and him/her?	<i>Desk and other features of the space's organisation could underline the hierarchy of power between you and the beneficiary.</i> If possible, consider organising the physical space in a way that supports a dialogical approach and a redistribution of power. Consider deciding with the person what is the best solution for your meeting, for example, moving the desk to the side, or meeting somewhere outside the office.
The beneficiary can choose when and where to meet you?	<i>Being the owner of one's own time and movement is a basic human need that people in homelessness rarely are in control of.</i> A way of redistributing power could be to let the beneficiaries set the frame, time and place for your meetings. Involving the person in the scheduling of the meetings (place, time, etc.) will promote his/her commitment and involvement in the process.
In your office, the beneficiary can see your laptop screen and read all the documents and notes you write about him/her?	<i>The social workers and the beneficiary need to hold the same information to make way for empowerment.</i> Keeping the person informed is a way for him/her to maintain regular contact with the organisation, to feel that the organisation and its professionals take him/her into account and care about him/her. Sharing with the beneficiary all the things you write about him/her gives back the power to the person.
In the interaction with the beneficiary, do you use professional or technical language?	<i>Technical languages can result in a defensive attitude from the person, can hinder his understanding and materialise the power difference between social workers and beneficiaries regarding professional knowledge.</i> Trying to adapt the type of language and terminology used to the person's characteristics could promote a better understanding, a trusting relationship and more effective cooperation.
During interactions with the beneficiary, are you aware of your non-verbal communication?	<i>It is common to have spontaneous non-verbal reactions during conversations, that can convey judgment, discredit or blame. People experiencing homelessness are already used to being judged and stigmatized in several situations.</i> Try and think of ways to counteract that in all verbal and non-verbal communication and to ensure that communication aims at developing a relationship of empathy and cooperation. Make sure you are aware of your non-verbal communication and that it conveys messages coherent with your words.

Working on the tangible elements of power in your organisation is a good exercise to build a service that redistributes power and promotes people's empowerment. Here we present the first level of reflection, there are deeper and more complex levels that need to be addressed more carefully.

For example, here are some insights into two complex issues that would be worth exploring further:

Power element	Reflections
Decision-making over treatment and support	Often, social workers own a big power in deciding a person's educational path. To share the power, try and promote active participation of the person in matters concerning him/her, by integrating him/her in the decisions about his/her situation and letting him/her the opportunity to choose from treatment and services.
Cooperation with network	Social workers deem to know in advance the problems of the person and tend to adjust the person's needs to the organisation's already existing tools. Hear the person and work closely with other organisations and services for helping the person in finding the best possible solution. It is unlikely that one organisation or one social worker has all the tools to address all the problems of one person. Cooperation and networking with other organisations, as well as possibly activating the persons' network can help at facilitating the support the person wants.

For a better understanding of these topics, visit our website <https://hoodproject.org/> in the videocasts and bites section dedicated to dialogical practices and Enabling Co-planning methodology.

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