

How to find out what people really want ? How to improve life in a community ?

Community Planning - a Public Matter

This publication:

- Is dedicated to communities, regions, providers and users of social services,
- Brings essential information on importance, principles and structure of community planning of social services,
- Offers a layout of more detailed methodological instrument designated to support communities and regions which are determined to introduce community planning of social services,
- It cannot give a comprehensive answer to all questions, which could emerge in connection with community planning.

I. Introduction

- **What is community planning?**

- It is a method that enables to prepare materials on the development of different areas of public life at the level of a municipality or a region and that strongly supports the principles of representative democracy. What is typical of the method is an emphasis on:
- the involvement of all stakeholders in a given area
 - dialogue and negotiations
 - achieving a result that is adopted and supported by the majority of stakeholders.

- **What is community planning of social services?**

- It is a method which allows for planning social services at the level of municipalities or regions in such a way that they really meet local specificities and needs of individual citizens.
- It is an open process of identifying needs and resources and of searching for the best solutions in the field of social services.

Experience in the use of some principles of community planning has already been gathered in the Czech Republic.. These principles have been used namely in the following areas: environment protection, preparation of strategic development plans of municipalities, prevention healthcare programs, collaborative programs for the prevention of criminality etc. Cities of Pisek and Usti nad Labem have had an experience in community planning of social services. Broad experience in the use of this method can be found abroad, too.

- **What's the aim of community planning of social services?**

- It is a method how to strengthen social cohesion of community.

- It is a method how to support social inclusion and to prevent social exclusion of individuals and groups.
- **What is the benefit of community planning for a municipality?**
 - This method engages all stakeholders of social services system (i.e. users, providers and purchasers) in a process of preparation and implementation of a plan of social services thus enhancing the involvement of citizens in a decision making process concerning the provision of social services, justifying decisions made by managing and representative bodies and increasing the involvement of citizens in a community life.
 - It enhances a dialogue and collaboration among citizens, increases a feeling of being a member of a community and it enables to identify new human and material resources.
 - It enables municipalities to pool existing resources and improves their effective use.
 - It increases the accessibility and quality of social services, extends the supply of services and assures that social services really meet identified needs, respond to local differences.
 - It raises the efficiency of funds invested because money is spent only on those services that are really needed.
- **How does a well prepared community plan look like?**
 - It is an outcome of negotiations among all stakeholders engaged in the process.
 - Its implementation is based on a broad partnership in a community.
 - It meets local needs and suits local conditions.
 - It identifies short term and long term targets and priorities of the development of social services.
 - It maps all public, private and voluntary bodies and entities from the perspective of activities that help achieve targets that have been set.
 - It includes a system of monitoring and evaluating the process and a system of reporting to the public.

II. Community planning - objectives and principles

- **What is an outcome of community planning?**

It is namely a system of social services at local level, which meets, identified needs, responds to local specificities and ascertains that spending of finances to social services is effective.
- **What principles must be adhered to in the process of developing a community plan?**
 - Needs, priorities and trends of the development of social services must be determined by people living in a given community.
 - All activities at a local level carried out in the course of preparation and implementation of a plan must be interrelated.
 - Improvement of social services quality must be considered a desirable and important feature of local community policy.
 - Priorities and trends of the development of social services are based on a conviction that every single user of social services is unique, that he/she has his/her own value, innate dignity and the right for self-determination.

- **What does a community plan contain?**

- A description and an analysis of existing resources (a list of governmental, municipal and non-governmental providers of social services and connected services – especially in the sphere of health care, education, jobs, leisure, opportunities for voluntary work, possibilities for neighbour assistance).
- Statistical, sociological and demographic data etc. (e.g. age structure of the population of a region, birth rate and mortality rate, forecasts of demographic development).
- A description and an analysis of wishes and needs that citizens have in the sphere of social services.
- A future vision of social services – identification of priorities and objectives of the services development.
- A timetable for the work progress and principles that must be adhered to in the course of developing and implementing a plan.
- A manner in which individual stakeholders at local level will be engaged in the development and implementation of a community plan – definition of responsibilities and obligations of stakeholders.
- A method of monitoring, evaluating and possibly modifying a community plan.

- **Who prepares a community plan?**

- A compiler of a community plan leads (coordinates) the process of community planning and he/she continuously provides partial written outputs including a community plan in its final shape. Following options can be used in reality:
- Community plan is developed by a municipal/regional authority; an expert on community planning is an employee of municipal authority or a regional office.
- Municipality/region charges an entity (e.g. a non-profit NGO) with the development of a community plan. In that case the role and engagement of a municipality or a regional office must be agreed in advance. In particular - the way in which a municipality/regional office is engaged in the process of community plan development, a condition that it accepts the process and that it makes decisions in accordance with outputs of a community plan.

- **What is a relationship between a CP of a municipality and a CP of a region?**

- In an ideal situation a regional CP plan is based on finalized community plans of municipalities and it focuses especially on services that are complementary to those provided by municipalities.
- Services delivered by regions are of a broader, regional competence.
- If a CP of a region is developed in parallel with municipal CP, transfer and sharing of information must be in place.

- **Who is engaged in the preparation of a community plan?**

Purchaser

Purchaser is a body that is responsible for delivery of social services that meet local needs – in our case either a municipal authority or a regional office. Members of a municipal (regional) council as elected representatives of the public create a political climate that is conducive to the implementation of a community plan. It is very important that a municipal council adopts a resolution by which it declares its determination to develop social services. It thus becomes:

- an expression of political will in a municipality/region;
- confirmation of legitimacy of community planning;

- guarantee of the involvement of other stakeholders.

Municipality/regional office namely:

- Creates opportunities for a long term engagement and collaboration of citizens,
- actively extends the range of methods for managing and planning of social services and their coordination with other public services,
- enhances the engagement of citizens in a decision making process concerning social services,
- publishes from the very beginning all essential information about the process of community planning and its outcomes (this is done in a comprehensible and accessible manner),
- respects targets and priorities identified in a CP in its decision making on social services,
- sets clear rules for financing social services that match priorities of a CP.

Provider

Who can be a provider of social services? A natural person, non-profit NGO, an organisation established by a municipality, an organisation established by a regional office, an organisation established by a central government. All providers have an equal position in the process of community planning. Their objectives and plans (intents) are of the same weight.

User

A social service user is a person who is in a bad social situation for whom social services are intended. Objectives and intents of users have the same weight as objectives and plans (intents) of purchasers and providers in a process of community planning. Identifying users, addressing and involving them in the process of developing a community plan is an irreplaceable opportunity for identification of needs in social services, obtaining information on the quality of delivered social services, discovering gaps in social services offered and identifying new resources for meeting the needs (e.g. self help activities).

What will a user and a provider gain, if they get engaged in the community planning?

- an opportunity to contribute to the development of a comprehensive system of social services,
- an opportunity to promote his/her own interests and objectives,
- an opportunity to initiate new collaboration,
- information on activities, needs and trends in the sphere of social services.

The public

The public must be continuously informed on plans (intents), outputs and objectives of a community plan. The aim of an information strategy prepared in advance is to make information accessible to the public. It is desirable for the public to be involved in the process of community planning from the very beginning.

Other organisations

Local organisations and groups of interests who are concerned with the provision of social services (e.g. public institutions, hospitals, labour offices, schools, non-profit NGOs, police) as well as civil initiatives, ethnic groups including those with whom communication is difficult – are addressed and called on to get engaged in the development of CP. The greater the involvement of other organisations -which differs according to their further engagement in meeting priorities and objectives of a community plan- the higher is the efficiency of the process of community planning.

- **What are the main principles of community planning?**
 - ***Partnership of all stakeholders*** – needs and objectives of all stakeholders are of the same importance. Opinions of all parties must be given the same space.
 - ***Involvement of local community***. It is necessary to look for various methods and forms of addressing and involving local community in this process. An offer for involvement must be comprehensible (e.g. according to the place of residence, life style, interests, social status or ethnicity). No one must be excluded or discriminated.
 - ***Identification of new human and financial resources***. What should not be forgotten is collaboration with entrepreneurs because it can be beneficial to both parties, work of volunteers, self help groups, home nurses and help of neighbours that play a very important role. Community planning is one of the instruments improving the quality of a community life.
 - ***Working with information***. It is necessary to provide for an equal access to information in the managing structure and ensure that the information is made available to the public. If there is a regular transfer of information, people will submit relevant comments and ideas. It is necessary to determine a method for submitting comments and a way in which they will be treated.
 - ***The process of developing a community plan is as important as a final document***. Community plan is not developed by a group of experts. Community planning process means searching for different people who are engaged in a discussion. This process provides for a situation in which a proposed system of social services is unique and fully matches local conditions and resources.
 - ***Building upon existing and well-proven collaboration***. A well-tested collaboration can be an inspiration for other partners in community planning. Extending collaboration among all partners helps improve the quality of social services offered.
 - ***A compromise between wishes and possibilities***. Community planning always results in a compromise between what we want and what is available. What is possible does not concern only material, financial and human resources but also an agreement that defines who and to which extent will contribute to meeting the objectives set by a community plan.

III. How do we proceed in the preparation of a community plan?

PHASES OF COMMUNITY PLANNING		
Phase No.1	Where to start?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - setting up of an initial work group - definition of stakeholders that should - be engaged in the preparation of a CP - method of addressing and calling on other partners - plan for gaining political support from a municipality - information strategy
Phase No.2	Setting up a managing structure for community planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - involvement of all stakeholders in the process - setting up an organisational and management structure for the preparation of a CP - definition of rules for actions taken by a management structure
Phase No.3	Understanding problems in a community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - presentation of objectives, interests and needs of all stakeholders - creating and publishing mechanisms for active engagement of the public - analysis of needs and an assessment of existing resources - evaluation of strengths and weaknesses of an existing social services system - identification of opportunities and threats, outlining trends of the development of social services
Phase No.4	Proposal for the development of social services	<p>Vision of the development of social services includes namely:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - key underlying values that will be respected and adhered to in the process of a CP preparation and its subsequent implementation

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - direction in which social services will develop in future - an objective that is to be met, priorities - obstacles that will have to be overcome - regional and supra regional resources that can be used - vision of social services development is accepted by a majority of partners engaged in the community planning
Phase No.5	Strategy for social services development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - a plan of gradual steps and tasks to meet defined objectives and priorities - a system of monitoring the implementation of a community plan - preparation of a final version of a CP - submitting the text of a community plan to the public to comment on it - approval of a CP by a Municipal Council
Phase No.6	From planning to implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - implementation of a plan - informing the public on the implementation of a CP - continuous identification and engagement of new partners - instruments that enable to introduce changes in the original CP

V. How can MoLSA¹ assist in the preparation of a community plan?

MoLSA promotes the extension of community planning to other locations in the Czech Republic. MoLSA has prepared several instruments to enhance this process in the years 2002 and 2003. In autumn 2002 a methodological material “Guide to Community Planning” will be published. It should serve those self-governments that will have made a decision to launch community planning. The Guide will not represent an instruction containing strictly defined procedures but it will rather be a summary of principles and rules that should be applied to develop a quality community plan.

A second instrument is an educational program that will enable to acquire competencies required for the coordination of the process of developing a community plan at a local level.

¹ Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs - MoLSA

A program will be prepared in such a way that it will be suitable for representatives of purchaser, provider and users. Three persons from every selected municipality/region will participate. The program will open in autumn 2002.

A third instrument consists in providing funds to support municipalities and cities that will have decided to introduce community planning and also those municipalities and towns who have already developed their community plans up to the point of setting a priority and an objective of social services development. Funds will be required from the state budget for the year 2003. Provision of necessary funds will depend on the approval of the state budget.

All aforementioned instruments will be prepared separately in collaboration with a work group that was established in MoLSA in January 2002. The group is composed of representatives of towns, municipalities, regions and NGOs. The aim of the work of this group is to consult and comment on all materials prepared by MoLSA before they are published.

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