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STREET CHILDREN AND GAINING INDEPENDENCE*: CHALLENGES AND POSSIBILITIES

Dzieci ulicy a usamodzielnienie – wyzwania i szanse

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Abstract

This paper discusses the issue of gaining independence by young people who, owing to their adverse life circumstances, face a difficult start in adult life. Beginning an independent life, even with the support and aid of relatives, may involve confronting the challenges of everyday bleak adult life. Gaining independence is much more difficult for young people who leave educational and care centers (care leavers), or youth who avoid contacts with adults, and consequently live in a street milieu. The aim of this text is to focus attention on the process of gaining independence by the street children. It considers if it is possible for them at all, and what should gaining independence by street children involve, and what should indicate the completion of this process. The paper asks who supports these children, and introduces them to adult life? This is a very unique target group for care providers, and social workers whose assistance is limited to those activities carried out only in the streets. Hence, can street workers, that is social workers who work with street children, guide them with respect to gaining independence? The text addresses these problematical issues, and so considers the notion of street children's gaining independence.

Keywords: gaining independence, care leavers, children of the street / children on the street.

*The term gaining independence is used to present situation. Young people who leave their homes, or care institutions where they were brought up. It could be comparable to care leavers, but in this text this definition is extended to people who do not identify themselves with care institutions for children and Youths.

Streszczenie

W artykule poruszono problematykę usamodzielnienia się młodych ludzi, którzy ze względu na nie-sprzyjające warunki życiowe mają trudny start w dorosłe życie. Rozpoczęcie niezależnego życia, nawet przy wsparciu i pomocy bliskich, może wiązać się z wyzwaniami codziennego ponurego dorosłego życia. Osiągnięcie samodzielności jest znacznie trudniejsze dla młodych ludzi opuszczających placówki wychowawczo-opiekuńcze (wychowanków) lub młodzieży, która unika kontaktów z dorosłymi i w konsekwencji żyje w środowisku ulicznym. Celem tego tekstu jest zwrócenie uwagi na proces usamodzielnienia się dzieci ulicy. Autorka zastanawia się, czy w ogóle jest to możliwe i na czym powinno polegać usamodzielnienie się dzieci ulicy i co powinno wskazywać na zakończenie tego procesu, kto wspiera te dzieci i wprowadza je w dorosłe życie. To bardzo wyjątkowa grupa docelowa dla opiekunów i pracowników socjalnych, których pomoc ogranicza się do czynności wykonywanych wyłącznie na ulicy. Czy zatem streetworkerzy, czyli pracownicy socjalni pracujący z dziećmi ulicy, mogą pokierować nimi w kwestii uzyskania niezależności? Tekst porusza te problematyczne kwestie, a więc rozważa pojęcie niezależności dzieci ulicy.

Słowa kluczowe: usamodzielnienie, wychowankowie ulicy, dzieci ulicy.

Introduction

Becoming independent involves charting one's future according to one's own plan. In the life of each young person there comes a moment when they begin to make independent decisions concerning their functioning in community life. They construct, more, or less responsibly, their reality, and, although they believe that they will manage on their own, support offered by a more experienced friend, parent, or care provider may help them avoid many mistakes, incorrect decisions, and consequently, the resultant outcomes. This is a difficult time in the life of any young individual; hence, it is most important not to go through it alone, but to be properly assisted. Unfortunately, adequate support, both psychological and economic, is not granted to everyone. Young people who were not cared for by their families during childhood, avoided institutional support, and looked for understanding in the streets, have nobody capable of introducing them to a responsible adult life in the community. Moreover, the lifestyle they have chosen actually does not allow them to benefit from assistance offered by adults, and in particular, from adult advice. As for financial assistance, this situation is different since they do not eschew such support. In this text the sense of gaining independence by street children is addressed.

Seeking independence is a natural part in the life of any individual. When learning to be independent, people acquire new skills and competences, broaden their knowledge, and most importantly, gain individuality. M. Winiarski (1999; p. 251) addressed this issue as follows: it may be understood as a feature of character, or a situation, the state of independence in life. It may be perceived behaviorally as is done by psychologists. In their understanding, it is the individual's activity consisting in undertaking tasks, their fulfillment, and controlling their outcomes without the participation and intervention of other people. Independence is manifested mostly in that

individuals decide on their own about their lives, guide their lives according to professed and preferred values, solve various problems (including the difficult ones) that they face in their lives. They are able to satisfy their biological, as well as social and cultural needs on their own. Independence in the situational context means, that individuals are able to manage on their own any situation (normal, difficult, adverse) in various spheres of life, transform these situations at their own discretion (consistent with their preferred values), and even create new situations that facilitate their optimal self-fulfillment.

Gaining independence is a long educational process. It aims at leading an independent life integrated with the community. Support offered to a person who attempts to become independent involves creating conditions to continue education, providing financial assistance in the form of adequate housing, and finding employment, as well as ensuring legal and psychological assistance.

Young people who leave child care centers (care leavers) have adequate financial means secured, and the support of an appointed assistant to supervise their process of gaining independence; one who can guide and help them in making their first life decisions. Primarily, the undertaken activities aim at:

- regulating the child's legal status, and determining the relationships with the family of origin;
- designing an individual life plan that should account for a care leaver's aspirations, individual capacities and interests, and provide for the assistant's input in offering aid in the gradual achievement of the set goals;
- teaching care leavers the principles of community life;
- teaching care leavers skills necessary for self-care, and home management;
- teaching care leavers respect for and looking after personal / public property, and rational management of financial resources;
- preparing care leavers to independently initiate and maintain contacts with people outside the center, teaching them to handle various matters in different institutions;
- preparing care leavers to undertake paid employment;
- teaching care leavers to organize and manage leisure time;
- supplying care leavers with the skills, and knowledge necessary to fulfill social roles in family life (Raczkowska, 1983, pp. 141–142.).

The situation of street children, as regards gaining independence, will be completely different. These are young individuals who avoid contact with adults, their advice, and even assistance. They have run away from homes, care centers, and even if they appear there, it is for a short time, only to return to a street milieu where they find the aim of their lives. In the subsequent sections this paper addresses, who can help them enter adult life, and what should such assistance involve. However, first it explains who can be termed 'a street child' consistent with pedagogical literature.

Terminological issues – children on the street / children of the street

According to the definition adopted by the Council of Europe: *street children are children under 18 who, for shorter, or longer periods, live in a street milieu. They are children who live wandering from place to place, and who have their peer groups and contacts in the street. Officially these children may have as their address their parents' home or an institution of social welfare (educational center, psychiatric center for youth or any other institution). Most significantly they have very few, or no contacts with those adults, parents, school, child welfare institutions, social workers, with a duty towards them* (Głowacka, 2003, p. 878). What is important in the definition offered by the Council of Europe is that this category includes not only children who live in the streets, but also those who stay there periodically. Their situations may be complemented by pedagogical characteristics. They face indifference and abuse. They constantly experience violence, seduction, and isolation. They undertake poorly paid, often humiliating, jobs in order to survive. They beg, steal, and have sex for money. They find substitutes for family among their peers, and feel safer among them. However, they nevertheless experience the lack of safety, up-bringing, and education, but most of all the lack of love (Głowacka, 2003).

The presented characteristics of street children sketch their living conditions. Importantly, they stay, not necessarily live, in the street for longer periods. It should be emphasized that being a street child is not always synonymous with homelessness. These children's living conditions depend on the economic situation of the country they inhabit. In economically developed countries, such as the USA and West European countries, the majority of street children are young people who have run away from their family homes, or child care institutions. Due to inadequate care, lack of interest, violence, or sexual abuse children choose the street environment. However, in developing countries, such as Brazil and African states, street children have neither homes nor families that they might return to (Mickelson, Roslyn, 2000; pp. 25–26). Consortium for Street Children the term 'street children' describe children who:

- depend on the street to live and / or work, either on their own, or with other children, or family members;
- have a strong connection to public spaces (e.g. streets, markets, parks, bus, or train stations), and for whom the street plays a vital role in their everyday lives and identities. This wider group includes children who do not live, or work on the street, but regularly accompany other children, or family members in the street.

To sum up street children are children who depend on the street for their survival – whether they live on the street, work on the street, have support networks on the

street. Sometimes it could be a combination of the three (<https://www.streetchildren.org/about-street-children/>).

A very similar distinction was developed by S. Stephenson (2001):

- *children on the street* are children who spend most of their time in the street, but return at night to their homes or child care centers,
- *children of the street* are children who permanently live in the street.

Their common feature is that they run away from adults, and treat a street milieu as the safest space for them, where they feel most comfortable.

When considering the situation of street children in Poland, it may be assumed, following the National Committee for Education and Resocialization, that Polish street children are those children who, as a consequence of their families not fulfilling their basic functions, spend much time outside their homes – in the streets, in the playgrounds, and other places of uncontrolled activities. A street milieu is the primary source of knowledge about life for them. This is where they satisfy their natural cognitive and social needs, which are neglected in family homes by their parents. These are then children who are brought up in the street (Kołak, 2003), and, following Stephenson's terminology (2001), children on the street. They are children who have support networks on the street (<https://www.streetchildren.org/about-street-children/>).

Educators who work with them describe them as children who spend practically all their time in a street milieu. They only stay overnight at home. The street is the environment where they find (*arrange*) everything they need – from money to food, toys, and clothes. They do not know the value of money and things. They find pleasure in destroying property. They are frequently members of informal child gangs, where *the cult of power* is followed. They get involved in fights and assaults on randomly chosen people. They earn their living mainly via begging and stealing. They trade acquired goods among each other, or on street markets. Some of them experiment with alcohol, glue, and stimulants since lack of other activities, and care turn such experimentation into an attractive form of spending their time. Almost all children on the street have serious problems at school due to truancy, aggression, and low intellectual potential caused by educational neglect. They replicate their parents' lifestyle, and become part of the dregs of society (www.dzieciulicy.ngo.pl). Street children have assimilative abilities for difficult living conditions outside the home and school. Unfortunately, sometimes it is connected to anti-social behaviour and prohibited acts. I. Bibars (1998) dealing with street children in Egypt, claims that the term 'street children' has very negative connotations, especially when the street is correlated with crime, vagrancy, and deviation. These children are not only at risk of being swallowed up by the criminal world, but mainly by social exclusion. Their living conditions are far away from safe, cozy houses. They have limited access to education, sometimes they avoid schools themselves. Mostly, adults do not

protect their needs in everyday life according meaning of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Street children are people hurt not by life, but by the nearest people. Often by parents, loved ones, whose primary duty is to love their children, care for their development, trust, safety, and care (Adamczyk, 2016). That leads them to the street where they can find other street children who understand and protect them. At the same time they become part of socially excluded groups.

After this preliminary analysis of different interpretations of the notion of children of the street / children on the street, it may be recapitulated as follows: these are individuals under 18, coming from high risk, or good families, whose parents, due to parental ineptitude, financial problems, or lack of time resulting from focusing on professional careers, insufficiently meet their emotional and financial needs. The sense of loneliness makes them seek care, understanding and love in a street milieu, that takes over the educative function, replacing the parents.

Children on the street often have parents who inadequately fulfill their parental obligations. Then the state takes care over them via an institutional framework: child care institutions, family-type care institutions, and foster families. M. Nowak-Dziemianowicz (2006) stresses that, although the names of these institutions contain the word 'home', or 'family', in fact care centers do not create a family atmosphere. They are nothing more than institutions. Children do not have their own place there. They have lost their family homes, apart from those cases when they are taken care of by relatives in foster families. M. Nowak-Dziemianowicz actually refers to them as 'homeless children'. If we assume that homelessness is a situation where individuals have lost their own homes, do not have their own private space, and can only rely on public support, then this applies to the so-called social orphans. These are children who are deprived of their own living space. They differ from adult homeless people only in that they are victims of their parents' helplessness and irresponsibility, rather than choosing their own destiny in the street.

J. Garbaring tried to identify the factors that enable a child to get out of street life. He distinguished the following aspects (Prajsner M. & B. 2004):

- there was an authority in the child's family
- there were certain norms in the family, the value of learning was considered as a way to social advancement
- there was somebody who watched over the child, paid attention, and took care.

These people happen in the street children's life- street workers. They show them possibility of becoming independent in social and street life. They lead children to freedom and conscious decisions. Sometimes, independent life for these children takes place on the street, sometimes they leave that environment, but street workers help them to decide themselves and choose what is the best for them.

Study results – children of the street / children on the street in their milieu

Interested in this group of children, I wished to explore it, and deepen my knowledge about children on the street. I carried out a research project among children on the street, utilizing a documentary method (Bohnsack, 2004). The results were presented in the publication of 2012, *Codziennosc uliczna z perspektywy dziecka* [Street daily reality from a child's perspective].

Working on the research project consisted of three stages:

1. City tour, and photographing selected places by children.

I asked children to go with me to the city, and made photos wherever they wanted to.

2. Watching photos, and choosing the most interesting ones.

I showed children all photos, and we chose the most interesting according to them.

3. Doing photographic reportages by children.

We made photographic reportages about their life on the street on huge sheets of paper. During this activity we also had group interview (focus interview) (Barbour, 2011). Children were making reportages, and were talking about their motivation to present these photos, and what do these places mean to them. I let the children to lead me in their life.

In order to discuss the issue of gaining independence by children on the street, I will present some of the results.

In a street milieu, children construct their own rules, and it is the street, not parents, that is the teacher of life for them. The street provides them with the space to hide from the control of care providers. Children who participated in the study sketched the following image of children on the street:

- They avoid relationships with adults since they have repeatedly experienced that such relations may be painful and disappointing,
- They do not believe that they may change their fate, they lack self-confidence,
- The street represents a territory where adults cannot limit their liberty, freedom and independence; hence they like this place so much. It is not the adult who decides about children in the street, but children decide about themselves,
- They are ready to cooperate in a group, and sacrifice themselves for others if threatened by adults. They are united only by a common aim that is not allowing adults to limit their freedom,
- Their look after each other, help each other in leading the street life, support each other, while simultaneously competing to dominate the group, and establish a power hierarchy,

- They do not forgive. Betrayal of the group means exclusion for that individual. There is no friendly attitude towards the ‘confidant’ in the street; such a person can no longer rely on peers’ assistance,
- They take responsibility for their decisions and actions, and punish those who do not obey their code of conduct,
- Children on the street do not perceive themselves as defenseless and failures – as they are often treated by adults. They are autonomous, courageous, cunning, and resourceful in street life,
- They construct their daily reality in the street. With their appearance and body posture, they imitate those who, according to them, will cope in any situation, are autonomous and brave (Author, 2012).

They manage well the street life. They lack, however, faith in their own capacities to become self-fulfilled outside a street milieu. Unfortunately, this is the image of themselves they acquire in family homes and welfare institutions. They are most frequently treated as those who need to be supported and looked after. Or, on the contrary, they are left to their own resources in homes full of violence, poverty, and lack of understanding. It turns out, however, that children of the street / children on the street are capable of dealing with their fate, but they need self-confidence, and belief in their self-agency (Author, 2012). The strategy of street work is based primarily on trusting that with support provided by adults, rather than their intervention, these children are able to overcome their life difficulties. It is then worthwhile to offer them an opportunity to construct their daily reality according to their own ideas.

The next part of text discusses, what happens in the context of gaining independence when these children enter an adult world, and the street may cease to be their only living space? This question is answered by comparing support offered to children on the street / children of the street, and to those children who benefit from institutional care.

Support for children on the street

In Poland, the fate of neglected youngsters, wandering in residential districts, is primarily addressed by non-governmental organizations. In some cities, Municipal Councils employ street educators. However, since the profession of a street educator is not legally established, these activities are intuitive, both on the part of municipal authorities, and street workers themselves. However, in many places all over Poland, non-governmental organizations are very effective, and they have at least a few years of experience with assisting children on the street, for instance: the National Committee for Education and Resocialization – Warsaw, Catholic Care Centre for Children and Youth ‘Guardian Angels Home’ – Katowice, Youth Center ‘U Siemachy’ – Kraków (Kurzeja, 2008), the Powiśle Social Foundation – Warsaw (Szymańska, 1997),

Association: Group of Social Animation Education GPAS Praga (Szczepański, Kuzak, 1997), Society for Health Promotion and Social Threats Prevention 'TADA' from Szczecin (that in subsequent years extended its activity to include Zielona Góra, Poznań, Warsaw, Gdańsk) (Kubicki, Olcoń, 2003), and many others. Non-governmental organizations respond to the needs of children on the street. Continuing the tradition of street education initiated in the 1960s, they act in the milieu occupied by the children in need, and support them while respecting their individuality and rights.

Many important principles of street work have been devised to help adults reach out to street children. First of all, a street worker should frequent those places where youth and children congregate, in order to shape the sense of stability that is lacking in the chaotic world of street children. Children quickly get used to the presence of street workers who are always ready to listen to them, and offer them assistance. Their expectations as to a regular contact with someone who unceasingly wishes to offer them attention cannot be disappointed. Street educators attempt to adjust their working time to street children's habits and customs. Street workers' active attitudes allow them to adequately frame the daily routine of the youth through the introduction of various forms of spending leisure time constructively. It is also important to clearly communicate what position, and function street workers occupy (children do not call street workers by their names). Discretion and confidentiality are significant as they are necessary when close relationships with children gradually develop. Additionally, it should be remembered that contacts between street workers and children always have to be voluntary for both parties. In this way adults can show children that their privacy is respected. Street workers should respect some rules and code of conduct that govern the places, and environments they enter. Caution and good sense are particularly essential as they dictate to what extent a street worker may continue to follow the law of the street, and thus not break an established relationship, and when it is unethical to co-participate in the events happening. Some personal distance should also be retained as regards the integration emerging in the street (Cartuyvels, 1994).

Support offered in the institutional framework can be very interestingly compared to that provided by street educators. The following table presents the comparison of support for children on the street, and that for children offered by institutions:

Table 1. The aid for street children

Support for children consistent with legislation (Act on Family Support and Foster Care of 9 June 2011)	Street working
Forms of Support	
2 Forms: family, institutional	Street working – work carried out in children’s living environments to reach those in real need of help; entering the child’s territory
Family	
Working with the family to allow children to return to their closest environment.	Establishing relationships with families, and attempting to cooperate to help children.
Managing problems	
Indicating how to overcome life difficulties according to the principles of community life.	Assisting to overcome difficulties while respecting children’s rights to make their own decisions, leaving children the initiative to act, accompanying children in their choices. (Street children will often be guided by the code of conduct valid in the street rather than social conduct). Street educators search for children’s talents and skills that will allow them to believe in their own capacities, and thus overcome life difficulties.
Health care	
Ensuring health care.	Health care, cooperation with local authorities to be able to provide medical help.
Education	
Ensuring educational possibilities and developing children’s talents.	Organizing vocational trainings that prepare children for future employment (demonstrating the possibilities for re-integration with society).
Recreation	
Organizing leisure time, respecting children’s interests and talents, while simultaneously attempting to extend the forms of spending free time to include participation in culture.	Recreational activities carried out in the street to teach children cooperation, sharing, following the principles of social life.
Meeting emotional needs	
Attempting to meet emotional needs (if only possible in the framework of foster care, possible to a lesser degree in the institutional framework, since street children do not trust adults).	Attempting to meet children’s emotional needs. Often a street educator is the first adult who is interested in the feelings of particular children.

<p>Support for children consistent with legislation (Act on Family Support and Foster Care of 9 June 2011)</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Street working</p>
<p>Gaining independence</p>	
<p>Preparing for a dignified independent life.</p>	<p>Re-integrating street children into community life. Street educators attempt to re-integrate children into community life, while integrating the community to the life of street children and their choices.</p>

Street working is part of a concept coming from outside social work. In pedagogy and social work is not very often to go out from institution, and to help in the client's environment. Street workers enter the child's territory, and try to help him / her in real space of being, living. They learn the street world of the child. While working with a child in an institution, or foster family is about the child moving into a new, unfamiliar to them space. It is the educators who are at home, and the children are guests in their world.

It is very important, that whether in an institution, foster family, or on the street, educators, and street workers work with whole families, not just with children. They help to children's parents create the best possible living conditions for their children. The difference, however, is that street workers try to prevent the child from being taken away from the family home. Educators and foster parents work with biological parents to improve their family situation so that children can return home.

Social workers and educators try to understand, and to shape the world of values, but apply other means. Educators teach their students how to overcome life difficulties according to the principles of community life. Social workers, while respecting street children's rights to make their own decisions, accompany them in their choices. And these choices are often dictated by street life rather than social order. However, it is such decisions that help to survive on the street. Therefore, it is often street workers who learn from the children of life, not the other way around. Street life is taught by children with adults, and institutional life is taught by adults to children.

In the institution, and foster care educators have more possibilities to ensure health care and education for children. Street workers can only support families to provide medical help. Sometimes they organize different vocational trainings, which are very helpful to prepare to adult life. While leisure time activities are connected to the work place of the educators. Street workers prepare recreational activities in the street. They can use street children's interests which they could meet while observing their life on the street. Whereas educators invite children to participate in the culture.

It is very difficult to meet emotional needs of hurt children. Institutional, foster, and street children are minors who have been harmed by adults. Educators and street workers are often the first adults who are interested in the feelings of particular chil-

dren. The most important is that the child must feel safe, trust, and then he / she maybe let to help himself / herself. So the most important is the atmosphere created by the caregiver, and only then is the space created to meet emotional needs.

We call institutional children who leave care system – care leavers. They try to lead independent living. Street children are independent on the street long time before street workers start to work with them. The difference is that their caregivers try to re-integrate them into community life, with all respect to their decisions and choices.

Summarizing, expectations of street children with respect to adults involve mainly the absence of adult interference in their independent functioning in a street milieu. Their priority is to avoid contact with adults, and primarily to avoid institutional support. Often, these children are under foster care, and yet they nevertheless run away to the street. All enumerated forms of support granted by family, or institutional care are not only insufficient, but actually inadequate for children who do not expect such support. Children on the street avoid care centers and adults employed there. Hence, street education – offering non-institutional support for children on the street – is so significant. It is a form of social work based on outreach work: reaching out to children rather than inviting them to institutional settings.

Conclusions – street worker’s assistance in gaining independence by children on the street

Considering the situation of children on the street and their expectations, the question arises: What does it mean to gain independence in their case? After all, these are individuals who are independent in their lives led in a street milieu. Active in their daily street reality, they make independent decisions and implement them. They do not allow for adults’ intervention and control. If they follow any advice, it is advice given mainly by their street peers, or perhaps offered by a trusted street educator. They decide about their lives, guide them consistently with values professed by a street group. They solve their problems on their own since they have been frequently disappointed by adults’ support. They satisfy their biological, as well as cultural and social needs. They can manage difficult situations of street life much better than some adults. Most importantly, these children do not want to leave a street milieu, and this actually excludes the process of gaining independence. Can we then actually talk about the process of gaining independence in the case of children on the street?

Street work is about assisting individuals deprived of points of support, too lost to build their own future, (...) during a long-term process of becoming independent and responsible persons. Empowerment is the most important issue (Cartuyvels, 1994).

The street often deprives children of their dignity and subjectivity. Harsh realities of daily life, feigning independent choices, actually do not leave these children any choice. They enforce adaptation in order to survive. And, although children have an

impression that they are responsible for their actions, in fact these actions are enforced by the code of conduct in the street rather than by their independently made decisions. Although they pose as strong and independent individuals, these children lack self-confidence (Author, 2012). Actually, what they need is someone – and this is the role for a street educator – who will assist them in becoming self-confident, and help them to believe that they are valuable and unique individuals who can manage the many difficulties that they need to face. Often all that these children hear from adults is that they act badly, make bad choices, do not handle their lives well, and will not achieve anything. The role of a street educator is to strengthen their capacities and discreetly accompany them in their choices.

Different public and private programs have been developed worldwide to offer alternatives for life away from the streets. However, a significant number of people continue to adopt the street as a way of life. The decision to stay on the public highway and make the street a viable alternative for life can be understood only through the construction of a street culture (Pérez Garcia, 2002), in comprehending how an ensemble of ways of life, customs, knowledge, and degree of development allow people living in the street to build a value judgement, and to decide to stay in street groups (Cartuyvels, 1994).

Gaining independence can be defined in simplest terms as functioning in society. Street work, however, aims at helping children in independent life in the street, first by assisting them (and teaching them independence, making choices, and then releasing them out into the world, having self-confidence: I can and I will manage). However, this is only a matter of survival, of adaptation to street life. Street children are suspended between the street where they spend most of their time, and inept parents, or care centers that do not meet their expectations as regards care taking. Who can assume the role of an assistant in helping children gain independence? Can we speak of the process of gaining independence as an outcome of street work?

This is not the main goal of a street educator. Yet, indirectly, through assistance in street life (recreational, educational, up-bringing activities that occur in the street), street educators prepare children for community life. Street educators, just as assistants supervising the process of gaining independence, aim at:

- helping children in designing and organizing an individual life plan. While working over such a plan, they account for aspirations, individual capacities, and interests of children on the street;
- teaching children the principles of community life through play activities organized in the street;
- teaching children respect, and looking after personal and public property, as well as rational management of financial resources;

- preparing children to independently initiate and maintain contacts with people outside the center; they indicate, help, and provide advice as to how to handle various matters in different institutions;
- preparing children to undertake paid employment;
- teaching children to organize and manage leisure time;
- supplying children with the skills and knowledge necessary to fulfill social roles in family life; they often mediate between children on the street and their parents. Using themselves as examples, through conversations and discussions they indicate, and demonstrate how to be parents and support the family (Raczkowska, 1983, pp. 141–142).

Street workers show children an alternative to their daily street reality – life in the community, while respecting their right to choose the milieu where they feel safest, and most familiar with. At the same time, they teach the principles of community life through play, conversations, and assistance offered. In their activities they focus on strengthening children’s resources, discovering their potential, and allow them to use this potential during various activities. This helps such children to gain self-confidence, and prepares them for community life if only they make such a choice and decide to replace their street life with life in society.

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