

SOCIAL SCIENCES

Volunteering as additional resource for inclusion autistic children in sociocultural environment

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Abstract. The article deals with researching the phenomenon of «volunteering» from the sociopedagogical point of view; the role of volunteering in integration autistic children into the society is underlined; the author outlines the range of problems concerning social development of the above-mentioned category that can be solved with volunteers involvement; the peculiarities of the development of children with ASD are specified. The article presents the results of the research on students' readiness for volunteering. The influence of volunteering on the personality of volunteer is described.

Keywords: *volunteer, volunteering, child with autism, integration, inclusive education.*

Introduction. In recent years there has arisen the need for renewing the social protection system of children with autism and their families in Ukraine. Inadequate legal and regulatory framework, as well as social workers' insufficient experience in promoting socialization of autistic children, cause difficulties in the process of their involvement in the inclusive-social space. Consequently, there has appeared the necessity to attract not indifferent community with active humanistic position to solving the problem of social development of children with autism. It is worth mentioning that under the conditions of inclusive society establishment in Ukraine the role of volunteer is gaining importance since they actually act as go-betweens for children and the society. Numerous social problems of autistic children and their families call for immediate solution, and the success of the intended changes will greatly depend on the activity of voluntary helpers engaged in social assistance.

Analysis of relevant researches. The problems of charity and volunteering in the national science and practice were researched by O. Bezpalko, O. Bryzhovata, R. Vainola, I. Hryha, M. Deichakivskyi, L. Duma, N. Zaveryko, Z. Zaitseva, I. Zvierieva, A. Zinchenko, N. Zaveryko, I. Ivanova, N. Ivchenko, A. Kapska, O. Karpenko, L. Koval, N. Komarova, O. Kuzmenko, O. Lysenko, V. Nazaruk, I. Pinchuk, F. Stupak, S. Tolstoukhova, I. Trubavina, O. Shatokhina, O. Yaremenko. Their works prove that in Ukraine volunteering has not acquired mass popularity, yet it has become an important constituent of the activity of non-governmental social services.

Different aspects of the question concerning the development of the disabled in the educational environment with volunteers' assistance were outlined in the scientific works of the modern scholars – M. Andrieieva, Yu. Bohinska, O. Rasskazova. The results of their researches prove that a significant condition for integrating a disabled child into the society is the development of their sociality. The results of their scientific search should be taken into account while investigating the question of organizing volunteering as additional resource for integrating autistic children into the society.

The aim of the article is an in-depth study of the volunteering phenomenon in social and pedagogical terms as

an important resource for involving autistic children into active social life and practical check on students' readiness for volunteering activity.

The development of volunteer movement in Ukraine can contribute to solving a wide range of national problems that have not been apprehended by the society for a long time and have not been solved due to the lack of the personnel and inadequate legal and regulatory framework that ought to have regulated the process. One of the significant problems of our society that can be solved with the help of volunteering is assistance for children with autism, namely their involvement into educational inclusion and social life, as well as social assistance for families bringing up autistic children.

The academic thesaurus of the Ukrainian language defines «volunteering» in terms of voluntary enlistment and in general treats it as service to the people. People who work in social agencies on the same principles are also considered to be volunteers [2, p. 105]. The Universal Declaration of Volunteering, adopted at the XIth Congress of the International Association of Volunteers on September 14, 1990 in Paris, defines volunteers as representatives of all ages and occupations, various strata of society, who direct a certain part of their efforts, time and knowledge to the welfare of other people. We agree with Ye. I. Kholostova's opinion that «volunteers are people who do something voluntary, in consent, without any compulsion, work for free both in state, and non-governmental medical, educational or social institutions» [6].

In Ukraine volunteering is regulated by the Law of Ukraine «On volunteering» (2011), in particular Article 435.

The analysis of the various definitions of the notion «volunteering» allows singling out its main features: voluntariness, free-of-charge basis, non-professional social activity of the evident generally useful character that contributes to the development of professionally significant personal qualities of future specialists in social pedagogy [1,3,5].

It is worth mentioning that a person engaged in volunteering, especially concerning children with special educational needs, must have a certain level of personal and special readiness.

Experimental work was carried out to check students' readiness for volunteering aimed at children with psychophysical disorders, especially autistic children.

The experimental research, which lasted for 8 months, was conducted in 2017-2018 academic year in the Municipal Establishment «Kharkiv Humanitarian Pedagogical Academy» of Kharkiv Regional Council within the framework of «Volunteer School» under the guidance of O. Rasskazova, M. Andrieieva, and first-year students in specialty «Social Work»; it involved 22 respondents.

Students' volunteering ability was determined by the following criteria:

1. Students' readiness for volunteering.
2. Level of tolerance.
3. Communicative social mobility.

To solve the above-mentioned tasks the following kinds of analysis were used: complex monitoring student-volunteers during meetings at Volunteer School and while performing volunteering activities.

The following methods were used: the self-designed questionnaire to define the readiness for volunteering; the express-questionnaire «Tolerance index» (Soldatova, Kravtsova, Khukhlaev, Shaiherova); Test on communicative skills (Mikhelson);

To solve the tasks we used the self-designed questionnaire «Are you ready to be a volunteer?», which includes 11 questions. The readiness to provide disinterested assistance was expressed in the following way: 76 % answered «yes», 10 % answered «no», 14% – were undecided.

It should be noted that among those who were ready 48 % made up students who underwent preliminary training at Volunteer School, and 28 % – first-year students who joined the School that year. Such quantity distribution of respondents is caused by young specialists' age-related need for dynamic social activity, which is the main motive for providing disinterested assistance.

24 % of those who appeared to be unready were the first-year students in the specialty «social educator». Thus, we can draw a conclusion that the majority of the students, especially those who attended Volunteer School, were more ready for volunteering.

To solve the next task we used the methodology of the express-questionnaire «Tolerance index». It helped to single out the following indices of students' social tolerance: 14% of students demonstrated high level of tolerance; 48% of students showed medium level of tolerance; 36% of students were characterized by low level of tolerance. Low level of tolerance indicates high personal intolerance and evident intolerant attitude to the environment and other people.

Medium level is demonstrated by the respondents who are characterized by both tolerant and intolerant features. They behave tolerantly in some social situations, but display intolerance in others. Representatives of the group with high level of tolerance express explicit features of a tolerant personality. It should be taken into account that the respondents of this range can demonstrate high level of social desirability. To analyze tolerance aspects qualitatively we used the division on subscales: ethnical tolerance 11%, tolerance as a personal feature 50%, social tolerance 39%.

To define students-volunteers' communicative skills we applied Test on communicative skills by Mikhelson.

This test is a kind of achievement tests, i.e. it is compiled from tasks with the correct answer. The test suggests a particular behaviour model which corresponds to competent, confident partnership style. The degree of correspondence to the model is defined by the number of correct answers. Incorrect answers are subdivided into wrong "downwards" (dependent) and wrong "upwards" (aggressive). The questionnaire includes the description of 27 communicative situations. There are 5 possible models of behaviour in each situation. It is necessary to choose one way of behaviour, which is typical of you. You cannot choose two or more variants, or suggest your own one, which is not given in the questionnaire. Using the key, we defined the response pattern which corresponds to the chosen answer variant: competent, dependent, or aggressive. Finally, we counted the percentage of the correct and incorrect answers in terms of total number of the chosen answers. The authors subdivided all the questions into 5 types of communicative situations:

- situations that require response to the positive statements of the partner 16 % of the respondents;
- situations that require the student-volunteer's response to the negative statements 22 % of the surveyed;
- situations in which student-volunteers are addressed with a request 15 %;
- situations that call for a kind of conversation 27 %;
- situations that call for empathy, understanding the partner's feelings and conditions 20 % of respondents.

We defined the level of the communicative competence and the quality of the main formed communicative skills.

While doing this activity volunteers had to overcome certain obstacles, as there were several of them, who did not take the problem of child disability seriously, did not support the idea of integration, did not realize the notion "social integration". Such misconceptions and the wishes expressed concerning the ways to improve integration of children with functional and mental disorders into the society were used to prove social and pedagogical conditions of integration. It concerned mostly the necessity to develop the system of volunteer work training, to provide optimal mental microenvironment for integration of children with functional disorders and to encourage social activity of such people.

After having determined the attitude of the volunteers to the process of integrating children with functional disorders, in particular autistic children, into the social environment, there left no doubts that the majority considered inclusion of children with special needs in the social life to be reasonable and essential, and treated volunteering as additional resource for integrating autistic children in society.

In the process of working out the fundamentals of students' training to volunteering we studied the specific character of the development of autistic children's social competence. Kanner singled out cognitive and behavioural peculiarities of children with autism, in particular: child's inability to emotionally respond to their mother, show anticipation before being taken into mum's arms; detachment from the outer world ignoring external stimuli and at the same time being afraid of loud moving objects; not developing enough natural speech to meet their daily communication needs, delayed echolalia and pronoun

reversal, literality in comprehending and using words; hyperdeveloped rote memory and difficulties in using abstract notions; difficulty with imaginative play and with developing symbols into language; quick-wittedness in solving sensomotor tasks. The researcher also noted that children with autistic disorders display distinctive striving for monotonous activity, stereotyped repetition of movements, sounds, actions with certain objects. It should be stressed that the above-mentioned criteria have been significantly edited and specified in further scientific researches. Thus, successive collection of the sufficient factual data allowed abandoning a common belief that an autistic child obligatory possesses a high intellectual potential; the significance of speech disorders has been proved and their specificity has been detailed [7]. It is essential that E. Ornish and E. Ritvo singled out the peculiarities of perception and organization of their motor activities as the key features of children autism in order to understand the specificity of autistic children's behaviour. In particular, in 1978 E. Ornish suggested treating specific child's response to a sensory stimulus as a symptom of autism. It may be expressed in ignoring a stimulus, morbid reaction or special «captivity» by certain sensory impressions. Furthermore, in 1976 L. Wing defined the difficulty in symbolization as one of the main symptoms of autism. It means literal, non-figurative comprehension, difficulties in transferring established skills to a new situation, developing a symbolic game or making it more complicated [4, p. 25 – 34].

Speaking about volunteer assistance to children with autism, we should stress that there are no «typical cases», all autistic people have their own personality and differ in their social development. This idea is proved by the fact that an autistic child can display attachment to their caregivers, which is practically the same as other children's attachment. The above-mentioned category of children is capable of identification – they recognize their reflection in the mirror (Dawson and McKissick 1984). Children with autism can recognize other people and report it verbally if they can speak (Ozonoff and others 1990; Smalley and Asarnow 1990). Autistic individuals can treat other people and ways of interaction differently. Complete apathy is not characteristic of many people with autism. They long for close relations and try to attract other people's attention in various, but non-traditional ways (Sigman and others 1986; Sigman and Mundy 1989). We can assume that inability to regulate attention and follow the object, which attracted somebody's attention; incapability of recognizing and differentiating other people's emotions; no command of the language, or inability to use it as means of communication (it is illustrated by preserving grammar in writing and phonetics) make it impossible to establish adequate social relations with others. Scientific literature states that autistic children's propensity for breaking social norms is combined with proportional physical development, characteristic serious and delicate «refined» facial expression, which provokes treating the usual for such children behaviour as deviant. Other people's reaction negatively influences the socialization of children with autism and makes their parents avoid social contacts [4]. As a result, we get negative experience of establishing social connections and partial or complete isolation of the child in a microgroup, and later on in the

society. Due to the fact that the society itself is a source of new psychosocial formations, autistic children face certain difficulties in their social development. We believe that the situation gets worse when parents realize the diagnosis and the fact that their child is different makes them persistently interfere in the child's world and spend all possible resources to make their child look the same as others. It often causes children's aggressiveness and parents' depression, which slows down integration of children with autism or makes it completely impossible. Under such conditions volunteers working with this category of children and their families can help to find an alternative solution of certain problems, because when parents focus their attention on their children difference and their problems, they constantly experience psychological and social tension. When mother stays with her child round-the-clock psychosocial climate in the family is getting worse and worse, mother cannot realize her professional ambitions and eventually children have even more problems. Constant fight with the diagnosis causes depression and frustration, which in its turn results in problems with health and social welfare.

Moreover, volunteers could solve the problem of organizing entertainment for children with autism, as it is one of the ways of social integration. Entertainment sphere involves a wide range of human vital functions, the child is not restricted by any external factors and is dependent only on their inner wishes and inclinations. That is why entertainment activity is impossible without inner human factors that promote, or vice versa prevent from development, comprehension and realization of personal needs. The choice of a particular kind of entertainment is conditioned by its individual or social value from the person's point of view, the content of the entertainment activities reflects the aims and tasks the person sets: to acquire knowledge and skills, to work out norms of practical behaviour, to adopt other cultural values, to improve or master different spheres of social activity [1, p. 22]. The content of the entertainment reflects the essence, interrelation and distribution of its constituents: self-education, amateur lessons, health-improving activity, getting acquainted with cultural values, communication, passive rest, creative activities. However, taking into consideration the peculiarities of autistic children development the process of organizing their entertainment is a rather significant component of their lifestyle, as it promotes their self-actualization and development in accordance with their wishes. In such situations a volunteer acts as a go-between for the child and the society, which requires volunteers' additional knowledge, efforts and professional search.

Another problem that can be solved with the help of volunteers is tutoring. Tutor is a special pedagogical position. Tutors deal with developing individual educational programs for schoolchildren and students, support the process of individualization and individual education at school, higher educational institution, in the systems of supplementary vocational education. This occupation is of special importance in inclusive education, as integration of children with autism requires support and assistance of the above-mentioned category [3].

One more important task, which can be solved with volunteering resource involvement, is public education

promoting the awareness of autism, peculiarities of such children development and establishing social contacts with them, as well as social value of every member of society irrespective of their health level. Television, radio, printed press and electronic mass media can provide information on achievements of autistic children, favourable conditions for their development and social integration and thus contribute to acceptance of the above-mentioned category of children. Information support can be performed at the local and country level.

At the same time working with the above-mentioned category volunteers not only improve their knowledge of this problem, but also gets valuable experience of dealing with autistic children. It is a chance to understand these children, one more step to establishing inclusive society. Working as a volunteer one can feel new emotions that have never been so vivid before, for example the feeling of being necessary and important, disabled children's trust, love and tenderness, their parents' respect and gratitude [1].

Thus, all the above-mentioned allows us to state that volunteering can be treated as necessary additional resource for integrating autistic children into the society, as social integration of children with ASD is quite different from the socialization of neurotypical children, and the result can be out of common and ambiguous. We believe that in the company of their peers, with the help of volunteers and «therapy» communication children have much more chances to successfully integrate into the society. We want to stress that autism is a developmental disorder, but not a mental disease. Under the conditions of the appropriate management children with autism can develop successfully, adapt in the society and benefit it. How-

ever, it requires a lot of efforts, human resources involvement, accurate knowledge and realization of what to be done. Worldwide practice of assistance to children with ASD proves that management, education and communication therapy with peers contribute to the integration of autistic children into the society. In its turn volunteering influences not only solution of the social problems of autistic individuals, but also volunteer's behaviour, their development, formation of the best personal qualities. There was an experimental research carried out with the aim to check students' readiness for volunteering. The following criteria were applied: students' readiness for volunteering, level of tolerance, communicative social mobility.

The research allows us to conclude that students want to participate in volunteering directed to the integration of disabled children, this activity attracts interest and enthusiasm, but lack of professional knowledge and special skills caused a low index of tolerance. The majority of students displayed medium and low level of tolerance towards children with psychophysical disorders. Students' communicative social mobility is low as the research showed that students cannot sometimes adapt to new conditions quickly and are not open to communication. It can be explained by the fact that first-year students are still going through the stage of adaptation and may experience heightened anxiety.

We have drawn a conclusion that students should undergo special training for volunteering. It is the practical activity that forms the personality of student-volunteers and affects positively the processes of disabled children integration, in particular children with autism.

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