The web of human and social networks which define a child’s world begins to weave itself even before birth. Each of these networks can prove to help or to hinder the growth of a person. It is the job of a social worker to understand and explore these links.
“The Helping Process for Vulnerable Children”
Training module for social workers.

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We hereby thank Fabrizia Alliora, Gabriella De Col and Sabrina Bosio, trainers of the METE company, for carrying out training courses in Uganda, Rwanda and Kenya.
Vulnerable children and their families are almost always the beneficiaries of the projects in the countries where AVSI operates. The main goal of AVSI is to promote access to education, health services, psychosocial and emotional support for these children and their families either establishing a personal relationship with the child and his parents (or his legal guardians) or carrying out activities and events that can involve all children of the community where they live. The project that carries out this action in the countries where AVSI is present is the Distance Support Program (DSP), thanks to which an Italian family, an individual or a group of people take care of a needy child, physically far away, sending a stable and continuous economic contribution. The DSP project doesn’t only aim at assisting needy children and their families, but rather, progressively, at stirring up, within families themselves, sustainable conditions and sense of responsibility concerning child education, so that any external help is no longer needed. Local organizations, either institutional or not, going from voluntary work groups, associations, parishes to community-based organizations or NGOs, through their social workers or community volunteers are responsible for AVSI projects and reach out the children and their families. Each social worker follows personally a certain number of children. The personal relationship between social workers and children is ensured by regular home visits, where social workers meet as well brothers, sisters, other relatives and legal guardians of the child they follow. In these last years social workers in charge of taking care of children and families and working in African countries have received a training conducted in many sessions, through which a helping process for families and children has been developed. During the training, the trainers, authors of this module, have tried to fulfill the double task of handing over a working method that, within the framework of AVSI perspective, can take adequately into account the value of human being as well as his/her relationships, and to introduce a vision, which tries to be as scientifically rigorous as possible.

This training module reflects the experience the trainers had in Rwanda, Kenya and Uganda and is meant to be a useful instrument for professionals working with families of vulnerable children.

Training Methodology

The method used in these trainings is not to teach lessons. Rather, the approach used in training is the participatory approach. This empowering style of facilitating encourages the realization of the capacities and resources of participants. It also promotes open communication among participants as well as facilitators. This is done so that the personal experiences of the participants, and their personal understanding of the issues explored, are discussed and shared openly. All are reinforced in what they already know from personal experience and all learn from each other.

The training should thus be flexible and geared to the needs of the individual group. Facilitators can adjust the training based on the understanding and experience of the participants, which is constantly assessed by their answers and responses to the topics.

The participatory approach also means that each participant is involved in thinking about his or her own experience of life and giving feedback on all the topics as they relate to his/her own thinking, problems, personal solutions, strengths and weaknesses. Although the tendency of people is to speak and think about others rather than themselves, it is the responsibility and
art of the facilitator to help the participants focus on their own experience throughout the course. For this reason one aspect of the training is that it is a therapeutic process, a kind of retreat for the participant. Focusing on the experiences of the participants is also a way to bring out the value of each of them. Individually they become more aware of themselves, the problems they are having, and their own resources and capacities.

The basis of this training approach is the conviction that you can become a good helper if you begin and remain in the process of listening to yourself, taking care of and helping yourself first, so that you can better understand and help others.

During the training the facilitators use different methods to help the participants understand the important points and concepts. The team also attempts to bring the group together so that the participants feel free to express themselves, give honest feedback to the facilitators, share their own ideas or point of view, and even disagree with material presented. The team tries to create a comfortable climate of unity and enjoyment in being together as a group.

The teaching will be given through face to face lectures as well as through individual work, group work and more actives methodologies such as role play, dramas, energizers etc.

### Module Structure

The module is composed of subsequent chapters, with each including the title, content, and suggested methods of facilitating.

The tools and instruments (in addition to the complementary texts) referenced in the text are to be found in the resources.

The following symbols are used throughout the manual in order to help participants and facilitators easily identify key elements within each section:

- **Discussion Topic**
  Suggested topic of conversation during group work.

- **Group Work**
  Exercises designed to engage groups as a way to deepen lessons learned in each section.

- **Individual Work**
  Exercises designed to provoke individual reflection of participants.

- **Energizer Games**
  Games designed to build cohesion amongst participants while also teaching relevant lessons.

- **Role Play**
  Activities designed to deepen the understanding of the topics.

### Training Objectives

The main goal of this training is to offer to social workers theoretical contents and qualified methodological contributions to their work with children, families and communities. At the end of the training, the following results are expected: 1. Acquiring new qualified educational knowledge about the child, the family and the community; 2. Acquiring a methodological pathway focused on the team group work to understand better their on-field experience; 3. Acquiring operational tools and instruments.
For years, AVSI has elaborated a method, arising from the various experiences collected in various countries in the world. It is the fruit of the signs that the actions of human beings have left in the reality, settled over time; systemized and generalized in order to be capitalized and to be transmitted to others. This method is the conceptual framework of the value choices AVSI means to promote through its presence in the world. It is based on five qualitative principles and can help understand the content and style of the action to beneficiaries.

The five founding principles of this action are:
1- Centrality of the person
2- Starting from the positive
3- Doing with
4- Development of intermediary bodies
5- Partnership

Centrality of the Person
The person, who is unique and inimitable, is at the center of the whole action, because he/she is a created being, therefore in its origin structurally prone to relationship, which is an integral part of its humanity. Relationship is an unavoidable condition of its development and comes into play primarily with family and emotional proximity networks, secondarily with community and social organizations.

The centrality of the person becomes evident on three levels:
a) in sharing his/her vital needs, firstly the needs of beauty, goodness, justice, which is connatural to human person and to which every other need, even those linked to the physical survival of the person itself, must be traced back.
b) in sharing the sense of life which must be stirred up within an educational relationship where help goes far beyond poverty conditions or material needs. It is precisely what makes beneficiaries equal to social workers and reduces cultural differences doing them justice, because both need to understand and accept life events within a global meaning that embraces both the beneficiary and the social worker.
c) in being moved for the other’s, the beneficiary’s condition, for his/her pain, suffering, shortcomings, which leads the social worker to take the beneficiary into charge, offering a help which allows to understand and accept his/her own limit and shortcomings, being total free from the final result. This freedom is the first requirement to avoid that need becomes a blackmail for both.

Starting From The Positive
Positiveness is the sign that reality is friendly, that goodness is present and possible; it indicates aspects where life progresses towards development and highlights strong points to hold to. At the same time, it allows to give hope a concrete and present content, to show the possibility of a change in people’s life because this change has already happened and so it will be possible once again.

Each person is a richness, is a capital, without which humanity would be poorer. A positive approach towards reality generates a new way to operate, because it lets people discover their value and develop
their personal responsibility.

This principle translates into an operational indication, one starts from what is present in terms of competence, resources, expectations, desires, and not from what is lacking, work starts from what is happening, developing. The signs of goodness within reality are like footsteps on a path people has already discovered and walked along, which must be continued.

Doing with
Nothing can become good in another person’s life if he/she can’t participate in it or be a protagonist of it. The most serious problem in developing countries is due to excess or degeneration of social welfare, i.e. making people objects of help and not acting subjects of their development. This subjectivity is expressed on three levels: knowing, assessing and acting within a single action, the shared action. It allows, while taking place, to acquire capacity to know and evaluate reality. Therefore, it isn’t necessary to act on or act for, but act with, to respond together to needs, identify together difficulties, to examine together their consequences and possible solutions.

The starting point is a relationship with the beneficiary, the method is sharing. Doing with is the operational consequence of sharing.

Intermediary Body Development and Subsidiarity
Society arises from free aggregation of people and families into groups/associations which represent the first level of social organizations which people create to respond to their needs. They express capacity of initiative and freedom of action, creativity oriented to common good. They are shaped according to the form people organized in association give to their needs because they are closer to their desires within a logic of solidarity.

Constitution and development of intermediary bodies is one of the most important goals, because it allows to put into effect completely the principle of subsidiarity. People are by nature relational beings which get together in movements or associations determined by ideal criteria supporting them along this path and stimulating them to create works responding to human needs. According to this principle, the State is conceived to serve these realities and consequently people.

The AVSI method favors constitution of these organizations which must be acknowledged in their cultural and social value, supported in their action by concrete means, avoiding them to be taken up or replaced by other private or state organizations holding more economic or social power.

Partnership
In development projects it is capital to set up a real partnership among all either public or private local and international bodies on the concerned area, avoiding overlapping and favoring synergies and optimizing use of already scarce resources at disposal to cooperate in coping and solving a present need.

Partnership aims at giving sustainability to the own action by powering the role of local subjects which are valued and supported, without replacing them in their freedom of action.

These principles of the AVSI method are not only a theoretical premise, but they also establish an ideal framework, and the basic tenets of a professional methodology; they permeate and imbue its whole development, shaping the method itself either in term of ties and of quality indications in the various phases of the helping process.
Chapter 2
The Helping Process

Within reality, reciprocal help is the way in which an individual lives his/her humanity by taking into charge reciprocal needs either in everyday life and exceptional or critical situations. It is a spontaneous way of acting within relationships because it lies in the human nature to be sensitive and interested to others’ needs. This help takes different forms, creates different ties and comes differently into play: it can be naturally offered between people, either by volunteers and by professionals. For this reason, they are to be considered separately in order to describe their specificity.

Natural Help Between People
In human society, help isn’t a professional category, but rather existential, because it defines reciprocity exchange between people either relatives or strangers. It arises from an encounter between people who acknowledge each other as significant, to such an extent they can’t avoid taking each other into consideration. Encounter creates a very interpersonal space, a space to welcome the other in his/her diversity.

Welcome is the first form of concrete help offered to others, recognizing that the other is given and embracing him or her in his existence, sharing his/her condition and destiny. Welcome engenders some specific gestures which represent a more specific help content:

- Follow-up, as a capacity of staying close to the other on the same path, but also as a capacity of orienting him/her in his difficult circumstances.

- Comprehension, as a capacity to be embraced together with another person, and therefore involved, in an emotional and affective situation which is significant for both, which allows to understand what the other is living not only on the rational, but also on the existential plan. This capacity pertains to the sensitive inheritance of the individual and can become more intensive and deeper.

- Containing, as a capacity of holding together, of bearing the other’s difficult aspect, but also offering a relationship space to which a person can trust his/her pain and be sure that it will be loved and guarded, but at the same time that it can be looked from a distance.

Therefore help in anybody’s life arises from an encounter and develops as welcome; the latter engenders interpersonal dynamics, which take specific forms such as follow-up, comprehension and containing. The interpersonal relationship which derives from these three aspects is called “sharing”.

Sharing is a company mode which is realized when someone participates in the other’s reality, not only for the need condition the latter is living, but also and above all for the common human experience, recognized in the other’s desire of happiness, in whose certainty it is possible to cherish hope in the present and the future.

Therefore sharing represents the whole help content and method, the core of a helping relationship. Help is offered from individual to individual, therefore is highly relational and not technical at all.

Help Offered by Volunteers
It is offered by people who are highly motivated and interested, offering spare time for people in a difficult situation who are initially strangers. It is based on people’s availability and gratuitousness and is not paid, except some expense pay-back. It is completely similar to help between people in its content, but not in its form. In fact, voluntary help is not sporadic, it tends to become systematic and organized, although minimally, ensuring stability and constancy,
to such an extent that union forms are developed and (obviously non-profit) associations are founded.

It is a highly relational help and it introduces the first elements of technical intervention whenever rules are established and instruments are used such as mobilization, social animation, etc. For this reason, it is an intermediate form in-between natural help between people and help offered by professionals.

Help Offered by Professionals
Within social work the pivot of any helping intervention is interpersonal relationship meant as “capacity to begin a relationship with the other and at the same time to think about oneself and about the relationship that is being developed to grab the sense, the meaning and the thereby expressed material meanings” (Manoukian, 1995). It represents the fundamental structure of the act of offering help or exerting control within a “professional setting” composed of the following factors: task, role and the functions connected to it, time and space.

It is within the interpersonal relationship that the social worker by understanding the beneficiary’s emotional-affective world, will help him/her to acknowledge his/her problem and to give it a meaning, which can orient the beneficiary to find solutions, i.e. a different way to figure out his or her present and future condition.

Relationships are therefore privileged “places”, built up for two people, where the other can show, recognize and redefine himself or herself, acknowledge the truth of self as a desire for happiness, the wish of being what one really wishes to be, beyond what he or she really can.

Any form of help, either material, psychological, educational or social if it isn’t part of a significant interpersonal relationship, risks to be a way of “doing” that doesn’t promote any exchange and it doesn’t help the person to put himself or herself into play and to become an active subject/protagonist of his/her need as well of his/her response to the need itself.

In fact in everyday’s experience, as we have seen above, social workers are not the only subjects offering possibilities to establish relationships and lending help. When you think of close friends and relatives, of primary networks, and in particular of the role played by members of voluntary work associations it is a highly relational environment, where multiple help forms are present.

But in the case help is offered by a professional, relationship:

- takes place in an already given setting (workplace, time, service time, etc.);
- is characterized by the social worker’s technical skill, based on knowledge learnt by studies, whose distinctive feature is scientific rigor, which translates into theoretical contents, methodological contents and technical instruments;
- orients exchange to user advantage, putting into play an affectivity mediated by professional responsibility that will respect the user’s boundaries. The capacity of entering a relationship is innate, but watching over oneself and others from the right distance for both people is not so obvious. It can be educated by training, enhancing individuals’ qualities such as gratuitousness, sensitiveness, perception and respect of the other as a plus value, listening
capacity.

- is inserted in a wider framework of social action, which is the expression of the social politics of the country where an individual lives.

However, human and social sciences aren’t able on their own to give a meaningful sense to the action, therefore the action risks to become ineffective if it does not thrust its roots into the existential meaning of help, on principles, such as those promoted by AVSI, in a theoretical and methodological vision which takes into account human being as carrier of a desire of infinity, which appears fathomless even to the most sophisticated sciences.

**The Helping Process**

It is an operational and mental method the social worker can follow in addressing needy people, their families and their communities. It consists in ensuring that they will develop the necessary strategy, skills and competence to take into charge their life needs, using personal and network resources at their disposal. It implies building a significant relationship with the beneficiary, which make him/her aware of his/her desire and active subjects of possible change.

In the practice it unfolds in phases, following a logical and chronological order, which makes it possible to recognize, analyze and systemize every passage of every phase, each of them having different content and objectives.

In the next chapters we will take into consideration each of these phases, detailing its goals and aims, outlining its content and operational implications, indicating complementary instruments and tools for theoretical and methodological in-depth.
Chapter 3

Intake Assessment and Observation

Intake Assessment
It is the first meeting point between the social worker and the beneficiary. It is a physical place, more than this it is a relational place where the demand can be freely presented because the beneficiary feels himself accepted and acknowledged. This place can be created by listening carefully, by a loving and well-disposed look, by an attitude full of positivity.

Welcome is the first way of giving an answer and establishes the first moment of observation. It is the phase of the helping process that aims at knowing the situation for a preliminary evaluation allowing to define the intervention or to forward the demand to another service department.

Demand is crucial to start an action of. It is important to define who is demanding, because the act of demanding implies that someone comes to me, derives from a person having risked to take initiative, probably after trying many times, after coping with doubts, incertitude and suffering. Demand expresses an “I” who is already moving.

If I want to help someone the first step is focusing on the request, which is the first action thanks to which the beneficiary becomes active, showing his/her desire to exit from his/her difficult situation, showing in other words to have hope.

Accepting a request aims at:
1. Relieving this person from the emotional burden he/she is living and, at the same time, sharing evaluation, that must be carried out together; 2. Offering help to establish a contact with people who in their turn need help; 3. Clarifying the nature of the problem and trying to establish a first contact about the current adversity or trouble; 4. Increasing the knowledge of the environment; 5. Creating alliances with network members, with service organizations.

A social worker can receive a request from: the child, his/her family, relatives, neighbors, other organizations. In any case, it is necessary to think about the variables of the source, their implications and action consequences (Guay 2000).

Whatever the request may come, and from whoever it may come, the response should address three levels: child, family, community. This means that the social worker does not collect only information, but observes the child and simultaneously, his/her family and the community.

![Diagram showing the sources of the request and the steps to be taken](image-url)
The Observation

Observation is a method to know and understand the reality to pass to action. Observing requires the desire of meeting, putting oneself into play, to know someone you need to enter a relationship with, it is necessary to have an emotional knowledge. In fact, the “I” discloses and reveals only in front of a “you”, within reciprocity dynamics which puts individual and the other’s emotional dimension at the center of experience.

Suggested Methods of Facilitating

Lesson

Plenary discussion:
What is the difference between the question coming from the child and the one coming from the family?

Role play:
imagine the first meeting between a guardian and a social worker. During the discussion highlight that the first answer is to welcome, which is also the first moment of the observation.

Group work:
What are the difficulties during this phase of intake assessment?

Energizers:

The candies’ games
Each player gets as many candies as he wants. When everybody has chosen, the facilitator invites everyone to introduce himself saying as many qualities as the number of candies he chose. Goal of the game: A good way to start playing with a new group. The game promotes the knowledge among participants and increases self-esteem.

Greeting the others
Ask the players to greet using different gestures or verbal expressions, according to other cultures. (ex. How do people greet in China or in India?). If the players don’t know different expressions, the facilitator can make some examples and ask them to repeat those gestures or those words.

Goal of the game: To encourage meeting among different cultures using different gestures or verbal expressions according to the different cultures.

The Observation requires attention, existential and relational openness, spirit of adaptation, indulgence, initiative as an active position to the other, global vision on reality, as a capacity to take into consideration all factors into play.

The most significant observation is direct, being physically present, by interviews, or home visits, putting into play look, listening, relevant questions. It can take place according to other modalities, being part of the work environment, meeting other social workers and some time, reading accurately documentation with clear-sightedness and intelligence.
To carry out his work, the social worker needs to collect elements of knowledge concerning the child, his/ her family, the network the child belongs to, the social environment made of organizations and institutions.

The Child Observation

What should be observed in the child? The look on the child must embrace him/ her in his/her globality. However, we can have some reference points to make the observation more specific.

When observing a child we must pay attention to four factors:
- his/ her appearance: how does the child appear to his/her observer?,
- his/ her behavior, how does he/ she interact with the observer or with others?,
- his/ her way of entering a relationship, i.e. how does the child relate to his/ her brothers and sisters, his/ her friends and schoolmates?
- how the social worker perceives the child.

This aspect is capital, because when a social worker starts a relationship with the child and has to understand what it means for him/ her, he must be aware of his feelings. If knowledge is an affective process, the first social worker’s resource is in her work is his person, his heart, which must be taken into consideration as an evaluation criteria.

The social worker must know the child directly, without external mediation, so that the knowledge is not spoiled by the adults’ feelings, expectations and unfortunately even interests. However, it is important to listen what significant adults say about the child: how he/she behaves, how he/ she enters in a relationship, how he/she expresses his/ her needs, if he/she is obedient or transgressive

(see the format for the observation of the child in annex 1).

For an in-depth, read the complementary text n.1 “Child global development: emotional and cognitive aspects” by Fabrizia Alliora.

The Observation of the Family

Any individual lives the experience of a family, which is the strongest human experience. The family experience is essential for child growth, because family leads the child to fulfill his/ her needs and desires and leads the child to become an adult 1.

- The family’s good consist in relationships, in ties
- Family allows to establish internally primary ties + essential ties between its members, but also externally with other people and other social bodies.
- These ties are crucial for the human being because the essence of our identity consists in relationships, any of us has been generated and wants to be recognized.

Therefore it is important for a social worker to know the family of a child. Observing the family may permit to know the child, to know who he/she belongs. to

The observation of the family must include following aspects:
- The structure of the family
- The human inheritance of the family
- Affective and ethical relationship quality within the family
- The skills and competence of the family
- How it carries out its task towards its members: welcome, protection, care, education.

The format for the observation of the family (annex 2) will allow us to situate the knowledge path without getting lost in secondary details.

For an in-depth, read the complementary text n.2 “Family, a resource for the human being” by Lia Sanicola.

1We call “family” the adults living with the child, the little community of different age and gender having blood ties with the child, looking after his/ her growth and education.
Lesson on the Observation

**Group Work and Plenary 1:**
Observe the movie Billy Elliot by using the format for the observation of the child in annex B. Follow with the questions contained in the movies annex.

**Group Work and Plenary 2:**
A member of the group chooses a child who knows very well and introduces him/her to the others. Then the work is presented in the plenary.

**Role Play:**
The social worker goes to observe a child and her family at home...

Annet 8 years old: she is not going to school because they have little money and she works at home helping the sister. She doesn’t know English.

Family composition: the father is dead, mother is HIV positive and sick at home.

One daughter, 15 years old, heads the family, working as a tailor at home. She has a sewing machine.

Three little boy children (10, 7, 4 years old): the first two go to school, the last one is handicapped.

One aunty living at home, without a job. They live in a poor house, only one room all together, without mattresses.

The social worker finds all the family at home. The two children who are at school are coming back home while the social worker is there.

Energizers:

**“Don’t Trust Your Eyes” Game:**
Divide participants into two equal teams. Teams line up shoulder to shoulder, facing one another across a five-meter space. Explain the rules of the game to them.

The first team will pass a small object behind their backs, while the second team claps and counts to 10.

When the second team gets to 10, the other team must stop passing the object. The second team has three chances (three players should guess) to guess which player of the other team has the object. If they guess right, they get one point. If they guess wrong, the “passing” team gets one point.

It is then the second team’s turn to pass the object, and the game is repeated. The first team that reaches five points wins the game.

**Game Message:**
to observe well means to see also things that are hidden

**The Jealous Mum Game:**
The facilitator sets the chair in a circle. Half of the participants (called mums) goes behind each chair keeping their hands behind their back, the other half (called the children) sits on the chairs except one that must be left free. The mum behind the free chair has to try and “get another mum’s child” winking at him. The child who the mum winks at must try and run onto the free chair, but if “his mum” touches him, he can not move.

**Game message:**
to get the attention of the group and channel the energy of a group too excited to focus.
The Observation of the Community Environment: Social Network Relevance

In the child-centered and family-centered help process, the relevant community context in our case is characterized by a face to face relationship web, whose distinctive feature is physical proximity and emotional closeness, which are called social networks. They will be the object of a precise and direct observation.

In the first phase of the help process the social worker will try to know to whom the child belongs, not only at family level, but also at network level, he/she will try to understand for whom the child is important, to whom he/ she is related, who offers support, on whom he/ she can rely, who may be willing to collaborate, to “act with”. The social worker will be able to carry out this preliminary observation to the extent he/she can explore his/ her personal networks, allowing him/her to see and listen the network “language”, to grab its essential elements and evaluate them for a global knowledge of the child.

The best way of knowledge is direct, but this doesn’t mean information given by beneficiaries can always be reliable and useful, at least for a first global evaluation. When observing social networks it is important to bear in mind two aspects:

- Networks aren’t only important because they “act”, but because they exist and they are present. They give people’s life a meaning even when they’re inactive. They belong to the human and social inheritance. It is necessary to evaluate their potential, not only operational, but also concerning their relational meaning.

Networks don’t exist and mobilize depending on the social worker’s plan, but depending on the value that its members, and networks on the whole, attribute to the network they belong to. Evaluation of cultural factors will then show if and to what extent every individual will rely on acknowledgement and, consequently, on his/her network help.

For an in-depth, read the complementary text n.3 “Network approach in social work” by Lia Sanicola.

Suggested Methods of Facilitation

Plenary Discussion:
The facilitator asks: What kind of network do you know?

Possible answers: telephone, electrical, roads, internet, airline, financial, net, colander, racquet, mosquito net, spider web

The facilitator asks: mention a verb connected to the network above.

Possible answers:
Net – to retain, to contain
strainer – to filter
Internet – to communicate, to know
Mosquito net – to protect

Individual work
Make your own social network by using the material in annex

Group Work
Make the network and the support sheet of a child you know well, by using the material in annex, then discussion in plenary.

Energizers: Games of Cooperation:
Crocodile game
Show the players the borders of the area where they are free to swim as in a lake. Put the sheets of paper on the ground, those represent islands. Command everybody to swim all around the place except on the papers till the facilitator shouts: “crocodile” and everybody runs onto
the papers in order not to be eaten. Those who are not on the islands are eaten and therefore eliminated from the game. Keep reducing the number of islands to make the game more interesting. Finally the one left is the winner.

Goal of the game: Have fun, stimulate movements and cooperation among the players.

Points of land
The group is divided into more teams containing the same number of participants. Show that each part of the body (hands, feet, back, etc.) that touches the floor earns one point. When you announce a number, the whole team has to form such number as fast as possible. For example, if you have 5 people in a team, you announce 17 = 10 feet and 7 hands touch the floor. 5 = everybody has to stand on one leg. 20 = everybody lies on the floor with his hands and his feet touching the surface.

Goal of the game: Work together, cooperate, focus, have a body contact.

Spider web
The group stands in a circle. The first person taking the rope, keeps a part of it in his hand and says: “my name is...and I through the rope ( that can be fastened to a small ball or a plastic bottle ) to... ( and asks an other participant’s name in the group ). The person receiving the rope as well keeps a part of it and asks another person’s name. The game ends when everybody holds a piece of the rope. Finally a web will be formed and a person from outside can get over it.

Variation: instead of their names people can say: I am, I like etc.

Goal of the game: Understand the importance of social relation-ships, of the web and help of the community.
Chapter 4

Operational Hypothesis

Evaluation is a capital phase, because it helps to make the hypothesis of an intervention, it motivates its reasons, it sets the base to elaborate an intervention plan. It consists in a knowledge and comprehension process of the reality and of the people involved in order to formulate the feasibility process.

We talk about an evaluation “process” to indicate a progression which takes place over time, hand in hand with observation, within the history the social worker is building with the beneficiaries, becoming deeply involved, letting more and more significant technical and rational elements interwoven with emotional-affective factors.

Evaluation must allow to formulate an helping plan offering essential elements for a decision. For this reason it is necessary:

• to document and get documented;
• to formulate operational hypotheses;
• to justify an intervention proposal.

During the evaluation process, the social worker must try to answer five questions as a guideline:

1. **Who has a problem?**
   Is it the beneficiary who is suffering most? Who else is perturbed by the situation? How intense is the need of change? What is the beneficiary ready to do to show his need of change?

   To what extent is he ready to get involved in exchange of the operator's help? At the same time the social worker must single out which people can be involved in the helping process and therefore identify and involve networks, that's to say any people who is concerned, even indirectly, by the situation or who can bring help.

2. **Why now?**
   Sometimes the request of help is preceded by triggering factors (job loss, mourning, relational problems, the partner's disengagement, a traumatic event) or by stressing situations that become intolerable for the individual or for his family, which bring along everyday life's disorganization and emotional-affective disorder.

3. **To what extent is the beneficiary mobilized to change?**
   The whole intervention is based on virtual forces of change - as people's capacity to mobilize to change their situation - as help coming from the social network - as help that the social worker can give

   To stir up forces oriented to change you need therefore to identify the level of suffering and hope that the beneficiary expresses, acting as an incentive for his engagement, as well as the need of change which has been expressed, and the most motivated people to change.

4. **What is the problem? What vulnerability and risks exist?**
   It is difficult to make changes if the problem has not been adequately identified or has been misinterpreted. Therefore it is necessary to be able to describe it in...
terms of observed factors, gestures and behaviors.

A problem in fact results from an unbalance between challenges in life (needs) and the available resources to cope with it. This unbalance makes people more vulnerable, exposing them to risks going from survival risk to corruption and loss of sense and self esteem.

Children, even if they are vulnerable, can develop their competence, values and qualities.

Vulnerability is certainly a problem, but is not a total hindrance, it slows down. There are children who “can”, but to be aware that they can they have to start from what they have.

Why is it important to start from this wealth, to start from what the child is and from what the child has? Because to develop a skill you must have a reason, a motivation, arising from self-confidence. Self-esteem, confidence, motivation arise when someone says you are worth.

It is necessary to start from the certitude that it is possible and for this reason it is necessary to find what is positive in life. In the history of every person there are some trace of goodness, which are permanent and present even today.

We are not “the lack supplier”, or those who provide what the child lacks, but we are those who observe the child's original beauty and help him/her develop his/ her inheritance.

Without recovering self-esteem and confidence in your own potential, it is difficult to make a real change. For this reason, the evaluation process must involve all people implied in an education process towards the child.

For an in-depth, read the complementary text n.4 “What is risk and vulnerability” by Giovanni Galli – Marcello Kreiner.

5. What are network resources?
The presence and mobilization of a network can make the difference in the assessment of a situation, because it remarkably increases either material and relational resources.

In evaluating network relevance it is important to be able to answer to some questions: who is present in this child's life? What responsibility does he take, what does he offer, what does network on the whole as well as every single component mean for the child? Is the network static, passive, indifferent or dynamic? On whom can the social worker and the child rely to cope with reality problems?

The complementary text “Network approach in social work” by Lia Sanicola will help us learn in-depth how to use networks and their resources.
Lesson on Vulnerability

Individual Work on Vulnerability:
Each of us has strong points and weak points. Think to your aspect (how do you present yourself), to your competences (your actions) and to your relationships. By comparing weak and strong points, what is your vulnerability?

Group Work 1:
Who are the children we meet? Why can we say that they are valuable children? That is: why have they a value? Choose a group of children you know and introduce them to the plenary session as if the were a team who needs to participate to an international competition.

Group Work 2:
What do our children ask? What are their needs, their demands? During the discussion in plenary, underline that needs can be divided into categories and try to do it with participants.

Group Work 3:
Describe some situation of vulnerability and discuss their causes. Are there differences for the different age groups? Write the answers on a big sheet to be presented and discussed in plenary.

Group work 4:
Analyze the vulnerability of the child you know well and discuss in the group the different factors of vulnerability.

Enhancement Games:

I am, I can, I have:
Using adhesive tape stick on each participant’s shoulder a paper with three statements: I am... I can... I have... the players have to walk around the room with a pencil in their hand, completing the statements with positive characteristics that correspond to every “friend”. The game ends when all statements have been completed.

Now everyone can lift the paper and read what the others think about him. The authors of the statements remain anonymous, to allow the children to find the courage to tell others what they normally wouldn’t say freely.

Goal of the game: Recognise ourselves and others peoples’ positive sides.

The Fan of Positive:
Everybody writes his name and draws a small picture of his face. Then everybody passes the paper to his left. Each person writes something kind about him or her, whose name is on the paper. So the paper is passed to all players until it goes back to his owner.

Goal of the game: Recognise ourselves and others peoples’ positive sides.
The definition of objectives is the first step to elaborate an individual plan which should be meant not only as a process to reach a solution to problems, but as a hypothesis according to which people are guided to fulfill their life project, responding to needs which are modifying over time. Plan objectives represent the image of an improved situation in the future, they must describe reasons why beneficiaries need the project and which advantages do they take from it.

In other words a negative, problematic situation should be turned out into a positive realization, and should be positively formulated.

The intervention plan should qualitatively be able to:
- give a meaning to the beneficiary’s needs;
- aim at enhancing positiveness, understood as experience and resources;
- aim at strengthening capacities or skills that the child and families already possess or may possess;
- take into consideration the social networks they belong to and their possible implications.

Definition of Objectives
It is an apparently simple operation, but often reduced to a bureaucratic act, which repeats the same intentions and actions for everybody – or at least for many beneficiaries – without showing each individual’s qualities and uniqueness.

This methodological error derives from a bundle of factors, mainly because of response system standardization, lack of personalization and in-depth of the observation and evaluation phase (which is reduced to a superficial and standardized interpretation leading to a list of needs which are the same needs for different beneficiaries), showing the social worker’s training weakness, who automatically “applies” to very different people what he has in mind to do.

Although aware that responses are often standardized, that the number of beneficiaries is very high and they have very similar needs, what is not the same is the individual himself that can live very differently and can give a very different meaning to his needs; therefore each situation becomes different from the other. It is the social worker’s professionalism which must be able to catch the needy individual’s peculiar features and shape objectives that fits him as a glove.

An objective does not describe what the social worker intends to do, but it indicates goals towards a certain action is directed, as well as what the beneficiary will achieve at the end of the intervention.

Generally we formulate three subsequent stages:
- general objectives,
- specific objectives and expected results

While the pathway of defining objectives
follows a top-down logic from general objectives to expected results, the operational path presupposes as starting point available means, in other words personal and organizational resources starting from which it is possible to identify actions and foresee reliable results from these actions, which the social worker will then orient to objectives.

To be realizable and realistic objectives must be:

* **Well-identified:** not generic, not valid for any beneficiary, but specific for the individual(s) that are being looked after, in that context, during that time, acknowledged by the beneficiaries themselves.

* **Concrete:** clearly visible, realistic, really attainable. It is necessary that the beneficiary can see its feasibility to engage himself despite constraints and difficulties.

* **Measurable:** they must describe clearly the situation you wish to obtain. Results' monitoring and evaluation must be possible or at least you should be able to express your judgment on them.

* **Shared:** by the concerned people and by the whole staff who is taking care of the situation. They cannot be imposed but they have to be negotiated.

* **They must have a timeline:** Objectives must be fulfilled by a certain date, a chronological framework within which a specific situation must take place. Deadlines are necessary to fulfill plans and motivate people to reach the objectives.

What are the condition to fulfill an objective? It is important to check compliance between identified objectives and:

- values and expectations of the various subjects and actors involved in the planning process.
- If a plan or project is shared, it can rely on mobilizing various resources in synergy.
- The individual's skills and competences, i.e., assessing whether or not the objective lies in the reach of the beneficiary's possibilities.
- Available resources or resources that can be mobilized.

Definition of the Intervention plan

Drafting the intervention plan means to single out in a clear and understandable way for everybody:

- **WHAT IS TO DO:** actions and interventions which are meant to be useful and necessary to reach the objectives;
- **WHO DOES IT:** subjects taking responsibility and suitable resources which are employed to solve the problem: all those who have made themselves available must find their room in the intervention plan.
- **HOW:** Ways and strategies to carry out projects.
- **WHEN:** Duration (start and end date of the intervention) and frequency (how many times a day or a week does the intervention take place).
- **BY WHAT:** necessary resources for each action or intervention.

To write an intervention plan

- **WHAT:** actions, interventions that you consider useful and needed to reach the objective
- **WHO:** all the persons who take upon the responsibility to solve the problem; all the available persons should be part of the plan
- **HOW:** ways of implementation, strategies, instructions or indications on how to act
- **WHEN:** timeframe (date of beginning and end of the intervention), frequency of the activities
Intervention strategies should take into account the following aspects and differentiate themselves on three levels:
1. the child;
2. his/her family;
3. his/her social network

At each level we must consider what people belonging to social networks can put into play and how to enhance their contribution at most. The presence of an unemployed but still active grandmother, for example, must imply a help who foresees her involvement in her family’s economic support.

Priorities
The social worker faces children, adults and families who are very needy in contrast with scarce resources. Besides, people demand support based on their needs which do not always respond to reasonable criteria to which the social worker has to lead the beneficiary.

Here below are some criteria that can serve as a guideline to define priorities:
- Seriousness, meant as irreversibility of negative consequences deriving from inaction or late action.
- Urgency, fastness of necessary action.
- Problem relevance concerning after-effects of the problem’s positive or negative consequences.
- feasibility due to the presence and accessibility of professional, organizational and economic resources (tools, human resources...)
- Interest, i.e. personal motivation and pleasure/disappointment in acting.
- Action hindrances, in terms of knowledge, time, means, circumstances.
- Opportunities, in other words specific situations for which beneficiaries are willing to help to start a collaboration. Over time, staff will work to show real needs on which they can invest more effectively.

Suggested methods of facilitating

Lesson

Group Work:
give to groups the story of a child. Tell them to: redefine the vulnerability, the resources, to make a hypothesis considering also the resources of the environment and of the organization, to define the objective and plan one or more actions (answering to the questions: what can I do? Which results do I expect to reach from what I will do?)

Cross the River:
Two volunteers get the rope, go away from each other and move the rope acting like waves of a river, slowly at first and then faster acting like bigger waves. The players, in group of 5 align and holding each others’ hand, have to jump above the rope all together without touching it. The group whose even one participant touches the rope is eliminated.
Goal of the game: Work together; find solutions and get together to win.

Human Machines:
The group is divided into 5-8 peoples’ teams arranged along the available directions. Each team plans how to build a machine only using their bodies. It has to be a real machine, like a phone or a bycicle for instance. It can also be an imaginary machine which has never been invented before. In 5 minutes, the teams come back and each team has to build its machine not saying what is going to be. The others have to guess it.
Goal of the game: Work together, cooperate, test each person’s different qualities.
Evaluation is a knowledge pathway allowing to attribute a value to what the social worker has done for the child, the family and the community.

This value can be attributed comparing the present to the beginning. It is not a process performed sitting behind a desk, but getting involved in a relationship with the child, the family and the community. This involvement allows the social worker to perceive whether, how and when the situation has improved.

Therefore to evaluate does not mean to measure, but to describe a change in terms of improvement and effectiveness.

**Evaluation variables**

Evaluation must be planned from the beginning of the helping process. During the planning work we have to define:

- who will evaluate: who will perform the evaluation, the social worker having the case in charge, another social worker, the coordinator.
- for whom the evaluation is performed: for the social worker himself, for the whole staff, for the organization, for donors or other people.
- the reason why the evaluation is performed: to take decisions, to regulate intervention plan, to obtain project refinancing, to verify its effectiveness, but above all to check whether we are working well and whether we have obtained the child’s and his/ her family’s improvement.

- What is evaluated: actions, results, improvements, expected and unexpected changes, social workers’ attitudes and actions, the intervention plan itself.
- how to evaluate, collective and qualitative information, building specific instruments for data collection and data analysis, but above all recording social worker’s perceptions about reality.
- when to evaluate, deciding frequency, choosing the moment in which it is reasonable to perform an evaluation.

**What should be evaluated**

Evaluation can focus mainly on three areas: actions, results and objectives.

**Actions:** evaluation consists in assessing whether a certain intervention has been implemented according to the hypothesis done, within the foreseen schedule and assigned resources. The intervention plan serves as a reference and has to judge quantitatively (what has been performed) and qualitatively (how it has been performed, how long and by which means). It is true that social workers’ initiatives do not always refer to an intervention plan rigorously designed, because these initiatives respond to circumstances as they are, requiring promptness and creativity. Verifying accomplished actions is part of the method and requires a culture inspired by the fundamental exigence to stick continuously to reality. Without a verification, work remains confined to the sphere of subjectivity and has no objective confirmation.

It is a good rule for a social worker to give himself evaluation criteria and, once an intervention has been carried out, to submit it to a verification, discussing it with his staff, his team and his responsible.

**Results:** evaluation concerns assessing effects obtained by accomplished actions, i.e. their effectiveness. It requires refer-
ence points, expressed as useful indicators to describe previous situations to which the situation after the intervention must be compared.

For some actions, for example school results, designing indicators and evaluating results is not difficult, because the effects of a good intervention can be immediately assessed by specific tools. Other actions, like, a change in the family situation, are more difficult to evaluate.

It is advisable for social workers to associate the observation of the reality and their perception of the changes to specific tools and instruments designed to verify whether these supposed changes have really taken place or not.

Objectives: for them the evaluation is surely the most complex and the most difficult to carry out, firstly because objectives are generally reached in a very long time, secondly because the definition of the objectives itself is often problematic and even too generic, therefore it often lacks an “a quo” starting point of reference to then evaluate the “ad quem” final point. Besides, the time factor leads to the fact that the social worker starting the intervention is not always the same as the social worker ending the intervention. Despite that aspect, we must never renounce to wonder if we have obtained what we have planned, for this reason it is important to go continuously to the starting hypothesis, which constitutes the baseline from which an objective can be formulated.

Suggested Methods of Facilitating

Lesson

Group Work 1: What changes did you notice in the children and families? What has changed around you?

Group Work 2: Why is evaluation useful? What is it useful for?

Group Work 3: Read together a given form of a case and:
1. Identify what to evaluate for this particular situation 2. Judge if there are all the needed information for an evaluation and 3. Find qualitative and quantitative indicators for what you want to evaluate

Individual Work: How can I measure if my motivation has changed? Find an indicator of change in your relationship with the children.

Activation Games:

Multiple of 3: The facilitator asks the participants to count. When a player has to say a figure containing “3” or being multiple of “3” he has to say “boom” instead of the figure. Who goes wrong gets out of the game till there’s a winner.

Goal of the game: Stimulate attention, focus.

Catch a Finger: The players form a circle. Each person stands with the palm of his right hand up and a finger of his left hand pointed under his left partner’s opened hand. The facilitator placed in the centre of the circle counts: one, two, three. At three you must try to catch the finger placed under your right hand before your companion withdraws his hand. At the same times try not to let your next partner catch your finger. Try a few times then change hand.

Goal of the game: Get the attention of the group and channel the energy of a group too excited to focus.
Chapter 7

The Social Worker and His Actions

The social worker is a professional managing the helping process. His aim consists in ensuring that beneficiaries acquire or keep the necessary competences and skills which are necessary to respond to their needs through:

a. helping them acquire personal and social well-being by offering concrete help
b. guiding them in an educational pathway to responsibility and reciprocity.

For this reason he will be able to collaborate either with needy people and families and with their networks, playing different roles as proximate person, psycho-social professional and relational network guide (Guay 2000).

It is a proximate person because the social worker is visible and carries out a guiding function in carrying out life project of the individuals and families.

It is a psychosocial professional because it offers a presence and a listening ear in beneficiaries’ critical or transitional moments, mobilizing constantly community resources and giving concrete help, where they are necessary.

It is a relational network guide because it performs an orienting function to relational life either for people and families and for primary networks, as well as between different networks, taking moreover the function of facilitating and mobilizing network processes toward sharing and autonomy.

The Social Worker Profile:
Distinctive Features
The social worker’s attitudes are deriving from his existential convictions and from the training received.

These features shape his profile and are: attention to the request, acknowledgement of tie definitiveness, existential openness, unassailable availability, positiveness enhancement, freedom from result.

a) Attention to the Request.
Human need is not first and foremost a lack or a void to fill up, but the way itself to live. Any person carries elementary needs, which are generally fulfilled in everyday’s life or by extraordinary initiatives, within an individual’s own life context i.e. within primary and secondary networks, addressing specific institutions such as families, schools, hospitals and state and private organizations, such as voluntary work and religious associations, etc.

The social worker may come to notice a need, either directly or indirectly. The request of help is a remarkable starting point because it shows up, becomes evident, can be heard, compared to what remains still hidden. A request of help becomes real when a need is present, indicating at the same time that a subject is putting in action his desires. This aspects reveals itself only in the relationship with another subject or a context which can properly acknowledge, welcome and enhance him.

The desire of being acknowledged and of belonging lies in the depth of individuals and the social worker can let it emerge so that the beneficiary can move and exit his position of person in need and can become, at least potentially, a protagonist of the helping process.

b) Tie Definitiveness.
Each tie, each human relation has its own unique property characterized by definitiveness. It is indelible, even if it is touched by hatred or by love, it can be hurt and conflicting, interrupted, sociologically and juridically dissolved, but ontologically inerasable, because it has an essence exceeding the relationship context.

Each encounter that brings into being a relationship, always brings along the imprint of eternity, is eternal, may it last an hour, a day, or a lifetime.
Circumstances may draw near or away, unite or separate, but there is an aspect which is inextinguishable. This aspect applies to every sort of relationship, even to the professional one.

This awareness produces in the social worker a human position toward the beneficiary, recognizing in the relationship with the other, the permanence of the Being constituting both and only this aspect can legitimate a sharing experience.

c) Existential Openness.
When existential openness lacks, we tend not to see what is happening, to deny far-reaching events or their meaning, to censor events distinct from our sensitiveness and culture. To be existentially open means on the contrary being able to acknowledge and enhance what is happening compared to what is planned and scheduled, looking at the way others live their life and not focusing on difficulties happening, appreciating other’s point of view rather than ours.

It implies as a consequence, accepting the type of life that families and networks choose to give each other, respecting other’s schedule and not only considering ours.

When a social worker enters a relationship with the beneficiary, he encounters a different world from his. Being existentially open means recognizing this diversity and being able to enhance it.

d) Availability.
It is an attitude, that, if considered obvious, can lack, either because it costs efforts on a personal plan and because it requires conditions. Availability refers either to the social worker’s ground attitude and to the conditions the social worker sets to carry it out. Moreover working within a network and with networks is not the same as working with individuals. Relational life has its own way of life, its own places, its own schedules and rhythms, therefore it is necessary to change our attitude to harmonize with it. Network events do not coincide with individual events and anyway, they are not added to each other as an amount. If you would like to understand, observe them and listen to them, you have to be available to other’s way of life, places, schedules and rhythms, which change depending on habits, tradition and culture.

e) Enhancing Positiveness.
It concerns a social worker’s ground position based on the conviction that reality, although full of problems, suffering and drama, always contains positiveness, because it is invaded by a goodness which in the end is winning. Only carriers of this conviction can understand it, highlight it and enhance its value as the very first resource to restart, to rekindle above all the most significant relationships and ties. Without this conviction no help is possible: who can ever trust a social worker who does not look positively at the present? Without this positive look, no hope in the future is ever credible.

The presence itself of the social worker is a sign of this positivity, of a positive response within reality, because it expresses the presence of an individual interested to me.

Enhancing positiveness is not based on optimism, but on reason, i.e. on cleverness of life knowledge taking into account all factors, being able to recognize suffering and, last but not least, to recognize the sense which is attributed to life itself, which is not defined by evil, but by good.

f) Freedom from Result
The concept of freedom from result presents many paradoxical aspects. In fact, how is it possible to invest into someone’s
work, to think about an action, to put energies and resources into it, if a result is not expected, how can someone hope into something that can happen and that someone would like to happen?

In fact only realism allows to live this paradoxical attitude, this realism allowing me to hope because I have a certitude, what has happened in my life and in the life of many people I meet, while what may happen does not lie in my hands, it is an event.

In fact, not only my professional competence and skills are into play, but also the other’s freedom to be helped, to be changed or healed, to be what God would like the other to be.

This aspect implies a wound which is always bleeding, someone’s limit to acknowledge and embrace, to let us look at the other’s limit with humility and contribution. Precisely in going with the other, we become more true, walking with him/her. It is what makes us love this profession, because we can face all the time that we are to be changed, to be healed, to be saved.

The social worker’s actions: concrete help
The social worker’s task is helping beneficiaries acquire satisfying personal and social well-being, offering concrete help and guiding them along an educational pathway to responsibility and reciprocity.

The first help form is the social worker’s presence, being visible, reachable and accessible. That being stated, the social worker’s help interventions can be classified into:
- material help,
- psychological help,
- social help,
- educational help
- guiding

These forms are inserted into an interpersonal bearing relationship, well discussed above.

Material help consists in offering different sorts of means: food, clothes or school material, money to start a business, to pay medical care, etc.

Psychological help (also called emotional support), is offered either through interpersonal relationship and through support offered by network members implied and involved in the intervention plan. It consists in actions of relational nature, which, within interpersonal dynamics, produces positive effects on individual’s well-being, such as accepting more willingly their situation and showing self-esteem. Sometimes it requires to carry into effect interventions based on advice and persuasion, resorting to one’s own influence capacity for the child’s or the families’ sake.

Social help consists in interventions targeted at people and families, rather than interventions targeted at individuals. It can be:
- to rekindle the cycle of solidarity between families and their own environment, often interrupted;
- to identify proximate people and helpers normally present in the community;
- to carry out support activities, for example creating self-help groups;
- to create job opportunities for individuals and groups;
- to promote cost-saving groups.
- To promote recreation activities, venues and exchanges of experience.

Educational help can be specific help offered by specialized personnel for the child (pedagogical help) and for family members (adult education). They are carried out in different places by educators, tutors and teachers, they can be school activities or educational support at home when taking into charge the child and to
help in coping with everyday’s life. Help is embodied in interpersonal relationship, which is the fundamental tenet of every form of help and always translates into educational or specific help.

Social follow-up is a form of help and consists in a non-directive mode by which the social worker follows the different stages in which the intervention plan is carried out offering help with discretion, where required, making his presence evident and proximate to whom may need it. It is a more similar intervention to primary network member than to service intervention, but it differentiates from the first ones, precisely for the professionalism the social worker can put into play, a plus value, compared to natural help, because he can understand needs and mobilize technical responses, where necessary, as well as monitor relationships from a technical point of view.

Suggested Methods of Facilitating:

Lesson

Group Work:
What do you like in your work?
What is it difficult in your work?

Generally it comes out from this exercise that social workers are interested in the relationship with the child and the family and this is essential because a good relationship is the first mission of a social worker and the very first resource of the work is the person of the social worker!

Exercise:
I describe myself:
The part of my body that I love more:
A part of my character that I like:
A part of my character that I don’ like:

What I like to do in my free time:
What I like in my work:
The person I love more and why:
The characteristics of people with whom I am fine:
I draw the animal who represents me more:

Individual work:
Think to your daily work and answer to the questions in the figure.
A social worker, to carry out his work, has a bundle of means, called technical tools and instruments, because they imply a technique to use them, in other words they have structural and operational features that make the individual instrument or tool suitable to the object, in a way which is efficient for action, and effective as for the purpose for which it is used.

Some instruments and tools are in common with other professionals, such as interviews, others are more specific of social work, such as home visits. Some instruments and tools are the fruit of the social workers’ creativity, that being on the field, develop the capacity to cope with it, as in the case of the network diagram or the support table in network intervention (see annex 3).

We classify instruments and tools used by social workers into two groups:

1. **Instruments and tools of the relational dimension.**

They are used in order to know and to act, therefore to enter a relationship with the beneficiaries, and his/ her family, with the group, with the social networks, with the community, with other social workers.

They are:
- individual and couple interview (implying listening skills),
- home visit,
- exploration network tools and instruments (network diagram or the support table),
- the beneficiaries’ group meeting,
- the social workers’ group meeting.

2. **Instruments and tools of the organizational dimension.**

These instruments and tools allow their organization for which you work to fulfill its own efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability goals which are planning, organizing, managing, documenting. For this purpose, the child and family’s social forms are essential as well as the collection data forms and the data registers.

In this chapter’s context, we will analyze thoroughly only two instruments and tools which we think to be crucial in the helping process: the home visit and the social form, while we refer to the complementary text n.3 about social networks and annex 3 for an in-depth about specific instrument and tools of network intervention.

**The Home Visit**

Home visit is a form of interview carried out with an individual, but more often with a family in their everyday environment. It is a precious instrument for the social worker's profession and can have different goals:
- observing and getting to know, understanding
- helping
- verifying
- redefining the relationship with the beneficiary in his/ her life environment.

Sometimes it is used in a bureaucratic way, because it is a due act to the organization. When it is used in a targeted, purposeful way, with respect to aims and contents, it becomes an essential instrument.

**Home Visit Contents**

What the social worker can do or has to do depending from the home visit goals: it can be only one goal or all goals at the same time on the basis of the helping process phase, on how much time the social worker knows the beneficiary, from his recorded information.

1. **Knowledge**

He observes the individual in his life environment, more precisely:

How they appear: the family’s health conditions, house conditions and management (hygiene, logistics, organization) and surroundings (district, village). How they behave in his presence, how they treat the environment, objects, how they welcome the social worker, with openness and kindness or with narrow-mindedness, with suspicion, with fear.
Chapter 8 (Cont’d)

How is their relationship, which is the relational dynamics within the family, how they look at each other, how the adults look at children, how they treat and look after them, how they treat each other, if they listen to each other. How are their relationships within and outside their family, their network ties, particularly with their relatives and neighborhood.

The social workers listens, discovers and understands, points out the object and action meaning, because home is the place where family values are handed over through little gestures in everyday life.

Finally, he reinterprets the needs in the light of the environmental context: how do life context and network relationship affect the beneficiary’s difficulties, as a resource, rather than as a cause?

2. Help
The social worker offers help through his watchful presence, positive look, enhancing what he sees, listening carefully, asking relevant questions. He offers advice emotional-affective support, orients and gives an advice. He can announce the supply of material help expected by the beneficiary, bring material help personally or come with the supplier. Help is the only objective justifying, in the beneficiary’s eyes, the social worker’s intrusiveness into the family’s very intimate core, which is their home, while a positive and constructive interpersonal relationship allows him to overcome hostility.

3. Verification
It is not about checking, but verifying if collected data about beneficiary’s needs and resources correspond to reality, in order to benefit from the plus-value of reality correspondence, verifying if already formulated hypotheses should be adapted or changed and if the work plan is appropriate.

In other words, the social worker should take into consideration the possibility that what he has seen, listened and understood in his office, what he has evaluated must be verified in the beneficiary’s life environment. For example, he will verify that the network diagram and the social support table are complete and relevant to reality; that expected and announced changes are objectively observable.

4. Redefining the social worker-beneficiary relationship
During a home visit the social worker can create relational condition to redefine relationships in a different context in the life environment where the beneficiary can move most securely, confidently, where he feels most at ease and less subdued to the power the social worker has on him. A new dynamism in the relationship can give a new perspective to evaluation and create more room for interventions to carry out.

Technical aspects
1. A home visit must be prepared.
It is necessary to know in advance and clearly which objectives the visit should reach, whom we intend to meet, which new information should be acquired, how much time should it last.

2. A home visit must be announced.
Although we are aware that there are many communication troubles in an environment where there are no phone, mailing does not work, people are not always reliable, it is advisable that home visits don’t come “by surprise”, but they are announced.

3. A home visit is observation-centered.
Observation implies on its turn, two modes: a well-oriented look towards objectives and careful listening, which comprises words, gestures, sounds, noises, smells, but also sensations and feelings. Although aiming at help, let’s not forget that we always need to know and understand, because reality is developing, people change either in demanding and in receiving, relationships redefine continuously when event change, always bringing along novelty.

Sometimes the presence of two social workers can be useful to share their tasks.
and objectives and, finally, to cross-check their observations.

### Suggested methods of facilitating

#### Lesson

**Role play** read the story of a child then play a visit at home. Ask to the participants what they learnt out of the home visit, which was not written in the story.

#### Questions for the plenary:
- What are the signs you give attention to while making a home visit? Why?
- In which situations do you feel at ease?
- In which situation do you feel not capable?

#### SOCIAL FORM

It is a social form where relevant information as well as the intervention plan are reported (see annexe 5). It is divided into 4 parts.

The first part reports general information:
- Data concerning the child, including his/her photo.
- Data about the child's family.
- The house where the child lives.
- The child's and family's history.

The second part records the first and the second part of the help process:
- The child observation
- Network exploration (with enclosed tools and instruments: network diagram and support table).
- Child vulnerability evaluation and adopted criteria.

The third part describes the intervention plan:
- Goals to pursue
- The social worker's work hypotheses
- Interventions that the social worker intends to carry out

The fourth part concerns intervention verification.
- follow-up intervention
- follow-up visit

Information delivered by the social worker must be exhaustive, clear, and relevant/important, significant/useful, on the whole they should give a unitary picture of the child's situation.

The social form is a precious instrument, because it documents the social worker's profession and, through follow-up, the changes happening in the child and in his/her family thanks to support given. It reports not only information but also the relevant facts, allowing to construct a documented history, a result verification, intervention regulation and planning. Finally, it allows case referral to another social worker or service, if necessary.

This form of documentation presents limits and risks. The biggest limit is that within the synthesis process we cannot relate either the child's situation and the social worker's intervention. The most recurring risk is that forms may be the same, because information and descriptions are reduced to standardized formulae, therefore children may seem all the same, they cannot be recognized, they have no distinctive features. Given that problems are often very similar (poverty, school drop-out, disease, handicap, etc.), documents have no outstanding features and remarks and may seem very anonymous.

Filling up the social form requires professionalism and competence, synthesis skills, but above all attention and interest for the child, in order to single out all information and details characterizing this particular situation, to be able consequently to make choices favoring changes and helping to find problem solutions.
Human relation skill is not a skill among others, but the skill that defines human being. In fact, psychological birth of a human being coincides with the child’s capability to establish a relationship with the significant other (the mother) and maturation is reached when the child is able to establish adequate relationships, i.e. deep exchanges with the people in its family and social environment.

In this course I’d like to help you rediscover what the psychiatrist Facchinelli has defined as the essential condition to stay with children.

He said in one of his books: “Children need adults who enjoy staying with them”. This aspect assesses how worth I am in your eyes. If you enjoy staying with me it means I am worth for you and if I am worth for you I am also worth for myself. Sense of security is based on worthiness.

In guiding you on this pathway, I will follow two thematic trends:
- Emotional development
- Cognitive development.

These aspects are strictly connected and interwoven, for this reason to be understood they have to be analyzed together.

a) 0-1 years: build up confidence.
It seems almost certain that fetuses perceive not only noises, sounds and lights, but also their mother’s sensations and emotions; the umbilical cord not only passes nutrients, but probably a lot more.

Within the uterus, the fetus had organized his life drawing benefit from the perfectly calibrated world that this anatomical seat represents by nature. At the childbirth, he is obliged to cope with a remarkable quantity of external shocks.

He starts experiencing abruptly the atmospheric pressure and a variable temperature. Moreover, he is presented now with the visual, acoustic, tactile stimuli that he learnt to know in another way, no more softened by the amniotic fluid, but much more intense. Reference points he was used to, such as the mother’s heartbeat, suddenly disappeared.

The impact with all these new situations to cope with and to manage produces in the child the need to defend himself, to take time to adapt to new realities grading and proportioning them to his endurance skills.

It is maybe for this reason that newborns, in the first days of their life, regress to a prenatal life as if they still were in their mother’s womb, as if they where a whole with their mother or better, as if their mother were an extension of their self.

The fetus, shaped into the mother’s body, knows this only mental experience of union at childbirth, he and his mother are the same thing in a state of con-fusion, which implies the concept of fusion, of course.

Nevertheless, care, as well as the continuous and stable presence of the mother favors the gradual development of a vague awareness that the object, the other from self exists and this other can take care of him.

This evolution process goes on up to the moment in which the child feels himself as separated from the mother: he discovers that the other, the external object exists independently from himself and vice versa and feels separation as well as, for the first time, sense of self-awareness.

If we try to represent a newborn’s mind at birth, we could render it symbolically as a circle.
inscribing the mother-child couple. The fetus, shaped into the mother’s body, knows this only mental experience of union at childbirth, he and his mother are the same thing in a state of con-fusion, which implies the concept of fusion, of course.

According to psychoanalysis, between the birth moment and the seventh-ninth month of life, these two worlds differentiate slightly from each other. We could represent this phenomenon with this sequence:

This evolution process goes on up to the moment in which the child feels himself as separated from the mother, which we could represent as follows:

At this point the child doesn’t know “who he is”, but he knows that “he is”, that he exists and he can make this wonderful discovery thanks to the relationship with the object, with the other from self, i.e. the maternal figure or the person who takes care of him since birth.

Now let’s stop and make some educational considerations:
If we observe this pathway, we see clearly how psychological birth does not coincide with physical birth. While the second one is a very precise event in time (I know the day and time when I’m born), psychological birth is a slow process implying moving back and forth. It is a process that supposes a security base that arises from a deep and total sense of belonging: it seems paradoxical but to define myself I must belong to someone, to say me I need a YOU to address.

The child starts living in a sheltering uterus, but can continue living only if this sheltering space remains. Psychologists talk about psychological uterus, a mental and emotional place that continues the warm, sheltering action of the uterus. This place is the mind and heart of the parents or care-giving adults. For man this pouch is represented by the parents’ or care-giving adults’ arms.

Human beings have expressed ever since their need of belonging to someone, to live in someone’s body.
D. Winnicott, great pediatrician and child psychoanalyst, states that in the animal world it only exists a cub to which we could compare to man’s cub: the kangaroo. This cub, in fact, need staying a certain time in the mother’s pouch, which gradually prepares it to the impact with reality. For man this pouch is represented by the parents’ or care-giving adults’ arms.

Let’s talk now about intelligence development, bearing in mind that emotional development and cognitive development are strictly connected.

Piaget, the most authoritative expert in the field, maintains that the earliest stages of thought lie in sensorimotor schemes activating in the first months of life. He states that thought, in
these first months of life is action. The movement schemes and, even before, perceptive auditory visual schemes expand slowly as a spiral and enlarge encompassing a greater number of experiences and build up new skills. This stage does not precede thought but is thought. The child first moves the head, then he starts moving the trunk and the limbs, he will slowly start sitting, crawling and then, around the first year of life, he will start walking.

Within grasping schemes are also included the object grasping schemes and even the object hypothesis schemes. In what sense? We take for granted that objects are remaining in the physical world beyond our perceptions: we know very well that what is outside our sight field remains independently from us. Instead, the child must develop this permanence, thanks to recurrent experience cycles. Acquiring the “object constancy” is capital for every logical operation.

Here is a first evident connection between emotional and cognitive development because it is the adult’s stable and reassuring presence, which on one hand offers emotional security, and on the other hand, it supports the certainty that things you do not see any more continue to exist.

Certainly, in the orphanage context caregivers change even during the same day, it is necessary, as far as possible to organize these alternating shifts, as regular as possible, and to prepare the child to the next caregiver.

What is crucial is sharing the method, the child realizes that the caregivers are sharing ideas: “......I’m so important that they’re talking because of me...”.

I think that it is not easy in your situation to see children in need and tolerate that these needs cannot always be satisfied adequately. For instance if you have many children to care about and you are alone you suffer because it is impossible to give each child the same amount of time and care. This aspect is certainly very important but what really counts is keeping this “pain” alive, not getting used to it and saying: “That’s the way it is, you can do nothing about it”, but on the contrary keeping desire alive and keeping attention wake for needs and rhythms of each child.

Winnicott says that mothers haven’t to be “good”, but “good enough”, because children need either gratification and frustration, so don’t feel discouraged for your unavoidable errors, you aren’t always able to understand immediately people’s needs. What is essential is maintaining warmth and vitality in your relationship with the kids.

b) 1-2 years: a step towards autonomy.
The key word of the first year is “confidence”, the second year is characterized by the word “autonomy”.
The child, in fact, wants to exercise his new movement, manipulation and verbal expression skills.

It is evident that he becomes very skillful in jumping, running, climbing, he starts controlling his sphincter and self-feeding.

He understands that he is an individual distinct from others, that he has self-initiative, his own personality and the means to achieve it.

This autonomy awareness goes hand in hand with the desire to verify and to practice it.

That is the sense of a phase called “opposition phase”: even if a proposition may be considered as pleasant, the first answer is very often: “no”.

This “no” goes far beyond the incidental fact and it means: “That’s the way I am and that’s the way you are, I’m different from you”. This way you are confronted with an essential educational problem: what is the adult’s role?
A child who is starting to practice his autonomy is like an athlete who is trying to increase his forces fighting against someone who is acting as a partner. The partner must accept the fight but also resist.

Giving the sense of the limit is fundamental because the child cannot establish it alone. Few and clear age-adapted rules are essential for the child's interior security. His bullying, his resolute way of opposing are not a sign of force, but a sign of weakness, of fragility.

Autonomy has been just conquered: on one hand, he is afraid to lose it and on the other hand, he wants to practice it in order to master it more and more.

From the point of view of the social worker binding is expressed by "care", which includes at the same time "protection" capability and capability of "letting off", so that the child can do freely his own steps under the wake and loving eye of the adult caregiver.

As for intelligence development, when he is able to represent mentally what he does not see, the child enters a new phase called "representative thought". New schemes integrate the old one in a more complex and composite continuum.

The child becomes in other words able to represent mentally what he doesn’t see, and to correlate these representations with the instant perceptual data: if a toy falls under the sofa I’m able to think that the broom handle in the kitchen can serve as an arm prolongation and help to get it nearer.

Starting from this age three activities, which are strictly connected to representation, become apparent: imitation, symbolic play and language.

Previously imitation was immediate: the mother clapped and the child did the same. Now he can imitate after observing. Previously imitation was immediate: the mother clapped and the child did the same. Now he can imitate after observing.

What symbolic play is: previously objects represented only themselves, i.e. the child played hitting the spoon on the high chair, touching, exploring ... now objects don’t only represent themselves but a lot more (I turn a chair upside down and it becomes the car by which Dad drives me to school).

These activities are only possible because the child is able to represent mentally what he does not see, objects can consequently acquire a symbolic power.

These are then the two play functions:
- Playing is learning
- Playing is expressing and mastering feelings.

c) 2-5 years: (towards dialogue)
The child relationship with his mother at the beginning of life is very deep and intimate but it is a relationship where the roles are confounded, where the boundary between the self and the other is unclear.

We have seen that growing up means learning to tolerate separation and recognize himself as an individual distinct from other individuals.

From three to six years children try in any way to affirm their growing autonomy and to give sense to the world around them.

Their understanding mean is language, which is continuously evolving and that they have to experiment as much as possible.

To be sure that this happens in a group much attention and a good planning are necessary.
During this lifetime period, the child lives in a state of particular emotional fragility, because he starts realizing that he is not the only one being loved. If the child lives in a family, realizing that it exists a loving relationship between the father and the mother can unleash in him a strong jealousy feeling. The crucial problem is for this reason elaborating the maze of conflicting feelings that he nourishes towards both the father and the mother.

Growing up towards a greater autonomy, the child, when he is cognitively skillful discovers that the father and the mother have also a relationship between them independently from him, while at the very beginning he was self-centered.

This situation is overcome, when the child gives up his egocentric claim to have the opposite sex parent on his side and takes the image of the same sex parent to oneself (identification process). Simplifying, it is as if the boy for example said: “I can’t compete with my father, but I can become like him, so when I’m grown up I can have what he now has”.

During this phase, the child needs understanding very well the father and mother roles. Even in a child community, where dynamics are necessarily different from a family, the question of the egocentrism phase exit is capital. The child must differently learn to tolerate he is not the only one and this process is stressful. For this reason, a great tolerance of difficulties, of oppositions, of child refusals and even a great respect of rhythms that each child shows to become more mature.

Secondly, you do not have to expect a progressive and linear path, always in the same direction, but rather a tortuous, bendy mountain path, which shows regressions and the resurgence of apparently overcome troubles. Adults should not be worried about this way to proceed, because it is the normal way for a child to grow up.

Conclusive remarks
Who is the adult then and which is his essential function? The adult guides the child along this path, it represents the place where the child can live and his crucial function is well expressed by the words TAKING CARE.

From the point of view of the parent or social worker binding is expressed by “care”, which includes at the same time “protection” capability and capability of “letting off”, so that the child can do freely his own steps.

Care comprises capability of closeness and capability of distance. The child in fact expresses in his relationship with adults either protection and exploration needs, that must be both fulfilled.

“Taking care” encompasses two crucial aspects: the resource of affection and the respect of law and norms. Law is the regulating principle of human behaviors, what gives sense and direction to actions.

Affection allow the child to assimilate vitality, warmth, confidence, self-esteem, relation skill; law confronts him with limit helping him recognize external, physical and social reality he has to cope with and in which he’s inserted.

“Rules” help who is growing up differentiate from others, retain his own his own impulses, educate himself to relation reciprocity.

However, how can you achieve it? It is necessary to risk his personality in the relation with the other to stir up in the child the desire and the hope to live an authentic relationship.

Professor E. Scabini, Psychology professor at the Catholic University in Milan, writes that “being social worker means building a strong, reliable and trustworthy relationship which
constitutes a sure base from which one can draw to be nourished.” Nevertheless, relationship has to be continuously nourished, otherwise it becomes poorer and relationship care is a very concrete fact, not an abstract aspect: you have to offer time and space.

What shall we retain and rediscover together at the end of this meeting?

I think it would already be remarkable if we could rediscover the pleasure of staying with children. Being a social worker is an enormously enriching condition and security sense becomes stronger if children feel that adults enjoy staying with them: “... If you, mother, father, social worker enjoy staying with me it means I’m worth for you and if I’m worth for you I’m also worth for myself.”

Only in this way, you can guide them in building a solid and sure self-esteem.

**EVOLUTIONARY STAGE SYNTHESIS**

**a) 0-1 years: (build up confidence)**

**EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT**
- The life in the uterus.
- The fusion experience with the mother
- Towards self-perception

**COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT**
- Stage of perceptual-motor intelligence
- Towards the conquest of the object constancy
- Perceptual-motor intelligence

**b) 1-2 years: (towards autonomy)**

- Opposition phase: the child perceives himself as distinct from other individuals
- He grows autonomously in three directions:
  - Food
  - Sphincter control
  - Movement

**2-3 years (towards independence)**
- Oedipal crisis (mother, father, child)
- Process of sexual identification

**3-4-5 years (towards dialogue)**
- Birth of moral conscience
- The importance of peer group
- Discipline and rules

- Representational thought phase
- Observational skills (intuitions)
- Accessing symbols (language, symbolic play)
- Thought is egocentric, irreversible and concrete

- Representational thought evolves in a more and more complex way (language, symbolic play)
- Thought becomes reversible and less and less egocentric
Introduction

Family is a resource for the human being, due to what it is, rather to what it has. This conscience is not always adequately present, so that the Blessed John Paul II recalled “Family, believe in what you are!”

Family generates, gives a human form, humanizes what it arises from it and what binds within it, it is the source of deepest affections and of responsibility towards the other. Many aspects make family a resource for human beings, above all its constitutive aspects, but also the quality of social relationship within and outside family, its capability of educating and coming to terms with its task, taking care not only of its members, but also of human beings as such.

The constitutive aspects of family

Family is a social subject, which owns a planning capability that it can develop autonomously, according to peculiar criteria, putting into play specific means and bearing corresponding responsibility.

It is characterized by three crucial aspects (Scola, 1998), coming into play in everyday’s experience.

The first aspect is man and woman’s welcoming capacity, they are at the beginning strangers, who thanks to reciprocal affection, are opened to difference and to an encounter way, which will extend to children and to those encountering the family. Within family, the difference and the capacity to welcome is set at origin from the very moment of its constitution, within man and woman’s encounter, as man and woman are “different” human beings.

When this difference welcoming capacity hasn’t sufficiently matured, when it causes excessive effort or even negation then it is difficult that a family can open to the other from self, sheltering a child or alike, who differs from him because of culture, attitude, life expectations and behaviors.

The second aspect is the couple unity, which determines family unity itself and marriage gives it stability guarantee over time. Unity is an essential and unavoidable condition in an educational pathway that has to be started and it requires a confrontation possibility with adults, who precisely in their affection, judgment and behavior unity, which has become stable over time are the most important source to stir up the child’s affection. Without an alliance between husband and wife- a pact rather than a contract-it doesn’t exist a family unity and without putting into play this unity, each opportunity either for his own children and for the fostered ones is a desperate undertaking or even a claim.

The third aspect is fertility, this generative capability that isn’t just and only the natural characteristic, albeit very important, of setting children into the world and being fertile, but it is recognizing the child’s value: he’s a new presence who requires to be fed materially and to be nourished symbolically, who requires to be inscribed into generation history to prove in the future that he’s responsible within his family and within society. The child hasn’t to be constrained, he has to be supported and “set off” so that he can take the baton of his family’s truthful sense, reinterpret it according to his own personality and hand it over.

Parents are therefore fertile when they are able to promote their children as responsible, giving them effective time and space, without taking their place.

Family’s fertility however isn’t only expressed by natural generation but also by that generative capability in a broad sense, which assigns to it the task of mankind’s guardian and that becomes explicit through family projects and plans (from everyday life management to capital household construction, such as home-building), through creativity,

Resources: Complimentary Text

2. Family, A Resource for the Human Being
Lia Sanicola
through initiatives, gratuity and social engagement.

An example of this fertility is welcoming a child generated by another family, a child in a difficult situation, who requires care and affection that his parents cannot give him.

Some capabilities and qualities develop starting from these three tenets and make family a factor and place.

1. Family is a growth and maturation factor, because its structure and interior dynamics allow the progress and fulfillment of affection, giving it stability over time. It is a “goodness” factor for people’s present and future, whose history is welcomed and guarded by tradition. It is a powerful educational factor, because it act involving people, through everyday life’s gestures, rather than speeches and training them to relational life. Within family, every individual recognizing a “you” discovers his own “self” and learns to relate to a “we”.

2. At the same time family is a place, a home, where basic individual needs and demands are welcomed and satisfied in a permanent way in space, which ensures continuity over time. Therefore it is set as primary place for nursing and caring, but also as primary context where you concretely learn to live the self related to others (Giussani, 2001).

The Quality of Family Ties
The family solidity and consequently its essence as resource, depends on the quality of ties generating in it (Scabini, 2001, 2002). These are characterized by:
- An affective quality based on confidence and hope, symbolically represented by the maternal figure.
- An ethical quality based on loyalty and justice, symbolically represented by the paternal figure.

Both are indissolubly interwoven because affection establishes reciprocity, proper to the gift logic, which within the family peaks in the heartfelt gift of self between husband and wife and children.

On the other hand, reciprocity is a source of obligation and creates in the family expectations and responsibilities over generations allowing everyone to develop a security feeling. This derives from counting on the other according to his needs, according to the real existing possibilities and the rules established over time by the family culture.

When emotional and ethical qualities are compresent in a balanced way, without dominating over another, family represents a powerful resource because it allows to experience either affection- and consequently reciprocity- and the sense of duty towards the other allowing care and education of the human being.

It is not rare that disequilibrium between emotional and ethical aspects becomes evident: the first ones are over-evaluated and the second ones are underestimated. Affection without direction transforms itself into fluctuating feelings. Uncertainty about value, about sense of belonging and family tasks weakens ties requiring stability by continuously appealing to behavior rules, without any success. As a matter of fact, attention focuses mostly on feelings and less on affection and there is also little sensitivity towards justice and respect. Feeling expresses in fact the need of the individual who is feeling, while affection is directed towards the other, is sensitive to the other (Scabini, 2001, 2002).

Family has some peculiar tasks-functions:
• the custody and care of ties within family, between generations and descents, between family and network, developing unity within and around the family by creating ties based on affection and identity;
2. Family. A Resource for the Human Being (Cont’d)

- taking care of natural and acquired children, supporting and protecting them;
- taking care of weak members, in particular elderly and disabled people;
- upbringing as transmission of life crucial values, as an introduction to reality, but also as facilitation to school education thanks to mindful and responsible choices;
- production of economic resources thank to work and sparing;
- Responsible and constructive management either of space (in particular home) and of time comprising holidays, culture and sport.

If we consider the child development, family is the first place where the human being, the child experiences existing, being an I. Such an experience allows in its singularity, acquiring an aware identity, an essential factor to relate significantly with reality. The possibility for a child to identify himself as a unique and inimitable subject is strictly connected to the experience of living a welcoming relationship, where the child can experience belonging.

The child needs to feel himself “belonging” to his parents and he is welcomed by them if primarily they live belonging within their relationship, in their turn as they both have experienced it in their family. For this reason, « family is the tender cradle of the child’s mind as well as of his body» (Ackermann 1976).

A child is welcomed as part of self, as a free gift to self to protect and guide, in order to consent him to face reality freely and subjectively.

Such a dynamic allow parents to consider their children’s needs as important as theirs and to contribute consequently to their satisfaction.

This way the child makes a welcoming experience where his needs find an answer. This aspect structures a background confidence whose substance will constantly set to test coping with reality.

Therefore, welcoming and sharing are the only possibilities to make a relationship worthwhile from a human point of view because only within them a person can be exactly a person, given that a presence is warmly embraced by another presence (Giussani, 2005). This embrace can follow any itinerary but has an a quo point and an a quem point.

The a quo point is the person: embracing the other can’t only mean accepting him, but must be opened to gratuity: only if we are aware to be loved - evidently or covertly- we can love, shelter in us, share.

It is educational capacity, which makes family a resource for people and community, if an inimitable “climate” is developed, sounding like a breath of fresh air for the people breathing it, allowing adults to play the role of a reciprocal guide towards adults and children. Within family in fact the human being is not only raised and educated, but also protected.

This protection concerns in the first place the household members, in a descending sense towards children, in an ascending sense towards their own parents. This capacity to embrace generations makes family a “peculiar” resource, because the quality of family ties crosses and implies time and space, involving adults, young and elderly people within the same history.

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1. A historical sketch
The network concept and its correlated practices enjoy today a great success in every field of knowledge and human activity.

In human sciences, starting from Barnes (Barnes 1972) and passing through Manchester anthropological school, networks have exerted a crucial influence on social work. Ross Speck has elaborated an intervention model based on “therapy” connected to the Paolo Alto school (Speck 1976), followed by Lambert Maguire. Both have, however, represented the systemic approach vision. We owe to Quebec researchers an interesting practice perspective, introduced in Italy by the research group I coordinate at the University of Parma.

Starting from couple crisis and from its consequences on family, practices have broadened their vision and strategy, searching human resources beyond the family itself. However, the pathway is not homogenous. There are social situations in which you can observe that community life is very vital and you can count on it, provided that the community concept can be reformulated in relation to the existence of the social “networking” relationship.

2. Some definitions
But what are social networks? It exists a large number of studies, researches and theories, which constitute for us a crucial framework. Present literature talks about networks such as:
- connecting systems,
- communication networks,
- as a strategy set up by individuals,
- as a “form” of social relationship.

We mention hereafter definitions we use to identify social networks, as a form of social relationship to which we refer when we talk about network intervention (Guédon, 1984). These networks characterize and distinguish themselves into two big categories: primary networks, also called informal and secondary networks, also called formal.

Primary networks are made up of family ties, neighborhood, friendship and work relationships; they build up thanks to the acting agents, they cannot be created nor produced, but generated over time, recognized, promoted and oriented.

They establish the sense of social debt as organizational principle, recurring to reciprocity as a method and to gift as a mean.

Illustration 1 Social network correlation within communities (Rossi 2001)
The social relationship that is being established is characterized by horizontal and vertical loyalty between generations. In fact, primary networks build up the framework where the gift spirit settles and develops in a privileged way, shaping the emotional world of individuals and collectivity.

Formal secondary networks are made up of official organizations and service institutions (schools, hospitals, state offices, etc.). They are based on the equality principle guaranteed by law, they are characterized by exchanges based on rights, first of all the citizenship right and they employ redistribution as a method. They provide services and they intervene on a user availability. They are part of the regulatory system and they constitute generally a constraint for social reality.

Tertiary sector networks constitute themselves as non-profit service organizations and use not only law, but also solidarity as a medium. This is the case of social cooperative, voluntary and social promotion organizations, foundations.

Market networks pertain to the economic sphere, they are based on the equivalence principle, and they use market as a method (this aspect gives them their name) and as a medium money and profit: to this category belong companies, enterprises, commercial units, shops, liberal profession activities, etc. The relationship being established is characterized by the exit possibility, since it does not create a tie nor an obligation except for what is exchanged.

We have used these definitions, which are fundamental tenets of our work method, network intervention. This thesis is based on the social action project theorized by Claude Brodeur and his team (Brodeur et Rousseau, 1984).

NETWORK INTERVENTION
1. An operational paradigm
The theoretical framework that we presented at the beginning of this work, as we have seen, allowed to develop a network approach to social politics, i.e. giving a networking content and direction to the “macro” dimension of social politics. The theoretical framework that we have presented at the beginning of this work, as we have seen, allowed to develop a network approach to social politics, i.e. giving a networking content and direction to the “macro” dimension of social politics.

However, it exists a dimension in-between the micro and the macro, between the single individual who brings a health problem into his social environment (Sanicola 1996), i.e. the community to which he belongs, that in our epistemological perspective we call network. Our approach, and the paradigm that is deriving from it allowed to develop an action model, the network intervention inscribing in the collective social work practices and however differentiating from them, because it lies in an intermediate space.

It was made possible by the fact that social networks detain a high value not only cognitively, but also operationally, because they can be accessed for exploration and they allow to develop an action to their advantage.

Network intervention hypothesizes a focused (axée) action on the primary network as an element of human capital to mobilize, promote and strengthen in order to reduce and/or compensate the disequilibrium between challenges and resources. This action is carried out by adopting a relational perspective, which observes social reality not from a linear logic but rather from a relational approach. This point of view allows to highlight reciprocity and complementarity between the above mentioned four factors of social reality, in particular cultural factors, as an orienting pole within the situation multidimensionality.
The operator takes therefore the role of relational guide towards individuals and networks, so that they can orient themselves putting into play their personal and social capital, i.e. mobilizing networks themselves to exit from dependence and need.

As you can note, the question is not in the first place organizing services, but favoring that people, having a meaningful relationship meet whenever it is necessary to take in charge a particular need, for which a demand has been expressed or for which a problematic situation has been arising.

Some elements derive from these consequences:
- The immediately concerned network hasn’t been conceived and built up by the operator, but it’s the fabric of already existing relationships in the subject history.

It is necessary to verify that people are willing and agree so that they can meet and cope with the situation together.

In fact, when the operator fits into a network, he intrudes in an already set dynamic, which coincides with a critical event and is part of a tendency to change, as the presence of a demand shows.

When the operator asks a person to invite some network members and when he successively proposes that the network continues to meet prefigures some goals, which are sustained by a double aim:
- Favoring reconstruction and consolidation of existing relationships, promoting network mobilization towards the collective. In this way they can recognize and identify their members, confirming that they belong to the network;
- Favoring, at the same time, the network support capability, consequently their freedom of action promoting network mobilization towards autonomy. In this way, they can take in charge their members and the problems they express.

This double movement finality, towards sharing and network autonomy, tends to hold within networks the possibility of sharing their experience with other subjects to redefine problems, taking responsibility to cope with them, using existing resources within networks and elaborating concrete solutions, building up common rules for action.

The possibility of starting an autonomy process of primary networks compared to secondary networks is hereby introduced, by the fact that the first ones take charge of problems and they can cope with them. If necessary, they can still access institutional resources, in a more specific way, for the needs the primary networks cannot really satisfy.

Besides, primary networks, once activated and mobilized, will continue to put into play their competence, carrying out a preventive function for needs and problems, which in the future their members could present in the future.

2. The network operator and his basic principles
This kind of work demands first of all quality and conviction, not only technical skills, although they aren’t excluded, but required. In fact, the possibility to carry out network intervention depends from a mentality change correlated to some basic principles of this intervention. This new mentality produces a new way to be which partly combines humanity and partly technical skills (Draher, 1984).

Availability and existential open-mindedness are key human attitudes. They are techni-
3. The Network Approach in Social Work (Cont’d)

cal attitudes, related to the intervention method and technique: capability to move away from the problem, form directiveness and content non-directiveness.

At the heart of the social work form we call network intervention, there isn’t only a technique, but mainly the personal and professional position of a subject having a method to cope with reality. The network operator takes as a reference an action philosophy in which the above-mentioned attitudes are rooted. Without these approaches, the method itself becomes sterile.

This philosophy’s starting point is a perspective that considers people connected by reciprocal relationships within a network. The following hypothesis can be made: 

a) Every person is responsible of his own life, related to the others’ and human need, in its natural genesis produces within the network sharing and belonging;

b) The network members own the competence to define personal needs and find adequate answers to arising problems. The fact that the latter aren’t taken into charge and they orient themselves towards answers coming from the institutional system is the manifestation of contradictory relationships within the network itself. However, it is possible to improve every member’s well-being by changing network relationship and favoring a mindful and selective access mode to the system;

c) The essential change agent isn’t the operator but life community itself, which we call network, a relational unit having history made of family, blood relationship, neighborhood, friendship and work ties. The network is competent to interpret its needs, share them, elaborate a project and possibly solve them (Brodeur C, Rousseau R., 1984);

d) The action target goes further and hypothesizes the possibility of a change in social relationship within society, to the extent in which community can become independent from the institutional level and propose new network relationship, where power can be redistributed.

Starting from this philosophy, Brodeur assumes that the operator has to work to support thinking within network and let surface the network’s desire to change, encouraging a transformation process from individualization to sharing and from dependence to autonomy.

3. Network Intervention stages

In the experimentation conducted in Italy by the Network Intervention Study and Research, the methodological process was developed in two stages: the first concerning exploration and the second the mobilization of social networks.

These are two stages that are not diachronic, but develop in a synchronic way because exploration in fact coincides with an immediate network mobilization, starting with the presence of the operator in the network.

However, we keep this logic distinction for two reasons:
- because it’s not rare that some situations only require exploring work in addition to case management work
- because we dare to situate, as in a conceptual watershed between exploration and mobilization, the network hypotheses we won’t develop in this work, but are a fundamental reference for the operator’s orientation in his network relational guide function.

4. Network exploration

Network exploration consists in going out of his environment to introduce in a given, unknown environment to try exploring it. It also implies being able to represent and describe it, taking into consideration some specific aspects, according to accurate indicators. It uses techniques, tools and instruments, which are suitable to the characteristics
of the environment to be explored.

When the operator introduces himself in networks, he aims to formulate a network hypothesis. However, this goal isn’t merely cognitive. The operator’s presence in the network, the techniques he uses so that network members can express themselves are in fact an intervention form producing, as we will see, an impact on individuals and on networks as a whole.

The operator observes different network reality levels and listens to them as well, as follows:

Network type identification: the operator categorizes networks in primary, secondary networks and decides to which category the observed networks belong.

Primary network exploration. The operator observes which sorts of networks are present: family and blood relationship, friendship, neighborhood, school and work networks, wondering which ones are central and which one are dominant. He explores three dimensions of primary networks: a) network structure, taking into consideration existing ties and how they influence network structure b) the role played by individual members as well as individual networks c) relationships existing between network members and the network dynamics they generate, with particular attention to the network movements towards collective and towards autonomy, as well as evolutions over time, in space and within relationships (Sanicola, 1995).

The exploration of this field has allowed specific network characteristics to surface pertaining to a certain collective, to such an extent that real “network portraits” have been depicted. It has also allowed to elaborate network hypotheses for homogeneous collectives, permitting to rationalize operators’ investments and service.

The correlation between primary and secondary networks. The operator will observe how individuals access secondary networks and how they are correlated to them, what they think about service operators, on what and to what extent they depend on them, if this dependence seems to be chronicized. He will listen to what primary networks demand to secondary ones: services, material help, information, emotions, or if they ask for substitutive support, i.e. help that competes by nature and specifically to primary networks (closeness, company, friendship, affection), or complementary to those already offered by primary networks (information, specialized services, aids, benefit payments). He will highlight which place secondary network operators take in patient’s life: alliances, conflicts, contradictions. Finally, he will observe how primary and secondary network cultures carry out transactions and how information circulates from primary to secondary network and vice versa. He will observe if primary network culture produces solidarity as for secondary network level and if the operators’ culture can produce control or marginalization within primary networks.

Secondary network exploration. Within service culture, you talk about networks to indicate both operators’ networks and organization networks. Both can be explored in two ways.
- The first one develops from individual subjects. By observing and studying network diagrams, it allows to “reconstruct” networks started by operators and their relational sedimentation. It is possible to highlight recurring elements and variables concerning network structuring, functions they carry out, dynamics and therefore movements towards collective and towards autonomy.
- The second one draws its method and tools from organizational methods.

Our research work concerned primary network exploration, in their correlation to sec-
ondary networks. However, we think it is useful to highlight some reflections we made during these years.

In fact, primary network mobilization and operators’ network development can be carried out leaning on the network intervention methodology acquired by operators and their desire to work within the network.

On the contrary, to develop and mobilize secondary networks, i.e. systemic complex organizations it is not only necessary to show political willingness and to have a mandate, but also organizational conditions lying on an upper level compared to the base operator’s position.

Our consideration is based on observational data: not rarely operators' investments have been blocked by institutional and organizational constraints, which, in fact, have prevented from any network intervention plan.

Exploration network tools and instruments
The network operator disposes of a tool battery: network diagrams, board diary, social support analysis grid, burden distribution grid, morphological and relational exploration grid for primary networks.

Network diagrams allow to graph networks and to communicate synthetically with operators and users. To create diagrams it is necessary to set a list, i.e. a list of people appearing in the discourse, as well as of services involved in the situation. On the basis of this list, the position of many people within reciprocal relationships at a given moment of their history can be represented.

A board diary is necessary for the operator to think about the situation and to do a content analysis on the various network members’ expression forms, up to the collective discourse, as well as of services involved in the situation. To do so, a written report concerning meetings, encounters, events, reflections, events is required.

A social support analysis grid allows to analyze in depth the supporting characteristics existing within networks, from a material, informational and emotional point of view.

A network exploration grid is an instrument that consents the operator to focus in a targeted way the exploration field. It foresees an indicator battery, schematized in four areas (networks, ties, functions and relationships), to collect quite homogeneously network elements concerning structural, functional and relational aspects (Sanicola, 1995).

A burden distribution grid allows to study burden user distribution between primary and secondary networks. It is build along two axes, the first one reports all primary and secondary and tertiary network subjects, the second one lists either care services (supply, company, care...) and secondary network typical services.

This tool allows to identify the caregiver and the service supplier, if primary networks supply specific secondary network services (such as health care service) and if the latter provide specific primary network services (such as emotional support and company in everyday life).

There are various network diagrams forms: the most used are two:

a) Todd’s diagram Made up of a series of concentric circles, with the user at the center, it is divided into various sectors (household, blood relationships, neighborhood, etc.), in which network members are situated from the center to the exterior in a decreasing
order according to the distance from the person situated in the middle. Made up of a series of symbols that indicate the network nature as well as existing relations, it consents to determine reciprocal relations and to highlight very well the correlation between the various sorts of networks being present. It helps the operator to move away from the problems and from the demanding person to acquire a “network glance” (Besson, 1993).

b) Rousseau’s diagram Made up of a series of symbols that indicate the network nature as well as existing relations, it consents to determine reciprocal relations and to highlight very well the correlation between the various sorts of networks being present. It helps the operator to move away from the problems and from the demanding person to acquire a “network glance” (Besson, 1993). Next schema shows a bubble diagram with the symbols we introduced into Rousseau’s diagram.

5. Network mobilization: the action model
What are the possible movements that operators should facilitate and support for a network change? Brodeur and Rousseau (Brodeur and Rousseau, 1984) observed that in social reality, like in service organizations, we can find two movements developing on two axes: the first axis concerns the movement going from individual to collective; the
second one concerns the movement going from independence to autonomy (see image 8).

We mean by movement towards the collective the process that, starting from encounter and reciprocal recognition of individuals leads to encompass people's belonging sense to their network and generate at the same time willingness to share a need and take a problem into charge consolidating by effect individual and collective identity. It is a network existential process that the operator's technical intervention can orient, support, value, letting this process become evident up to its maturation.

We mean by movement towards autonomy the process which, starting from the belonging sense leads through the need sharing experience to develop the dimension of freedom and as a consequence, the capacity to take responsibilities and risks for choices to make. The movement towards autonomy can even lead to keep distance from the network, the operator and the service.

![Network movements diagram](image)

Ill. 8: Network movements (Brodeur, Rousseau 1984)

These two movements exist either in primary and secondary networks.

The operator, working within secondary networks, can explore and observe existing movements and, setting himself at the center, can favor and support network processes towards collective and autonomy.

At the same time he's situated within primary networks and knits a confidence relationship, to the extent he's welcomed and recognized as a solidarity agent.

He works in order to get networks elaborate shared action rules and criteria. Through
network glance and network listening, he facilitates identification and belonging processes to collective charge bearing and to the creation of a shared network project, which tends to be autonomous in comparison to secondary networks (see ill. 9).

Brodeur has described the network process into phases that have also been observed in our research work in Italy.

Ill. 9: network intervention project (Brodeur e Rousseau 1984).

Hypotheses and interventions
Operators, during their exploration work within primary networks hypothesize that it can exist some recurrent situations observed during our experimentation:

a) Networks are restricted, made up of few knots, whose ties are not very close. People have never been there or they have moved away. Network structure is disproportioned to the needs they express.

b) Networks aren’t very active, ties and knots are present, but relationships are characterized by negligence, lack of interest and of organization. These networks would be able to take in charge the manifested needs, but they don’t know how to proceed or they don’t want to, they don’t take the corresponding responsibilities;

c) Networks manifest internal contradictions, conflicts, unease. Relationships are overwhelmed with suffering, which makes them unable to share their needs.

d) Networks manifest marginalization, conflicts, contraposition. Communication and solidarity with different culture networks do not exist. Relationship between primary and secondary network indicate “cleavages”.

In contrast with these recurrent situations, the operator can carry out his relational guide function orienting networks towards:

1. Structure strengthening, meeting periodically networks members, inviting them to open themselves to other members, creating space for everybody, helping networks to strengthen existing relationships and to create new ones;

2. Function activation, promoting support reorganization, helping it to move away from the presented problem, to invest into relationships, to collect network creativity, to re-
3. The Network Approach in Social Work (Cont’d)

view past experiences, highlighting how questions were usually solved;
3. Facilitation of relationship change process and, therefore, in the network life quality: orienting network relationship life non-directively, supporting network processes oriented towards positive quality, highlighting change. Intervention at this level is the most complex and challenging because it requires hypothesizing the network relational situation;
4. Facilitation of exchange between different culture networks, supporting development of solidarity dynamics towards cultural and ethnical minorities to improve civil cohabitation.

At the same time the operator, taking a place within secondary networks can develop ties, establishing connections of different nature between operators and services, such as: information, collaboration, financial flow (financing or economic co-participation), common projects, contracting obligations and commitments, connections and bureaucratic constraints.

The project will determine the connection sorts activated between agents and actors due to everyone's operational differentiation and to the extent to which they are involved in the project. It is a network of networks in which, even in this case, the operator acts as a relational guide:
- favoring and promoting primary networks.
- managing and overseeing secondary networks.

Mobilization instruments and tools
The network operator has at his disposal a battery of tools to mobilize networks: phase table, movement analysis grid and support group.

A phase table allows to monitor intervention in its most important stages. After an introduction phase, in which the operator contact the network, there is a transition phase, where a transformation process develops, implying a network mobilization. An awareness phase follows, where the network becomes aware of its internal and external resources, up to the action phase, where the network carries out its project (M. Bélanger, R. Rousseau, 1993).

The movement analysis grid, elaborated initially by R. Rousseau (R. Rousseau, M. Belanger, 1985) has been modified by the operator team that has used it. It allows to highlight network movements from individual to collective and from dependence to autonomy, through some indicators consenting to single out significant events of network life.

A support group is made up of a network operator group meeting regularly to think about common interventions. Operator situations are presented and then a common analysis is contacted. This method allows to share of personal and professional resources, as well as a more careful methodological approach to network intervention principles.

6. Network Strategies
Network mobilization can be associated to network actions and to organizational strategies.

6.1. Network actions
To favor and promote primary networks, some network actions have been singled out (Guay 2000):
- Taking demand into charge, associating to the person establishing contact. Build-
ing a relationship with the demanding people means going in the same direction as the network movement, in other words going hand in hand with the person who has already mobilized to cope with and solve the problem.

- **Offer support: sharing responsibility.** Responsibility sharing enlarges the framework of expectations that are redistributed among many subjects initiating a different way to face the problem.

- **Relieving responsibility of the patient’s family and supporting caregivers.** It is necessary to identify “who” supports “who” and among these people to single out the person bearing the most important burden (the caregiver), to support him and to avoid burnout and saturation.

When a person (caregiver) bears a heavier burden in comparison to the available resources he enters a risk area, he is exhausted, risks collapsing. Supporting consists first of all in welcoming unease and overtiredness of the concerned person, heavily involved in the problem, validating his wish to be relieved.

- **Reactivating existing ties.** J. Guay talks about reinitiating the cycle of reciprocity (Guay 2000), it is necessary to work to recuperate relationships. It is a very delicate relational work, which is not limited to a contractual task, but is about reconstructing self-esteem, reestablishing expectations, recuperating relationship vitality, reinvesting into responsibility.

- **Transforming the customer into a helper.** A way to let someone in a difficult situation exit from his pre-established patient role consists in mobilizing his resources and putting them into play taking responsibility towards someone else. The customer is often not competent to cope with his problem, but he can put into play other competences and enable his responsibility towards parents, children and other people in a difficult situation with a global tie strengthening effect.

- **Promoting mutual-help-groups.** We can distinguish two dominating group forms, the one led by a professional and the one animated by people who have lived the problem in the past. The latter have an authority and a competence deriving from deep existential knowledge of the problem. Often the first group form risks prolonging the customer dependence, not favoring his exit from it. For this reason, within the logic of our network approach we privilege the second group form.

- **Collaborating with associations and groups concerned with the problem.** Particular attention must be paid in order to favor real sharing of responsibility between institutional and associative partners, avoiding control attempts or instrumental use.

- **Collaborating with natural helpers.** Natural helpers are a very precious resource, they are people helping each other because of a particular sensitivity or because they have lived similar experiences without being part, strictly speaking, of primary networks or voluntary work associations. They can be shop owners, bar keepers etc.

### 6.2. Operational strategies for service networking

Let’s consider secondary network development as for their organizational strategy. As we have said, the network function is integration and differentiation, in other words accessing and exiting networks according to the project. It is therefore opportune that in developing a network project within local area, the network can have a physical place that makes it visible, recognizable and accessible. Network accessibility is a crucial point, therefore it is necessary to develop adequately the offer and access dynamics: it isn’t enough to offer resources in order to let people use them, as the borderline problem documents. Resources should be addressed to subjects in order to consent accessibility.

In this sense, some operational strategies proper to participated planning, which facilitate service networking (see Sanicola L. Dinamiche di rete e lavoro sociale, chapter...).
7. Network Intervention effects
We have found that already made interventions networks have presented some phenomena:
• structural changes, there have been modifications concerning network width and density, i.e. the quantity of people that are already acquainted, proximity-distance and tie intensity;
• Functional changes, we have observed that quantity and quality of exchanges have improved. Within primary networks, some variations as for the support nature have taken place. Therefore some material exchanges have become emotional, some informational exchanges have transformed into normative. Within secondary networks informational, collaborative exchanges as well as obligation and commitment contracting have multiplied, while connection and bureaucratic constraints have been reduced;
• Relational changes. Relations within networks aren’t linear, but they are characterized by complementarity. Many conflicts are overcome or managed. Changes that have taken place can be read in terms of internal network dynamics and of meaning that members attribute to the relationship themselves (C. Brodeur, R. Rousseau, 1987).

The most significant effects of network mobilization are therefore:
- A network enlargement in comparison to the original aspect;
- A new way to raise the problem, cope with it and solve it;
- Collective taking into charge through a shared project;
- A progressive autonomy of primary networks from secondary ones. This autonomy can also mean access to institutional resources in a more selective and specific way, for those needs for which primary networks are not effectively competent.

The network intervention, producing two synergic movements towards the collective and towards autonomy, carries out a change within the situations taken into charge that we can resume as follows:
• people’s exit from solitude or isolation, if not neglect;
• restart of “sharing” dynamics between people, by a burden redistribution that individuals imply;
• Sense production within relationships by reinitiating dynamics, which aren’t only based on reciprocity (giving-receiving), but also on gift (giving, receiving, reciprocating). (J.T. Godbout, 1994);
• Complementarity between primary and secondary networks on the basis of an autonomously formulated demand in correlation to existing needs and not in correlation to the offer of existing services. In other words, these services aren’t thought and structured in another dimension with respect to the needs, but modeled on true people’s demands.

Conclusions
We would like to underline, as we did at the beginning of this text, that network approach refers to some background criteria combining the solidarity principle with the subsidiarity principle.

The first one indicate the possibility-opportunity to draw from all resources which are present within networks based on a logic of complementarity and circularity, moving away from the problem and focusing on relationships and acting on the latter as a basic resource to cope with problematic situations.

The second one indicates the necessity that “strong” networks support the “weak” ones, providing all necessary means so that the latter can develop a freedom of action, without becoming, in their turn, dependent because of help they have received. Unfortunately, it is not rare to observe that service help, precisely in the field of dependences, takes away people from a dependence to create another, the dependence from assistance. Within our perspective, the operator works for subject autonomy, not only from needs, either material or relational, but also from service system that risks to self-perpetuate having effects that everyone knows.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Risk is probability to sustain a damage or a loss (physical, psychological, material, etc.). An individual or a group is vulnerable if he/she is subject to the negative consequences of a problem. This predisposition derives from an interrelational system between personal or group characteristics (physical, biological, psychological characteristics etc.) and environmental variables (related to physical, family, cultural, technological, political, social, economic, organizational environment).

We call « risk factors » the variables, features, processes, conditions, events, interactions and relationships influencing an individual or a group of individuals or their environment, which represent a danger or a specific threat related to a given problem. Therefore, for example, it is possible to identify factors predisposing children to sexual-specific or sexual aggression.

We remark that a risk represents probability to be exposed to a danger and not a certainty. In many situations, it is however difficult, even impossible to determine exactly to what extent a risk factor contributes to cause a damage. Often, it doesn’t exist a direct and immediate cause-effect relation between a risk and a particular result. For example, if poverty is certainly a predisposing factor to family violence, it would be obviously totally inexactly to affirm that all families in a precarious situation mistreat their children.

Let’s highlight for one more time that the notion of risk is relative. In fact, all factors don’t have the same predictive value. Therefore, an element can present a very remote risk, while another can lead to an almost certain risk. For example, living in an institution for disabled people in Belgium implies almost no risk of being exposed to sexual abuse, while being a street girl in Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso) is a crucial risk.

Risk is a very recurring concept when we discuss about health. Various health services are planned and organized after a risk evaluation. It applies to various health system elements, for example public health, specialized healthcare in institutions as well as health professional training. A risk-based approach is used in examining health-related and disease-related issues: this is the case, for example, of mental health, violence, mistreatment, neglect, suicide, physical, deteriorating and crippling diseases. We identify groups that could risk experiencing particular health problems: small children, women, young and elder people, people belonging to an ethnocultural minority, « gay people », lesbians, and bisexuals, people living in poverty, socially isolated people and institution-alized people.

In fact, the tendency to use and highlight the term « risk » has « become a spate ». A medical database consultation including articles of the last two decades leads to this conclusion. Other authors have pointed out that in other subjects such as education and social sciences, practitioners and researchers have adopted this conceptual paradigm to clarify and define various problems. Therefore, professionals in education sector has defined as a risk factor these conditions having a negative influence on children and reducing their success in the classical school environment and gradually they have established a set of characteristics that, when they are present, expose children to risk of school failure.

There is a certain number of reasons to highlight so much the concept of risk. Skolbekken attributes this phenomenon to the progress of science and technology; therefore we have probability statistics and more complex computer technology at our disposal, which allows to stress health promotion and risk management. Besides, this author points out that this aspect reveals that there has been a shift of thought about risk factors depending if they are managed by individuals or not.

Despite this attention attached to the concept of risk, there is no evident consensus in literature about a precise definition of the terms « risk » and « at risk ». We generally agree that risk is probability to suffer a damage or to lose something worthwhile. The Oxford
Encyclopedia defines risk as a possibility of danger, loss, wound or other regrettable consequences. However, these definitions give rise to a precise interpretation, which varies considerably.

In literature, the concept of vulnerability is even less precise than the concept of risk. Definitions are vague. The Oxford Dictionary defines the term “vulnerable” as follows: who can be hurt, who/ which can be damaged, exposed to damage by a weapon, a crisis, etc. The term comes from Latin “vulnerare” which means « to hurt ». Generally, it emerges from literature that individuals or groups are considered as vulnerable if they are predisposed to disease, to a damage or to any negative effect. This predisposition can have a genetic, biological or psychosocial nature. A health problem implies vulnerability but this only factor is not enough.
Annex 1

Format for the Observation of the Child

a) Aspect: how he/she presents him/herself

1) physical aspect (height and weight compared to age, malformations, hygiene, the way he dresses, psychological and mental development…)
2) health status (what are the most common illnesses, how and what he eats, bed wetting…)
3) language (free, stammering, he knows how to talk about his experience…)
4) movement (he walks independently, active/passive movement, motor control…)
5) character and emotional expression (ex. happy, indifferent, open minded, aggressive, kind, fearful/courageous…)

b) Capacity: how is his behaviour

1) play (does he have some plays? What are his plays? With whom? What is his favorite play?)
2) education (class, performance, attendance at school, participation to the school activities, home work…)
3) work (what kind of work he does, when, how much time, voluntary or obliged…)
4) level of autonomy (he takes care of his body, washes himself, dresses himself, he is responsible in his study/work, he is willing to help others, he takes responsibilities in the family…)

c) Relationships: how are his relationships

1) with parents, mother and father (verbal and non-verbal communication, physical and affective nearness, sense of belonging, he talks with his parents, confidence or ignorance)
2) with other adults, like relatives, teachers (the same as before)
3) with friends/pairs (who are his friends, behaviour to the child in the group of friends, communication, dialogue…)

d) Social worker’s feelings

1) how I perceive the child (he/she is sincere, he/she suffers….)
2) how I do react to his/her attitudes and behaviours (I protect him, I become angry….)
ANNEX 2

Format for the Observation of the Family

1) The family structure
   • composition, type of union, children

2) The human resources of the family
   • education
   • environment (characteristics of the house and of the context)
   • health status of family members
   • work
   • income
   • social network

3) The quality of relationship inside the family
   • in the couple (love, reciprocal responsibility)
   • paternal and maternal function
   • love and responsibility towards the children
   • educational capacity

4) The educative task of the family
   • to create an adequate climate atmosphere in the family
   • to care the members (integrity, protection, emergency issues)
   • to give education (affection, guide/rules, instruction, play)

5) The family “well-being”

We can say that a family is “healthy” when:
   • there is cohesion, clear difference among generations, individual autonomy
   • there is a good relationship among members (parents, parent-sons, sons-parents, among brothers and sisters)
   • there is stability and organisational adaptability
   • family members have enough competence for
     - problem solving
     - decision making
     - conflict mediation and solution
     - family management
ANNEX 3

Exploring the Child Networks

Sheet 1 - How to Explore the Child Network:
Make a list of important of the people in the child’s life. First of all, realize in which way they are grouped together in his/her life, the areas where they stay (e.g. family, friend, helping group, etc.) For each area, make a list of the important individuals (according to you), both in a positive and in a negative sense. If there are people you can not locate in a precise area, you can add an “other” area. If some of them can be located in more than one area (e.g. family and neighbourhood), just put them in the one you consider the most appropriate.

Sheet 2 - Graphic Representation of the Network:
Starting from the list of people presented in sheet 1, now show in a graphic way the reciprocal position of those people. Insert in the small circles the names of those who live together, representing a family knot or a sharing. Identify possible professionals and represent them with the corresponding symbols. After representing people, highlight the reciprocal links through the symbols for links: weak, strong, discontinuous, etc., connecting them as in the example:

Sheet 3 - Support Sheet:
Identify the role that people in the network have for the child, identify those who have more than one function in his/her regards and put in their initials, keeping in mind the function they have.

People who don not have any functions should not appear in the schedule. Are you satisfied with the help you get in your network, for each of the indicated functions? In general terms, can you rely on the help of the important (according to you) individuals when you need it?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family</th>
<th>Relatives</th>
<th>Friends</th>
<th>Neighbours</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>Organizations</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**SHEET 1 - How to Explore the Child Network**

- Family
- Relatives
- Friends
- Neighbours
- School
- Organizations
- Other

Date: ________________
Primary Network
- Family, friends, neighbours, colleagues, mates

Formal Secondary Network
- Social services, health services, police, other public services

Secondary Network of the Third Sector
- Faith based organizations, community based organizations, NGOs

Secondary Network
- Firms, shops, places of work...

Legend:
- Strong
- Weak
- Incontinuous, Irregular
- Broken, separation, divorce
- Interrupted
- Conflict-based

Signature: _________________________
Name: __________________________
### SHEET 3 - Support Sheet

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Play</th>
<th>Hospitality</th>
<th>Emotional Support</th>
<th>Material Support</th>
<th>Shelter (House)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Support to respect the rules</td>
<td>Health care</td>
<td>Food</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Counselling</td>
<td>Transport</td>
<td>School Fees</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Family**  
**Relatives**  
**Friends**  
**Neighbours**  
**School Worker**  
**Social Services Organizations**  
**Other**

**Name:** _________________________________  
**Signature:** ____________________________  
**Date:** ________________________________
**SOCIAL FORM**

**Note:** Two recent photos have to be provided with this present form.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Distance Support Coordinating Office</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Date:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group code:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(By office in Italy)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Child Identification**

| Child’s Surname: |
| Child’s Name: |
| Child’s sex: |
| Date of birth: |
| Place of birth: |
| District: |
| Place of present residence: |
| Village: |
| District: |

**Health situation of the family:**

- HIV + □ HIV – □ HIV unknown □
- Very bad □ Bad □ Good □ Very good □
- Malnourished □ Physical handicap □ Mental-handicap □ Others (Specify) ……………………

**Father**

| Name: |
| Age: |
| Status: alive □ (present □ absent □) unknown □ dead □ HIV + □ HIV – □ HIV unknown □ |
| Place of Residence: |
| Level of education: |
| Profession/source of income: |

**Mother**

| Name: |
| Age: |
| Status: alive □ (present □ absent □) unknown □ dead □ HIV + □ HIV – □ HIV unknown □ |
| Place of Residence: |
| Level of education: |
| Profession/source of income: |

**Guardian**

| Name: |
| Age: |
| HIV + □ HIV – □ HIV unknown □ |
| Place of Residence: |
| Level of education: |
| Profession/source of income: |
| Relationship with the child: |
## The child’s family

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the family member</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Relation with the child</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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</tbody>
</table>

Family members not living with the child in the same house, but present for the child (lively, significant)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the family member</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Relation with the child</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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</tbody>
</table>

## The child’s house

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description of the house:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

How is water obtained? :

Is the home provided with a pit latrine for only the family use? :

Is there provision of electricity? :

Is the house owned or rented? :  
What is the monthly rent? :

## The story of the child and his/her family.

(specify also how you got in contact with the child and if the child and the family get any other assistance from your organisation or from other organisations and what kind of assistance)
The observation of the child and his/her family
(the aspect, the capacity, the relationship of the child/ the quality of relationship inside the family, the educative task of the family, the family “well-being”, the social network around the family)

The child networks (see attached graphic and support sheet)

Information about the school and the performance of the child

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the school :</th>
<th>day</th>
<th>boarding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School (District) Location and distance from child’s home:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Present class:</td>
<td>School performance:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Evaluation of child vulnerability
(needs and resources of the child and his/her family)

Needs

Resources:

Vulnerability criteria used to identify this child as eligible for support:
poverty  single or total orphan  handicapped  child headed family  abandoned  child mother  with parent/s HIV/AIDS positive  other (specify) __________________________
**Intervention plan** (hypothesis, results to achieve, proposed activities)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FOLLOW UP VISIT/ INTERVENTION</th>
<th>date:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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</tbody>
</table>

Name, date and signature of the child’s guardian confirming the information and giving authority to AVSI to disclose information in order to solicit funds to assist the child:

Name and signature of the person who has filled the form:

Name and the signature of the social worker following the child:

WANGWE IGNATIUS

Acknowledged by the person responsible for the AVSI/OVC project in your organization (name and signature):