

TO BE A CASE MANAGER IN CHILD CARE SERVICES

A. Costin, R.L.Bran

Alina COSTIN

Assist.prof., PhD

Aurel Vlaicu University of Arad, Romania

Renate Liliana BRAN

Assist. prof., PhD

Aurel Vlaicu University of Arad, Romania

Abstract: More and more is talked about a degradation of the social workers` status in Romania, who are extremely necessary yet absent in structures such as schools. Different actions conducted by CNASR (National College of Social Workers in Romania) try to revive and improve the framework of social workers` activity but mostly they aim for the social acknowledgement they deserve. In this context, I would like to underline the numerous roles a case manager needs to take as a specialist in coordinating interventions with children separated from their families. Another aspect worth highlighting is the competences and qualities a social workers needs when trying to fulfil these roles. In situations when each case is actually *a child`s life and future*, the pressure caused by *too many cases* and *poor remuneration* are not reasons to compromise the quality of intervention.

Starting with public support and advocacy, mediation between agencies and people und ending with case monitoring and closure, the case manager plays a leading role in drafting the intervention measures along with his/her team. S/he successfully supports an activity, which has an ending, namely a happy child with his family or a new family for the child.

The complexity of case management process and the importance of properly assumed interventions by a whole team call for exquisite qualities of case managers. They coordinate a whole procedure and are responsible for decision-making and actions taken during case investigation.

In this paper, I would like to capture some of the roles taken by a case manager and to develop a profile by highlighting the qualities required by such roles.

Keywords: case manager, role, social organization, consultancy, public support and advocacy.

Introduction

This paper does not aim to criticize the society's generalized attitude towards the social worker, but starting from this aspect, I want to describe the complexity of the roles that the case manager as a specialist in coordinating activities for a child separated from the family takes. They are an argument in favour of the recognition of a social worker's status in Romania. The multitude of skills and abilities that a social worker must own, places him among the most complex specialists; on the other hand, the diversity of roles turns him into the man who makes all things and thus he loses the well-deserved stateliness.

What does the literature say about the social worker, or how he is described?

The social worker promotes the ideal of social justice (Krogsrud, 2006), is an agent of change, "charged with individual value" (Goldstein, 1973, p.30 cited by Neamtu, 2003), but overall he is a promoter of universal values and of support and equity.

Set in a lot of situations from professional point of view, the social worker implements a variety of principles and slams the most difficult and often contradictory situations.

As a case manager, the social worker is challenged to embody all values specific to the profession, expressed with equidistance and, especially, in full agreement with his own conscience.

In recent years these merits were recognized and applauded; social worker galas organized by CNASR, The social work days, conferences with tradition on social worker status, the pressures of the College on the government to improve the financial situation of social workers show the interest in valuing this profession.

Conceptual delimitations

Is it difficult to be a case manager? The answer to this question should be known by the students of Social work study programme. The difficulty and beauty of this segment of activity oblige us to operationalize certain terms and then to describe the activities and duties of a CM (case manager). Defined as "pragmatic response to the realities of offered services" (Austin și McClelland, 1996, p.1 apud Krogsrud, 2006, p.412...). the case management represents the perfect way to mediate between the client and offered services Thus, the case manager becomes a mediator, a well known of existing resources at the community level, which can be used for the people found in great difficulty.

In Romania, the regulation of the legal aspects of assistance coordination and the intervention activities for a child separated from the family are governed mainly by the Law 272/2004 regarding the protection and promotion of child rights and the Order 288/2006 for the approval of minimal compulsory standards on case management in the field of the protection of child rights.

The last source defines the case manager (CM) as the professional who coordinates social work and protection activities carried out in the special interest of the child, having as purpose the development and implementation of:

- the individualized protection plan (IPP) for children separated from their family (Article 53 of Law no. 272 / 2004 on the protection and promotion of children's rights);
- the recovery plan for children with disabilities (Article 21 of GO no 1437/2004 on the organization and operational methodology of the child protection commission);
- the rehabilitation and/or social reintegration plan for abused, neglected and/or exploited children, including victims of trafficking, labour exploitation, sexual exploitation for commercial purposes.

Weil și Karls (1985, p.1) came up with a more succinct definition of what a case manager does..."In this regard, all clients of such social services will benefit of all services, treatment, welfare, and oportunities to which they are entitled".

Some clarifications are needed related to each of these comprehensive functions of CM.

A case manager for each case will be appointed immediately after the establishment of the measure of special protection. So, by law, a case manager will be appointed for children in special protection, for children with disability being with the record of the complex evaluation service of DGASPC and for all abused, neglected and/or exploited children being in the evidence of DGASPC. Depending on the situation of each child, the case manager develops an IPP, the recovery plan or the rehabilitation and social integration plan, plans that include service planning and interventions throughout the period in which the child is assisted. The method of case management involves a long-term cooperation of the case manager with the case coordinator and the multidisciplinary team to find the best solution for the child and to draw a way of intervention that must be done according to the identified needs and with the possibilities of recovery and family integration. The investigation of the case is coordinated by the case manager and requires strict adherence to clearly defined indicators for each stage of case management according to Order 288/2006.

Skills and qualities necessary for case manager

In the debate on the difficulty of being a case manager I would start from Rose's statement (1992, p.271) which indirectly captures the essence of a case manager`s work: "...if there is a complex planning of the services together with appropriate resources, if various components of the system services were integrated, if there were extremely responsive providing systems, easily accessible and with appropriate methods of intervention case management would not be needed". In another paper the author understands that the case manager is the person responsible for ensuring the timely and adequate delivery of suitable

community- based services (Rose and Moore, 1995). Sometimes the term case management is used, particularly by social workers, to distinguish providing services to address the concrete needs of clients for shelter, food, clothing, income, and so forth from providing clinical social work services that often include some form of psychotherapy (Friedman, Williams, 2008, p.198)

Of all the roles of social worker that of advocacy reaches properly the purpose of case management, namely the adequacy of services to the needs of individuals, family, groups and even the community. In other words, the role of advocacy involves the existence of an influence on the political field and this task belongs to social workers, especially to CM. The difficulty lies in exercising this role at the individual level and less on the institutional level, making this activity less efficient. A first condition for the case manager`s efficiency is knowledge of available community resources, of public and private services which are available. Particularly valuable is the community that can respond to some requests in emergency cases. The access to resources is fundamental in case management, so a conscious and informed community will be an asset to the case manager. Most times the CM is in a position to create resources when there are insufficient or none. The difficulty lies in exercising this role at the individual level and less on the institutional level, making this activity less efficient (Gavrila- Ardelean, Horvath, A., 2009).

Table no 1. Some absolutely necessary qualities for a case manager

Qualities required for a case manager	Concrete contexts that require these qualities
the knowledge of available community resources	CM is the main pawn in mingling customer needs with community resources
Creativity / creative personality	Creating new resources when they do not exist
Spontaneity, prepared for crisis situations	To hold management techniques crisis
Good coordinator, organized	Ensure the effectiveness of the services provided and their proper implementation in line with the client`s needs
Promoter of changes	The change that he calls relates to the system for the supply of services
Ability to work in a team	The client needs are addressed in a multidimensional manner, so there are multiple different perspectives for problem solving.
Perseverance	In this context, it is envisaged that quality perseverance is absolutely necessary in achieving the target advocacy
Mentors	Assists clients in activities defending their rights

Behind coordinating interventions, the case manager conducts a lot of activities:

- Problems solving
- Public support and advocacy
- Intermediation between agencies or individuals
- Social planning
- Community organization
- Monitoring services

The pressure exerted by the social work system itself with its malfunctions plus the personal problems or difficulties in managing such cases is properly managed only if the CM has some special qualities and skills. There are lots of elements that affect the smooth running of the case management process, elements that constitute obstacles in the on-going investigation of such cases. It seems that different social systems (or being at various stages of development), as the Romanian and the American system face the same difficulties in the functioning of case management. Figure 1 reveals the forces that gravitate around case management procedure, which are, in fact, problem areas for the social worker. The lack of human resources (recognized problem in Romania, but not found in the foreign literature) or their improper training, the standards built unrealistically or the laws rigidity are factors that directly affect the quality of services constituting the first two elements that interfere in the work coordination of interventions. But how can be a problem like the insufficient number of case managers be solved? The CM is overloaded with work and therefore the failure to comply with mandatory minimum standards of quality.

Cojocaru confirms these elements as a factor influencing the case management in his paper from 2008, but identifies at that time some issues that we believe have been overcome, namely: superficiality in developing IPP (multiplying without taking into account the child's personal features), the adequacy of the measures to IPP, and no changes to IPP depending on the progress of the case etc.

As we said, the case manager brings together the client who is in different situations of vulnerability or crisis with the services. This means that he creates a link between the need and the solution which responds to this need. This objective is influenced also by the way the community understands the social problem and wants to be involved in identifying individuals / families in difficulty and their referral to the specialized services.

Here's a real circuit of the challenges in which the CM may ally with the community (that means that it can be considered a valuable resource) if he previously managed its awareness, an awareness of humanistic values and principles.

The guide of case managers (USA, 2014, p.6) indicates some dissonance between the social policies at system level and the procedures and practices at the case management level.

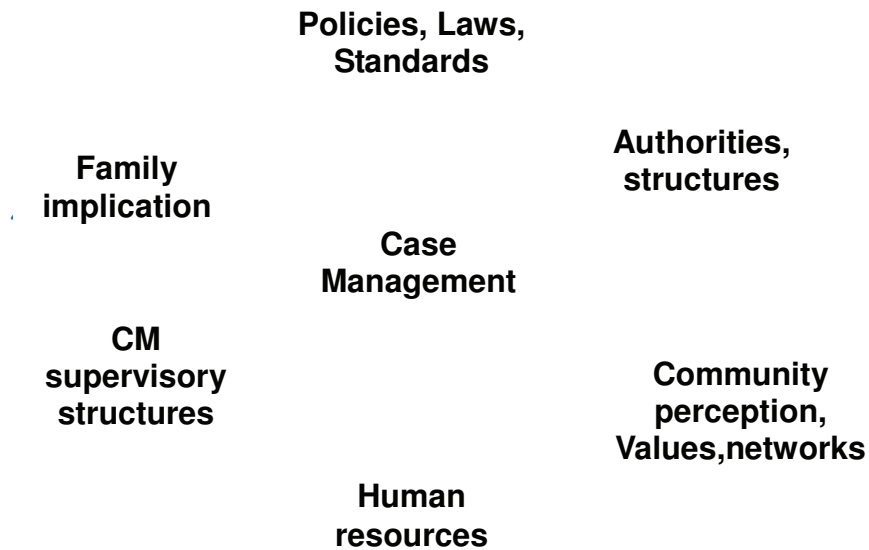


Figure nr.1. Elements influencing the case management system

Source: *Case Management Toolkit: A User's Guide for strengthening Case Management Services in Child Welfare, 2014*

The complexity and difficulty of exercising the role of case manager is given also by the interventions which differ according to context and type of the needs. Thus, we identify three goals that the case manager follows:

- The goals of primary care: coordination of services offered to different groups of patients/clients
- Social goals: "the main objective of CM approach in social work practice is to keep individuals in primary support groups" (Moore , 1990, p. 446)
- Medical - social goals: providing social and medical services to prevent/solve the problems in vulnerable populations.

If we refer to the manner the case manager choses to focus his/her attention, we distinguish between resource centred management, results centred management, problem centred and appreciative management. Each type of approach faces difficulties when put into practice. On the other hand, each way of managing the entire procedure has certain advantages. This theoretical classification of management types brings about serious issues in case management because the case manager is forced to focus on results but also mind the available resources; reaching the goals/results can be jeopardized unless new resources are delivered on

time. Problem centred management is beneficial if the client's strong points are taken into account.

Case Manager Job Description

A good argument in favour of the complexity of a case manager's role is the listing of some of his duties as presented by the job description:

- builds multidisciplinary and inter-institutional teams
- ensures cooperation and the child's/family's/legal guardian's active involvement.
- monitors the way special protection measures are implemented; checks periodically the circumstances which led to establishment of protective measures for cases under surveillance;
- re-assesses periodically the progress made, the decisions and specialized interventions for cases under surveillance; designs along with a multidisciplinary team the individual protection plan or other plans stipulated by the law, if necessary
- prepares the child's reinsertion into the natural family or into a temporary foster family, into the adoptive family or any other form of special protection.

These functions of case management describe the enabling-enhancing pattern which promotes orientation towards the individual and family. The aim is to enable them to respond to challenges and also to assess constantly the way family or group efforts are integrated in the efforts of the formal system. Briefly, the role of the case manager is to monitor the services, to assess, offer consultancy and enhance collaboration, coordination, counselling and register/monitor progress. Krogsrud (op.cit. p. 414) understands that four are the case manager's main activities: enlargements of the position and visibility, staff planning for case takeover, creating a bond between clients, resources and advocacy.

Conclusions

The conclusions of this paper involve giving an answer to the question whether it is difficult to be a case manager. The arguments I have brought present the case management procedure, the multitude of aspects that need to be taken into consideration and mostly the context in which the process unfolds. All these aspects highlight the dynamic and complex character of case management procedures. Yes, it is difficult to be a case manager because "the stakes" are high and they refer to a child's and a family's welfare. The entire path towards this welfare seems disturbed by multiple factors, including legislation, procedures, policies and authorities.

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