PATHS TO THE PERSON

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PATHS TO THE PERSON

COMMUNITY ASSIGNMENTS IN ACHIEVING
INDIVIDUAL PREVENTION GOALS

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To the Holy Father John Paul II
– Servant of the dignity of the human person –
the Founder of the Pontifical Council for Health Care Workers

Peer Groups
(IWONA NIEWIADOMSKA)

1. Informal Peer Groups as a Risk Factor
for Deviant Behaviours

In the process of their growing up, teenagers go through an important stage in which they form informal peer groups which gradually replace the family and school environment together with the influence they exert and start shaping their behaviours and attitudes. Peers are attracted to one another because of their willingness (Macacci et al 1996, pp. 76-82):
– to test themselves,
– to compare themselves with one another,
– to gain new experiences,
– to compete with one another for social status.

It is as early as in the final years of elementary school that first groups come into being. In these groups individuals share their feelings, secrets and dreams. Young people begin to display stronger and stronger tendency to gather together and spend their free time in one another's company.

The strong influence of friends on the shaping of teenagers' behaviour results especially from (Orwid, Pietruszewski 1996, pp. 89-93)**:**
– **intensified intergroup conformism,**
– **tendency to encapsulate society, which is emphasized by external characteristics such as listening to the same kind of music, wearing specific clothes or talking in slang.**

In order to illustrate the issues connected with the shaping of teenagers' deviant behaviours by peer communities, we will present the findings of a research carried out on 120 seventeen-nineteen-year-old boys. The subjects were divided into two groups according to their tendencies towards deviant behaviours: 1) depraved boys (N=60), who were found to have resorted to different kinds of destructive behaviours, including pun-

ishable deeds. 2) boys who are positively adapted to the current social standards (N=60). The information concerned with demoralizing tendencies was gathered with the help of the Deviant Behaviours Questionnaire by I. Niewiadomska. The data concerned with the functioning in peer groups was gathered with the help of the Socializing Systems Questionnaire by I. Niewiadomska.

Tendencies concerning teenagers' functioning in peer groups.

– The results of the research allow us to conclude that all the subjects take part in meetings with their peer friends outside school – 92% of the depraved boys and 78% of the positively adapted teenagers meet their friends from the yard, estate and/or stairwell.

– The first difference between the two groups compared is that 8% of the depraved teenagers belong to subculture groups (such as Skate, Hip-Hop, Punk, Hipsters) while nobody from the other group is a member of such.

– The second difference is that 22% of the positively adapted boys belong to formal peer groups (such as Scouts, Youth Academy, school special interests group, sports club, religious group).

Such high intensity of membership in informal peer communities proves that they fulfil important functions for their members – the most significant of which are the protective and stratification functions (Błachut et al 2001, p. 362).

The protective function of peer groups consists in the fact that a "community of equal members" allows a young person to:

– **reduce the tension which appears in connection with being under adult control,**

– **solve his problems through direct contact with his friends.**

The realization of the presented function results from the fact that in an organized teenage community there is a possibility to satisfy one's safety needs (for example the need of acceptance and belonging), to openly express one's thoughts, to solve problems together, to make collective decisions and take collective actions, the responsibility for which is divided among several people. If there is any perceived inconsistency with the group's beliefs, it is eradicated and group conformism is created, which enables the members of a given community to dissociate themselves from the rest of the society (Ostrihanska, Greczuszkin 2000, p. 162).

The stratification function is connected with the fact that an adolescent achieves a social rank due to his abilities and not according to his age.

The relations presented above are confirmed by our research. In both groups the subjects (almost 100%) usually mention the importance of talking with friends and conventional behaviours such as listening to

music, playing computer games, watching films. At the same time it should be pointed out that boys who are socially unadapted meet their friends more often than the teenagers who are positively adapted. On the basis of the research findings we may conclude that informal peer groups are of particular significance to the teenagers who display deviant behaviours. Therefore it is this group of teenagers that is more willing to increase the frequency of their interactions with friends. Attributing such an important role to meeting friends is often a sign of a young person's readiness to submit to the standards of behaviour presented by the group, which in literature is often referred to as "blind conformism" to the group's expectations (Błachut et al 2001, p. 362).

The conclusion presented above can be confirmed by the fact that groups of demoralized youths usually appear in socially disrupted areas, where the normative system binding the society has been considerably weakened and a new set of rules has replaced it and now shapes interpersonal relations. Empirical analyses show that deviant teenage communities often appear in areas where there are high levels of crime and alcohol consumption, high divorce rate and other phenomena which negatively influence interpersonal functioning (Błachut et al 2001, p. 365). Therefore, similarity in social status and insufficient adult control (especially parents' control) are among selective factors for juvenile gangs to come into being (Błachut et al 2001, p. 364).

The reasons mentioned above determine young people to grow up in a "socialization vacuum" which deprives them of the possibility to assume and play unambiguously defined social roles. Marginalized teenagers, however, have the same needs as their positively adapted peers, which motivates them to unite in communities made up of individuals who have similar problems. Such communities give teenagers opportunities to satisfy their frustrated needs. At the same time these people often have problems in establishing long-lasting relationships and suppressing their hostility, which results in them not being able to create a cohesive community. Therefore, socially excluded young people create **"quasi-groups"** which are distinguished by peculiar characteristics (Ostrihanska, Greczuszkin 2000, pp. 162-163; Błachut et al 2001, pp. 367-368):

– in a "quasi-group" there are no clearly defined roles, no precise expectations of individual members, there is no explicit position on binding norms; a direct result of the deficiencies mentioned is the way the young people acquire prestige – through violence and intimidation, the application of which becomes the essential method to satisfy the need of recognition and prestige;

– the members of a "quasi-group" prefer the rule of "manifold igno-rance", which means that each member of the community believes that his friends fully identify themselves with the norms of the community. There-fore, on the one hand, there are no sincere talks on the subject of beliefs and value preferences of individual members and, on the other hand, each member pretends to be stronger than he really is. This generates aggres-sive behaviours and intensifies negative social roles; however, individual talks with members of different "quasi-groups" prove that more often than not they do not know how to behave in different circumstances and which values to adopt as theirs;

– the majority of a "quasi-group" members function on its fringes, they come and go;

– such communities do not have a permanent leader – this role is some-times assumed by a permanent member who – at least for a short period of time – is able to gain control over the rest of the people;

– a "quasi group" functions the way its members function (negative social experiences of the teenagers who form the group are reflected in its malfunctioning), but at the same time it makes it easy for the youths to display deviant behaviours because it provides justification for that kind of behaviour.

In the analysis of deviant youth communities we should pay atten-tion to groups which are paracriminal and groups which are abrasive in nature. The first type – **paracriminal communities** – are usually formed in the districts of big cities with high levels of crime, where people from lower social classes live. In such conglomerations children very early start to orientate themselves towards illegal means of gaining success. Patterns of criminal behaviour are usually set by adults. Direct contact with such adults results in teenagers learning deviant activity through the phenome-non called social modelling. Youths coming from "criminal districts" learn deviant roles and try to play them. Seemingly senseless manifestations of aggression or thefts serve the purpose of rehearsing the role. Hierarchical structure of a youth group – with a clear division of each of the members' rights and duties – very often is a reflection of adult criminals' communi-ties. Behaviours which are characterized by a high level of conformism to the norms of the "underground" world enable young people to emphasize their qualifications for participating in this world. When an individual or a group rises in the criminal hierarchy, then their aggressive behaviours which are expressive in nature – for example acts of hooliganism or point-less aggression – tend to gradually disappear. At the same time young people often learn that aggression is a criterion according to which, on the one hand, human value is measured and, on the other hand, a control

over one's own and other people's situation is maintained (Poznaniak 1998, p. 137).

Informal youth communities which are combative in nature most usually come from environments of inconstant composition where there is hardly any social control and, at the same time, neither lasting bonds between people nor a cohesive axiological and normative system had a chance to develop. This situation is characteristic to large estates in big cities where the disorganized community is not able to provide individuals who are becoming adult with access to socially accepted ways of achieving success or to ensure a safe future for them. Young people who come from such environment are often forced to solve their adaptation problems themselves. An important method of adaptation for adolescents in the face of social defeat (experienced or predicted) is reflected by the phenomenon called "companions in misery" (Ohme 1993, p. 294). When a teenager experiences his failures, he can reduce his negative emotions in a group of people who are similar to him, who are his companions in misery, as a result of the following processes: (Ohme 1993, pp. 300-301):

– positive emotions induced by a mere act of affiliation and others' presence,

– articulation of the feelings experienced,

– reduced self-concentration and suppression of the processes which lower one's self-esteem,

– dispersal of responsibility – staying with other people after a failure relieves tension and nervousness,

– the feeling of liking evoked by collective activity and similarity between the members of the group – "companions in misery" create a positive bond between one another, which is constantly being strengthened by fear, cooperation and noticeable similarities of the emotional states experienced,

– subjectivism of the group's attitude – the assessment of one's social status depends not so much on one's characteristics but on the comparison of his features with the characteristics of the other members of the group; when the group creates its standard of "being a looser", the person who has actually suffered a failure does not see the contrast between his own social status and the other people's situation.

The factors presented above lead to an increase in the sense of the intergroup identity, to a strong identification with the other members of the community as well as the standards within the group (Gray-Little, Hafdahl 2000, pp 26-54). In this way a redefinition of the reference group for one's behaviour is done – that is the socialization influence of peer

society. The exertion of the group's pressure may consist in: (Błachut et al 2001, p. 363):

– emphasizing the roles which demand behaviours that are at variance with the standards,

– familiarizing the members with the strategies of behaviour which are contrary to social standards and drilling them with arguments which may justify all their wrongdoings,

– interfering with the roles which are essential in proper socialization or making it more difficult for the members to come back to the roles they played before joining,

– facilitating the process of assimilating the values and norms which are at variance with the values of a given society.

Distancing himself from the binding standards, a young person liberates himself also from the restrictions imposed by the society and gravitates towards aggressive behaviours when faced with any source of frustration. Physical strength, ability to fight and/or resistance to pain may also help when social status of adolescent members of a community is being determined (Vitaro et al 2000, pp. 313-325).

In our research we noticed that there are often instances of deviant behaviour when the depraved teenagers get together – as many as 72 % of the subjects stated that alcohol is drunk at such meetings, 38% of the group admitted that they wander around the streets pointlessly, 13% take drugs and 12% of the subjects admitted that they have participated in group thefts. At the same time it should be emphasized that this type of behaviour does not take place at the meetings of the positively adapted boys. The findings of the research confirm the socializing influence of a friendly community on the shaping of deviant activity. We can also see that peer community constitutes the strongest factor affecting the use of psychoactive substances because the onset of such behaviour usually depends on (Ostaszewski 2003, p. 90):

– staying in company of friends who drink alcohol and/or take other psychoactive substances,

– encountering offers to take psychoactive substances (negative peer pressure),

– previous experimenting with chemical substances.

According to the differential association theory the process of learning destructive behaviour undergoes the same mechanisms as learning behaviours which are in conformity with the standards (Siemaszko 1993, p. 87).

A fundamental part of the process of assimilating deviant behaviours takes place within primary groups which play a vital role in the process of

socialization – usually within the family and peer communities (Siemaszko 1993, pp. 101-103). The proposition is supported by our findings, according to which depraved boys – when in the company of their friends – usually display behaviours which are socially disapproved. Among most common deviant activities taken up by youths when with their friends there are: drinking alcohol (93%), taking other psychoactive substances (48%), stealing (50%), starting fights (37%), destroying different objects (32%), using coercion (23%) and mugging (17%). Therefore, we may conclude that some peer factors – for example observing one's friends' behaviours, performing joint activities, encouraging one another to activities which are against the standards and dividing responsibility for the effects of their behaviour – determine the initiation of destructive activity, including taking extreme risk (Ostrihanska, Greczuszkin 2000, pp. 162-163).

The meetings with the members of deviant youth groups may differ in frequency, the time they last, anticipation as well as intensity. According to the concept of differential association the elements mentioned above may influence a young person's behaviour in the following way (Siemaszko 1993, p. 101):

– The earlier the contacts with the patterns of deviant behaviours, the bigger the probability that the person will prefer the observed patterns of conduct,

– The more frequently and the longer an adolescent observes generally disapproved activities, the bigger the probability that he will display them himself.

– The bigger a teenager's commitment to deviant community and its doings, the bigger the probability that he will behave in accordance with intergroup standards.

It should be emphasized that a community exerts its influence more considerably on people who experience difficulties in psychical functioning (for example because of low self-esteem) and/or in social functioning (for example because of the lack of acceptance from other people) (Ostrihanska, Greczuszkin 2000, p. 164). At the same time the results of empirical analyses distinctly indicate that the age of adolescence is often connected with experiencing different kinds of problems. The findings of a research carried out on over 20 thousand teenagers coming from different countries – after rejecting 21% of the answers – enabled us to distinguish three types of development in the age of adolescence (Orwid, Pietruszewki 1996, p. 95): harmonious (23% of the subjects), fluctuating (35%) and turbulent (21%). Adolescents may encounter the following difficulties:

– immaturity and/or restricted way of thinking (52%);

– considerable pressure from the environment, which in consequence leads to a low motivation to act constructively and/or to submission to the group (52%);

– emotional immaturity, including hypersensitivity (50%);

– lack of lasting rules, on which one can base one's own behaviour (46%);

– high intensity of aggression towards others (46%);

– high level of aggression towards oneself (41%);

– lack of faith in one's own abilities, which results in the lack of motivation to take action (36%);

– numerous fear reactions (30);

– tendency to manipulate others (24%);

– desire to stay anonymous because of the fear of interpersonal contacts (23%).

The circumstances which show that friendly communities may contribute to young people preferring destructive activities constitute an important justification to look for the answer to the question, whether a youth community can be employed to prevent this kind of activities.

2. Peer Health Promotion Programmes

An argument indicating that a constructive community of friends significantly contributes to the shaping of young people's positive lifestyle is the fact that functioning in this type of community is one of the most important factors which protects them from destructive behaviour (Wojciszek 2002, p. 38). It should also be emphasized that:

Peer prevention distinguishes itself with a particularly high effectiveness (Gaś 1999, p. 88).

The effectiveness of the programmes which are based on peer instruction results from two ways of teaching (Rosenthal, Zimmerman 1978, pp. 24-31):

1. through social modelling,

2. as a result of experiencing the sense of one' s self-efficacy.

Re 1) The effectiveness of teaching through social modelling. Every human has various abilities to adapt to the surrounding world. Human adaptation and developmental changes are rooted in social systems and therefore, teaching new behaviours is more effective when it is connected with a net of influence coming from other people (Bandura, 1977b, p. 59).

Acquiring new behaviours through modelling takes place through the process of observation learning – watching the behaviour of another person. Observed activities carried out by "models" create a kind of a rule (matrix) for the generative behaviour of the individual learning them. The patterns of activity adopted by the observer constitute a basis for the shaping of lasting cognitive attitudes and emotional reactions towards particular people, places or situations (Bandura 1986, p. 11). It should be stated that social learning involves not only gathering new information but also shaping different abilities. The influence of a constructive peer environment on assimilating important life competences by a teenager may consist in:

– showing constructive behaviours before an individual develops his own preventive strategies;

– creating opportunities for a young person to exercise his abilities in different social situations;

– creating situations in which an adolescent will be able to apply his learned competences in everyday life.

The regularities presented above prove, therefore, that:

Modelling a constructive lifestyle in natural environment is the most effective method in the promotion of health (Bandura 1997, p. 27).

The speed of this process greatly depends on the characteristics of the "models"– especially on their accuracy, credibility and to what extent the observer identifies with them (Rosenthal, Bandura 1978, p. 622). It should be emphasized at the same time that the process of modelling the advantageous changes requires an appropriate environment. It results from a regularity according to which a man actively influences the environment, and the environment exerts its influence back on the man, constituting at the same time a store of potential patterns of activity and the information about their effectiveness and value. Therefore, the most advantageous conditions for learning new behaviours are when a person is able to strengthen and generalize the sense of new experiences (Bandura 1997, p. 124; Oleś 2005, p. 229). The reasons mentioned above argue that when planning and then realizing health promotion programmes among the young generation, one should definitely consider peer modelling.

Re 2) Teaching as a result of experiencing the sense of self-efficacy. The sense of one's self-efficacy determines the act of undertaking an activity, effort put into it, perseverance, overcoming different obstacles and encouraging one's inner resources to meet social requirements (Sęk 2006, pp. 110-111). The following factors have a particular influence on this conviction (Bandura 1997, pp. 56-64; Pervin, John 2002, p. 484):

– achievements – successes or failures; these experiences are of special importance because success leads to the enhancement of one's self-efficacy, while experiencing failures or lack of success results in its weakening.

– "helpful" experiences – other people's observations concerning the effectiveness of behaviours in particular circumstances. It is a way of integrating one's own competence with the knowledge of other people's effectiveness;

– verbal persuasion – instructions from the environment concerning valuable goals, means of achieving them as well as the cost of the aspirations;

– physiological states – kinds of physiological and emotional experiences which accompany aimed activities; optimal excitement leads to an increase of the sense of one's efficacy, while its excess or insufficiency decreases this conviction.

The sense of self-efficacy is defined as a factor which enhances human motivation to take up activities directed towards the realization of one's personal goals (Skinner 1996, p. 556). Its strengthening function is noticeable in a few aspects.

First of all, the sense of one's self-efficacy frees oneself from alternative goals – a person devaluates alternative results whose realization may end in a failure and pays more attention to the goals which are more valuable for him because they may bring success (Wrosch, Heckhausen 1999, pp. 415-427). This regularity determines that a human individual is distinguished by his tendency to choose his life goals in such a way so as to gain success, making efficient use of existing personal resources (Elliot et al 2000, pp. 789-791).

Second of all, human perseverance in intentional activity is conditioned by positive or negative feedback concerning the effectiveness of subsequent stages of such activity. When people make progress in achieving goals, they feel happier. Difficulties in realizing aspirations, on the other hand, lead to low life satisfaction. The findings of the research show that the positive feedback between success and an increase in motivation to take up another activity is stronger than the negative feedback which causes decrease in motivation when one experiences a failure (Bandura 1977a, pp. 191-215).

Third of all, the more a person believes that he will succeed in achieving his desired goal, the bigger his persistence. A person's commitment to a task increases when he is dissatisfied with his achievements and at the same time aware of his competences which enable him to gain success. A decrease in one's persistence in intentional activity results from situations in which he is not able to perceive his self-efficacy (Zaleski 1987, pp. 974-975). Among such circumstances there are (Oleś 2005, pp. 216-217):

– repeated failures despite remarkable effort put into the fulfilment of aims,
- lack of conviction about the possibility of achieving goals,
- too little feedback that would support one's self-efficacy,
- unrealistic and hardly attainable goals.

Moreover, in intentional activity a person aims at establishing control over achieving his intended goals. Therefore, the most universal motivational tendencies are connected with a keen observation of the environment and attributing the ultimate result of the undertaken activity to oneself. The basic consequence of this control is the modification of the environment in such a way so as to create a possibility to accomplish one's personal plans. It is only when it is impossible that inner control processes lead to the transformation of goals – for example by means of devaluating the unreachable goals or applying defence mechanisms (Heckhausen 2000, pp. 1015-1029).

Perceiving one's self-efficacy leads to the shaping of internal control, which consists in perceiving connections between one's activity and its effects (Weiner 1985, pp. 548-573). Empirical analyses prove that people with a sense of internal control are characterized by a greater commitment to intentional activities, independence of judgment, more constructive preventive strategies in difficult situations, higher indication of self-acceptance and a lower level of fear (Skinner 1996, p. 556).

The cause of deviant behaviours is often the conviction that one is incapable of gaining control over potentially threatening events and managing difficulties: "I will not handle this situation" (Oleś 2005, p. 225). This kind of conviction contributes to an increase in psychological tension, fear and helplessness, which are even bigger and more difficult to bear when one believes that he should take control over the event and feels responsible for its course and effect. (Ajzen **1991,** pp. 179-211). This regularity gives grounds to believe that taking control over events is an important risk factor for deviant behaviours, which is supported by empirical studies. It was found in criminological research that common crimes are usually committed by young men who cannot achieve success because of economical or racial marginalization (Short 1998, pp. 3-6). The results of the analyses also show that most criminals have an external locus of control, which means that they do not see any connection between their own doing and its consequences (Hollin et al 2004, p. 42). It is characteristic especially to reoffenders with a long criminal career who often serve their sentences in isolation and abuse psychoactive substances (Maruna 2004, pp. 195-197). The conclusions from the research allow us to suspect that criminals characterized by internal locus of control manifest behaviours which are

in accordance with social norms to a greater extent because, in comparison to the criminals with external control, they more frequently display conformist behaviours, take responsibility for their crime, prefer life goals which are directed towards their job rather than pleasure and achieve more success (Blatier 2000, pp. 103-107).

Perceiving one's self-efficacy shapes one's self-esteem (Scheier et al 2000, pp 178-209). An increase in a person's positive attitude to himself when he has a high sense of self-efficacy results from situations in which he chooses more difficult goals, is more consistent and persistent in the activity he has undertaken, is in a better mood when realizing the activity and has a positive attitude towards the future. Additionally, he is more flexible in his behaviours, thanks to which he copes with the problems and failures he encounters more effectively (Pervin, John 2002, pp. 483-484). On the other hand, the connections between the lowering of a person's self-esteem and the conviction of his self-efficacy are a consequence of situations in which he experiences a lack of faith in his abilities, a sense of futility of the activities he undertakes because of his past failures, fear of new failures, impossibility to control his reactions in difficult situations and a pessimistic attitude towards the future (Holden 1991, pp 53-93).

People are not always aware of the relations between their self-esteem and the conviction of their self-efficacy. Success is usually accompanied by a higher consciousness than failure. It is because when people achieve success, they want to prove the value of their "self", and when they fail, they need it protected (Steele, Aronson 1995, p. 797). That is why people are more prone to attributing greater significance to themselves when they succeed and blaming external factors when they fail (Zaleski 1987, p. 970).

Empirical tests clearly indicate that people who prefer destructive behaviours suffer from a low sense of self-efficacy. This phenomenon is confirmed by research on direct evaluation of one's achievements as well as by analyses of people's self-regard. Low sense of self-efficacy is also connected with a particular attitude to the past which may consist in establishing unrealistic goals, more wishful thinking than real abilities and lack of planning and perseverance in pursuing goals (Steuden, Jaworowska 2004, pp. 300-305).

Summing up the method of learning new behaviours analyzed here it should be emphasized that:

The risk of deviant behaviours is remarkably lower in people who are characterized by a high sense of self-efficacy (Benda 2001, pp. 722-724).

The relation presented above indicates, therefore, that peer preventive programmes should include the shaping of a sense of self-efficacy in the

participants of the programmes. Training in enhancing one's sense of self-efficacy should enable young people to gain competence in establishing realistic goals and devoting effort to achieve them.

The consequence of experiencing one's self-efficacy should be (Baumeister et al 1996, p. 15):

– increasing the number of successes in different fields of life,
– strengthening one's control over the undertaken activities,
– reinforcing positive self-esteem.

The probability of changing harmful habits and antisocial behaviours should enhance especially in the situation where an increase in one's sense of self-efficacy is accompanied with the conviction that one's conduct to date has had negative effects and that its change may, on the one hand, reduce the risk of threat or potential loss, and on the other – may constitute a kind of compensation for the damages caused (Bandura 1991b, p. 268).

Regularities connected with social learning constitute a basis for the conclusion that peer health promotion programmes may be oriented towards three kinds of goals (Gaś 1999, p. 44):

1. teaching constructive behaviours and competence in taking care of one's health through the process of modelling and rehearsing roles – for example peer teaching programmes, peer counselling programmes;

2. enhancing one's sense of self-efficacy through the possibility of involvement in constructive activities and developing life competences – for example peer action inspiring programmes;

3. teaching managing negative peer pressure through social modelling as well as creating personal standards – for example positive peer influence programmes.

The process of achieving the goals presented above may be diverse in character because planning a preventive programme largely depends (Gaś 1993, pp. 53-58): on the assessment of the participants' needs, on the established goals and their translation into specific tasks, and on the resources available.

3. Peer Health Promotion: Practical Application

One of the examples of peer health promotion is the university preventive programme which was initiated at the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin (KUL) in 2004 (Niewiadomska 2006, pp. 195-204; Niewiadomska, Kalinowski 2007, pp. 147-158). One of the programme's basic goals

was to facilitate students' development and personal potential as well as to manage their free time in the academic environment. The table below illustrates the action taken in the health promotion programme realised at the university.

Health promotion programme at the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin (KUL). 2004/2005

Health promotion at KUL				
↓	↓	↓	↓	↓
Integration of the offer put forward by subjects acting for the students	Enhancing the activity of special interest groups	Peer prevention	Preventive conferences	Enhancing the activity of tutors

Integration of the offer put forward by subjects acting for the students. The realization of the task consisted in supporting and coordinating the initiatives promoting a healthy lifestyle launched by the student government, university youth organizations, the management of halls of residence and university departments responsible for sports, language, cultural and artistic classes. The integration of the existing forms of students' free time management at the university was directed towards preventing boredom and showing young people some alternatives to a passive lifestyle. Thanks to the offers put forward by the organizations mentioned above, students could satisfy their various needs – for example educational, cognitive, integration, recreational and cultural needs.

Enhancing the activity of special interest groups was helpful in the constructive management of students' free time and in satisfying their needs. It was done in two ways:

– allotting scientific grants for activities taken up by students in interest groups;

– training the guardians and chair people of the groups in obtaining European funds for scientific activity.

Peer prevention. In this task we organized a students volunteer group of about one hundred people who worked towards two basic goals: 1) promoting a healthy lifestyle among students; 2) acquiring preventive abilities which may be realized also after the students have graduated – in local societies.

Our volunteer work was divided into two stages. During the first stage students took part in different courses which were to enhance their preven-

tive competences. The subject matter of the courses in question included issues concerning:

– the idea of voluntary work and its capabilities,

– the use of information strategies – especially in formulating information promoting health,

– different possibilities of managing young people's free time,

– the creation of support groups for a healthy lifestyle,

– recognition of the symptoms of behavioural disturbances in young people,

– the use of intervention strategies,

– the shaping of safety in local communities,

– the construction of original preventive programmes.

The second stage consisted in implementing the original programmes which had been worked out by nine groups of the students involved in our project. The following strategies were included in their programmes:

Group no. one: informational activity – the promotion of a healthy lifestyle among students.

Group no. two: educational activity – running workshops developing students' abilities, for example their learning ability or the ability to manage stress.

Group no. three: integration activity – organizing support groups for the development of students' interests at the university.

Group no. four: integration activity in halls of residence.

Group no. five: foreign students integration with Polish students in the academic community of CUL.

Group no. six: intervention activity – launching a students SOS intervention helpline.

Group no. seven: realization of intervention strategies – launching a students SOS intervention e-mail.

Group no. eight: intervention activity – launching a students SOS intervention box.

Group no. nine: information, education and intervention in the promotion of a safe lifestyle among the students of CUL.

The programme of students' voluntary work presented above constituted a kind of proposal for peer environment to engage in different forms of interesting activity which supports their physical, intellectual, emotional and moral development. The suggestions, on the one hand, were directed towards contributing to students cultural initiatives, and on the other, they constituted a basis for bringing individuals closer to their environment. It should be emphasized that the aim of launching and developing the initiatives designed to shape students' culture was also to strengthen the

students' identification with the axionormative system of the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin. The discovery and realization of these values is easier in a constructive peer group. Providing peer help for students in difficult situation was an equally important aspect of our volunteer programme. Peer intervention strategy was realised through launching a students helpline, students intervention box and students internet counselling service.

Preventive conferences. Another opportunity to shape students' attitudes was to engage them in organizing a series of preventive conferences entitled *Addictions: Happiness or threat?,* whose aim was to introduce the problem of chemical and functional addictions and suggest a few possibilities of how to prevent such addictions.

The conferences were designed to integrate preventive activity in local communities. The integration had a two-level character. First of all, organizational cooperation enabled a few institutions to tighten contacts with one another. The conferences were co-organised by the Department of Social Psychoprophylaxis (CUL), Scientific Circle of Students of Psychology (CUL), Scientific Circle of Students of the Institute for Family Studies (CUL), KUL Students' Voluntary Organization, *Catholic* Counsel *Association* for *Addicted* Persons *"Agape", National Centre for AIDS, Regional Police of Lublin, Municipal Police of Lublin. Students also co-organized the conferences, taking care of administrative, logistic and technical services. Their task was also to run workshops teaching about peer prevention.*

The second level of integration was connected with the participants of the conferences – that is teachers, catechists, tutors and secondary school, college and university students from Lublin Voivodeship. In total, there were about six thousand participants in the whole series. The fact that students could co-organize the event was of a high developmental importance to them – they could shape their attitudes towards addictions, cooperate with peers and create their personal resources connected with preventive activity. The changes presented above could take place by means of three interconnected experiences – organizing an individual's behaviours, providing positive patterns of behaviour and enjoying success.

Enhancing the activity of tutors. Eliminating risk factors for deviant behaviours in the academic environment of CUL was connected with the need to enhance the tutors' influence on the students. A series of training courses was organized whose aim was to develop their competence in helping young people. The subject matter of the courses included the following issues:

– symptoms of psychological stress,
– constructive and destructive ways of managing stress,

– risk factors for the victimization of young people, especially students,

– shaping of anti-victimization attitudes,

– symptoms of neurotic disturbances,

– symptoms of mental illnesses,

– signs of using psychoactive substances,

– HIV/AIDS issues.

Generalizing the description of the preventive programme implemented at CUL, it should be emphasized that there are important arguments for initiating integrated health promotion programmes among young people – with a special concern for the peer influence (Gaś 1999, p. 59).

Argument 1.: High Effectiveness.

The goals connected with the promotion of health may be realized effectively because of their compatibility with young people's real needs and interests and because they mobilize the resources of local community.

Argument 2.: Showing Alternatives to the Current Lifestyle.

The participants of preventive activity may realize that a person can actually influence the circumstances which stimulate human development. In this way one ceases to be merely a passive recipient of the offer made by other subjects. Such attitude contributes greatly to the shaping of one's habits connected with constructive free time management as well as pursuing one's interests.

Argument 3.: Cost-effectiveness.

This condition can be fulfilled thanks to young people's enthusiasm and involvement. Young people's initiatives are usually undertaken on a voluntary basis.

Argument 4.: School of Maturity.

Peer strategies provide opportunities to take up constructive activities, take responsibility for oneself and for other people and to develop one's life abilities. At the same time, taking up prosocial activities creates favourable conditions for young people to shape their maturity, which in turn generates their openness to new experiences.

Argument 5.: Shaping one's Identity and Developing a Healthy Lifestyle.

Committing oneself to preventive activity enables one to realize common values, shape prosocial attitudes, experiment with generally valued social roles and experience the sense of togetherness thanks to situations which encourage establishing partnership with peers and adults.

Argument 6.: Broadening a Help Offer for Teenagers who Experience Difficulties.

Providing help for people who are faced with various difficulties – for example because they have just moved to a new place, they have learning difficulties, somebody close has died or has been taken ill – is an important aspect of preventive activity. Temporal support in the moment of crisis helps young people to rebuild their relationships with the surrounding world – and that makes their lives satisfying and meaningful again.

Implementing peer health promotion programmes among young people requires the fulfilment of two basic conditions, however. The first is that the whole project should be controlled by a competent adult person who understands young people's problems and at the same time who realizes how important the role played by young people is in preventing the problems. The other condition consists in young people's adequate preparation to realize the strategies promoting health.

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