

Increasing Participation of Service Users by the help of Personal Budget in Finland

In this article I describe preliminary experiments that deal with clients of social services and how they manage to support their lives and activities with the help of a personal budget. In the study, I tentatively analyze how the new orientation model in the social field works and how it can support the clients. A national health and social services reform is currently taking place in Finland. The target of the reform is simplifying the financing and offering customers more freedom of choice in the services. Another objective is to provide service users with more equal opportunities than before, and to cut cost increases. Basic services will be expanded and information technology will be used.

In the near future the responsibility for providing public health care and social services will be guided and governed by 18 autonomous regions. While establishing the new counties and reforming the structure, services and funding of health care and social services, the reform will transfer new duties to the counties. Public administration in Finland will be organized on a three-tier level as follows: central government, counties (autonomous regions) and local governments as municipalities. The state, however, shall have primary responsibility for financing the counties. In addition, the reform aims to close the sustainability gap in government finances. The goal is to save on costs of health and social affairs. The reform in health care and social services is expected to save approximately three billion euros by the year 2029. The health care, social services and regional government reform will come into effect on 1 January 2020. (Government proposes to increase freedom of choice in health and social services 2017).

Increasing the empowerment, self-determination and participation of service users

Freedom of choice means that clients would have the right to choose for themselves where to get health and social services. In many cases it has already been possible to choose, but the freedom would expand further. Publicly funded health and social services would be provided by both public and private organizations and NGOs, such as associations and foundations. Client fees would be the same across all service providers. Wider freedom of choice would increase clients' role in decision-making. Another goal of the reform is to improve the availability, quality and cost effectiveness of the services.

The idea is to transfer authority to clients, and to engage them in the planning and decision-making about service utilization, as well as to make extended information more available to them (Rose and Black 1985). The components of empowering people from disempowered situation are social action, political awareness, the right to say and to "have a say", recognizing oneself and being recognized as competent, and the use of power. (Breton 2008.) Clients would have more freedom to choose the service providers that best suit them. The goal of personal budgeting (PB), which is part of the reform, is to support clients with their life planning and to empower them in terms of participation, involvement and social citizenship. Strengthening the agency of the service user increases the client's self-determination. Supporting clients' involvement in the services results in an increase in well-being and activity, which are keys to social citizenship. When an individual is positively recognized by their immediate surrounding community, their positive self-image, participation and agency are strengthened in the community as well as in society.

In general, the social and cultural effect of the market reforms has been to intensify a transactional relationship; what is actually wanted is something more human and caring and less busy. (Cottam 2015.) Personal experience of social and societal reciprocity has profound ontological significance for an individual. However, it is one of the most important factors creating the wellbeing. (Ostrom and Walker 2003.) The idea is to respect the service users and build their capacity for self-determination and participation. It is the responsibility of the services to recognize the unique experience of the individual, to learn from the client and to value the individual's right to self-determination (Johnson and Munch 2009.) Self-determination means that clients receiving social services have the freedom to choose how to act and make decisions for themselves (Biestek 1961.) When the services are available to the client and assessed together with a social worker and a counselor, the service user is involved in the process of developing the plan so that it is relevant, meaningful and usable for the service user (Healy 2012).

The project for supporting social citizenship

Searching for improved cooperation, flexibility and citizen participation are in focus when developing services. Recognizing that service users (that is, all people) have strengths and capacities, plays in an important part in improving the services. The "Personal Budgeting - The Key To Citizenship" project has started supporting the development of freedom of choice as well as self-determination and participation of clients by the help of a personal budget within health care and social welfare reform. The personal budgeting model is new in Finland even though there have been some prior experiments related to it. In the project there is cooperation between all participants. The project

has different kinds of partners, such as: six community pilots (municipalities), associations and universities of applied sciences in Finland. Personal budgeting has been available in many countries in Europe, such as the Netherlands and Great Britain. Funding for the Personal Budgeting - The Key To Citizenship project comes from the EU (ESF) and The Ministry of Social Affairs and Health in Finland. Operating time period is 1.6.2016-31.5.2019. (Henkilökohtainen budjetointi)

New liberal ideas have emphasis on individual choice and responsibility instead of solidarity and common responsibilities. There is a danger that the participation and involvement of a service user to the reform is based only on short projects or depends on the will of a single employee. (Beresford 2009.) The purpose of the project is also to influence the development of the legislation regarding the freedom of choice, and as part of that the personal budget, so that it is more customer friendly and relevant for the service user. The one big question is whether the administration of the health care and social services reform will take the results of the project into consideration.

Overall, the goal of the project is to support clients' participation, self-determination and empowerment by the help of a personal budget. The main question is: what are the consequences if the client chooses a personal budget for the client, worker, superiors and service system? Service user and his/her needs are in focus. The approach and methods used in the project are close to action research, in which actions are research-based and participants of the study are employees, supervisors and clients in an organization that uses personal budget. The empirical material is gathered by surveys, interviews, diaries and observations, client panels and workshops as reports of social conditions in pilot areas. Participation in the project is voluntary. Researchers in the project analyze the empirical material and background theories. Preliminary interviews and survey of workers and supervisors has conducted as workshops and reports of social conditions in pilot areas.

The target group for the personal budget project is wide. Clients must be adults and they must take part in a service needs assessment in a social welfare office, in order to make sure they have the legal right to the services. The purpose of using personal budget in the project is that it's used mostly as a preventive action, which allows lighter support at a later stage. The problems of such service users have not become so complicated and severe that they would require more diverse and multi-professional support and services. (Rousu 2017) A British study has shown that older people with many difficulties have experienced personal budgeting too stressful and complicated to cope with it. (Woolham 2017.)

In personal budgeting the variety of services is mostly defined by the service user. The social worker and the client discuss which services are relevant for the client. The social worker as client follows the content and the budget of the services. Many times the client needs support from a social worker

or a relative or a close people to understand and recognize his/her wishes and possibilities when choosing the services. The idea is that if the service user has relatives or volunteers, they can support him/her best in the decision-making. Social workers have been alarmed if the use of their client's personal budget doesn't seem to be going in the right direction. Mistakes can happen, however, and in such cases the service can later be cancelled and the client will then return to more formal services. Another big challenge regarding the personal budget is changing the attitudes of the social workers and directors. The old system allows the service user to choose whether they accept the services offered to them, or not. In the new model the role of social workers and counselors is to support the service user in his/her choices even though they may seem odd, as long as they are acceptable and relevant for the service user.

Service users' self-determination and empowerment with the help of the personal budget

The personal budget permits different kinds of services in many fields. So far, in the social sphere there has been some experiments of personal budgeting projects. Services are individually tailored to the needs of each client or family. For families with a disabled child, the personal budget offers support to the parents (grown-ups), which then benefits the whole family. Service users have changed their old services, such as day care activities of disabled people, to new ones: for example horse-back riding (Ihamäki 2017.). Young adults who have grown up in institutions and who now have the right to after care services, have been given a personal adviser and a supporter.

There have been some cases where clients have dropped out of the services, when someone who needed support has not received it or services have not been appropriate for a person. However, such situations have been handled by the help of personal budgeting, which has led to increased well-being of the clients. For instance, a young boy with Asperger syndrome has received a personal supporter, with whom the client has managed to use the public transport and meet other people. (Leppäranta 2017). In practice, the cost of the personal budget is the same as the cost of other services was before.

As organization empowering people to analyse and manage the sources of their problems and to develop their own strategies. Empowering an organization is a process which is implemented in all major stages beginning formal and informal organization and professional workers and leadership. (Adams 2007, 117-135.) The social workers who work with the clients need support from the organization in managing the personal budget process. The leaders have to recognize the different needs that each personal budget has for the worker and the organization. With the help of the

relevant choices, services are diversified and quality increases. The personal budget provides customers with disadvantages with more appropriate services and promotes their well-being. Attention must also be paid to people who don't have as much capacity for making decisions, so that they can get adequate support. The reform will become more successful when both customers and employees are involved in the planning of the change. Whereas social workers and counsellors have the understanding of the clients' comprehensive needs, the best results can be reached when clients and workers both are involved in developing the process. It also means active information and communication between all parties involved. (Kivinen 2017.)

Empowerment focuses on enabling representation for groups suffering from some kinds of discrimination or ignoring rights. Therefore it is essential to strengthen and develop clients' life management, positive skills and their capacity for independent living. (Borodkina, Törrönen and Samoylova 2013.) All in all, it's too early to made comprehensive conclusions about the personal budget project, but some results can already be discussed. Co-creation of the personal budget has been implemented in the project. Leaders and employees as well as clients of a pilot organizations have been involved in developing the process and later there will be many more participants. So far clients or their families who have used the personal budget have described the responsibility given to them, and in some cases their family, as empowering. They have been involved in the action and they have had the opportunity to choose and suggest services that seem more suitable for them. The best things is that they have successfully implemented their own choices of services in practice and they have felt empowered.

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