

ALINA COSTIN

VOCATION AND PERSPECTIVES IN THE SOCIAL WORKER PROFESSION



PRESA UNIVERSITARĂ CLUJEANĂ

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BIOSHORTS

CIPRIAN HERTE (born 1979) is an Information Technology professional, employed at a market leading company that produces roofs and components for Automotive industry. His main current activity is team leadership as well as managing IT related projects, systems and resources. Although the field of work is mostly a technical one, he is interested in understanding human interaction, relationship and communication as well. Since 2020 Ciprian is a certified NLP Practitioner. In the last years has completed a bachelor's degree in Social Working (2023). In the spare time he is involved as a volunteer and entrepreneur, in various projects in the social area. Mentioning a few, we have - managing the first (2021) and second (2023) edition of "Jocurile soarelui" an event dedicated to children with different degrees of disability under 18 years of age and their social inclusion. Project management for the founding of CIPCEPC (Interdisciplinary Center for Practice and Research in Child Education and Protection) center in "Aurel Vlaicu" University of Arad, Department of Pedagogy, Psychology and Social Work. Co-host and moderator for International Conference on Social Work Practice, Health and Education: Building Trust and Solidarity For a Good Society - 1st Edition at "Aurel Vlaicu" University of Arad, Faculty of Educational Science, Psychology and Social Work. Host of the "Social Worker's Tool-box" workshop series dedicated to the professionals in Social work to help them manage daily and long term stress through a series of relaxation exercises, guided and individual meditation and Autohypnosis and guided hypnosis practices.

Currently is studying a master's degree in Social Working Services (2025).

EMESE-ROBERTA BOJIN (psychologist, born 1985) member of the College of Psychologists of Romania since 2008, with a rich professional activity in the field of school psychology, holding the position of school counselor teacher of the Arad County Center for Resources and Educational Assistance, within preschool, primary, middle and high school educational institutions, since 2008. She also works as a volunteer psychologist within the Center for Counseling and Psychotherapy for Parents and Children "Equilibrium" Arad, since 2014. She is also a psychologist in the specialty of Experiential Psychological Counseling within the Hrițcu Zagorka Individual Psychology Cabinet, Arad, since 2015. Her academic background reflects a thorough preparation to bring valuable contributions to her professional field. She holds a degree in Psychology from the Faculty of Sociology and Psychology at the West University of Timișoara (2003-2007), with a master's degree in Family and Couple Counseling from the West University of Timișoara (2007-2009). In addition to her university education, she followed a training program in Experiential Psychotherapy at SPER Bucharest (2008-2016), which allowed her to deepen her knowledge of psychological counseling methods based on experiential approaches.

BÎȘCĂ FLORIN DACIAN (born in 1979) is a prevention specialist for drug abuse among adolescents for almost 20 years. During the past years he was responsible for all drug prevention activities in Arad County and he implemented prevention projects in school, family and community. Also, he had responsibilities in assisting drug users. He is passionate about informatics and technology; he is currently a student of Aurel Vlaicu University from Arad and he is about to graduate in June 2025. During the years he participate in many European projects as youth worker and a leader, promoting volunteerism and youth exchange programs.

Most relevant project he participated in were: International Leadership Visitor Program, SOHO Training Course, Many worlds one heart, Youth Network, Do Your Best! Just Invest! and SOHO for EVS Support People.

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Foreword

A book is a message, one that the author would like to convey to the reader. I am addressing first and foremost my students, toward whom I have an enormous responsibility. Over the years, my perceptions of what it means to be a good teacher have changed. Now I believe that the most valuable thing I can do is to offer them unique learning contexts. So, I set out to present them with a few life experiences from which students can extract new meanings that may inspire them. I kept wondering what the structure of the book should be, but eventually I managed to break away from the traditional textbook format, giving the work an atypical structure.

Doubting that I was doing the right thing, I found Constantin Necula's work, "God and the Heart of Man. The Peace of the Moment with Personalities from Romania", and I gained courage. His book includes a list of revealing interviews, described by Father Constantin Sturzu as a manual for uplifting hearts. But the Voices in my book (my friends who agreed to the interview) also have this great quality of uplifting—provided someone looks at them closely. In fact, it's all about attention.

Attention requires depth, focus; and we are no strangers to the fact that, being constantly in a rush, we no longer have time to be attentive. Osho says that among all living beings, including the animal world, plants, and human beings, man, although the most gifted, is the most inattentive. A multitude of signs and stimuli come to us in the form of symbols or messages, but we stubbornly ignore them. But maybe we should be most attentive to the people around us—those among them

who are discreet and quiet, who build around them, uplift others, who devote themselves every day in silence.

I hope this book will inspire its readers and give them wings to become what they believe they can become. The three interviews were conducted out of a desire to highlight three valuable people who deserve to be heard. In all my interactions with students, I invite them to go deeper; I draw their attention to the motivations and resources that people have when they engage in a process of change. I ask them to look closely at the person behind the professional. I remind them that the role of specialist is achieved over time and with effort. I remind them that this process can be winding, sprinkled with failures. There is no elevator to success, there are only small steps taken with patience and dedication.

The purpose of my work is to bring to the reader's attention three specializations that the social worker can pursue, namely school counseling, anti-drug counseling, and entrepreneurship. For each of these fields of activity, I conducted an interview in which the interlocutor speaks about their experience, highlighting an important dimension of their social intervention. By going through each interview, the reader will be able to enter the story of each character, having the opportunity to indirectly understand the particularities of the respective field.

This work contains three parts. The first part, entitled *The psychological architecture of the social worker*, presents an analysis of some specific traits of the social worker (less frequently discussed), namely enthusiasm, vocation, and wisdom. I especially wanted to open the book with this chapter to highlight a few characteristics that are noticeable not only in social workers but also in students preparing for this profession. Among all the definitions that can be given to a social worker, I prefer the one that portrays them as an agent of change. Enthusiasm gives them strength, determination, and the belief that things can change even when they seem unchangeable.

I. Psychological architecture of the social worker

My perception of how social assistance is done or what it means has changed over time. We have long since left behind the classic definition that implied the *provision of services to people in difficulty*; Today I understand social assistance as the approach through which bridges are built between people. I also understood that these bridges do not always require special knowledge, nor in-depth studies. *To be with others, to help, to be sensitive to...Moving mountains, entering through the window when the door is closed, believing when no one does*, these are some expressions specific to people who manifest themselves as social workers, but practice other professions. Beyond diplomas, social work is a gesture of humanity. Many surprises come from less fortunate people who seem to have little to offer; There are also people who have concerns that are very far from the field of social assistance and yet they discreetly bend over to the needs of others. Bridges between people are built when someone listens, or stubbornly believes that they can change something, having only enthusiasm and determination at hand. We can say that this attitude is specific to a cohesive society, with a high level of social capital. **Social capital** refers to human networks, mutual trust, and the norms of cooperation that exist in a society or community. It is the “measure” of the degree to which people are willing to collaborate with each other and support the common good. This can include family, friendship, or professional relationships, as well as trust in public institutions and authorities. In a plastic definition, we define social capital as the land on which bridges between people are built. In a community with high social capital, people are more willing to build bonds based on trust, empathy and collaboration. For example, in a school where there is a solid social capital (parents who are involved, teachers who are supportive and students who support each other), the bridges between students and teachers, but also between the community and the school, are much easier to build. Any act by which someone extends a helping hand, when networks of support and mutual help are formed, strengthens trust in the community and supports long-term collaboration.

Long practice in social work and constant contact with practitioners, civil society and volunteers meant countless contexts in

which I was able to accurately detach some common traits of the person involved. Leaving aside skills such as empathy, availability, determination, *the people involved* invariably manifest the traits of the integrated person, enthusiasm, vocation. Building bridges between people involves continuous learning about humanity and about the strong bond that is created between people when they truly dedicate themselves to the common good.

1. Enthusiasm

What is it and where does the excitement come from? Looking closely at the psychological profile of social workers and students who choose to follow the social work study program, we can identify some specific elements that distinguish them from other professional categories or from students who follow other study programs. The social worker looks at the whole and makes decisions, immediately “jumps”, is effervescent, gets involved, shows strength and confidence. He is distinguished by modesty, perseveres in his work, finding satisfaction and meaning when they transmit strength and heal. But what I could feel from the contact with all the people involved is *the enthusiasm*. Indeed, a particularly valuable quality in professions that involve interaction with another is enthusiasm (E). We can ask ourselves where it comes from, if it can be learned and how it manifests itself. The explanatory dictionary of the Romanian language shows that enthusiasm is a state of strong animation accompanied by the externalization of joy; passion (in speech); extraordinary emotion, and has as synonyms ardor, momentum, momentum, exaltation, passion, ardor, animation. Most of the studies on this subject are related to the context of learning, respectively to the conceptualization of enthusiasm and its impact in the educational environment. Enthusiasm is the ability to be interested and passionate about life and all that it entails (White, 2013). It is a manifestation that highlights the wearer, making him pleasant, attractive, strong.

Enthusiasm is a positive personality trait that reflects a high level of energy, passion, and emotional involvement in an activity or goal. Psychologists consider it an essential element of well-being and personal success related to extraversion. Research in personality psychology (the Big Five model) shows that enthusiasm is closely related to the trait of **extroversion**. Extroverted people are more likely to experience excitement naturally, due to their high sensitivity to rewards and social interactions. It also plays a role in motivation and performance, increases **intrinsic motivation**, which helps people persevere in activities that they find engaging and satisfying. It is also associated with **better performance** in work and education. According to positive psychology, enthusiasm contributes to increased **happiness** and **emotional resilience**. Enthusiastic people tend to experience positive emotions more frequently, which helps them manage stress better. The enthusiasm is **contagious**. In a group, an enthusiastic person can positively influence the mood of others, which explains why charismatic leaders have a strong impact on their teams. Research suggests that enthusiasm is associated with **dopamine**, the neurotransmitter responsible for motivation and reward.

In social work and in the teaching profession, E is positively correlated with the motivation of the respective practitioner of the student (Bettencourt et al., 1983). It is expressed through a positive attitude, availability, high level of involvement and positive feelings in relation to work, in general and in personal and professional relationships. The teacher succeeds in transferring the intrinsic value of learning, as Kunter et al discover. (2008), and we dare to say that the enthusiastic social worker has the same ability to bring to life his belief in change, healing and empowerment. Paraphrasing, enthusiasm means the expression of the spirit and when it is authentic, it reflects a strong emotion of joy towards something in which we have a strong interest. We can imagine what it is like to have enthusiasm for a profession that already involves honesty, orientation towards the other, desire to do good.

The strongly positive feeling of being passionate about work gives meaning and engages a lot of psychic processes, involvement in the process of personal and professional development. Moreover, passion, or enthusiasm for one's own work gives happiness and a high level of quality of life. Here is a simple reason why the enthusiasm has sparked interest in the academic world. Schwab (1998) said that *A man can succeed in almost anything for which he has unlimited enthusiasm*. Speaking of enthusiasm, I wonder what terms it might be associated with; what people on the street would answer in a quick poll about what it means to be enthusiastic. In a simple and unelaborate exercise applied to students, they answered that they understood by enthusiasm the following: *joy, passion, impatience, ardor, love*, etc. There was no association with any term with negative connotations; however, Stasny, (2008) discovers with surprise that the term was viewed as offensive as correlated with religious extremism. Later the term, coming from the Greek *enthousiasmos*, meant *to possess a god*, so that eventually the meaning of *being mad would be known*, to have a special interest in something.

Why do some have it and others never get to experience this experience? Is it necessary for a person to be in a specific setting, to meet someone in order to get excited, or is this his innate trait? Most people think about enthusiasts that they have a kind of "fire" and they put it in their acts, in all their acts, in the way they speak (energetically, warmly, involved), in the ideas they promote, in the methods they apply, in the unique paths they choose to take... in everything they do. These people are "ecological", born specifically to animate and enliven everything around them. Overall, it's nice and comforting to have an enthusiastic person around. Associated with enthusiasm, or perhaps, because of it, these people have the belief that what they do can change the world for the better. Enthusiasm can be perceived as naivety, childhood, pure madness, or even a desire to stand out, agitation. Who would perceive this trait in this way? In general, rational people, who *do not dream of green horses on the walls*, who analytically look at a situation and classify it as *unchangeable*. Most of them say that *'s it*, they shrug their shoulders,

convinced that nothing can be done. The enthusiast naively ignores both closed doors and obstacles.

Enthusiasm is an extremely valuable resource that *dominates the individual, which helps him to clearly see the possibility of making something shine. An enthusiastic man is a man who uses this gift for a specific purpose. A cycling enthusiast puts enthusiasm into his effort, and so does an athlete. Does enthusiasm imply passion, or does the enthusiast of something invariably get excited? In this case, the enthusiasm would direct its owner towards those less attractive areas of life, not at all noticed. those areas that are occasionally mentioned by people, through simple reflections like... Nothing can be done. it is a lost cause...I'm too young to do anything.* We believe that having enthusiasm means believing in a stubborn way that the idea, the faith, the conviction you have can generate that change that no one believes can happen anymore. Enthusiasm gives the individual a unique ability to ignore difficulties, complicated contexts, chaos, and inertia as if they don't even exist. He disregards them unlike another who feels overwhelmed by them and gives up implementing his plans. So, this huge trait contains within itself a cocktail of other traits such as vision, courage, determination, clarity, strength, stubbornness with the help of which it trains resources, sets a rusty mechanism in motion. Of course, you don't just believe that your idea dressed in *fire* is valuable; enthusiasm pushes you further and forces you to do, to fix. to wage war with something grounded, rigid, completely stiff.

Starting from the premise that explanations about what enthusiasm is must be sought in psychology, we try to fit it into the category of emotions. According to anthropologist Ekman (1970) people experience 6 basic emotions: anger, fear, surprise, disgust, joy and sadness. However, there have been various controversies based on which the basic emotions would be only 4, or even more, respectively 27. However, the subject is quite unclear: the very definition of emotions can be perfected, and it is also not clear whether they vary from one culture to another. However, enthusiastic personalities exist and manifest themselves in the same way all over the world.

Is enthusiasm an emotion? It seems so, it has to do with the anticipation of a pleasure or the visualization of an event, states, process that induces joy. An excellent book, entitled *Enthusiasm Makes a Difference* (Peale, 2003) defines enthusiasm as a vital force that allows the manifestation of curiosity, interest in life, joy, success. The opposite of enthusiasm is considered to be boredom, blasphemy, or disinterest. Many studies have been conducted in which the main variable was enthusiasm; in education, the enthusiasm of teachers is considered a kind of magic ingredient, *the convincing variable* (Keller, Hoy, Goetz, Frenzel, 2016). Starting from what the scientific results say about the impact of teacher enthusiasm on the educable, we can extrapolate, saying that enthusiastic people motivate, inspire, excite in turn (Brophy 2000, Kunter et al. 2013), promote student learning and performance (Keller et al. 2013). Enthusiastic people are, it seems, happier and healthier and according to Sutton (2005) they are more efficient in their work. A review of the literature on the topic of teacher enthusiasm shows that (Keller, 2016):

- The conceptualization of enthusiasm is deficient; several concepts related in meaning circulate, thus explaining the various research directions;
- Enthusiasm refers to a nonverbal expressiveness displayed outwardly, and as an effective teaching strategy (Murray, O'Brien, 1983);
- Enthusiasm is evaluated as an active and motivational factor (Kunter et al. 2008);
- Collins (1978) identifies several indicators of enthusiasm in teachers: vocal animation, wide-open eyes and eye contact, demonstrative gestures, body movements, meaningful facial expressions, descriptive word selection, acceptance of students' ideas and feelings, and an overall high level of energy.

Enthusiasm is associated with a stimulating, energetic, and motivating teaching style (Walberg & Paik (2000)); other approaches describe enthusiasm as nonverbal expressiveness, marked by demonstrative gestures, vivid facial expression (Murray, Haddock, Zanna, 1996; Murray, 2005). Both variants belong to the category of

manifested enthusiasm. Keller (2016), who synthesized the interpretations and meanings of enthusiasm in literature, also identified another dimension of enthusiasm, namely, the characteristic of the (affective) teacher. In general, he shows recurrent pleasure and emotion related to teaching (Kunter, 2013).

How do we recognize enthusiastic people? If enthusiastic teachers *move*, gesticulate, show a keen interest in the subject, make eye contact with their students, enjoy and are excited, in the same way any other enthusiastic person lives and experiences life, regardless of their interests or activities.

Social work is also a professional framework marked by challenges, which requires a multitude of resources and desires, including enthusiasm. The professional context in which social intervention takes place presupposes the existence of social problems, conflicts, inequity, etc.; Under these circumstances, it is quite surprising that social workers constantly maintain their enthusiasm and determination. An answer may come from Norman Vincent Peale (2003) who said: "The blows of life cannot bring down a person whose spirit is warmed by the fire of enthusiasm. Stasny, (2008) investigates this aspect on a batch of social workers working in the field of mental health. The author understands that having enthusiasm for work implies a high level of joy at work. He emphasizes the hostile environment, the high level of stressors, the low salary level specific to the profession of social worker. Enthusiasm in this profession involves maintaining a tone, high vitality, a positive attitude constantly manifested in relation to the beneficiaries, although the environment is recognized as one that generates stress, professional exhaustion, compassion fatigue. Can the enthusiasm of social workers be cultivated and what can increase this emotion? When the enthusiasm of a social worker decreases, it affects the very nature of his work and somewhat vitiates the therapeutic relationship with the beneficiary, respectively the quality and efficiency of the intervention.

Enthusiasm is found as an indicator along with responsibility and passion for work as variables in studies on work addiction (Spence & Robbins, 1992). It is also the ingredient that employers are looking for,

beyond experience or skills; Cooperation, optimism, enthusiasm are in themselves peculiarities of a successful professional attitude. I would say that enthusiasm is more than a variable that increases the chances of success, I believe that being born with enthusiasm for something, discovering this force early, is in itself a prerequisite for happiness. Indicators of enthusiasm at work could be cheerful, cooperative, interested, willing to learn, tolerant of criticism, willing to try new things and challenges. Mature response and directed towards efficiency, harmony, homeostasis. If enthusiasm is a motivational impulse, facilitating or maintaining the behavior involved, it means that it is a mechanism involved in the process of self-determination. And indeed, optimism and enthusiasm are the engine that propels the individual above the turmoil and temptation to give up.

In recent years, more than ever, on all video channels, in the form of quotes or teachings, a lot of theories related to the conditions of happiness, well-being, harmony with one's own self is circulated. Positive thinking, as indicated as it is exposed to criticism, is by far the most promoted of the techniques that ensure the road to success; positive thinking or positive mental attitude (AMP) is understood as optimism, hope, focus on the bright dimension of things, focus on the good side that is hidden in any event/thing/bad mood. The benefits of AMP include happiness, health, and improved relationships. However, overconfidence, optimism led to disappointment, have a negative impact on the variables mentioned above.

Adams, (2017) associates the ability to empower with enthusiasm and belief system; Potter, (2009) is of the opinion that soulless work dampens enthusiasm until motivation is extinguished, the author argues that there is a strong correlation between motivation, enthusiasm and burnout in the sense that burnout eliminates motivation and enthusiasm as the meaning of work disappears. Reflecting on one's personal role, constantly engaging in new experiences and professional challenges, accepting the constancy of changes in one's personal and professional life, practicing gratitude, being aware of one's own value are some exercises that improve and restore enthusiasm.

In an exercise to develop a valid and reliable scale for assessing enthusiasm among teachers, Punia and Bala (2021) included the following dimensions in the rating scale:

- interest and involvement;
- interaction with students;
- passion for teaching;
- creativity and innovation;
- professional development;
- enrichment of the subject's knowledge;
- professional commitment.

These dimensions of enthusiasm can also be indicators of enthusiasm in the case of social workers or other professional categories. The evidence shows that social workers who show enthusiasm are concerned with personal development, document their casuistry more intensely, appeal to specialized theories/knowledge for a richer background, interact with the more involved beneficiary, work with passion, dedication and involvement. Referring, therefore, to the results of the study by Punia and Bala (2021) on teacher enthusiasm, we try to extend the dimensions of enthusiasm to any other enthusiastic individual in relation to his work. Thus, the social worker promotes change through his enthusiastic attitude, participates with the beneficiary in the process of discovery and healing, encouraging his participation in his own transformation, instilling confidence that it is possible to overcome the obstacle that keeps him stuck.

Permanent contact with loss, suffering and shortcomings give rise to feelings such as disappointment, the feeling of uselessness, hopelessness, routine, which decrease enthusiasm and flatten the person's emotional background. In these conditions of constant exposure to stress, empathic capacity decreases and compassion fatigue occurs. Most social workers experience this form of burnout that is incompatible with enthusiasm. Because enthusiasm means energy, and energy feeds the body and gives it vitality.

The neuroscience of enthusiasm looks at how the brain processes and regulates this positive emotion. Enthusiasm is closely linked to the

brain's reward system, and neurotransmitters play an essential role in generating and maintaining it. Dopamine is the main neurotransmitter associated with excitement. This “motivation hormone” is essential in expecting and anticipating rewards and fueling motivation and curiosity. A high amount of dopamine leads us to look for activities that we are passionate about and to get especially involved when we anticipate a pleasant experience that generates important results. Dopamine is produced in several areas of the brain, but the most important are **the substantia nigra** and **the ventral tegmental area**, which are part of the reward system. **The prefrontal cortex, considered the regulator of enthusiasm, is a part of the brain responsible for planning, decision-making, and emotional self-regulation.** When we are excited, the prefrontal cortex keeps this state active and directs it towards concrete actions. The limbic system, especially **the amygdala and hippocampus**, plays a fundamental role in **processing positive emotions**. When we experience excitement, the amygdala amplifies the emotional response, and the hippocampus links it to positive memories, thus reinforcing the experiences that motivate us. Enthusiasm and stress are influenced by opposing chemical systems: on the one hand, cortisol (the stress hormone) can inhibit enthusiasm and motivation if it is released in excess. **Oxytocin and serotonin**, which are linked to well-being and social connection, can support enthusiasm and its maintenance.

It is believed that enthusiasm can be stimulated by setting engaging goals that provoke and incite knowledge, new experiences; practicing **gratitude** activates the brain areas responsible for positive emotions. It is useful in this regard to be exposed to new experiences that encourage curiosity and novelty. **Regular physical activity** increases the production of dopamine and serotonin, which are so necessary to maintain this beneficial state.

2. About the integrated man

A central characteristic of social workers seems to be the one specific to the *integrated person*. If we are attentive to each other, but attentive in a deep and analytical way, we can see, and before we see, we can feel, sometimes without understanding, superiority. But not one that is conferred by a social position, or a certain function, nor that manifest superiority, which is desired to be recognized, but the superiority that inner unification confers. Some people operate by other “rules”; They don't respond the same way as most, to the same stimuli. They don't rebel, they don't contest, you might think they have nothing to say, or that they don't care. They are not the center of attention and they do not want to. He quietly, discreetly enjoys himself and life ... Looking at them you can think that they have something to hide, that they know something, a secret that places them in a state of absolute comfort and peace. Today we know that everyone has their own truth and perspective, and as a result of this, in any confrontation, everyone is right. His justice. Understanding, integrating and constantly relating to this reality is like finding the philosopher's stone. Because, in this way, you no longer tend to clarify to the other that you understand better, because you already know that he has his version of truth; Then, you no longer need to rise above it because you understand the subjectivism with which each of us looks at things, and therefore, you can question your own truth. That turned six, which someone else sees as new, signifies this attitude very well.

We can only suspect that those people I have begun to talk about, who are distinguished from the great mass, experience the above. It is possible that someone stays aside for fear of intervening, his discretion is based on isolation, his silence is deep and dark, his detachment masks his distrust, etc. There are, however, several clues that “unmask” the integrated, unified man.

Iolanda Mitrofan, from the position of experiential psychotherapist, explains that the harmonious, efficient, healthy, flexible personality is specific to the integrated being. This posture, of an integrated being, has gone through stages, has understood and become aware of the traps it sets in its own evolution, the self-conditioning to which it has responded.

Before being in tune with himself, the (un)integrated man questioned himself, he lived forgetting himself, he closed his eyes where he had to open them wide and understand. A long process with many stops and turns on the road, with decisions and *changes of mind*, repeated falls and rises, this is the route that can transform the toxic man into an integrated one. In the state of toxicity, the individual has an ally with anyone else besides himself; He is not his friend, he is angry with himself, he postpones happiness until he will be. or until he becomes, or until he has. or he will know. He is not lenient with himself, he is constantly under his own magnifying glass, he does not have the courage and does not allow himself to be himself. He poisons himself with limiting beliefs, he punishes himself harshly, he does not come to light. He does not love himself, he sees himself as ugly, powerless and unworthy of respect. Such a personality manifests itself "poisonously", does not do good to those around him, defends himself, bringing others down. Anchored in this ball of irrational beliefs, the individual contests and cancels his resources by ostentatiously looking at his limits.

The integrated man, says Iolanda Mitrofan (2004) can be called unified or ecological for the world in which he lives, being a factor of autoimmunization in the process of the living, in its healthy, creative perpetuation. If human ecology studies the relationship between social phenomena and the space in which they are contained, social ecology studies the relationship of man with his natural and social environment. And if the term ecological makes us think of a clean, neat, protected environment, the ecological man would be like that space: clean, purified, only good *for others to breathe*. Good to put on the wound is said in popular language, and we know that it is about someone generous and kind, quiet, someone we perceive as a bandage.

Emotional maturity

Emotional maturity must be understood as a process by which the personality, with constant tendencies to update, constantly strives to

improve its emotional health both intrapsychically and intrapersonally (Smitson, 1974). This effort or permanent tendency to actualize the self promoted by positive and humanistic psychology consists in training our inner resources for self-realization and full fulfillment. The emotionally mature individual has come to form a system of values and standards, to project his ideals and to have a high level of consciousness through the recurrent process of socialization. He relies on himself, and this confidence in his own strength has propelled him from dependence to independence, manifests (relative) liberation from feelings of inferiority, selfishness or competitiveness. Other characteristics concern (Saul, 1947):

1. an increase in productive capacity and a decrease in (receptive) needs;
2. reaching the “genital level” with a “mature” capacity for “object interest” for people and things outside oneself;
3. to be creative and not destructive to oneself and others;
4. a firm sense of reality;
5. flexibility and adaptability.

Operating with the concepts of *self*, *self-image*, *ideal self*, Carl Rogers, emphasizes the constant need of the individual for self-realization in which the finality would be represented by the state of congruence between the self-image and the ideal self. The process never ends, we are constantly updating, being our own architects. Although this tendency to reach our full potential is innate, factors related to childhood experiences can significantly limit our availability, effort, determination, and desire to embark on this process of change and renewal. Because it is a process that requires courage, resilience, joy of experimentation, risk-taking, decision-making capacity, etc.

Actually, Rogers identified some traits specific to individuals who practice self-actualization, that is, those who are functional:

Openness to experience: perhaps it represents a cardinal trait, which allows the person to understand and enjoy the experiences they have even if they cause suffering or loss. Someone who is open to experience has an analytical mind, dissects the experience and its impact on it (the person) and integrates it as information. In this way, self-knowledge will

be an important step towards change. Rogers' statement that the individual can change only when he knows and accepts his limits is well known. So, the equivalence between who he wants to become and his behavior does not contradict each other, or is not in a significant discrepancy.

Existential intelligence

We can feel it in people who philosophize about the meaning of life; they seek to understand why things happen, if there are coincidences, interpret the experiences they live, manage without difficulty to venture into the realm of introspection looking for answers about themselves (Al-Fatlawi, Moneim, 2021). They are people who take care of themselves, who promote positive values such as love and truth, enjoy providing support, pay attention to the people around them. These people integrate difficult experiences into their philosophical pursuits: they intellectualize and use existentialism (as an ideology) as a basis for understanding what they feel and experience. Existential intelligence involves the ability to contemplate topics related to life, meaning, death, purpose, humanity, consciousness, truth, etc., and to conceptualize deep philosophical questions. This type of intelligence, added later to the 8 types of intelligence proposed by Gardner, ¹ constitutes the main ingredient among the traits of people with careers in fields such as psychology, teaching, or any other field that requires sensitivity and depth.

Here are the items that make up the existential intelligence assessment scale:

- ✓ I'm actively trying to understand my purpose
- ✓ I am fascinated/intrigued when I hear people talking about the meaning of life or when they discuss such topics

¹ Theory proposed in 1983 by Dr. Howard Gardner, professor at Harvard University. He suggests that the classical theory of intelligence based on IQ (intelligence quotient) has its limits and proposes, and observes that there are 8 other types of manifestation of intelligence: *visual-spatial, linguistic, logical-mathematical, bodily kinesthetic, musical, intrapersonal, interpersonal, naturalistic intelligence*)

- ✓ I often read books or articles or watch videos/lectures about the meaning of life
- ✓ I spend a lot of time thinking about my existence or existence in general and/or its meaning
- ✓ I'm attracted to conversations/books/lectures/ or other platforms (podcasts, etc.) that discuss death, death, and the afterlife
- ✓ I often stop while walking with myself in my daily life to think about what I am doing or why I am doing it
- ✓ I spend a lot of time thinking about what (my appearance or in general) defines me
- ✓ I spend a lot of time contemplating whether my (and others') existence is real
- ✓ I spend a lot of time thinking about the nature of reality and whether God exists
- ✓ I often think about the origin of existence.

Creativity

Julia Cameron beautifully defines creativity as *the natural order of life; being a pure creative energy*, creativity has the power to unlock, heal, and reanimate human potential. Functional people, capable of self-actualization, use this competence (creativity) to identify solutions, enrich life, bring benefits to themselves and others. By creatively giving new meanings to experience, life, time, and putting them at the service of good, these people manage to build and rebuild themselves always. Therefore, the growth potential of the healthy individual can be activated through creative techniques so that he can shape his inner universe.

Wisdom

Perhaps, a sum of all these traits can be found in what we call wisdom. So, the man capable of actualization would be a wise man. Because, wisdom means knowledge, the ability to judge and weigh

things. We say about a wise man that he chooses well, he chooses both in his favor and in favor of others so that his choices involve as low costs as possible. The wise man seems to have an impressive strength and patience to start over again and again, with confidence (and this can mean updating). Moreover, to act wisely means to use and apply the knowledge acquired through learning. Wisdom means common sense, impartial judgment, self-knowledge, ethics, goodwill, compassion (Staudinger, Glück, 2011), decency, elegance. The quoted author is known for trying to study this construct (wisdom) scientifically. The difficulty is determined, however, by its definition and measurement. However, different research groups (Aldwin, 2009, Grossmann et al., 2020; Jeste et al., 2010) agreed on the operationalization of the term wisdom as follows: as reasoning based on morality and as reasoning based on problem solving. They agreed that wisdom balances and integrates opposing viewpoints, engages in reflection, adapts its solutions to the context of the problem, and demonstrates intellectual humility. All these meta-cognitive characteristics of wisdom are based, according to the author, on moral aspirations. So, observe Grossmann et al. (2020) that what motivates the wise individual is the harmonization of personal interests with those of others, the pursuit of truth, and the recognition of humanity.

The definition and measurement of wisdom has sparked several controversies, outlining several great perspectives. A group of researchers (the Berlin group led by Baltes) suggests that wisdom is a process and product of knowledge. They define wisdom as expertise in the fundamental pragmatics of life (Baltes & Smith, 1990; Baltes & Staudinger, 2000), and all the meanings and discoveries of this group are concentrated in the Berlin wisdom paradigm. Another group studies wisdom as a constellation of characteristics of a person expressed in tendencies in cognition, motivation, emotion, and behavior (Ardelt, Pridgen, Nutter-Pridgen, 2019; Webster, 2007).

Several scales of wisdom have been developed:

- Self-Rated Wisdom Scale (Webster, 2003): scale developed on the basis of this of wisdom: “competence in, intention to, and

application of critical life experiences to facilitate optimal development of self and others” (Webster, 2007, p. 164);

- The three-dimensional wisdom scale (Ardelt, 2003): wisdom is operationalized as an integration of cognitive, reflective and compassionate personality qualities;
- The Adult Wisdom Scale (Le, Levenson, 2005) assesses wisdom through a single component: self-improvement, which implies a decrease in dependence on the outside, an increase in spirituality, a feeling of connection with the world.

So, there are points of view according to which, being wise implies having practical knowledge about how to live well; other views suggest that wisdom has nothing to do with knowledge at all, but with appealing to a set of moral norms (Whitcomb, 2011). Garrett (1996) does not separate the two dimensions, but integrates them into a set of beliefs absolutely necessary for the individual to have goodness.

It seems that all the attributes of wisdom are found in the words of the First Epistle to the Corinthians of the Holy Apostle Paul:

Love is benevolent, love does not envy, does not boast, does not boast;
Love does not behave unseemly, it is not inflamed with anger, it does not think evil, it does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but it rejoices in the truth.
Love never falls.
Because the desire for harmony, to balance the different interests or opinions in a group, is based on good will.

Proper behavior implies moderation, respect, the search for truth, as an imperative of a clear conscience means wisdom, and the meanings of wisdom seem to overlap with the meaning of love. Can faith play a role in achieving this state of full harmony with the self? Belief as a universal and dynamic quality of human meaning creation can be defined in terms of the center of values, images of power, and masterful stories of each individual (Fowler, 1991). Belief develops in stages towards a point of maximum self-contouring and minimization of the personal self as the point of view from which evaluations are made.

To summarize, and “start over”: is emotional maturity the basis of wisdom? Or in other words, is maturity itself a variant of the

psychological perspective of wisdom? Or vice versa? Kramer (2000) summarizes the guidelines on wisdom and says that it would be conceptualized as: (1) *a rare, highly practiced and developed form of cognitive expertise in the field of human affairs, which allows multiple channels, or* (2) *a constellation of personal attributes that reflect a high degree of cognitive, affective and behavioral maturity that allows for an unusual degree of sensitivity, open-mindedness and concern for humanity.* Taking each characteristic in part, and using logical reasoning, cognitive expertise presupposes knowledge from experience, experience presupposes openness to experience (considered the most important predictor of deception), introspection, because in its absence there is no self-knowledge or maturation, dialectical thinking. In any case, the wise man does not lament so much in the face of life, nor does he show despair and dissatisfaction in the struggle with life. Indeed, what he does, helps him to live with serenity everything *that comes*.

In the psychological model of wisdom, its functions range from *individual contemplation, judgment, and problem-solving* to the ability to guide and advise others (Sternberg, 1990). Kramer (2000) discovers important differences in the vision of wisdom: one facet of wisdom is the ability to plan and review one's own life (which he finds in the theorization of Baltes & Smith (1990) or Staudinger & Baltes (1997), another form of which presupposes the existence of an empathic, intuitive feeling and connection with the needs of others (Pascual-Leone, 1990).

a. Vocation as a central trait of the social worker's personality

Another dimension of the personality of social workers, an extremely obvious one, which shines through in all their actions is the vocation. Vocation comes from within, it is not transmitted, it cannot be imposed, it has to do with the tendencies of each person's personality, with his natural, innate orientation towards something. Therefore, it is based on values or truths that animate and give individuality to the one who possesses them. Paraphrasing Palmer, someone who has a vocation for something follows the question *What is my nature, Who am I*, rather

than *What should I do with my life?* because, having a vocation, the course of things is quite obvious. The discourse on the origin of vocation places the discussions in terms of spirituality, being understood as a call of God to engage in the life of the community.

The meaning of the verb to contemplate is, according to DEX, to look at it for a long time, meditatively, with admiration and emotion. It can also mean thinking, pondering, meditating, reflecting. But etymologically, the term comes from the Greek language which means “to know beyond words” (Case et al., 2012, p.346). Contemplation mediates self-realization in that it involves a voluntary act of inner investigation and the construction of a deep connection with the foundation of our being (Ducasse et al., 2019). It seems that, in recent years, people have understood that going down inside themselves, connecting with their self, contemplating themselves in the end are practices that lead to increasing their well-being. Along with yoga, introspection, meditation, prayer, metacognition, reflection, contemplation is also found in more *concrete* /accessible ways of life such as the arts, sports, education or reflective career practice.

In the learning process, contemplative practice can be integrated as a component that aims to promote the development of existential intelligence, understanding of the meaning of life and of the final reality, in fact, facilitating the formation of a student's worldview (Clarke, Braun 2013). The introduction of contemplative studies into the curricula of some university programs aims to discover human nature, one's own meaning and the way of social engagement in accordance with one's own self.

What is the connection between contemplation and vocation? Contemplative science, which studies the metacognitive capacities of self-regulation of the mind and modes of existential awareness, has aroused tremendous interest in recent years. The high level of self-awareness can be mediated by the motivational factors of meditation practice; Contemplative practices such as compassion or mindfulness are important vehicles for rapid growth, constituting, in fact, prerequisites for sustaining well-being.

Contemplation is a term with deep spiritual meanings; an example of St. Theophan the Recluse clarifies the meaning of *contemplation*: if helping someone is an act of mercy, seeing God in the needy is contemplation

The vocation for a profession presupposes, in addition to the natural orientation towards a field or activity, a set of skills, qualities necessary to be trained in order for the set of latent predispositions to come to life. Stoll et al., (2020) attempt to identify career course predictors using the Big Five personality theory (Roberts & Wood, 2006) and professional interests (Holland, 1997). The authors consider the major life goals that most loyally reflect personality and vocational traits (Allport, 1961, Roberts, Nickel, 2021). The results of the study indicate the following:

Table no.1. Major Life Goals, Summarized by Roberts and Robins (2000)

Economical	The desire to have a career with high status and a high standard of living and wealth. A preference for explicit manipulation of objects, tools, machines, and animals.
Aesthetical	The desire to produce good artistic work or to become accomplished in music or the arts. A preference for manipulating physical, verbal, or human materials to create art.
Social	Desire to help others in need and promote the well-being of others A preference to influence others to inform, form, develop, heal, or enlighten.
Relational	The desire to have a family and harmonious relationships with others.
Political	The desire to have influence in public affairs and to become, for example, a community leader.
Religious	The desire to participate in religious activities and pay attention to the spiritual life.
Hedonist	The desire to have fun and an interesting lifestyle
Educational	The desire to have good grades (at school) and to obtain, for example, a high school diploma.

Source: Stoll et al., 2020, p. 2

The Big Five Personality Traits, summarized by McCrae and Costa (2008);

- **Neuroticism:** The tendency to experience negative emotions such as anger, worry, and sadness, as well as interpersonal sensitivity.

- **Extroversion:** The tendency to be talkative, sociable, and to enjoy others; the tendency to have a dominant style.
- **Openness:** The tendency to appreciate new ideas, values and behaviors of art.
- **Agreeability:** The tendency to agree and go along with others rather than asserting one's own opinions and choices.
- **Conscience:** The tendency to be attentive, to be on time for meetings, to follow the rules and to be hardworking.

It is necessary to understand and know how personality traits play an important role in pursuing one's vocation. Because, we can observe how someone who has a vocation for music is endowed with musical skills; another who has a vocation for research, is analytical and precise, therefore, we could think that vocation is a “gift” and whoever is aware of this gift, takes a huge step towards an exceptional life. Personality traits are stable and broad dispositions that manifest as complex schemes in which individuals behave, think, and feel (Robert & Wood, 2006). The Big Five Model, also known as the Five Model, is a personality theory, the most recognized and accepted today, which states that personality can be reduced to five basic factors, known by the acronym CANOE or OCEAN.

Career guidance counseling on the choice of training and professional development direction, uses a system of theories such as (Leung, 2008):

- Theory of Work Adjustment (TWA, Dawis & Lofquist, 1984)
- Hollands Theory
- Self-concept theory
- Personality trait theory, the Big Five model
- Gottfredson's Circumscription and Compromise Theory
- Cognitive career Theory.

The first theory, TWA, considered an extremely valuable and applicable tool by psychologists in assisting clients in the field of career choice, was developed in 1964 at the University of Minnesota by René Dawis, George England and Lloyd Lofquist. The authors say that there is a dialogue between the person and the work environment *of giving and taking from each other* (Dawis & Lofquist, 1984) and that in this way the

correspondence between them is constantly maintained and reset. In explaining the complex model, in fact, the concepts of personality, flexibility, reactivity, perseverance, etc. were integrated; however, Hesketh, Griffin, (2005) propose updating the TWA in the sense of highlighting the variables of personalities that work in combination in order to be able to predict the strategies of adjustment to the requirements of the position.

Conscientiousness vs. Lack of Direction

Conscientiousness	High Level/High Score
	Competent, Organized, Obligation, Effort to achieve, Self-disciplined, Deliberation, good impulse control, detail-oriented, attentive
	Low level/low score
	Incompetent, Disorganized, Careless, Procrastinating, Undisciplined, Impulsive, Difficulty Controlling Impulses, Lack of Direction

Neuroticism vs. Emotional Stability

Neuroticism	High Level/High Score
	Impatient, Angry hostility (irritated), Faces a lot of stress Self-awareness (shy), Vulnerability, Faces dramatic mood swings, capricious, prone to excessive sadness, irritable, low self-esteem, self-pity
	Low level/low score
	Don't worry too much, Calm, emotionally stable, Confident, Resilient, rarely feels sad or depressed

Openness vs. Closure vs. Experience

Open to experience	High Level/High Score
	Curious, Imaginative, Creative, Open to trying new things, Unconventional, artistic. They prefer diversity and value independence. They are curious about their surroundings and love to travel and learn new things.
	Low level/low score
	Predictable Not very imaginative Doesn't like change Prefers routine Traditional, adapts more slowly, pre-familiar style, low creativity

Extraversion vs. Introversion

Extraversion	High Level/High Score
	assertive, sociable, fun-loving and extroverted. They thrive in social situations and feel comfortable expressing their opinions. They tend to gain energy and become enthusiastic about being around others.
	Low level/low score
	introverts, reserved, more peaceful. They prefer to listen to others rather than need to be heard. Introverts often need periods of solitude to regain their energy

Agreeableness vs. antagonism

Agreeableness	High Level/High Score
	gentle, confident and loved. They are sensitive to the needs of others and are helpful and cooperative. People consider them trustworthy and selfless
	Low level/low score
	suspicious, manipulative and uncooperative. They can be antagonistic, they make others feel less pleasant and trustworthy.

Personality traits manifest themselves as stable dispositions that allow a person to fit into certain behavioral categories (with some deviations); Based on these traits we perceive the other as calm and balanced, volcanic and impatient, agitated, etc. Roberts & Wood (2006) identify a gap between an individual's goal-oriented orientation and personality traits. Roberts et al. (2007) believe that personality traits are important predictors for a person's personal, relationship or professional development.

The concerns about what brings people satisfaction in their work are as old as possible; Over time, several variables were found, from the conditions offered by the job, to the salary, to certain characteristics of the organization, etc. In the end, it was concluded that in order to be happy at work, what matters is not so much the “what” of a job, but more the “who” and “why”: job satisfaction comes from people, values and a sense of achievement. Equally important is the feeling of belonging to a professional group and the creation of professional networks, relationships, support groups that are created in the professional

environment. Some authors talk about being of service to others and having the feeling that you can produce and provide well-being.

One of the most famous examples of this comes from the first story in the Bible. In the second chapter of the Book of Genesis, God—who recently created Adam and considered his creation “very good”—gives Adam a blessed vocation that pleases them both: “He put him in the Garden of Eden to work it, and take care of him.” A chapter later, after the displeasure with the serpent and the apple, God drives Adam and Eve out of Eden, cursing them: “By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the earth.”

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About finding meaning with Ciprian Herța

We are each a story. The most representative personality of humanism, Carl Rogers believed that transformative energy, that is, our constant tendency to update ourselves, sets the “story” in motion.

Can you tell us what your story is about?

My story is one like any other story. It's a story with ups and downs, with good days and days when you have to learn something. Just like in a story, each event has its own meaning and we, the characters involved, influence the course of the story through our choices. We can make choices more or less consciously and we can also choose whether to learn something from that story or not.

After I became a parent, I realized that with the joy of being a father comes a responsibility. You become responsible for the safety, well-being, education of the little one, for the crystallization of the adult in the making. We all know that the method by which children learn and are formed is imitation, taking over from those close to them more or less healthy behaviors, beliefs and aspirations. Through the power of personal example, we contribute to establishing values, forming patterns and defining the personality of the little man.

This awareness of the role of a “super-hero” model for the little one, forces me to channel my actions and organize my life in such a way that every day I learn something new, to be better than yesterday, not to let myself fall prey to hardships, to learn to appreciate the little things, to enjoy each day as if it were the last.

My story is about becoming the best version of myself.

The human mind has the ability to recreate its own psychological reality.

Referring to the social dimension of the direction you chose to explore, what were the mechanisms behind this choice?

At some point in my existence in this world, I realized that I had achieved a number of things that require people around me to just dream. We have reached

a point where we have achieved a lot materially and yet this did not seem to be enough. I didn't feel fulfilled although apparently, I had everything, I needed to make me feel complete.

Moreover, I went through a process of transformation, which made me come into contact with people who, although they apparently had "less", were more satisfied with themselves, more serene, more sensitive and more aware than me. These people helped me, supported me, and contributed to the formation of a new self in my person, without asking for anything in return. Without having a tangible, material or real benefit, they did what they had to do in an altruistic way.

It took me a while to understand that you can give without expecting anything in return. To understand that we humans are actually social and sociable animals and we can consciously choose to do things for others in defiance of the phrase "everything costs money".

Also, in the last two years, I have also understood that when we give, we do good, we help, we give, we contribute, we bring value, we improve, by our own will, we are actually doing ourselves good. This "good" could be defined as manifesting itself on several levels:

- On the physical level - changes in our metabolism are brought about when a series of neurotransmitter substances are discharged into the body. Thus, we experience sensations of relaxation, decreased risk of anxiety disorders, cognitive decline, diseases of the neurovegetative and neurological system in general.*
- on the social level – the feeling of belonging appears, that we are not alone and we are safe and by the very contribution on various levels in favor of the members of society leads to an increase in the development of the society of which we are part.*
- Spiritually – regardless of one's faith, we can have similar values. Solidarity and compassion, ethical balance and equity, peace, can bring within us the state of self-actualization, fulfillment and realization of personal potential.*

People have the ability to see or intuit through a process of superconscious perception the potential of their becoming. I had the opportunity to see in you during the two years of study the reality of this manifestation, expressed in a variety of attractive, useful, necessary ideas and projects.

Starting from the premise that the definition of the project idea involves at least two, i.e. a team, what is your perception of the potential of today's young people to be in touch with themselves, to gravitate around their potential and to fulfill it?

If I were to use a somewhat modern and technical language, the human mind can be compared to a very high-performance "computer". Each person uses this computer according to how much access to information, life experience they have and how much they want to do so.

In recent years we have realized that we humans can divide ourselves according to two typologies.

- Those who are content with the little that is offered to them, who indulge in the juice of inaction, in the warmth of the comfort zone, who "break the door at 4 p.m. when I leave work", who when they receive something, consider that they do not have to offer anything in return. I see these people as being immersed in a sleep, of reason.*
- And the others who are in an eternal search to learn more, to become better at what they do. They want to take to the level of personal mastery a field in which to work, and when they consider that they have reached that point, they understand that it was only a step on the path of personal evolution. They don't get drunk with the scent of success, but continue to start what I called earlier, the best version of themselves.*

The necessary information, nowadays, is omnipresent and uncensored, in personal development books, on online channels and social media, so accessed by young people. Once we have accessed and received the information, each of us is able to make our own choice in which of the two typologies we fit.

I believe that the potential of each of us (because, isn't it - we are all young) is maximum. It is limited only by the intention, will, and ability to "wake up."

- *If the answer to the previous question is not encouraging, I am the first entitled (as a parent and teacher) to ask myself what is our contribution, as adult shapers of destinies, to the current state in which our young people find themselves. But it would not be enough to find out why.*

Returning now to your perspective, what is the area of interest for you? In which of the problematic areas of social life do you feel you could bring about change?

The moment I became aware of myself, that I exist and that there is more than what my two eyes can see, I understood that what is happening around me is a consequence of my choices. I also understood that every person has his or her own path in life and that he or she has the right, the power and the ability to choose his or her own path.

However, in any healing, physical, mental or spiritual, the first step is always awareness. When we are not aware of what is happening to us, of our actions, of the path we are on and of our options, we only look absently, at the passage of time of our lives.

For me, the area of interest is to contribute to the awareness of my peers. Of those who want and ask me, of course. Let's overcome together the state in which we live "on autopilot", to get out of the comfort zone that is a great impediment in the materialization of personal potential. And by seeking a higher level of consciousness for each of us to become Alive.

One way or another, there comes a time for each of us when we feel the acute need for meaning.

How do you think it is to professionalize this need?

After each of us succeeds sufficiently to cover Maslow's needs in his pyramid, I also believe that this "need for meaning" – as you call it, arises.

I believe that the greatest blessing on a professional level is when you practice what fulfills you morally and spiritually. That's when the flow state seems to appear. Then even time seems to pass differently, you don't feel tired.

And the problems and impediments, which inevitably arise, turn into challenges that do nothing but help in personal development.

I have met people who work in fields for which the satisfactions and joys brought by the activity they do outweigh the material benefits, although the effort and time invested is considerable. This probably explains the passion and resilience of employees in the contemporary state social system, given that the remuneration of the services provided by them is not a priority of the governors.

Therefore, I believe that there must be a balance between the effort made and the benefits received. Then go to work with pleasure – as they say.

There are undeniably “fundamental encounters” throughout our lives. These are the ones that help us understand that, although it didn't seem like it, we headed in exactly the right direction. We get to discover a meaning in the existential scenario in which we find ourselves. At that moment, divided parts of our personality are reintegrated, dissipated soul dimensions are unified into a revealing whole.

In what way, was your choice to follow the training in social work a fundamental encounter?

I remember very well that day in September when I confirmed my enrollment in the Social Work specialization. I remember that I had a turning point, because my rational mind was telling me that it might not be the best choice and that the time and effort, I put into starting a new training in a totally different field from what I normally do was not justified. On the other hand, however, somewhere in the subconscious the voice of the heart told me that I had to do something, which would be for people and for their benefit. I've received so much over time and now it's time to give it in return.

Fortunately for me, I had people by my side in those moments, who supported me morally and believed in me. The encouragement “... Go, because it is not known who you will meet there.” Later it turned out to be an inspired choice.

And what an inspired choice it was!

During these years I met simple people from whom I learned a lot. I learned to give without expectations, to do everything that is in my power without looking back. I learned that not all people want to be helped and that sometimes, those helped do not have the will to help themselves.

I met wonderful teachers, from whom I learned the joy of sharing with others from your consciences, and that there is always something else to learn, to discover. I learned that with the right guidance and patience from them, you can overcome what you considered to be limits.

I met mentors, who know how to stimulate and bring out the best in us, who know how to appreciate the effort made. That even when we are in the dark, with masterful skill illuminate the most suitable path for us.

*I thank you and I am grateful to you and to them for this **fundamental meeting.***

II. Bullying, marginalization and school dropout – the shadows in the schoolyard

Introduction

In recent years, the child's situation in school has changed a lot. On the one hand, he benefits from the best educational services, his needs are met by associated specialists, such as psychologists, psychopedagogues, social workers or school counselors. On the other hand, we hear more and more frequently about anxious, depressed students, about their major sufferings at school. It seems that children have never been so sensitive or fragile to the challenges that come their way. The school, as an institution, makes considerable efforts to meet the complex needs of its pupils and family, offering a stimulating environment, providing after-school services, providing them with various solutions. However, many dissatisfied voices are heard, angry parents, either excessively involved in the educational process, or absent and superficial. Indeed, the family in our society faces many challenges, it is in a certain drift. Too many parents migrate leaving their children in the care of their grandparents, too many divorced parents, too many material difficulties, too much domestic violence.

An extremely worrying news provided in the media refers to the suicide rate among children up to 15 years old in Romania, twice the European average. We also find out that one in two Romanian teenagers has thought about taking their own life at least once, and suicide is the second leading cause of death among young people aged 15 to 24 (Mediafax, 2024). We don't know exactly what happens in our schools because there are no studies on this subject, except in isolation, the fact is that the well-being of children/students in school is not what we want, or in other words that school seems to fail in its social role.

Given the complexity of the situations that can arise in a school, in the dynamics of parent-teacher, student-teacher relationships, but also situations generated by dysfunctions in students' families (death, divorce, breakups, conflicts, poverty, illness, disability, etc.), the responsibilities of the social worker/school counselor are huge, and their

intervention extremely valuable. This is the reason why Paisley and McMahon, (2001) state that the job interviews of school counselors have long gone beyond the theoretical questioning and are based a lot on the evaluation of crisis intervention skills, psycho-pedagogical evaluation, and the proposal of intervention plans for different case scenarios. The American Association of School Counselors (2011) defines the school counselor as an educator, graduated with at least a master's degree in school counseling, being qualified to respond to the developmental needs of students, ensuring comprehensive counseling (on different topics of problems). School counselors, says Dahir (2004), are also key pawns in the management and support of children left behind, a phenomenon that is particularly accentuated in our country.

The services of school counselors are highly sought after in schools in poor areas (Bryan et al., 2009) but not only. In Romania there are geographical areas where the migration of the labor force is very accentuated and implicitly a large number of children left behind who require consistent support in adapting and facilitating the school-grandparent or foster family dialogue. In rural areas, schools face additional problems (Monteiro-Leitner et al., 2005). There is a serious concern for the subject of the professional identity of school counselors (Brott, 2006; Harris, 2009; Harrison, 2022) which is believed to be quite confusing, or in any case, crowded with responsible. These are due to the demand for the student's level of well-being in school, a goal promoted and supported by a series of social and educational policies with an impact on the professional identity of the school consultant. Interviews with school counselors reveal a split in the sense of identity of counselors according to their position in schools (as a counselor teacher or part-time employee), i.e. they either feel part of the collective and having meaning and significance, or they feel oppressed and limited in their interventions by the school management (Brot, 2006). The school counselor is the specialist who provides psychological, educational and vocational support to students, parents and teachers. It addresses problems such as school dropout, marginalization, school maladjustment, emotional difficulties of students, crisis situations, etc. Its main role is to provide

support to students in developing socio-emotional skills, support in overcoming personal or academic difficulties. An important responsibility is the one related to guiding students/their school and professional orientation. In these cases, educational resource and assistance centers are an extremely valuable resource for teachers. The multitude of social pressures that are exerted on the child has numerous effects on his well-being, emotional balance or academic skills.

The school counselor distinguishes himself as a professional in dialogue with teachers, speech therapists, itinerants, school mediators, often in order to collect data in carrying out the psycho-pedagogical evaluation of students and preschoolers. More and more situations are reported that require the intervention of the psychologist and school counselor: bullying, marginalization, learning difficulties, difficult adaptation to the school environment, behavioral problems, family problems, etc. The information, consultancy and support provided to both students and teachers in understanding the problems that arise in the school environment gives the school counselor a particularly important status, a specialist in optimizing school-student-family relations.

Other responsibilities, according to the legislation, refer to:

- ✓ **It provides information, counseling and support activities in order to prevent the trafficking and consumption of drugs/prohibited substances, juvenile delinquency and pre-delinquency and other risk behaviors, as well as any form of violence in the school environment, including bullying, cyberbullying, as well as activities to prevent and mitigate the factors that determine behavioral disorders.**
- ✓ **Carries out the evaluation, psycho-pedagogical assistance and appropriate monitoring of children identified with low cognitive and/or socio-emotional adaptive abilities** in relation to their age and level of schooling
- ✓ **It offers, upon request, support for pre-university education units of the "Hospital Schools" type, through evaluation activities and psycho-educational assistance.**

We can easily see the importance of the counselor's responsibilities in the school environment, especially in the current context marked by social changes and imbalances. We develop below some important topics for social work students interested in making a career as school counselors. From the multitude of problems that can arise in the school environment, we will refer here to some situations that teachers always report, namely bullying, school dropout and marginalization.

1. Bullying and school violence

Bullying involves any kind of violent act carried out intentionally, with the intention of hurting a vulnerable person (Hikmat et al., 2024). These acts include verbal violence (insults, nicknames, humiliation), physical violence, mental violence (isolation, ignorance) or cyber-bullying, a phenomenon that is increasingly common with the development and access of children to social networks. Bullying is not limited to teasing in the schoolyard. In 2024, forms of bullying have evolved, and the most widespread of them is cyberbullying. Children and adolescents are almost permanently connected to the internet, and social networks, WhatsApp groups or gaming platforms become the places where bullying continues even after classes are over. Malicious messages, sharing screenshots without consent, exclusion from online groups or even anonymous threats are just some of the ways in which cyberbullying affects victims emotionally and psychologically. Unlike traditional bullying, online bullying is difficult to control – the content can go viral, the aggressors can hide behind anonymity, and the victim feels that he has nowhere to take refuge. Another worrying aspect is that in the age of artificial intelligence, technology allows images and videos to be manipulated to create false but extremely harmful content. Deepfakes and video edits are sometimes used to humiliate colleagues, and this type of bullying has serious consequences on the mental health of those affected. In addition, the social pressure to always be “perfect” on social media increases anxiety and lowers teens' self-esteem.

According to statistics by the Josephson Institute of Ethics in 2024, 47% of adolescents aged 15 to 18 reported bullying experiences, 50% were ridiculed or groped, and data from an experiment with a sample of 100,000 children from 18 different countries conducted by the United Nations Children's Fund indicate a percentage of over 67% in experiencing bullying (Hikmat et al., 2024). Childhood and adolescence are essential periods in the physical, emotional and social development of individuals and such disruptions throughout childhood and adolescence can have a strong impact on the person's mental health and psycho-social functioning throughout life (Ye, Wu, He, 2023). In the case of high school students, more than half of them report symptoms of depression, and 30% of adolescents end up being diagnosed with depression, a disorder characterized by feelings of worthlessness, difficulty maintaining normal school standards, intense and long-lasting sadness, and loss of pleasure from previously pleasurable activities. Depression in adolescents is also frequently associated with poor academic performance and difficulties integrating or not being accepted into peer groups (Ye, Wu, He, 2023). In addition, another alarming factor is suicide, which is the third leading cause of mortality among children and adolescents.

The results of a meta-analysis conducted in 2023 in Asia indicate an extremely strong relationship between bullying and depressive symptoms in children and adolescents, who are 2.77 times more prone to pathology than a child who does not have bullying experience. The researchers also identify several elements strongly associated with bullying, including predisposition to anxiety, poor school performance, and mental and physical health problems (Huang et al., 2022). When a student is constantly bullied, anxiety is no longer just a fleeting emotion, but becomes a permanent state that profoundly affects their daily life. In the absence of a social support system from the family or a school counselor, the child comes to anticipate unpleasant situations at school, and this continuous stress influences both his mental health and his ability to focus on learning. The fear of humiliation or social exclusion makes him always on alert, which consumes his energy and significantly

reduces his attention during classes. An experiment conducted in Shanghai, 2015, indicates significant decreases in science, mathematics, and reading performance tests for students familiar with a hostile environment or who reported bullying experiences (Huang et al., 2022).

In the long term, this state of anxiety affects school performance. The student loses interest in educational activities, encounters difficulties in the learning process and may begin to avoid school. Tests become sources of major stress, and academic results decrease not due to lack of capacity, but due to emotional exhaustion and a feeling of helplessness. In severe cases, this can lead to chronic absenteeism or even school dropout, with long-term consequences on their educational and professional path. In addition, anxiety caused by bullying does not disappear with the passage of time, but can persist into adult life. Many of those who have been bullied develop self-confidence problems, difficulties in interpersonal relationships, and a tendency to avoid social situations. Therefore, the impact of bullying is not only immediate, but can profoundly influence both the present and the future of a child. Taking these problems into consideration, we consider the need for school mediators or psychological counselors to intervene in the occurrence of these problems.

When a student is a victim of bullying, be it classic or cyber, the intervention of a school counselor can make the difference between a long-lasting trauma and an effective solution. First of all, the counselor creates a safe space, where the student can talk openly about what is happening to him, without fear of being judged or punished. Active listening and validation of emotions are essential in this process. Once the problem has been identified, the counsellor can get in touch with teachers and parents to better understand the context and find appropriate solutions. In the case of cyberbullying, digital security specialists can also get involved, and sometimes it is necessary to report abusive content on social platforms or even involve the authorities if the situation is serious.

Further, the counselor works with both the victim and the aggressor. While the victim receives support to regain their confidence and learn how to cope with such a situation, the aggressor is helped to

understand the impact of their behavior and correct their attitude. The advisor also organizes workshops on empathy, online safety and mutual respect, to prevent such incidents in the future. The intervention does not stop only at the individual level; Schools that take bullying seriously implement clear anti-bullying policies, create awareness campaigns and promote a culture of respect and inclusion. In the end, the key is collaboration: students, parents, teachers and counsellors must work together to make the school a safe place for all.

Another aspect that highlights the need for early intervention in bullying cases is the perpetuation of abuse patterns in the case of individuals who have practiced bullying in childhood or adolescence. Bullying is a behavior that indicates a need for dominance, revenge, obtaining social status or resources, identity, or belonging (Sanders, Malamut, Cilessen, 2021). By analyzing these desires expressed through such a drastic behavior, we can create some hypotheses about the origin of these needs and the way in which the child has learned to express them.

A child who exerts his power through verbal, physical or social aggression and is not confronted with the consequences of his actions learns that bullying is an effective method of getting what he wants. This mentality can later be transferred to personal relationships, to

workplace or even in interactions with their own children, turning into so-called “adult-bullies”, or generically, individuals with abusive tendencies (von Humboldt, Ribeiro-Gonçalves, Leal, 2022).

As they grow up, a former school bully may develop antisocial behaviors, having difficulty respecting the boundaries and rights of those around them. Studies show that some of the children who have been bullied in childhood are more likely to adopt aggressive behaviors in adult life as well, either in intimate relationships (controlling or abusing their partner) or in the professional environment, in the form of leadership based on intimidation and manipulation. There is also a correlation between bullying and delinquent behavior, such as physical violence, substance abuse or problems with the law.

An important aspect is that a child who practices bullying can be, in turn, the victim of a toxic environment, either at home or in society. Many aggressors come from environments where violence is normalized and have learned that power is earned through intimidation. Without intervention and education, there is a risk that these children will not correct their behavior and perpetuate patterns of abuse in their future relationships. That is why it is essential that both the school and the family intervene early, not only to protect victims of bullying, but also to give bullies the chance to learn empathy, respect and self-control.

2. Discrimination and school exclusion

Socioeconomic status is a criterion of discrimination that affects many areas such as employment, education, housing (Peterman, 2018). Belonging to the peer group is a key indicator of a child's development, affecting both their socio-emotional state and academic performance (Montoro et al., 2021). The school environment should be a safe and inclusive space, where every child feels accepted, respected and encouraged to develop harmoniously. However, reality shows that many students face discrimination and exclusion, phenomena that can affect both their emotional development and their educational path. These problems can arise for various reasons, be they social, economic, cultural or related to the individual characteristics of each child. There are categories of marginalized students, and if the school fails to limit the social inequalities that generate these situations, there is an expansion of marginalization, stigmatization, labeling (Geronimo, 2011; Howarth, Andreouli, 2015).

One of the most common reasons for discrimination in school is the socio-economic status of the student. Children who come from low-income families may be marginalized because they do not have branded clothing, modern technological devices or other goods considered standard by their peers; discrimination on this basis is so strong that the American public divides society into the *haves* and the *have-nots*

(Moorman, Wicks-Smith, 2012). In some cases, even teachers may unwittingly contribute to this discrimination through different expectations of children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Ethnic or cultural origin is another factor that can lead to the social exclusion of children. Differences based on race, ethnicity, are everywhere around us (Nieto, 2004). Students who are part of minority groups are often treated differently, either through subtle prejudices or hostile attitudes from peers or teachers. D'hondt et al., (2021) state that ethnic discrimination is an extremely common situation in education, which is why the school counselor has this huge responsibility to organize and intervene so as to support ethnic minority groups to benefit from equality in the educational system (Banks, 1993).

This type of discrimination has profound effects on the child's identity, affecting their self-confidence (Toomey, Umana-Taylor, 2012), academic results, and desire to integrate into the community (Luong et al., 2023). Acts of discrimination related to the individual's race are a very common problem, often being a behavior learned from the family, or an internalized stereotype related to a certain race or ethnicity, which has strongly negative and persistent effects on the discriminated against throughout life, even in adulthood (Montoro et al., 2021). Children with physical or intellectual disabilities also often face both social and educational barriers. In the absence of effective inclusion policies and an education based on empathy and acceptance, these students are often excluded from common activities and treated as "different" or "incapable", although the presence of atypical students among typical students generates cohesion, support, valuable context for learning (Graham, Proctor, Dixon, 2016). In this educational context, students isolate themselves and develop emotional problems.

Another significant context of exclusion is the non-conformity with the social norms imposed by the group. Children who do not meet gender expectations or who have different preferences and interests than most are frequently subjected to social pressure and, sometimes, bullying (Obiunu, 2013; Rao, 2013). For example, a boy who is not interested in popular sports or a girl who engages in behaviors considered "non-

conforming” to gender stereotypes may become the target of exclusion and negative labeling. There is gender discrimination including in the study formations - bachelor's level, where Hashmi et al., (2013) report unethical comments, denial of opportunities, including by teachers; what is interesting is that women are the main victims as well as aggressors and that in this age segment academic performance is not significantly affected but the level of emotional impairment is high.

School performance can also generate discrimination. Students who achieve exceptional academic results may be perceived as “nerds” and excluded from social groups, while those who have difficulties in learning may be considered “weak” and ignored. These labels create a toxic educational climate, in which students are defined strictly by their academic results, without taking into account other qualities and abilities they possess (Sayman, 2012).

The impact of these forms of discrimination and exclusion is profound and long-term. The most common consequences of marginalization are anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, and difficulties in relating to others (Yang, 2023; Wenham, 2022). In some cases, this phenomenon increases the risk of school absenteeism or even school dropout. Moreover, negative childhood experiences can significantly influence their resilience to adversities such as marginalization, exclusion, discrimination.

Combating discrimination in the school environment requires a collective effort on the part of teachers, parents and educational institutions (Plantilla, 2005; Bojarski, 2013). The most effective form of combating discrimination is through education, through the promotion of the principles of equality, tolerance and inclusion, through educational programs focused on diversity and mutual respect. The paradox is all the greater as the school environment, the framework considered to promote equality, is transformed from a healthy space into a framework that perpetuates inequality. Rapid interventions in cases of exclusion or harassment, as well as the creation of an environment in which each student feels valued, are essential measures to prevent these problems.

Discrimination and exclusion of children in school are problems with significant effects on their development.

An educational system that protects the rights of all students and especially of minority groups, involved in promoting inclusion is a generator of well-being, balance and valuable resources for society. In Thailand, for example, there is a project called Laboratory School in rural areas, in which the principles of the friendly school are implemented, in which councils set up at community level develop school curricula for minorities. The Philippines and Colombia have also adapted their education systems to the problem of limited access for girls in rural areas. The presence of educational programs that encourage diversity and acceptance of differences can significantly contribute to the development of a positive climate, in which each student feels respected and valued. One of these programs is called ASCA- American School Counselor Association, developed in 2019 by the American Human Rights Association, and represents an institution that fights for collaboration, systematic change, equity and equal rights implemented in schools starting from the youngest possible ages (Shell, 2021).

Effective measures include interactive sessions on diversity, group activities encouraging collaboration between students and mentoring programmes that support the integration of vulnerable children (Rhodes, Liang, Spencer, 2009; Wyatt et al., 2019).

Teachers also play a key role in preventing exclusion. They must be trained in identifying and managing cases of discrimination and encourage empathetic behaviour among pupils. The inclusive attitude of the teacher significantly influences the way a child is perceived by his peers. It is therefore essential that teachers adopt a fair approach, based on encouraging each student, regardless of their social, ethnic or personal situation. I always repeat the fact that, for many students, the teacher is the only safety net not having the necessary support in the family. In this case, despite the overcrowding of tasks of the teacher (didactic, administrative, enforcement) it is also his duty to look carefully with his eyes wide open at the child in front of him, in order to decipher some behaviors such as isolation, aggressiveness, anger, maladjustment, etc.

The presence of a school counselor specialized in inclusion and diversity can bring a significant impact in combating discrimination and supporting vulnerable children. A well-trained counselor can identify the signs of social exclusion early on and intervene to provide emotional support and concrete solutions. It can work both individually with affected students and peer groups to facilitate integration and mutual acceptance (Reese, 2021).

Another important aspect is that a school counselor can also provide support to parents, helping them to better understand the problems their children are facing and to find solutions to help them overcome social or emotional difficulties. In addition, the counselor can work with teachers to implement effective methods of conflict management and promoting empathy among students.

Finally, combating discrimination in schools cannot take place without constant education for empathy, respect and acceptance of diversity. Both the school system and the educational counselors must create a safe environment, in which each student feels protected and valued. By actively promoting inclusion and swift interventions in cases of discrimination, the school can contribute to the formation of a more tolerant generation, capable of living in a diverse and equitable society.

Thus, investing in educational programs, counseling and training for teachers is an essential step to ensure a school environment in which no child feels marginalized or wronged.

3. School dropout and lack of motivation for learning

School dropout, along with the intention to drop out of school, is a phenomenon studied in many communities, with patterns found in certain contexts, such as combinations of individual and contextual factors of pre-adolescents/adolescents. At the individual level, it seems that boys of adolescent age have the highest predisposition to school drop-out, and at the contextual level, low socioeconomic status, a

negative family climate, and poor integration into the peer group are risk factors (Bianchi et al., 2021).

School dropout is already classified as an extremely complex phenomenon, constantly growing and resistant to educational and social policies (Chirtes, 2010). One of the most important factors that determines school dropout is the precarious economic situation. Students who come from low-income families often have to help their parents through work, which prevents them from continuing their education. Structural, material, social, economic factors interact in a dynamic that is difficult to decipher, but the multi-curricular approach can be a good start in limiting it. An important risk factor for school dropout is the unstable family environment (Chenge, Chenge, Maunganidze, 2017). We also recall the importance of the educational status of parents in continuing or dropping out of school. Intergenerational illiteracy is explained as follows.

Frequent conflicts in the family, lack of parental support, or responsibilities imposed on children, such as caring for younger siblings, can prevent them from attending school. In some cases, parents do not understand the importance of education or do not encourage their children to continue their education. Academic difficulties and lack of educational support are another common cause. Students who experience learning difficulties and do not receive the necessary help from teachers or counselors may end up feeling discouraged and dropping out of school. Also, a hostile school environment, characterized by discrimination, bullying or the lack of a psychological support system, can lead to social exclusion and, implicitly, to dropout (Fobih, 1987).

Cultural factors also play an important role (Shahidul & Karim, 2015). In some communities, especially in rural areas or in families of certain ethnic groups, education is not seen as a priority, and traditions or social norms impose other responsibilities on children, such as early marriage or domestic work (Pop-Flanja, Herța, 2019; Surdu, Vincze, Wamsiedel, 2011).

In addition, the intention to drop out seems to strongly correlate with the individual's self-esteem. Conceptualizing self-esteem, we are talking about positive and stable attitudes and beliefs towards oneself,

which are in turn associated with increased self-efficacy in the academic context, and school performance (Bianchi et al., 2021). The drastic decreases in self-esteem during adolescence and puberty are due to the belief that he is part of a disadvantaged, disadvantaged category, and in the context of belonging to a disadvantaged community, it can be a major risk factor for school drop-out.

School dropout has serious consequences on the individual socially, psychologically, economically (McCaul et al., 1992; Sum, 2009). The lack of adequate education significantly reduces a person's chances of obtaining a stable and well-paid job, leading to an increased risk of poverty and social exclusion. People without education tend to face difficulties in integrating into the labor market and are more vulnerable to economic instability. Psychologically, dropping out of school can lead to a sense of failure, low self-esteem and difficulties in social relationships. Many of those who drop out of education develop antisocial behaviors or are more likely to engage in illegal activities, thus increasing the risk of juvenile delinquency (Tramontina, 2001).

From a social and economic point of view, a high rate of school dropout affects the whole of society. The lack of skilled labor slows down economic development and increases dependence on social benefits. In addition, the justice and health systems can be overburdened by problems associated with lack of education, such as crime or mental health problems (Bianchi et al., 2021).

One of the most important aspects in preventing school dropout is the financial support provided to students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Many children drop out of education due to material deprivation, and measures such as social scholarships, providing free school supplies and textbooks, subsidizing transportation, or providing a hot meal at school can significantly contribute to keeping them in the education system. This reduces the economic barriers that prevent school attendance and provides equal opportunities for all students.

Another essential factor is the creation of a favorable and inclusive educational environment, where each student feels accepted and supported. Teachers need to be trained to meet the diverse needs of

students, and schools need to implement clear policies against bullying and discrimination. By promoting a climate based on respect and collaboration, social exclusion and discouragement of vulnerable students can be prevented. Teaching methods should also be adapted to make learning more attractive and accessible to all. Another crucial aspect is the educational support and psychological counseling provided to students. Many of those who drop out of school face academic difficulties or emotional problems that are not properly managed. Through access to psychological counseling, free tutoring, and mentoring programs, students can receive the help they need to overcome obstacles and regain their motivation to learn. In addition, extracurricular activities can play an important role in developing self-esteem and keeping students involved in the school community (Stancu, 2020).

Family involvement is another determining factor in preventing school dropout. Parents must be informed and supported to understand the importance of education in the future of their children, and this task is also on the list of responsibilities of the school counselor, but not only. Organizing information sessions, creating partnerships between school and family and providing support for parents from vulnerable backgrounds are essential measures to ensure the educational continuity of students. A stable and supportive family environment can make the difference between academic success and early abandonment of education. For students who cannot adapt to the standard educational program, it is necessary to develop flexible alternatives. Second chance programs are essential for those who have dropped out of school and want to continue their studies. Vocational courses can also provide students with practical skills and a path to integration into the labour market. Online or hybrid education is also a solution for children who, for various reasons, cannot attend school on a daily basis.

An important role in combating school dropout is also played by partnerships between authorities, NGOs and local communities. Non-governmental organizations can provide educational, financial and psychological support to children in vulnerable situations. Also, private companies can contribute by financing scholarships or by offering

internships for students who are preparing for a professional field. Creating community centers where children can participate in educational and recreational activities can help keep them in the education system (Stancu, 2020).

In conclusion, reducing the school dropout rate requires a sustained and well-coordinated effort. Through financial support, the creation of an inclusive school environment, the provision of counseling and alternative education, as well as community involvement, access to education for all children can be ensured. Education is the foundation of a prosperous society, and investing in preventing early school leaving is essentially an investment in the future.

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II. Bullying, marginalization and school dropout – the shadows in the schoolyard

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**Emese Bojin, about children's
silent signals and what parents
and teachers need to know**

The globalized society in which we live exerts a variety of pressures and demands on children and adolescents. According to sociological studies, the school takes over social inequalities and not only fails to dissolve them, it also perpetuates them. Iolanda Mitrofan (2005) said that man takes from his environment not only air, water or food, he also takes over information manifested in the form of emotions, attitude schemes, patterns of behaviors, psychologically metabolized.

How are these social inequalities seen in the child's life in the school psychologist's office? What kind of emotional information have you identified in school-age children that are obstacles in their lives?

Inequalities: poverty, separation, environment, ethnicity, disability, disorganized family

In general, the school aims to blur social inequalities and respect children's fundamental rights. Thus, the school where I work declares itself to be an inclusive school, being open to all those who need education, regardless of their social or ethnic origin, disabilities, religion or nationality, education being a right of all, not just a privilege of some favored communities. But only after the children are accepted to attend school regardless of their condition, the difficult work begins – that of contributing to the harmonious development of each child, on all levels.

In the school counseling office, we discover that all these social inequalities are at the root of children's suffering and represent vulnerabilities that can very easily become reasons for the development of disorders. The problems with which children come from home leave their mark on their ability to cope with school demands and the pressure of the group of elders to fit into the standards they outline. The constant thought that "I am not like the others, like the majority and that's why I don't fit in among them" creates their feeling of inadequacy and this strikes exactly in the fragile identity and formation that is shaping up crookedly. This is the biggest obstacle in children's lives because the school does not take responsibility for those who fail to keep up with others. School counseling is only

a small part of what the school offers to children in an attempt to compensate for the minus that children come from their background.

The family should be the child's strongest protective factor. Its main function is the socializing function; however, it can be a wrong start for the child, sometimes even a risk factor. The family can alienate, it can make us sick, it can force the child to play roles that do not represent him.

What painful luggage did you find in the children? What struggles do some of them fight?

The family can indeed be the source of children's great suffering, and the most frequent situations I have faced in the school counseling office, in which the family leaves its mark in an extremely destructive way on children's development, are the following:

- *The divorce of the parents and the transformation of the child into a weapon of revenge against the other;*
- *Or a life lived in promiscuity by single mothers with multiple partners who keep changing;*
- *Domestic violence – children beaten by parents who do not have even minimal skills to manage their own emotional states and problems;*
- *Abandonment – parents who went to work abroad who left their children in the care of grandparents or other relatives;*
- *Loss of a caring and affectionate parent through premature death due to terminal illnesses such as cancer;*
- *Alcohol addiction of one or both parents and implicitly their inability to take care of their children's needs properly;*
- *Delinquent fathers who end up in detention for shorter or longer periods and who become a landmark for children.*

Before desensitizing or decompensating into a disorder, children and adolescents in situations like those described try to cope on their own or by appealing to the support of the group of friends. Unfortunately, many times their burdens are felt to be too heavy for what they can carry and then various wrong

ways of coping arise such as tobacco, alcohol, prohibited substances, self-mutilation.

In psychotherapy it is said that the child is the symptom of the parent.

How does anger, loss, anger, shame, etc. manifest in children?

In most cases, in young children (preschoolers and primary school children), these emotional problems manifest themselves in the form of behavioral disturbances. Children who seem hyperkinetic have that psychomotor agitation that is actually the façade under which fear, shame, anger, etc. are hidden. They are often mislabeled by teachers with ADHD, without confirmation of a real diagnosis, because they demand a lot of attention through their restless behavior. Other types of problematic behaviors that have these encapsulated emotions as a substrate are violent behaviors: hitting other children, jokes about pinching, hindering, stating that they are “just for fun”, physical bullying but also verbal bullying, manifested by insults, harassment, intimidation. Buffoonery is another common behavior in children and masks all loss, shame, anger.

In pre-adolescents and adolescents, on the other hand, one can predominantly observe the behaviors of withdrawal into the inner world and the closure of any path of communication, especially with parents, friends and teachers. In the school counseling office, life stories are told that have not been put into words before. Suffering takes shape by expressing it in words, by taking it out of the child’s emotional sphere. Sometimes it takes a long time for this externalization to take shape. Some teenagers write and free themselves in this way, and in the counseling sessions we read together the pages of the personal diary. There is also the possibility in this age category that the suffering takes the form of the behaviors described in young schoolchildren, but less frequently.

Usually, the adults around the child are the ones who accept with more reluctance the fact that those problematic behaviors are actually the symptoms of family dysfunctions.

What should every teacher know about the emotional well-being of the student?

The emotional well-being of students should be a priority in schools because the well-being of today's children depends on the success of tomorrow's adults. In recent years, especially after the pandemic period, there has been an increasing emphasis on the emotional well-being of students and teachers. Courses are organized on this topic, there are groups dedicated to sharing ideas and examples of good practices regarding the well-being of teachers and students in school, educational projects and school competitions are organized on this subject and more and more schools from all corners of the country are striving to ensure the well-being of students and teachers at school.

Teachers should know that in some cases students have an unfavorable atmosphere at home and school can be the only stable environment for them where they feel valued. I have met students who have developed a secure relationship with the teacher, the headmistress, with me or another teacher and that relationship was for them the only constant source of emotional well-being.

Last but not least, teachers should also know that students can reach their full potential, obtaining very good school results only if they go to school with joy, have a friendly school environment, positive relationships with teachers and other students, an atmosphere of respect and appreciation of the uniqueness of each student so that self-knowledge and self-esteem are encouraged.

What are the signs that something is happening to the child/adolescent in the class?

The most obvious signs that should give us food for thought could be the following:

- Sadness or lack of enthusiasm for activities that previously enjoyed them*
- when the child suddenly withdraws and no longer wants to socialize*

- *when he becomes insecure, fearful*
- *when the child complains of pain that keeps running through the body*
- *when sleep problems occur: insomnia, nightmares, enuresis*
- *when it becomes aggressive*

Usually, children who go through various family-related problems begin to somatize worries and thus various accusations and pains (headache, belly, nausea, unjustified fatigue, anxieties, depressive states) appear more and more frequently. Another very common sign is that students who are going through difficult situations begin to record worse and worse results in learning. Apathy appears, daydreaming, concentration problems, sometimes different types of tics appear, they no longer show the same enthusiasm for the activities that were previously preferred by them, they become more internalized and withdrawn during breaks, they no longer socialize or play.

Any change in the attitude, behavior, school performance or habits of a child or adolescent can be signs of difficulties they are facing. That is why teamwork is needed by all the adults around the child: teacher, nurse, school counselor, parent. Children need the support of adults to get through various difficult stages and there are many families where the problems start precisely from those who should protect and provide the most favorable conditions for the development of the child, that is, the parents. In these cases, the adults at school have a difficult mission and a responsibility at the same time, that of intervening in the best interest of the child.

How does the school-family partnership work? What to do when the family does not have the necessary competence to raise a competent child and cannot provide a healthy environment?

The partnership between school and family is for the benefit of both, because the school needs the support and collaboration of the family, but the family also needs the school in support of the education offered to the child. This relationship between school and family should ideally work on the principle of authentic collaboration, based on trust and mutual respect, to give the opportunity to form an open relationship, conducive to communication and exchange of ideas, all for the interest and benefit of the child. In reality, the vast majority of parents come

to school only when they are called, when meetings with parents are organized, lectures for parents or celebrations and festivities. A nice initiative in the school where I work is the organization of the parents' week, the period when the school doors are open to all parents who want to participate in the activities organized in the classrooms and are even invited to hold different activities with the students. Involving parents in school life in this way strengthens the bond of collaboration. In such contexts we can see how involved the family is in the child's upbringing and education.

When families show lack of interest, neglect of the child's activities at school, or even the constant refusal to respond to the teacher's requests, then suspicions arise about the parents' competence to provide children with a framework conducive to the development of a harmonious personality. When the general signs of lack of well-being appear in the child, along with the lack of involvement and collaboration of the family with the school or the refusal of the parents to sign the counseling agreement for the student to be included in the school counseling program, we are talking about abusive families in most cases. The fear of these parents that we could discover the serious things that happen at home makes them reluctant to collaborate with the school. In the great majority of cases, the truth is inevitably discovered and when we discover an unhealthy family environment for the upbringing, development and education of the child, the school as an institution has the obligation to request the intervention of the competent authorities. The school management requests the support of the General Directorate of Social Assistance and Child Protection, which takes over the case, conducts the social investigation and establishes the next steps, in special situations leading to the forfeiture of parental rights. The sad thing is that those children who end up in placement centers temporarily or permanently separated from their parents, have proper care, but the love and protection of a loving family that they did not have at home, cannot be offered by any state institution.

What are the most common challenges in school?

The biggest challenge today is to adapt the school and the educational system in our country to the current generations of children. Generation Alpha is represented by children born after 2010, who are between 0 and 12 years old. These children are currently in kindergarten, primary classes and the fifth and sixth grades of secondary school. Children in grades VII-VIII and high school are part of generation Z, the most studied generation of all time, as it is considered the generation that presents radically different characteristics from all previous generations. They are also called digital natives, due to the rapid evolution of technology to which they are perfectly adapted from the earliest ages.

The abundance of information, the diversification of the channels of access to it and the accessibility with the digitization of the world has led to significant neural changes. The students we currently have in school have difficulties in time management, concentration problems and maintaining attention on the task, which is why boredom occurs. Whether it is a counseling activity or a classroom teaching activity, they cannot keep their curiosity and sustained attention to listen to the opinions of their colleagues, a more cumbersome explanation from the teacher and more recently we have noticed that not even the videos capture their attention and interest. They like to do things, to experiment, not to talk about them - they find teaching unnecessary and boring. The speed with which children of generations Z and Alpha access and assimilate information in motion has formed the need for instant gratification, cultivating impatience, but also difficulties in concentrating in direct interpersonal interactions. Thus, a big challenge I face in school counseling is the problem of school motivation.

Last but not least, one of the biggest challenges is to keep up with the rapid evolution of technology, to be up to date with everything that represents the world of children, pre-adolescents and adolescents. They reveal themselves to those they feel close to their world, those who understand them and know more about the problems they face. I very aggressively reject any opinion of an adult that begins with the expression "in my time..." And they accept us as mentors or role models only if we don't seem outdated in their eyes.

**What do these child difficulties say about our society?
What worries you about the way this mechanism of providing
psychological services in school works? How does this
profession bring you satisfaction?**

My concern has always been about the large number of children assigned to each school counselor, which is why we are not able to cover all the counseling needs in the school, having to select cases according to urgency and difficulty. These constraints sometimes make us feel ineffective and insufficient.

The profession of psychologist who works among children can bring countless satisfactions because it is about helping children find the right path in life and develop in a balanced and harmonious way from all points of view. The satisfaction comes from the well-being that counseling sessions can bring back into the lives of the preteens and teens I work with. It also comes from the joy with which the children surround me, the affection, the hugs, the messages written on pieces of paper torn from notebooks, the drawings with flowers, rainbows and portraits surrounded by hearts and the small attentions with which the children come to me. When I see that an activity that I have designed with a lot of soul has an impact on them, when I receive phone calls or messages of thanks from parents, when I hear positive feedback and words of appreciation from colleagues and management, then satisfaction fills my heart.

Every child or teenager leaves home in the morning (in the happiest case) carrying the burden of everyday life.

III. Substance use prevention begins in the family

Another topic I wish to develop in this paper is related to substance use among adolescents. Among all the study directions associated with this issue, prevention within the family remains a neglected and difficult subject to implement. Access to parents is challenging because it requires their consent to dedicate a certain amount of time, yet a significant number of parents do not give enough importance to this issue, considering it irrelevant, or they simply do not participate in the school-family dialogue. The largest proportion of prevention activities takes place in schools with students, activities carried out by anti-drug counselors, who are very few in number and operate within drug prevention, counseling, and evaluation centers. The large student groups included in these campaigns limit the effectiveness of the intervention, and the possibility of organizing small-group sessions is also low due to insufficient human resources.

In numerous studies analyzing substance use, alongside the reasons, the population prone to consumption, and the impact of this act on the individual and society, one question becomes evident: why do people use these substances? Although a complex question, research agrees on one major risk factor: the family environment.

Drug use has become an increasingly significant problem among young people in recent years, including numerous cases of consumption within high schools or middle schools. A statistic from 2016 indicates that 5.6% of young people aged 15 to 26 admitted to having used drugs of any kind at least once; meanwhile, research from India in 2003 recorded over 8 million young people under the age of 20 as cannabis users (Nath et al., 2022). Additionally, the World Health Association states that, starting in 2020, the highest-risk population for substance use consists of boys and young men aged 15 to 20.

Some factors strongly correlated with the consequences of drug use among young people include conduct disorders, aggression, impulsivity, attention deficits, a predisposition to becoming problematic adults for society, susceptibility to mental disorders, depression, and, consequently, an increased risk of suicide. Additionally, Nath et al. (2022) identify key risk factors such as parental attitudes toward drugs and alcohol, as well

as peer pressure. Given the truly dramatic impact of substance use at any age—especially early on, during major periods of cognitive and psychosocial development such as puberty and adolescence—we can deduce the importance of having a safe family environment that effectively prevents substance use and addresses its consequences.

Adolescence generally represents the social group most prone to risk-taking, curiosity, susceptibility to peer pressure, rebellion against authorities, and experimentation with various activities and substances (Nawi, 2021). This is due to numerous changes occurring both at the bio-physiological level and the psycho-social level. From a bio-physiological perspective, major hormonal changes take place, including increased levels of sex hormones and modifications in cortisol, the stress hormone, which makes adolescents much more prone to stress, anxiety, and mood swings (Steinberg, 2017).

Additionally, adolescence and young adulthood are periods of prefrontal cortex development, which completes its maturation at the age of 25. This process involves developing emotional regulation functions until the mentioned age. Another aspect that may explain the predisposition to risk-taking is the increased activity of the limbic system, which is strongly associated with emotions and rewards. The changes brought by these modifications make adolescents more inclined toward immediate rewards and, consequently, less capable of effectively delaying gratification, especially in the absence of strong social support. In interaction with an increasingly versatile environment and a variety of new social experiences, these biological aspects make adolescence a period characterized by exploration on all levels (Steinberg, 2017).

These bio-physiological changes occur in all adolescents, and the predisposition to risk-taking is present during this stage of life. However, numerous elements differentiate the actions that adolescents choose to take—more explicitly, protective factors (Nawi, 2021). These protective factors are essential in helping adolescents develop to their full potential and become highly adaptive adults. Among them, we include high self-

esteem, parental monitoring, academic competence, repeated exposure to anti-drug policies, and friendships with peers (Nawi, 2021).

A clinical study conducted by Rusby et al. in 2018 analyzes the influence of the parent-child relationship on alcohol and marijuana consumption among 400 adolescents aged 13 to 15, using three temporal measurements (fall, winter, spring), focusing on the following factors: the quality of the parent-adolescent relationship, parental monitoring, and parental substance use. The results show very strong correlations between adolescent consumption and the parental relationship, revealing the following:

- Parental substance use increases the likelihood that the adolescent will consume alcohol without perceiving this behavior as problematic.
- Girls are more strongly and negatively influenced by the quality of their relationship with their parents.
- Parental monitoring significantly reduces the probability of adolescents engaging in risky behaviors and giving in to peer pressure.
- The adolescent's perception of a poor-quality parent-child relationship represents a major risk factor for an extremely early onset of drug and alcohol use.
- Parental monitoring is most effective when associated with a warm and supportive parental relationship.
- Parental supervision should be adapted based on gender, considering the challenges each gender faces during pre-adolescence.
- Reducing substance use within the family, along with parental involvement in the adolescent's life, are also protective factors.

Another study conducted by Mills et al. (2021) examines parental support and parental monitoring as protective factors in adolescent substance use (specifically alcohol and cigarettes), categorizing the results by gender and age. The authors define parental support as

affection, constant encouragement, physical affection, open discussions without judgment, and general signs that the child is loved and cared for. Parental monitoring refers to consistently tracking the child's location and activities. The study found that parental monitoring was more prevalent in girls and that substance use increased significantly between the 8th and 10th grades.

The results indicate that the most important and effective protective factor against substance use is parental support, for both boys and girls, having a stronger impact during adolescence than in pre-adolescence (Mills et al., 2021). Regarding parental monitoring, the study observed that while it significantly delays the onset of initial substance use episodes, it does not ultimately alter the likelihood of a child engaging in such behaviors. These findings align with studies demonstrating the importance of growing up in a warm and harmonious family environment and the protective effect this factor has against engaging in risky behaviors during adolescence.

Another relevant study focusing on a substance increasingly associated with adolescent use today examines the impact of parental prevention on adolescent e-cigarette consumption. Data were collected from 176 adolescents and their parents, analyzing parental attitudes toward the risks associated with using e-cigarettes of any kind (Trucco, Cristello, & Sutherland, 2021). The results show that parents' negative attitudes toward e-cigarettes correlate with their intentions to prevent their children from using such devices, which, in turn, is associated with a significant decrease in adolescent interest in e-cigarettes. The authors also link lower e-cigarette use to open conversations between parents and children about the risks of these substances.

Substance use family prevention strategies

- The Strengthening Families Program

The Strengthening Families Program is an evidence-based prevention program founded in 1982 by the National Institute on Drug

Abuse and is designed for high-risk families regarding substance use. The program consists of 14 training sessions focused on basic parenting skills and family therapy sessions aimed at preventing substance use and strengthening connections and protective factors between parents and adolescents. The program's goals include improving parent-child communication, increasing confidence and resilience against peer pressure to engage in risky behaviors, and reducing the risk of substance use.

- Familia Unidas Preventive Intervention

This is a multi-level intervention program created to empower Hispanic immigrant parents in supporting their children's healthy and risk-free development. Parents are taught parenting skills and prevention strategies to strengthen the parent-child relationship in a culturally adapted manner, suited to their circumstances. The program consists of 8-9 group sessions, led by a facilitator who proposes discussions and exercises, and also includes family visits ranging from 4 to 10 times. Some benefits include increasing awareness of negative environmental influences on children, improving parental supervision, and enhancing mental health.

- Triple P- Positive Parenting Program

This is one of the most effective evidence-based parenting programs, focused on providing parents with simple and practical strategies to strengthen a stable and healthy relationship with their children and to develop adaptive ways of dealing with age-specific problems and challenges. It focuses on developing positive parenting techniques, implementing balanced discipline, setting firm but flexible boundaries, and reducing stress and family conflicts—factors that later serve as protective elements against exposure to substance use.

According to specialized studies, the originating family environment is the best predictor of the lifestyle an individual will have. From the very first year of life, the development of an insecure attachment style, exposure to abuse, neglect, or parental mental disorders can have strong effects on a child's mental or physical health. These aspects are

relevant because it has been demonstrated that mental disorders of any severity represent a major risk factor for substance use starting at a young age (Volkow, 2001).

Therefore, understanding the gravity of this phenomenon is necessary in order to grasp the strategies that can significantly reduce the chance of a child engaging in such behaviors. What does parental prevention look like? Specialized studies show that it is initially effectively achieved on the foundation of a stable, warm, and understanding relationship between the child and the parent. Effective results are reported when substance use prevention is carried out through open and sincere communication, sharing experiences, and listening without judgment; establishing clear but reasonable rules, with detailed explanations of the consequences of substance use, as well as the healthiest ways to manage exposure and temptation; and finally, one of the most relevant factors of prevention is behavioral modeling. Among the main risk factors for early substance use are substance use disorders in the family (Anderson et al., 2023).

Excessive monitoring has been proven to be a factor that is effective in delaying the initiation of substance use, but not in preventing it from occurring once monitoring ceases (Mills et al., 2021). Thus, it is recommended that monitoring be carried out in terms of ensuring the child's safety while avoiding excessive control over activities and social circles. Natural communication based on trust reduces deviant behaviors and acts of rebellion in adolescence against excessive parental restrictions.

Additionally, open and informative communication about substances and their understanding during adolescence has been shown to be extremely effective in managing temptation when drug exposure occurs (Mills et al., 2021). Children who perceive parental monitoring as behaviors aimed at ensuring their safety or as expressions of curiosity about their lives from their parents are more likely to honestly share life experiences and feel comfortable opening up to their parents.

Other protective factors may include involvement in constructive and enjoyable activities, either with the child's social group or through

frequent engagement in sports or recreational activities as a family. Spending quality time with family reduces the likelihood of the parent being perceived as a rigid authority and increases the probability that the child will succeed in initiating and maintaining healthy and stable relationships with peers who share similar values and interests, allowing them to spend time in safe environments and contexts. Thus, another protective factor is maintaining interpersonal relationships with healthy social circles, thereby limiting early exposure to substances.

The relevance of drug and substance prevention within the family is undeniable. Using specialized data, we can summarize this concept into the following aspects:

- Substance use has become a serious global issue, representing both a precursor and a consequence of mental illness in adolescents and young adults.
- Children and adolescents are being exposed to substance use at increasingly younger ages, an aspect that often escapes parental supervision and control.
- Numerous prevention programs exist in schools, but the most effective prevention begins within the family.
- Parents worldwide have access to skills training programs to help them implement prevention strategies and strengthen their relationship with their child.
- The key factors of parental prevention are: open communication based on trust, adequate information for adolescents regarding substances and their consequences, monitoring and setting rules implemented through communication, explanations, and trust, as well as strengthening the parent-child relationship as a protective factor against temptation.

In the family, a child's resistance to social pressures is built—a resistance that, when related to the temptation of drugs, involves their proper positioning. Saying No to drugs, smoking, or alcohol, and rejecting the countless external pressures, represents the ultimate goal of parental education—a strong and relevant signal that parents have succeeded in their role. However, it is not that simple, as the child's

psychosocial traits equally constitute either a risk factor or a protective factor. Kang (2022) shows that an adolescent with high scores in neuroticism, openness, and extraversion may be more receptive to substance use compared to one with high levels of agreeableness and conscientiousness. Other authors associate substance use with low academic performance, cognitive structure deficits, and high scores in affiliation, autonomy, and impulsivity (Labouvie & McGee, 1986).

Parental strategies have also been studied:

- In preventing substance use among children, it is necessary to study parents, educators, but primarily parental child-rearing methods. Research supports the hypothesis that a child's social competence is largely a consequence of a specific type of parenting and the provision of a family environment that effectively meets the child's needs (Robertson, David, Rao, 2003).
- Strong positive relationships with family, active parental involvement in the child's life, monitoring their social circle, and offering trust constitute the most powerful protective factors in raising a child resistant to drugs (Sloboda, 1997).
- Vermeulen-Smit, Verdurmen, Engels (2015) highlight the increased effectiveness of prevention programs conducted with the parent-child dyad compared to programs that involve parents separately from their children.

Conclusions

The field experience of anti-drug counselors and the conclusions they provide should serve as valuable recommendations and premises for developing new strategic directions in drug prevention. Preventing substance use within the family is a rather difficult goal to achieve; on the other hand, school interventions are built upon the student's condition as it was shaped within the family. In most cases, school-based prevention is ineffective because it targets students who are already using substances.

Under these conditions, an extremely effective approach would be a “school for parents” structure that would accompany parents in the process of raising their children. Since social and emotional competence is developed within a stimulating environment characterized by warmth, support, empathy, predictability, and balance, parents from all backgrounds also need support and specialized guidance.

We therefore emphasize the need for the implementation of very early intervention measures and the intensification of non-governmental sector efforts in providing support to parents in this regard.

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**How an anti-drug counselor
sees prevention.
Discussion with Florin Bîșcă**

An undesirable situation that affects a significant population of people and is perceived as problematic by an important segment of society is considered a social problem. Sociologists also state that, in order to be classified as a social problem, that situation must create a need for change and incite collective action aimed at controlling and limiting the factors that sustain it. Is substance use a social problem in our community?

A: Yes. Drug use is an issue that our society is facing. It has evolved significantly over time and has now reached a critical point of spread. We see more and more young people destroying their lives and their future by using drugs. Drug use is heavily promoted through social media, music, movies, and video games—all of these reach young people, influence them, and can lead to the initiation of drug use.

Unlike other social issues such as poverty, delinquency, corruption, and terrorism, substance use is not as visible—it does not happen openly. Could we believe that its scale is not that large?

This is false. Even if it is not always visible, drug use is very widespread in our society, and young people are the most vulnerable social group. Current trends focus on introducing cheap drugs to the market that cause addiction in a very short time while also having a devastating effect on consumers' health. As a secondary consequence, this leads to an exponential increase in drug use. As a further result, we are increasingly seeing people on the streets under the influence of psychoactive substances—drug use is becoming more and more visible.

1. In a special session of the United Nations General Assembly on drugs (UNGASS 2016), 193 member states defined drug addiction as a complex multifactorial health disorder, characterized by its chronic and recurrent nature, which can be prevented and treated, and not as a result of moral failure or criminal behavior.

How important is prevention within the National Drug Strategy, and how is this process carried out?

The National Anti-Drug Strategy places special emphasis on drug use prevention activities. Interventions take place at all levels: school, family, and community. The activities and projects carried out are diverse and target all age groups. Some examples include: information sessions, prevention campaigns, peer education, initiation and implementation of projects aimed at preventing drug use, the creation of preventive video materials, and the promotion of volunteer activities.

Many parents show interest—albeit a late one, I would say—in the topic of drug use. Some of them believe that their child would never be tempted to try drugs. These same parents admit that they have never discussed the topic of drugs with their child but still expect them to behave in a mature and responsible manner.

Are parents prepared to address this topic with their child?

They should be. Parents can never exclude this risk; they must be aware that it exists and that it can affect their child. I have had cases in which model children with very good academic results and who had a healthy emotional and physical development became addicted to drugs in a very short time. The reality shows, however, that there is a large segment of parents who do not correctly appreciate the magnitude of this social problem, or do not understand the enormous pressure that the peer group can exert on their children regarding consumption. The unwillingness to know more about the subject of drugs turns them into parents unprepared to address this topic. Specialists from all fields of education, social assistance, police should put this topic on their agenda.

Sociologists and psychologists are particularly interested in identifying risk factors associated with drug use. Most people believe that young users come from families of drug users or are part of marginalized groups.

In fact, what are the reasons why a teenager or young person ends up using drugs?

The causes are multiple. In fact, we can talk about a combination of these. Some causes that can lead to drug use are curiosity about the effects of drug use, the group of friends or the pressure of the group of friends. This is one of the most important factors that can lead to the onset of drug use. Many young people experience cravings for the first time in the group of friends. Another factor could be certain problems that young people face, and drug use is falsely seen as a solution to them. Young people must be aware of the fact that drug use does not solve problems, drug use is a problem in itself. Other factors that can lead to drug use would be insufficient information about its effects. Young people tend to see only the positive side in drug use: how it makes them feel, a way to have fun, to lower inhibitions, to be accepted, to stand out, etc. They are also not interested in the negative aspects: how quickly they cause addiction, how many people have died from overdoses, how many have become addicted and never recovered, or who have been permanently affected by the substances they consumed.

A very rich literature emphasizes the fundamental role that the family plays in preventing drug use in children. Various authors show that there are positive and negative parenting practices; that it is in the power of the parent to raise a child resistant to the temptation of use.

If you could give all parents a message on this topic, what would it be?

Never underestimate the possibility of drug use. To be well-informed about new trends and to spend as much time as possible with their child. To talk about the risks of drug use with their child.

What should all children know about drugs?

That they are dangerous, that they are addictive, and most importantly, that they cannot control them. I have met many young people who have started using drugs with the false impression that they are in control of their drug use, that they can stop whenever they want. Young people should know that drugs are designed to be addictive, and once you become addicted, the road to recovery is very difficult, and the trauma that results from this process is often permanent.

Who are the most valuable partners of drug prevention and counseling centers?

It is not possible to make a ranking of them. Anyone who wants to get involved in drug demand reduction activities is welcome to do so. Thus, the partners of the prevention centers range from public institutions with skills in the field to non-governmental associations, volunteers and peer educators.

How is drug addiction treated in Romania? What are the services that the family of an addicted teenager can call on?

First of all, for the services offered to be effective, the teenager who is addicted to drugs must be aware of the fact that he has a problem, and want to solve it. It is not enough for his family members to want this. In fact, this is the first step towards rehabilitation. The services offered within the centers for prevention, assessment and anti-drug counseling for drug users are: medical evaluation, psychological counseling and social counseling.

The concepts of dependence and addiction have entered our vocabulary. Today we already know that there is such a thing as an internet addiction, video games or even a candy and that the mechanism of addiction is similar regardless of the object of dependence.

Is drug dependence different? Is it more dangerous than the others?

Dependence is dangerous in general. Drug dependence is dangerous because it affects the drug user from a medical, physical and psychological point of view, from the point of view of the way in which he relates to the society in which we live and from a legal point of view.

Given the complexity of the factors that interact in determining behavior resistant to drug temptation, what is the dimension that should be improved in this process of preventing consumption in adolescents?

I would like to emphasize a particularly important aspect that represents a less practiced component of the anti-drug strategy, namely prevention in the family. Throughout my career, I have carried out perhaps thousands of hours of prevention with students of all ages and I have been able to observe that their receptivity varies depending on several factors. Talking to these children and in groups and in particular, I have been able to clearly distinguish the profile of the child receptive to these anti-drug messages, a profile outlined in a certain type of family. Therefore, I can state with certainty that the importance of the family in preventing the consumption of alcohol, tobacco and drugs is particularly important to protect the health and well-being of its members, especially children and adolescents. At the same time, however, the family can be the place where drug use begins (children or adolescents are unintentionally pushed towards it) but at the same time the family can be

the place where drug use can stop depending on the willingness of the family to adapt and face new challenges.

Based on this idea, a disorganized or absent family can generate attitudes that favor the beginning of drug use among young people. However, often, even behind an apparently healthy upbringing, small factors can be hidden that can trigger the onset of drug use. At the same time, a united family, with healthy relationships and open communication, can provide a safe and supportive environment for young people and is an essential protective factor against drug use.

Often there is an enormous difference between parents' knowledge about drug use and what their children know about this phenomenon, these differences must be reduced in order to provide an adequate education to children. Parents have an important role in educating children about the risks and consequences of drug use. Correct and objective information can help young people make informed decisions, and the education provided by parents will be "tested" when the young person is not under their supervision and has the opportunity to use drugs. The choice that the child will make is largely influenced by the education received at home.

Let's not forget that parents are role models for children and a healthy lifestyle, without the use of harmful substances, can positively influence children's behavior.

Some known strategies for preventing drug use can be based on the following approaches:

- Encourage open and honest communication by actively listening to children's concerns and offering emotional support when needed. In the absence of these elements, the child can find satisfaction in peer groups where psychoactive substances are consumed.
- Establish clear limits on the use of harmful substances by explaining the reasons behind these rules and ensure that they are respected. These explanations should be updated on the latest trends related to drug use, thoroughly motivated and understandable to children.

- Spending quality time together these common activities can strengthen relationships and provide healthy alternatives to drug use.
- Supervise children's activities by knowing their children's activities, their friends and the places they frequent. All of this can help you identify potential warning signs.
- Recognizing warning signs pay attention to any sudden changes in children's behavior, such as social isolation, decreased school performance or mood swings.

In conclusion, drug prevention is a shared responsibility of all family members, let's not forget that through communication, education and mutual support, we can create a safe and protected environment for all. It is particularly important to understand that prevention is not a singular event, but a continuous process.



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