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FAMILY MENTORING: SHARING LESSONS LEARNED ON PILOTING THE STATE STANDARD OF THE SOCIAL SUPPORT SERVICE REVISED TO BETTER ADDRESS THE NEEDS OF FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN EXPERIENCING DIFFICULT LIFE CIRCUMSTANCES

Abstract. The article delineates crucial updates pertaining to the State Standard of the social service of the social support of families / individuals experiencing difficult life circumstances – a predominant social service in Ukraine. The revised draft of the Standard was formulated by incorporating an analysis of the existing practice of the social service aligned with the current standard of 2016. This was complemented by a comprehensive review of recent normative documents regulating social services provision, alongside an exploration of international approaches in social work with vulnerable families and children. The piloting phase of the revised Standard draft spanned from May to October 2023 and encompassed 109 social services providers engaging approximately 200 social workers. Fundamental innovations introduced in the revised Standard primarily focused on refining the scope of recipients for the social service, emphasizing its content towards fostering social and parental competencies aimed at augmenting parental capability to address children's needs. Furthermore, the revision introduced the concept of a “family mentor” approach, emphasizing collaborative, empowering, and skill-building interaction between social worker and client. Within the ambit of the draft of the revised Standard, specialized tools were devised to assess the individual needs of the social service recipient, formulate individualized plan, conduct final monitoring, and evaluate quality of social service provision. The piloting phase corroborated the relevance of the proposed changes to the current Standard, underscoring the necessity for approval of the draft Standard, with minor adjustments resulting from the piloting process.

Keywords: Family mentor; Social Service; revised State Standard; Social Support; Family with children; Difficult life circumstances; Piloting.

INTRODUCTION

Social services are a modern form of care of a state for its citizens serving as a pivotal mechanism in advancing societal welfare (Pinker, 2023). In Ukraine, social services, alongside cash-based social assistance, constitute integral components of the social welfare model. Their primary objectives encompass the prevention, resolution, and mitigation of difficult life circumstances experienced by individuals or families. The framework governing the provision of modern social services, as well as ensuring their accessibility at the community level, was developed with the enactment of the Law of Ukraine “On Social Services” in 2019. According to this legislation, social services are administered in adherence to state standards.

The state standard defines content and volume, rules and regulations, conditions and procedures for the provision of a social service, and also sets requirements for ensuring the required level of its accessibility and quality. Piloting is a stage of developing a state standard of social service. It is carried out to determine the possibility of its further practical application (Order of the Ministry of Social Policy of Ukraine № 282 “*Procedure of elaboration of state standard of a social service*”, 2012). Besides this task, the piloting process performs several important functions: experimentation, demonstration, implementation and learning (Ettelt et al., 2014), as well as mobilizing resources and resolving potential ambiguities and conflicts associated with innovations (Bailey et al., 2017).

The social support for families / individuals experiencing difficult life circumstances is a complex community based social service, that is one of the most commonly provided by social services centers. These centers are the most widespread institutions among social service providers, mainly communally owned, as they exercise the mandate of local governments to ensure the provision of social services to the population of territorial community (Law of Ukraine “*On Local Self-Government in Ukraine*”, 1997). According to the data provided by the Ministry of Social Policy of Ukraine (hereinafter – Ministry of Social Policy), there were 22,178 recipients of the social service in 2022, which is 11.5% of all families and individuals in difficult life circumstances.

According to the current state standard of the social service of social support for families/ individuals experiencing difficult life circumstances, approved by the Order of the Ministry of Social Policy No. 318 of 31.03.2016 (hereinafter – the current Standard), this service includes a set of activities, including: needs assessment, preparation of an individualized plan, identification of ways to solve problems, regular meetings or visits, assistance in obtaining other services, developing skills to overcome or minimize difficult life circumstances. In most cases, this service is considered to be the key social service in work with families with children. Especially when there is a need to develop parental competences: in cases with the risk of child neglect, child abuse, or placement of child in alternative care, included residential facility for round-the-clock stay that still exist in Ukraine.

At the same time, the definition of the content of the social service in the current Standard is not sufficiently practice-oriented and too broad, that complicates its application (Liutyi & Havryliuk, 2020; *Services for pregnant women*, 2021). In fact, the procedure for providing of the social service is identical to the case management procedure. The reason for this is that the social support service for families /individuals was a universal tool before

the reform of the social services system and covered the entire range of social work with vulnerable families.

This article seeks to advocate for the necessity of amending the current state standard governing the social support of families or individuals experiencing difficult life circumstances, considering lessons learned from piloting the revised Standard. Correspondingly, the objectives are as follows:

- Identification of key innovations to be integrated into the current Standard.
- Presentation of the piloting methods and the resultant findings concerning the revised Standard.
- Identification of necessary alterations for the draft Standard based on piloting outcomes.

The study was conducted through a thematic analysis of existing research and publications, as well as an analysis of empirical data obtained during piloting of the revised Standard, and reflections from supervisors overseeing social workers that provided the social service during the piloting phase.

ANALYSIS OF RESEARCH AND PUBLICATIONS

The Ukrainian scientific discourse contains mainly educational materials related to the provision of the social service (Zvereva et al., 2010; Kyianytsia & Petrochko, 2017; Liubetska, 2018) and the best implemented practice of working with vulnerable families and children (Moroz et al., 2008; Dashchakivska, Stelmakh & Martynenko, 2021). In our view there is a lack of publications or surveys that analyzes the effectiveness of the social service or compare it with other models of social support for vulnerable families with children.

In practice, the provision of the social support service for families /individuals experiencing difficult life circumstances needs to be improved. The surveys conducted by the “Support to Ukraine’s Reforms for Governance Project”, funded by Global Affairs Canada, implemented by Alinea International (hereinafter – the SURGe project) in cooperation with the Ministry of Social Policy and other partners (*Access of children with special educational needs to inclusive education, 2021; Implementation of the practice of patronage, 2021; Services for pregnant women, early age children, 2021; Workload of social work specialists, 2022*), and observation of the practice of providing the service demonstrate problematic aspects as follows:

- low frequency of meetings with recipient of the service;
- use of inspection of family instead of home visits in order to support, develop the necessary skills, establish relationships with the family members, etc;
- pretentious attitude towards recipient, that obstructs trusting relationships;
- insufficiently developed individual approach in interaction with recipient due to difficulties in identifying its strengths, lack of understanding the reasons that led to a difficult life situation, etc;
- monitoring of housing conditions, assistance in processing documents and cash social benefits are mostly used activities but skills development is rarely applied;
- low level of interaction with other organizations that could be involved in solving the problem situation of client, etc.

These problematic aspects are related to systemic gaps in the system of social service provision, such as insufficient number of social work professionals; identification of families in difficult life circumstances at the stage of high complexity of the case; lack of interagency cooperation; lack of professional education of large number of social workers and case managers, etc. However, specifying the range of recipients and the content of the service, filling it with practical tools for interaction with recipient, and taking into account changes into the normative regulation would make the service more practice-oriented, its provision more professional and increase its quality.

The study of foreign experience demonstrates that social support for vulnerable families with children can be effective only through a comprehensive integrated approach that combines financial assistance, community based social services and home visits. Such approach can improve quality of parental care, reduce the risks of child maltreatment, and have a positive impact on child health and development (Berger & Font, 2015). Literature review shows that regular home visits reduce the risk of domestic violence recurrence (Niland, Zukiewicz & Sama-Miller, 2020), symptoms of depression in pregnant women, and speeds up diagnosis and access to necessary services (Tandon et al., 2020). At the same time, there are several meta-studies that argue impossibility to prove statistically a direct positive impact of the home visits on positive outcomes for mothers in difficult life circumstances and their children due to the influence of multiple factors on their situation (Bennett et al., 2007; Macdonald et al., 2007). In support to this thesis, some studies have emphasized the impact of meso-factors, such as community disadvantage on mothers' engagement in home visits and changes in family life. This impact increases when factors such as poor housing conditions and maternal mental health conditions were added (Bae et al., 2019).

A more detailed analysis of the provision of social support to vulnerable families with children in some European countries and the United States has revealed that the social service “family assistant” in Poland and “the social service for the development and support of social skills at home” in Lithuania need special attention. Those services correspond to the existing social support service in Ukraine by content and socio-cultural context.

For example, the corresponding service in Lithuania (Sprendimas Nr. T-369 “*Dėl socialinių įgūdžių ugdymo*, 2020) is also provided at the place of residence/stay of the recipient and focuses on the development of his/her social skills, regardless of the vulnerabilities (the same service can be provided to an adult with a disability and a family with children). The tasks of the social service are as follows:

- providing emotional support, increasing the motivation of client to participate in skill development activities, for example, positive parenting, family strengthening, non-violent behavior training, addiction treatment, etc;
- disseminating knowledge and information with the scope of improving the situation of the family, developing family and social relations, organizing family self-help groups, and other preventive activities;
- providing intermediary support to families in applying to various state or municipal program of support, etc.

The social service “family assistant” in Poland focuses on parenting competencies and aims to support families which have or are expecting children. It is preventive by its nature, as it is provided in cases of prenatal loss or notification of the probability of having a

child with a disability (Ustawa “*O wsparciu kobiet w ciąży i rodzin “Za życiem”*”, 2016). Attention should be paid to the approach expressed in its name “family assistant”, because it emphasizes the leading role of recipient in changing his/her situation. Support offered by a “family assistant” in case of a crisis pregnancy or a family with a child with a disability includes:

- counseling on infant care, household budget management, etc.;
- providing information about the support services (including creating a catalog of services together with a woman / family);
- assistance in family life management, performance of household duties, professional development and job search, planning family leisure, etc;
- mediation between family and educational, medical institutions for children, executive authorities, etc;
- delivering of information about the functions of social service providers, family and child support centers, etc.

Summarizing the analysis of research, publications, and existing practices of social support for families with children, it should be recognized that the social protection of this group of recipients is a challenge for different countries due to its close connection with child protection issues (Datchenko, 2022). Elaboration of amendments to the current state standard of the social service of social support of families / individuals experiencing difficult life circumstances should take into account the existing practice of the social service provision, its strengths and weaknesses, as well as foreign models and approaches that correlate with Ukrainian system of social service provision and are similar in socio-cultural terms.

Key innovations to the current Standard

In view of the above, within the framework of cooperation between the Ministry of Social Policy and the SURGe project, a draft of the revised state standard of the social service of the social support of families /individuals experiencing difficult life circumstances (hereinafter - the draft of the Standard) was developed and piloted. The objectives of updating the Standard were as follows:

1. To specify content of the social service by making it more practice-oriented and focusing on the development of parental competencies.
2. To confine the range of recipients of the service by prioritizing vulnerable families with the risk of child neglect.
3. To outline the list of competencies of the social worker who provides the service.
4. To elaborate specific tools for assessing the individual needs of recipient of the social services, developing an individual service plan, conducting final monitoring and evaluation of the quality of social service provision.

Thus, based on the analysis of international experience and national social work practice, the key innovations proposed in the draft Standard are:

1. The purpose of the social service is focused on the development of social and parental competencies of recipient in order to increase the ability to meet the needs of child. The activities that could be provided within the service are specified at the Appendix 3 to the draft of the Standard.

2. The list of recipients of social services has been narrowed, with a focus on the vulnerable groups at the highest risk of inadequate childcare and upbringing.

3. An approach that should be used during the provision of social services is defined as based on partnership, empowerment, and skill-building interaction. The professional role of social worker in interaction with recipient is defined as a “family mentor”. His / her main activities include motivational counseling, home visits, and social and parenting skills training.

4. Specific tools have been developed to assess the individual needs of the social service recipient (Appendix 1 to the draft Standard), to elaborate an individualized plan of the social service (Appendix 2 to the draft Standard), to conduct final monitoring of the social service provided (Appendix 4 to the draft Standard) and evaluate its quality (Appendix 5 to the draft Standard).

Methods of piloting

The revised Standard was piloted in 23 regions of Ukraine in accordance with the Order of the Ministry of Social Policy № 58-N “On Piloting the Draft of the State Standard of the Social Service of Social Support of Families/ Individuals Experiencing Difficult Life Circumstances” published May 10, 2023. The duration of the piloting was 4 months (from May 15 to October 15, 2023).

The selection of social service providers to participate in the pilot was carried out by the Ministry of Social Policy on the defined criteria:

- registration of the provider in the Register of Social Service Providers;
- at least 2 case managers/social workers working with families with children and at least one of them has a degree in social work/social pedagogy/psychology;
- capability to carry out home visits 2 times a week;
- consent and willingness to participate in face-to-face training, monthly webinars, online supervision meetings, and to complete reporting and monitoring documentation.

As a result of the selection process, 105 communal social service providers and 4 non-governmental organizations took part in the piloting. It should be highlighted that the number of social service providers participated in the piloting of revised Standard is rather high, which indicates the significant popularity of the social service and the interest in its improvement. For comparison, 34 providers took part in the piloting of the social day care service for children with disabilities (Ministry of Social Policy, 2021), and 19 providers took part in the piloting of the social support service in inclusive education (NUSH, 2020).

Research hypotheses with which the piloting process was launched were as follows:

1. Confining the circle of recipients and focusing the content of the social service on the development of parenting skills will make its provision more practice oriented.

2. Specific tools in the provision of social services will help to engage the recipient of the social service in assessment of their own individual needs, including fulfillment of care and upbringing responsibilities, elaboration of plan of the social service, its evaluation and conducting the final monitoring.

3. Adaptation of the “family mentor” approach through its actualization in the revised Standard, relevant training and methodological support for social service providers will help to build a more trusting relationship between provider and recipient, which in turn will

affect the level of cooperation between them and the recipient's involvement in more independent decision-making regarding its situation.

Methodological and technical support for the piloting process was provided by the SURGe project. This support consisted of 3-day offline training conducted for social workers on the content and organization of social service providing in accordance with the revised Standard in May 2023; 4 webinars on the development of parenting and social skills, family budget management, dealing with the domestic violence and child abuse; 3 supervisory meetings regarding the practice of individual need assessment, individual plan elaboration and emotional support of the social workers.

Social service providers who participated in the piloting completed a short online questionnaire monthly in order to deliver information on the progress of the pilot, raise questions and difficulties, as well as reveal difficulties and strong points of the work according to the revised Standard. At the end of the pilot, they filled out a final online questionnaire and sent final report on the results of the pilot to the Ministry of Social Policy with suggestions and comments to the draft of the Standard. Thus, the main source of data on the results of the pilot is the feedback of specialists who worked with families according to the revised Standard.

RESULTS

The results of the piloting presented here are based on the responses of final online questionnaires completed by 102 social service providers. According to the data obtained, 199 social workers piloted the draft of the Standard.

1. Recipients of the social service of the social support of families / individuals experiencing difficult life circumstances

During the pilot, 298 families with 534 children received the social support service according to the revised Standard. The families included in the work usually had several vulnerability factors. The most common factor was the avoidance of parental responsibilities, which accounted for 59.4% of the total number of families. In second place was the families which raise child with a disability (12.4%) and families whose parent has a disability (8.1%). Other factors were represented in smaller numbers: families in which child abuse has been detected; families whose children were taken away from their parents without deprivation of their parental rights; families whose children are placed in alternative institutional care; families with children whose members are war veterans or defenders of Ukraine; families where there is a dispute between mother and father in divorce regarding the place of residence of children and the participation of a parent in their upbringing; families in which children systematically leave the place of residence without permission; underage, single mothers; families whose children are placed in the temporary foster care (patronage); families with children whose members are prisoners of war or missing; women who have expressed an intention to abandon their newborn child or are at risk of abandonment; internally displaced families; families of victims of domestic violence; families which parents abuse psychoactive substances. All these vulnerability factors, except for the last three, have been foreseen in the draft Standard among the recipients of the social service. During the piloting, only one vulnerable group among the intended

recipients of the social services was not represented: families whose parents' parental rights have been restored.

2. Results of work with families / individuals during the piloting

Professionals who provided the social service to families according to the revised Standard revealed that the tools (of individual needs assessment, of individual plan elaboration, etc.) helped them to identify the strength of family and this ensured better family involvement and partnership development. The final data indicate that 70% of the families participated in the work increased their motivation to change because of interaction with social worker.

Over the 4-month period of piloting of the draft of the Standard social workers managed to achieve positive results in working with families of social service recipients. The main results are presented in the table. 1.

Table 1: Positive outcomes achieved in the work with recipients during the piloting of the revised Standard

<i>Achievement</i>	<i>N. of families</i>	<i>Percentage of the total amount, %</i>
Improvement of parenting skills	186	62.4
Ensured access to necessary services for the child/children/adult family members	128	42.9
Developed relationships between the child and mother/father/other caregiver	117	39.2
Improved housing and living issues	112	37.6
Managed health issues of the child/ adult family members	103	34.6
Improved relationships between adult members of family	88	29.5
Employment of an adult family member	46	15.4
Reintegration of a child from the alternative care to the family	8	2.7

Social workers also expressed as positive achievements: preparation of necessary documents, developing household management skills, organizing a safe space for child, planning family budget, improving intra-family communication, psycho-emotional climate, treatment of alcohol dependence, etc. In one case, placement of a child into an institution with round-clock stay was prevented.

By the end of the piloting period, 97 families (32% of the total) had concluded their eligibility to receive the social service because they fulfilled the individual plan or refused to receive the service. Among them, in 76 cases (78% of the total) the level of implementation of the individual plan was considered as sufficient and high. The work continues with the rest, given the need.

3. Piloting of the procedures

The draft of the Standard defines the algorithm for the provision of the social service, considering the general algorithm for case management, which is defined by the Article 18 of the Law of Ukraine "On Social Services" (2019) and the Procedure for the Organization of Social Services (2020). So, the direct provision of the social service begins after the respective decision made by the social protection authority, if the assessment of the needs in

social services has confirmed an exigency of this particular social service. After the decision the next steps are as follows:

- 1) assessment of individual needs (the form set out in Appendix 1), that may take up to 15 working days;
- 2) elaboration of an individual plan of the social service, that takes up to 5 working days;
- 3) signing an agreement on the provision of the social service and individual plan;
- 4) direct provision of the social service;
- 5) conducting final monitoring (during the last month of the social service provision).

In accordance with paragraph 6.2 of the draft of the Standard, the period of the delivery of the social service should not exceed 12 months. The duration of each case is determined specifically, and indicated in the individualized plan, considering the needs of recipient, his/her level of motivation for change, and the complexity of the case.

Since meetings with recipient, including home visits, are one of the key methods of provision of the social service, the draft of the Standard regulates their frequency: once a week at the initial stage of social service provision, which lasts up to 2 months, and at least once every 2 weeks at the next stage of social service provision.

The piloting confirmed that the procedures and timeframes proposed in the draft of the Standard generally meet the practice and specifics of social work with vulnerable families. Most of the respondents of the monthly reports noted that the time assigned for the key stages of social service delivery was sufficient. The frequency of interaction with recipient, as laid down in the algorithm of the social service, ensures the development of partnership and dynamics of the necessary changes. At the same time, in the final report, some providers suggested

- extending the period of the individual needs assessment to 20 working days, and the period for individual plan elaboration to 7 working days;
- allowing the possibility of extending the period of social service provision beyond 12 months, if needed;
- increasing the frequency of home visits at the initial stage of social service provision to “at least 2 times a week” in order to establish a relationship between a social worker and a recipient.

Despite the methodological correctness of the latter proposal, its implementation will be at risk. A lot of providers, mainly from rural communities, emphasized difficulties due to lack of transportation and time resources to visit recipients living in settlements far from the location of the social service center. In addition, many providers drew attention to the need to reduce the maximum allowable workload for a social worker from 10 to 5-7 recipients of the social service simultaneously, which is also justified by the heavy workload of social work professionals.

4. **Piloting of the approaches**

According to the paragraph 1.2 of the draft of the Standard, the provision of the social service relies on partnership, empowerment, and skill-building. The approach is rooted in traditional social work concepts of the client strengths (Munford, Sanders & Maden, 2012; Bellinger & Ford, 2022), the self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997) and the motivation for change (Miller & Rollnick, 2012). This approach is reflected in the

professional role of a social worker in interaction with a recipient called “family assistant” and in the principles of the provision of the service: accessibility and openness; dignity, respect, partnership, and non-discrimination; individual approach and comprehensiveness; family-oriented approach; legality and safety of recipient and provider of the social service; privacy and confidentiality. Also, the tools for providing social service (individual needs assessment, individual plan, and final monitoring) were designed in order to take into account recipient's opinion about its own life situation, his / her readiness to change, and to express partnership between provider and recipient.

The piloting revealed a greater involvement of specialists in the work with recipients, which is a consequence of more detailed needs assessment, more frequent home visits and realization of the principles underlying the revised Standard. The respondents emphasized the establishment of trusting relationships with recipients, which led to their greater involvement, activation, and caused positive changes in their life situation. Here are some quotes from the reporting questionnaires:

“Trusting relationships are being built between us and our clients. It has become easier for us to find the necessary tools to solve the problems that our families face. Our clients have gained confidence in their abilities.”

“Recipients of the social service have shown interest in the changes because of the individual approach to each family. The role of social worker has changed in this pilot: family mentor is an assistant to the family, not a problem solver for the family.”

At the same time, feedback from other pilot participants indicates difficulties in establishing contact with recipient of the social service and in conducting motivational counseling:

“The main problem that arose during the provision of the social service was a low motivation of client to change and aggressive attitude towards social worker in one of the families. A reason for this was frequent visits to the family, which were carried out according to the requirements.”

“If we start working with an 'old known' client, it is somewhat difficult for both, the social worker and the client, to switch to a 'new' form of interaction.”

Several respondents raised a need for further detailed training on the motivational counseling which could be helpful to deal with the difficulties in interaction with recipient.

5. Piloting of the instruments

As already mentioned, the draft of the Standard included specific tools for individual needs assessment (Appendix 1 to the draft Standard), individualized plan elaboration (Appendix 2 to the draft Standard), final monitoring conducting (Appendix 4 to the draft Standard) and evaluation of quality of the social service provision (Appendix 5 to the draft Standard). The piloting confirmed a logical connection between all the tools and their functionality to achieve the goals of the social service provision. In particular, the individual needs assessment form helps to identify the strengths and needs of the recipient in the frame of fulfilling care and upbringing responsibilities, and allows prioritizing tasks for further work, taking into account the motivation of family members. Many respondents noted in their feedback that the tools help to provide social services in a more personalized way.

“The tools elaborated in the draft of the Standard allow more professional needs assessment and better planning of the social services, as well as more effective provision of the support to the family.”

In addition, the individual needs assessment tool allows the recipient to be involved immediately in the analysis of its own situation. This is facilitated by self-assessment scales and a list of indicative questions to recipient, which are rooted on motivational counseling techniques.

“Assessment of the individual needs of the family helps them to look at existence of problems that they haven’t perceived before, seeing the situation as normal for themselves and their children.”

At the same time, the use of the new tools created difficulties for the social workers due to their novelty and the amount of time required to fill out the individual needs assessment form, as well as the complex wording of some questions.

DISCUSSION

Summarizing the results of the piloting phase, it is worth noting that the hypotheses were verified. Specifically, the findings confirmed the stated hypotheses:

1. Confining the circle of the recipients and focusing on the development of parental competencies in the content of the social service make its provision more specific, practice-oriented and personalized.

2. The use of the “family mentor” approach has a positive impact on the developing of a more trusting relationship between the provider and the recipient, higher level of cooperation between them, and increases the possibility of involving the recipient in more independent solution of issues related to its situation.

3. Specific tools provided in the draft of the Standard reflect the approaches and principles of social service provision. Their complementarity and role in personalization of the intervention are confirmed.

The draft of the Standard must be finalized to harmonize the timeline of various stages of the social service provision, improve the individual needs assessment tool (regarding complicated phrasing of certain questions), and establish the maximum workload of a social worker when serving multiple recipients simultaneously.

An important factor influencing the successful application of the draft of the Standard was the training of social workers conducted before the start of the piloting phase, as well as supervisory and methodological support during the piloting. This support for the specialists contributed to their identification in the role of “family mentor”, as well as to their sense of self-efficacy and mutual assistance on a peer-to-peer basis. Based on this fact, we can conclude that there is a need for preliminary training of specialists to provide the social service in accordance with the revised Standard.

At the same time, when discussing the results of the piloting of the draft of the Standard, attention should be paid to the systemic difficulties in provision of the social services that caused complication during the piloting. In particular, it is the insufficient number of social workers in social services centers, which increases workload of the existing ones. At the same time, the profession of a social work specialist (social worker) remains underpaid and has little prestige (Lomonosova & Filipchuk, 2022). Another problem is a lack of psychologists among the staff of social service providers, which makes

the interdisciplinary approach impossible when processing traumatic experiences or providing psychological support to recipients. As mentioned before, there is also an infrastructural problem that consists in a lack of transport of the social service provider or public transportation to reach the families living in remote rural areas. The impact of these systemic factors can significantly reduce the quality of the social service provision, even if it is provided in accordance with the draft of the Standard.

In addition, a relevant issue identified during the pilot is digitalization of documentation in the process of social services provision. The availability of an electronic case management tool would reduce the workload of a social work specialist in terms of filling out documentation and allocate time for meaningful preparation for interaction with service recipient and its analysis. Analysis of the workload of social workers in pilot communities in Lviv Oblast (2022) revealed that during provision of the social service under the current Standard, 5% of the work time was spent on preparing family visits, 14% - for conducting the direct visits, 49% - for filling the documentation, 26% - on traveling to the place of recipient home, 5% on service-related conversations. The issue of digitalization of social services goes beyond the provision of this particular social service and is related to the implementation of the strategy for the digital transformation of the social sphere (Resolution of Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine No. 1353-p "*On approval of the Strategy for Digital Transformation of the Social Sphere*", 2020), which includes formation of the Unified Social Information System (USIS), the Register of Social Service Providers and Recipients, digitalization of the case management procedure, etc. Despite the existing barriers and risks, the expected results of this process are quite high (Danyliuk, Dmytryshyn & Horan, 2023).

Summarizing the data obtained by piloting, we can conclude that the provision of the social service of the social support of families / individuals in accordance with the draft of the Standard is an effective way to work with vulnerable families with children which need developing of parental competencies to ensure the care and upbringing of a child in the family. From a conceptual perspective, this social service has the potential to prevent institutionalization of children and thus serves as a preventive measure in the area of child protection. Further research is necessary to assess the effect of social service provision in accordance with the revised standard on positive changes in the lives of families who received the service. This research should focus specifically on the potential of the service to prevent the removal of a child from a family or reunify a previously removed child with their biological parents.

CONCLUSION

The article discusses the modifications made to the current Standard of the social service of social support of families / individuals experiencing difficult life circumstances. It highlights the significant improvements proposed in the draft of the Standard, the method of its pilot testing, the results obtained, and identifies the primary aspects that require amendment before the revised Standard is ratified. The revised Standard introduces several key innovations, such as narrowing the range of social service recipients, focusing on developing social and parental competencies to enhance parents' ability to meet their child's needs, and establishing a "family mentor" approach for the interaction between social workers and recipients. This approach emphasizes partnership, empowerment, motivation,

and skill-development. In accordance with the present regulatory documents and the content of the draft of the Standard, specific tools have been developed for the individualized needs assessment, individual plan development, final monitoring conducting, and evaluation of the quality of the social service provision.

The piloting of the proposed changes to the current Standard confirms their relevance in addressing practical issues related to organizing interaction with recipients, considering their motivation, and developing necessary resources. The “family mentor” approach has had a positive impact on identifying the strengths of recipients of social services, developing partnerships with them, and empowering them. However, certain technical aspects of the draft of the Standard require improvements. First, it is determining the maximum allowable workload for a social worker. Second, there is a need to change the wording in the assessment form to make it clearer and more accessible. With these aspects finalized, the draft of the Standard could be recommended for approval.

The piloting process also confirmed the importance of training of the specialists to provide the social services according to the revised Standard and their methodological and supervisory support in the process. Additionally, the piloting demonstrated presence of institutional and infrastructural hindrances to effective and quality social service delivery that surpass the specific service. Overcoming these hindrances entails systemic solutions within the social services realm.

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АСИСТЕНТ СІМ'Ї: РЕЗУЛЬТАТИ АПРОБАЦІЇ ПРОЄКТУ ДЕРЖАВНОГО СТАНДАРТУ СОЦІАЛЬНОЇ ПОСЛУГИ СОЦІАЛЬНОГО СУПРОВОДУ СІМЕЙ / ОСІБ, ЯКІ ПЕРЕБУВАЮТЬ У СКЛАДНИХ ЖИТТЄВИХ ОБСТАВИНАХ

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Анотація. У статті викладено основні зміни до державного стандарту соціальної послуги соціального супроводу сімей/осіб, які перебувають у складних життєвих обставинах, що є однією із найбільш поширених соціальних послуг в Україні. Оновлений проєкт стандарту був розроблений на основі аналізу існуючої практики надання соціальної послуги відповідно до чинного державного стандарту (затвердженого у 2016р.), врахування останніх нормативних документів, що регулюють надання соціальних послуг, а також вивчення іноземних моделей соціальної роботи з вразливими сім'ями та дітьми. Апробація оновленого проєкту державного стандарту тривала з травня по жовтень 2023 року та охопила 109 надавачів соціальних послуг із залученням близько 200 фахівців із соціальної роботи / соціальних працівників. Ключові новації, запроваджені в проєкті стандарту, стосувалися звуження кола отримувачів соціальної послуги, фокусування її змісту на формуванні соціальних та батьківських навичок з метою посилення спроможності батьків задовольняти потреби дітей. Крім того, оновлений державний стандарт ввів професійну роль «асистент сім'ї», що підкреслює засади взаємодії між працівником надавача та отримувачем соціальної послуги як базовані на партнерстві, наснаженні та розвитку навичок. В рамках проєкту державного стандарту соціальної послуги було розроблено спеціалізований інструментарій для оцінювання індивідуальних потреб отримувача соціальної послуги, складання індивідуального плану, проведення підсумкового моніторингу та оцінки якості надання соціальної послуги. Пілотування підтвердило початкові гіпотези та актуальність запропонованих змін до чинного державного стандарту соціальної послуги (2016), підкресливши необхідність затвердження проєкту стандарту з урахуванням результатів апробації.

Ключові слова: асистент сім'ї; соціальні послуги; оновлений державний стандарт; соціальний супровід; сім'я з дітьми; складні життєві обставини; пілотування.

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