

## Social pedagogy at the Department of Christian Education at the Sts Cyril and Methodius Faculty of Theology, Palacký University Olomouc, Czech Republic

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### Introduction

For more than ten years, the Sts Cyril and Methodius Faculty of Theology (CTMF UP) has taught social pedagogy. The programmes offered build on a dual base. They draw on Christian tradition and the very concrete need to offer help to people who find themselves trapped in difficult life situations. At the same time, they also expand the offerings of non-theology programmes at the faculty. Over the years we have built an environment which is highly appreciated by our students, one in which they can focus both on developing themselves and finding a way to success in the job market.

At present, in the academic year 2020/2021, the accreditation of the social pedagogy study programme is being offered in cooperation with the Faculty of Education, although for many years it was sponsored and carefully developed only by CMTF UP. Students are officially enrolled at the Faculty of Education, while many classes and seminars are still, as they have been since the start thirteen years ago, taught by the Department of Christian Education at our faculty, which still guarantees this study programme.

### The history of our programmes and their contents

Courses in social pedagogy are taught mainly by the Department of Christian Education, which was opened in 1993 and organised and run by Assoc. prof. Rudolf Smahel. Since then we have provided the faculty with courses in fields such as pedagogy, psychology and catechism, complementing the theological offerings in other departments. The idea of establishing social pedagogy as a study field at our faculty, introduced by Dr. Jiří Pospíšil and Dr. Jaroslava Martinů, dates back to 2004. Careful preparation and work to pass the accreditation process followed, and since 2007, when the first bachelor's programme was started at the Department of Christian Education, social pedagogy has been an important part of our faculty. In 2009, the offer was complemented with the possibility of earning a degree through part-time studies.

The idea of offering a complementary master's programme began shortly after the field had been established. This work was mainly carried out by Assoc. prof. Petra Potměšilová, who replaced Assoc. prof. Rudolf Smahel in 2016 and is the guarantor of the current social pedagogy study programme. Students first gained the possibility of earning a master's degree in 2015; this was followed by a part-time studies programme in 2017.

The aim of the programme is to deepen and develop the necessary knowledge and skills so that graduates are able to carry out their work independently and effectively. We focus on the managerial, creative and socio-pedagogical activities needed in practice. Design, implementation, and evaluation of preventive and intervention projects are important traits of the programme. Like the bachelor's, the master's programme is taught in cooperation with the Faculty of Education. The graduate profile of the bachelor's and master's programmes corresponds to the standards of the Association of Educators in Social Pedagogy, in whose creation Dr. Jiří Pospíšil and Dr. Milena Öbrink Hobzová participated.

From the beginning, our programmes have been strongly connected to the faculty's Christian role, and to the wider concept of social pedagogy. We put an emphasis on values and principles important in Christian tradition, and on their application in the educational process. This is reflected in the course offerings of our programmes. We teach a range of subjects, for example sociology, philosophy, law, social work and European cultural history, in which a wider ethical aspect is always present. The courses also involve pedagogy and psychology. Primary prevention in both institutionalised and non-institutionalised education is an ever-present theme, visible in subjects such as social pedagogy, social pathological phenomena, leisure pedagogy and management of leisure activities.

As a part of our wider profile, students are required to learn the methodology of leisure activities (drama, music, arts, science, humanities, computer science, physical education and physical recreation). They are prepared for working with a range of different groups, in both prevention and intervention, through a wide choice of facultative courses, such as alternative school systems, seminars in art therapy, experiential education, adult education, and introduction to the study of mass communication.

Our students also take part in an adaptation course, which takes place in the first year immediately after enrolment. The course is organized by the staff of the House of Ignác Stuchlý in Fryšták, specializing in work with children and youth. This course not only works as an ice-breaker and team-building opportunity, but also gives them experience with the methods of social pedagogy directly from the start of their studies. This course is also a part of the new accreditation in cooperation with the Faculty of Education.

One important feature of our study programmes is the connection of theory and practice, which is reflected in the concept of the final theses. Whereas our master's students deal with research into socio-pedagogical topics in their theses, bachelor's students may choose to either write a thesis or complete a bachelor's project. The idea of the projects is to find a partner in the practical field of social pedagogy (such as educational institutions, social services, non-profit organizations, etc.) and create specific ideas about how to develop activities for the organisation's target groups. This ultimately helps them to improve and also helps our students to find employment after their studies. Eventually, it also contributes to establishing the social pedagogue as a wider profession in society. This idea of theses has been kept in the current accreditation with the Faculty of Education.

Another feature is that we have always motivated our students to do internships to gather experience from social pedagogy in the real world. In this way, not only do they learn how to implement what they have learned, but they also meet the various groups that social pedagogues work with on an everyday basis, be they adults, youth or children.

### **The current form of the study of social pedagogy at CMTF UP**

The field has gone through some organisational changes lately. Since applying for the institutional accreditation in 2019, CMTF UP and the Faculty of Education have cooperated regarding the programmes (meaning that for the Faculty of Education it is a new study programme). This means that bachelor's programme students must choose to specialise in Education in Leisure Time (CMTF UP) or Prevention of Social Pathological Phenomena (Faculty of Education). However, both faculties participate equally in teaching the core courses.

The same situation prevails in the follow-up master's study (again in the case of both forms). The specialization chosen by CMTF UP is called Design and Management, and it corresponds to the traditions of the study accredited earlier at the faculty. The Faculty of Education instead offers Educational Counselling.

## Graduate profile

When studying social pedagogy at CMTF UP, the focus is always on the development of work competence with future target groups, whether children, youth or adults. It is important that our students are able to work with all future clients and help them to create values, attitudes and healthy lifestyles, and to find the meaning of life. In this, our firm foundation in Christian tradition is a beacon. It helps our students to develop the necessary skills and find the right motivation for their work in a way that will improve society („Změna akreditace,” 2018).

A number of our graduates have found employment over the full range of social pedagogy, for example in schools and educational facilities, as teaching assistants, leisure time teachers, or workers in social services (in low-threshold facilities for children and young people, low-threshold facilities for drug users, shelters, etc.). Many have ended up in management positions in these organizations, and often return to their alma mater to talk to students about their experience. Our graduates have also spread the good name of the faculty in other fields, such as child social and legal protection, human resources and media.

There are several reasons why our graduates value the faculty and the education they received. The first is that our courses are always connected to practice, and they develop the necessary skills not in a lecture hall, but in the place where they will work in the future. Another reason is the individual approach and friendly environment at the faculty. As a result, they tend to stay in contact with the faculty after having graduated, for example in 2015, when the conference *Social Pedagogy in Theory and Practice* took place, or the graduates' meeting at the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of social pedagogy in 2018.

## Science and research

The scientific scope of social pedagogy at CMTF UP is a result of the individual staff at the Department of Christian Education, united in the research of values and their reflection on education and leisure time. We also organise a bi-annual international conference called *Youth and Values, Values Education in the Context of a Pluralistic and Multicultural Society* in cooperation with Paidagogos – Society for Philosophy, Theory, and Praxis of Education. Over the years this has become a popular discussion platform for experts in the field of social pedagogy.

The department is also active in publishing within the field. One recent example is the monograph *Social pedagogy in theory and practice* (Potměšilová, 2013). It emphasizes the goals and methods in the work of a social pedagogue as well as the ethical and spiritual dimensions of pedagogical practice. This publication was followed by *Social pedagogy and its methods* (Sobková, Öbrink Hobzová, & Pospíšilová, 2015) two years later. In addition to methods, it also dealt with the concept of social pedagogy abroad (such as in Great Britain, Scandinavia, Germany and Poland). The central theme of values and value education appeared in another joint publication, *Reflections of emotions in the attitudes towards immigrants* (Sobková, Öbrink Hobzová, & Trochtová, 2016).

Our research focuses (often together with students within specific university research projects) on a range of topics: integration of people with disabilities, temperament of children with special needs (Assoc. prof. P. Potměšilová), social and personal development, including emotional and spiritual aspects (Dr. G. Šarníková), language education of adult immigrants, their integration and multicultural education (Dr. M. Öbrink Hobzová), the spiritual dimension of social pedagogy and development of natural human spirituality (Dr. M. Fojtíková Roubalová, Assoc. prof. L. Dřímál, A. Kožárková), and values and value education (Dr. L. Trochtová).

It should also be noted that two members of our staff, Dr. Jiří Pospíšil and Dr. Milena Öbrink Hobzová, participated in the foundation of the Association of Educators in Social Pedagogy in 2013, and they are members of the executive board. Being an editor of reviews and information, Dr. M. Öbrink Hobzová is also an active member of the editorial board of the journal *Social Education*.

## Conclusion

Social pedagogy at CMTF UP has come a long way since the time of its foundation as the “youngest” social pedagogy in the Czech Republic. It has turned into an attractive field of study, now an integral part of the Palacký University Olomouc, whose graduates can find a variety of employment opportunities. Our department is also involved in a wide range of cooperation with partners from other universities, and through the Association of Educators in Social Pedagogy we participate in discussions on the direction of Czech social pedagogy and the profession of social pedagogue.

The department has developed both its study programmes and research output since the beginning. Looking at the results, it is easy to see that we are going in the right direction. Based on the diligence that the members of the Department of Christian Education have demonstrated many times during the existence of social pedagogy, we can say that the further development of this study programme, if the conditions in society allow for it, is in good hands.

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