

THE EXPERIENCE OF CIP IN A FINNISH PERSPECTIVE DURING FIVE DECADES

A social worker's perspective of CIP during five decades from a Finnish point of view was the main theme of Susanne Holmström's thesis, which was accepted at the University of Helsinki in March 2006 as part of a Master's degree in Social Work

Having participated in CIP/Philadelphia in 1990-91 I wanted to know more about what Finnish social workers before me had learned from the CIP programs. The final analysis is based upon a survey/questionnaire which I sent to 98 social workers who had participated from the Programs first years 1957 to 1993 when the certain CIP era was ending. The 85 % answered. The overall impression was that the experience had a huge impact on the participants' professional and personal lives.

The social workers who had participated in CIP have reflected upon their experience of the exchange program from a both professional as well as a personal point of view. Most of the social workers participated when they had already been working as social workers in Finland. Someone called the participation an adventure; others said that the experience contributed to a development of their professional identity, a process that continues through out their lives. Meeting/ being confronted with different cultures, different ways of thinking was described as a process of finding one's own cultural belonging and professional identity. I found it challenging to reflect upon the meaning the participants have given the experience.

The answers were divided into three different groups which was in accordance with the historical development of CIP (Glenn Shive 1993): 1956-1965 The early CIP/ Henry B. Ollendorff and the Cleveland program; 1966-1979 The different affiliates taking form; 1980-1991 Post-Henry B. Ollendorff.

The participants in the **pioneers' 1957- 1965 group** described their exchange in CIP more in terms of a cultural exchange. They also refer to the new methods of community and group work they had the opportunity to get in touch with. International understanding was however more emphasized, often the experience was described as a cultural confrontation which you hadn't possibilities to in Finland of the fifties or sixties.

The period 1966 – 1979 can be seen as a period of professional profiling. The program experienced a boom with a high number of participants as social welfare and services developed in Finland. Most of the participants worked within health care, mental-health care or with substance abuse related fields. Those working with child and youth issues and the social workers working with

subsidence abuse seemed to be most professionally orientated. The participants found their stay very rewarding. There was openness in getting in touch with different methods of social work. Back home the participants could use many things they had learned in their work. Many participants expected to come to the original sources of social work – to the US that had seemed to be the leading country in many areas. For some social workers the participation was however, a disappointment and it appears that the level of American social work varied very much.

During **the period of 1980 – 1993** new groups of social workers attended the program. You find for example social workers working with issues of unemployment or social benefits in this group. Earlier this group had represented an orientation that hadn't been open to American influence in social work. Structural changes in social welfare and society in Finland opened up new professional interests.

For many social workers the time in the program was important as a sabbatical period. What you draw from the exchange experience depends on many factors. Many participants found that the carrier has indirectly been affected. It had broadened the carrier, deepened the way of how you work and of your life orientation. Many have gained confidence to manage in an international context. The international experience gave building stones for a development of both the professional and personal identity. The essential learning experience of the exchange program during all the different periods seems to be the interaction itself - the interaction between the participants, the interaction the participant has with the hosts and the colleges in the working setting. It helped the participants to gain new perspective on their work and their professional context as well as on their personal cultural identity.

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