



INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SOCIAL EDUCATORS

The AIEJI President Report of 2009 – 2013

The congress in May 2009 in Copenhagen gathered 600 people to discuss and develop social education. At the time, the global economic crisis had just begun and there was a collective feeling that for many social educators around the world, and the people they work with, the crisis would have a severe impact.

Unfortunately, 4 years later the situation has changed only to the worse. Many of AIEJI's members experience their work has been submitted to cuts and reduced public financial support. In Denmark, a large part of municipalities have made substantial cuts in areas where social educators work. We may have the best jobs in the world but we also face some tough challenges as we are often first in line to experience the effects of a society in deep economic crisis.

A global platform

Therefore, more than ever, we need to speak with a strong voice and we must stand together to continually develop and discuss our profession, social education. In 2009, we set out to create a global platform for social educators around the world, we wanted to make a place where social educators can find information, exchange experiences and be united.

The website

To fulfil this goal we created a new website that made it easier to communicate news and events and other relevant activities, and also made it easier for everyone using the site to comment on each post. On the website we also have all our publications and you can find links to other sites about social education.

Publications

AIEJI has in the last congress period continued its work to discuss and develop the theoretical framework of social education. Since last congress we have published two documents. The first one, "Working with persons with developmental disabilities – the role of the social educator", was published in 2010.

Persons With Developmental Disabilities

This document, as the title implies, discusses, in the light of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the role and responsibility of the social educator when working with persons with developmental disabilities. It discusses the ethical dilemmas social educators often face during their daily work and it discusses what the fulfilment of the universal human rights means for persons who, one way or another, are in public care and for the people who work with them who must make sure to know, respect and fulfil these rights.

Placed Children

The second document "The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and social education – children placed outside the home" was published earlier this year, February 2013. The document discusses the rights of placed children – for example the right to be heard and be involved in main decisions concerning their lives – and the role of social educators as guarantors of their rights.

Both documents are part of our on-going work of discussing and defining social educational work and the role of social educators.

Organisational Developments

AIEJI is by nature a grass-root organisation driven by personal enthusiasm and idealism of its members. This is a good thing but it also makes AIEJI very vulnerable and dependent on specific people and their commitment to AIEJI. Therefore the Nordic members of AIEJI have launched a proposal where the intention is, with approval from the General Assembly, in the coming congress period to work on making the board less vulnerable to personal changes while strengthening the regional bureaus of AIEJI.

The board

The idea is to change the composition of the board by reducing the number of board members to a total of 12 and appointing the majority of seats to organisational members keeping one seat each for institutional and individual members. A board constituted mainly by organisations will have a strong platform while also reaching more people through the member organisations.

Regional offices

At the same time, we wish to strengthen the regional offices. The regional offices should be able to initiate activities at a local level which they feel would benefit and be of interest to the members living in that region. Therefore, the regional offices should have an annual budget to spend and in return compose an annual report of activities reflecting what the budget has been used for. By making it possible for the regional offices to conduct their own activities the intention is to reach a wider circle of our members out there working in the field who will have better access to AIEJI through the regional offices.

In times, when the world becomes ever more connected while many are still inflected by the economic crisis it is important to look for simple and do-able ways to reach our members and help them in their professional development. The proposal from the Nordic countries aims to do so. Through active regional offices we will make it easier for our members to connect and with a strong board backed by member organisations we continue to develop AIEJI into a strong and professional organisation.

Members

In the period 2009 – 2013 the majority of new members have been organisational members in Category A. This is a healthy development because it gives more volume to AIEJI as our work reaches more people. Through our member organisations we are in touch with many more people at a more direct and local level. As more and more organisational members from different parts of the world join AIEJI, AIEJI gets a better opportunity of developing and discussing social education from a global and more universal perspective.

NGO Status with the Council of Europe

On 21 April 2013 AIEJI will be added to the list of INGOs holding participatory status with the Council of Europe. In effect, this means that twice a year AIEJI will be invited to participate in NGO conferences hosted by the European Council where relevant topics within the work area of the council will be discussed. This way, AIEJI has a forum of other NGOs to network with and can contribute to relevant discussions on social policies in the council.

Report from the regional offices

AIEJI has regional offices in Asia, Europe, the Middle East, Latin America and North America. The office in North America has, through the last congress period, needed a new representative and still does.

The office in Asia has unfortunately been marked by illness the past 2 years. However, the Russian member organisation, that manages the regional office in Asia, has held several international conferences in the region on social pedagogy and social policy.

In the meantime, the offices in Europe, the Middle East and Latin America are all active and a report from each follows below.

The European Office

The European Office has continued the evaluation of the European Directive 2005/36/CE about the Recognition of Professional Qualifications, specifically the "Proposal for the modernisation of the Professional Qualifications Directive" launched at the beginning of 2012. We have also followed the Webcast meeting on the Modernisation of the Professional Directive on 5th January 2012. And the recent news about European professional card.

We have to highlight the introduction of common training frameworks and common training test that will replace common platforms. This new mechanism should offer the possibility to extend the mechanism of automatic recognition to new professions and this is why is so important (this levels means to have a status as European regulated profession). The establishment were voted in at Committee on Internal Market on 23rd January 2013 through amendments on the Draft Report on Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Directive 2005/36/EC on the recognition of professional qualifications and Regulation on administrative cooperation through the Internal Market Information System. We are studying this last information about how can we support our own framework about social educators. This is an aim to the next period in order to get our professional recognition all over Europe.

Concerning our profession, other key elements of the proposal are the following ones:

1. The introduction of a European professional card. It will be made available according the needs expressed by the professions and it will take the form of an electronic certificate, allowing the professional to provide services or become established in another Member State.
2. Better access to information on the recognition of professional qualifications. The Points of Single Contact, created under the Services Directive, which will allow citizens to obtain information in one place about the documents required to have their qualifications recognised and where they can also complete all online recognition procedures.
3. Mutual evaluation exercise on regulated professions. This is a new mechanism introduced in the Directive to ensure greater transparency and justification of the professions they regulate through a specific qualification requirement. Member States will have to provide a list of their regulated professions and justify the need for regulation. This should be followed up by a mutual evaluation exercise facilitated by the European Commission.

We have finished with our survey concerning "Situation of social educator's professionals in Europe". We have translated it into English with economic help of AIEJI. We will have a definitive version when we established new contacts with another countries through the workshop about this survey. When we will be able to publish and we would like to spread in AIEJI web page and AIEJI network. We think this document is important for several reasons:

- It is a first step in order to have an overview concerning the profession in Europe.
- It is important to balance our chances within the new legislation framework concerning the European regulation of profession.
- It is a good way to spread the importance of the profession in Europe and compile more information concerning the profession.

Workshop about the survey

We have been developing the whole workshop about the survey. We think our main purpose is to encourage most of European countries in order to participate in this workshop in order to check the information and waiting their advices. Then we can distribute to European AIEJI members to check it. Once we have all the information, we will create a definitive version ready to be disseminated.

Main goals

- To have an overview concerning the profession
- To diffuse the profession
- First step to compile more information
- To enrich the survey with participants experiences

Workshop Time Plan

- Power point presentation about the survey (20 minutes)
- Discussion about the document (20 minutes)
- Conclusions (10 minutes)

The Latin American Office

The Latin American Office during the period from 2009 to 2013 had two responsible members: until April 2012 the office was under the coordination of Mr Eusebio Najera, Chile, and from then Mr. Ney Moraes Filho, Brazil, became the mangaing officer.

The LA members changed during this period: ADESU from Uruguay resigned; ADESO from Chile became a member; AEESP from Brazil, became a member; individual members from Uruguay and Brazil have also joined AIEJI while some lost their membership again because of failure to pay the dues.

During this time there has been one meeting with a group of individual members form Uruguay, during the Campinas' International Seminar on Social Education and Non Formal Education (Campinas-SP-BR, nov-2011).

The most important activity of this period was the international seminar organised in association with AEESP, the Sao Paulo State Social Educator's Association. The seminar was held in Campinas, Sao Paulo, 17 – 19 November 2011. More than 200 professionals from Brazil, Uruguay, Chile, Denmark, France, Swiss, Liberia and Angola participated in the seminar. The seminar discussed professional regulation, the teaching of the social educators and methodological and practical issues.

AEESP became a category A member of AIEJI and has a small but stable membership cast which the association tries to keep in contact with.

The LA regional office has contacts in Argentina, Chile, Nicaragua, Venezuela and Cuba and some of them are now members of AIEJI's facebook group.

The LA office participated in the 2nd and 3rd International Congress of Social Pedagogy. During the 2nd International Congress of Social Pedagogy we had a meeting between regional board members from Chile, Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay and Cuba. Eusebio from Chile also went to the Iberoamerican Congress on Social Pedagogy.

The LA office took part in the 6th National Social Education Meeting that discussed the creation of a national association of Brazilian social educators.

The LA office translated the “UN Convention on Child Rights and the Social Educator” and the “The Professional competencies – a conceptual framework” into Portuguese.

The Middle Eastern Office

Unfortunately, the political situation in the area didn't enable us to make big progress in developing regional activities. Therefore, our activity was mainly concentrated on three directions:

- a. continuous efforts to develop the social education profession in Israel
- b. promoting the participation of Israeli social educators in international gatherings in order to expose them to new and innovative models of activity.
- c. translation into Hebrew of important documents, related to the social education profession in the world and spreading it among social educators in Israel.

On the local scene, an important effort to vote in the Israeli Parliament a law that should legalize the social educator profession. This was initiated by us in 2008 when the Minister of Education was from the labor party and considerable steps forward were undertaken. Unfortunately, government changed and the new Minister didn't continue to work on this legislation.

Great efforts had been done in order to develop new options of full Academic training for social educators. From two Universities for applied Sciences that proposed such programs in 2009 we have now six Universities offering such trainings and three of them developed Master's programs in social education. Many veteran workers who didn't have formal training are getting the possibility to join these programs as in-service-training programs.

The professional journals of social educators, initiated by EFSHAR Association are getting constantly higher appreciation among field workers as well as by academic people and are becoming an important tool for exchange of knowledge and thus contributing to the development of the profession.

Work Programme 2013 - 2017

Turning the focus towards the work programme of the coming years there are two groups of citizens that rarely get much attention and receive the help and support they need. They are very different from one another but have in common that many societies often turn the blind eye on them.

Persons with mental illnesses

Persons with mental illnesses are very often not getting the right help or the support they need. Some are heavily medicated, some live in isolation and many of them would benefit from social educational support in order to find a way to manage everyday tasks and deal with life itself. But in many countries persons with mental illnesses are solely treated within the health care system.

As part of the work programme for 2013-2017 AIEJI will focus on persons with mental illnesses, how they are being treated and whether there are any national programmes for them, how their rights are ensured and how social educational support can be part of their treatment. A specific angle on this issue will be to discuss how they are – or to a greater extend can become – included in society.

Refugee children

As long as the gap between the rich and the poor keep getting bigger and as long as there are people and nations willing to go to war the world will experience millions of people who flee their homes, and the people and country they belong to, in the quest for a better life in strange and foreign places.

Among these refugees are many children who come as part of a family or unaccompanied. They grow up in asylum centres or refugee camps, sometimes in countries where they do not understand the language, separated from their families or with parents marked by the trauma of war, poverty, disease and other hardships. In environments characterised by uncertainty and unfamiliarity, the children must try and go to school, play and learn, grow and create their own identities.

In the coming work programme of 2013 – 2017 AIEJI will focus on children living in asylum centres or as unaccompanied refugee children separated from their families. What are their living conditions? How are they taken care of? How are their rights ensured? How can they benefit from social educational support? These are some of the issues we will look into while also looking into the extend of voluntary work in this field.

With this work programme AIEJI 2013-2017 will strengthen the professional development of social educators around the world.

Yours sincerely,
Benny Andersen
President, AIEJI