



ON THE STREET

A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR
NEW SOCIAL STREET WORKERS

BY DON IRVING AND SIMON WHITMORE



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INTRODUCTION

THIS PRACTICAL TOOLKIT HAS BEEN DEVELOPED TO SUPPORT WORKERS WHO ARE NEW TO SOCIAL STREET WORK; EVIDENCE FROM ACROSS EUROPE SUGGESTS THAT MANY NEW WORKERS ARE BEING RECRUITED AND DEPLOYED INTO POTENTIALLY CHALLENGING SITUATIONS ON THE STREET WITHOUT APPROPRIATE SUPPORT, TRAINING OR RESOURCES.

There is a lot of literature from around the world that focuses on social street work guidelines and good practice, however, our research suggests that there is a need for a toolkit which offers new workers a checklist of practical suggestions, particularly in relation to issues such as preparing for the street, safe working practice and making initial contact.

THIS TOOLKIT DOES NOT INTEND TO TELL ORGANISATIONS WHAT TO DO; IT IS SIMPLY A PRACTICAL WAY TO ADD TO THE SUPPORT FOR NEW SOCIAL STREET WORKERS ENTERING THE FIELD, OFFERING THEM A FRAMEWORK OF IDEAS AND SUGGESTIONS FROM ACROSS THE PROFESSIONAL FIELD THAT WILL GUIDE THEM THROUGH THEIR EARLY DAYS IN STREET WORK.

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WHAT IS SOCIAL STREET WORK?

THE TERM 'SOCIAL STREET WORK'
ENCOMPASSES A RANGE OF PRACTICES,
ALL OF WHICH TAKE PLACE 'ON THE
STREET'.

These include outreach work,
detached work, project-based work and
group action. Social street workers may find
themselves working with people in one or
more of the following areas:

Runaways

Sex workers'
industry

Drug
users
and/or
addicts

Work
with
gangs

Human
trafficking

Work with
social
migrants

Work with
minority groups
groups

Mobile
schools

People who are forced
or choose to spend their
time on the street and
those living on the street

Information regarding these groups can be found at: www.travailderue.org

The importance of the role of the social street worker has been summarised by Jean-Marc Delizée, secretary of state for the fight against poverty for Belgium, who states that:

"Social street workers can give back to people in difficulties the power to act in their own lives and to move towards improved well-being, using the values of justice, equality, human dignity and solidarity."

STREET WORK METHODOLOGY

THERE IS NO SINGLE DEFINITIVE FORMULA FOR SOCIAL STREET WORK.

Different social street work organisations develop different ways of working.

However, there are many similarities in relation to the street work approach.

THESE INCLUDE:

1:1 Support

Accompanying an individual in various aspects of their life, either on an ad hoc or a long term basis.

Group Action

Working with groups of individuals through various activities which encourage meetings and strengthen links, combining a trust-based relationship with socio-educational objectives.

Community-based Action

Community-based Action – This aims to engage and foster citizen participation, in order to promote the empowerment and development of the community or the environment.

To gain further understanding of social street work approaches, there is a list of suggested reading at the back of this toolkit.

SECTION 1

THE INDUCTION PHASE

ALL NEW SOCIAL STREET WORKERS SHOULD GO THROUGH A PROPER INDUCTION PROCESS BEFORE THEY ACTUALLY GO OUT ONTO THE STREET.

The value of this induction process should not be underestimated. Whilst there are many excellent examples of effective induction processes across Europe, there are also cases of new workers being underprepared and ill-equipped to begin street work due to poor organisational priorities.

THE FOLLOWING IS A SUMMARY OF SUGGESTIONS FOR THE NEW WORKER:

familiarise yourself with your organisation's policies and procedures, including those relating to matters of confidentiality and health and safety.

get to know other staff and the culture of the organisation you work for. when are your team meetings? who are the specialists within your team?

develop a positive working relationship with your manager by establishing regular supervision meetings and make sure you know how to contact them when necessary.

seek clarity about your role (see 'preparing for the street'). who are the people you will be working with? what will you and your team aim to achieve? where will this work take place and what situations are you likely to encounter?

identify a 'buddy' or spend time shadowing a more experienced worker.

agree on a simple way to describe the term 'social street worker' to the people that you will come into contact with.

try to gain an understanding of the legal framework which social street workers operate under.

as a new social street worker, you should be encouraged by your organisation to help identify your own needs during the induction process.

take advantage of any opportunities to undertake observational visits to other social street work organisations.

REMEMBER.
THE BETTER
PREPARED YOU ARE
AS A WORKER, THE
BETTER YOU WILL
PERFORM ON THE
STREET!

SECTION 2

EXPLORING YOUR FEARS AND CONCERNS

OFTEN A PERSON APPOINTED TO THE ROLE OF SOCIAL STREET WORKER WILL APPROACH THEIR NEW POSITION WITH MIXED EMOTIONS. THEY MAY BE EXCITED THAT THEY HAVE A NEW JOB AND WILL BE MEETING NEW PEOPLE, BUT THEY WILL ALSO HAVE FEARS AND CONCERNS ABOUT THE REALITY OF WORKING ON THE STREET.

In order for you to establish yourself quickly and effectively you need to have the opportunity to express these fears and concerns. Good practice recognises the need for workers to have personal support in place. This includes the chance to talk with others, the chance to work alongside more experienced colleagues and access to further training.

THE FOLLOWING ARE SOME REFLECTIONS MADE BY SOCIAL STREET WORKERS ON ENTERING THE FIELD:

SOMETIMES PEOPLE
IN NEED MAY NOT WANT TO ENGAGE
LEAVING YOU FEELING REJECTED

"You must be patient and resilient! It takes time to establish relationships. You need to make yourself available without being intrusive. Recognise that you will not be able to engage with everyone you meet."

UPSETTING THOSE YOU
ARE WORKING WITH

"Ensure that you are respectful and sensitive to the needs and circumstances of the people you meet. Be honest and remember your professional boundaries."

FORGETTING NAMES

"Try to find a nickname that you can use as they are often easier to remember. It will be your fear of forgetting that will be the barrier; names will come to you in time."

NOT SURE
HOW TO ACT ON THE STREETS

"You should always be aware of the language you use and the way that you dress. If you are unsure about anything talk to your manager or ask more experienced colleagues."

NOT HAVING THE RIGHT SKILLS

"Think about the skills you will need and don't be afraid to tell someone if you are unsure about what you do. Learning alongside the people you are working with is often a great way of building a bond. Learn from your colleagues and watch how they work. Talk to your line manager if you feel you need further training."

always be aware of your organisation's policies and procedures. They are there to guide you when faced with moral and ethical dilemmas.

NOT KNOWING
WHAT TO DO WHEN IT SEEMS THERE
IS NOBODY AROUND

"See this as time for research. When it's cold and wet on the streets, where are people going?"

REMEMBER,
IF YOU ARE UNSURE
ABOUT WHAT TO DO,
YOU SHOULD ALWAYS
ASK SOMEONE. IT IS
BETTER TO BE SAFE
THAN SORRY!

FEELING SUPPORTED

A COMMON THEME RUNNING THROUGHOUT THIS TOOLKIT IS THE NEED FOR ONGOING SUPPORT FOR SOCIAL STREET WORKERS, PARTICULARLY THOSE NEW TO THE FIELD.

Although support mechanisms differ from one organisation to another, it is widely accepted that there are some minimum standards which need to be in place in order to provide adequate support to street workers.

THESE INCLUDE:

Having the opportunity to shadow more experienced colleagues and ask lots of questions!

You should not be expected to suffer in silence. Thoughts and concerns should be shared with a colleague.

In the case of an emergency when you are working, ensure that you can easily contact your manager.

Always be on the lookout for appropriate training and development opportunities.

Be sure to take time to reflect on your practice and review your performance. Ask yourself 'what could I do better or differently?'

Use your supervision sessions to discuss your work on the street.

Ensure that you have office space and administrative support where possible.

Ask your manager to accompany you when you are out on the street. This will give them a better understanding of what you are doing on a day-to-day basis.

Take the opportunity to attend local and national street work events whenever possible.

Ensure that you maintain a healthy work/life balance.

It is important that you discuss the need for flexibility in your work. For example, you may be delayed due to dealing with a crisis in the community or with a person you are working with. In this case, your manager should ensure that you are given time off, or are reimbursed in another way.

The suggestions highlighted above are not new, but they can help organisations provide a framework for supporting their workforce on the street. Social street work for the new worker can be a lonely place leaving them with a sense of isolation. It is important that your manager does everything possible to support, reassure and show you that you are a valued member of the team.

"WE NEED WORKERS WHO HAVE ALREADY CONFRONTED THEIR DEMONS."

"I DIDN'T REALISE THAT PEOPLE LIVED IN SUCH DIFFICULT SITUATIONS."

STAYING SAFE ON THE STREET

NEW SOCIAL STREET WORKERS INVARIABLY ENTER THE PROFESSION WANTING TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE TO THE LIVES OF PEOPLE ON THE STREET.

This often involves working in potentially dangerous or hazardous settings. It may be taken for granted that you are able to cope with the many different (and sometimes complex) situations you may find yourself in.

THESE SITUATIONS COULD INCLUDE:

Working with sex workers on the side of busy motorways.

Providing support and needle exchange to drug users.

Contacting groups of young people involved in gang culture.

Providing information and advice to homeless people in disused premises.

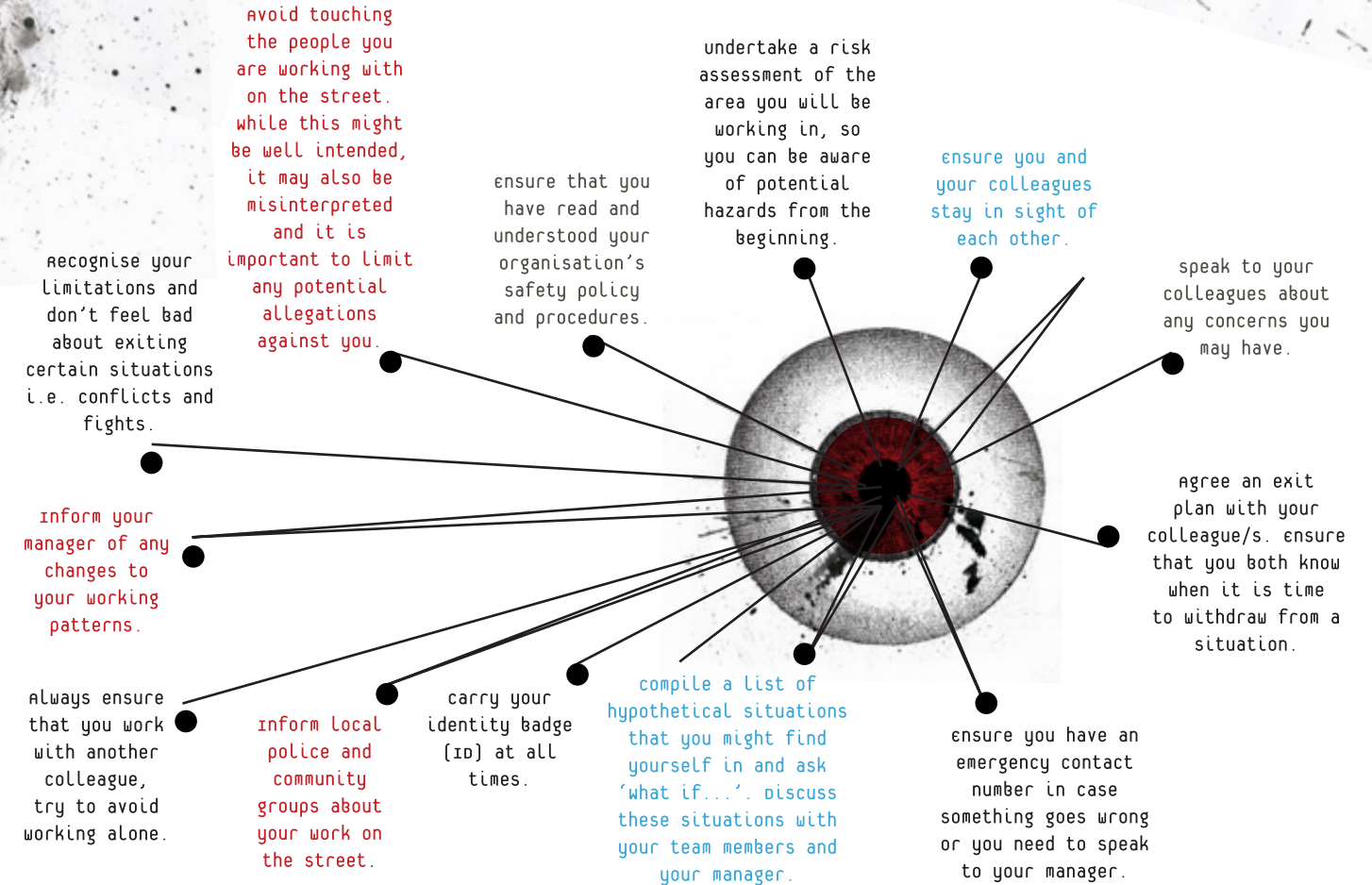
Community-based action work, for example, mobile schools.

Working with people who congregate in public places, such as shopping centres and parks.



WHATEVER ENVIRONMENT YOU WORK IN, YOUR SAFETY IS PARAMOUNT!

TO THIS END, THE FOLLOWING LIST PROVIDES A NUMBER OF PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS YOU SHOULD CONSIDER:



THE WAY WE WORK

GIVEN THE OFTEN DIFFICULT CIRCUMSTANCES FACING PEOPLE ON THE STREET, AS A SOCIAL STREET WORKER YOU SHOULD EXPECT TO BE CONFRONTED BY A RANGE OF ETHICAL AND MORAL DILEMMAS.

These could involve issues relating to drugs, illegal activity, relationships or politics. It is therefore important for you to have a clear set of boundaries and to always act in a professional manner.

THESE SHOULD INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING:

- ✗ do not condone or condemn the lifestyle of the people you meet on the street.
- ✗ do not agree to keep secrets.
- ✗ ensure you understand and follow your organisation's policies and procedures, including confidentiality, child protection and safeguarding.
- ✗ recognise potential conflicts of interest when working within your own community.
- ✗ be careful with regard to social networking and remember that people on the street may have access to your personal details.
- ✗ think about the language you use and be sensitive to cultural and religious needs.
- ✗ be aware that as a professional street worker you have a duty of care towards all those you work with.
- ✗ be reliable and consistent in the way you approach your work on the street. This will help you to develop and maintain positive relationships with the people you are working with.

SCENARIO 1

You are about to finish work on the street and you are approached by a 15-year-old girl. She informs you that she has nowhere to sleep. She asks you for money and she also asks where you live...

what issues does this raise?
what action do you take?

REMEMBER,
IF YOU ARE UNSURE
ABOUT ANY SITUATION
YOU ARE FACED WITH,
DON'T SUFFER IN
SILENCE. DISCUSS IT
WITH A COLLEAGUE OR
YOUR LINE MANAGER.

this is not an exhaustive list and there will be many situations that will test your professional boundaries. Think about situations you might find yourself in and discuss them with your colleagues.

BELOW ARE TWO EXAMPLES OF SUCH SCENARIOS:

SCENARIO 2

You live in the same community in which you work. It is your day off and someone knocks on the door of your flat. It is one of the people you work with on the street. He is an intravenous drug user and he asks you for a new injection kit...

what issues does this raise?
what action do you take?

SKILLS & QUALITIES FOR THE STREET

SOCIAL STREET WORKERS ENTER THE PROFESSION THROUGH A VARIETY OF DIFFERENT ROUTES. THIS CAN VARY FROM THOSE GAINING PROFESSIONAL QUALIFICATIONS TO THOSE WHO ENTER THROUGH VOLUNTEERING AND LOCAL COMMUNITY ACTION.

Whatever the route taken by the worker, there are certain qualities and skills which are required to undertake work on the street. THE FOLLOWING IS A LIST OF SOME OF THESE QUALITIES AND SKILLS:

communicate effectively and be able to say 'no' when required.

be flexible and able to change your plans in order to adapt to unexpected issues. remember, things don't always go to plan.

be respectful, aware and sensitive to culture, ethnicity, race, sexuality and religious matters.

be a reflective worker and think critically about your practice. ask yourself, 'How did the session go and what can I do next time? what has worked and what could I do better?'

be able to deal with challenging situations on the street.

be able to provide appropriate information and advice as and when required.

be open and honest with yourself and others.

be observant and aware of what's going on around you.

question negative behaviours in an appropriate and sensitive manner.

be consistent, do what you say you will do and don't promise what you can't deliver.

develop a range of practical skills, which are quick and easy activities to do on the street.

be a team player and support colleagues.

understand your personal prejudices and do not let them cloud your judgement.

REMEMBER,

WE ALL HAVE DIFFERENT SKILLS AND STRENGTHS - NOBODY IS GOOD AT EVERYTHING. WORK WITH YOUR TEAM AND GET TO KNOW EACH OTHERS AREAS OF EXPERTISE. YOU CAN ALSO LOOK TO THE LOCAL COMMUNITY AND OTHER ORGANISATIONS THAT MAY BE ABLE TO CONTRIBUTE.

"WE ACCEPT THOSE WE WORK WITH FOR WHO THEY ARE."

"BE AUTHENTIC, PEOPLE CAN SEE THROUGH YOU."

YOUR BAG OF TRICKS

HERE WE WILL LOOK AT THE PRACTICAL RESOURCES YOU MIGHT NEED TO USE IN ORDER TO UNDERTAKE YOUR WORK. SOME OF THESE RESOURCES ARE COMMON TO ALL STREET WORKERS, WHILST OTHERS WILL BE SPECIFIC TO YOUR ROLE. FOR EXAMPLE, THE SOCIAL STREET WORKER FOCUSING ON REDUCING HARM MAY NEED TO CARRY INJECTION KITS AND A SHARPS BOX FOR USED SYRINGES.

The social street worker working with sex workers may be required to carry condoms and information on safe sex. The homelessness worker may carry food and blankets.

WHATEVER THE FOCUS OF YOUR ROLE, YOU NEED TO MAKE YOURSELF AWARE OF THE FOLLOWING:

what resources are available for the team to use.

what information might be helpful to carry which will signpost people to other services?

how, when and where you might be required to use your resources.

what, if any, are the safety issues you will need to be aware of in relation to using these resources?

if you require resources which are not available then you can always look to other local organisations to see if they can help.

YOUR 'BAG OF TRICKS' MAY INCLUDE:



once again, this is not an exhaustive list! you will need to consider your role, and depending on the area you will be working in, what resources you will need to carry in your own 'bag of tricks'.

REMEMBER,
DON'T BECOME
A TARGET FOR
OPPORTUNISTIC THIEVES.
ALWAYS BE CAUTIOUS
WHEN CARRYING
VALUABLE EQUIPMENT
WITH YOU ON THE
STREET.

SECTION 4

PREPARING FOR THE STREET

WHEN YOU ARE PREPARING TO GO OUT ONTO THE STREETS, IT IS IMPORTANT THAT YOU UNDERSTAND YOUR ROLE.

You should familiarise yourself with the aims and objectives of your organisation and the environment you will be working in, both politically and culturally.

THE FOLLOWING ARE SOME STEPS YOU CAN TAKE BEFORE MAKING CONTACT WITH PEOPLE ON THE STREET:

REMEMBER,
THAT DURING YOUR
PREPARATION PERIOD
YOU WILL NEED TO
"LISTEN AND OBSERVE".
THIS WILL HELP YOU
TO ESTABLISH YOUR
PRESENCE ON THE
STREET AND GAIN AN
UNDERSTANDING OF
THE WORK THAT LIES
AHEAD.

what
resources
are
available
for the team
to use.

visit the
area at
different
times of day
to see when
people are
about.

identify
any barriers
which might
affect your
work.

be
sensitive
to any
cultural,
religious
or
political
issues.

undertake
a risk
assessment
of the area
and look for
potential
hazards; it
is important
that you feel
safe.

meet with
local
agencies,
community
groups,
traders,
and in
particular,
the police.

find out
about the
issues facing
people on
the street
in your
area, such
as social
and economic
factors.

"YOU CAN'T BE
EVERYTHING TO
EVERYONE."



"THE FIRST
CONTACT COULD BE
THE MOST IMPORTANT
ONE THAT
YOU MAKE."



INITIATING CONTACT

"WELL HELLO!
I'M THE NEW SOCIAL
STREET WORKER."

As the thought of making contact with people on the street for the first time approaches, apprehension will begin to build. You may find yourself asking questions such as :

"WHAT WILL
HAPPEN WHEN
I GO TO MEET
PEOPLE FOR THE
FIRST TIME?"

"HOW SHOULD
I INTRODUCE
MYSELF?"

"WHAT
SHOULD I
SAY?"

"WILL
THEY BE
AGGRESSIVE
TOWARDS
ME?"

"WILL THEY
TELL ME TO
GO AWAY?"

"WILL THEY
LIKE ME?"

"WILL THEY
CHALLENGE
ME?"

social street work takes place in many different environments and there is no single approach to making contact. much will depend on your personality, life experience, how comfortable you feel and how willing you are to learn from your colleagues.

BELOW ARE SOME PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS REGARDING THE INITIAL CONTACT-MAKING PROCESS:

approach people with caution, as they may be suspicious about who you are.

be honest and tell people who you are and exactly what you are doing. practice a simple and clear message that describes your street work.

visit other organisations, particularly ones which might be working with the same people who you want to contact on the street.

watch how other team members make contact and learn from them.

distributing leaflets and fliers can be a useful way of starting conversations.

start up a conversation by asking for the time or directions to a local place or venue.

don't outstay your welcome. recognise when it is time to leave the session.

REMEMBER,
TO DEBRIEF WITH
YOUR COLLEAGUES
AT THE END OF EACH
SESSION. TALK ABOUT
WHAT WORKED WELL
AND WHAT DIDN'T WORK
WELL. THIS SHOULD
HELP YOU TO PREPARE
FOR YOUR NEXT VISIT.

taking a 'box of tricks' with you (for example, juggling balls) can be a good way of breaking the ice.

using questionnaires can be a good tool for introducing yourself and initiating a conversation.

inform people that you will be back again on another occasion.

carry contact cards and hand them out to people that you work with.

SUGGESTED READING

Dynamo International has compiled a list of useful reading material from around the world on the subject of Social Street Work:

The Role of Group Action in Street Work published by Dynamo International offers a wide range of stories written by street workers from across the world.

The International Guide on the Methodology of Street Work throughout the World provides workers and their managers with an in-depth insight into the overall methodology of street work.

OTHER READING INCLUDES:

101 Things To Do on the Street: Games and Resources for Detached, Outreach and Street-Based Youth Work by Vanessa Rogers.

The Manual for Outreach Social Street Work With Children in Bulgaria: A Manual Based on the Experience of Organizations in Bulgaria published by the International Labour Office.

Good Practice: Czech and Foreigner Experience from Low Barriers and Easy Contact Services published by Česká Asociace Street work.

Blood, Sweat and Tears: A Report of the Bede Anti-Racist Detached Youth Work Project by Stella Dadzie.

Management of Detached Youth Work: How & Why - Youth Clubs UK Publication.

Detached Youth Work: Guidelines 2007 - National Federation for Detached Youth Work (UK)

DYNAMO INTERNATIONAL NETWORK FOR STREET WORKERS

dynamo international co-ordinates the international network of social street workers. It was established to support workers now deployed in a variety of settings on the street with children, young people and adults. There are now over 50 national platforms across the world, aimed at increasing the efficiency and quality of practice through training and exchange of educational tools. The other key objective of the network is to generate an international mobilisation to build lasting and structural answers towards problems that people on the street face around the world. Information about your national platform can be found by visiting <http://travailderue.org>

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

don irving and **simon whitmore** are both experienced social street (detached) workers from the UK. They believe passionately in the street work approach and have worked for many years in the support and development of new social street workers.

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