

T20 An example of a successful counselling: Mr DR and the tailor from Gambia

Please, D. briefly tell me an example, a history of work inclusion to which you contributed as a career counselor.

I'm thinking to A.M., a tailor from Gambia. When we met, on the occasion of our first interview, we had no abode. He slept, secretly, when he could sneak into a flat of friends who could still enjoy the hospitality of the Sprar projects [a national acronym for projects dealing with migrants issues from the arrival].

What barriers and difficulties did you face to reach these goals?

Mainly deal with all the bureaucracy associated with these projects but also decide the tasks that were associated with my role as a career counselor. My question was how to design a future without considering the complete picture? I am convinced that a career advisor or counselor cannot, and should not take care of everything, but he has to take it into account, and activate, as far as he can, all the necessary support: activate a network of services, make phone calls to get information adequate when the person cannot deal by themselves, give timely directions, reassure and trust the darkest moments, highlighting the benefits that will be achieved by persisting with a certain behavior when the person can see anything but the difficulties of the present.

What kind of supports did you find to deal with your and AM goal?

Resources from the project, members of the equipe, other organizations and associations, AM awareness, determination and empathy with the persons he met

To what extent could you count on AM resources?

A.M. had faced really difficult scenarios in his life, with courage, dignity and humility. He had not lost the trust, the hope and the ability to see in the world and in the others their goodness. I worked on "a ground that really, just needed a little of water"

Can you please tell more on these resources, for instance on courage?

In difficult moments when it came to encouraging, together we came back to some stories of his past, and together we saw how much courage he had, what situations he was able to face and solve. We looked to courage as an ability to take a stand in face of possible otherwise, and how those possibilities were in themselves a conquest.

What were the strengths and difficulties experienced, and the strategy you set to plan and work on personal and work future goals?

My work in that project consisted in constructing a professional and personal future goal that would allow him to stay (if he still desired it) in Italy, in decent living and work conditions, guaranteeing at the same time the basic needs: home and food. I was very impressed by his deep adherence to the path, which required a long term, indeed complex, response in a situation of urgent need.

A.M had received many immediate but temporary answers, which had only moved the urgency of a few months. He understood the importance of identifying a goal for the future.

Thanks to the resources of the project we managed to organize training activities and activated an apprenticeship in a small tailor shop, so he could get some money. For a period he was hosted into a small religious community, which allowed him to present himself to work clean, rested and not hungry. His long term and complex goal, was having a job (as a tailor, but not necessarily), a house for rent alone in which he could get his daughter now almost adult from Gambia, give a future daughter and, why not, build a new family. On the other hand, it was not entirely certain that this could be achieved in Italy and did not rule out as soon as the opportunity arose to move to other Italian or European cities.

On the other hand, the short-term goals were to obtain the social security check for unemployed, to reach a small monthly income and expenditure plan, to participate as far as compatible with the internship, to training courses and active job search groups, building a network of meaningful relationships.

He built good relationships at work, his training was prolonged more than expected and, thanks to his ability to be appreciated, he was offered a house for rent at reduced costs. With the money of the training he managed to repay small loans, send a fixed amount per month to his daughter and move, when there was opportunity, in Puglia for an interesting and well paid job, knowing he can return as soon as finished to continue and reach the goal further.

He succeeded in building good relationships at work; his training was prolonged more than expected and, thanks to his ability to be appreciated by persons he met, he was offered a house for rent at reduced costs. With the money he gained, he could manage to repay small loans, send a fixed amount per month to his daughter and move, when there was an opportunity, to Puglia for an interesting and well paid temporary job, knowing he could return and continue to work for his life and work goal.

What strategies did you use to support the design of the future goals?

I tried to work on stimulating the anticipation of the future, proposing several times to think of the scenario of his destination, his home, his hypothetical routine, the ability to write to his daughter who was ready to welcome her. As for work, the main objective was obviously to satisfy the economic needs. Tailoring remained in the background for a while, also because he had verified that he had to learn to use machines other than those he knew well and an excessive fatigue to his back that could make more difficult to move in industrial tailoring.

Did you encounter stereotypes, prejudices and labels that hinder inclusion process of your client?

The idea that some activities did not pertain the counseling activity. As I said, I do not think counselor should take care of everything, but I think he should have the professional maturity to take responsibility for making decisions related to the meaning of his work the idea that there should not be exception more specific supports. But also the idea that the level of care needed in the services dealing with immigrant should adhere to lower standards. I think this is a great obstacle, a sort of self-check.

With what specific actions did you overcome these barriers and support job inclusion of the person who was in counseling?

I did something I'm used to do as a counselor: I told the story, protecting the privacy, I gave him a body, a voice (reporting his words, and here I had an easy task because really A.M knows how to speak to people), a family (a daughter who studies, a daughter who will have a future because the father is building it). I went in person to talk to people who could activate resources. I asked the support of colleagues in following a path and their support in pursuing the goal. I took my responsibilities. I trusted the person. I encouraged him to continue doing well as he was actually doing.