

International Network for School Social Work

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The effect of school social work intervention on students refusing to attend school in Japan

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In Japan, school refusal is emerging as a big issue. The term describes the refusal of a student to attend school for more than 30 days in a single school year. It may be the result of any one or a combination of factors, including emotional distress caused by bullying or problems interacting with classmates, laziness, delinquency, family troubles and/or an acute dislike or distrust of a teacher or teachers. Whatever the cause, over 120,000 students are diagnosed with school refusal every year.

Traditionally, student issues have been left to teachers to deal with. However, teachers have limited resources for dealing with student issues. So, in October 2007, a local board of education responsible for 6 elementary schools and 2 junior high schools introduced a school social worker. The school social worker was assigned the task of supporting 27 students drawn from the 8 schools. Twenty-six of the 27 students had not attended school frequently or at all since the beginning of the new school term. One student had attended a special class at an “educational support center”. All 27 students were experiencing problems such as those described above.

To tackle the problem, the school social worker initially provided the following 4 services: 1) Student counseling in order to understand the student’s needs from a strengths perspective, 2) Parental counseling in order to understand the parents’ needs from a strengths perspective and advise them on how to better understand their child’s needs, 3) An intermediate channel of communication in order to improve poor or estranged relationships between the school and parents suspicious of school rules and/or policies, 4) Collaborative support through the student support team (i.e. the school staff, the school social worker and related agencies) in order to improve the student’s situation with respect to problems such as parental neglect, poverty, divorce, learning disabilities and peer problems.

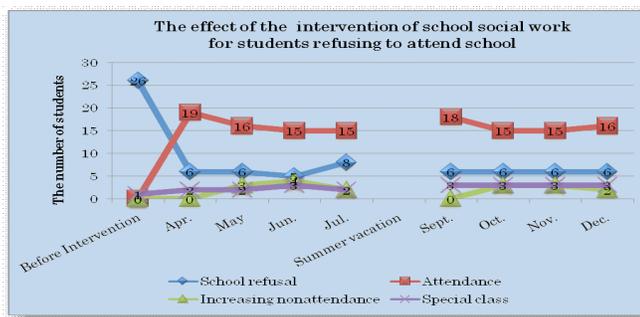
The school social worker was able to apply the following 4 steps to every case. Those steps are “needs assessment”, “support plan formulation”, “support implementation” and “evaluation”.

The results over a 6 month period (ending in March 2008) were: 1) Seventeen of the 27 students had begun to attend school regularly by the beginning of the new school term in April 2008, 2) Two students had passed an entrance examination for a high school and began to attend it in April 2008, 3) Two students had begun to go to the educational support center, 4) Six students were still not attending school in April 2008 and gave no indication that they might soon return. These students were exhibiting signs of delinquency and developmental disabilities and also experiencing serious family problems.

The results of continued intervention over a further 9 month period were: 1) Sixteen students were attending school regularly, 2) Two students who had begun attending school regressed into increasing

non-attendance, 3) Three students were attending the educational support center, 4) Six students persisted in a state of school refusal despite the continuing presence of the school social worker. Failure to solve the problem was related to the attitude of the student and parents who hadn't addressed the problem or made a concerted effort to change their situation.

The results of the present research show that students are more inclined to attend school if their family circumstances and school environments are improved, and if factors responsible for their non-attendance are removed. The continuous presence of the school social worker was also found to be necessary if relapses into school refusal were to be prevented.



The Continuing Development of School Social Work in Mongolia **Erdenetsetseg Tserenpuu, Officer of the Mongolian Association of School Social Workers**

Social workers were first placed in secondary schools in Mongolia 12 years ago. Since then the number has grown to 638 and the service has expanded to include all secondary schools. The Mongolian Education Law includes the term “education social worker”, however “school social worker” is the more familiar title in the community. Establishing social work in schools has also been a catalyst for introducing social work into other fields such as hospitals and prisons.

In June 2009, the “National Forum for Education Social Workers” provided the opportunity to shape the future of the still young profession. The forum was organized and financed by the Mongolian Association of School Social Workers, the Department of Social Work of the Mongolian State University of Education (MSUE) and Save the Children, UK. It was attended by 30 education social workers, policy makers and social work educators.

During the forum, a code of ethics, developed and proposed by the association (MASSW), was approved. The development of the job description was the other main project.

We determined that all education social workers have to focus on the issue of child protection and child rights at their schools, in order to protect children from all types of abuse and to ensure children’s right to learn and participate fully. The job description will be sent to the Ministry of Education and Culture for approval. The job description will enable school social workers to focus their efforts, instead of being diverted into administrative duties and student activities such as sports, monitoring the quality and standards of the lunch program and supervising the children while they clean the school. It will also help the association and the social workers themselves to interpret their role to the community and to school staff, especially the school director.

As a result of the forum discussion, the workers have made the following main proposals to the Ministry of Education and Culture:

- Pass a new job description for education social workers
- Give a license or official permission from the Ministry for serving children in schools
- Promote the role of education social work in the schools.