

Social networks of persons with disabilities in supported independent living

Evvy Meys, prof. Dr. Bea Maes





Story of Erik

Social network



"Relationships with people in the immediate environment, such as one's own family or partner, neighbors, friends or volunteers with which a social relationship exists"

(Thesaurus Zorg & Welzijn)

Important aspect of the subjective well-being and of the objective quality of life of people with disabilities (Verdugo, Navas, Gómez & Schalock, 2012; Maes, 2015)

BUT at the same time persons with disabilities **often do less well** in terms of social relations and social participation (Robertson et al., 2001; Forrester-Jones et al., 2006; Van Asselt-Goverts et al., 2013)

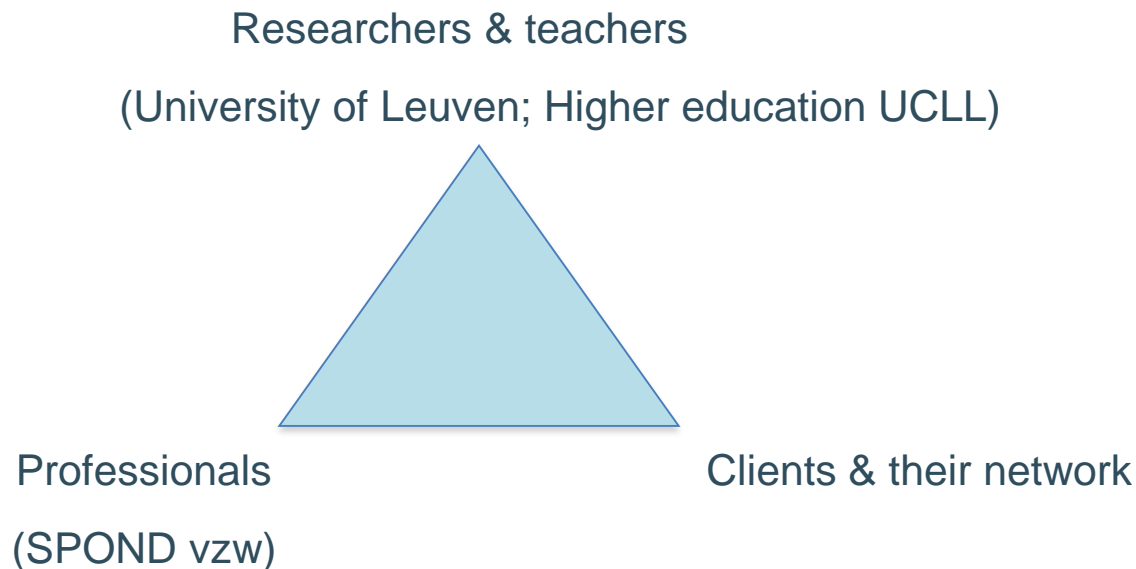
→ Explicit and systematic attention to analyze, broaden and/or strengthen the social network around a person with a disability.

An academic workplace

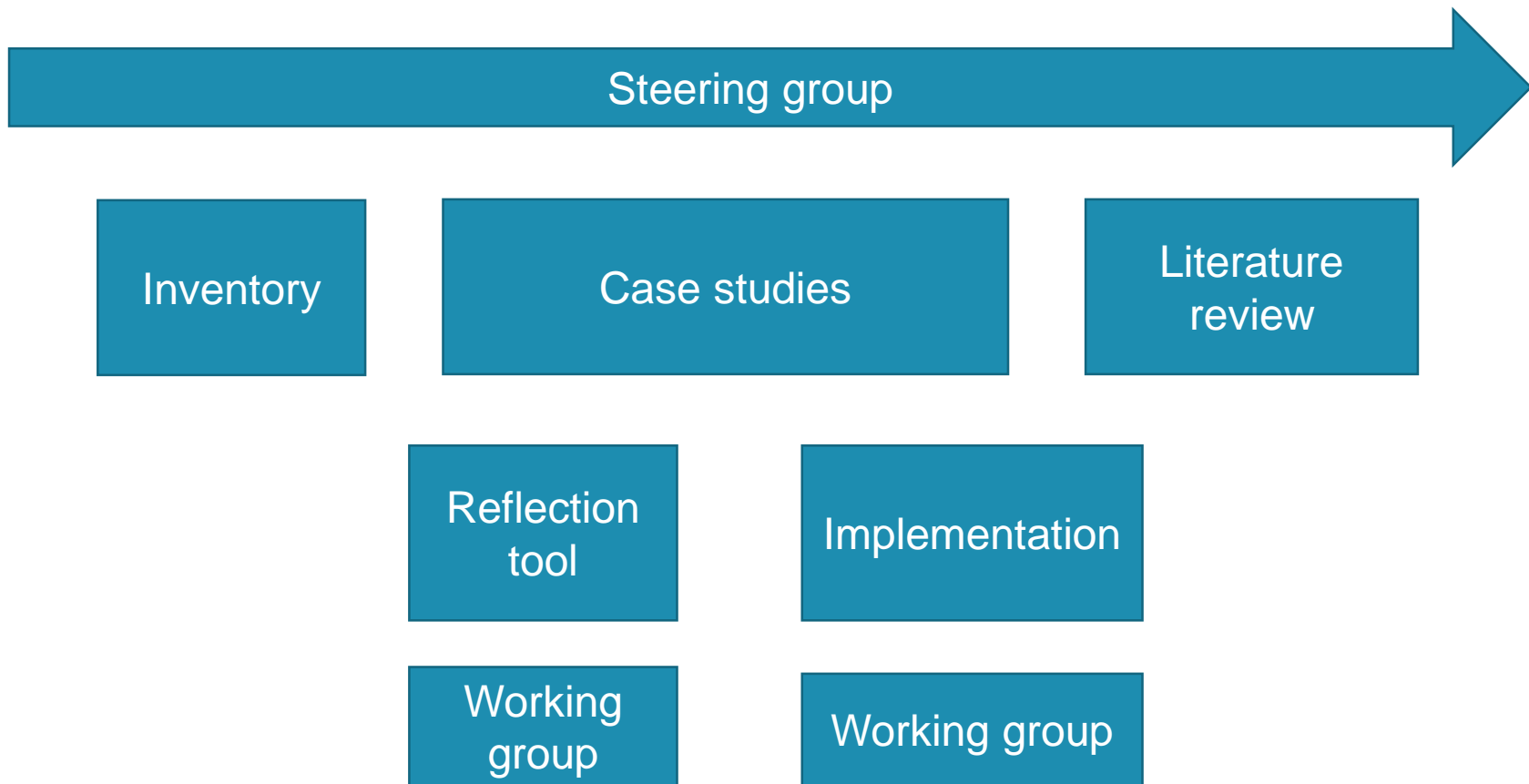


“How can support workers be helped in the development of the social networks of their clients with disabilities?”

Connection daily practice & science → questions from daily practice and kick off day



Trajectory



Inventory



Research objective:

- (1) Listing the **currently used methods and strategies** on social network development (fill-in table)
- (2) Investigating the **perceptions of support workers about bottlenecks and the added value** of social network development for clients, professionals and society (10 open ended-questions about attitudes and perceptions)

Participants: 21 ambulatory services for adults with disabilities, Flanders, Belgium

Added value



Client

- Creates a sense of belonging (to a network, to society)
- Can contribute to QOL
- Gives a social safety net
- Is a counterweight for loneliness

Professional

- Shared responsibility in supporting clients
- More & more 'natural' care
- Support worker as a facilitator
- Better understanding of client-situation
- Inclusion

Bottlenecks



Client

- (too) High expectations of his/her own network and society
- Fear to go outside/meet new people
- Other (and more urgent) needs of support
- Conflicts of loyalty in his/her social network

Professional

- Lack of consent or support from client and/or his/her network
- Disability-related problems
- Uncertainty about the position/attitude of the support worker
- On organizational level: lack of vision, time and/or funds
- Social networking as a government-driven strategy – too much pressure on caregivers in social network?

Qualitative case studies



14 cases

1 Case = 1 client (interview)

2 network members (interview)

1 support worker of an ambulatory service (interview)

Client file (qualitative file analysis)

Topics:

- What does your social network look like?
- Are you happy with your social network?
- What role has your support worker in these networks?

First results



Possible positive influences

- Individual factors
- Social media
- Stimulating network members
- (organised) Group of network members
- Partner

Possible negative influences

- Little social initiative (client)
- Difficulties in maintaining social relationships
- Communication problems
- Limited mobility

Influencing factors on satisfaction



- Degree of support from others
- Degree of social contact with network members
- Size and composition of the network
- Reciprocity
- (non-)Understanding
- (negative) Treatment
- Reachability
- Trustability



Translation to daily practice

- **Elaborating tools** on the level of clients, network members & professionals
- **Themes** reflection tool professional

Client-centered (microlevel)	Organisation-centered (mesolevel)	Policy- and society-centered (macrolevel)
<i>The client and his/her network</i> The client and his/her network Living environment of the client The social network of the client <i>Role of professional</i> Approach of professional Attitude Mandate	Organisation Volunteers Other organisations	Effect of policy Effect of society

Mandate (role professional)



- Given mandate from client as professional towards network members
- Given mandate from network members as professional towards client
- Wanted mandate as professional
- Coping with relations between network members and clients
- Coping with sensitive information from client as professional (professional confidentiality)
- Bond of trust/thrustworthiness

Further research



Mechanisms and influencing factors in strengthening social networks of persons with disabilities in ambulatory home-based services

Research objective

- (1) develop and empirically validate a conceptual model that embraces the complexity and dynamics as well as the influencing mechanisms and factors for network development and support
- (2) to translate this conceptual model into evidence-based methods & strategies

Method



Phase I: Developing a conceptual model

- Systematic literature review
- Analysis of 14 case-studies

Phase II: Empirically validating conceptual model

- Monitoring of identified influencing factors
- Questionnaire
 - 50 PwD
 - 50 professionals
 - 100 network members

Phase III: Identifying & developing interventions

Thank you for your attention!

Questions?

Evy.meys@kuleuven.be

