

FAMILY ASSISTANCE DESK

SPORTELLLO ASSISTENZA FAMILIARE (SPAF)

REGGIO EMILIA



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EMILIA



WHY

- To answer the challenge of an ageing society and the increasing care needs of elderly people
- To integrate family assistants in the networks of local services for elderly and dependant people
- To fight against the irregular status of migrant care workers and irregular employment relations
- To train and re-train family assistants

workers and language courses if necessary, it monitors and re-assesses care needs and offers tutoring to care workers and informal care givers (i.e. family members) when needed, it supports fair employment relationships between families and care workers, and it organises meetings and activities to develop relationships among care workers and to exchange experiences and knowledge.



WHAT

Family Assistance Desk - *Sportello Assistenza Familiare (SpAF)* facilitates the matching between demand and supply in the private care market, i.e. between families and care workers. Furthermore, it gives information about legal aspects of contracts and employment relations. It offers bureaucratic advice and guidance to immigrant care workers in accessing local services, it provides training to care



WHERE

The practice concerns the District which encompasses the eight Municipalities of Reggio Emilia (county city): Bagnolo, Cadelbosco di Sopra, Castelnuovo di Sotto, Albinea, Quattro Castella, Vezzano sul Crostolo.



WHEN

Created in 2009.

FOR WHOM

This practice addresses families and care workers both native and migrant.

BY WHOM

The SpAF was created by the Plan Office (*Ufficio di Piano*), which brings together the public officers responsible for the Health Unit and the Social Policies Departments of the Municipalities belonging to the District and which is in charge of the management of social policy funds and monitoring. In 2011, the Plan Office delegated the coordination of the project to RETE (*Reggio Emilia Terza Età* – Reggio Emilia Third Age), which is an ASP (*Azienda Pubblica Servizi alla Persona* – Public Company for Personal Services). The other partners are: the ASP Opus Civium, the voluntary organisations CeIS (*Centro Italiano di Solidarietà* – Italian Centre of Solidarity), and Caritas service *Casa Betania*. Beyond this core network, several local services and offices work as information points orienting people to SpAF desks; their staff have been equipped with materials and briefly trained on how the SpAF works.

THE LONG TERM/ THE NEXT STEPS

Since the beginning, the project recognizes the crucial role of 'informal care givers', i.e. family members, and of mutual help relationships both between families and between care workers. However, these objectives appear to be the most challenging to achieve. Therefore, the follow up of the project is mainly focused on the development of a community welfare based on relationships, co-planning, co-responsibility, i.e. the development of communities responsible for the common wellbeing. Furthermore, the project has partially shifted from an attempt to support cooperation among care workers, which actually failed, to the attempt to support cooperation among families, which might in turn encourage the former. In this perspective, the idea of developing community welfare solutions passes also through the creation of groups of families who jointly employ groups of care workers with the aims to lower costs for each family and overcome one-to-one employment relationships which may lead to exploitation, burn-out and isolation of both care workers and elderly persons and their families.

LEARNING TO TAKE HOME

WHAT MAKES IT WORK

The project merges together the public sector, the market (i.e. employment of care givers by families)

and the third sector into a single service belonging to local welfare. This welfare mix solution has allowed:

- To keep the total expenditure rather low supporting the economic sustainability of the practice.
- To be flexible since voluntary organisations can be more adaptable to clients' needs and more reactive than public entities.
- To capitalise on the reputation of these associations and on the relationship of trust between these NGOs and local families. In fact, to hire a family assistant, especially if co-resident, means to give access to one's home and to the custody of elderly family members. This requires a higher amount of trust in comparison than other jobs. It is therefore crucial that the broker is trusted by both parts and especially by the family.

The functioning of the practice is also related to the availability of the partners to be engaged in a never-ending re-framing and re-planning work and to the implementation of monitoring activities which allow the adaptation to new needs, opportunities and constraints and continuous improvements.



WHAT MAKES IT INNOVATIVE

The most innovative elements of the project are:

- The ability to take into account both the needs of (mainly migrant) care workers and (native) families
- The ability to deal with different dimensions of care work (bureaucratic and contractual matters, training, sociability, care workers' care needs, etc.)
- The capacity to represent a reference point also after the signature of the contract between families and care workers



WHAT MAKES IT RISKY

- The welfare mix solutions and the heterogeneity of partners, despite being an innovative element, may also bring about some risks, since partners have different views, priorities, competences and procedures. Therefore, an effective collaboration requires a strong effort to build and maintain a common framework, reciprocally adjust working practices and keep the partners' stakes in the project alive despite its possible evolutions.
- Although all the partners and beneficiaries are aware of families' preference for Italian workers and discrimination against certain nationalities and ethnic groups, so far neither informal nor formal actions have been implemented to counter this phenomenon. This situation may become harsher because of the economic crisis which is pushing native women to enter the domestic work sector and use the SpAF desk increasing competition and tensions between migrants and natives.