

**ISMGE 2020****II International Scientific and Practical Conference "Individual and Society in the Modern Geopolitical Environment"****PUBLIC RELATIONS IN SOCIAL WORK: EXPERIENCE OF THE KURGAN REGION**

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***Abstract***

This article analyzes the features of public relations in social work. The authors note that it is necessary to study PR as functions of effective management in social work. The introduction of PR in social work is an innovative resource that can increase the performance efficiency of social institutions and social workers themselves, the quality of services for clients and society as a whole. This is especially true for the Kurgan region, where the role of the social service system is very high for a number of reasons. The article analyzes the structure of PR on the example of one of the most effective, according to the results of an independent assessment of the quality of service delivery, social service institutions of the Kurgan region. In the structure of PR in social work, two components are singled out: external and internal. External PR institutions include working with key audiences in the external environment: regional and city mass media, structures of government bodies and higher-level authorities, public organizations, fundraising (volunteering, sponsorship), production collectives. Internal PR in the institution is implemented by such forms of work with the labor collective as the organization of professional training of employees, professional skill contests, protection of the profession. Based on the empirical analysis, the authors conclude that developed public relations are one of the important factors in increasing the efficiency of social work, and as a recommendation, it is proposed to introduce a PR specialist in the staffing list of social service institutions.

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**Keywords:** External PR, internal PR, public relations, social work, quality control.

## 1. Introduction

The socio-economic transformations, taking place in Russia recently, have led to various changes in the life of the society, to the transformation of the social system and, in particular, many social connections.

At the moment the formation and development of public relations are becoming an urgent problem of society, and, therefore, new methods, the help of which is useful for the society and social institutions, are becoming very important.

PR is an integral part of the effective management of any organized form of activity: state and municipal, industrial, commercial, public, etc., including relations of non-price competition (prestige, authority, reputation, trust, mutual understanding, etc.). The relationship between the company and the public is one of the most important topics today. Favorable mutually beneficial relationships help to create a trusting background for the company to interact with customers, partners and investors.

## 2. Problem Statement

Public relations perform the functions of managerial communications. In foreign practice, they are called "public relations" (PR). In Russia, it is also customary to use this term and its designation.

The very word combination "public relations" appeared in everyday life in the late 80-ies. Now in modern literature there are about five hundred definitions of what PR is. The classic definition of PR was given by Black (2003): "PR is the art and science of achieving harmony with the environment through mutual understanding based on truth complete informational content" (p. 15). Currently, there are a lot of works by foreign and domestic authors on the theory and practice of developing public relations. In particular, it is Avidar (2017), Antric et al. (2019), Black (2003), Bourne (2019), Botan and Frey (1987), Cutlip et al. (2016), Lee and Yue (2020), Peter (1972), Sommerfeldt et al. (2019), Kuznetsov (2007), Shishkina (2002) and others.

At the same time, in our opinion, insufficient attention has been paid to the development of public relations as a function of effective management in social work.

## 3. Research Questions

According to the definition in the "Modern Encyclopedia of Social Work" (Zhukova, 2008), public relations (PR) in social work is a system of constant versatile communicative activity, its organization and management, aimed at establishing positive interaction, understanding, and friendly relations of social welfare institutions, social services, social workers with the public (clients, consumers of social services, local authorities, government, legislative and public organizations and other structures and representatives).

The purpose of public relations in social work is to collect, reflect upon and disseminate positive, historical and modern experience in charity, volunteering, social security, social protection, social services; to create an attractive image of social workers; to establish contact, to improve interaction with stakeholders, with the population, with state and non-state institutions, organizations.

Despite the variety of definitions, the researchers concur in one point: activities in the field of public relations are a number of communication management processes between an organization and its target audience. At the same time, the target audience can be understood widely as the public.

The public is all those with whom a social organization comes into contact both inside it (employees, personnel, workers, members of public organizations, etc.) and outside it (users of social services, local residents, social customers, partners, consumers etc.). If we imagine an organization that implements social work as a subject of public relations, the public as an object, and the relations themselves as feedback between the subject and the object, “public relations” can be defined as follows: these are targeted actions of specialists to form and maintain public trust in the subject of public relations.

Thus, the main goal of public relations is the formation and maintenance of trust to the organization, implementing social work. The word “trust” is the key one in measuring the nature of social PR. Therefore, any leader should understand that the final result and basis of the organization’s PR activity is to establish trust between the public and the organization, realizing various types of social work.

Public relations activities in social services include:

- any actions, aimed at improving contacts between people or social services;
- anything that can presumably improve mutual understanding between social services and those with whom they come into contact both inside and outside;
- measures, aimed at expanding the sphere of influence of the service by means, adequate to the goal and not contradicting to social ethics;
- recommendations on creating a favorable climate, on strengthening the public importance of social services, image events.

#### **4. Purpose of the Study**

The Kurgan region is a border one. It borders on the Chelyabinsk, Sverdlovsk, Tyumen regions and the Republic of Kazakhstan. The population for 2020 is 827.166 people. Since the Kurgan region is a region with unfavorable levels of economic development and the life of the population, social work, aimed at mitigating the problems of certain categories of citizens, is in great demand in the region.

Improving the efficiency of social work is one of the priority tasks of social policy. Theoretically, PR can act as a factor, determining the increase in the efficiency of social work. Therefore, in this study, the purpose has been set to examine public relations as a factor of increasing the efficiency of social work on the example of the organization of social services in the Kurgan region.

#### **5. Research Methods**

The main research methods are the following:

1. independent assessment of the quality of work of social service organizations of the Kurgan region, including:
  - 1.1. questionnaire survey of service recipients. The toolkit (questionnaire) contains questions formulated in accordance with the criteria specified in the Federal Law No. 442 dated December 28, 2013 (Federal Law of the Russian Federation No. 442-FL, 2013) and the

indicators shown in the Decree of the Government of the Russian Federation No. 638 dated May 31, 2018. (Decree of the Government of the Russian Federation No. 638., 2018);

- 1.2. observation method. The Decree of the Government of the Russian Federation contains detailed assessment criteria for the general improvement of the organization of social services and the criteria for access to services for people with disabilities (Decree of the Government of the Russian Federation No. 638., 2018);
  - 1.3. analysis of official sites of social service institutions; assessment of remote methods of interaction (telephone, electronic services, etc.).
2. analysis of the documents of the State budgetary institution “Center of social services for senior citizens and people with disabilities in Kurgan”.

## 6. Findings

The analysis of the assessment of the activities of social service institutions of the Kurgan region has been carried out to compare the satisfaction of various criteria, characterizing the quality of the services provided in different institutions, with the general regional result of the satisfaction with the criteria, as well as to compare the institutions among themselves, on the basis of which the organizations are subsequently rated (Moroz & Padurina, 2019). In total, 1613 respondents were interviewed in 17 out of 42 institutions of the Kurgan region during the sociological survey. The first place in the rating of social service institutions of the Kurgan region in 2019 was taken by the State budgetary institution “Center of social services for senior citizens and people with disabilities in Kurgan” (hereinafter referred to as the Center). 252 respondents were interviewed there.

Following the objectives set in this article, let us consider the respondents’ answers on the activities of the Center’s specialists in the field of public relations in more detail.

**Table 01.** Are you satisfied with the quality, completeness and accessibility of the information on the work of the organization, displayed on the stands?

N:	data	the number of respondents	% of the number of respondents
1	Fully satisfied	11	84.62
2	Partially satisfied	1	7.69
3	Unsatisfied	1	7.69
	<b>Total:</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>100.00</b>

**Table 02.** Are you satisfied with the quality, completeness and accessibility of the information on the work of the organization, located on the site?

N:	data	the number of respondents	% of the number of respondents
1	Fully satisfied	8	88.89
2	Partially satisfied	0	0.00
3	Unsatisfied	1	11.11
	<b>Total:</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>100.00</b>

Thus, 92% of the Center’s clients are satisfied with the quality, completeness and accessibility of the information on the organization’s work, displayed on the stands (Table 1.). Only 5% of the respondents appealed for the information, displayed on the stands, 4% of the respondents visited the organization’s website. Among those who turned to the site in search of information, 89% were satisfied with the quality of the provided information (Table 2).

**Table 03.** The satisfaction with the communication with the employees of the organization

N:	data	with the politeness of the organization’s employees during the initial contact (in %)	with the friendliness, attentiveness of the organization’s employees during the direct service delivery	with the friendliness, attentiveness of the organization’s employees while using distance forms
1	Fully satisfied	96.77	97.20	98.89
2	Partially satisfied	3.23	2.80	1.11
3	Unsatisfied	0.00	0.00	0.00
	<b>Total:</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>100.00</b>

**Table 04.** Would you advise your relatives and friends to contact this organization to get social services?

N:	data	the number of respondents	% of the number of respondents
1	Yes	242	98.37
2	No	4	1.63
3	<b>Total:</b>	<b>246</b>	<b>100.00</b>

This means that 100% of the respondents are more or less satisfied with the politeness and attentiveness of the organization’s employees at different stages of communication with clients (Table 3.). 98% of the respondents would recommend relatives and friends to contact this organization for social services (Table 4.). The satisfaction of service recipients with the organizational conditions of service delivery (availability and clarity of navigation within the organization of the social sphere; work schedule of the organization of the social sphere, etc.) is also quite high. 99% of the respondents are satisfied with the organizational conditions of service delivery.

The assessment of the site of the institution has shown the presence of a large amount of useful information, relevant news and materials related to the activities of the organization.

The assessment of distance methods of interaction between service recipients and institutions has also shown good result. The secret call has been effective. The Center staff answered all the questions of the “client” politely and in detail. A detailed response has also been received to the e-mail message. The contact form, located on the site, needs improving. In general, we can conclude that the Center has done well.

Further, on a successful example of the State budgetary institution “Center of social services for senior citizens and people with disabilities in Kurgan”, the analysis of the performance of the Center’s specialists on external and internal PR.

External PR implies working with key audiences in an external environment.

The experience of the Center in the development of public relations has been gained for about 30 years since the opening of the first departments of social services for senior citizens in the city of Kurgan. Then the first publications appeared in the regional newspaper “Novyy Mir”, the city newspaper – “Kurgan and Kurgantsy”, the first speeches of department heads and consumers of social services were made on the radio.

In the following years, with the development of various forms of social services for elderly and disabled people, with the improvement of the legislative base of organizations that provide social services, after a series of reorganizations, for 10 years in Kurgan the State budgetary institution “Center of social services for senior citizens and people with disabilities in Kurgan” has been developing the social work with senior citizens and people with disabilities. Public relations (PR-activity) have formed into an important managerial direction, coordinated by the organizational and methodological department of the Center.

For these years, the Center’s relations with the media have been developing and improving. In the regional, city newspapers, on the regional radio there are publications and broadcasts for the holiday dates: Defender of the Fatherland’s Day, International Day of Worker’s Solidarity, Women’s Day, Victory Day, for professional holidays - Day of the social worker, Day of the elderly, Mother's Day, etc. The Internet site, showing work experience, news, etc. is becoming more and more popular.

The development of interagency cooperation, fundraising (volunteering and sponsorship) is playing an increasingly important role in building public confidence in the activities of the Center and in the realization of work forms. The cooperation by contract is being pursued with 12 cultural institutions, 49 educational institutions, 8 public health institutions and 16 public organizations, industrial and commercial structures, in total with 125 labor collectives. Such cooperation allows developing, improving and promoting innovative technologies of social work.

Currently, the Center implements: “Preventorium at home”, “Teamwork method of providing social services”, “Volunteer movement”, “Interest clubs”, “Bibliotherapy”, “Nursing service”, “Social taxi”, “University of the third age”, “Emergency social services”, “Social place for renting rehabilitation equipment”.

At the “University of the third age” there are 10 faculties: “Psychology”, “Health”, “Historical and local lore “Russia and Zauralie”, “Religious Studies”, “Information technologies”, “Legal knowledge”, “Decorative and applied arts”, “Foreign Languages”, “Musical creativity”, “Gardening”. Each direction is organized by the order of the director, presentations of such forms of work have been carried out, the experience is revealed at regional and zonal seminars in the system of social protection of the population of the region, and there are publications in the media.

One of the activities of the Center is the realization of social projects. Currently, there are seven of them: “We give the warmth of soul to people”, “The connecting thread of generations”, “Information kaleidoscope”, “School of the care for people with limited mobility”, “Safety school for the elderly and disabled”, “World of equal opportunities”, “Social tourism”. Each project has its own program and is supervised by an employee of the Center. Methodological manuals and recommendations have been issued on the activities of each structural unit, innovative forms of service delivery, and social projects to help employees of the Center and for the population. Brochures on the history of the Center and its

veterans are also published. In 5 institutions of social protection of the population and 5 departments of the Pension Fund of the city, the stands are located with information materials on the work of structural units, information technologies, social projects of the Center, telephone numbers are given for reference.

Volunteers and sponsors take an active part in providing one-time aid to elderly people and people with disabilities, in conducting flash mobs on pre-holiday days, in financing and collecting holiday sets, in attending concerts, performances, and other cultural events.

An important area of public relations at the Center is internal PR. It is implemented in such forms of work with the labor collective (and this is more than 500 people) such as: organizing professional studies with employees of organizations that provide social services, professional skill contests, protecting the profession (creative report, work with social service veterans, application of moral and material incentive measures).

In professional training programs, along with questions of the theory and practice of social work, one considers questions of the theory of the development of social work in Russia, abroad, in the Kurgan region and in the Center for Social Services. To hold classes, employees of the Main directorate for social protection of the population of the Kurgan Region, the Administration of Kurgan, teachers of the department of sociology, social work and work organization with the youth of Kurgan State University are invited. Mastering of theoretical questions is taken into account during the certification of specialists and social workers of the Center.

The professional skill contest “A social worker - a source of strength, hope, faith!” among the social workers of the Center has become a systematic part of the work of the labor collective. The following objectives are defined in the contest regulation:

- professional development of social workers;
- discovery of talented creative workers;
- development of creative initiative and innovation;
- support of the introduction and development of innovative technologies in the field of social services for the elderly;
- creation of conditions for professional and personal self-realization of employees;
- formation of understanding of the importance, the necessity of their work among employees;
- increase of the prestige and formation of an attractive image of social work.

The contest takes place in three stages, including the assessment of the quality of service, knowledge of theory and competitive tests. The information about the winners of the contest is published in the media. One of the main and significant internal PR events is the annual meeting of the labor collective on the implementation of the collective agreement between the administration and the trade union organization and the development of social services. In the work of the meeting, along with the labor collective, there are representatives of the Main directorate for social protection of the population of the Kurgan Region, the Administration of Kurgan, the Regional committee of the trade unions and the media.

Thus, having analyzed the rating of social service institutions of the Kurgan region, based on the results of an independent assessment of the quality of service delivery, as well as the features of external and internal PR in the State budgetary institution “Center of social services for senior citizens and people

with disabilities in Kurgan”, it can be stated that public relations are an important factor in improving the effectiveness of social work.

## 7. Conclusion

For about 30 years in Russia, social work has been developing and improving. It has become an integral part of the implementation of social policy in every region. Among the population the authority of organizations, implementing social services, is growing.

In our opinion, taking into account the prospects for the development of social work and its significance, it becomes necessary to introduce public relations specialists in the staffing tables of the institutions, which should provide: understanding and perception of the organization’s mission by the public; the formation of communication channels with people who are provided with services; creating and maintaining conditions for raising funds. Social PR should establish harmony in the relations between the organization and society, create the relationship of trust among the population and authority structures, this is a sign of a peaceful life of the country and an indicator of the absence of social tension. The organizations, carrying out social work, take upon these functions, and they need to be able to work with their environment, to bring their noble mission to everyone.

As this study has shown the Kurgan region has a lot of effective organizations providing the population with social services, one of which is the State budgetary institution “Center of social services for senior citizens and people with disabilities in Kurgan”. An important factor, ensuring the effectiveness of the Center, is well-organized public relations.

## Acknowledgments

We thank the Main Department of social protection of the population of the Kurgan region for the materials provided.

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