

## **Experiential knowledge and experiential expertise as equal sources of knowledge**

source:

National Advisory Committee Higher Social Studies (2022). *Social in movement. Empowerment of the social professional as fundament*. Association of Universities of Applied Sciences, August 2022.

*This advice supports the attention for experiential knowledge in Social Work Education.*

*At the moment (Spring 2023), a working group is developing an action plan to put this advice into practice for all the schools of social work in the Netherlands.*

The social professional gives priority to people in vulnerable situations. This focus is also present in empowerment, where priority is given to people in poverty, homeless people, people with disabilities, whether mental, psychological or physical. Connecting with these groups and giving them a voice in society is the aim of empowerment. This fits in seamlessly with the aim of the social professional to hear and make explicit the voice of people in vulnerable situations, to facilitate and create participation opportunities for them and thus promote social inclusion. By proximity and by connecting well with people, especially those in vulnerable situations, the social professional can get to know their living environment and estimate the impact of policy on their daily lives. Empowerment expressly aims to give the so-called 'silent' or 'silenced voices' a voice in aid, society and policy. Creative methods such as art, co-design, play, often underexposed, appear to be a good means of letting 'silent' voices speak and enabling society to discover and utilize their needs, interests and capacities (see below). more Hannes, 2021).

The recognition of this experiential knowledge of people in vulnerable situations as an equal source of knowledge also means reciprocity in the relationship between, for example, a professional and a citizen. The professional stands next to people, not above them. The point is that the professional learns to look for solutions together with people in a process from which both parties can learn and become stronger.

Experiential knowledge can evolve into experiential expertise by, firstly, processing and broadening one's own knowledge (into collective knowledge) and, secondly, by expertly introducing this broadened knowledge into, for example, policy or assistance.

Training is often followed for this growth towards experiential expertise. Experiential expertise is thus a professional source of knowledge that should be used optimally in various contexts in an empowering society: not only in practice or policy, but also in research and education. There are already good examples of this nationally and internationally. Various methods are already available for collaborating with experts by experience in education, including Living Library, working in tandem in the Social Work degree programs and joint workshops (see Driessens & Lyssens-Danneboom, 2022). The central aim here is to strive for inclusive education and inclusive research, ideally in combination with inclusive practices and inclusive policy in domains such as the labor market, health, sport, culture and leisure.