

Ainoa Marín Risquez

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3637-4384>

**Autonomous University of Barcelona
Spain**

“THE ANGEL’S SHARE”

Abstract

In this paper I present my personal reflections and knowledge of social work based on the film “The Angels’ Share” directed by Ken Loach and released in 2012. The movie is about young who cannot escape their criminal past. To avoid prison, they are sentenced to community service with an assigned social educator, Harry. He soon becomes their mentor, reintegrating them into society in a most curious way, introducing them to art and the world of whiskey. The message of this film goes beyond being hopeful, as it shows us the variability of social work, and how it consists of helping individuals, groups or communities to improve social functioning and create conditions, adapting to each situation by using the optimal resources for the individuals being the environment.

Keywords: social work, social educator, reinstatement, community service

In general, the movie “The Angels’ Share” is about young people (Robbie, Rhino, Albert, and Mo, among others) who cannot escape their criminal past. To avoid prison, they are sentenced to community service with an assigned social educator, Harry. He soon becomes their mentor, reintegrating them into society in a most curious way, introducing them to art and the world of whiskey.

One of the characters who forms the closest bond with Harry is Robbie, a young man with a partner and child who has a lot of trouble reintegrating into society due to his violent and criminal past. Thanks to his mentor, and later friend, he discovers his interest and skill in the world of whiskey. We can see the will of Harry to teach these people in the best way possible for them. Looking for their interests, helping with their recovery from drugs or supporting their family. Harry lives up to the definition of a social worker, looking for the best resources to help the youngsters, and with his own personal touch, his devotion to whiskey.

We see how, in a comical way, the film introduces you to the world of social work. We see how the characters learn and, in a “criminal” funny way, they end up changing the course of their lives towards a better bath for both themselves and their families.

Judging by the cover, “The Angels’ Share” would not be the first film I would have thought of seeing. However, when I read the synopsis, it was the meaning of the title that inspired me.

“The Angels’ Share” is, in the history of whiskey, a small amount of whiskey that evaporates through the wood and into the atmosphere. And, by giving the angels their share, we ensure that the whiskey is the best it can possibly be when it’s bottled.

After re-watching the film, I somehow understand why they chose this title, or at least I have found what it means to me in relation to the film. If we extrapolate the whiskey to the dysfunctional lives of these young people, we see a sensational relationship. Just as whiskey needs to lose part of its essence to become better young people need to improve themselves by transforming their older life.

I would also like to highlight the inspiration of Harry’s character. The ability to adapt his skills to help people individually and in the way they need and, at the same time, to know how to transmit and help in group dynamics is simply moving to watch.

I do adhere to the definition and means of social work, with “helping individuals, groups, or communities to improve social functioning and create conditions” being the definition and adapting to each situation using the optimal resources for individuals being the means. That is why this film has taught me another way to help others. As I said before, I really enjoyed the approach, in a comical and special way “The Angels’ Share” used to show that even if it seems impossible to help people excluded from society, if you use the right tools for each situation and person it is possible, just like Harry’s character does.

On the one hand, when talking about social work, there are often examples of people in need that society empathises with, such as child poverty, disabled people, abused women or immigrants. On the other hand, there are other people at risk of exclusion with whom society does not develop empathic feelings, such as people at risk of social exclusion due to criminal or delinquent problems or with addiction problems, like the characters shown in this film.

This is because we believe that these people are in this position because they have brought it on themselves, as if it is their own fault that they have ended up in this situation, without taking into account the individual background of each person.

However, these characters slyly show what has brought them to this situation and how, internally, they wish to leave this part of their lives behind, accepting the help they need to be better for their families.

I never thought I had also this view about these people until I saw the movie and debated it with friends. I believe it is time to change this point of view and start considering every person and every situation that has caused them to become less social functioning than the other. It is time to stop judging and start emphasizing in order to help them in the best way we can as a society. In summary, I would recommend this movie to anyone who wants to have a good time and to anyone interested in social work because it provides another perspective on this profession.