

Voices of Youth

SMS

REPORT OF BEST PRACTICES

**Skills, Methods and Structures (SMS) to support that
the voices of young people are considered in policy
and decision making (Leonardo da Vinci Project)**

2013-2015

Sweden, Holland and Belgium

Introduction

The overall objective of this Leonardo da Vinci project was to address the issues concerning the difficulties that the European countries and institutions have in finding ways for political and social involvement of young people at risk of exclusion, as well as young people who are already socially excluded through for example drop-out from school or apprenticeships and employments, housing and relation problems.

We have identified skills, methods and structures needed to boost true participation and inclusion of the voices of vulnerable youngsters in democratic processes, in policy making, care planning and in daily life decisions. In doing so we have improved our own skills to work in a democratic and inclusive way. Increasing participation of vulnerable youngsters at all levels may also hopefully be a small contribution towards combating poverty and decreasing drop-outs from schools in accordance with the Europe 2020 agenda.

The partners have gathered "best practice" ways of approaching the issues through exchange of experiences, in study visits and discussions, in and between meetings. We have also learnt from young people and taken into consideration their input from their life experiences and from their participation in the study visits and discussions.

In this report we have described the projects visited, the tools being used and an evaluation of best practice when working to include vulnerable youngsters and to let their voices be heard by politicians and policy makers

Projects visited

Rotterdam April 2014

Rotterdam Youth Counter

www.rotterdam.nl/jongerenloket

“Getting young people qualified for the future”

The Rotterdam Youth Counter (Jongerenloket) is the gateway for all young adults 16-27 years old, who live in the city of Rotterdam.

Services and advice offered within this project is education, employment, care programs, central youth reception, and welfare and community service.

The staff works with the vision that young people are responsible for the development of their talents and by cultivating these; the young people can reach independence. During the intake of young people they work with Self-Sufficiency standards as a tool to assess the young person's level of independence.

New Chance

www.denieuwekans.org

The New chance is an organisation for socially excluded young people who want to work actively to improve their own situation and change their behavior and general outlook on life.

We help them find their own way in life to become positive and self-sufficient members of society.

New chance methods are based on a combination of education, support with practical problems and behavioral training.

New Chance is also using the Self-sufficiency standards as a tool to assess where the young person is at when entering into the program and to measure how far the young person has got when leaving the organisation.

Wijkscholen

www.rotterdam.nl/wijkscholen

The Wijkscholen is aimed at young students at the age of 16-23 years old without formal education and with complex problems in several areas. The Wijkscholen offers an intensive program combined with health care and work with the aim to bring positive change in behavior so the young student can move forward to formal education or employment.

The program offered is focusing on small group tutoring and personal approach. The young person gets a personal coach and is further guided by a full team of teachers, health care professionals, coaches and craftsmen.

Västerås October 2014

here 4 U

www.here4u.se

here 4 U is an organisation working with bringing young people forward. We are present at primary and secondary schools and in neighbourhoods. here 4 U was founded in 2002 as a project focusing on improving the social environment in schools. Prime target was and still is to reduce bullying, raise awareness of intolerance, increase safety and empower students. Today around 50 schools in Västerås work with this concept including 550 students at the age 9-19. here 4 U have been awarded several diplomas and prizes over the years and the organisation has been evaluated with good results including positive personal effects of being a member of here 4 U as well as working effectively against bullying in schools.

Chance2Change

www.forebygggarcentrum.se

Chance2Change is a project working with young men at the age 18-25 that are vulnerable and is not in employment, training or education. The project works with the young men to enable them to make a change in their way of thinking of the future. The attending youths works with themselves to try to gain more knowledge about where they are at and how to proceed to get into education or employment. The project has translated the matrix of standards for Self-sufficiency from Rotterdam and is now using that as a useful way of measuring how far young people reach during their time at the project.

Ungdomsdialog (Youth council)

www.ungdomsdialog.se

Ungdomsdialog is a way to ensure a good communication between young people and the politicians of Västerås city. It started up as a project to find a model and a structure that would last over time and through the variety of political parties in power.

The result is a structure with many different methods. The main way of working is to acknowledge adolescents as individuals with different needs and also to find young people that aren't involved in politics to become part of discussions and debates around topics of interests to them. One method that Ungdomsdialog works with is Opera.

Leuven April 2015

Casa Girls

www.risovlb.be/#/project/22

The work with Casa Girls started in 2014 to try to reach more teenage girls in an area called Casablanca in Leuven. The aim was to inform the girls about various activities in the area and also provide specific activities to girls. The youth club on site mainly attracted young men.

The project has been running for a year now and a group of 22 girls meet regularly. The group is representative for the neighbourhood and the girls are motivated to contribute by looking for ways of funding trips or other events. In this group peer support is very important.

The young girls have also started to come to other happenings that are provided by the youth club.

Kabinet J (Youth council)

www.kabinetj.be

Kabinet J is the Leuven's youth council and the official voice of young people in the city. Kabinet J has 20 motivated youngsters at the age of 16-25 years old. Kabinet J organizes participation moments with youngsters that ends with a written recommendation for the policy makers of the city. One politician is selected to work with Kabinet J and to ensure their recommendation is heard by all politicians in power.

Kabinet J wants to listen to as many youngsters as possible and have used several different methods such as events, on line chatting, visits to schools etc. Kabinet J has been successful in being an organisation that includes youngsters from all different communities in the city. Kabinet J works hard to get as many young people as possible involved in the topics that politicians wants the answer of, from young people but also helps groups of young people to be listened to.

Jeugdadviseurs (Youth advisors)

www.jacoostbrabant.com

Youth advisors are a project about friends helping friends. Young people have a tendency to go to the peers when they have a problem. The purpose of this project is to try to get a group of young people the basic counselling skills so they are equipped to deal with all sort of problems presented to them by their peers.

Every year in February a new course is on offer to young people to become Advisors. The training starts with a weekend away with teambuilding and the group then meets regularly to get skills needed to be a good Advisor. Every year we train around 15 young people at the age 15-25 years old to become Advisors.



The group in Leuven, Belgium April 2015

Tools

Opera

Opera is a communication method that makes sure everybody in the group gets to say their opinion. In big groups often only a few people speak their mind and the result of the discussion is not a conclusion of the whole group, but the result of the people comfortable speaking their mind. The aim with Opera is to create an environment where everybody feels comfortable and safe to express their thoughts. The key for this to succeed is a structured conversation in five steps. The five steps are **O**wn suggestion, **P**air suggestion, **E**xplanations, **R**anking, **A**rranging – the first letter of each step makes the word OPERA hence the name of the method.

Opera was designed by Kari Helin who also is the founder of Innotiimi, www.innotiimi.se.

In Opera you start the process with an open question that the group would like an answer to. The facilitator leads the group through the process where all the participants feel involved. Before starting the OPERA process the facilitator start with

- Explaining the background for the process
- Giving an open, well thought through question

What is the reason for the process? To which question do we need answers? What issues need group discussion and consensus? The question should be focused on the particular issue. Then the process may start with the following steps:

O – own suggestions (The participants begin the process by working on their own. They are given some time to think individually about the issue by concentrating on the question and by writing their suggestions on a piece of paper.)

P – pair suggestions (The participants are now given time to work in pairs. Their task is to discuss the suggestions that they have written down during the last phase. From their joint suggestions, they are allowed to choose the four most important. They are given blank sheets of paper and a blue marker pen by the facilitator. The four ideas are then written onto papers, one idea per sheet. The sheets are then placed onto the work board using a separate column for each working pair.)

E – explanation (Each of the working pairs briefly explains, to the rest of the audience, the suggestions that they have attached to the work board.)

R – ranking (The pairs are now given the chance to select from all of the suggestions on the board. They are allowed to mark, with a small red plus sign, the four suggestions that they consider to be the most important according to the selection

criteria given by the facilitator. During this phase of Opera, a common opinion is formed about which suggestions should be taken further.)

A – arranging (With the help of the participants, the facilitator arranges the ranked suggestions on the work board according to the importance attached to them, as indicated by the red pluses, and according to the core ideas contained in the suggestions. The objective is to form the suggestions into coherent themes and to gain a holistic view of what they represent.)

Finally the facilitator needs to agree with the participants as to what to do about the suggestions remaining on the board.

The Opera helps the facilitator to guide the group and to find answers to questions and the participants feels fully involved in all steps. Innotiimi arrange training for facilitators that wishes to use this method. We have worked with the method in all visited countries and it has proven to be a very good tool to get all young people's voices heard.



Solution focused approach

All the Swedish projects that we visited was working in a solution focused way which means they are looking for solutions and not focusing on the problem. In the assessment or at the start of working with a group or individual young person the staff is looking at what is actually working for this young person and then they are starting to build on that strength.

Solution focused way of working is a friendly and respectful way of encouraging young people in their belief that they can master change by and for themselves. Solution and ideas emerge in a dialogue and in the interaction between the worker and the young person.

Self-sufficiency matrix

The *Self-Sufficiency Matrix (ZRM)* is one of the main pillars on which the Youth Desk's work is based. Since 2010, youth coaches fill in the ZRM for every youngster who reports to the Desk for the first time.

The Matrix has been translated to Swedish and is now also used by the project Chance2Change. The concept of ZRM originates from the United States and offers an objective instrument to determine an individual's ability to foresee his or her own basic needs.

The ZRM reviews the following 11 domains: finance, time spent during the day, housing, household relations, mental health, physical health, addiction, activities in daily life, social network, participation in society, and issues with the justice department.

For each domain, a scale from 1 to 5 is used to determine how an individual performs, where scores of 1 and 2 are reviewed as 'fails', whereas a 3 is seen as only a modest pass. The ZRM has proven to be an extremely reliable instrument, which on average reaches a reliability of 96% when used by a trained youth coach. Working with the ZRM does not stop after the intake, but is used throughout the re-integrative process.

In total there are four variants. The ZRM that is completed during the intake session serves as a baseline, as it provides a snapshot of a person's current situation. The second step is to set a reasonable goal, expressed in a ZRM score, where the person will be working towards over a set period of time.

Success stories

In Leuven they are working with success stories. Professionals and young people were sharing their success stories and were led by a facilitator to look at all the ingredients needed for a success story.

This is done as a workshop and one person in the group tells their own success story and the rest of the group is listening and writing down what they think were the essential things in the story that made it successful. All the groups then put up what they have found was the essence of the success.

The whole group is then analyzing and pin point what is the essential thing for making a success.

Both Holland and Sweden will try to carry out similar workshops in the autumn of 2015. We are also waiting for the manual for the method to be completed by workers in Leuven.

Empowerment

In all the projects that we have been visiting and in discussions with young people and professionals during this project, we have found that empowerment as a method is the only way we can work with young people so they can achieve their goals.

The young people we meet are vulnerable and in one way or other have been marginalised from society. To work with empowerment to create a process of obtaining basic opportunities for these youngsters is definitely the best practice.

To give young people self-respect we have to involve them fully in the process to play an active role in solving their own crisis and not treat them as helpless individuals that are recipients of voluntary or statutory services.

Learning by doing

In all the projects visited we have seen young people learning by getting the chance to do exciting activities which challenge them and make them interested in learning more.

We have also seen how staff is listening to what young people want to learn and then creates activities so they can achieve their goals. Learning opportunities are changeable to suit the group of young people that are involved at the moment. They can very easy change to fill another group's need. The main thing is to give the young person the opportunity to do something in which they have shown an interest so they can further develop skills that will eventually get them equipped for further education or training.



Best Practice

All the visited project filled out a Best practise form with questions about required competencies and skills that is needed to work within the project both on a individual level and a organisational level. We collected the forms from 9 projects and we evaluated their findings at our last boardmeeting in Brussell. We had young people attending from all countries and they contributed to the discussions .

We also decided to carry out a Opera to see what we thought was the most important things when it comes to hear the voices of vulnerable young people. Below is showing the results from the board meeting.

The Criteria

During the meeting in Brussels we used the opera instrument to set criteria of elements needed in the non-formal training of professionals who work with young people.

How can we make the voices of vulnerable youths heard?

	Social Skills	How to do it?	Organizational Skills	Platform
1	Adults supporting youth when they want to express an opinion	Processing information into patterns	Remember about two ends: - Collecting voices - Disseminating	Participation platform for youngsters and managers, policy makers and politicians
2	Create relationships with youngsters	Obligation to meet youngsters	Getting the issue on the agenda in organisations and politics	Create a platform (on line/off line)
3	Taking them seriously and listen	Use youngsters to reach out to other youngsters	Sustainable structure	Creating a platform to express their issues (participation)
4		Making sure professionals have competencies that will enable them to listen forward and give back response		

Added value

We have been able to attract a lot of young people from all the participating countries and the youngsters has not just been involved in the study visits but all the discussions around how to include vulnerable young people in democratic processes, in policy making, care planning and in daily life decisions. Five young people from Sweden went to Holland to meet up with each other as they had become such good friends during a study visit.

We have also included young people that have never left their country before and we have seen them developing an interest in travelling which they would not have done if they haven't got this opportunity to take part in the project. There is also young people that have participated in the project that have become so much more confident and aware of social exclusion and so they have made the decision to work with social issues and are at present looking for education/training.

Summary

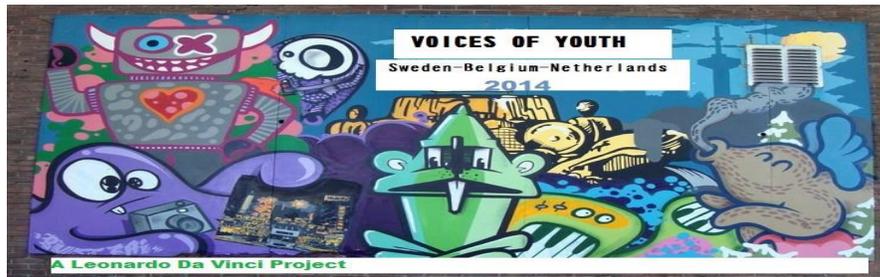
We have been able to see a range of imaginative and innovative approaches to draw young people back into society. All projects show intrinsically attractive activities and using these as hooks to secure the young person's involvement. Negotiation, flexibility and differentiation in the development and provision of programmes are needed to reach youngsters that are or have been excluded.

Open communication based on trust and mutual respect between professionals and the young people and small group sizes combined with individual sessions is something else we have learnt is essential to achieving and developing young people to reach their full potential and to become part of decision making in the organisation.

Variation in pace and activity should not be undervalued as all the young people are different and they need different time to develop both themselves and to get an understanding of the organisations way of making decisions. We can't expect young people to fully participate and have an opinion if they don't feel secured and at ease with the organisation they are involved in. Listening together with timing is therefor also very important when we are trying to hear the voices of vulnerable youth.

Good quality and up to date environments where young people feel welcomed and valued is the key for projects to succeed to fully include all the young people they are working with.

www.voicesofyouth.eu



Voices of youth have an active Facebook group.



This project has been funded with support from the European Commission. This reports reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.