

Innovation for Employment Progress Report (Public)

Lifelong Learning Programme
Leonardo da Vinci Multilateral Project

Project Partnership:

National Care Advisory Service (Rainer), United Kingdom

SWSPiZ: Academy of Management, Poland

IAYPIC: Irish Association of Young People in Care, Ireland

CSAGYI: Family Child Youth Association, Hungary

CPIP: Centre for Promoting Lifelong Learning, Romani



Project information

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Beneficiary organisation: RPS Rainer

Project coordinator: Lucy Sweetman
Project coordinator organisation: RPS Rainer
Project coordinator telephone number: 44 1225 464463
Project coordinator email address: Lucy.sweetman@catch-22.org.uk

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Executive Summary

This is the Progress Report for the project Innovation for Employment (IFE). The report describes the first year of the project including establishing the partnership, organising and holding our first meeting and beginning the development and testing of our ideas. Our work is concerned with the needs of care leavers: children and young people who are in transition from the care system. We are a partnership of five countries: UK, Ireland, Poland, Hungary and Romania. We have quite different systems of care for young people who cannot live with their parents or other family but we felt that it was possible to develop a training course that would meet the shared basic emotional and wellbeing needs of the young people with whom we work.

Emotional Health and Wellbeing is a term we use to describe health needs that are more holistic than simply the absence or prevention of disease. Research shows that young people who have been in care are more likely to be vulnerable to mental illness, particularly depression, they are more likely to have low self-esteem and can lack the skills, aptitudes, confidence and resilience to enable them to address and “bounce back” from difficult or taxing situations.

Having the opportunity to understand our emotions, manage relationships and communicate our feelings confidently is an essential part of feeling confident about ourselves and our place in the world. These are also skills that are critical to preparing young people for adult life, including a life in the world of work.

We included work on employability because we felt that for young people who have been in care it is important that a range of opportunities are made available that can support their development and skills in the jobs market. We felt that there is a close tie between the emotional well-being of young people from care and providing opportunities that both develop their confidence, self-esteem and abilities while at the same time giving them the skills that will help them in the labour market. In addition the purpose of providing some form of employability activity was to enable young people to be involved in the development and delivery of the emotional health and wellbeing training.

Through the work so far we have defined the issues that young people from care face and which are shared across the partner countries. We have examined good practice and research on interventions in each country that address these issues and we have begun to explore with young people the kinds of issues they would like to be addressed in the training course. We have also involved young people in all aspects of this work, in line with each country’s employability plan.

We are now in a position to take our work forward and finalise a shared version of the training that can be piloted and evaluated across all the countries. This will be our final product, alongside clear models of best practice in providing employability opportunities for care leavers.

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1. Project Objectives

The project has two main objectives:

- 1) To develop and test a single model of Emotional Health and Wellbeing Training for young people who are leaving or have left care, across all the partner countries
- 2) To develop employability models for care leavers in each partner organisation.

We know that young people who have been taken into care are more likely to experience the kinds of emotional disruption that can have long lasting effects as they move into adulthood. Too often when we talk about young people's health it is from the point of view of securing the absence or prevention of disease. Too often, young people do not receive the kind of support and help that enables them to develop "emotional intelligence" skills that can help them negotiate their way through difficult adult experiences and feelings or to come to terms with the experiences they have had which led to them coming into care.

We wanted to identify the shared emotional and wellbeing needs of young people from care across all the partner countries so that we could design a training course that could be used across the European Union and would meet the majority of care leavers' needs.

Our aim was to provide an opportunity for young people to understand their feelings, how to manage them, how to develop positive relationships and improve self-esteem and self-confidence.

Our second objective relates to employability. Care experienced young people often lack confidence and self-esteem, they find it difficult to be resilient when new situations arise that challenge them. We felt that it was important as part of the project to develop opportunities for young people to experience new opportunities that would give them work-based skills. We felt this linked well with the emotional health and wellbeing work. We felt it was important to link the two objectives so that young people could be employed as trainees to help deliver the health and wellbeing work. This is part of developing services that enable and empower young people to participate in their development and delivery.

Each partner country is developing an employability workplan to enable young people to have a role within their organisation. Since the project started the employment situation for young people across Europe has worsened. It is critical that we provide opportunities for young people to learn work-based skills and to develop their confidence at the same time so that they can go forward into work with some experience that will be useful to an employer and skills and confidence that will help them secure their own future.

2. Project Approach

The approach of the project has been to work across the partners to identify the shared emotional health and wellbeing needs of the young people we work with and to examine and explore the current practice and research in our own countries relating to our objective of providing a cross-European training framework for care experienced young people. From this we have begun to develop an outline of a programme of training for young people that the partners have been developing by working with young people in their own services.

We began our work together in late December 2008 and met for the first time as a project team in Lodz in March 2009. Our meeting in Lodz allowed us to get to know each other, establish a shared understanding of our project objectives and begin the work of identifying the issues faced by the young people we work with. Care experienced young people are part of our project partnership and participated in the initial project meeting.

Each partner country has been working with their own young people to establish whether the issues we have identified are right. Partners have also been exploring those issues in more detail with young people to discover how they can be addressed effectively in more detail through a training programme.

We have used a combination of research, good practice, shared understanding and working with young people to develop clearer ideas about what should be in the course and how it should be approached.

At the same time, partners are exploring how young people can be involved in delivering the training as part of the second objective, that is to provide employability opportunities to young people from care.

The essence of our project is collaborative; to work together to develop the kinds of support that will be most useful to young people in helping them understand and manage their emotional wellbeing as a means of enabling them to make the best possible transition from care.

Our development and piloting work will provide us with the opportunity to explore and define the interventions that have the greatest impact on young people. Our aim is to develop the kind of resources that respond to the needs of young people from different countries which we know sounds like a difficult task. However, the emotional skills that young people need to succeed in the transition to adulthood are similar across our European partnership.

Once we have completed our development and piloting work, we will be able to present working models for developing care experienced young people's emotional wellbeing.

3. Project Outcomes & Results

We completed our kick-off meeting in March 2009 at which we identified the issues we felt that care leavers from across the partnership faced. We established the main areas that we felt the training course on emotional health and wellbeing should cover and we committed ourselves to addressing those with the young people we work with.

From the work we completed in March 2009, we have created an initial outline of what the training pack should look like and how it should be formatted with support for staff and young people. We have researched similar work in our own countries to ensure that we are capturing best practice and putting it to use.

Each partner country has been involved in developing the framework for the training and the models of employability. Young people in the partner countries have been working with staff to explore ideas and as a result, we have a clearer vision of what the final training programme will look like.

Different partners have explored different aspects of the programme and some have piloted particular exercises and approaches with young people. The partnership has also worked with young people to establish their feelings and concerns about what should be included and how the training should be provided.

We have written employability plans for every partner country to show how each partner will offer employability opportunities to the young people they work with. We have publicised the work we have been doing through our own networks in each country and through linking to the <http://www.catch-22.org.uk/index.asp?m=238&s=273&ss=969&t=Innovation+for+Employment> website.

The work has also involved ensuring that information about the project has been disseminated fully across each country's networks. Our aim has been to ensure that practitioners, carers, policy-makers and academics have been informed about the project's objectives and results so far.

4. Partnerships

Our partnership is diverse but highly skilled. It includes an advocacy organisation for young people in and leaving care, a university research centre with an interest in children and families, an NGO concerned with lifelong learning and a university involved in practice learning in the social field.

The partnership is led by Rainer through its National Care Advisory Service which is a policy and practice organisation concerned with improving young people's transitions from care.

As a project we are a partnership of organisations across five countries. As well as utilising these partnerships to deliver the work, each partner organisation is using working within its own partnerships. For example in the UK, the project activity is being delivered in partnership with two local authorities, members of the National Leaving Care Benchmarking Forum. The UK is also using its partnership links with regional leaving care fora to collect good practice information on emotional health and wellbeing.

In Poland, the project team is working in partnership with staff and young people from one of the children's homes in Lodz and this is common to the other partners who have links with care providers in their cities to ensure that young people are involved extensively across the project.

Partnership working is all about shared objectives and clear communication. Our partnership has been successful in developing the first stage of the project and we hope to go on to deliver an excellent final year's work.

As a partnership, as well as delivering the objectives of the project, we are learning from each other, sharing our practice and knowledge and beginning to think about other ways of collaborating with each other.

As part of our future planning over the next twelve months, we must consider how we will sustain our partnership after we have completed our project, either as a learning and practice-sharing network or to continue to develop joint projects.

We will all have a duty to continue to promote and disseminate the shared results of our project.

5.Plans for the Future

The next half of the project will concentrate on taking the work on emotional health and wellbeing we have done so far and turning it into a testable programme for each country. We will then use this work to finalise the programme for publication at the end of the project. We will also extend the use of young people as part of the project team, including delivering the emotional health and wellbeing work, across the partnership.

We will take time through the final stages of the project to work closely with young people to ensure that we have a programme that they think is useful and will work. We will evaluate the efficacy of the project and its application with young people over the coming year.

As we do this we will develop the pack and resources that will go with the training and disseminate our work in line with our project plan.

We will evaluate the employability activity in the project with young people, including assessing the success of the intervention for organisations.

We will finalise the models and their evaluations for completion at the end of the project.

We will have a final project meeting in Timisoara, Romania in early September 2010. At this meeting we will agree the final versions of all of our materials and ensure that everything is ready to be published at the end of the project. We will celebrate our successes, examine the weaknesses in the project and give consideration to future partnership activity and sustaining the work across the partnership.

Our aim for the next part of the project is to complete all of our activity and deliver all of our planned products in time for the close of the project. We will ensure that all of our activity and products are fully publicised across the EU.

We will produce the evaluated models for the training alongside a final report and a process evaluation from which other projects can learn lessons about how best to approach a transnational partnership of this nature.

6. Contribution to EU policies

The EU considers young people who have been in care a vulnerable group economically. Our project aims to evidence that through providing emotional health and wellbeing training, support and employment opportunities to care experienced young people, we are able to mitigate some of that disadvantage and empower them to make better, healthier transitions to adulthood and independence.

The project offers clear learning about the support of vulnerable people in a difficult economic period. We know that youth unemployment has increased rapidly in the twelve months since our project started and is now reaching critical levels across the EU for all young people. Our work concerns young people who are leaving care, they are vulnerable for very specific reasons many of which leave them open to exclusion from the labour market. They can find themselves embarking on independent life without the skills or experience they need to ensure their own economic wellbeing; they can be under-confident, have trouble working with others or achieving basic administrative or written tasks.

Our project will provide us with models of support for care leavers that could also be applied to other vulnerable young people who need support to gain the skills and experience that will help them enter the labour market. We think that when we publish our models at the end of the project, colleagues in Europe will find them very helpful.

In the UK the IFE project is also linked into the From Care2Work initiative, supported by the UK government and recently promoted at a European conference. Models of good practice from this initiative will influence the application of our models across the partnership. The initiative supports local government and employers to provide employment experiences and opportunities for care leavers to improve their employability. This project began in May of 2009.