



Reducing Occupational Stress in Employment

Final Report

Public Part

Project information

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Executive Summary

Target audience

The Reducing Occupational Stress in Employment (ROSE) project aims to support front line staff and managers who work in the occupational/rehabilitation services for people with intellectual disability and mental health problems. The literature indicates that working in this area of training can be particularly challenging for staff in terms of occupational stress and emotional exhaustion, which can lead to experienced personnel leaving posts. Such loss of experienced personnel may diminish the ability of organisations and services to provide effective delivery to service users.

Project objective

This project aimed to develop a combined person and work directed multi-modal intervention *de-stressor* programme in order to improve long-term retention of training and support staff who work with people with mental health and/or intellectual disabilities in the occupational/rehabilitation and social care environment.

Description of the ROSE consortium

The ROSE consortium comprised nine organisations drawn from six countries within the European Union. The partners brought a range of high value clinical, research and service delivery expertise including cognitive behaviour therapies, multiple intelligence teaching approaches, e-learning, service design and quality assurance.

Approaches used in the project

Nine work packages were designed to develop the project. These packages focused on a review of current literature on stress and interventions; data collection from service organisations and staff in the sector; analysis of data; product design relating to stress management; web based delivery and evaluation of utility; dissemination and exploitation of the final web based intervention/ support programme. All nine partners in the six countries participated in these activities.

Initially, particular interest focused on the profile of the sector across Europe and the experience of work related stress amongst front line staff. To develop this profile a mixed method research approach using a cross sectional survey design and focus groups was utilised as methods of data collection. Data was collected from a range of managers and support workers in 5 countries. Data was then analysed both statistically and qualitatively.

Following data collection and analysis, two intervention programmes dealing with personal work related stress and environmental work related stress were designed and piloted in five of the partner countries through a prototype web design. After successful piloting a web based platform was established and the intervention programmes were launched and delivered to the target audience through e-learning software technology.

Major results

Our results indicate a lack of uniformity in organisational approaches, staff education and staff support as this relates to workplace stress in this sector. Those working in the sector see a need for effective individual and organisational support in the management of stress. The adoption of an online stress management programme was perceived by workers as a commitment on the part of their organisation to employee well-being.

As a result of this feedback, two online learning session programmes (one person centred and one environmental for managers) were developed and launched. The project results were widely disseminated through the project website, international conferences, workshops and publication, both press and peer review.

Prospects for the future

ROSE is significant at a time of widespread economic and social difficulties in Europe. The online programme reflects European Commission initiatives on social inclusion, work place employee well-being, policy harmonisation and mental health. These are reflective of the priorities of the European Pact on Mental Health and Well-being. The project, hosted by the European Association of Service Providers for People with Disabilities (EASPD), provides a sustainable and readily accessible source of information and support to front line workers and the wider public. It is the intention of the project team to progress this initiative further in the future.

Details of project website

The project website can be accessed via the EASPD website at www.easpd.eu. Alternatively, it can be accessed via www.leonardorose.eu. The website consists of two sets of what we refer to as 'learning sessions'. 'Learning Sessions for All Staff' deal with management of stress at a personal level. 'Learning Sessions for Managers' aim to help the manager to improve the working environment so it is generally less stressful for all those who work within it. The set of 'Learning Sessions for Managers' have been specifically developed to help managers, though all users of the ROSE website can access them.

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1. Project Objectives

Aim

The ROSE project aimed to develop a 'user-friendly' person and work directed stress management online programme for staff working with people with mental health problems and intellectual disabilities in occupational and rehabilitation centres in Europe. The project had four main objectives. These were:

Objectives

- Develop a short integrated person and work directed programme that can be used in a variety of vocational rehabilitation settings within the social care sector of the participating member states;
- Raise awareness of the importance of dealing with the issue of occupational stress and risk of burnout amongst staff working in the vocational training and employment sector, initially for those staff dealing with users of mental health services;
- Evaluate the programme utilising a range of measures to assess the views of programme participants on the efficacy of the programme;
- Assess the value of the programme to the wider social care service domain.

Consultation, benefits and impact

In order to achieve its objectives the ROSE programme team consulted widely with managers and support workers to enable them to understand the nature of stress in the sector and also what workers felt would help them to cope with such stress. The views of this target audience were then incorporated into the design of the programme.

The ROSE programme attempts to educate managers and front line workers, including trainers and support workers, to manage their stress, at both an individual level and also in terms of the working environment. It thus aims enhance workers' well being in this sector. The development of an open web based learning platform through which workers easily access the programme means that managers and staff are able to regularly access information and guidance regarding work related stress. This regularity of access is likely to reinforce their learning and provide them with support.

The research literature shows that stress is a significant cause of ill health amongst front line workers in this sector and often leads them to leave their employment. Therefore, by supporting workers to manage their stress more effectively, the ROSE programme aims to impact in a positive way on staff retention in the work place.

2. Project Approach

The ROSE project combined an individual and environment directed approach towards stress management. This combined approach is unique in relation to the management of work related stress. An important aspect of such a combined perspective was the incorporation of a range of views on stress that reflected cultural, professional and lay understandings.

Thus, the ROSE project is a European collaboration involving nine partners drawn from academic, clinical and service provider backgrounds. The input of these partners from a range of disciplines and European countries contributed to the development of a culturally sensitive approach to stress management.

Partner input has also been supplemented by the involvement of beneficiaries as a key group in informing the programme development. The ROSE project completed a number of key information gathering activities. These included the following:

- A survey of national structures for the support of occupational and rehabilitation centres for service users with mental health problems and/or intellectual disabilities in each of the project partner countries;
- A survey of local legislative and resourcing structures and issues; the nature of organisation in vocational delivery in the partner countries and the nature of the workforce employed and the client groups served;
- An organisation and human resource survey to gather information about services at a local or micro level in each of the partner countries;
- Focus groups conducted with a range of managers and support staff in each of the five partner countries. The purpose of this was to identify the nature of stressors in the vocational sector amongst these potential beneficiaries of the project;
- A stress assessment survey, which used the job content questionnaire, was distributed to a sample of frontline workers and managers in five EU countries to assess individuals' level of stress in their workplaces;
- A survey of frontline workers and managers was used to identify their preferences for web design so that the online programme could be tailor made around their preferences.
- A pilot study to test the efficacy of two sets of learning sessions on managing work related stress (one person centred and one environmental centred) on a prototype web platform.

As a result of these key activities the ROSE project team gained a comprehensive overview of the sector in five European countries – Austria, Italy, Ireland, United Kingdom and Romania – as this relates to the structure of services; educational and worker requirements and supports; the nature of organisational stressors, the experience of individual and environmental work related stress.

This in itself was beneficial since it is the first time such information was gathered on this sector. In addition, the information was employed in an applied manner to inform the development of the work related stress management programme to help

individual workers, managers and organisations more effectively to address the issue of work related stress and employee well being.

3. Project Outcomes & Results

Outcomes achieved are as follows:

- Management and quality assurance action plans were completed for the project;
- A ROSE project promotional leaflet was developed and disseminated to stakeholders across the EU. This leaflet raised awareness of the commencement of the ROSE project and outlined the aims and objectives of the project to a wide audience;
- A ROSE project promotional website was established containing information about the ROSE project. This can be accessed at www.roseproject.eu This website provides further information about the project and news of its activities and results;
- One data base of key contacts was developed.
- Interim and final quality management evaluation reports were completed;
- A survey of the structures of services and nature of stressors in the workplace was completed
- Focus groups were conducted with managers of centres and front line workers in five EU countries to explore what they feel are the stressors within their organisations and what they feel might help them to manage work place stress;
- Profile and Needs Data for web design gathered from managers/support workers in 5 of the partner countries;
- A comprehensive review of the literature on person directed and work directed stress management interventions was conducted in order to evaluate best practice in terms of interventions and self assessment tools to better inform the individualised programme design;
- A comprehensive review of the literature on work directed stress management interventions was conducted in order to evaluate best practice in terms of interventions and assessment tools to better inform the environmental programme design;
- Two support programmes were developed one to manage personal stress and the other on the management of working environments to make them less stressful for workers;
- Web platform utilising e-learning software technology for the delivery of the above programmes;
- A pilot study in five countries was completed to test the efficacy of the web platform and programme content;
- One dissemination plan was completed and then implemented;
- A sustainable web site at www.easped.eu was established to host the ROSE programme with a corresponding Facebook page.
- Conference papers were delivered at a range of international conferences, seminars and symposia
- A report was delivered to members of the European Parliament
- Policy makers were contacted in each partner country making them aware of ROSE

- Academic papers have been accepted for publication in peer reviewed journals for late February 2011.

Results

Findings suggest there is a wide variation across the five EU countries in terms of funding structures, qualifications of staff and career progression in the vocational and rehabilitation sector. Findings also highlight the lack of centralized profile data in each country on even the most basic indices. Thus, for example it is not possible to assess the overall usage of services in terms of client numbers, the number of staff employed in the respective sector in each partner country nor how much is actually being spent on services at a national level.

A comparative analysis of the organisational and human resource profile of this sector indicates that a large number of centres across the five countries included in this study are unlikely to have risk assessment policies and procedures in place as these relate to work place stress. This is significant as it highlights the need to support staff in dealing with work place stress proactively.

In terms of the nature of stressors in the vocational and rehabilitation sector, key stressors identified by both managers and front line staff included uncontrollable/unpredictable events, multi-tasking, lack of funding, poor communication and inter-personal conflict. Managers reported experiencing particular stressors in terms of the negative connotations ascribed to the term 'stress'.

Front line staff referred to stressors in terms of the client group served and a sense of lack of support from the organisation. All participants identified significant benefits for them personally and for their organisations in relation to the establishment of an online stress management programme.

However, of equal significant is the symbolism that such a programme's adoption by their respective organisations would have for staff. It would indicate to them that the organisation valued the worker and was prepared to adapt to their needs. In this context it may be a powerful intervention to improve staff moral and sense of 'connectedness' to their employing organisation.

A comprehensive literature review on person directed stress management interventions and self assessment tools informed the person directed stress management programme design. The ROSE website incorporated many features from previous research on reducing personal worker stress including; information on what stress is and the causes of stress; changing an individual's lifestyle as a means to reduce stress; cognitive behaviour therapy techniques for cognitive behaviour restructuring; problem solving and time management techniques; communication skills training; and a platform to facilitate social support.

These features all address various issues raised by the user-group at the focus meetings. The exact content and format of each of these features has been tailored by examining evidence from previous research in the area to ensure best practice.

A comprehensive literature review on work directed stress management interventions and assessment tools informed the environmental programme design. The ROSE website incorporated many features from previous research on reducing stress in healthcare providers including; information on the organisation and stress; interpersonal skills, listening and assertiveness; leadership and motivation; change management, problem solving and conflict resolution, organisational policies, risk assessment; and ergonomics. These features all address various issues raised by the cohort of managers at the focus meetings.

The person and work directed interventions in the ROSE programme have not previously been combined in such a way for workers in this sector. By investigating evidence for online delivery of cognitive behaviour therapy and online delivery of stress management interventions, the style of delivery of the ROSE project was developed.

The style of the web-based intervention has benefits including a wide array of different modules for website users to try to make it easier to find something that is personally useful for reducing their levels of stress. For managers it provides information and guidance on how to make the work environment less stressful for those who work within it. It also allows individuals to use interventions on the website in their own time and at their own pace, using the website as often or as little they want.

The ROSE online stress management programme can be accessed at www.leonardorose.eu or www.easpd.eu

4. Partnerships

The project consortium comprised 9 different partner organisations spread across 6 EU Member States – Austria, Belgium, Ireland, Italy, Romania and the United Kingdom. Each partner had a specific role within the project reflecting their particular area of expertise and experience and provided added value to the project.

The consortium met on four major occasions together in London, Waterford and Rome, supplemented by a number of meetings held between specific partners in relation to different aspects of the project. In addition to these face to face meetings, the partners held monthly online conference calls using Skype.

Whilst face to face meetings dealt with the overall strategic management of the project, the monthly online meetings addressed its operational aspects. This regular contact resulted in close collaborative working partnerships between all members of the ROSE project and equal participation in relation to their role in the project. In this context the project promoted shared decision making, worth and understanding from a cultural perspective amongst all partners. In addition to this sense of group and European coherence the ROSE consortium fostered collegiality and knowledge transfer between partners. The added value that each partner brought to the project is set out below.

Waterford Institute of Technology (Ireland)

The co-ordinating organisation was Waterford Institute of Technology (WIT), which is located in Ireland. Waterford Institute of Technology is one of the largest third level institutes of technology in Ireland, with 9,000 full and part-time students. WIT has a track record of success in all major research funding cycles in Ireland and Europe. The Institute possesses internationally recognised scholarly expertise in the Humanities, Health, ICT, Architecture, Business and Education. Specific expertise and competence relevant to the ROSE project includes experience in the assessment of vocational support for people with mental health problems, design and delivery of programmes based on multiple intelligence teaching approaches, research in health based informatics, web based distance learning design, expertise in applied and social psychology.

European Association of Service providers for Persons with Disabilities (Belgium)

The European Association of Service providers for Persons with Disabilities (EASPD) represents over 8000 service providing organisations across Europe and across disabilities. Its main objective is to promote the equalisation of opportunities for people with disabilities through effective and high quality service systems. Its work is based on the three interconnected pillars: Impact (European Policy), Innovation (Research & Development as well as implementation of international projects) and Information (for members). EASPD established 4 Standing Committees, each with a specific focus: employment, enlargement, education, and EU policies in general. EASPD's work is guided by the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities and other important international documents such as the Disability Action

Plans of the Council of Europe and the European Commission. EASPD strongly believes in interdependence and partnership between user's organisations, providers and authorities at all levels to tackle the challenges ahead. The majority of the member organisations of EASPD are NGO's, established by parents and friends of people with disabilities (pwd). Many of them continue to participate on the boards of the organisations. Its role in the ROSE project has been to manage communication between partners and to disseminate information about the ROSE project. In this role its breadth of contacts across Europe uniquely positions it as an effective communicator of the value of ROSE in terms of the programme and its accessibility.

Department of Psychological Medicine, King's College London University of London (United Kingdom)

The division of psychological medicine is the largest group of researchers at the Institute of Psychiatry, with 25 sections dealing with different aspects of research of mental illness ranging from eating disorders to psychosis and from dementia to war-related mental ill health. The division has a turnover of more than 12 million pounds in research grant funding, with a strong track record in fulfilling European funded research. It has a world reputation in the area of treatment for psychological related distress and the treatment and management stress related illness. Its particularly strong track record in the clinical treatment of stress gives significant credibility and validity to the ROSE stress management programme.

RD Consult (Ireland)

RD Consult has many years of experience in the development of quality assurance programmes across a wide range of disability services e.g. Mental health, Intellectual Disability etc. RD have particular experience in the area of facilitation and support for people with mental health difficulties as they try to make the transition from transitional job support to actual real jobs. In addition to this RD have provided support to many training organisations in the disability sector with regard to the development of quality assurance systems designed to assist services in developing best practice with regard to the development of their training programmes in the VET area. In recent times RD have invested a lot of time in the development of Employee Assistance Programmes for use in the mainstream employment arena which are designed to assist employers in their actions to try and deal with the very real difficulty facing employers with regard to lost working days caused by stress related illness among the workforce. RD is also involved in research with other stakeholders at national and international level to try and determine the impact of occupational stress at the workplace. RD Consult's involvement with well-being in the work place and also its quality assurance and evaluation expertise means that its oversight of the ROSE project in terms of meeting outcomes is extremely well informed.

Hf Trust Ltd now called HFT (United Kingdom)

Hft provides a wide and varied range of services across the UK for people with learning disabilities. They offer a range of Registered Residential Services and Supported Living initiatives throughout England and also run many discrete specialist services for people with specific syndromes or complex support needs including Autism and Prader Willi Syndrome. Hft provides inclusive services, which are

individually tailored to each person's needs and wishes. Their values are key to all of the services we provide and apply equally to staff and service users.

In everything they do Hft emphasise the importance of Care, Consultation and Communication - they provide a caring and supportive environment where consultation and communication are central to providing quality services. They value diversity and they ensure that people have the Opportunity to develop skills and experiences. They uphold the individual's right to Respect and dignity. And they believe in Empowerment - we enable people to develop their potential, to make informed choices and to take responsibility. The philosophical principles underpinning Hft's work as this relates to client well being also is reflected in its work with staff. It therefore, provides the ROSE project with an important input in terms of understanding the operational aspects of employee well being in the work place.

Pro mente steiermark GmbH (Austria)

Pro mente steiermark are involved in a range of significant activities and provide a large range of services for people with psychological problems. These include deliberation, social work care, integration planning, work assistants, day structure, work relevant competence training, diagnostic, qualification and occupation, rehabilitation for employment. In addition to this work with people with problems Pro mente also provides a range of consultancy work with employers and others as this relates to the employment and social integration of people with psychological problems. They are also significantly involved in the development of employee well being initiatives in the work place. In this regard their contribution to ROSE is in providing expertise and advice on how such well being initiatives such as stress management can be integrated into the work place.

Associazione Scuola Viva (Italy)

Scuola Viva is a rehabilitation centre for people with intellectual disabilities and dual diagnosis. It is organized in two departments: a semi-residential day-centre and outpatient ambulatories. Scuola Viva utilises an extensive and maintaining approach to care, depending on the level of severity of the disease and of the period of care. It is also a research, training and documentation centre in the field of intellectual disabilities. It is a referral point for cultural and professional training of staff, utilising the latest methods of teaching and rehabilitation, with a focus on the personal development and social integration of students. It has a multi-disciplinary team made up of psychiatrist, neurologist, physiatrist, child neuro-psychiatrist, psychologist, physiotherapist, speech therapist, neuro-psycho-motility therapist, nurses, technicians, social workers, assistants, educational therapists, occupational therapists, health and social assistants. Rooms for personal and cluster settings, gymnasiums, equipped laboratories, sports ground, refectory and administrative offices compose the Centre. Associazione Scuola Viva has a long history of working in the sector and therefore contributes this long term perspective towards the development of ROSE in terms of how it can be implemented and in terms of practical advice on sustainability.

Fundatia Alpha Transilvana (Romania)

Fundatia Alpha Transilvana is one of the most important social service provider organisations in Mures County, Romania. It has been in the community since 1992. It has about 700 beneficiaries per month, with 57 employees and 30 volunteers. The main objectives of Fundatia Alpha Transilvana are to increase the quality of life of its beneficiaries, and to positively promote disadvantaged groups of individuals. The Alpha Transilvana Foundation provides a chain of services for people living with physical, psychological or social disabilities. It provides prevention, early intervention and rehabilitation programs for children with special needs. It offers vocational orientation, supported employment services and sheltered workshops for young adults with disabilities. It is also a resource centre for NGOs and provides humanitarian donations for the poor and social-medical institutions. Because Fundatia Alpha Transilvana is located in a new accession country and has to grapple with issues of resourcing they act as a useful point of reference within the ROSE project as to what is possible to implement within new accession countries.

Partnerships established with groups outside of the project consortium

The ROSE project benefited through the partnerships established with groups outside the consortium. The ROSE team consulted a range of managers and front line workers in the sector to identify what workers felt would help them to cope with the stress they experienced in their work places. The views of this target audience were incorporated into the design of the programme.

To date there has been a large amount of interest in the ROSE project that demonstrates the need for an online stress management programme for workers in this sector. The ROSE project team have engaged with a large number of potential beneficiaries in Europe, the United States and Australia. A number of enquiries have been received from interested local and national stakeholders and service organisations about the ROSE project, accessing the website and details of specific information that is available on the website.

5. Plans for the Future

The ROSE website is maintained on a web server based at the EASPD in Brussels and is publicly accessible. It will be periodically reviewed by members of the development team to maintain content. The development team will also examine further long-term ways as to how this innovation can be transferred across Europe. This may be achieved through involvement in other trans-national projects as well as the on-going work of our European partners and umbrella organisations. All partners will continue beyond the lifetime of the project to disseminate information about this project. Currently, there are plans to develop an accredited educational package in which individuals will receive formal training in the management of stress.

6. Contribution to EU policies

The ROSE project will provide data and information to support local services and European Commission initiatives' on social inclusion, workplace support, policy harmonisation and mental health. ROSE is significant at this time considering the current thrust of EU policy initiatives on mental health, work place stress and employee well-being at a time of widespread economic stress. The online programme reflects European Commission initiatives on social inclusion, work place employee well-being, policy harmonisation and mental health reflective of the priorities of the European Pact on Mental Health and Well-being. The project, hosted by the EASPD, provides a sustainable and readily accessible source of information and support to front line workers and in this context is a concrete expression of the principles enunciated in the 'European Pact Mental Health and Well Being'.

7. Web Development

The development of the ROSE application followed an iterative software development process consisting of detailed requirements analysis, design, development, testing and implementation phases. Focus groups combined with “throw-away prototyping” were used to inform the requirements analysis and design phases. The development lifecycle was cyclical in nature with repeated iterations of analysis, design, development, testing & implementation.

The project website can be accessed via the European Association of Service Providers for People with Disabilities (EASP) at www.easp.eu. Alternatively, it can be accessed via www.leonardorose.eu. The website consists of two sets of ‘learning sessions’. ‘Learning Sessions for All Staff’ deal with management of stress. ‘Learning Sessions for Managers’ aim to help the manager to improve the working environment so it is generally less stressful for all who work within it. The set of ‘Learning Sessions for Managers’ have been specifically developed to help managers, though all users of the ROSE website can access them.

