



Local Discussion Groups - Bulgaria

Y.U.S.S. - Addressing Youth Unemployment through Soft Skills Coaching Programmes

2011.1.FS1.I.F005.25052



Partnership

Spain

ADESEMA

Ms. Vera Bartolome (Coordinator)

E-mail: v.bartolome@adesema.org

Bulgaria

BDA

Ms. Denitza Toptchiyska

E-mail: denitza@bg-da.eu

France

IDF

Ms. Ramona Dogaru

E-mail: bastia@idf-corse.eu

Portugal

ISQ

Ms. Isabel Dias Nunes

E-mail: ICNUNES@isg.pt

Germany

VHS Cham

Ms. Martina Bachmeier

E-mail: mbachmeier@vhs-cham.de

Austria

E.N.T.E.R.

Ms. Daniela Maresch

E-mail: daniela.maresch@enter-network.eu

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1. Introduction

This document has been written for the multilateral project “Y.U.S.S. – Addressing Youth Unemployment through Soft Skills Coaching Programmes” (2011-1-ES1-LEO05-35958) funded by the action Leonardo da Vinci – Transfer of Innovation within the framework of the Lifelong Learning Programme.

It presents the results and recommendations of the Local Discussion Group, involving different stakeholders. All projects partner in Spain, Portugal, Germany, France, Bulgaria and Austria formed separate Local Discussion Groups and elaborated reports on their work.

These recommendations will help to adapt the final products according to the needs and requirements in the relevant national context.

The Local Discussion Groups provide a good opportunity to work in close co-operation with different stakeholders on the local level which is also a step towards successfully implement the Y.U.S.S. methodology and tools in all project countries.

Volkshochschule im Landkreis Cham e.V.

2. Local Discussion Groups

Local Discussion Groups were established in Spain, Germany, France, Bulgaria and Austria involving e.g. staff members from partner organisations, young unemployed people, local employers, training institutions and human resources managers.

The partner institutions organised different Round Tables in order to receive as much information and recommendations as possible from the Local Discussion Groups.

In the following please find the results of the different project countries.

2.1 Bulgaria

Local Discussion Group, Nr. 1 (Bulgaria)	
Place	ID Formation, 20200 Bastia
Date	08 February 2012
List of participants	ID Formation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Denitza Toptchiyska – project manager and trainer - Nina Getova – clinical and counselling psychologist and trainer - Dimityr Ganchev – psychologist and trainer
Local Discussion Group, Nr. 2 (Bulgaria)	
Place	ID Formation, 20200 Bastia
Date	23 May 2013
List of participants	ID Formation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Denitza Toptchiyska – project manager and trainer - Nina Getova – clinical and counselling psychologist and trainer - Yoana Deninska – trainer - Elena Georgieva – psychologist - Elena Aleksova – psychologist

(Insert photo of this LDG here)

Minutes	
Summary	08 February 2013 and 23 May 2013
Issues covered	<p>1. Usefulness of YUSS methodology and tools for development of soft skills among young unemployed</p> <p>BDA works in collaboration with two psychologists that participate in transfer and adaptation of the YUSS products.</p> <p>Dimityr Ganchev is a school psychologist and he is well aware of the difficulties that young people face in their everyday life. His work is aimed at helping young people adapt in different settings like peers, family, friends, and school. In other words, he is in touch with many young people and he fosters development of their basic skills. His major roles and functions as practicing school psychologist include psychoeducational assessment, consultation and interventions.</p> <p>Both coaches, Dimityr and Nina, have experience in helping young unemployed people develop their soft skills. They've been already aware of the project since they took part in the interviews conducted with Human Resources experts. The aim of these interviews was to identify basic soft skills required by managers in organizations in Bulgaria.</p> <p>The aims of the first local discussion group meeting were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transfer of materials • To identify the most proper national target groups for the piloting coaching experience • To discuss the coaching activities proposed in the manual • To decide which exercises to be included in the coaching sessions • To adapt the materials in a way that fits the national context

and that meets the needs of the participants

- To draw the pilot coaching experience plan

The group decided that the most appropriate target group for the piloting experience would be high school students (boys and girls under the age of 18) since they are young unemployed people and they need to improve their soft skills. Dimitry, the school psychologist, invited a young person he consults to attend the piloting.

The second LDG was organized after the piloting experience with high school students. One of its aims was to inform other experts how the activity was perceived by the specific target group and by the coaches, and then discuss usefulness of the coaching program, and suggestions for improvement. The group discussed the exercises and their effectiveness, what still needed to be adapted and improved.

Aims of the second local discussion group:

- Discussion on relevant soft skills addressed
- Discussion and suggestions for new activities, ideas, themes, exercises to be included in the manual
- Recommendations concerning soft skills, target groups, adaptation and improvement in relation to national context and specifics, etc.

Coaches shared their coaching experience with other local discussion group (LDG) participants. When referring to usefulness of YUSS methodology and tools, it is important to distinguish between experience of coaches and other participants since coaches have direct observations on effects and results of the coaching program. Coaches find the methodology very useful because it offers interactive techniques and gives young people the opportunity to practice these soft skills in a team. They appreciate the advantages of the principle “learning through experience” incorporated in the coaching material. The coaching program is based on improvisation, innovation and interaction which makes it especially interesting and motivating for young people. Coaches find it challenging to decide for which target groups that methodology would be most useful.

The trainer and the psychologist who have not participated in the piloting, received the coaching manual in advance in order to be familiar with it. They showed a great interest in the YUSS products. They appreciated the interactive methods of coaching and referred it to the national context and the rare opportunity of high school students in Bulgaria to express their opinions and ideas, and be active but not passive learners.

Group participants shared their opinion that in order to be more useful, the coaching manual needs to comprise more aspects of these soft skills and to emphasize some of them. They also mentioned some missing soft skills that need to be included and the importance of presenting soft skills as a nuclear that is constructed of different interdependent soft skills. They also reported that the coaching program needs to include more exercises and homework assignments as well as self-monitoring techniques if we seek long term effects on users.

After the local discussion, participants filled out an evaluation form.

1.1. Practical Guide:

Participants find the practical guide very useful since it offers:

- General idea of functions and roles of a coach
- Self-evaluation tools
- Guidelines for being an effective coach (practitioners and beginners)
- Guidelines and specific steps for coaching a team
- Important guidelines to evaluate results
- Explanation of the coaching process
- Practical tips for drawing a coaching session plan

1.2. Skills Methodology adapted to Y.U.S.S.

1.2.1. Soft Skill 1: Ability to adapt to the organizational environment:

Participants in group discussion (coachers, trainers, psychologists) discussed and identified which activities would best help coachees develop the necessary soft skill “ability to adapt to the organizational environment”. They chose the exercise presented in the coaching manual called “fairy tales in new guise” as it requires team work, cooperation and collaboration with other team members; adapting to their needs and ideas. Coachers decided to add a new element to that exercise: after transforming the fairy tales „The Princess And The Pea“ and „The Magic Porridge Pot“, participants were asked to present the fairytale using drawings and/ or theatre playing. Coachers proposed this exercise “Making a scene representing a given situation and playing it (for individual or group work)” as it also requires cooperation and ability to adapt to team and organizational environment.

1.2.2. Soft Skill 2: Communication

Participants find useful the exercise proposed in the coaching program called “Crime News Report” since through it coachees can experience verbal transfer of information as well as information distortion and active listening. Thus, they can learn how to avoid information distortion and to make conscious efforts (when communicating) to hear not only the words that another person is saying but, more importantly, to try and understand the complete message being sent.

One new activity was proposed by participants. Four of the group members in the piloting experience take part in that exercise. Participant N 1 should answer the random questions of participant N 2, tell his/ her first association of the random word given by participant N 3, and imitate the behavior and movements of participant N 4 at the same time. All the participants that were just observers really enjoyed that exercise. Participant N 1 shared that being engaged in multiple activities (doing so many things at once) is really confusing. Then, participants had to reflect on communication channels (verbal and non verbal communication). They also commented on the difficulties, challenges, barriers to effective communication.

1.2.3. Soft Skill 3: Emotional Intelligence

Some participants shared the opinion that emotional intelligence is the most important social skill and that young people generally do not know how to cope with their emotions. That corresponds to the findings in WP2 related to Bulgaria that HR experts consider “being able to manage his/ her emotions” skill as a fundamental one.

LDG participants find a correlation between emotional intelligence, self-management skills and success. Participants think that young people need to be more self-aware of their own emotions (for example, fear of failure which keeps you away from your goals and desires) and more assertive as well. So, it would be useful if the coaching program covers some helpful homework assignments that develop emotional intelligence (reflection on your own emotions and emotions of others).

Participants appreciated the exercise “Perceptual positions” and its usefulness regarding understanding of other people’s feelings, thoughts and emotions. They considered the third position of the independent observer as most important.

1.2.4. Soft Skill 4: Autonomy

Coachers consider the exercise in the manual useful; they reported that they would apply it in the future with other coaching groups or teams.

Young people in Bulgaria are usually financially dependant on their parents. Specifically high school students are not used to being so autonomous and independant in their everyday lives. Therefore, autonomy and self-confidence need to be encouraged in young people.

Participants proposed a new activity for the development of autonomy which they called “River crossing”. By this exercise participants can experience autonomy in practice and also find out for themselves what tools they use to cope with difficulties in their lives, do they need other people’s help in such situations, or are they autonomous and able to cross the river by themselves. The river crossing activity consists of 3 elements: experience, self-monitoring and reflection (analysis).

We adapted that exercise as it covers individual coping strategies. It revealed participants' vision on obstacles and ways/resources for overcoming difficult situations.

Another component of that exercise was playing the scene of river crossing. Participants were allowed to use the help of other group members and the chairs in the training room.

1.3. Complementary coaching tools (e.g. number sufficient, more, less)

Participants agreed that the complementary coaching tools offered in the coaching program are useful since they encourage team work, collaboration, and enhance group cohesion. Participants appreciated the most the following complementary coaching tools:

- The role-play exercise
- Wheel of life
- Personal SWOT analysis

The LDG participants also proposed some coaching tools that fit the national context (some of them are already mentioned above). They also demonstrated interest and willing to use the coaching program and tools offered in it at their own work environments.

2. Possible adaptations

- 2.1. Recommendations in terms of topics / soft skills (missing ones, more emphasize on special ones)

LDG participants generally agree that the 4 competencies "autonomy", "ability to adapt to organizational environment", "communication" and "emotional intelligence" are the soft skills that young people in Bulgaria need to develop in order to be competitive in the current labor market. However, they commented that some skills are missing in the manual or need to be extended. For example, one participant recommended adding the component "nonviolent communication" (or collaborative communication) to the soft skill "communication". Some participants recommended more emphasis on autonomy

and emotional intelligence (homework assignments, self-reflection and self-assessment etc.). Other participants suggested more emphasis on assertiveness, self-monitoring, self-confidence and ability to present yourself efficiently.

The findings in the WP2 also indicate that the skill “respect for hierarchical relationships skill” is an important one.

- 2.2. Recommendations in terms complementary coaching tools (missing ones, more emphasize on special ones)

The second LDG recommended including psychodramatic techniques and exercises for developing emotional intelligence and other soft skills. Psychodrama works with human emotions and thoughts so it is an effective way for young people to experience the soft skills covered in the coaching program. Participants also suggested giving homework assignments which focus on self-monitoring (for example, reflection on emotions, making autonomous decisions in everyday life, facing and overcoming difficult situation, etc.).

- 2.3. Recommendations concerning trainers (are the coaching model and the practical guide sufficient for them to understand the methodology, do they have special requirements)

Participants gave positive feedback on the coaching model and the practical guide. The LDG appreciates the fact that the methodology takes a practice oriented approach. They find the materials sufficient for understanding, preparation, and implementation of coaching in groups of young people, individuals, teams, etc.

The coaching program consists of various tools and exercises that would support a successful coaching initiative. Participants also find it very useful having tools for self-assessment. However, participants noted that a coach should know very well the coaching process, the coaching techniques and tools, differences between roles (of a coach, leader, counsellor etc.), common characteristics of the specific target group.

2.4. Recommendations for setting/environment where to use the tools (are the tools transferable to the national context / are they variable in their usability / can they be used for the national target groups (e.g. for groups, for individuals, graduates, school-drop outs)

All LDG participants agreed that the tools are transferable to the national context in general. They also agreed that many groups can benefit from this coaching program.

However, different target groups require different approaches. For example, we found out during the piloting experience in Bulgaria that high school students cannot refer themselves to work environment. It was difficult for them to imagine or put themselves in the position of an employee; they still perceive and think in terms of peer relations, school, boy-girl relationships etc. So, we adapted the exercises in a way that will be more familiar with them. For example, when playing the exercise “perceptual positions” they assessed and thought of a conflict situation concerning school environment (teacher – student) but not work environment.

Participants were in doubt when determining the most adequate target groups. Respectively, they expressed different opinions. Some of them think that the program would be most suitable for young people under the age of 18 (students) and drop-outs since they lack many soft skills. Other participants think that high school graduates are in the most delicate and demanding situation as they are faced with the necessity to get a job or start a university. High school graduates and university students feel more insecure; they face, for the first time, labour market competition and that is a factor that makes these target groups consistent with the coaching program.

- 2.5. Recommendations for implementation:
Ideas for potential implementation of the tools in running national activities and suggestions how to make the tools suitable for that context

The LDG reaffirmed the usefulness of the coaching program.

They suggested for potential implementation finding stakeholders that offer youth guidance and support; organizations, institutions, individuals who encourage young people's professional and social integration. Therefore, it is necessary to start a dissemination process so that national stakeholders become familiar with the program.

Participants in LDG suggested that many national institutions, organizations and individuals would show interest in the program since it is aimed at personal and professional development of young people. The National Employment Agency might show interest in including the coaching manual in some of their programs.

- **2.6. Recommendations concerning diversity reasons in national context**

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- **2.7. Considering the printed materials in terms of layout, clearness, appropriateness, usability, availability**

Participants consider the printed materials appropriate in terms of layout, clearness, appropriateness, usability, and availability.

- **2.7. Others**

3. Any other practical tips for coaches/trainers working with young unemployed

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Participants in the LDG group proposed some practical tips for coaches/trainers working with young unemployed:

- Coaches/trainers need to know the specifics of the target group (the coachees)
- Coaches/trainers need to plan and organise their work in accordance with these specifics

The evaluation forms that LDG filled out show that all participants were well aware about the general objectives of their participation. They all also think that the venue is comfortable and fits the needs and objectives of the Local Group (medium value = 10). The feedback concerning

	<p>facilitation of the group, encouragement by facilitator/ mentor, overall satisfaction is also very positive (median value = 9).</p> <p>Participants demonstrate some doubt in terms of satisfaction with their own contribution to the LDG and the level of satisfaction with the changes introduced to the Be Competent, Be Sapiens products (median value = 9).</p>
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Annex I: Local Discussion group Evaluation- Bulgaria

Questions	answers from participants to LDG									mediane value	%
Were the Local Discussion Group general objectives explained to you clearly since you were contacted to participate in it?	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	y		100%
Was the venue comfortable and fit the Local Group needs and objectives?	10	9	9	10	9	10	9	9	9	9	
Did you find the group was well facilitated?	9	9	9	8	9	9	8	7	10	9	
Did you feel your own participation was encouraged by the facilitator/mentor?	10	8	10	9	9	10	8	7	8	9	

Express the level of satisfaction with the changes introduced to the Be Competent, Be Sapiens products	8	9	9	7	9	10	8	7	6	8	
Do you think the size of the Local Discussion Group was adequate for the objectives it had?	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	y		100%
Are you satisfied with your own contribution to the Local Discussion Group?	9	8	7	10	8	9	9	8	7	8	
Do you think that with the changes the Local Discussion Group proposed the Be Competent, Be Sapiens products will improve	8	6	8	7	6	9	7	5	7	7	
Please mark the overall Local Discussion Group experience	8	8	9	8	8	9	8	8	8	8	

Annex II: Piloting coaching experience plan