



# Pilot coaching experience - GERMANY

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

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## 1. General Overview

The pilot experience in Germany took place between April 25, 2013 and May 2, 2013 and it was integrated in running training activities for young people in transition between school/general education and the labour market.

In Germany, the general unemployment rate is quite low. The situation in the Cham region is even better with an unemployment rate of 2,9% in May 2013. For young persons the rate might be slightly higher, however, most of them are able to find an apprenticeship work placement after school. In some regions in Bavaria (e.g. Cham region) there are even more apprenticeship work places than job-seeking young persons. As a matter of fact these work places do not always fit with the ideas and desires of young persons for their job. There is a substantial demand at the labour market for butchers, bakers and people working in the tourism branch, such as waiters and cooks. However, many of the young people tend to decide for other jobs which is also related to uncomfortable working hours (early morning, late evening, weekend) and high physical stress in these jobs. Moreover, not all of the young people are able to find a working position either due to their ideas of their future job or due to their lack of knowledge, skills or competences. These young persons are trained to improve their general knowledge, but also their soft skills.

The Y.U.S.S. piloting in Germany consisted of 6 sessions of 5 lessons of training on April 25, April 29, April 30 and May 2, 2013. A total of 10 persons participated in the coaching, in some sessions there were up to 13 persons. The range of age was approximately between 17 and 25 years. Two of the participants were school dropout without any formal education certificate, seven of them completed secondary school (9 years), one of them completed upper secondary school (10 years). At least two of the participants had a migrant background. All of them were looking for a job position on the labour market (apprenticeship). At the end of the Y.U.S.S. sessions they completed the pilot evaluation questionnaire. Many for them asked for help as they did not understand the questions. Meanwhile trainers clarified the content with the young people on an individual basis, this was also a good opportunity to provide personal feedback to the young people. Although these young people are involved in training at present they appreciated the Y.U.S.S. experience in general as it was “different from normal lessons”.

## 2. Session 0 – General Introduction

**April 25, 2013: 12.45 – 13.30**

First of all, the participants were introduced to the Y.U.S.S. project and its objectives. As they worked with trainers they knew, no special presentation of coaches had to be included, also the group members knew each other. This was the reason why the coaches decided to focus on the soft skills of the Y.U.S.S. rather than starting with ice-breakers and major team building processes in the beginning.

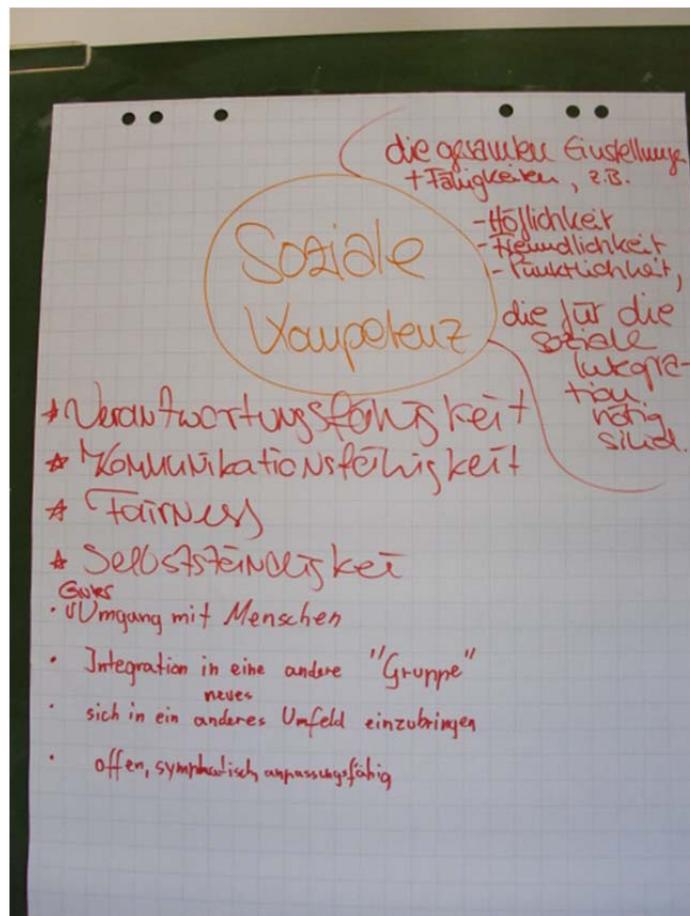
The coach pointed out the main goals of the Y.U.S.S. project and also the important role of the piloting within the project. In order to emphasize the importance of the piloting experience but also to motivate the young people the coach invited them to take advantage of this experience on soft skills training. The participants started with the piloting experience in the atmosphere of the VHS classrooms. This place had been known for them for several months before.

In a next step, the trainer opened a discussion on key competences / social competences / soft skills. Most of the participants did not know about these technical terms and it had to be clarified by the trainer. As soon as all participants were familiar with the terminology in general and had found several examples, the group started a brainstorming about the given competences that are important at work and which are focused in the Y.U.S.S. project: Capability to adapt to an organizational environment, communication, emotional intelligence and autonomy.

Time Table: 1 lesson

Objectives: Introduction of the Y.U.S.S.  
Motivation  
Support group discussions  
Ensure group building  
Clarification of technical terms  
Sensitising for the topic of soft skills

Methodology: Presentation  
Brainstorming  
Group Discussion



### 3. Session 1 “Adaptability”

**April 25, 2013: 13.30 – 16.45**

This session 1 “Adaptability” was conducted in relation to Session 0 on the first day of the pilot experience. It was possible to lead over the group discussion from Session 0 to the first soft skill “Adaptability”

First of all, the trainer asked for examples for “Adaptability” and “Flexibility” which they face in their daily life in order to sensitize the group for this soft skill and also to clarify the definition of this soft skill.

As a main result of the piloting sessions in Germany, it can be stated that it is of utmost importance to find the suitable level of language in order to ensure that the training participants understand the topics and tasks. In other case, they are not able to contribute and to take advantage of the training programme.

Only when breaking the content/technical terminology down to their personal life, participants were able to understand about the single soft skills and accepted also the importance of the competence in their individual career. The focus on soft skills was completely new for the group and gave them a new awareness of soft skills.

After this introduction to “Adaptability” the group started with the exercise of “Fairy Tales in a new guise”. It became clear very soon, that most of the participants did not know before about these very popular (German) fairy tales. Therefore at first the trainer had to clarify vocabulary. The next step was the discussion about the stories – what is the idea behind these fairy tales? As this group of low-educated young people is not used to reflect in this way, it turned out to be quite challenging to undergo this exercise. However, when the sense – and also the task of drawing and telling an adapted story – was clear, the participants started quite eagerly with the exercise. Due to the amount of time which was dedicated to explanations, the exercise took much more time than the foreseen 60 minutes. Including the presentation of results and the reflexion on the exercise, the soft skill “Adaptability” and the importance of it in the individual life it took the group nearly three hours to complete session 1.

Time Table: 4 lessons

Objectives: Introduction to “Adaptability”  
Break it down to individual life  
Transfer the fairy tale exercise in new context  
Obtain feedback from participants about experience  
Reflexion on the exercise / soft skill and link to personal life  
Motivation to think on individual life

Methodology: Introduction of Adaptability  
Finding examples from individual life  
Discussion  
Introduction of Fairy Tales  
Group Discussion, Clarification of terminology and interpretation,  
Strategies on how to start work in small groups of 3-4 persons  
Presentation of results by groups  
Reflexion on exercise and transfer to individual life in group discussion



## 4. Session 2 and 3 “Communication”

**April 29, 2013: 12.45 – 16.45**

**April 30, 2013: 8.00 – 12.00**

As the trainers and coaches decided that communication is one of key competences that the group of young people often lacks they prepared two sessions for the topic of “Communication”. The main objective was to include theoretical as well as practical exercises and examples from their individual life in order to make participants aware of the importance of communication not only in private life but also in the labour market.

The more theoretical session focused on characteristics of a good listener, characteristics of a good speaker and setting up general rules for communication. The theoretical four-sides model (Schulz von Thun) was introduced in order to make visible the different problems of communication (self-revelation, factual information, appeal, relationship).

According to the target group of young people it was challenging for the low-educated participants to get familiar with the theoretical part also given in the Y.U.S.S. manual and even more to transfer it to their own life. The elaboration of simple rules for communication was therefore planned by the trainers to be included also in the concluding Session 6.

The exercise “Crimes News Report” which was included in Session 3 was done like proposed in the manual: After an introduction, the group was separated in two groups of 5 people. One of these groups left the room and waited outside while the other group listened to the Crime Report which was read by the coach. It turned out the task was very difficult for the group. Some of the participants were not able to concentrate on the task and did not stop talking which also influenced others. The experienced coach interprets that this kind of refusal as signal to show not only unwillingness but a lack of the demanded communication skills.

Although some participants were able to present a good performance, also due to the fact that it is assumed that they are belonging to the type of auditive learners.

In order to link the experience of the exercise with real life, the participants were asked how they would react in a real situation, e.g. in working life, as an accident witness or when explaining the same situation to a friend. It turned out that they would prefer to have different versions of a story depending upon the person they speak to.

As a consequence it was worked out that the style of telling a story might be different but the content itself / the facts cannot be changed independently to whom the story is told. It is also most important to respect any details in order to be able be a reliable witness.

Participants became aware of the importance of communication by these sessions. Although, the exercise itself seems to be quite abstract for this target group. In order to relate communication more with their real life, an additional exercise will be prepared by the trainers for this soft skill "Communication". (Rules for Communication)

Time Table: 8 lessons

Objectives: Introduction to “Communication”  
Break it down to individual life  
Theoretical models in order to illustrate the topic  
Practical Exercise: Crime Report  
Obtain feedback from participants about experience  
Reflexion on the exercise / soft skill and link to personal life  
Motivation to think on individual life

Methodology: Introduction of Communication  
Finding examples from individual life  
Discussion  
Introduction of Crime Report  
Group Discussion, Clarification of tasks,  
Forming groups  
Reading – clarification of any doubts concerning vocabulary  
Presentation of results  
Reflexion on exercise and transfer to individual life in group discussion



## 5. Session 4 “Autonomy”

**April 30, 2013: 12.45 – 16.45**

Session 4 focused on the soft skill “Autonomy” and according to the Y.U.S.S. manual the coach invented the “Autonomy” with the more theoretical background as well as made the group experience autonomy with the exercise “Playing one`s part”.

The group started with a brainstorming on “what is autonomy”. In the following special characteristics of autonomy were developed (by means of the graphic example for the trainer). The young people contributed to the session and also gave valuable input. It was possible to work out the session topic and other basic knowledge on a more theoretical basis and at the same time have a lively and fruitful discussion.

During the exercise “Playing one`s part” the motivation of participants was high. They appreciated the methodology of group work where they had the opportunity to be creative. They were little problems to understand the exercise, due to clear instruction they were able to reflect and react accordingly.

For the coach it was apparent that the younger participants (16-20) had more motivation than the older ones (20+). Those characterised the exercises at first as “childish” whereas they got aware of the real deeper sense of the exercise only at the occasion of the reflexion phase with the group.

Time Table: 4 lessons

Objectives: Introduction to “Autonomy”  
Break it down to individual life – find examples  
Find characteristics (graphic example)  
Practical Exercise: Playing one’s part  
Obtain feedback from participants about experience  
Reflexion on the exercise / soft skill and link to personal life

Methodology: Introduction of Autonomy  
Finding characteristics (Mindmap)  
Brainstorming  
Introduction of Playing one’s part  
Group Discussion, Clarification of tasks,  
Reading – clarification of any doubts concerning vocabulary  
Presentation of results  
Reflexion on exercise and transfer to individual life



## 6. Session 5 “Emotional Intelligence”

**May 2, 2013: 8.00 – 12.00**

The Session 5 for the participants introduced the topic of “Emotional Intelligence” which was seen by trainers in close cooperation with “Communication”. The theoretical introduction had to be adapted by trainers as the one from the manual seemed to be too difficult for the target group. The coach decided to develop in a first step a mindmap including the main basic emotions (grief, disgust, joy, etc.). Also pictures of persons were shown and participants had to guess the emotion of the persons. As a third step, the participants performed emotions and the group had to guess the emotion. This very basic approach helped the piloting group to understand the background of emotional intelligence.

Furthermore, the coach invented a practical example where two young people were having an argument whether drinking alcohol is part of joining a peer group or not. This example was chosen in order to lead the group to realize that there are different positions (person 1, person 2 and a person in third position). As this example was very close to their private life they were able to contribute to the discussion.

When aware of this fact, participants were asked to do the exercise “Perceptual Positions” and write about a conflict in their real life from different positions (their own position / the positions of the other person like friend, parents, brother, sister / a third neutral person). The exercise was quite challenging for the young people. On the one hand they had to change position which was new for them and on the other hand they had to write about the emotions which is very difficult for this target group. They are often not used to express themselves in a written form. The coach pointed out that the content is confidential and it is optional to share it with the group. One young man reported on a conflict with his girl-friend. The group handled it very confidential and had a fruitful discussion on how to solve the problem.

A final reflexion phase concluded the session. Coach and participants appreciated the experience although it had to be adapted to the needs of the target group.

Time Table: 4 lessons

Objectives: Introduction to “Emotional Intelligence”

Mindmap

Link to practical life with a study case

Practical Exercise: Perceptual Positions

Obtain feedback from participants about experience

Reflexion on the exercise / soft skill and link to personal life

Reinforce teambuilding by sharing topics related to emotions

Methodology: Introduction of Emotional Intelligence

Mind Map

Study Case as practical example

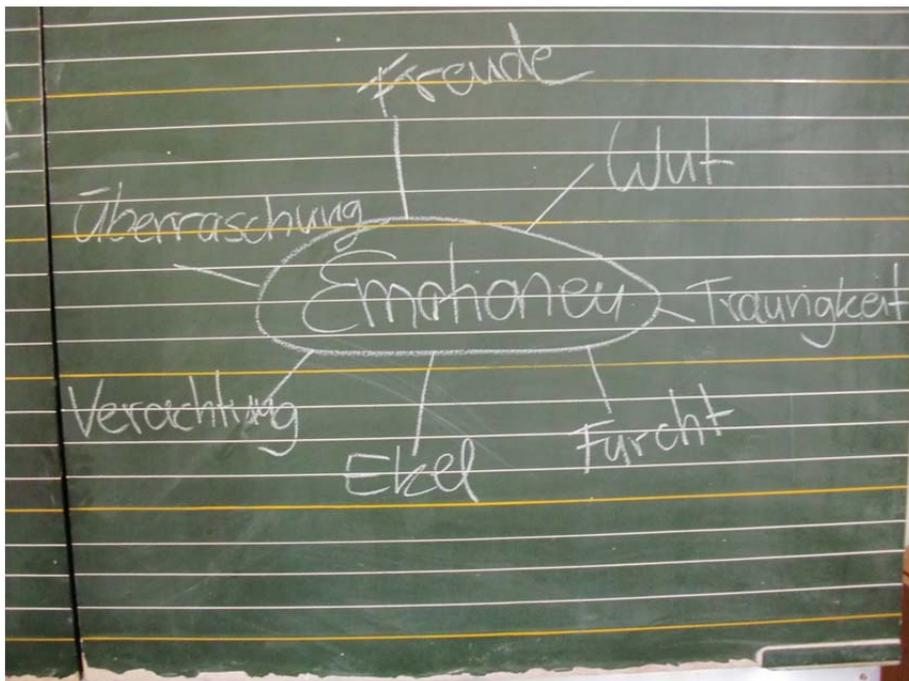
Exercise: Perceptual Positions

Group Discussion, Clarification of tasks,

Writing down individually

Sharing content with the group (optional)

Reflexion on exercise and transfer to individual life



## 7. Session 6 “Additional Activities, Conclusion”

**May 2, 2013: 12.45 – 16.45**

The last session of the piloting experience was dedicated to the additional activities given in the manual and the development/testing of new additional activities that might be more appropriate for the target group of low-educated people, persons with migrant background and very young people (16+). A second focus of the lesson was put on a general conclusion of the experience in order to motivate the participants to take advantage of this experience and also to collect their feedback.

The first complementary coaching tool “Spaghetti Tower” was seen critical by the coaches as “playing with food” is not appropriate in the national context but in particular with a target group with young people from families living from social welfare. So, they decided to do it with wood bricks and a small ball. As mentioned above following additional activities were introduced and tested:

- Prepare Rules of Discussion (Communication)
- Molding Sculptures (Emotional Intelligence)
- Potsdam Conference (Adaptability)

All the three experiences went very well with the instruction given to the participants. The basic tools were understood by the participants and they were able to take advantage from this learning experience.

In the final part of the session participants were asked to fill in the feedback questionnaires. For most of them this was a challenging experience. Although the questionnaires were translated to German (same version was used in the German and Austrian pilots), it was necessary to explain some questions. The coach also explained that there is a range of evaluation from 1 – 10, with 10 as the best mark. However, there might be some questionnaires where the young people did it vice versa, as 1 is the best mark in the German school system.

Time Table: 4 lessons

Objectives: Introduction to “Additional Activities / Conclusion”  
Test different activities  
Obtain feedback from participants about pilot experience  
Reflexion on the experience / soft skill and link to personal life

Methodology: Discussion  
Different exercises involving group work with discussions and decisions  
Explanation of Feedback questionnaire  
Filling in Feedback questionnaires individually  
Reflexion on exercise and transfer to individual life,

### Prepare Rules of Discussion (Communication)



## Molding Sculptures (Emotional Intelligence)



## Potsdam Conference (Adaptability)



## 8. Conclusion: Strengths and Weaknesses experienced

With reference to the general overview at the beginning the German coaches faced the target group of low-educated young people, some of them with migrant background. Furthermore, this was the reason why some difficulties came up during the exercises. However, there was also positive feedback and positive aspects that were expressed by coaches and participants.

Strengths: new learning experience

interesting as put in another learning context

motivating as many team work activities are included

focusing not on knowledge but on soft skills

new educational materials

manual and tools sufficient for trainers to prepare their lessons

tools can be easily adapted to context by experienced trainers

Weaknesses: target group had difficulties in understanding the activities

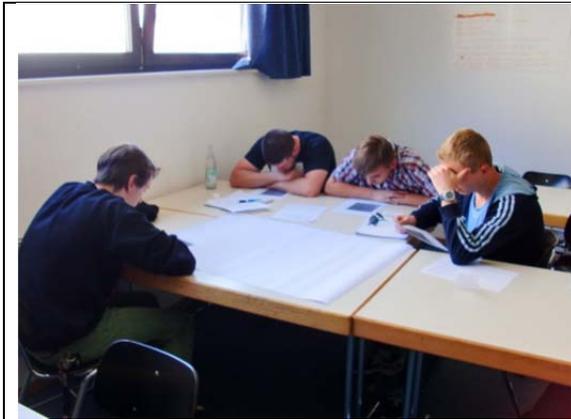
level of language too high for this target group

target group does not possess basic knowledge to build on (fairy-tales)

difficulties for participants to express oneself (oral presentation and written texts)

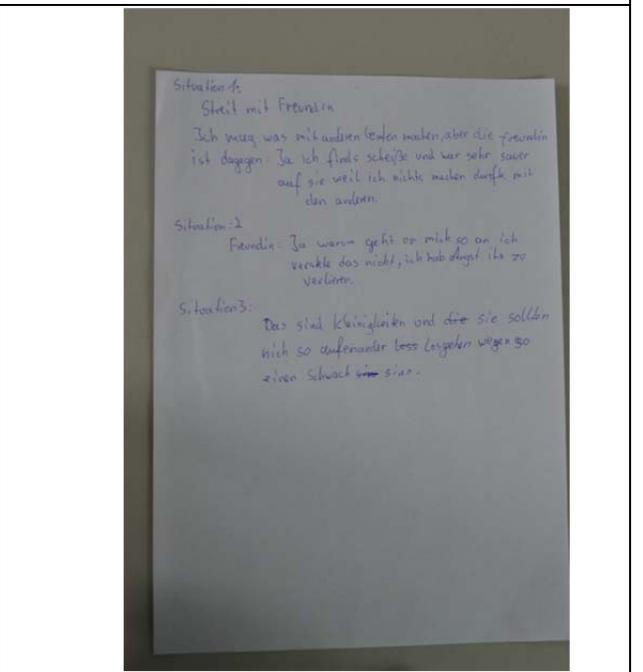
problem of understanding the transfer from the activities to real life context

## Annexe I: Other Coaching experience photographs



100g schwer:  
~~K~~fee, Karte, Schokolade,  
ein Stück Draht, kleiner Spiegel,  
Kompass, Taschenmesser, Stück  
Schmir, Streichholzschachtel,  
ausgestopftes Krokodil,  
Lieblings CD





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## ***Annexe II: Attendance sheets***

see separate document