HEALTH PROMOTION FOR YOUNG PRISONERS
[ HPYP ]

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Website
www.hpyp.eu/about.php

Summary
The HPYP project carried out a comparative assessment of prison environments hosting juvenile offenders in seven EU Member States and, based on a participatory approach, developed and piloted a toolkit for advancing health promotion within this group. The HPYP toolkit provides guidelines to psychologists, facilitators and social workers about how to address and raise awareness about health issues. The topics addressed range from regular sports to informative sessions about substance and drug use, sexuality, infectious disease, as well as relationships, healthy nutrition, hygiene, physical and mental health and well-being.

WHY IS THIS AN IMPORTANT ISSUE FOR EUROPE?

Even though youth justice, more specifically how to deal with juvenile offenders in terms of convictions, remains a contested policy issue, there is general agreement that rehabilitation deserves greater attention. There are several international conventions and standards to this effect such as the United Nations ‘Standard Minimum Rules for the Administration of Juvenile Justice’ (1985) and ‘Rules for Protection of Juveniles’ and the Council of Europe ‘Recommendations as to the Appropriate Treatment of Children’ (2003). Young offenders often come from marginalized social environments and families at risk of poverty with low levels of educational background. Their knowledge about and practices regarding health promotion, like their social skills, are already quite low upon entry into custody and risk getting worse through the experience of incarceration. In turn, this worsens their integration chances upon release.

AIMS & OBJECTIVES
Against the above background, the overall aim of the HPYP project was to develop and improve health promotion for young people in custody. More specifically, its objective was to develop a toolkit with a set of best-practices to help increase the knowledge of juvenile offenders about various health issues and dimensions. In the framework of HPYP, health promotion includes any and all activities, programmes and initiatives aiming to raise awareness and to develop skills for preventing and promoting physical, emotional, mental and social health. This includes a wide range of measures from regular sports to informative sessions about sexuality, alcohol, tobacco, and drug use, training in dental and oral hygiene, interventions regarding mental health needs, self-harm and suicide as well as training on conflict management.

METHODS
In terms of methods, the HPYP project adopted a participatory approach. The views of juvenile offenders on relevant topics regarding health promotion were surveyed by means of standardised questionnaires. The survey was followed by focus groups that discussed and elaborated the findings. A total of 571 young prisoners across 38 prisons participated at the
survey; of these 223 took part in 24 focus groups. In addition, 228 prison staff and NGO representatives were interviewed face-to-face using open questions. The survey, focus groups and expert interviews were carried out in Germany, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Latvia and Romania. A UK team contributed to the project secondary analysis of existing national data.

**OUTPUTS**

The main output of the HPYP project was a toolkit for implementing health promotion activities targeting juvenile offenders in custody. The toolkit addresses psychologists and social workers working in or outside prisons with juvenile offenders. It includes user-friendly guidelines and action plans for engaging into educational, raising-awareness and social activities with young prisoners to help impart knowledge on various health promotion fields such as sexuality, relationships, infectious diseases, body hygiene, drug and alcohol abuse, sports and exercising, health nutrition as well as mental health and well-being. The toolkit was pilot-tested in Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Latvia and Romania with very good results.

In addition, the project delivered a comprehensive literature survey on the policy context of youth justice and health promotion in the partner countries; and national research reports on the surveys, focus groups and expert interviews and their results.

**EFFECTS ON POLICY at EU LEVEL and FUTURE PRIORITIES**

The HPYP toolkit is one of the first of its kind. The approach it advocates is innovative and, for many European Member States, quite new. Having been successfully piloted in several of the new Member States of the European Union the expectation is that it can now be diffused and widely used in many others as well. A key prerequisite in this respect is the increase of financial resources allocated to integration policies targeting juvenile offenders – in general and those in custody in particular. Health promotion should additionally form part of a wider package of measures targeting social integration and including vocational training and other social skills.

Additionally, the project has delivered comparative information on the health-related problems faced by juvenile offenders in custody from different European countries, thus establishing a first knowledge base for beginning to think about European standards in this sector.

In the long-term, the implementation of project results such as those delivered by HPYP will help improve the lifestyle and behaviours of young prisoners by increasing their awareness of health issues and by encouraging them to assume greater responsibility for their lives.