

BUILDING ON DIVERSITY - A REGIONAL INTEGRATION NETWORK SERVING PEOPLE WITH PHYSICAL AND MENTAL DISABILITIES

At the age of 46, Waltraud, had to give up her job as a receptionist in a large hotel because of a severe mental health problem. Now, more than two years later, she is about to finish her psychotherapy and there is a positive prognosis for her re-integration into the labour market. The employment services have agreed to finance additional training that will offer her another chance to work in the field of tourism. But such training is not available locally and her medical treatment prevents Waltraud from moving away from her home city. A local tourist office is considering employing her, but the management believes that she will need special psychosocial tutoring, during the initial stages of this new job. There is a local service that can provide exactly what is needed but Waltraud's health insurance will not pay for the cost of this type of support.

These are the problems experienced by only one individual but they illustrate the gaps in provision that a German DP (SPIN) is tackling by establishing a regional integration network.

AIMS AND BACKGROUND OF THE DP



In Germany, the (re-)integration of people with disabilities or mental health problems is supported under different regulatory frameworks and funding arrangements that operate separately, but sometimes in parallel, and involve a wide range of different types of agencies in the fields of rehabilitation and training. The complexity of this system makes it very difficult for potential users to understand the services that are available and it also frequently leads to fragmentation and gaps in provision. Whilst recent changes in social legislation, aimed at improving the coordination of different systems and agencies, offer considerable scope for the creation of new cooperative structures, these opportunities remain largely untapped.

The Steinburg and Pinneberg Integration Network (SPIN) is exploring methods and conditions for the implementation of a sustainable territorial cooperation network that can serve as a model for other areas in underpinning the reform process launched under a new Social Security Code IX legal provision.

In Steinburg and Pinneberg, two neighbouring districts in the north of Schleswig-Holstein, SPIN is bringing together the resources and expertise of all the relevant players and testing new approaches to setting up local associations of service providers. It has found that models of individual mentoring, tutoring and case management that extend beyond the institutional boundaries and are backed up by staff training, can substantially enhance the practical effects of this process .

The DP's Managing Organisation (Brücke Schleswig-Holstein) was created in 1984 through a merger of several regional associations that were providing support services to facilitate the transition of people with disabilities or psychiatric problems from rehabilitation centres and psychiatric hospitals to work and independent life in the community. Thus, it has a long-standing history and experience of working with these target groups and well-established links with relevant public and private actors in these fields. These actors include Rehabilitation Centres/Hospitals, Training Institutions, Local Authorities, Public Employment Service, Health Insurances, Employers Organisations, Chambers of Craft, and of Industry and Commerce and the Social Services.

Even before the launch of EQUAL, these actors had identified the need for improved cooperation and coordination in their work and some discussion and planning had already taken place. The partnership philosophy of EQUAL and, indeed, the operational concept of Development Partnerships provided a very strong incentive to speed up this planning process. It was recognised that EQUAL offered a particularly appropriate framework and also the resources to translate their shared goals and aspirations into a practical work programme.

SPIN's main target groups include people with severe physical and/or psychiatric impairments who require support for their (re-)integration into the labour market. There are more than 1000 such individuals including:

- people with mental health or psychosocial problems (the largest group with over 650 individuals);
- people with disabilities;
- young people without a vocational qualification

In addition, the DP is also working with just under 300 employees in SMEs, including management staff and trainers, and is offering services and advice that can motivate and support companies to become pro-active partners in securing employment for its target groups.

Through its networking approach, SPIN seeks to combine and adapt local provision for the qualification, rehabilitation and integration of these target groups in a way that responds more effectively to both the diverse and specific needs of disadvantaged individuals and the requirements of the regional economy.

ACTIVITIES AND EXPECTED OUTCOMES

SPIN operates through a number of different target group-specific projects and transversal task groups.

The linchpin for almost all of its practical activities is **ZEBRA** (Centre for Vocational Rehabilitation and Work/Zentrum für berufliche Rehabilitation und Arbeit), a sub-organisation of Brücke Schleswig-Holstein with sites in both districts of the DP. ZEBRA operates as a **one-stop shop or service agency**, providing advice, guidance and counselling to individuals who are usually referred to ZEBRA by local welfare offices or employment agencies. It designs **individual integration pathways** by orienting its clients towards the specific project(s) that can offer support tailored to individual needs. ZEBRA plays a central role in case management by drawing on "CaseXP", a newly introduced IT-tool/database, and by establishing contacts with employers. It also organises seminars, workshops and information events for management staff and shop stewards on how to cope with difficulties and conflicts related to the employment of people with disabilities or mental health problems, and it also provides consultancy services to individual companies.

SPIN's specific projects:

- **Outpatient Rehabilitation** of people with psychosocial problems involves vocational preparation, training and work experience in close cooperation with local employers. All of these activities are close to home and based on individual rehabilitation plans. The success rate in terms of placement in permanent employment is about 50%;
- **Preventive Occupational Medical Services and Advice for Companies** is aimed at employees and HR managers. The objective is to counteract stress and depression that can affect stability and also the cost effectiveness of the enterprise;
- **Youth Vocational Assistance** offers low threshold access to vocational preparation and work experience for young people with severe psychosocial problems who have dropped out of the education and training system. It also supports them in the development of personal skills and competencies;
- **Regional Training Consortia** combine and pool the resources of different agencies and enterprises and offer new local training opportunities for disabled/disadvantaged young people;
- **Transition from Medical to Vocational Rehabilitation** provides on-going, individualised information, counselling and support to patients of the psychiatric

departments of the district's hospitals related to employment and training. It involves close cooperation between medical experts and experts working in the field of labour market integration, self-help activities and case conferences. The project closes a gap in the provision of care that hitherto existed between the patients' stay in hospital and their (re-)entry into employment;

- **Reintegration of people recovering from Long Term Illness** is led by the craft-guild health insurance organisation and has developed a step-by-step approach to the integration of the long-term sick, including those with severe disabilities. The main components are psychosocial guidance and individual coaching that help to solve or prevent problems in the work place

Transversal projects and tasks groups:

- **Gender Mainstreaming** is the priority task of a specialist advisory service that monitors Equal Opportunity (EO) issues in the work of all of the individual projects (please see above) and in the SPIN DP, as a whole. This service carries out gender-specific analyses of all activities, proposes specific EO measures and supports and coordinates their implementation;
- **The Communication and Information Network** provides an internet-based platform/portal to facilitate communication and exchange of information and data between all partners and actors in the DP, as well as offering training in how to use this network effectively. Special facilities (Chat Rooms, Peer Counselling) and interactive practical tools are made available to all beneficiaries involved in the different projects and a Homepage (www.equal-spin.de) informs the general public and other interested organisations about the work and the composition of the DP;
- **Empowerment** is promoted by dedicating a percentage of the time of central staff resources, to work directly with the DP's target groups. Key activities include continuous contact with, and support of, self-help groups especially with a view to enhancing their problem-solving abilities, follow up to complaints, the organisation and encouragement of peer counselling and the assessment of project activities in relation to empowerment issues;
- Other transversal tasks include **Evaluation** and the **Coordination of Transnational Cooperation**. Responsibilities for each of these tasks have been allocated to two different partners within the SPIN DP;

The outcome of all of this work is an evident improvement in the performance of support systems that (re-)orient severely disadvantaged groups towards employment and this has been noted not only by all of the actors in the DP, but also by the individuals who are in receipt of the DP's services. The improvement can be seen in the fact that gaps in the provision of support and services are being filled, more people have found placements, the integration processes are now shorter and more effective and, perhaps most importantly, there are higher rates of job retention amongst these vulnerable groups.

The innovative aspects of the DP are to be seen primarily in its partnership or networking approach. Rather than creating new services, this approach has resulted in the coordinated **delivery** of existing integration and rehabilitation services and this has proved to be much more effective.

In terms of a policy impact, it is expected that this multi-agency cooperation will be sustained, as a feature of mainstream provision within its regional context. Thus, it will become a practical model of the reform process envisaged by the Social Security Code IX, which can be transferred and adopted throughout Germany.

TRANSNATIONAL COOPERATION

SPIN provides the secretariat of the [in-work](#) Transnational Partnership (TP). A topic common to all of the partners is tackling structural deficiencies in the labour market integration of severely disadvantaged groups and in strategies for networking between the key agencies that offer assistance to these groups. After the first joint conference of this TP, SPIN is now exploring how two successes of its Austrian partner [STYRIA INTEGRA \(AT-1B-18/05\)](#) might be applied in Schleswig-Holstein, namely:

- Incentives to Promote the Involvement of Employers, such as the "Job Oscar" that is presented to employers in Austria who have demonstrated their commitment to the integration of people with disabilities;
- Strategies for Mainstreaming, as the Austrian DP is developing a number of different techniques and tactics that are all geared to ensuring that severely disadvantaged groups will have a legal entitlement to comprehensive integration assistance.

From the experience of its Dutch partners [SPOOR 11-PA en PA Rijnstreek \(NL-2001/EQA/0058\)](#) and Forumtheater (NL-2001/EQA/0081), SPIN is expecting to learn more about new methods that use work as a starting point for the rehabilitation of people with psychiatric or psychological problems, as opposed to the more conventional measures that assume that rehabilitation is a precondition for work.

INVOLVEMENT IN ETG1

The manager of the DP, Günter Ernst-Basten, participated in the [Initial Workshop](#) of the EQUAL European Thematic Group on Employability, (ETG1) in Birmingham. As a member of the [Working Group on People with Disabilities](#), he has agreed to coordinate a sub-group that will identify [promising practices](#) and develop messages related to improved coordination and cooperation between different services in the field of vocational, medical and social rehabilitation (please see the conclusions of the [first meeting](#) of the Working Group).

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