

New care services enhancing employment

Support services for families that have children or adults with disabilities or older relatives are not normally provided in Estonia. People with care obligations, particularly women, cannot participate in the labour market, due to the lack or scarcity of such facilities. It also appears that these families are often not able to organise themselves to share the task of caring. Thus, the main aim of the Estonian Development Partnership (DP) entitled "Development of a Multi-functional Care Service to Enhance Employment" is to support those women and men with care responsibilities to be active in, or return to, the labour market through the provision of a new kind of service.

Multi-functional care requires multi-functional training

The project is developing a training concept with an innovative approach that combines the acquisition of knowledge and skills for three different tasks through three different modules, which are:

- Providing care to adults with disabilities and/or elderly people;
- Housekeeping as a home-based service;
- Taking care of children with disabilities, including the provision of respite care.

The course that entails 280 hours of training covering the three modules is just about to start and it comprises theory, independent work and practical phases to enable the participants to undertake all the tasks. The idea is that the participants should not have too narrow a qualification and, as a result, be able to assist families and people with a variety of needs.

The trainees are currently being selected through individual interviews. The programme targets people who are either inactive or, at the moment, have only a part-time job. Having relevant qualifications is an advantage, but the DP is also looking for candidates who are both committed and motivated to become a carer and sees these qualities as being the most important prerequisites.

In the future, the DP's partners plan to divide their roles more specifically, and will also try to involve people who already have some qualifications and/or practice in working with children with disabilities in the fields of education, social work or health care. The future participants in the next up-dated training modules will then be able to decide in the light of their existing knowledge and experience, which parts of the training they really need.

People with disabilities are involved in the development of the training. They play an important role as advisors and also act as lecturers, providing the necessary know-how concerning the needs of this target group, at a very early stage of the project.

Innovation to improve the quality of care

During its lifespan, the project will experiment with the multi-functional care service. In parallel, it will focus on a detailed planning process that is intended to lead to the sustainability of this new service. This process will take account of requirements in terms of human resources, logistics and infrastructures and also raise the awareness of political decision-makers in local communities about the importance of issues related to the provision of care.

The DP believes that the innovation in its approach resides in the fact that a variety of care tasks that are normally separated are now being merged into well orchestrated sets of activities:

- care of people with disabilities will be linked to the care of elderly people;
- care for children with disabilities will be integrated with new respite care; and
- house-keeping tasks will be connected to the above services.

Thanks to their multi-faceted qualifications, the approach improves the labour market situation of carers. Merging the different tasks also results in a more effective use of human resources, as those who have completed the training are able to take care of children, adults or elderly people with disabilities, and to undertake house-keeping tasks at the same time. An important advantage is that one care worker can now look after a family instead of two or three carers having to be involved. From the family's point of view, this makes it easier to develop a good relationship with the carer who, in turn, becomes more familiar with the needs of the person requiring care and her/his family. Being aware of, and understanding, the evolving needs of people with disabilities throughout the whole life-cycle is an essential part of the skills of a carer, which is clearly a benefit in linking the care of adults with disabilities with the care of the elderly.

For childcare services, a new form of respite care will be tested, using combinations of innovative care such as summer camps and holidays for groups of children with similar needs with more traditional forms like care in a kindergarten group, or care in the home of the child or the childminder. In the case of children of school age, the intention is to combine respite care with an active policy of enhancing their social competence. It is planned to develop their social skills to an extent that is equivalent to their age and this is a level of development that is not naturally accessible for children with disabilities. This process will promote their independence and help prepare them for adult life.

Partnership makes things happen

Two non-governmental and non-profit organisations have joined forces to make life easier for families with care responsibilities. The Tartu Board of Disabled People seeks to improve the social, educational and cultural situation of people with disabilities. Founded in 1994, the organisation acts as an umbrella for



Regional Groups representing people with different kinds of disabilities. The aim of the Estonian Agrenska Foundation is to develop a family-based counselling and rehabilitation centre for children with disabilities and special needs, and to promote appropriate forms of education and training for this group. An important feature of the project is that the two organisations

will offer a multiple service package. This will ensure the reliability of the service, and through the combined contacts and networks of the partners' governing bodies, the DP's influence on future policy development and practices will be maximised.

The Agrenska Foundation, which has taken the lead in planning and implementing the training scheme, also has the responsibility for transnational work. It is gathering relevant information from partner countries and will evaluate good practices with a view to adapting them for use in the Estonian context. In addition, the project would like to establish long-term relationships with some of the partners in the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Italy and Latvia. Such relationships would be aimed at a further development of specific care services and would reinforce the exchange of experience in fields of mutual interest such as social services, disability organisations and policy making.

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