

A LIFE-LINE FOR THE SANDWICH GENERATION

By establishing new care services that have an intergenerational dimension, the Portuguese Development Partnership (DP) VIVER has made an important difference to the lives of women and men who have care responsibilities for both children and ageing parents and are thus, members of the "Sandwich Generation".

INTERGENERATIONAL CARE BENEFITING THESE THREE GENERATIONS

The [project](#) idea was a response to changing family patterns in Portugal. Statistics show that in the last two decades, the migration of families from rural areas to coastal regions has led to increased urbanisation. This population shift has meant that many of these families no longer have the support of grandparents, particularly when it comes to caring for, and bringing up, children. At the same time, it has become more difficult to care for old and frail people within the traditional framework of the extended family due to increased mobility of workers, higher divorce rates and more workplace demands. In cities, a phenomenon called age segregation is also developing. Senior citizens tend to frequent "elderly-only" day centres or to live in residences or care homes, while children and young people also spend the vast majority of their leisure time in age group specific centres or programmes.



Together with these changes, the female employment rate has significantly increased. At 60%, it is amongst the highest in Europe and for women aged between 20 and 39, who might be expected to be tied up with the responsibilities of raising a family, it is even higher at 73 %. At the same time, traditional gender roles and attitudes tend to persist and women continue to shoulder the bulk of all family tasks. Given that about one third of all families have at least one member aged 65 or more living with them and that the existing childcare provision, in particularly for younger children, leaves much to be desired, Portuguese women clearly face a daily battle in reconciling their roles of workers, mothers, wives, homemakers and carers of their ageing parents.

VIVER has been linking five local networks, each bringing together companies, schools, local authorities, health and other social care institutions. These networks are committed to the introduction of a new quality of care into facilities for children and older people, whilst at the same time breaking down age segregation. DP partners were convinced that elderly people could provide positive role models for children, sometimes even becoming "foster grand parents" for children whose real grand parents live much further away. Getting involved in caring for children can open up ways for older people to become more active and this, in turn, helps them to stay healthy, both mentally and physically. VIVER successfully encouraged such relationships between the young and the old through experimenting with several models of intergenerational care. Working closely with crèches, kindergartens and community centres it focused on:

- Recruiting older adults as care providers;
- Motivating and supporting children in interacting with elderly people in institutional settings;
- Stimulating parents to participate directly in intergenerational activities in community centres;
- Launching activities open to kids and older people from different backgrounds.

Activities always took account of both sets of interests and included music, reading/writing, painting, dancing, and often celebrating special occasions such as Christmas, Carnival or other holidays. In passing on their life experiences, skills and also traditions that would otherwise have been lost to the youngsters, the older generation gained both satisfaction and self-esteem. "Taught" by the kids, they also caught up with the information society, exploring ICT and the

Internet and this helped them to become familiar with e-mail, as means of keeping in touch with their families. Almost unconsciously, these senior citizens were developing a better understanding and acceptance of today's children and young people and thus, they were enabled to build new, meaningful relationships in the community. Besides benefiting from improved care provision for their children and other dependants, the parents of the "sandwich" generation were stimulated to re-enforce their relationships with social care services and schools and to play a more active role in the education of their children

INTERGENERATIONAL ANIMATORS AS AGENTS OF CHANGE

The core element of the DP's strategy to adapt intergenerational relationships to the new realities of family life was the introduction of an innovative professional profile: the "intergenerational animator". To date, professionals in social care and education services have no specific training in establishing or running intergenerational activities. The training scheme developed by the DP enabled these new animators to plan and develop activities bringing three different generations together. The underlying principle is that quality care in early childhood and old age is a crucial support to working parents but also that it can be delivered in such a way as to stimulate the early development and learning of children, whilst increasing older people's capacities to live a much fuller life. The modular course that was implemented as a pilot programme was a combination of formal learning and on-the-job training. It involved twelve participants with multiple academic backgrounds such as psychology, sociology, social care and socio-cultural animation and with different experiences in working with children or elderly people. Subjects covered ranged from social policies and relevant legislation, through the theories and practices of child and adult learning to diversity issues and conflict mediation.

To ensure that the new activities would carry on after the end of the VIVER project, the participants who were chosen for the training were professionals employed by institutions that were members of the DP. Also, thanks to the project's on-going dissemination strategy, many municipalities in Portugal are now interested in embarking on similar ventures.

BRINGING ABOUT CHANGE IN THE WORKPLACE

A second strand of VIVER's activities was targeted at local companies, and particularly SMEs, and aimed to support them in initiating and strengthening work-life-balance policies. This included sensitising employers and HR staff to the dilemma of reconciliation and making them aware of the relevant legislation and of public funding measures to promote family-friendly and flexible working time arrangements. To ensure the lasting commitment of employers from the various areas in which the DP was operational, care services were offered to children and/or other dependants of the employees of the enterprises that became associated with the project.

CREATING A EUROPEAN NETWORK OF CITIES FOR RECONCILIATION

As a member of the Transnational Partnership (TP) "[European Cities Network for Conciliation](#)" VIVER helped to set up a permanent international grouping of projects (in [France](#), [Spain](#), [Italy](#) and [the Netherlands](#)) that is promoting and lobbying for work-life-balance issues at all geographical levels - neighbourhood, town, city, regional, national and European. The network has also created a Knowledge Centre to disseminate EQUAL good practices and has drafted a "Charter" that has been signed by the twenty founding members. This Charter is currently being circulated to other local government authorities and the network continues to grow.

VIVER - Developing Creative Intergenerational Relations

Byweb 2 - Formação e Informática Unipessoal, Lda

Teresa Pinto

Rua das Cruzes, n.º 718

P- 4535-011 LOUROSA

Tel.: + 227 410133

Fax: + 227 410134

E-mail: tpinto@byweb.pt

<http://www.viver.org/>