

COOPERATING TO CUT OUT CRIME

In Finland, the number of prisoners has been increasing by 10% every year, since 2000. There are also major problems with re-offending as 70% of all offenders and 90% of young offenders return to prison after serving their first sentence. In the Kainuu Region in central Finland and also in its northern neighbour Koillismaa, the most common offences are drink-driving, crimes of violence and crimes against property. The proportion of offences involving narcotics is also increasing in these regions and most offenders suffer from alcoholism or other forms of substance abuse.

EQUAL has stimulated a corporate approach to combating these problems and the creation of the PoMo – Personal Move Development Partnership (DP). The aims of [PoMo](#) are very much in line with the emphasis in the European Employment Strategy on active labour market measures. PoMo is also a response to a specific recommendation within the Councils Recommendation ([2004/741/EC](#)) on the implementation of Member States' employment policies that proposes that Finland should “*take special measures to facilitate the activation and integration of disadvantaged young people, disabled people and immigrants*”

“Kainuu is a good place to carry out projects. The social capital of Kainuu is the ability to cooperate across the administrative sectors with different actors. In Kainuu, we do not compete for clients, but work together,” says Pekka Kepanen, Manager of the Probation Service. He also explains that *“this work, which was stimulated by EQUAL, has been coordinated by the Probation Service but it has involved many representatives of the public administration, as well as the third sector.*

PUTTING THE SUPPORT IN PLACE

An Intervention Programme has been created for young offenders between 15 and 20 years of age and a Support Programme has been established for people under 30 years of age who are leaving prison – both of these schemes are based on the motivation of the young offender to become involved in the programme and on continuing advice and assistance from an adult mentor.

The work of PoMo is a natural extension of a previous [YouthRISE EQUAL DP](#) but a number of advances are being made that are based on the lessons that have been learned in the first project. The key individuals in both programmes are the case managers and the supporters. In YouthRise, the case



Developing trust in mentors in the great outdoors

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managers were all located in probation offices but now they are members of staff of other organisations in the DP. The reason for this change is that there is more likelihood that the practices of these organisations will be influenced and thus, the DP's approach will continue after EQUAL. The supporters include both professional staff, such as qualified youth workers or social workers, but also mentors who might appear to be ordinary people, but in the course of their lives,



A training session for some of the POMO mentors

they have all accumulated wisdom and experience that could be invaluable to young offenders. Since many of the young men in the project do not have adult males in their families or social networks and most of the professionals in the project are women, the majority of the mentors are male. These mentors are being paid for their help and this enables more intensive support to be provided. Also, the mentors have the opportunity to study for a professional qualification in social work when they are not working in face-to-face situations with their young charges.

THE INTERVENTION PROGRAMME

The intervention programme is a method of providing timely assistance between the discovery of the crime and the actual court proceedings and this is offered over a period of up to three months. Participation in the programme is voluntary and selection takes place after a case manager from the DP has interviewed the young person and, if he or she is a minor, a meeting is also arranged with the parents. The most important factors for selection are the young person's motivation and commitment to change their life style on their release and to work towards this change through their involvement in the programme. If the motivation and commitment are positive, the case manager and other staff from the DP and the Probation Service help to design a programme for that individual. A cooperation agreement is then signed by all including the young offender, which specifies the rights and responsibilities of the different parties, and this enables all the public agencies involved to exchange the necessary information about individual concerned.

The activities within the programme are planned on the basis of a risk and needs analysis and the core elements include tackling the abuse of intoxicants, dealing with criminal behaviour or tendencies, assistance from a personal supporter, and contact with the employment service.

In terms of the abuse of intoxicants, help is available from a professional worker employed in the local Addiction Clinic who analyses the situation of the young offenders and, on the basis of this, the most suitable course of action is determined. The young offender meets together with the case manager once a week on issues related to criminal behaviour. The offence which was committed is reviewed and the young person's attitudes towards offending are examined. Practical community work is also included at a time and a place that are determined on the basis of the offence committed and on the young person's life

situation. For instance, a young offender who had committed a serious assault but had a catering qualification, worked in the kitchen of a care home, where he encountered people with physical disabilities on a daily basis. The young person also meets his or her supporter or mentor on every week and these sessions concentrate mainly on everyday life and leisure time.

All of this seems to have worked for Antti Haikala who had had so many fines that he was facing a prison sentence if the next time he offended. *“I got hooked on better things again, and boozing and other things were left in the background, when I started doing those things that a young person should do,”* says Antti and he also explains that now *“if anyone comes and tries to pick a fight, I don't hit them; I go to them the next morning and ask whether they still want to fight. I don't lose control like I used to.”*

The Intervention Programme also gives guidance, if necessary, on matters concerning housing, education, careers, social benefits and finding employment. With almost all young offenders, a plan for paying any fines or damages that might be imposed by the court is formulated. When the court proceedings are approaching, the case manager helps the young offender to get a counsellor when needed and together with the project manager, a statement is drafted for the Court and Prosecutor on progress made during the programme. If the young person has completed the programme successfully, this can reduce the severity of the fine and in some cases, the prosecution has even been waived.

THE SUPPORT PROGRAMME

The support programme is primarily aimed at people under 30 years of age who are to be released from prison. As with the intervention programme, the young person's motivation is central and people only join the programme at their own request. The assessment of motivation is, therefore, one of the challenges of the project and is carried out through intensive discussions during the motivational interview. Here again decisions on accepting a participant are made together with the Probation Service and again a cooperation agreement is signed.

The time of imprisonment is used to support the return to the civilian life as much as possible by participating in rehabilitation, work and education. When the time of release comes closer, the participant plans for the return to the civilian life together with the local support network of agencies. The offender's housing situation, income, employment and education are all central issues in these negotiations. A start is made in finding out about the individual's employment potential, as well as the availability of suitable jobs or training places. During the whole process, the case manager co-ordinates the required back up services. This is a very important task because many of the participants have social, emotional and behavioural problems that are intertwined.



Finding a rhythm for rowing and for everyday life

Also, during the time of imprisonment, the DP selects possible mentors and the young offender decides with the chosen mentor how they should start working together in the programme. On the day of the release, the case manager and the mentor pick up the participant from the prison and take him or her home. From then on support is available every day for an average of 37 hours per week and this is because the risk of recidivism is at its greatest just immediately after release. At the beginning, the plan is to find a rhythm for everyday life and to investigate the possibilities for work. The mentors and the young offenders also spend leisure time together trying out the young person's former hobbies or starting new ones. There are also practical things that have to be done and with their mentors, some of the participants have redecorated their flats or learned to cook. The importance of this type of support is shown by a number of responses from these ex-prisoners, which were gathered during the evaluation of the programme:

- *"I took care of all the everyday things with my mentor, I could ask for advice if I didn't understand and as an older man he could give advice about work;"*
- *"He was a good guy. We went bowling, to the movies and shopped for clothes. He also organised support from the Social Security Office and the Housing Department;"*
- *"He helped in things and life got more normal;"*
- *"I didn't think of him as a mentor but as a friend."*

The mentor's support in finding useful and fulfilling activities is vital because the unemployment rate in the area is around 20% and most of the young people cannot rely on a job to create a daily routine that will stop them from re-offending.

Apart from mentoring, the other key task in the Support Programme and also in the Intervention Programme is motivating. Motivational interviewing, as carried out by the case managers is an issue that received considerable attention within the MERIT transnational partnership of which YouthRISE was a member. It can be described as *"a directive counselling method, tailored to suit the individual, seeking to elicit a change in behaviour by helping the individual to examine and resolve their ambivalence."* This is an interesting but quite complex approach and much more information is contained in the partnership's publication "Motivational Interviewing within Juvenile Custodial Institutions," a copy of which may be obtained by writing to info@work-wise.nl. Another joint publication produced within MERIT is "Towards more Effective Transnational study visits" a guide to help ensure that time spent with transnational partners is used to the full. A CD-Rom entitled "Life is out there" has also been produced as a report on the YouthRISE DP. Both of these are available from PoMo (see contact details in the final section).

PARTNERSHIP IMPROVING PERFORMANCE

Within PoMo, all the most relevant actors can be found such as the probation office, police service, prosecutor, court and prisons that relate to both regions. Also involved are housing departments, the joint social work/employment offices and youth work offices. From what has already been told about this DP, their respective roles in the project should be quite clear. However, there are two other partners, the local church and a township society. The youth worker from the church acts as a "supporter" for the young offenders and the church also

helps in finding opportunities for these young people to offer community service. Again the environmental society can offer opportunities for voluntary service or work experience in its recycling schemes.

The DP has learned from the YouthRISE DP and has restricted the number of people in its Steering Committee. For example, the six prisons are urged to be in close contact before each meeting and they only have a couple of members on the committee which is now limited to about 20 people. When external assistance is needed, experts are invited to attend meetings on an ad-hoc basis. In addition to the Steering Committee, there is a Steering Group of five people, which is representative of all the main interests including the third sector and this can be convened at short notice to deal with any immediate problems or issues.

These arrangements are not meant to create exclusive groupings but simply to improve efficiency and the DP has developed a strategy to make sure that a wider circle of individuals or agencies maintain their interest in, and commitment to, the project and its programmes. Twice yearly evaluation conferences are held that involve all those whose work makes a contribution to the DP's objectives and a number of thematic workshops and seminars are organised to which there is also an open invitation. Virpi Kaasinen, the project co-ordinator and her staff ensure that they meet with every agency in the DP once or twice each year, in addition to carrying out promotional activities with probation services, prisons, schools of social work and EQUAL DPs in other regions of the country. Apart from activities in Finland, many people have travelled abroad to take



An evaluation meeting with all the local partners

part in the EQUAL transnational partnership. Virpi feels that *“For PoMo, the intensive experience of living and working together during these exchanges and study visits has really enhanced the mutual understanding of each of our local partners’ objectives and improved the quality of the cooperation and the relationships back home.”*

One forum in which agencies and individuals continued their cooperation in Kainuu and Koillismaa was the local support network of agencies. This also proved to be a positive experience for those involved. Kari Paakkunainen, the project evaluator from the University of Helsinki, sees it this way - *“within the project, we have discussed whether the multi-professional network meetings around the juveniles are a good practise or bad. The professional actors have given positive feedback, since in these meetings we can see the client's situation as a whole, with all its problems and nuances, and all the agreements become known to all.”* Kari also believes that *“the value of an Equal programme is in creating new ways of thinking and partnerships and maintaining political imagination and a spirit of reformation rather than in the empirical evidence.”* However, it is unlikely that individual partners would have maintained their

interest in imagination and reform unless they had evidence that it was bringing some benefit to their agencies. Happily this is the case for PoMo. *“Two brothers from my patch who were participants on the Support Programme have not re-offended over the last year. Compared with their record in the twelve months before they were sent to prison, my police officers now have 30 less crimes to investigate”* is how the Chief of Police of Koillismaa identifies one aspect of the project’s success. Similarly, the prosecutors, courts, housing departments, joint social work/employment offices and youth work offices all realise that these young people will be making fewer and less frequent demands on their time and resources, as a result of their participation in the programmes. Also, in a more positive sense, they now know that if they are having problems with a young offender, they can call on other agencies who can assist them or on mentors who might be in a better position to advise or counsel that individual. For the prisons involved, the situation is slightly different but certainly they welcome the increased contact with the “outside world” and the fact that there are organisation that can assist in the planning and the implementation of plans for the release of their inmates.

The improvement in performance brought about by the DP is not only recognised by the local partners. The County Administrative Board of Oulu recently awarded a prize to the Kajaani District Office of the Probation Service for its EQUAL activities and their success in preventing young people from re-offending. Also, and perhaps more importantly, the national Committee for Juvenile Offences invited the project to give evidence and its experiences have been included in a consultation document on amending the sanctioning and sentencing of young people. The changes in legislation resulting from this consultation are expected to come into effect sometime after 2007 but as Tarja Filatov, the Finnish Minister of Labour, said at a recent ESF seminar in Helsinki, *“charting the needs and making plans do not, however, give results, if the individual does not receive the services which he or she needs.”* This is exactly where the practice of PoMo has so much to offer to any reform!

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