

FINLAND

Local development

Location

Hämeenkyrö

Programming period

2014 – 2020

Priority

P6 – Social inclusion and local development

Measure

M07 – Basic services and village renewal

Funding (EUR)

Total budget 7 949.93

EAFRD 2 961.00

National/Regional 4 089.00

Private 899.93

Project duration

2017 – 2018

Project promoter

Hämeenkyrö municipality

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www.hameenkyro.fi/tietoa-hkyro/ajankohtaista/ulapalla-tarinoita-etsivan-nuorisotyon-nuorilta/

A project to give a voice to rural youth, to hear and publish their stories and to make them visible in society and its decision-making process.

Summary

Social exclusion is one of the biggest problems facing young people in Finland, both in urban and rural environments. Rural areas have specific challenges, such as long distances to travel, low population density, few young people and rare public youth centres. The project wanted to give a voice to the rural youth, to publish their stories and make them visible in society and its decision-making process. Through storytelling the project made new preventive and low threshold forms of youth work better known.



Results

The project publication, *On the Open Sea*, is available both in printed and electronic forms. It comprises stories that deal with how to meet other people, school life, jobs, hobbies and other daily routines. They also address discovering a sense of place and belonging, depression, social exclusion and bullying, among other issues.

The project has raised discussion on whether in the digital era young people are adequately heard. Do we know how they are doing? They don't seem to care much if they live in a small rural place or a big city – more important for them are the availability of good, safe social networks and the opportunity to find their way in life.

The most severe cases of socially excluded young people have been selected from cases of preventive youth work services at the home. The most rewarding stories in the publication tell how such persons have started feeling better only after a few weeks help from youth work services.

Lessons & Recommendations

- It was important for young people to be able to share their stories anonymously.
- Good commitment of the municipality youth workers was very much needed.
- The project has raised the idea on mobile youth gathering places (e.g. furnished vans) that could allow young people living in isolated villages to be reached too.

Context

The economic crisis that started in 2008 affected northern Europe. Unemployment rates multiplied, especially among young people. This caused a variety of social problems such as loneliness, mental health issues and drug abuse. In a recent national safety review social exclusion was named as the biggest threat to Finnish society. Even though economic recovery has finally reached Finland, the youth unemployment rate in the country (18.6%) is still higher than the EU average (17.7%) and considerably higher than the 8.4% unemployment rate for the Finnish population as a whole.

Hämeenkyrö is a rural municipality of 10 600 inhabitants in the Tampere region. Its youth unemployment rate has been higher than the national average: in the worst years almost a hundred young people under 25 years old were unemployed. To tackle this and related social problems the municipality has been investing in new forms of preventative youth work.

Objectives

The project objective was to publish a book featuring the stories of 17-28 years olds who have been at risk of social exclusion. Storytelling helps to empower the narrator and also publicises new preventive and low threshold forms of youth work. This will hopefully enable new socially excluded young people to benefit from youth services as well as improve the status of youth work in municipal planning and budgeting.

Activities

The project staff interviewed 20 young people aged 17-28 for the publication. These individuals were selected through the municipality's youth work channels, and they were willing to share their stories. The backgrounds vary from recently arrived migrants to persons who have always lived in Hämeenkyrö, and from drug addicts to ordinary young people who go to school or work. The interviewers and young people knew each other beforehand so there was enough trust for difficult experiences to be freely discussed.

The young people contributed to the layout and look of the publication. They wanted it to be targeted first to other young people who are struggling in Hämeenkyrö. It was launched in June 2018 at a festive event attended by young people and local decision makers.

Main results

The project publication, *On the Open Sea*, is available both in printed and electronic forms. Among other themes the stories address:

- Finding a meaning to your life
- How to meet other people
- School, job, hobbies and other daily activities
- Sense of place and belonging
- Depression
- Social exclusion and school bullying
- Drug abuse
- Debt problems

The project has raised a discussion if the digital era youngsters become adequately heard and met in the society. Do we know how they are doing? All stories emphasise the meaning of face-to-face meetings and peer-to-peer support in youth work services. The youngsters don't seem to care much if they live in a small rural place or a big city – most important are the good and safe social networks and finding an own pathway to life.

The most severe cases of socially excluded youngsters have been selected for preventive youth work services from their homes. Deep depression may totally kill one's ability to carry out one's own initiatives. The most rewarding stories of the publication tell how such persons have started recovering and feeling better only after few weeks within the youth work services.

Key lessons

This Finnish example could be easily replicated in other rural municipalities in the country and elsewhere in the EU.

It was important for young people to be able to share their stories anonymously.

Good commitment of the municipality youth workers was also needed.

The project has raised the idea of mobile youth gathering places (e.g. furnished vans) that could reach young people living in remote villages too.

“The biggest change that preventive youth work services have brought to me is that I am not so demanding and strict on myself anymore. The first two years living on my own almost destroyed me, but now I see some future again. And I am not alone.”

one of the interviewed young people

Additional sources of information

<https://indd.adobe.com/view/d89f33da-1aee-434c-addf-8fd77d9ef360>