

Seminar, Kraków 17 – 23 June 2023

Increasing Youth Workers Competences in Social Inclusion and Youth Empowerment



Inclusion

is a concept that means everyone is welcomed, respected, and valued, regardless of their differences. It is about making sure that all people, regardless of their race, gender, age, abilities, or background, are given equal opportunities and are treated fairly.

The "Increasing Youth Workers Competences in Social Inclusion and Youth Empowerment" seminar was conducted over a span of five days with the aim of equipping youth workers with the knowledge, skills, and tools necessary to promote inclusion among young people. The seminar focused on understanding the concept of inclusion and diversity, engaging and empowering youth inclusively, and building inclusive networks. The participants consisted of youth workers from various organisations and backgrounds.

The first day

of the seminar was an opportunity to get to know each other. We played a range of inclusive games around town to create trust, learn about each others expectations, set safe ground rules for inclusive work environment and boost our creativity.

Second day

provided participants with a solid foundation in understanding inclusion. It began with an introduction to the concept of inclusion, emphasising its importance in fostering diverse and thriving communities. The participants engaged in discussions and activities to explore their own unconscious biases and understand how intersectionality affects individuals' experiences. Strategies for creating safe spaces and promoting open dialogue were also explored.

On the third day,

the focus shifted to inclusive youth engagement. Participants learned about the significance of youth participation and empowerment in decision-making

processes. They gained insights into designing and implementing inclusive programs and activities that cater to the diverse needs and interests of young people. Communication skills, including active listening and empathy, were honed to ensure effective engagement. Conflict resolution strategies were also introduced to promote dialogue and peaceful resolution.

On the fourth day,

of the seminar we focused on building inclusive networks. Participants explored the benefits of collaboration and partnerships in promoting inclusion and connecting young people with community resources. The unique challenges faced by marginalised youth were discussed, and strategies for providing targeted support and advocacy were shared.

The final day

of the seminar focused on the concept of inclusive leadership. Personal stories of hardships and challenges overcome were shared and a list of qualities of inclusive leaders was created. All participants shared their superpowers to add to that list. All highlighted qualities served to inspire youth workers in their continued service and guidance to diverse groups of young people. Participants developed individual action plans to implement inclusive practices in their work, including proposition of inclusive youth projects on various topics.

The evaluation highlighted learning outcomes and provided space to share feedback.

Some of participant's **feedback**:

What did you learn during Inclusion Seminar? Did it expand your perspective or inspire you to explore new areas within Inclusion?

“It made me reflect on language barrier and build on the knowledge we shared to communicate better” / Maribella, Cyprus

“Detailed direction of inclusion. Bias, discrimination, intersectionality, how to empower young people and structure safe and inclusive program for them” / anonymous

“I will apply in my work many things I've learnt like how to be empathic, communicative and assertive”/ Jose, Spain

“I learnt new methods and techniques of inclusion that I can use in the future. The project inspired me to focus more on creating an inclusive environment for all of us”/ Lopes, Hungary

“I’ve learned how to implement the inclusion onto future projects. I’ve learned how to verbalise the inclusion ideas into the program” Marzena/ Ireland

“Deeper understanding on the topic” Marios/ Greece

“I’ve learned so much that to be honest, I’m still processing. I feel inspired to include some of this content in my work” Susana/ Portugal

“I can understand better the meaning of inclusion and why is so important to us and our lives” Magdalini/ Greece

Some examples of best practices

Creating Safe Spaces:

Establishing safe and inclusive spaces is crucial for promoting open dialogue and fostering a sense of belonging among young people. Youth workers should strive to create environments where individuals feel respected, valued, and comfortable expressing themselves without fear of judgment or discrimination. This can be achieved by setting ground rules for respectful communication, actively listening to youth perspectives, and addressing any instances of bullying or exclusion promptly.

Youth Participation and Empowerment:

Actively involving young people in decision-making processes and empowering them to take leadership roles can significantly enhance inclusion. Youth workers should create opportunities for meaningful youth participation by involving young people in planning, designing, and evaluating programs and activities. Encouraging young people to voice their opinions, ideas, and concerns allows them to contribute to their communities and ensures that their needs and aspirations are taken into account.

Collaboration and Partnerships:

Building inclusive networks and collaborating with other organisations and community resources is essential for supporting young people from diverse backgrounds. Youth workers should actively seek partnerships with

organisations that represent different communities, cultural groups, and social services. These collaborations can enhance access to resources, provide specialised support, and create a broader range of opportunities for young people. Building strong networks also helps in challenging systemic barriers and advocating for inclusive policies and practices.

Ongoing Professional Development:

Inclusion is an ongoing process that requires continuous learning and growth. Youth workers should engage in ongoing professional development opportunities to stay informed about emerging best practices, research, and inclusive approaches. This can be achieved through attending workshops, conferences, and webinars, as well as participating in online communities or forums focused on inclusion and youth work. Continuous learning allows youth workers to adapt their strategies, refine their skills, and stay up-to-date with the evolving needs of young people.

Creating Safe Spaces

Establish clear expectations

Clearly communicate expectations regarding behaviour, language, and attitudes that promote inclusivity, respect, and empathy.

Set guidelines for creating a safe space where everyone's voice is valued and where discrimination, bullying, and harassment are not tolerated.

Promote Active Listening

Encourage active listening by teaching and modeling effective listening skills.

Create opportunities for youth to share their experiences, opinions, and perspectives, and ensure that they feel heard and valued.

Facilitate Constructive Dialogue

Create a safe and structured environment for open dialogue and discussion.

Use icebreaker activities, group discussions, and debates to encourage youth to express their thoughts and engage in respectful conversations.

Provide guidelines for respectful communication, such as using "I" statements, actively seeking understanding, and avoiding personal attacks.

Encourage Empathy and Perspective-Taking

Foster empathy by promoting activities that encourage youth to understand and appreciate diverse perspectives.

Use role-playing exercises or storytelling to help youth step into others' shoes and understand different life experiences and challenges.

Encourage reflection on how their actions and words can impact others and emphasise the importance of empathy in creating an inclusive environment.

Address Bias and Stereotypes

Facilitate discussions on unconscious bias, stereotypes, and their impact on inclusivity.

Engage youth in activities that challenge stereotypes and encourage critical thinking about societal norms and expectations.

Provide opportunities for youth to share their personal experiences of bias or discrimination and discuss strategies to counteract them.

Implement Restorative Practices

Introduce restorative practices as a way to address conflicts, promote understanding, and repair harm.

Teach youth conflict resolution skills, restorative dialogue techniques, and problem-solving strategies.

Encourage them to take responsibility for their actions, make amends, and work towards restoring relationships in a constructive manner.

Provide Education and Awareness

Offer educational sessions or workshops on diversity, equity, and inclusion topics.

Bring in guest speakers, organise cultural celebrations, or engage in community service projects that promote awareness and understanding of different backgrounds and identities.

Provide resources, such as books, documentaries, or online platforms, to further educate youth about social issues and the importance of inclusion.

Youth Participation and Empowerment

Youth empowerment is a process that involves providing young people with the **knowledge, skills, resources, and opportunities** they need to become active, engaged, and confident individuals who can contribute to their communities and shape their own futures.

Here are some basics of youth empowerment:

Meaningful Participation:

Youth empowerment starts with recognising and valuing the input and participation of young people in decision-making processes that affect their lives. It involves giving them a voice, involving them in planning and implementing activities, and creating platforms for their ideas and perspectives to be heard and considered.

Skill Development:

Empowerment involves equipping young people with essential life skills, such as communication, critical thinking, problem-solving, leadership, teamwork, and decision-making. These skills help them navigate challenges, express themselves effectively, make informed choices, and take on leadership roles.

Access to Information and Education:

Providing young people with access to accurate information, quality education, and resources is crucial for their empowerment. It enables them to develop knowledge, broaden their horizons, and make informed decisions about their lives and communities. Access to education empowers young people to pursue their passions, develop their talents, and expand their opportunities.

Building Self-confidence and Resilience:

Youth empowerment involves fostering self-confidence and resilience in young people. It includes creating a supportive environment that encourages them to take risks, learn from failures, and develop a positive self-image. By nurturing their self-belief and helping them build resilience, young people are better equipped to overcome obstacles and pursue their goals.

Mentoring and Role Models:

Providing young people with positive role models and mentors who can guide, inspire, and support them is an essential aspect of empowerment. Mentors can offer advice, share their experiences, provide guidance, and help young people explore their interests and talents. Having someone to look up to and learn from can significantly impact a young person's personal growth and development.

Encouraging Critical Thinking and Social Awareness:

Empowering young people involves encouraging them to think critically, question societal norms and injustices, and develop a social awareness. It means fostering a sense of empathy, understanding of diversity, and a commitment to social justice. By encouraging critical thinking, young people can analyse and challenge existing systems, work towards positive change, and advocate for their rights and the rights of others.

Creating Opportunities for Engagement:

Empowering young people includes creating opportunities for them to actively engage in their communities. It can involve supporting youth-led initiatives, volunteering programs, community service projects, or participation in clubs, organisations, or forums where they can contribute their skills, ideas, and perspectives.

Youth empowerment is an ongoing process that requires the collective efforts of families, communities, educational institutions, policymakers, and society as a whole. By investing in the empowerment of young people, we can help them realise their full potential,

become active citizens, and shape a better future for themselves and their communities.

Conclusion

The “Increasing Youth Workers Competences in Social Inclusion and Youth Empowerment” seminar proved to be a valuable learning experience for the participants. It equipped them with a deeper understanding of inclusion and provided practical tools and strategies for engaging youth inclusively. The seminar emphasised the importance of creating safe spaces, empowering young people, and building partnerships to foster inclusive communities. The participants left with renewed motivation and concrete action plans to implement inclusive practices in their respective roles as youth workers.

Moving forward, it is recommended to provide ongoing support and resources to the participants, such as follow-up sessions or a platform for sharing best practices and challenges faced during implementation. Continued training and capacity-building opportunities can further enhance the participants' ability to promote inclusion and empower young people within their communities.

Two youth exchanges build around the principles of inclusion will be implemented after this seminar in 2023-2024 and numerous other projects in local communities of the participants.

Those interested in more information regarding those two agendas, that were developed during the seminar, please contact the organisers or visit the resources section of our website.

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