**Online Platform for Exchange of Special Needs Youth Work Methods (OPEN)**

*Project Identification Number 2017-1-BG01-KA205-35775*

Context

The project combines the efforts of 5 youth NGOs and 1 umbrella organization from 5 countries (BG, IT, MK, RO and SI) at cross-sectoral level (youth and school education) in developing the first online platform (OPEN platform) for validating good practices in youth work that can be applied to 5 groups of youth learners with special needs**: Autism, Visual and Hearing Impairments, Dyslexia, Physical Difficulties**. These are the most common types of learning difficulties, acknowledged on national and European level. More and more youth work needs to address these challenges young people face. However, youth workers across EU do not have always the necessary instruments and know-how. Our project will explore a possible solution to this challenge by linking special needs education specialists and youth workers in our partner countries and across Europe through the innovative OPEN platform.

One of the project’s objectives is to develop an evaluation methodology for validating the good practices as applicable in one or more of the 5 areas of learning difficulties (Autism, Visual and Hearing Impairments, Dyslexia, Physical Difficulties);

## Partners

1.National Association of Resource Teachers - Bulgaria

2.Center for Youth Activism CYA KRIK - Macedonia

3.CET Platform - Bulgaria

4.OFENSIVA TINERILOR ASOCIATIA - Romania

5.YOUNET - Italy

6.CELJSKI MLADINSKI CENTER, JAVNI ZAVOD FOR MLADINSKO KULTURO, IZOBRAZEVANJE, INFORMIRANJE IN SPORT - Slovenia

How we define “good practice”

Case study is a well-known qualitative method for carrying out of researches.

**It is usually used when[[1]](#endnote-1):**

* The Program is Unique If a program is highly innovative. However, it is still necessary to document those impacts systematically, and to consider whether those impacts resulted from the program. In addition, the rich detail of a case study provides good information about the design of a program and the context in which it is delivered, thus allowing others to determine its appropriateness for their areas.
* An Existing Program in a Different Setting A case study can also be a useful evaluation tool when the project involves implementing an existing program in a new setting.
* A Unique Outcome In the course of doing a purely quantitative, non-case study evaluation, an outlier may occur (an instance in which the outcome for one member of the population differs greatly from the outcomes for the rest of the population). It may be that what happened in that one instance is sufficiently different to warrant an in-depth case study.
* An Unpredictable Environment When the environment is complex and turbulent, the achievement of a pre-established goal may be difficult to predict, or may only be achievable with unacceptably large negative side effects.

On the other hand “best practice” is a term from management and referred to the Cambridge Dictionary is defined as “a [working](https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/working) [method](https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/method) or set of [working](https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/working) [methods](https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/method) that is [officially](https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/officially) [accepted](https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/accepted) as being the [best](https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/best) to use in a [particular](https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/particular) [business](https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/business) or [industry](https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/industry), usually [described](https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/describe) [formally](https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/formally) and in [detail](https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/detail).

The business dictionary describes it as “A method or technique that has consistently shown results superior to those achieved with other means, and that is used as a benchmark.   
  
The evaluator Bill Brozo pointed out the need for a clear definition of this topic and made some. “It is very important to have clear criteria for deciding what constitutes “best practice” on the European scene. In the United States, for instance, this is a code for government approved practices, meaning only those supported by randomized control trials (RCTs) or with empirically verifiable results. …, I suggested two categories: “Best Practice” with just those practices based on empirical findings and “Promising Practices” with those that produce positive results but have not yet been empirically verified. …Another significant challenge is coming to consensus on the criteria of “best” and/or “good” practices. In fact, these two words have been used interchangeably, but may not mean the same thing. In general, best practice implies a significant evidentiary basis of effectiveness for the practice; whereas, good practice may have a record of effectiveness, but not necessarily grounded in empirical evidence.”

For the purpose of our current project we will use the term “good practice” and will refer to a practice which is grounded on a theory. A good practice is not only a practice that is good, but a practice that has been proven to work well and produce good results, and is therefore recommended as a model. It is a successful experience, which has been tested and validated, in the broad sense, which has been repeated and deserves to be shared so that a greater number of people can adopt it and may act as a source of inspiration for new projects.

1. Methodology

The good practices within “OPEN” project will be collected in 5 countries: Italy, Slovenia, Romania, Bulgaria and FYROM. As each organization is specialized in a certain type of activity it will focus its efforts in one of the following sectors of disparities:

NART: autism.

FYROM - dyslexia

Romania- blindness

Slovenia – physical difficulties

Italia – deafness

Every organization will collect at least 4 practices from its country. Every partner will use its own approach for identifying these practices – it could be a competition, a desk review, field visits. or other types of activities. Every partner will conduct a first stage evaluation of the national practices and will finally propose 4 practices for final approval. These 4 practices will be translated in English and proposed for a second stage approval.

The second stage of evaluation will be done within the same set of criteria but from other evaluators.

At the end at least 10 practices which are over a certain threshold will be published on the new platform.

Main criteria for evaluation towards the definition of good practice is:

**Theoretical base:** the practice is based on a theory

**Impact:** how the project/training/programme improves the daily routine of the beneficiaries

**Sustainability:** how the resources are used in the most effective way. The“good practice” meets current needs, without compromising the ability to address future needs

**Multiplying capacity:** the practice is transferable with a little adaptation

**Ethics:** principles like participation, equality and non-discrimination are met, professional ethics is ensured

**Innovative aspects –** how the practice in stake is different

**Measurable results:** to define one practice as good it has to be evaluated and to have a proven record on the results.

**Satisfaction of the end users:** the final beneficiaries – young people with disparities have to feel more self-confident and to gain new skills and knowledge for the future, Three-folded approach will be evaluated: change in attitudes, in knowledge and skills acquired.

Description of practice template

No more than 5 pages

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| --- | --- |
| Title | Youth program consisted of 10 inclusive workshops |
| Implementing organization | Center for Youth Activism CYA Krik  Mila Karadafova, Executive Director  e-mail: [infokrikcenter@gmail.com](mailto:infokrikcenter@gmail.com)  tel: +389 78 370 987  1000 Skopje Macedonia |
| Target group | Young people aged 15 – 25 with and without disabilities. |
| Short description, incl reliable theoretical background : | **Please describe in several words your practice – the goals, target groups, geographical scope, activities undertaken, results, impact**  The process of deinstitutionalization is the starting point of preparing the practice. The overall goal is the achievement of social inclusion in the society. The objectives are to lose the stereotypes and prejudices for each other through educational workshops and to increase the capacities of the young people with and without disabilities. Most of these programs are being implemented in the special schools, for the young people with typical development to realize the need of the process of deinstitutionalization. Each workshop is consisted of non-formal educational methods and aim to increase the capacities of the young people to become independent. The universal methods are adapted for usage while working with a mixed group of young people with and without disabilities. Every workshop has its own goal, but each one following is a step further from the previous one. The main topics of the workshops are contributing in improvement of the body motoric, memory skills, life skills, environment and common sense education. These topics can be also modified based on the needs of the group. The process of learning is constantly monitored by the youth workers, which can evaluate it after finishing the program. After finishing the program, based on the experience, the group keeps contact and socialize in their free time (with and without disabilities).  Link to the European youth strategy, focus on social inclusion:  https://ec.europa.eu/youth/policy/youth-strategy/social-inclusion\_en |
| Context | **Please describe the context of the practice you propose, including political context and source of financing Who are the users of the good practice?**  Since the year 2000, the process of deinstitutionalization is supposed to be happening in Macedonia. Sadly, in the past 18 years, not so many actions have been taken by the institutions. That is why, Krik recognized the need of entering the special schools and institutions, based on the experience in working with the young people with disabilities. In the past years, Krik is motivating youth organisations to be more inclusive by offering practices and knowledge. Last year the Macedonian ministry of labour and social policy started working on the actual implementation of the process and Krik is actively following and advocating the process for quality implementation. The young people in these institutions are the direct users of the programs, as well as the young people outside of them interested to join. Throughout the years a lot of young people joined the programs in the schools. Usually these kind of programs are implemented with the capacities that Krik has. It is the will of the youth workers to contribute in the process. Last year was the first time this kind of activities to be financially supported by a donor. In the project See You Watching Me, financed by UNICEF, there were 10 programs in 6 different cities of Macedonia and the results were very visible in the local communities. Direct users of the practice are young people as well as the youth workers developing their capacities. |
| Sustainability | **How long this practice is in the field? What are the required resources – human, financial, capital? Please describe how the resources are used in the most effective way, including financial resources, human resources, and other resources.**  Youth programs are in the field since youth work evolved on European level. This kind of target group included in the program is quite new and still developing. Krik is the first youth organization in Macedonia that is working on constantly improving this practice by implementing these programs. Each program needs two youth workers who are going to plan and implement the program from it’s very beginning until the end and evaluation process. Depending on the situation of the organization, the resources and capacities, the financial implications can be very low or minimal. The creativity of the youth workers is also very much influencing the costs of the implementation. In most cases, Krik implements this practice with its own resources and capacities, not funded by any donor or project. |
| Methodology | **Please describe your methods of work; Who are the institutions, partners, implementing agencies, and donors involved in the good practice, and what is the nature of their involvement? What were the major challenges? How they were overcome? What are the key success factors?**  The methods used are traditional non-formal education methods. They are modified in the way to be more suitable for the target group. The modifications are made by the needs of the participants. So far, Krik has established communication with 3 special schools and one center for rehabilitation and education in Skopje. As well as, city day care centers for people with disabilities in 5 other cities. They are providing space and knowledge about the capacities of the participants as well as expertise in implementing the activities. The presence of the care – takers and teachers from the schools is very valuable in the beginning of the program. The main challenges of implementation was the big wall of stereotypes and prejudices towards the people with disabilities. By a successful informational campaign Krik managed to make these programs attractive for the young people with typical development and they are joining more and more in each program. It is very important to explain to the young people with typical development what is their benefit from joining the program and make sure that happens throughout the process. The outcomes of completing each program is very visible within the group. How they behave with each other, the implementation of gained knowledge and mutual support are the key factors of success. |
| Innovative aspects | **What are the innovative elements? How this practice is better than the traditional approach**  The fact that through this process we can achieve social inclusion and encourage dismiss of stereotypes and prejudices, brings a new positive vibration to the society. Young people are getting more knowledge about their peers with a certain disability, while gaining knowledge and personally developing themselves. |
| Vlidation | What are the final outputs (measurable results), how do we know them? How it was evaluated  Implementation of gained knowledge is one of the tools for measuring the results of the practice. All of the workshops have a certain task which can generate visible results. Based on the mapping of needs of the participants, the program creates a strategy to boost the general knowledge of certain topics of the participants. By the end of the program, each participant is expected to provide solid and visible results of their knowledge of the certain topic. Very often, follow up activities come out as an output and the participants have the opportunity to practically show their skills and knowledge adopted during the program. |
| Impact | What is the impact? How we know it?  Satisfaction of the end users  The participants get more independent. They are given the opportunity to create their own opinion and use the method learning by doing. In this way, they show their capacity, they are encouraged and motivated to show their satisfaction. By their participation, they have an impact to the behavior of the people in their close and wider circle of people. |
| Potential for replication | How the practice could be transferred?  If possible, by organizing a training for youth workers which are willing to use this practice, it can be easily transferred. The successful stories in the past can be taken as an example, use all the experience and transfer it to the people who want to use this practice. |
| Ethics | How are the ethical issues incorporated in the implementation of the practice? (Equal opportunities. Inclusion. Equality between men and women, participatory approach, meeting individual needs, ect)  Every participant in this practice has their own capacities and needs. Throughout the process of creating the program, as well as the process of implementation, there is a process of mapping the capacities and needs of the participants. This is made due to keeping the quality of the youth work and making sure the outcomes and the goals of the program will be met. Having in mind the ethical issues, the program is focused on inclusion of people with disabilities, as well as gender, social and ethnical inclusion and equality.  <http://krik.org.mk/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Publication-See-You-Watching-Me.pdf>  <https://facebook.com/pg/CYA.KRIK/photos/?tab=album&album_id=1343040305840409> |

Evaluation methodology

Each practice will be evaluated towards the set of criteria by two independent experts. NART has a pool of experts/resource teachers which will evaluate the practices. The average between the two scorings will be taken valid. Every practice with more than 70 scores will be nominated for good practice and uploaded onto the platform.

If the scores of the two experts vary significantly (more than 15 points), the reconciliation will be organized.

After piloting the evaluation methodology it will be developed as an on-line self-evaluation tool and will be published on the OPEN’s platform where different organizations could use it.

Evaluation grid

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| --- | --- |
| Name of the evaluator |  |
| Theoretical base: the practice is based on a theory | Yes/no |
| Impact: how the project/training/programme improves the daily routine of the beneficieries | Max 20 scores |
| Sustainability: how the resources are used in the most effective way. The “good practice” meets current needs, without compromising the ability to address future needs | Max 20 scores |
| Multiplying capacity: the practice is transferable with a little adаptation | Max 15 scores |
| Ethics: principles like participation, equality and non-discrimination are met, professional ethics is ensured | Max 15 scores |
| Innovative aspects – how the practice in stake is different | Max 15 scores |
| Measurable results: to define one practice as good it has to be evaluated and to have a proven record on the results. | Max 15 scores |

1. http://case.edu/affil/healthpromotion/ProgramEvaluation.pdf [↑](#endnote-ref-1)