



Rethink

How we made young people with mental health problems feel more included



**City of
Linköping**



**ZEMGALES
PLĀNOŠANAS
REĢIONS**



Interreg
Central Baltic

**Many interventions
focus on the problem.
We wanted to focus on
ability and change.**

Development of a new training programme

A salutogenic approach

The Rethink project targeted young people, aged 18 to 30, with mental health problems in Linköping, Sweden, and Zemgale, Latvia. Usually interventions for this group focus on the problems. The service provision tends to be relatively fragmented and crisis orientated and many young people receiving these services experience social isolation and a sense of powerlessness. Instead we wanted to focus on ability and change. This salutogenic approach takes its starting point from the theory of Sense of Coherence and the assumption that comprehensibility, manageability, and meaningfulness in life is of great importance for an individual's wellbeing and possibility to cope and thrive.

Aiming for inclusion

The goal of the project was that the beneficiaries should feel more included in one or more of these areas: education/work, health, relationships, economy, hobbies/activities or sense of self. To achieve that we developed a new training programme with a flexible curriculum. The programme is based on the learning pillars of UNESCO, as well as the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. At least one of the following areas was included for each beneficiary depending on the situation of the individual:

- Learn to be (the right to personal development).
- Learn to live together (the right to be included in society).
- Learn to do (realize yourself in action).
- Learning to know (lifelong learning).

The target groups

The partners' target groups differs some regarding composition and characteristics. The initial baseline study showed that the group in Linköping often had mental ill health in combination with neuropsychiatric diagnosis and social problems. In Zemgale they often had cognitive impairments or disabilities as well as social problems. Also, the context in Sweden versus Latvia are different regarding services and possibilities. Common to both countries, however, is that the group is socially

isolated and excluded and the individual's skill, interest and motivation are rarely noticed.

A training programme with informal education

The new training programme builds on the individual's dreams, goals and need for support and has an emphasis on informal education linked to vocational and volunteer work experience options. The programme includes a flexible range of options, such as cookery, drama, yoga/sports, art, photography, dance, and were designed to engage the young people concerned and develop their social and communication skills. Two key components were the same for all beneficiaries – the support of a case manager and personal development with a mentor.

The Rethink project was carried out between 2019 and 2021 and the new training programme was piloted with 20 young men and women in Linköping and 20 in Zemgale.

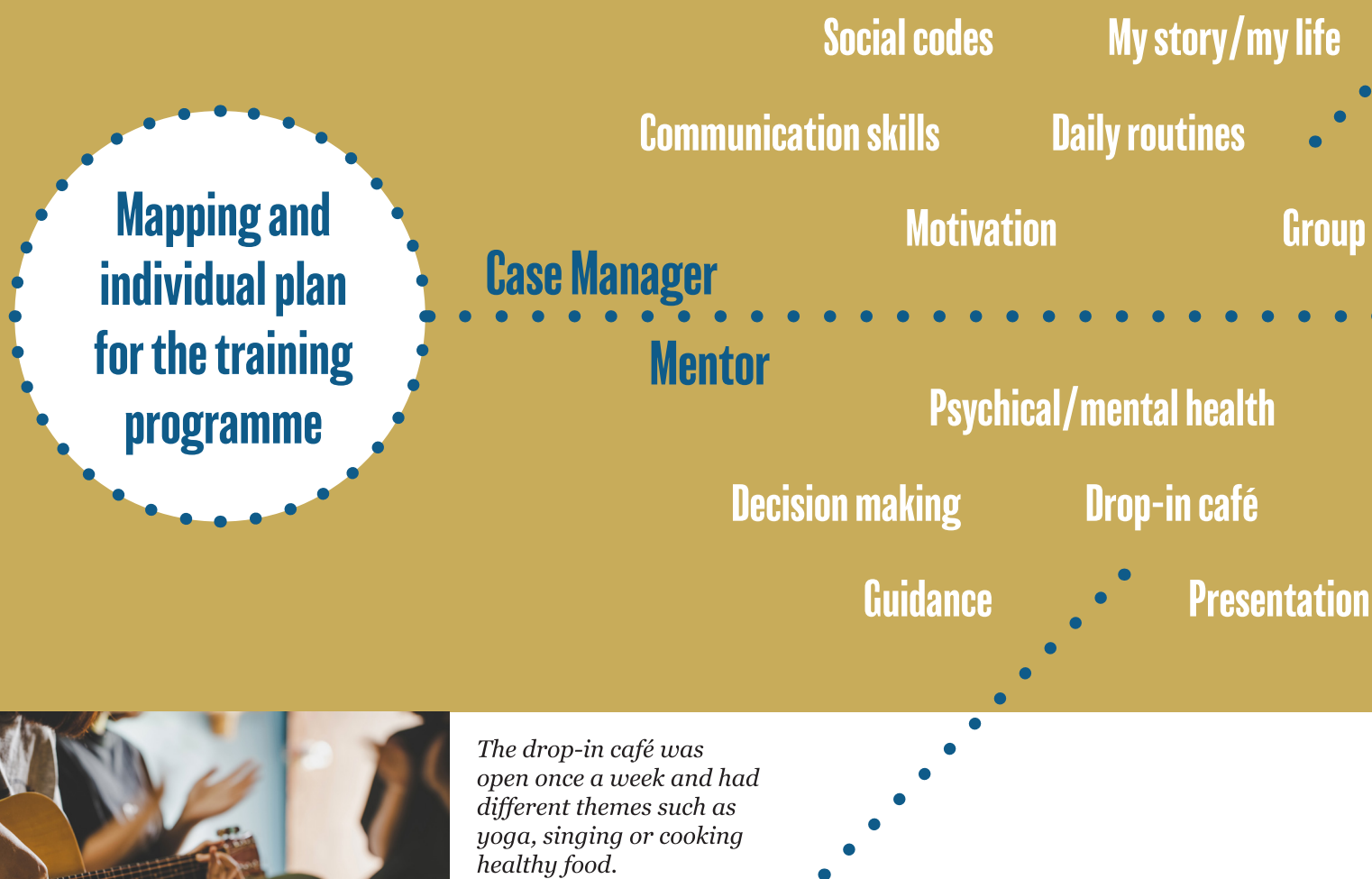


The tailor made training programme made it possible for the beneficiaries to follow their dreams.

The training programme process

The training programme has a flexible curriculum and is tailor made for each beneficiary. A case manager oversees the range of interventions being offered, liaises with other professionals involved and also supervises the work of the mentor. In the initial phase, the case manager and beneficiary establish goals and priorities in an individual plan for training. When the beneficiary is ready for a mentor or an internship, a selection process takes place to find a suitable match for that. Then the programme

continues with work and support towards established goals for about 4 to 6 months. The case manager and beneficiary are in contact at least once a week during the programme for feedback and to follow up results and outline the next steps. The case manager also keeps regular contact with mentor/workplace. In the final phase the case manager and beneficiary evaluate the current situation and update the individual plan with a progression strategy to follow when exiting the programme.



The drop-in café was open once a week and had different themes such as yoga, singing or cooking healthy food.



The beneficiaries were able to explore interests and talents.

The mentors made it possible for the beneficiaries to take part in activities and to get new perspectives. The role of the mentor is different from that of professionals. The mentors are often volunteers and can relate to the individual young person in a very different way, acting as a coach, adviser and motivator. In Latvia the mentors received an extensive digital training programme.



The beneficiaries got a chance to try out internships at workplaces.



In Latvia, the beneficiaries participated in a summer camp.

Outdoor activities, walks and picnics made it easy to hang out with others.



The programme made a difference

The project met its objectives

The training programme was piloted by recruiting 40 young people out of a forecast of 40, supported by 18 mentors out of a forecast of 20. 36 of the young people completed the programme, meeting the forecast objective of 90% achieving a positive outcome.

The beneficiaries felt more included

91% of beneficiaries who completed the programme confirmed that it had made a positive contribution to their social or economic inclusion. In addition to the mentoring and personal coaching, the group activities organised through the training programme, both in person and virtual, had a significant impact in building the confidence and communication skills of participants. For many beneficiaries the greatest benefit of the project was the opportunity to socialise with people in their own age group as well as the opportunity to develop new skills to support their personal development.

and practical life and creative skills such as learning to cook, drama, photography, foreign languages and shopping independently. Beneficiaries also learned CV preparation and job interview skills. 14 undertook voluntary/work experience, study visits and 5 obtained employment.

The role of the mentors

Overall, the mentors were highly positive about their experience of the project and felt that they had had a positive impact on the lives of their mentees. A number of them emphasised that the learning was a two way process and that they had learned a lot from the experience. The project showed that the selection process for mentors with appropriate backgrounds and attitudes is critical, as well as training to ensure that mentors fully understand their role and the needs of the particular target group with whom they are working. It also showed that a facility for mentors to share experiences and support each other can add value to the overall mentoring process.

Conclusions and possible lessons for mainstream services

The holistic and individual approach with focus on ability and a social context has made the beneficiaries feel more 'normal' instead of stigmatized. The programme has given them a sense of coherence and empowered them to follow their dreams in life. The project has achieved significantly more than its immediate objectives, in that its methodology and approach have considerable implications for the future practice of professionals and services working with young people with mental health challenges. Possible lessons include:

- The need for a person centred approach focusing on the individual's potential rather than just their problems.
- The role of mentoring as a complement to professional services.
- The need to tackle social exclusion and isolation as a prerequisite to economic inclusion.
- The need for Informal education to engage young people linked to vocational and voluntary/work experience options.



Do you focus on the problem or the ability? Is it time for a change?

The mentoring element of the project was viewed as highly successful by the beneficiary mentees with 92% feeling 'positive' or 'very positive' about the benefits of having a mentor during the project. Other positive outcomes included beneficiaries developing motivational and problem solving skills

**“It feels nice
because everybody has
a nice attitude in the meetings,
it feels friendly.”**

**“I’m very keen to change my life,
although a lot of things
have changed already.”**

**“Through my mentor
I get another perspective
on myself and
what is expected.”**

**“It was all there together, all the
lessons were following each other.
I liked it, there was a regime,
a movement, a mental movement,
a moment of reflection.”**

The Rethink project was carried out between 2019 and 2021. The Research and Development Centre in the Municipality of Linköping in Sweden was lead partner and Zemgale Planning Region was project partner.

The R & D Centre for health, care and social work is a part of the Municipality of Linköping and a collaboration between nine municipalities in the region of Östergötland and Linköping University. Since being established in 2000, we have carried out almost 140 projects in the area of welfare, based on a close interaction between research and practice. The projects are funded by member municipalities and external funds, at local, national and EU level.

www.linkoping.se/fou

Zemgale Planning region, ZPR, consisting of 22 municipalities, is since 2006 working as regional public authority with main function to carry out regional planning and development, regional coordination in different fields like transport, education, social services, environment protection and entrepreneurship. ZPR cooperates with numerous partners from institutions all around EU as well as with other Planning regions in Latvia and has developed and implemented a large number of projects funded by the EU and other sources.

www.zemgale.lv



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