



Recommendations for Peer-to-peer in youth information work

what
why
how ?

Result of the long-term training course
“YOUTH.INFO: PEER-TO-PEER IN YOUTH INFORMATION WORK”, 2015

Project initiated by NGO CREATIVITAS (Lithuania) (www.creativitas.lt)

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- Association of Youth Information Centres in Croatia (Croatia)
- ERYICA - European Youth Information and Counselling Agency (Luxembourg)
- EgoMind (Estonia)
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YOUTH.INFO: peer-to-peer in youth information work

Introduction and context

Team of the NGO Creativitas has been contributing since 2013 for the development of youth information and counseling system in Lithuania by organising international and national training courses for youth information workers “YIntro - Stepping into youth information”. This knowledge has also become part of various other projects and publications in the field.

This experience and the survey on the impact of generalist youth information, that was published in 2013 by ERYICA has inspired to go into rather still unexplored part of peer-to-peer work in youth information. Since the survey¹ has shown that young people see information delivered by their peers as rather reliable, however very few youth information centres are implementing continued peer-to-peer programmes in Europe.

One of the main obstacles for this approach to be developed was lack of methodology or guidelines on how to implement peer-to-peer activities in the generalist youth information work, because some specialised information services (especially in human rights, sexual or abuse prevention education) are using the benefits of peer-to-peer since a while.

Hence Creativitas with a support of ERYICA has gathered interested youth information organisations from all over Europe to experiment with peer-to-peer methodology and while experiencing it to collect practices and recommendations that could be shared with other colleagues.

This project is special in the sense of equal involvement and partnership of both - youth information workers (peer supporters) and young people/leaders (peer educators). As also in the structure of project: training course, practice period and evaluation of it in the end (see below).

This recommendation paper is a result of the project “Youth.Info: peer-to-peer in the youth information work”, which was funded by the EU programme “Erasmus+”. It is thought to be a resource of ideas and guidelines for improvement of youth information work. It addresses all stakeholders involved in the delivery of youth information services: policy makers, youth information workers, volunteers, youth leaders and young people.

This paper is a very first step on which further actions should be built. We are looking forward for your feedback and practices - either good or bad - to be shared.

1 Ewa Krzaklewska & Dunja Potočnik, Survey on Impact of Youth information and counselling, November 2013, in Marek Ivanovskis and Evaldas Rupkus, Compendium on national youth information and counselling structures, Luxembourg:ERYICA, 2013, 51; can be found under <http://eryica.org/sites/default/files/Compendium%20on%20National%20Youth%20Information%20and%20Counselling%20Structures.pdf>

Flow of the long-term project:

Preparation

- Analysis of information needs of young people at home
- Identification of young people, who could be establishers of peers network

Training course
(March 2015,
Lithuania)

- Overview of existing practices in Europe on peers networks
- Depending on different needs, working in separated or joined groups of peers and YI workers
- Topics of the training: youth information basics for peers, information and media literacy, delivery methods, motivating young people, working with groups of peers
- Planing actions for national activities

Practice
(3-4 months)

- Peers implementing information delivery activities, collecting materials from their activities
- YI workers facilitate the process, inviting young people to reflecting on the process, bring main insights

Evaluation
meeting
(June 2015,
Lithuania)

- Reflection and sharing of experiences during the practice period
- Covering the areas where more support is needed
- Evaluation, recommendations for peer-to-peer work in the youth information field
- Plans for further work and future cooperation

what?

What is peer-to-peer in youth information work?

European Youth Information Charter² art. 13 states that “Young people shall have the opportunity to participate, in appropriate ways, in different stages of youth information work, at local, regional, national and international levels. These can include, among others: identifying information needs, the preparation and delivery of information, managing and evaluating information services and projects and peer group activities.” Therefore organisations implementing this Charter, mostly every generalist youth information centre in Europe, should be ensuring participation of young people in their service delivery.

Participation is one of the main principles of youth policy and youth work in general. We find the manual “Have your say” as a very good resource for going into this topic: www.coe.int/youth/haveyoursay¹

Any youth information worker might find him/herself in the situation when one is not sure about actual needs and lifestyles of young people. Therefore from a very pragmatic point of view, peer-to-peer methodology might contribute to collecting knowledge about young people.

As Johan Bertels, the youth information expert from Flanders (Belgium), said “The idea is not to make counselors of them - they are just youngsters who know a little bit more, they can better identify what is happening in their environment and they can think what actions they could take”³. He also emphasizes on the young people role in giving feedback to youth information services and helping youth information workers to better understand quickly changing realities of young people.

Professional work requires understanding the fact, that peer-to-peer approach is a continuous process, which asks for some resources of the youth information service and the worker. Regular work through capacity building of peer educators and availability of the supporter for them are the basis for a start.

² <http://eryica.org/page/european-youth-information-charter>

³ Marek Ivanovskis and Evaldas Rupkus, Compendium on national youth information and counselling structures, Luxembourg:ERYICA, 2013, 105.

Good Practice Example

Vertti - A Peer-to-Peer Youth Information Initiative in Finland

Vertti is a peer-to-peer youth information initiative, funded by a grant from the Ministry of Education, which started as a pilot project in the Turku region in Finland in 2007. The idea was to try a new type of peer-to-peer information model, and one of the objectives was to encourage and involve young people in planning and carrying out youth information activities in their school. The guiding principles were to mobilise young people's own ideas to improve the availability of youth information at school and to develop co-operation between municipal youth workers and schools.

In the Vertti initiative, 13 to 16-year-old secondary school students that have volunteered to participate are trained to become peer-to-peer youth information officers (Vertti information officers, VIO). Since the Vertti initiative is a joint effort between schools and the municipal youth services, three different people need to be involved:

- 1) a secondary school student who wants to become a VIO;
- 2) a contact person at school, such as a principal, student counsellor or teacher; and
- 3) a youth worker who coordinates the VIOs.

After the project, the tried-and-tested initiative has become an elemental part of youth work in nine municipalities in the Turku region. The initiative is coordinated by the Youth Work Centre of the Leisure Section of the City of Turku, but co-operation in planning and implementation in the participating municipalities covers all youth workers who work as Vertti coordinators.

Further information: <http://eryica.org/sites/default/files/SHEryica%202014.pdf>

why?

Benefits of peer-to-peer in youth information work

Participants of the project have been sharing their thoughts on what kind of impact do peer-to-peer activities have on different levels.

Impact on community/society/policy for (of) implementing peer-to-peer activities

Advantages:

- + Young people pay more attention to other young people - it's more effective;
- + Equality among young people;
- + Young people can prove themselves in the eyes of adults (decision making, authority);
- + Different approaches to teaching and learning;
- + Inclusion of young people in the society;
- + Empowerment of young people;
- + Self-sustainable network of young people improving targeted or specific needs;
- + Acknowledgement of non-formal methods and models for work with youth.

Disadvantages:

- Lack of depth (in quality, knowledge);
- Less professional;
- Less information provided.

Impact on organization/institution implementing peer-to-peer activities

Advantages:

- + Increased outreach;
- + Partner network;
- + Updated information on trends;
- + Direct feedback;
- + Information is more accessible;
- + Image building and visibility;
- + Built capacity of organization (for staff team and richer content)
- + Training next generation of staff;

Disadvantages:

- Peers are non-professional youth workers;
- Drop-outs during activities;
- Information might not be reliable;
- Coordination of peers can be a challenge for an organization;
- More effort and resources are needed

Impact on individuals for implementing peer-to-peer activities

Advantages:

- + Awareness of new possibilities for peers;
- + Youth information workers (YIW) close connection with peers (connected with new insights, peers, needs, motivating);
- + Learning new skills (presenting, time management), social skills for both peers and YIW;
- + Practical experience;
- + Might help to choose a career path;
- + New contacts.

Disadvantages:

- Requires lot of dedication in energy and time for long term process of project/activity;
- Dropping level of personal motivation because lack of financial support for YIW;
- Social prejudice and pressure (for peers);
- Lack of recognition of achievements.

Good Practice Example

Watch Your Web - Infoscouts, Germany

Watch Your Web is a project on consumer protection oriented Youth Information and Media Literacy in social networks since 2003 in Germany. It aims to sensitize youths for a responsible use of data online. Besides an information portal, a video magazine and information brochures, the project also makes use of the Peer-to-Peer approach and involves youths in the information. It organizes trainings for young people to become a so-called Infoscout. The “watch your web Infoscouts” help others how to use digital media in a safe and responsible way. They address problems and demonstrate safe practices. Any driven young person between 14 and 20 interested in media can become an Infoscout. Infoscouts take on the responsibility to be available as contact persons for topics related to Internet Security at school, in youth groups and online. They are trained in the fields of “data privacy”, “smartphone security”, “consumer protection” and “cybermobbing” and learn methods which enable them to pass on their knowledge to others. Every Infoscout is obliged to organize an event on a specific subject. This can be a workshop, a presentation, a flashmob, a consultation-hour and much else. They receive and create materials for their performance with which they can inform other young people about the edited topics.

Further information: <http://eryica.org/sites/default/files/SHeryica%202014.pdf>

how?

Recommendations of the project participants

After implementing various peer-to-peer activities in their youth information services, participants of the project have come up with following recommendations that might be useful for others thinking on how to start peer to peer activities or improve for those who already working in their own ways. Recommendations are split into different parts of the process that proved to be the most important during the practice period.

Planning and preparation, resource management

Before going on the field, in your Peer education project/activity, you should dedicate quality time to define the strategy that you are going to apply and consider the resources.

Team management

Create a team and empower it (by assessing its needs and providing quality training, for example). For your team, consult who is interested and available within the organization and consider recruiting volunteers to support (for example, through the cooperation with partners - see recommendation “Map potential partners” bellow).

Make sure you distribute responsibilities within the team, considering the needs of the project and the skills and knowledge of the team members.

Integrate with other projects

Meet with the team of other projects to decide which resources can be shared. Instead of duplicating resources, sharing with other projects can give you easier and better access to facilities, materials, ideas and even financial support.

Map potential partners

If you take the know-how from your organization and the team (for example, using contact databases) you can reach for different partners that can be involved as sponsors (fund-raising) or for general cooperation. Local government, schools, local community in general, business actors, NGO, etc.

Define at which level the partners will be involved - if they take part in decision making, training providers, financial supporters, logistical supporters, etc.

Have a Plan B

While planning, preview alternative solutions, in case events will go differently as initial plan. Consider possible internal and external changes. For example, if a partner quits the project, how can you ensure that you are not depending on that particular partner.

In youth information work, working with young peers, there is a high chance that their plans might change (moving for studying, financial issues, etc.), therefore, count with drop-outs, designing the peer management according to this possibility.

Learn from other peer education project examples

Check in your local community if someone is working with this method. Look for international partners that can share their practical examples and support you in designing your project.

Researching young people's needs

The first piece of advice when it comes to the research of young people's needs is: DO IT. Any research is better than no research - YI services are pointless if they don't meet the real needs of young people.

There are different ways of getting to know young people's opinions and analyzing their needs. In general, when researching young people's needs, it is important to not only get and analyze their responses, but also let them see the outcomes.

Researching young people's needs

Online surveys are very easy to prepare and the data is ready as soon as respondents submit their answers. However, they often struggle with getting enough respondents (unless there is some substitution - voucher, money, chance to win something...). Paper questionnaires require more resources and people, but they usually have a better response ratio (e.g. if we hand them out at schools). We recommend to use between 6 to 10 (approximately) questions, preferably not open questions - respondents tend to skip them or get annoyed when there are too many open questions or too many questions in general.

Analyzing secondary data

There has already been conducted some kind of research in pretty much all areas of human life, therefore it is a good way to start with analyzing data from previous surveys or other researches.

Face-to-face interviews

Face-to-face interviews give us longer answers and a deeper insight into young people's opinions. They also allow us to see and work with young people's feelings and emotions. The interviewers should be approximately the same age as the respondents, it creates more trust and openness. Face-to-face interviews can be done almost anywhere - on the streets, at schools, at different events...

Expert interviews

If we find the right experts, they might give us answers even to the un-voiced questions and point us in the right direction for further research. Experts have a real-life experience from the field, they have already had to deal with different problems, they might help us avoid doing mistakes or going the wrong way in our research.

„Spying“ on youth

Sometimes it is better to just listen to young people, talk to them in a friendly manner, rather than conducting a professional, structured research. It allows us to get open and honest answers and opinions on things they want to talk about, rather than the things we ask them.

Focus groups

Focus groups allow us to discuss various topics with different groups (youth, employed/unemployed, students, experts...). It might be easier, especially for young people, to open up when they are in a group of their peers, rather than in a one on one interview with an interviewer. Focus groups give us a diverse palette of opinions, suggestions and thoughts.

Recruiting/attracting peers:**Advertising the project**

Distribute and promote the information (e.g. using flyers, posters, video, talks) through different channels (such as Facebook, schools, youth centers, youth gathering places) and show what's beneficial from the upcoming experience. Make visual, short, specific and clear message, promise something unique but realistic and ensure that it catches attention of potential peers.

Share information

Whether you are peers recruiting more peers or youth information worker, it is important to share and explain the goals/aims of the project, so that the peers are aware of what to expect and make sure that they can voice their expectations too - try to match them in the project. Example: have a meeting/informal conversation with the potential peer before him/her taking part in the project to make sure "we are on the same page".

Motivation to be involved in the project

Motivate peers by explaining the advantages and opportunities that they can get out of it. Example: you will get new skills (public speech, skills to take photos), knowledge, opportunities to participate in a training.

Socialization as an attractive factor

When advertising the project don't forget to mention the possibility to get new friends. Make sure that the peers and youth workers feel comfortable in the group and feel part of it. Example: create cozy atmosphere, good-trusting-supportive relationship between youth worker and peers.

Equality

Everyone should have the opportunity to participate in the project if they're motivated to. Ensure content and support matching their needs and training of the new skills if needed. Example: If someone from the minor community or with social risk inclusion shows interest, give them an opportunity to be involved as this will make the group more diverse and "rich".

Training peers

If you are organizing peer-to-peer training you should cover these topics:

- Status and needs of your target group (their background, geographical and social characteristics, education level, fields of interest...)
- Developing presentation and communication skills
- Models and methods of educating and informing target group that peers will use after training (e. g. Workshops in their school, presentations, round table discussions, etc.)

- Internal communication and team building
- Self-confidence development
- Evaluation (how much peers learnt during training?)

Guidebook for peer work

Guidebook should include all materials that can help peers with all situations, problems and questions that can occur in the future peer-to-peer work. Guidebook will also summarize all topics that will be covered during training course.

Training approach

Approach to peers, but also future peers approach to target group should be: interactive, youth friendly, informal, innovative, creative. During your work you can use: energizing games, combination and variety of methods, teamwork, small group works, role playing, brainstorming, art usage, guidebooks, prepared materials...

Trainer characteristics

Trainer should be person who is experienced youth information worker, has strength and is able to spread and share his/her knowledge to peers during the training programme. Some of characteristics that make good trainer are: experience, communication and presentation skills, facilitation skills, flexibility, tolerance, being respectful, authority, friendliness and accessibility.

Technicalities

Training should last at least two days and should be located, if possible, in an isolated/remote place. Recommended size of the group is 12-18 people, who are coached by 2-3 trainers (preferable an ex peer, project coordinator and experienced trainer).

Training course should not be restricted to only one training. It should be continued and constantly made during the whole project of peer educating and training.

Motivating peers

Peers should get a clear overview of their role in the project. The role should be clarified in cooperation with project team. Peers will get training, know which exact activities they are responsible for and how much time they invest into it.

Peers have to get clear information what is their benefit of planning and implementing activities of the project. Benefit might be learning (TCs) or work (volunteer) experience in a certain field, new connections and self-development in communication, planning skills etc.

Doing what one likes is a powerful source of motivation. Explore the competences of peers, as well as their preferences and interests, and involve everyone in processes that they can and they are willing to contribute the most. Working in areas that they are competent in will benefit the project/work and at the same time give peers the most success and feeling of accomplishment.

Motivation is maintained longer when peers can put their initiatives into practice and feel that the project/activity is theirs. Give ownership to young people, share decision making with them and give them space to realise their ideas. Gaining skills to run a peer-to-peer initiative also increases its sustainability.

Encouragement goes a long way in motivating peers around you. The messages such as: “You did a great job”, “You were great” etc. not only ensures your peers that their hard work paid off but also motivates them to continue that work and stay positive. Nothing is more demotivating than when a team leader shirks their role as the point person and assigns blame or responsibility on individual team members.

Set an example. Work hard! When your peers see how hard you are working and how are you dedicated to the idea/project/activity they will be motivated to follow suit. It is important to keep a positive attitude. Be a role model for peers around you because oftentimes a good mood and enthusiasm is contagious.

Have an honest communication with your peers! Give them information what is happening with idea/project/activity. If they have the “big picture” they will have feelings that they are part of idea/project/activity, that they are subject, not object.

Using digital tools have motivating effects among peers. The young generation prefers easy access to tools, documents and information sharing. If these aspects are complicated, that may become a demotivating factor.

Finally, have fun! Celebrating successes and organising events at the end of the (school) year or the project has a team building effect and keeps the group going.

Implementing actions

Explore the needs of young people before delivering activities. If young people needs do not match your activities or topics you are going to provide it may happen that young people will not participate in your activities.

Example: Youth House in Latvia

There was taken a survey (research) if young people want to have a youth house in their city. The answer was positive, so further actions there taken.

Youth information worker should provide all information about the content (the basis about the topic, e. g. volunteering abroad) and aims of sessions, activities and etc. If peers will have some questions it is important to answer them in order to make peers more confident.

Example: Summer campaign on mobility

There was organized a campaign about summer activities on mobility topics, e.g. volunteering, travelling, working and youth exchange. Before implementing activities youth information worker

provided all information what is mobility, what is important to mention about volunteering and other topics during campaign. At first peers were empowered by information basis and after that they could organise activities for other young people based on relevant information.

Be flexible in the process. If some methods do not work during the process, you should change them. Think about different solutions and ways how to provide the information you need.

Example: The Bosnian project

During the different parts of the project, there were different methods used to keep the youth (peers and other participants) motivated. One part of the project consisted of a competitive event, while other parts were classical workshops. The communication between the peers and youth workers was always friendly and the youth workers were flexible in their approach. Listening to the feedback, it was shown that this part was crucial for the continuous motivation of the peers.

Follow ERYICA principles in general : information provided during activities should be youth-friendly, equal, free of charge for everyone etc. It will help attract young people and avoid passive participation.

Example: Young journalists network “I Know It All” in Lithuania.

Every young person can become a member of this network. The content (topics, e. g. volunteering, studying, travelling, etc.) is based on the needs of young journalists and their personal interests. There is no entry fee, all activities (training courses, conferences, sessions) are free of charge. When journalists are included in producing content of, for example, national portal, the accuracy of the final content stays the responsibility of the youth information worker.

Think about a concrete target group. It will help to choose methods which may fix the best for the group and avoid passive participation.

Example: The Bosnian project

The main target group was high school students and this was consistent during the whole project implementation period. The methods that were chosen fit this target group the best and we feel that, if the group was more diverse, the wanted effect would not be achieved.

Evaluating and ensuring visibility

Ensuring visibility is important activity in the beginning of any project that should be handled separately. It’s important to plan this thoroughly.

Systematic and periodic evaluation on regular basis concerning peer-to-peer activities, work of peer network, organisation of youth information workers, cooperation with partners (if existing).

For evaluating you can use these tools:

- Self reflection and group reflection
- Meetings
- On-line diary after each activity filled by peers
- Survey after each activity

All of this should keep project flexible to any changes, ensuring of quality development of project and it's adaptation in new changes that occurred.

Peer to peer approach and activities should be integrated in youth information services and promoted through existing cooperation network (Facebook, websites of partners organisations, mailing lists, local newspapers and radio...), music schools, other youth centres, peers themselves and other existing projects.

Implementation should be organised by youth information workers in participation of volunteers and peers who should be in role of admins.

To ensure visibility of project funders and organisation, you may during activity use photos, posts in cafes, in youth information centres, posters, articles in local newspapers and school newspapers, news on local/state radio station or TV, designed logo or writings cached on a photos during meetings and activities and later posted in targeted media (Facebook, webpages, etc.), evaluation report, T-shirts, pens etc.

Good Practice Example

Youth to youth phone - Slovenia

The Youth-to-Youth Phone project has been implemented since 1993 in Slovenia. The aim of the service is to motivate young people to participate in peer-to-peer activities and improve their social and communication skills. A group of peer-to-peer counsellors as permanent youth panel has been established with the mission to empower young people on challenges of new technologies and internet safety. The purpose of the youth panel is raising awareness among Slovenian youth by giving useful information on using new technologies. The most important added value is getting valuable information about their online habits and the experiences they have on the internet. Additionally, it is easier to assess the level of risk behaviour of youth and what the pitfalls are, whether young people are behaving at risk fully because they choose to ignore the safer internet rules or they do not know or do not comprehend those.

Peer-to-peer counsellors are involved in every phase of the project - planning, executing, promoting and evaluating. They actively participate in creating awareness raising action, tools and materials on practically all stages of the process: selection of topic of the campaigns, development of the campaign's concept and at the final stage - testing of the campaigns.

Further information: http://eryica.org/sites/default/files/sheryica_i_spreads.pdf