

Social reintegration project 'My Guru'

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MISSION:

The social integration project 'My Guru' assists young former drug addicts to blend into society through work rehabilitation, giving these individuals the opportunity to obtain training in the practical skills and job experience needed in the restaurant trade. During the six-month program, participants are also provided with consultations by social workers and psychologists, participate in community building activities in order to gain social skills, develop self-confidence and organise themselves into self-help groups. From the very beginning of the project in 2004, almost 400 project participants have used this possibility for a second start in life and 90 percent of them successfully integrated into the labour market and society.

BACKGROUND

The social reintegration project 'My Guru' rests on the idea of work rehabilitation for young former drug addicts as a response to the lack of these initiatives in Lithuania. Work rehabilitation is a logical continuation of the rehabilitation process, through which people dependent on drugs receive a complete range of social services (medical, psychological, social and employment) enabling them to blend into society. Such work rehabilitation is needed as the next step after health rehabilitation programs, because the absence of proper professional skills, a patchy work history and the negative attitude of employers and society in general towards ex-addicts frequently causes relapsing problems. Reintegrating ex-addicts into society thus requires further help through the use of a complicated mix of psychological stabilisation, motivation, training and providing work experience.

The overall goal of the project is to create the opportunity for rehabilitating and integrating young former drug addicts into society and the labour market. In order to achieve this goal, the Vilnius City Council, Vilnius Centre for Addictive Disorders and 'Virsupis' Ltd. established the NGO 'Social Support Projects' in 2002. The founders of this NGO also provided the necessary conditions for opening the stylish 'My Guru' alcohol- and tobacco-free bar in the downtown area of the Lithuanian capital Vilnius. The Vilnius City Council provided premises in the city centre, 'Virsupis' Ltd. (and later "MG Baltic Investment" Ltd.) as well as financial support, and the Centre for Addictive Disorders contributes its expertise in rehabilitation. The first activities of the project were financed from the EQUAL initiative of the European Social Fund, and ran from 2004 till 2007. During this stage of the project the model of work rehabilitation and tools were created and tested. Since this time the continuity of the project activities has been ensured by profits from the salad bar and from the additional support for new

Key Facts:

- Theme of activity: work rehabilitation for young former drug addicts.
- Number of youth workers: 5
- Number of young people: 20-22 per 6 months programme.
- Target group: Young people between 18-30 years of age.
- Year activities established: 2004

initiatives of the European Social Fund. Thanks to its mix of grant and trading income, the enterprise is already showing a profit and is establishing a new social business model that other towns in Lithuania and other European countries are keen to copy.

APPROACH

The work rehabilitation methodology for young former drug addicts is based on a holistic approach, as training and providing work experience without additional social and psychological therapy are not enough for successful integration of this target group into society and the labour market. Therefore, this methodology combines therapy sessions along with training in the practical skills needed for the salad bar – bartending, cooking and waiting at table.

The work rehabilitation programme is designed for six months, during which participants are:

- Provided with professional training and work experience.
- Supported in managing documents, social security benefits and other questions.
- Provided with accommodation, a stipend, feed-in and public transport tickets.
- Provided with free consultations by social workers and psychologists.
- Motivated to receive a legal income.
- Encouraged to develop self-confidence.
- Ensured an active life through various social, sport and cultural activities necessary to their personal development.
- Facilitated in developing a young former drug addicts community and self-help groups.
- Encouraged to fight negative stereotypes about former drug addicts' capabilities and abilities.
- Supported and mediated in finding further jobs.

The main target group for the social reintegration project 'My Guru' consists of young former drug addicts after health rehabilitation programmes or after leaving prison where they had forced abstinence¹. The majority of them are dropouts from the education system, have no work experience, social skills, legal incomes or place to live. Project personnel cooperate closely with drug-addict health rehabilitation centres, communities of former drug addicts and probation offices to obtain information about work rehabilitation possibilities for the target group. The participants in the project learned about the possibility of taking part in the project from the personnel of these rehabilitation centres and probation offices, directly from presentations made by the project personnel, or from former successful participants in the project. The main motivating factors for joining

Key Approaches:

- Profession training and providing of work experience for young former drug addicts ensure more opportunities to find permanent work.
- Parallel social and psychological therapy to ensure higher self-confidence and development of social skills along with a positive world view.
- Providing accommodation and a stipend for participation time in the project significantly raises the success of reintegration into society as ensure supportive and secure environment.

¹ In Lithuania there are still no available health rehabilitation programmes for drug addicts in prison.

the project are: a wish to change one's own life, visible examples of successful results after finishing the programme as well as the provision of accommodation and a stipend during participation in the project.

The youth workers within the service are volunteers or qualified youth work professionals: social workers, psychologists, trainers for professions. Their role is to work individually with every participant in the project, helping them to know themselves, show their abilities, their best qualities and how to use them. The main success factors in working with this target group are: not to be indifferent, to hear and understand every participant, to provide a safe and supportive environment for personal development, to work as a strong team, to create a self-supportive community and to show positive life opportunities. A distinctive feature of this project is that the majority of youth work professionals are themselves former drug addicts and have experience of integration into the work environment and society. They join the project because they wish to share their positive experience, to support and help young people to understand and live with their addictive disorders. All of them express a high level of satisfaction and self-realisation in this kind of work as they feel rewarded by the progress of the project participants and experience their own personal development.

From the very beginning of the project, great attention was paid to training and learning issues, which are specific both for the social workers and project participants. A special training methodology was therefore created for the social workers and for the other personnel working with former drug addicts in this project. This methodology includes theoretical sections on medical as well as psychological and social issues as well as practical exercises for individual and group work. All new social workers who join the project receive this training; moreover, personnel who work with former drug addicts in many other rehabilitation centres and communities also use it in their work. Another methodology was created for trainers for professions, who provide this training for project participants. This methodology accentuates the practical side of professional training and includes a major section on the training of practical skills through practice in the salad bar 'My Guru'. After completing this professional training, project participants are tested and, if successful, they are given the City and Guilds International Vocational Qualification (IVQ) in Food and Beverage Service. This qualification, their work experience, as well as an employer's reference, should equip them to find a permanent job.

In order to improve the employability of project participants, measures are taken for mutual communication with other employers in the restaurant business, as negative stereotypes about former drug addicts' capabilities and abilities are still widespread and cause unwillingness to hire them. For this reason, regular round tables with other employers are organised to discuss these issues and to present project participants. After such meetings, the majority of project participants succeed in finding a permanent job. Further participation in former drug addict communities and the possibility of communicating with personnel and colleagues in 'My Guru' help them to solve any problems which arise and retain the jobs they have found.

OUTCOMES AND IMPACTS

The complex range of services provided by the social reintegration project 'My Guru' ensures the success of this project. According to the monitoring conducted by project personnel, 90 percent of project participants successfully integrated into the labour market and society: 70 percent of participants who successfully finished the programme continue to work in other bars and restaurants, some look for other types of work elsewhere (e.g. as

Main outcomes and impacts:

- 90 percent of project participants successfully integrate into the labour market and society
- A low level of relapse among project participants – young former drug addicts
- Youth workers improve their knowledge about addictive disorders and effective ways to overcome them

volunteers or social workers in other social projects), some took up their school or higher education studies again (e.g. law, sociology, administration, accountancy, social work, etc.). Every year this project successfully integrates about 50 former drug addicts into the labour market and society.

A low level of relapse can be also observed among project participants. The main precondition for this is the gradual change of their world view when participants experience the fact that their life can be different, that they can be a full-fledged human being, recognized by society and having some aspirations for self-realization. Recovery can best be achieved during work and employment. Work in the service area also helps to create relationships with clients, to receive a positive evaluation and smiles. Project participants start to feel that they are not condemned. They stop living in the past, feeling despair and blaming others, the environment, etc. They start to develop a more active participatory way of life, learn how to communicate and how to behave in public, to be responsible, to have duties, to find friends, and to find themselves. They break the vicious circle of continual criminal activities and convictions. They start to work, pay taxes and refuse the philosophy of dependence. They manage personal relationships with relatives, create their own families and are able to provide positive socialization experiences for their children.

Some former project participants establish former drug addicts' communities and help other drug addicts by working in various nongovernmental organizations (e.g. in social taxis for disabled people). Concrete examples of the added value of what is being achieved are the establishment of new rehabilitation communities in other regions of Lithuania and the social activities of the 'My Guru' bar, a social enterprise model for new social entrepreneurship initiatives (e.g. The Karpovo agricultural farm for the rehabilitation of alcohol addicts)². Another example of added value from project activities is the establishment by a social worker of a project for a homeless people's football team, in which some project participants who have experience in participating in sports activities (ex-sportsmen) are involved. This initiative has already been functioning for 3-4 years and the team participated in various world-class championships; e.g. in Mexico it took 8th place. This activity provides the participants with the motivation to live and explore the future: it allows them to engage in society, to find meaningful activity and to realize their potential.

Youth workers in the project, along with project participants, also gain from their involvement with activities concerning self-realisation and the development of their personality. They improve their knowledge about addictive disorders and their own social and psychological roots, as well as finding effective ways to overcome them. Knowledge of these issues is a valuable resource for youth workers in order to increase their competences and qualifications. All of them express great satisfaction with the work they do, as it is rewarding to observe how young people change and to feel that they are contributing to something positive. Therefore, youth workers in the project enjoy working in social support projects because of their value system and rewarding results and, even if they are no longer involved in project activities, they stay in this area of work and contribute to other social projects or establish new rehabilitation communities or self-support groups.

Two years after the salad bar 'My Guru' opened, it started to be profitable – which is one measure of success. So the social enterprise model relies on a subtle mix of financial support and empowerment to become profitable, meaning that it is not just a restaurant like others, but a place for rehabilitation. In 2005, the social reintegration project 'My Guru' won first prize in the Lithuanian Social Services championship. In 2009 and 2010 it was recognised as the most hospitable café in Vilnius. It has also been nominated for RegioStars 2010 Award category "City Star: the integration of migrants or marginalized groups in urban areas". Finally, 'My Guru' was nominated for a European Enterprise Award for Responsible and Inclusive

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Entrepreneurship in 2011 and won 2nd place³. The awards it has won demonstrate the project's success and also help project managers receive recognition for their work, raise funds, make the integration problems of former drug addicts and the results of work rehabilitation visible, and encourage replication of the social enterprise model.

TRENDS

The most expressed trend in the area of work rehabilitation emphasises the spread of the social enterprise model and new work rehabilitation initiatives during the last 5 years. A metal products company in the city of Kedainiai was established to provide training and employment for people with addictive disorders. Another work rehabilitation initiative has been implemented in the city of Akmene specialising in the construction sector. There are intentions to open similar bars to 'My Guru' in two other big cities – Kaunas and Klaipeda. Expressed negative trends are related to financial support from municipalities, ministries and social funds, as support budgets are cut off due to the financial recession. Because of this, it is nowadays difficult to provide stipends and accommodation for project participants. This situation has a negative impact on the possibility of a project being able to create a safe and financially stable situation for its participants, especially for participants from other cities and under a probation program. The result is higher relapsing levels among current project participants.

REGULATORY FRAMEWORKS

In general, regulatory frameworks are evaluated positively, for example, the Professional Training Law (2007), which legitimizes the concept of apprenticeship or the new Probation Law (2012), which allows alternative ways to imprisonment for serving a sentence and participation in social integration initiatives. The only limiting factor expressed concerns the Law on Social Enterprises (2012), some provisions of which (e.g. the requirement to employ four disabled persons in the enterprise for one year prior to the registration of the social enterprise, etc.) limit the project's possibility to register the 'My Guru' bar as a social enterprise and consequently to receive state subsidies for the activities and salaries of employed former drug addicts. There is in addition one more limitation in the regulatory framework of banks restricting the provision of needed loans for socially oriented enterprises as they do not own property. This restriction prevents the replication of the 'My Guru' social enterprise in other cities.

POLICY

The development of youth policy during the last 5 years has had a positive impact on the project area because of high attention being paid to the social integration of socially disadvantaged youth groups. The latest policy priority given to increasing employability also helps to develop their work rehabilitation activities. From the project side, representatives actively participate in policy formation through advice, consultation and participation in working groups for preparing youth, rehabilitation and other related policy strategies and implementation measures.

³ A restaurant for rehabilitation,
<http://ec.europa.eu/esf/main.jsp?catId=485&langId=en&featuresId=301&furtherFeatures=yes>

Top Tips:

- Seek to hear and to understand every young person.
- Use a holistic approach to ensure effective integration in work and society.
- Work individually with every young person to meet his/her particular needs.
- Create a safe environment to discover and develop young former drug addicts' best qualities.
- Involve young people in decision making about their own lives.
- Seek to increase the self-confidence of young former drug addicts.
- Create a strong team during the project, and in the self-help community after the program, to ensure further support.

NETWORKING

The activities of the social integration project 'My Guru' are based on partnership and widespread networking. Through project partnerships the project gains a threefold benefit: material provision of the project, a supply of potential project participants and training services. Networking involves various actors:

- Rehabilitation communities and probation offices, which send the project young former drug addicts as potential participants.
- Other work rehabilitation enterprises which can send or receive young former drug addicts for work rehabilitation according to whether there are too many new project participants or there is shortage of participants.
- Former drug addicts self-help communities where former project participants can be involved in their activities.
- Other social projects for sharing experience and sometimes for involving former project participants in their activities.
- Politicians for mainstreaming project results and influencing policy formation.
- Universities and colleges for cooperation in training, research and other related issues (e.g. art exhibitions of Art Academy students in the 'My Guru' bar).
- Mass media (e.g. Bernardinai.It) for visibility and mutual events, etc.

The project is also involved in international networking, the basis of which is rooted in EQUAL program international partnerships. Cooperation nowadays takes the form of Leonardo da Vinci mutual visit projects and there is a shared need to create an international project for replication of the 'My Guru' model in France and Italy.

SUPPORT

Because of restricted support during the financial recession, the social integration project 'My Guru' appreciates all financial support from national authorities and business. The most pressing need is to ensure the continuity of financial support from the European Social Fund with the possibility to finance project participants' stipends and accommodation during the work rehabilitation program. In order to replicate the 'My Guru' social enterprise in other cities, there is a need for political and financial support to arrange premises and material equipment for new socially oriented bars. To meet the expressed demand to replicate the model in other European countries there is also a need to win an international project for the piloting phase of this process.