



Erasmus+



June 2017 - SUMMARY

INTELLECTUAL OUTPUT 1: COMPETENCE FRAMEWORK FOR THE LIFE PROJECT

Introduction

The LIFE Project will seek to develop new skills, competencies and training products and methodologies to enable social workers and related professionals to innovate and adopt more effective interventions in working with families experiencing multiple and complex difficulties.

The present document deals with issues relating to competencies and skills. It is based on contributions from each partner. Those from partners in Portugal, Slovenia and Italy were provided in our meetings in the beginning of May 2017. Sweden and Norway have presented their ideas since then. Each partner has their own aims and priorities within the general set of common aims set out in the original project proposal. Here we present an outline of the partners' thinking and progress so far. Please note that the presentation from each partner is only briefly summarised here, especially those that are substantially the same as presented in earlier material (University of Ljubljana, University of Trondheim)

The Partners

APC Coimbra describes its target group as follows: *Families of disabled people from 0 to more than 45 years old, with diagnosis of Cerebral Palsy and/or other neurological disorders, or intellectual and multiple disabilities.*

APC is currently adjusting to pressures due to the impact of austerity. There have been changes in the resources available for service provision to the target group, and substantial changes in entitlement to service. Not only specific services for disabled children and adults are involved, but also provision of basic health and social services which disabled persons are so often dependent on. For Coimbra this amounts to severe pressure, especially on case management functions, which have become very difficult to perform. So this will be one focus in the training APC will offer. A review of caseloads has shown that 84 families meet the criteria defining multi-challenged families that have been set up in the LIFE project.

APC Coimbra has already chosen six participants for their training course (three social workers, two occupational therapists and one psychologist). This reflects the respective professions' involvement in the organisation's work with the target group.

Skills that are specified by APC include:

1. Understanding of innovation.
2. Critical reflection about intervention models and their underlying concepts, practice with multi-challenged families, case management and the client system.
3. Reflection about assessment of problems.
4. Analysis of existing instruments.
5. Skills required for scientific production (practice and evidence).
6. Ethical issues (the role of each professional and how this articulated in the organisational setting).
7. Organisational skills
8. Knowledge about evolution of social policies.

APC has a complex interplay with a variety of agencies and organisations. This has been described in their presentation, but is omitted here. APC has set up a stakeholder group.

FOU Centrum Linköping and the municipality of Linköping define their target group as *multi-challenged families with low income and social benefits/welfare from the member municipalities of the R&D-center*. They provide an explicit rationale for this choice based on earlier research carried out in Linköping and Trondheim. These have shown that

- Multi-challenged families have difficulties in benefitting from social services.
- Multi-challenged families may have many contacts with the welfare system; this complicates support.
- If parents and/or children have neuropsychiatric diagnoses this complicates the situation further.

They identify two major factors underlying this:

- A lack of relevant working methods that focus on the family as a whole and;
- The highly specialized organization of social and health care that leads to fragmentation of support.

The project *Family Pilot* conducted in Linköping set out to design, test and evaluate working methods for social workers as family pilots in order to effectively help and empower multi-challenged families. The project had positive and interesting results. Innovative aspects in the project were the development of new working methods for social workers as Family pilots. The methods involved:

- Focus set on the family as a whole.
- Acting on behalf of the family.
- Working flexibly to support the family at home and in relation to other partners, i.e. school, health care, Social insurance etc. This can include everything from

everyday activities at home to supporting families at meetings with representatives, “interpret” documents, help to plan and organize activities etc.

- The results show that the families’ home situation improved, stress was reduced, the school situation improved for the children, placements could be avoided, and parents could move from unemployment to work, training or education.

The working methods for the Family Pilots can be characterized as more generalist than specialist oriented and inspired by Case management. They addressed unmet needs (lack of proper assessment and co-definition of the problem, need for key person /coordinator, poor definition of social worker roles, fragmented professional interventions, and a general need to clarify professional roles and remits). Their innovative content was:

- Co-creation of solutions with the families, valuing their perceptions.
- Case management as part of an interdisciplinary approach.
- Need for reflection and perspective (with others).
- Focus on practical skills and solutions.
- Identifying areas of potential for change in the family situation.

Linköping specify a set of skills required to work with multi-challenged families:

- work holistically with the family as a whole (generalist)
- to be able to act in a complex and fragmentized context
- work in a multi-professional team
- work in an cross-organizational and coordinating professional role
- coordinate work of inter-organizational and multi-disciplinary teams
- work with innovations in social work in a family environment

A generalist role in social work means a shift from specialized social services, where every problem requires its specific contribution and where the mission is clearly defined, to provide support and treatment with width and a system theoretical perspective, to focus more on prevention work, to interact with all relevant partners and the family. A generalist should also be able to judge when there is a need for specialized treatment and be able to motivate and direct on to the current instance.

This can translate into different competencies and skills needed such as:

- Reflection on theory and practice
- Analyze complexities of life in multi-challenged families
- Analyze context and structural factors
- Assessment
- Team work
- Disabilities

The participants will be chosen from the member municipalities of the R&D-centre. The participants should have a connection with client work and have a formal professional education relevant to the field, e.g. in social work, psychology, behavioral science, physiotherapy etc. Furthermore, the participants should have some connection to area

based social work, i.e. focus on the local conditions in each area and how to improve a family's situation by strengthening and supporting natural networks and collaborative forums in the local community. Area based social work should build on a co-creation approach in which citizens should be involved in the planning and implementation of the actions.

The University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Social Work defines its target group as *families with multiple challenges, especially those threatened by social exclusion and the risk of poor health*. Their aims are similar to those pursued in the project “*Helping families in the community: co-creation of desired changes for reducing social exclusion and strengthening health*”. This project was described in some detail in the research documentation for LIFE, and will not be described here. In essence it sought to develop social work with families as the main vehicle of training. The Faculty has had a distinctive approach to training for social workers within the framework of bachelor- and master level education, encouraging students to reflect on their practice experience together with faculty members and field supervisors. Their aim has been to train social workers to co-create approaches and solutions together with the users of services.

The Slovenian partners are concerned about the impact of social change and poverty. There are some parallels to descriptions provided by Cervia and APC Coimbra, but a difference is that they describe a situation in which the basic functioning of the family unit and community may be increasingly threatened. As an example they point to the increasing frequency of situations in which mothers leave their families, most often with a background of very adverse circumstances. In the LIFE project the Slovenian partners will begin to extend their distinctive approach beyond social work training, into the work of the social work centers that provide service to local communities.

Ljubljana`s approach to working with multi-challenged families is that it is primarily a matter of good up-to-date social work practice. This has to be individual in the sense that the practitioner is the key to good work, and practitioners must be able to operate in situations of uncertainty. Learning is seen as always involving practical learning, and the approach to skills is that characteristic of clinical practice, in the sense that the relationship with the family and the possibilities opened up by this are in sharp focus (see the LIFE Research Summary February 2017 pp. 25-26).

The Faculty in Ljubljana would ideally want to offer training to some social workers from communities outside Ljubljana, but there are resource constraints that may make this difficult. The Faculty has established a stakeholder group.

The Centre for Child Welfare Research and Innovation, University of Trondheim Defines its target group as *families with multiple challenges that are in contact with child welfare services*. In practice these will be mostly families that have long-term contact with child welfare. Trondheim devised the master degree level course in innovation that has served as a forerunner for the training envisaged in the LIFE project. In the light of that experience it has been judged as important to adopt a broad definition of innovation (it being especially important to include low-level practical innovations such as changes in administrative routines, the precise framing of assessment work, and follow-up routines for work with families). In the project *Working with Neglected Families* designed as a follow-up to the *New Child Welfare*, financed by the Norwegian

Research Council, the centre in Trondheim attempted to establish an innovative approach to work with families in four local authorities. The results were by no means as positive as those of the Linköping *Family Pilot* project, but very interesting all the same. They suggest that social work in child welfare in the Norwegian setting is seriously constrained by management styles that use sub-optimal output measures to regulate work, management styles that have been much assisted by digitalisation of records and reporting procedures. In a sense management is not motivated to foster innovation unless the government imposes it, and may indeed actively oppose initiatives if they originate at the front line.

Trondheim specify a range of skills that somewhat resemble those provided by Linköping. The view of underlying problems connected with working with multi-challenged families is very similar, but Trondheim has perhaps a less optimistic view of the potential for general change due to their experience with *Working with Neglected Families*:

- Working with the whole family.
- Listen and learn from family members.
- Good communication skills including written presentation.
- Understand the importance of practical help.
- Understand the value content of models and methods and think critically.
- Learn how to assess and utilize research findings.
- Working with other agencies and professionals.
- Teamwork
- Ability to constructively question approaches and routines.
- Helping others to reflect about work and accept others' contributions.
- Attaining an engaged and helpful but realistic and critical approach to management.

The centre in Trondheim is working with two local authorities to select child welfare staff to follow the training. A stakeholder group has been established.

Cervia has decided to focus on families in which parents have difficulty in obtaining employment. Little research dealing with quality issues at national level is available, and our partner says that too little attention is paid to inequality and marginalisation issues. They are also concerned with community awareness of services and the importance of securing community supports. Cervia have interesting approaches to enlisting community support, as for example with their work with volunteers who can identify and channel families in need toward the services.

Cervia have to contend with more adverse circumstances than the other partners in the project. One aspect of this is that the municipal services they operate are under severe pressure due to austerity and legislative changes that have led to worsened circumstances for the target group, as we have seen in the Baseline Study. Services in Italy are much more regionally differentiated and organised than services in the other partner countries. Another issue is that Cervia to date has had difficulty in obtaining input from academic or research partners. Efforts have been made but up to 1st May

2017 these had not led to positive results. These issues are discussed in the second intellectual output document.

Concluding Remarks

All the partners have their own focus due to their particular situation. This is not surprising. But it extends to the definition of what skills the training programme should set out to develop. There are fairly close similarities between Linköping, Coimbra and Trondheim, though Coimbra specifies a broader range of skills. Case Management is a common interest they have with Linköping. Trondheim and Linköping have much the same reasoning about the needs experienced by families and the shortcomings of conventional service approaches, but in the case of Linköping this has led to a trial of a specific innovatory service model. Trondheim has been more preoccupied with a general reframing of service approaches, and has seen that there are obstacles to this. Ljubljana is reasonably enough much influenced by an agenda of establishing social work education and has chosen a model in which basic clinical skills in social work have first priority.

All the partners however agree on some core skill components and principles that training should embody:

1. An approach that deals with the problems encountered by the family as a whole.
2. Understanding that service structures and ways of working do not necessarily serve the best interests of multi-challenged families.
3. Working with the family as closely as possible, respecting and working on the basis of their experience and viewpoint.
4. Paying attention to communication skills.
5. Understanding the nature of disadvantage and disempowerment.
6. The importance of teamwork skills.
7. Working towards a dialogue with the owners of services and their management.

Based on these conclusions the key elements of the Competency Framework should include the following:

- A holistic approach to working with the family.
- Co creation of solutions with the family, valuing their perceptions. This contrasts with much current practice which tends to assume the families are fundamentally dysfunctional and that their perceptions are therefore of little value
- The need for a multi-disciplinary approach to address the fragmented nature of multiple professional interventions

- Case Management as part of this and understanding the challenge that this represents to professional and management hierarchies
- Understanding innovation in social work in a family environment
- Identifying areas with potential for change in the family situation and prioritizing interventions accordingly (being proactive rather than reactive)
- Practical Skills and Solutions required to implement innovation
- Generic Skills e.g. analyzing needs of families, reflection on theory and practice, problem solving, teamwork, communication.