

2023

TICK OFF THE CHALLENGES

Be the Role Model!

BOOKLET OF BEST
PRACTICES ABOUT
CRISIS MANAGEMENT
IN YOUTHWORK

By European Dialogue





BOOKLET OF BEST PRACTICES

This booklet is a collection of stories and their solutions from the experience of youthworkers and teachers from around the Europe.

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WRITTEN BY:

Maruo Calabrese, Ilaria Janczuk, Antonella Troiano, Batos Moscicky, Maciej Ryk, Bogumila Kozicka, Matic Fučka, Anže Alič, Juš Hladnik, Diana Yeghiazaryan, Inesa Shahazizyan, Davit Mirzoyan, Zuzana Parížeková, Milan Štrbák, Lukáš Jakubík, Katya Aneva, Robert Warren, Kallen Szymanski, Thomas Grau, Ayoub Aaboul, Claus-Peter De Moura Lima Kappling

PRODUCED AND PUBLISHED BY:

European Dialogue, NGO, Monika Kmeťová, Alexander Tomík

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STORIES FROM ARMENIA

By Diana Yeghiazaryan, Davit Mirzoyan
and Inesa Shahazizyan

From Uninformed to Empowered: Unveiling Youth Opportunities in regions of Armenia.

Once upon a time, in the picturesque Lori region of Armenia, lived a shy and intelligent girl named Syuzi. Growing up, Syuzi faced numerous challenges that hindered her personal growth and self-confidence. She experienced the harsh reality of being bullied at school, which left her feeling isolated and disconnected from her peers. As a result, she struggled to find her place in the world and was unaware of the opportunities that lay beyond her small town. Despite her intelligence and potential, Syuzi's lack of engagement stemmed from a profound lack of understanding about the world outside her immediate surroundings.

The limited access to information about youth work, volunteering, international projects, and overall opportunities for youth in Armenia, especially in rural areas, further perpetuated her disinterest.

In the absence of accessible information and guidance, Syuzi harbored a fear of participating in youth projects or engaging in youth work. She believed that these opportunities were either not meant for someone like her or required extensive prior experience and qualifications. This created a barrier that prevented her from stepping out of her comfort zone and exploring the wider world that awaited her.

Syuzi's story reflects a pervasive challenge faced by young people in Armenia, particularly those residing in rural areas. The lack of accessible information and limited awareness about youth work, volunteering, and international projects contribute to a sense of disconnection and disengagement.

Many young individuals, like Syuzi, remain unaware of the possibilities and opportunities available to them, leading to a lack of interest and reluctance to participate.

The absence of accessible information and the misconception that these opportunities are not tailored to their profiles or require extensive prior experience pose significant barriers for young people in rural areas. This perpetuates a cycle of disengagement, preventing them from realizing their full potential and contributing to their personal growth and the development of their communities.

Addressing this challenge requires concerted efforts to bridge the information gap and make opportunities more accessible and inclusive. By providing comprehensive and easily accessible information about youth work, volunteering, and international projects, young people like Syuzi can overcome their hesitations and embark on transformative journeys of personal growth and empowerment.

“...our continuous support and belief in her gave her the courage to try.”



SOLUTION

Noticing that young people in the regions of Armenia lacked engagement and information about youth work, we, as a group of dedicated youth workers, were determined to find a solution. We recognized the need to bridge the gap and provide opportunities for young people like Syuzi to explore the wider world and discover their passions.



One of the first things we did was organize visits to schools and universities in rural areas. We engaged in charity work, volunteering, and presented our organization, highlighting all the benefits and opportunities of being involved in youth work. The purpose was to promote understanding, ignite a passion for learning, and encourage active participation among students.

We believed that this program might serve as the turning point for many students, including Syuzi, who had immense potential but lacked the exposure and guidance to channel it effectively.

However, Syuzi still remained skeptical. She avoided participating in the activities and distanced herself from the group. The cause of her disengagement was rooted in fear and insecurity. She was afraid of being judged and rejected due to her lack of knowledge about the world and her own self-doubt.

Noticing Syuzi's hesitance we decided to approach her. Sharing stories of our own struggles and how we overcame them through engagement in international projects.

As Syuzi gained more confidence, we suggested she join an international project. Initially, she was unsure of her capabilities, doubting whether she would fit in or meet the expectations. However, our continuous support and belief in her gave her the courage to try.

Together, we worked on her application and prepared her for the challenges she might face. Through workshops, discussions, and mentorship, we helped her develop the necessary skills and mindset to thrive in a new environment.

As we worked together on her project, Syuzi's confidence soared. She organized workshops on personal development and leadership, leveraging her own experiences to motivate and guide others. Her project gained attention, gathering about 60 enthusiastic participants from various backgrounds and regions.

Syuzi's initiative inspired other students to take up their own initiatives, leading to a greater sense of community within the schools and universities.

Through this experience, Syuzi learned a valuable lesson: everyone has the power to make a difference, regardless of their background or initial disengagement. She realized that her lack of engagement was merely a result of her own fears and insecurities, which she was capable of overcoming.

Syuzi's involvement in youth work and international projects had a profound impact on her personal growth and development. She became more confident, outgoing, and socially aware. She developed leadership skills and gained a deeper understanding of the world around her.



“They become catalysts for positive change, implementing innovative ideas and solutions to address local challenges.”

IMPACT

The impact we had was crucial to create a safe and supportive environment where students feel encouraged to participate. It was important to listen to their fears and insecurities and provide mentorship and guidance accordingly.

Engaging young people from rural regions to participate in international projects can have a profound impact on their lives, their communities, and the world at large. Some of the key impacts that such engagement can bring:

1. Broadened Perspectives:

By participating in international projects, young people from rural regions gain exposure to different cultures, ideas, and ways of life. This exposure helps them develop a broader perspective, breaking down stereotypes and promoting cultural understanding.

2. Enhanced Education:

International projects and non formal education provide unique learning opportunities for young people to gain practical knowledge, skills, and experiences that are not readily available in their local communities.

3. Increased Empowerment:

Engaging young people from rural regions in international projects empowers them to realize their potential. It gives them a platform to express their ideas, contribute to meaningful initiatives, and be agents of change.

4. Community Development:

When young people from rural regions participate in international projects, they often bring back newfound knowledge and skills to their communities. They become catalysts for positive change, implementing innovative ideas and solutions to address local challenges. This leads to community development.

5. Inspiration and Role Models:
When young people from rural regions actively participate in international projects, they become role models for others in their communities. Their success stories inspire and motivate their peers to dream big, set goals, and actively engage in educational and international opportunities.

In conclusion, engaging young people from rural regions in international projects and youth work has a transformative impact. It broadens perspectives, enhances education, empowers individuals, contributes to community development, fosters networking and collaboration, and inspires others to follow suit. By investing in the engagement of rural youth, we can unlock their tremendous potential and collectively work towards a more inclusive and interconnected world.



...engaging young people from rural regions in international projects and youth work has a transformative impact.

LESSONS LEARNT

Syuzi's story taught us several important lessons. Firstly, providing information and raising awareness about youth work, volunteering, and international projects is crucial. Many young people remain disengaged simply because they lack knowledge about the available projects and initiatives.

Secondly, fear and insecurity can hinder young people from getting involved. It is essential to create a supportive and non-judgmental environment where young people feel comfortable expressing themselves and taking risks.

Thirdly, individual support and mentorship play a significant role in overcoming disengagement. By sharing personal stories and providing guidance, youth workers can empower young people to step out of their comfort zones and pursue their passions.



In conclusion, Syuzi's journey from disengagement to empowerment showcases the transformative power of youth work. By providing information, support, and mentorship, youth workers can help young people overcome their fears, discover their passions, and make a positive impact on their communities. Through Syuzi's story, we have learned valuable lessons and gained insights into effective strategies for engaging and empowering young people in Armenia and beyond.

DO's

- provide information and raise awareness about youth work, volunteering, and international projects.
- create opportunities for young people to engage in hands-on activities, such as charity work or volunteering.
- foster a supportive and non-judgmental environment where young people feel safe to express themselves and take risks.
- offer individual support and mentorship to help young people overcome their fears and insecurities.
- encourage young people to start their own initiatives and projects, fostering a sense of ownership and empowerment.

DON'T's

- DON'T assume that young people are not interested or capable without first providing them with information and opportunities.
- DON'T dismiss young people's fears and insecurities. Instead, address them with empathy and understanding.
- DON'T push young people into activities they are not ready for. Respect their pace and provide gradual support.
- DON'T underestimate the power of personal stories and mentorship in inspiring and guiding young people.
- DON'T neglect the importance of community-building and creating a sense of belonging among young people.

BEYOND COMPETITION

finding common ground in the camp community

By Diana Yeghiazaryan, Davit Mirzoyan and Inesa Shahazizyan

CAUSE

I was a team leader at a summer camp, responsible for organizing and facilitating various activities for the camp children. One night, as we were preparing to wind down for the day, we suddenly heard loud commotion coming from outside. Alarmed, my fellow team leaders and I rushed to the source of the noise and were met with a scene of chaos. To our dismay, we witnessed camp children jumping out of windows, shouting, and almost engaging in physical altercations with each other. The atmosphere was tense and filled with frustration and anger. It was evident that something had gone terribly wrong, and it was crucial to identify the cause and address it promptly.

Upon investigating the situation, we discovered that the cause of this disruptive and alarming behaviour was the unintended consequence of the competitive atmosphere that had inadvertently developed during the games we had organized for the children. In an effort to make the activities engaging and exciting, we had implemented a points system, where each team earned points for their achievements in the games.



“We wanted to shift the focus from competition to cooperation and promote a positive environment where the children could learn and grow together.”

However, the accumulation of points had powered heightened competitiveness among the teams. During one game, tensions reached a boiling point when one team suspected another team of cheating. This suspicion sparked a heated and emotionally charged discussion that escalated beyond control. Unable to find a resolution at that moment, the children decided to continue their dispute later that night when everyone was supposed to be sleeping.

The combination of the competitive nature of the games, the accusation of cheating, and the unresolved conflict created a perfect storm of frustration

and anger among the camp children, resulting in the chaotic scene we witnessed that night.

Recognizing the urgent need to restore order, foster a safe environment, and address the underlying issues, our team of youth workers quickly gathered the children, diffused the immediate tensions, and redirected their focus towards finding a resolution.

We understood that it was essential to intervene swiftly and provide the children with a space to express their concerns, frustrations, and emotions. By actively listening to their perspectives and acknowledging their feelings, we aimed to create an atmosphere of understanding and empathy.

Our priority was to emphasize the importance of fair play, teamwork, and sportsmanship. We wanted to shift the focus from competition to cooperation and promote a positive environment where the children could learn and grow together. This required a recalibration of our approach and the implementation of new strategies to prevent such incidents from recurring. By acknowledging the cause of the chaos and taking immediate action to address it, we set the foundation for a journey of healing, growth, and improved dynamics among the camp children.



SOLUTION

As youth workers, it was crucial for us to address this issue and find a solution to restore peace and harmony among the children. We immediately intervened, separating the children involved in the dispute and calming them down. We explained to them that the games were meant to be fun and not to be taken too seriously. Afterwards, we took the children back to their rooms and encouraged them to sleep. The next day, we made some changes to the schedule and focused

on team-building games in the morning. We designed activities that emphasized collaboration, communication, and problem-solving, fostering a sense of unity among the children.

We also organized a small presentation on the importance of discussing conflicts calmly and respectfully. We highlighted the value of listening to each other's perspectives, finding common ground, and resolving disagreements through peaceful dialogue.

To address the competitive aspect of the games, we implemented a new mechanism. Instead of counting points, we prepared three bottles filled with different colours of paint. Whenever a team won a game, we poured paint into their team's bottle, symbolizing their achievements and progress.



IMPACT

The incident had a significant impact on the camp's daily operations and the emotional well-being of the children. We had to dedicate almost an entire camp day to finding a solution and rebuilding trust among the children. This meant adjusting the schedule, conducting team-building activities, and facilitating discussions within smaller groups.

During these activities, we noticed that the children were still carrying the emotions from the previous night's incident. They expressed their frustrations, shared their concerns, and gradually began to understand the importance of respect, communication, and fair play. As the day progressed, their attitudes started to shift, and they embraced the new approach of playing less competitive games.



LESSONS LEARNT

The incident taught us several important lessons. Firstly, we realized that competitive games could evoke strong emotions in children, sometimes leading to conflict and aggression. While competition can be healthy and enjoyable, it is essential to strike a balance and ensure that the focus remains on collaboration, sportsmanship, and fun.

Secondly, open communication and conflict resolution skills are crucial in managing disputes among children. By providing a safe space for dialogue, promoting active listening, and teaching peaceful problem-solving techniques, we can help children develop healthier ways of addressing conflicts.

Lastly, flexibility and adaptation are key in youth work. When unexpected challenges arise, it is essential to adjust plans and strategies accordingly to create a positive and inclusive environment for the young participants.

In conclusion, the incident at the summer camp taught us valuable lessons about managing competitiveness and conflicts among children. By promoting teamwork, open communication, and emphasizing the importance of fair play, we can create a positive and supportive environment for young participants to learn and grow.



DO's

- create a supportive and inclusive atmosphere where children feel safe expressing themselves.
- design a variety of activities that promote teamwork, communication, and problem-solving skills.
- encourage fair play, sportsmanship, and respect for others during competitive games.
- provide opportunities for open dialogue and conflict resolution among the children.
- be adaptable and willing to make changes to ensure a positive and enriching experience for all participants.

DON'T's

- DON'T foster an overly competitive atmosphere that encourages aggression or conflict among children.
- DON'T overlook the emotional impact of competitive games on young participants.
- DON'T dismiss or ignore conflicts among children; address them promptly and provide guidance on resolving disputes peacefully.
- DON'T solely focus on winning and points; emphasize the value of collaboration and personal growth.
- DON'T be rigid in your approach; be open to adjusting plans and strategies when necessary.

SKIING AND DIFFICULT PATH

By Ayoub Aaboul
Photos from Unsplash



I would like to share with you a remarkable story that happen to me during a young camp. It was undeniably challenging experience from which I've learned a lot. So briefly it was a Ski-Camp for young and kids age from 9 to 14 most of them from Stuttgart region. The location was Arlberg ski resort in Austria, top elevation 2811m (Valluga-top). Our staff was 8 supervisors, camp leader, vice leader and 30 to 32 participants. Normally before every camp we are doing a lot of trainings and sessions in different fields (medical, hygiene and mental health). But before this camp we did a training for ski teaching, first aid medical course.

And a lot of procedures such as (information's card for each participant contains info like blood type age, phone numbers, addresses and making share that the cards was visible and safe) and for the us as a supervisor we must have all the time first aid medical equipment. During the camp We were changing the teams and trying to merge the groups based on skiing skills and speed of each participant. So, during the camp we had every time to work with different team. So, one day I had group of kids (girls from 10 ,11 years). And we are free to choose any road as long as it's a blue path for beginner.

So, my group was the day before with my boss, and they ask me to change the road because they did it with my boss and they insist for that and kept begging me with their cute faces. You know, kids. They were telling me that its more exciting and funnier but it wasn't funny for me. So, after we finished the path, I found out that the road was leading to the other side of the mountain not to the meeting point and we had only one hour to be there. We had to walk for two kilometres in a flat snow road and no one was there also they was no reception to call the team.



I was so stressed but, I tried to hide that to not make the kids panic, but because of the skiing materials were heavy for kids I had to carry everything myself. The ski boots, helmet, skis. People who saw me doing that effort offered to help me. But most of them were aged people and they have their own ski, so I kept thanking them and saying that I'm good. During all that time I was trying to stay calm down as much as possible. but after that we made it to the meeting point before some other groups and I bought sweets and snacks for them to make their day end little bit better. When we arrived, I couldn't move my arms and I had muscle cut for weeks because the materials were at least 20 kg. So, after all turned out that my boss never took that path before, and she was surprised that the kids saying that.

CAUSE

- Making decision based on kids desire and trusting them.
- I wasn't prepared for a way to communicate with the staff if there is no reception.
- I made the decision so fast that result was not reading map effectively.

THE SOLUTION

- Fast decision for walk, inability to wait and lack of communication with others.
- Managing time to take a rest every 5 minutes of walk so we could be there on time.
- Making hard physical effort and adapting on the existing situation.

IMPACT

- Stress and losing the ability to focus.

LESSON

- To be prepared for any situation
- To be more serious and stronger in front of cute begging little faces.

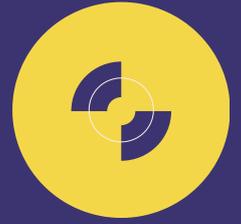
DO's

- Be always ready to face anything.
- Take responsibility.
- Act fast.

DON'T's

- Don't change the plans if it's not necessary.
- Don't make decisions based on weak reason.

EXCURSION IN THE FOREST



Stories by Thomas Grau & Claus-Peter De Moura Lima K pplinger

STORY N.1

CAUSE

On a beautiful day filled with excitement and anticipation, a group of youth participants embarked on an 8-9km walk through a forest to visit an ancient castle perched on a mountain and a barrage located at the foot of that mountain. The group, composed of 36 diverse young individuals aged between 12 and 18, was a mix of members from a German Youth Parliament, a Polish vocational college group, and a delegation from a German-Polish European-School. Four youth workers took care for the group. They had gathered in Morava for a youth meeting featuring an array of engaging workshops and activities centred around the themes of water and sustainability.

As the group went into the forest, after around 15 minutes, a sudden need for a pee break emerged among a subset of the participants, namely 5 girls accompanied by 2 boys. This unforeseen halt resulted in the group being split, with a notable distance appearing between the staff at the front and the staff at the rear, who was waiting with the boys for the girls. This presented a potential risk, as the lack of clear directions and supervision could have led to the pee break group to be left behind and losing their way or encountering further problems.





IMPACT

The unexpected pee break could have had serious repercussions. The increased distance between the front and back of the group due to the pee break could have resulted in this part of the group getting lost, or even worse, wandering off the safe path. In addition, other potential dangers or issues might have been harder to handle with the group being so spread out. Other potential dangers or issues might have been harder to handle with the group being so spread out.

SOLUTION

Despite the challenge, the situation was handled adeptly through clear communication and proper preparation. Prior to the trip, the front and rear staff had wisely decided to exchange their phone numbers and always keeping their mobile phones ready. This foresight proved invaluable when the pee break caused the group to split. The rear staff were able to contact the front staff and determine the correct direction, ensuring the lagging group didn't lose their way.

LESSONS LEARNT

The pee break scenario highlighted the importance of careful supervision and effective communication when managing a diverse group of youngsters. It underscored the need to always have contingency plans and reinforced the idea of pacing the journey according to the slowest participant to maintain group cohesion. After arrival at the castle, the situation was discussed and cleared. Communication between the rear and front staff must be always possible without mobile phones. This precaution made sure that the other scenario went smoothly.

DO's

- Always maintain clear and effective communication between the lead staff and the rear staff. This helps to ensure the smooth running of the group activities and can prevent potential mishaps.
- Adapt the pace according to the slowest participant. This helps to maintain group cohesion and ensures that no one is left behind.
- Develop a system for regular check-ins or signals. This can help keep track of the group's progress and quickly identify if someone is falling behind.

DON'T's

- Don't let the group spread out too much. Keep the group together as much as possible to avoid participants getting lost or encountering other issues.
- Don't assume everything will go according to plan. Always be ready for unexpected situations and have a backup plan ready.
- Don't disregard the importance of regular communication, even when it seems like everything is going well. Regular check-ins and clear communication are essential to ensure everyone is safe and accounted for.

STORY N.2

Later during the same excursion, another challenge arose when the group went down from the mountain to the barrage. A young girl from the group, struggling with a knee problem, started to fall behind the rest of the group due to her slowed pace. This physical discomfort threatened to exacerbate into a more serious condition given the challenging terrain and the physical effort required for the walk. The lack of immediate support could have further complicated her situation, potentially impacting her mental and physical well-being and overall experience.



IMPACT

In the second situation, the young girl with the knee issue faced a potentially aggravated physical condition. If left unattended or not properly addressed, her knee pain could have worsened, causing a more severe injury. Besides the physical distress, the girl could have experienced feelings of isolation and distress, which could have negatively impacted her overall experience and potentially discourage her from participating in future activities.

SOLUTION

When faced with the predicament of the young girl struggling with a knee problem, the rear staff displayed outstanding leadership and empathy. Not only did they adjust the pace to accommodate her and also offer emotional support, they also had another staff member nearby with a group of young people to support the rear staff. Throughout the walk to the barrage, they kept her engaged in conversation, sharing personal anecdotes and stories that helped distract her from her discomfort. They reassured her by informing her about the first-aid kit, replete with necessary medications, that was readily available if her condition worsened.

LESSONS LEARNT

In the second scenario involving the girl with the knee problem, the insights from the first incident were invaluable. Clearer communication and the presence of an additional staff member were key elements that improved the situation. This underscored the importance of addressing each participant's unique needs or challenges and providing individual attention. Having a first-aid kit at hand was another significant prerequisite emphasized in this scenario. These experiences underscored the importance of continuous learning and adaptability in managing group activities effectively.

DO's

- Be attentive to the needs of each participant. Each participant may have unique needs or challenges that require individual attention and empathy.
- Be prepared for physical challenges that some participants might encounter. This includes having a first-aid kit and knowing basic first aid.
- Use distraction tactics like engaging conversation when participants are struggling physically. This can help take their mind off the discomfort and make the journey more manageable.

DON'T's

- Don't disregard the physical limitations of some participants. Pay extra attention to those who might need additional support.
- Don't let a participant who's struggling physically fall behind without support. Always ensure there are additional staff members available to help.
- Don't forget to learn immediately from past experiences. Each situation provides valuable insights and lessons. Learn from these to enhance the effectiveness of future activities.

PROBLEM OF INSTITUTIONAL MEMORY

By Batosz Mościcki
and Bogumila Kozicka
from The Polish Forum
of Young Diplomats

The Polish Forum of Young Diplomats is a non-profit, non-governmental organization gathering around 230 students and young professionals from eight Polish cities. Members of the organization are mostly interested in political areas, foreign affairs and diplomacy.

Their mission is to create the right environment to thrive, learn and share the knowledge. They create and educate future leaders, whose abilities will help ensure Poland's position in the world. They organize meetings with experts, visits to embassies, and diplomatic posts. Regularly their members are referees on scientific conferences. Their volunteers help organize prestigious events like Warsaw Security Forum or Economic Congress in Karpacz.



IMPACT

Such a big non-governmental organization demands a huge amount of work, engagement, and coordination. Furthermore, as Association we are obliged by Polish law to fill multiple legal obligations (annual report on actions, annual financial statement, answering on correspondence from registration court). In the Polish Forum of Young Diplomats executive body is changing every year, as cadention of its members last one year. As a result, it is necessary to share all the necessary knowledge in a short time. Unfortunately, in the past outgoing executives' body did not manage to communicate appropriately with the new one. Therefore, successors were not informed about their duties and responsibilities. It was a great obstacle and risk which affected the whole organization.

CAUSE

- Members of the executive body rotate every year, so it is very difficult to keep institutional memory.
- Working in non-profit organizations we have to keep work life balance, and responsibly discharge our time for that activity - optimisation of time is very important for us.

SOLUTION

- a) Creation of The Code of Good Practice - every member of the executive body (term 2021-2022), before leaving his office, prepares instructions for his successor. The Code has from several to dozen or so pages with detailed characteristics of every position in the executive board. The Code of Good Practice should include:
 - duties of the particular member,
 - challenges that he will face,
 - outgoing projects,
 - advice for future members,
 - just a simple instruction on how to start.
- b) better logistic and time management,
- c) decentralization of duties (assigning additional members to help the executive board with the most important tasks).
- d) as fast as possible filling all legal duties after election of members of new executive board.

IMPACT

- The new elected board can immediately start the whole process of their assignments.
- Stepping into the new roles usually took around 6 months, and now it was only necessary around 2 months to get into normal working mode.
- We were able to immediately fill all the legal duties demanded by the court system and bank system after electing a new executive board.



LESSONS LEARNT

Experience which we gained in previous years showed us how important is smooth change of people sitting in the executive board. Otherwise, we were exposed to sanctions applied by the Polish administration and court system. Legal problems had direct influence over the working of the organization. We also had limited access to our bank account. As new members of the executive board had not been revealed in the court roll, we had weakened credibility in the eyes of our partners.

Secondly, using the Code of Good Practice allowed us to significantly shorten the time during new executive board members learning their new duties and tasks. It contributed to improving the working of the whole organization and eliminated the gap in work.

Implementation of above-described practice allowed us to shorten time of succession and allowed us to work without any distribution.

DO's

- Create The Code of Good Practice (for successors of the Board),
- Create a Rule Book for the newest members, aka instruction.
- assigning additional members to help the executive board.
- gets everything in the order.
- Teamwork.

DON'T's

- don't leave an open case before leaving the board.
- don't leave the newest successors alone during their first months.
- don't make boundaries between board and members.



STORIES FROM ITALY

By Mauro Calabrese, Ilaria Janczuk
and Antonella Troiano

STORY N.1

In Milan exists an association, called "Unit to prevent early school leaving" (Unità per il contrasto alla dispersione scolastica - CODIS). It is an institution that cooperates with social services and helps teenagers from 11 to 16 who are not regularly attending school for several reasons as poverty, linguistic difficulty and family problems. CODIS provides a space where teenagers can work hand to hand with professional educators in aimed project as alternative of the normal attendance in school in the morning and do after-school activities by combining formal and informal education such as playing instruments, doing artistic activities or receiving support to do their homework in the afternoon.

This is a story of a 12 year old boy with economic and social problems inside the family. His school got in touch with the association because he had bad behaviour, he annoyed his mates, he had difficulties to follow the common rules, the teacher's instructions and socialise with his classmates. In addition, frequently he skipped school

CAUSE

The real problem relates to his familiar background. His family faced many difficulties, and it wasn't able to keep the child away from the bad situation. In particular, he doesn't have a father and he lives with her mum, grandma and his two sisters in a very small apartment. Moreover, the problematic situation that affected his family has grown during the pandemic situation. In general, the situation caused several psychological problems also for teenagers with a "normal" family situation.

During that pandemic period in his family there was total chaos, and he didn't have a referent in his life.

He doesn't have a role model to follow, because his mother is alone, poor, with language difficulties in a foreign country and all the family on her shoulders. This had an impact on the time she could spend with the children. Indeed, was the sister who looked after the youngsters, and because of this she used to skip school or paying bills and buying food.

SOLUTIONS

The first solution found is to move him to an environment appropriate to its needs, putting him in touch with an institution that can focus on his educational problems. He was moved in a quieter environment, where activities as pet therapy, take care of animals and agriculture were organised. During these activities he was also taught traditional subjects like science and geometry, or literature and art, enriched with creation of drawings, readings, summaries or even cartoons. The second essential solution is to build a solid and trustable relationship with him, understanding what he loves, what his problems are, and adding some proof of confidence for example to lend him some of your objects to understand if he steals them, or allow him to go to buy something and trust in him.

The third solution is to build a safe space for him where he can express himself without prejudices and where he can feel comfortable.



IMPACT

The unexpected pee break could have had serious repercussions. The increased distance between the front and back of the group due to the pee break could have resulted in this part of the group getting lost, or even worse, wandering off the safe path. In addition, other potential dangers or issues might have been harder to handle with the group being so spread out. Other potential dangers or issues might have been harder to handle with the group being so spread out.

LESSONS LEARNT

The pee break scenario highlighted the importance of careful supervision and effective communication when managing a diverse group of youngsters. It underscored the need to always have contingency plans and reinforced the idea of pacing the journey according to the slowest participant to maintain group cohesion. After arrival at the castle, the situation was discussed and cleared. Communication between the rear and front staff must be always possible without mobile phones. This precaution made sure that the other scenario went smoothly.

DO's

- Always maintain clear and effective communication between the lead staff and the rear staff. This helps to ensure the smooth running of the group activities and can prevent potential mishaps.
- Adapt the pace according to the slowest participant. This helps to maintain group cohesion and ensures that no one is left behind.
- Develop a system for regular check-ins or signals. This can help keep track of the group's progress and quickly identify if someone is falling behind.

DON'T's

- Don't let the group spread out too much. Keep the group together as much as possible to avoid participants getting lost or encountering other issues.
- Don't assume everything will go according to plan. Always be ready for unexpected situations and have a backup plan ready.
- Don't disregard the importance of regular communication, even when it seems like everything is going well. Regular check-ins and clear communication are essential to ensure everyone is safe and accounted for.

STORY N.2

The framework in which this second story takes place is the same as the first one, CODIS association in Milan, but the role of the educators was a little bit different and the outcome as well. The aim of this educational path was to involve the youngsters who have social problems and integrate them into the social community through manual activities such as carpentry. This is a story of a 13-year-old boy. His school got in touch with the association because he had social problems with peers and difficulties in family. The association worked with another organisation specialised in creative activities and together they collaborated on the realisation of a project that consisted of making musical instruments and in this case an ukulele. The product was used as final middle school's exam, and then donated to the band in the music class.

The lack of care and attention from the family towards the teenager and the school, has negatively affected the relationship between him and the scholastic institution.

CAUSE

The main cause is the lack of care and attention from the family towards the teenager and the school, which has negatively affected the relationship between him and the scholastic institution. The little boy was not encouraged by his family to go to school, and so he did not feel integrated in the classroom. The family was unable to understand the boy's problems, and this caused aggressive attitudes on the part of the boy towards his classmates and teachers. The boy also used not to attend school. This boy lost interest in studying school subjects such as mathematics, geography, history.



SOLUTION

The boy is invited to participate and collaborate in after-school group work with other students in craft activities, where he can directly apply some of those subjects where he had previously shown no interest. To this end, age groups are created and given a target. Then the various work steps are explained, reading the technical drawing and materials are collected accordingly. Using carpentry tools independently or with the help of the educator, they were able to assemble step-by-step an ukulele within four-month.

IMPACT

Although during the presentation of the project the pupils seemed unenthusiastic about participating, they found motivation and enthusiasm enough to finish the project from the very beginning. At first, they were not so adept at working together, they had to learn over time the concept of teamwork to arrive at an optimal result.

Moreover, it was useful for learning subjects that they had difficulty learning at other times. In fact, craftsmanship through the application of theoretical principles with working tools, in the same way as the gamification in Youth work, is an activity that involves the students and have a positive impact on learning. Indeed, these activities involve measurement, analysis, calculation, manual skills. Thus, without realising it, they also develop dialogue, teamwork, and mutual support. They had the chance to recognize their contribution in the project and understood that everyone had to cooperate to achieve the end of it.



LESSON LEARNT

Even if they seemed to be without future and without dreams or quality, the application of the knowledge in concrete activities, create an environment where they could express themselves and be satisfied. So, we learned that everyone of us has something inside that is ready to be expressed, the important thing is to find the right environment that is able to valorise us.

Another lesson learned is that with manual activities such as sports, music, drama, art, gardening, it is easier to engage children not only with a difficult background but in every situation.

DO's

- Finding project financiers.
- Have confidence in the children.
- Spreading information about these centres.
- Be open to different teaching methodologies.

DON'T's

- Being impatient, believe that they will do everything perfectly right away.
- Demanding too much.
- Ignoring their needs.

STORY FROM BULGARIA

By Katya Aneva

“I managed to step out of my comfort zone, challenge myself and gain new experience.”

Every beginning is hard; the same is with youth work. Here I would like to share with you my first steps in youth working. After finishing with my university studies and while looking to start my professional career, I had a lot of free time which I decided to dedicate to volunteer work and gain some experience in this field.

I found on Facebook one non-formal group, where the members organize themselves and visit orphanage houses that are near my hometown every weekend. The idea was to collect books from the local community, bring the books to the orphans, but not just to make a library and leave the books, but also to read the books to the youngsters, because sadly enough a part of them cannot even read. We wanted to show them the beauty and power of the imaginary world of books. To most of the orphans nobody did ever read a single fairy-tale.

Being a very emotional person, it took me some time to decide myself visiting an orphanage house, as these places have horrible conditions in my country. I was afraid of becoming too sad and depressed, not knowing what to expect. So, I assure myself that at least the place we are visiting is for “normal” kids, without any physical or mental disabilities.

The trip to the orphanage went well; we had fun with the other volunteers and finally arrived at the destination equipped with lots of books. The building itself looked like a prison, with extremely poor conditions, set to be for 100 kids. The children were super happy to meet us. They were very curious and eager to know what we brought them. Seeing it was only books, they were a little bit disappointed. We tried to engage them and to read together. Some of them wanted to show us how good they already know to read, but all of them loose interest very easily and were very impatient in everything. Each one of them wanted to attract our attention, but we were only ten volunteers for sixty kids.

Then one kid came to me with a book. In fact, it was the one child with kind of mental disorder living in this orphanage, only because his twin brother and sister were there.

I started reading the book to him, but he was totally distracted, turning the pages very quickly, showing lack of interest to listen to me. I got very stressed from the situation, not knowing how to react. But then as I have some experience with baby sitting of little kids, I started reading in more interactive way, involving him by asking some “childish” questions, showing pictures, and making sounds. He really enjoyed the way of my reading, and he did not let me for almost the whole day.

In the end of the day, I felt very useful and happy. I managed to step out of my comfort zone, challenge myself and gain new experience. The most important thing I learned was that the people in need and with difficult background do not need compassion, but acceptance and personal attention. Generally we did not manage to make the orphans read and enjoy the books that much, but we continued our regular visits, became very good friends and it was more about playing together and sharing, but also helping with their studies, step by step.

DO's

- Be creative.
- Be brave and overcome your fears.
- Be a good listener and accept the people in need like equal, but without too much compassion.
- Even you fail to achieve your goals, you are on the right way.

DON'T's

- Don't panic.
- Don't feel pity.
- Don't trust every story you hear, as the kids have a very big imagination.
- You are there to be a friend, not Santa Claus.



JAPANESE PROMPT

By Kellen Szymanski

Throughout my life I continuously worked in volunteering and community services projects, and one of the most significant of these projects was volunteering as an assistant at a Okinawan orphanage in Japan. The volunteer work consisted of helping and organizing events for the orphans, who were commonly ages five through twelve. The age range of the students resulted in the volunteers and me deciding to focus on interaction with the children and chose to bring toys which volunteers owned for the orphans to play with. Additionally, the volunteers planned to aid students with any difficulty they were having regarding schoolwork. The volunteers and myself decided to focus on math as low level math skills could be easily visualized and communicated without the language difficulties. . This linguistic issue proved to be the central issue for the project as the only individual fluent in both English and Japanese was the facilitator of the orphanage who was not able to translate for the volunteers or the children due to management and teaching obligations, so the volunteers need to develop a means to work with the orphans without being able to verbally communicate, with the exception of small phrases which either the volunteers knew in Japanese or the children knew in English.

As the volunteers including myself established this a weekly project it was not possible to alter our schedule without offending the organizers. This resulted in the volunteers arriving at the orphanage with minimal language skills and needing to entertain a group of young Japanese children while possibly helping them with some math skills. With the issue of the language between the children and the youth workers causing fear of the project falling through, the volunteers decided that to best ensure the benefits to the children we would be serving the volunteers should focus on activities which require minimal verbal communication. This decision led to the emphasis on toys like legos and playing kickball which, most children would know how to play leaving minimal need to explain. Additionally, the volunteers decided to talk to the teacher managing the orphanage to see the activities that the students enjoyed, which resulted in the volunteers forming a better understanding of the activities that could be facilitated without causing any exclusion of the children. With this information the volunteers were able to set up activities for the children and allowed them to have fun and play with the toys we brought, and the volunteers organized games that were well received by the children.

This resulted in the first session at the orphanage being largely successful as the volunteers facilitated a safe and fun environment for the children without language skills. The goal of the project was to facilitate relations between the American military community and the Okinawan community by increasing civic participation among Americans. This project failed to consider the significance of the linguistic barrier when selecting the location that they would volunteer at which caused significant issues which have been outlined above regarding communication, organization of activities, and ensuring happiness of the children. To avoid failing to reach these goals the volunteers had to conduct in site crisis management, which resulted in alterations to the original project and a shift to a more pragmatic situation. Furthermore, without the proper organization and understanding of the situation it created fear that we would have to cut our visit short, but due to quick thinking and assistance from the staff of the orphanage we were able to adapt our plan and meet all three of our goals.

The most significant lesson that could be taken away would have to be preparation as poor preparation was the factor which inhibited this project.

The impact of the situation was an increased amount of doubt in the rationality of the plan and the leadership of the volunteer group which created this plan, as it appeared they had oversimplified the project the volunteers were taking on. The doubt caused initial difficulty in reacting to the problem, as discontented teenage volunteers felt uncomfortable with the responsibility that was being placed on them. Additionally, the fact that the issue was largely a linguistic one made it seem hopeless to alter the situation in the short amount of time once the issue was discovered. The language barrier was already of significant concern to multiple volunteers, and this was a result of the formality of Japanese speech and the fear of insulting or offending one of the children or one of the staff working the orphanage.

Furthermore, the concern was compounded by the fact that many volunteers had limited experience in Japan and were using this opportunity to interact with the local community. For the individuals seeking the ability to interact with the community they felt extremely isolated. The volunteering organizers quickly took action, and began the process of setting up games and toys that we knew we could use. At this point, other volunteers went to speak to the bilingual member of staff to learn more about the children and get assistance on the set up for possible activities that require equipment the orphanage was providing, for example, sport equipment. Following the beginning of set up for the day the volunteers began to realize the altered plan and began to have greater faith in the success of the project.

This led to greater faith overall in the plan and ensured the long-term viability of volunteering at the facility. Once the first day of volunteering was over, the volunteers decided that the project would continue, but that next week we would need to possibly bring volunteers with higher levels of Japanese understanding and start to learn about the language ourselves if we wanted to continue the project in the long term. Regarding this project, the most significant lesson that could be taken away would have to be preparation as poor preparation was the factor which inhibited this project. This can be seen in the limited preparation regarding the language barrier and the limited plans regarding activities which were presented for the event.



Furthermore, adequate preparation is even more critical in these situations as volunteering in communities with different cultural backgrounds and languages provides an increased chance of offense and disrespect by the members of the group. While the volunteers commonly have no intent to disrespect local customs it is vital to ensure that these events do not happen as they will decrease the likelihood the community will invite you back again. Additionally, this project also demonstrates the critical role of patience, as when I am working with an individual, I cannot understand or acts differently from me I must respect that person's culture and allow extra time for the individual to either explain to me their practices or accept them and accommodate them.

Patience was critical during my volunteering experience in Japan overall as it was significantly different from my experience with volunteer work in the United States or Europe. This was due in part due to different management culture and a completely different approach to volunteer work overall. So, in order to volunteer in the Japanese community, it was vital to understand their viewpoint and either accept the conditions which they function in or work jointly to accommodate both the interest of local culture and international volunteers. Unfortunately, these situations do not always work perfectly as seen in the example above, but continuous attempts to connect the community demonstrated that the volunteers were attempting to accommodate Japanese tradition while adding the community.

This recognition allowed the Americans volunteering at the Japanese orphanage to be partially accepted by the Japanese as social workers in the Okinawan community. When discussing the topics of what to do and not do in these situations especially in regard to Japan it reduces to cultural differences and work ethic. Concerning cultural differences in youth work, it is difficult for non-familial links to give advice to young Japanese. This can be in the approach to mental health in the West as compared with Japan, as in the case of the Japanese orphanage which I volunteered at, health check-ups were constant but there were very minimal checks on the mental wellbeing of these children. This is due to mental health in Japanese society being difficult and usually unchecked in many cases.



This causes conflict for many American youth workers as it cannot be a youth worker who provides advice regarding mental health. This is a job restricted to a few Japanese doctors only. While this is an extreme example of societal differences, mental health has become a central job for modern youth workers. Furthermore, preparation is critical as stated many times above, but it is important to ensure flexibility in all plans as most of the volunteer work will run into unexpected situations which need to be accommodated. Concerning what to do in these situations when you are volunteering internationally with people who may not speak the same language as you is crucial to maintain the ability to attempt to learn their language.

This practice will lead to respect from communities which you are working with as they see you attempting to acknowledge the cultural and societal difference between you and them, while not immediately falling back to your mother tongue. From this experience I was able to build the idea of volunteering overseas in as many places as possible and pushed me to be more involved in the local communities that I live in as opposed to solely the expat community.

Furthermore, this experience gave me the drive to learn language to better understand different cultures, and to work with these people while being respectful to their beliefs. This builds my understanding of the world, while allowing me to build relationships and partnerships around the globe. Furthermore, I want the ability to volunteer in as many situations as possible and the more than one understands about different communities the more opportunities are opened to them. During my experience at the Japanese orphanage, I was able to come to a greater understanding of volunteering and youth work and realize that this is an activity I will be participating in for the rest of my life.



YOUNG STUDENT CRISIS

By Lukáš Jakubík

Communication in working with young students at school relies on understanding, mutual participation, and cultivating positive relationships. It is important to create an environment where both parties desire good relations, seek understanding, and adhere to intergenerational norms. These norms can be found in the principles of netiquette, which have been established for the past two decades. For instance, it is crucial to express thoughts and questions clearly and comprehensibly. Students should communicate in a formal and respectful manner, while teachers should exemplify flexibility, clarity, and a solution-oriented approach. Sarcasm, condemnation, and highlighting failures should be avoided. In this fluent communication, self-evaluation is unnecessary. It is recommended that students proactively propose potential solutions, which can expedite the flow of communication and simplify the teacher's decision-making process.

Effective teachers provide students with ongoing constructive feedback, not only academically but also socially, emotionally, and psychologically. Praise acts as a stimulus for improved performance in the future. Teachers who inspire, are approachable, responsible, and maintain professionalism can effortlessly foster a sense of camaraderie. Trust plays a crucial role in communication, as coaching or mentorship often becomes an integral part of personal and professional development, which requires significant investment. In practical scenarios, especially when assigning more demanding homework that necessitates in-depth elaboration from students, fostering personal responses rather than relying on fraudulent or AI-generated answers proves worthwhile. Encouraging additional comments or addressing specific concerns solely for the student's eyes increases the likelihood of the student confiding in their wider problems.



CRISIS

Let's consider a situation where a student seeks advice on finding new (better) friends quickly or locating an expert in psychological health or psychiatry. The teacher's immediate response should prioritize emotional and social support, creating a "safe space" where the student feels heard and understood. Even a brief acknowledgement such as "I don't have enough time at the moment, but I'm aware of your situation, and we will address it soon" reflects a professional approach. Still, we need have in our mind, one person is not able to solve all the problem deeply.

SOLUTIONS AND IMPACT

Some European Union countries are addressing the shortage of experts in the psychosocial field by employing teaching assistants, school support teams, or certified psychologists. While emergency systems cater to immediate crisis management, the focus should be on proactive actions and solutions. The teacher doesn't need to immediately transfer the case to another expert but can engage in conversation and offer assistance without breaching trust. It is worth noting that parental involvement is sometimes lacking, and responsibility is being shifted to schools and youth organizations in less severe situations. Therefore, contacting parents should be reserved for serious crises. However, all available support from authorities and support teams can be extended to the student and legal representatives. Additionally, it is important to recognize that certain psychiatric issues require professional medication and cannot be resolved solely through our efforts. For youth workers, adopting a broader perspective is crucial as we are responsible for addressing interaction problems and social dynamics (the sociological aspect of our work).

Therefore, it is crucial to promote these services in our "safe environment" and remind students through bulletin boards, banners, and brochures. If these services receive support from the state and financial contributors, adequate funding should be secured to ensure their availability. Furthermore, such initiatives are not only sustainable but also adaptable to unforeseen needs. As an illustration, these psychologists have extended their helping hand to refugees affected by the conflict in Ukraine. While this is a separate story, it highlights the diverse ways in which support can be provided. Sometimes, a simple stuffed monkey, with the support of a manufacturer like IKEA, can become a much-needed comfort companion, offering solace, at least for a while. Remember, each student's journey is unique, and by offering understanding, support, and a safe space for communication, we can make a positive difference in their lives.

For youth workers adopting a broader perspective is crucial as we are responsible for addressing interaction problems and social dynamics..

LESSON LEARNT

Currently, some countries offer professional and anonymous assistance from psychologists through chat or free phone lines for one-hour conversations. These experts are trained professionals experienced in crisis intervention (e.g. iwanttodie.com). They possess a wealth of ideas and solutions that may surpass our imagination.

This includes issues we may not have caused but are aware of and possess the knowledge and collaboration skills to help resolve. Our availability through various communication channels, including multiple applications and social media, allows us to be easily reachable and familiar with these environments. At times, we may even be able to investigate the problem independently and form our own well-informed opinions. It is essential to minimize any potential harm caused by identified issues as promptly as possible.



HOW TO COPE WITH INACCESSIBLE STUDENTS AND THEIR PARENTS

By Maciej Ryk

It is a story that happened to me (Maciej) in the first year of my job. When I started teaching English, I conducted only private lessons. I got into it right away and liked it so much. The knowledge of the students varied, but it mostly corresponded to their age, with only one exception. There was a student from the 7th grade who was on the level of the four/five-graders. He had problems with the most simple things. But it's not what this is about, since that could've been worked on. The problem was his attitude. Since the very first lesson he was a bit absent and didn't pay attention. It seemed as if he was forced to come. I asked him if he was okay, and he just said he was tired. But again, that could've been worked on as well. I started inventing new ideas to keep him entertained, and it worked sometimes. But most of the time it was tough, especially when he started showing even more signs of discontent. Constant yawning, playing with his pen, rotating his head. I even started to suspect some mental problems on his side. That was the moment I talked to my boss about it. We called the mother to lightly ask about the situation. We asked how he liked the lessons and she just replied that he is content and apparently likes them. We decided to give it a try, but the situation continued. After some time, we talked to the mother again and told her about the son's lack of focus. She was surprised and said that he never told her anything. Only that it's okay for him. But she also wanted the lessons to continue. They did so in the same way as before, with mixed results and attitude from the boy.

I tried my best to make the lessons as efficient as possible, but then there was the problem with his knowledge of English.

It also turned out that he was younger than the rest of the 7th graders, 2 years younger. He may have felt excluded. It could've also been the reason for his insufficient level. The lessons continued this way until June. I tried to get some distance towards this situation, in order not to stress too much. I thought if the mother is ok with it, and the son is still coming to the lessons, I will just do my job. But I couldn't stop thinking that there was something really wrong there.

“He may have felt excluded. It could've also been the reason for his insufficient level.”

CAUSE

- The youth being forced by parents to take part in extra activities the parents consider to be vital.
- Not enough clarity with the mother. She seemed not to understand the problem, or to even see that there was a problem.
- The boy's lack of interest in the lessons
- There also seemed to be a problem with communication between mother and the son.

SOLUTION

When it comes to solutions in such situations, you have to remain alert and actively work towards resolving. You can never underestimate the current problem especially with youth. Clarification, talking with the parent and accessing the youth is a crucial step in working with growing up people who are sensitive.

IMPACT

The impact on me as a young teacher was major. It was the first year of my work, so I was very stressed with the situation. But it was also a major steppingstone in gaining necessary experience.

LESSONS LEARNT

This situation taught me a lot of patience and how to remain calm when the circumstances are not ideal. I also learned that the right communication is key. You have to be open towards the youth, try to approach them in a way that will let you access them. But I also learnt how to manage myself in this type of work environment. Working with and teaching young people is very engaging and sometimes exhausting and stressful. You need to stay focused. That is why looking after yourself is vital to look after your students.

DO's

- Observe and look for the best possible solutions.
- Communicate any concerns clearly.
- Be honest with parents and try to reach the youth.
- Be open towards young people, show them you are here, and you can help.

DON'T's

- Never ignore the problem.
- Be careful not to push young people too much.
- Don't lose patience and composure.

UNEXPECTED DRUGS AND A SEXUAL AFFAIR DURING A JOINT PARTY ON AN ERASMUS STAY

By Milan Štrbák

...one Erasmus volunteer poured a powder of unknown composition into the drinks of several participants who spent time with him during the disco.



CAUSE

An unpleasant situation happened during an international meeting organized by Erasmus+. Specifically, a group of Erasmus students decided to spend the evening together and then went to a disco in a local club. After arriving at the club, students ordered alcohol and drinks and started having fun and dancing. After the fun together, the next day was followed by sobering up, and negative facts surfaced where drugs and intoxicating substances were sprinkled on several Erasmus students. While all details are still being investigated as this incident is still current. According to sources and accusations, one Erasmus volunteer poured a powder of unknown composition into the drinks of several participants who spent time with him during the disco.

SOLUTION

However, the rollover of the case was accompanied by a delay where individuals were ashamed to speak for the situation that had arisen, and this also delayed the clarification of the entire case. The police were automatically included in the case, which brought professionalism and security to the case. After some time, thanks to the police, it was possible to identify the perpetrator, he was specifically a volunteer from the university whose task is to ensure a safe environment for young international students from abroad. Gradually, more and more evidence was revealed and it turned out that there was also sexual intercourse between the perpetrator and the student, whose drink was also filled with unknown substances. However, according to available information, sexual intercourse was voluntary. Automatically, after the case spread, mistrust and uncertainty reigned in the group of students and also in the organization of volunteers. The impact was individual, while volunteers and employees of the university tried to ensure the safety of everyone who was affected by the situation.

SOLUTION

The reputation and trust of the organization that is supposed to help and take care of safety has collapsed. The offender who poured unknown substances into the drinks was automatically excluded from all volunteer organizations and banned from participating in any other organizations. The organization will lose a member and the consequences will probably be even greater as the case has much wider consequences and the investigation is still ongoing. Furthermore, the resulting stressful situation may leave traumatic situations and thus the life of all students affected by this case may be affected in the future during the next trip.

The parents of the students will certainly be affected, as well as the perpetrator. In the case of a financial fine, the offender's parents may also be affected. It is very likely that further losses will be the financial costs of compensation, a good organization may have a social assistance fund. This does not replace the process of criminal prosecution and compensation for non-pecuniary damage to the victim. In any case, the negative impact will be damage to the name of the organization for a longer period, and it does not matter how they were involved in the case. Therefore, the organization can establish the position of public defender of rights (Ombudsman), who will deal with unexpected events in the future in the protection of members and individuals. At the same time, the negative impact can affect the entire ESN organization in the country because individual organizations cooperate with each other within universities. This can damage the name and reputation of whole Erasmus project at international level.

LESSONS LEARNT

As a lesson, there is increased prudence and consistency when consuming alcohol. In that case it is good to keep an eye on your glass and be careful that it is not left unattended. This is especially true in unfamiliar environments. It is also essential to be in the company of those we trust, so that we are in the case of being influenced by the collective. But the problem is that the perpetrator is in an organization that had trust and confidence in students. This kind of behaviour is not expected at all from an organization that helps students. Therefore, as another lesson learned, the introduction of psychotests for volunteers or at least criminal record and background checks of individuals should be necessary. Because work with people and especially where responsibility is needed for foreigners who do not understand the local language should have a deeper control to prevent infiltration of unsuitable participants.

..the introduction of psychotests for volunteers or at least criminal record and background checks of individuals should be necessary.

Personally, I am a volunteer and I know from my own experience that in the organization Erasmus students' network (ESN) we did not undergo any checks at all before we became members of the volunteer organization and therefore, I think that this could be implemented as part of increasing security. Another lesson, I think, is not to be ashamed to talk about when such a situation happens. Of course, it is difficult when one member is affected and, moreover, if it is so very difficult in the case of sexual abuse. But in this case, the rule applies: sharing is caring. Universities should also tighten the selection procedure supported by possible psychotests when selecting

volunteers who have the responsibility over the other foreign students. It is also correct from the other participants in the incident to be compact and a team.

Try not to underestimate the situation and carefully listen and talk while spotting any change in the behaviour of everyone in the group. Another lesson is to call the police as it has been done in this case. This will deepen the feeling of safety and security when clarifying the case. Certainly, a big thanks goes to the volunteer organization itself for not trying to hide the case but to talk about it publicly, regardless of the negative impact on reputation. It is the public discussion and non-disclosure of the case that brings transparency and is a suitable way to warn and prevent similar situations in the future for other organizations as well. Of course, it is also important to provide psychological support for the perpetrator because the clarification of the motive will be key, and possible interrogation may shed new light on the case. However, this case may not have been unique, and we do not know how often similar situations occur throughout Europe, as we do not have any statistics regarding these scenarios. Students who completed Erasmus abroad will receive a test before and after the end of their stay to evaluate the improvement of their language skills.

These statistics are very important because they document progress in education. However, an anonymous questionnaire with questions related to safety and psychological comfort, negative experiences, etc. is not available. Introducing such a questionnaire could serve as a useful statistic to familiarize not only with positive experiences, but also as an improvement and increase in safety for students who decide to complete Erasmus. Therefore, one of the lessons can be to introduce such questionnaires based on previous incidents to improve awareness of any negative experiences in individual countries, environments, etc.

DO's & DON'T's

Even if theory differs from practice, it is good to adopt rational thinking and not try to solve the situation on your own responsibility. Because sometimes we do not know the language or the culture in a foreign country, it is always good to contact the responsible persons. As mentioned in lessons learned, in such a case it is advisable to call the police, who will ensure safety and speed up the identification of the perpetrator. Also, calling the Ombudsman and other psychological support is key to ensuring the psychological well-being of individuals. Of course, it is good to talk about it publicly and not keep this information secret. Do not be ashamed to talk about the case publicly. This means that no details should be neglected, even if no damage to mental and physical health would occur. Do not underestimate the situation in case there was no serious injury. Because if the perpetrator were unpunished, it could happen again and again.

CRISIS MANAGEMENT

By Robert Warren

in International Volunteering Projects

International volunteering and research trips for Bachelor's students run out of the American University of Prague. The projects are designed to give students hands-on experience in leadership, social responsibility, and cross-cultural understanding. Typically, the projects involve taking 10-15 students to a developing country for one month to volunteer with human rights NGOs, meet with local leaders and innovators, and produce academic research and online content (vlogs and blogs) in areas of the student's choosing.

Considering current debates on the issues surrounding "voluntourism" and "white saviour complex," students also attend six preparatory lectures before departure, including but not limited to, the history, culture, and politics of the location along with an introduction to postcolonial theory as the locations are often postcolonial states. Additionally, students go through cultural sensitivity training; introductory language classes, how to operate in potentially dangerous environments; how to build contacts and produce field research; as well as guidance on understanding project logistics and potential pitfalls. This project gives students a unique chance to step out of the classroom and challenge themselves in ways very different from that of a traditional learning environment.

CRISIS – DENGUE FEVER IN SRI LANKA

The project leader (David) is travelling to the north of the island for a few days to Jaffna to research the impacts of the civil war with eight project participants. The four remaining participants will stay in Galle in the south of the island. Before departure, the second-in-command (Michael) tells David he is feeling a little under the weather but insists it is probably nothing. David does nothing.

“Could this kill him?” David asks. She apologises and says, “Yes. At this stage it’s about fifty-fifty...”

During the stay in Jaffna, Michael's condition begins to worsen. He complains of joint pain, headaches, and fever. He believes it is a stomach virus that will pass – and again, David does not act, assuming Michael is correct. It is only during the twelve-hour train journey back to Galle in the south of the island that David realises Michael is extremely ill. Arriving back in Galle, David rushes Michael to the local hospital. He is taken away for tests and David waits.

The doctor comes into the waiting room to speak with David sometime later. “It’s dengue fever.” She says, “Full blown. Stage four.” “How many stages are there?” You ask. “Five.” She says, “His blood is leaking fluid into his lungs and stomach. We don’t normally see such advanced dengue in tourists. He must be on day four or five by now.” “And stage five?” David asks. “The last stage is shock.” She says, “If he falls into shock, well, it’s not good.” “Could this kill him?” David asks. She apologises and says, “Yes. At this stage it’s about fifty-fifty if he’ll make it or not.”

Harry is taken away on a gurney into the ICU where he will stay until his condition improves. David heads back to the NGO to confront the other participants.

CAUSES

1. Negligence – Whenever running a project of this nature, complaints of illness must always be taken seriously. David's faith in Michael thinking his initial symptoms were nothing to worry about was a major error on David's part. As leader of the project, he must take responsibility over all participants, including his assistant, even if it may mean at times being overly cautious. Better safe than sorry.

Harry is taken away on a gurney into the ICU where he will stay until his condition improves. David heads back to the NGO to confront the other participants.

2. Poor project preparation – These projects involve in-depth preparatory training to ensure all participants are aware of all potential problems. Knowing the symptoms of Dengue fever should have been included in this training. Though at first it may seem like the flu, the arrival of intense joint pain is a sure sign Dengue is present.

3. Lack of on-site disease prevention – There is no vaccination for Dengue and it is contracted by mosquito bite. Though many of the participants were bitten by mosquitos throughout the project, Michael was the only unlucky one. Use of mosquito nets when sleeping, and deet when on beaches or forested areas, especially at night, should have been encouraged.

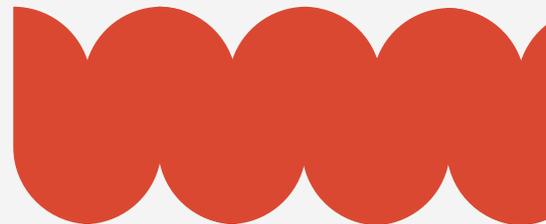


SOLUTIONS

1. Reassure participants
When a member of international project is taken seriously ill it obviously has a huge impact on the group and the project at-large. The first step for David is to return to the NGO HQ and meet with the participants; explaining to them the nature of Michael's illness and the steps that must be taken to ensure Michael's well-being. In the meantime, it may be wise to keep the participants busy to prevent them from becoming overly consumed with the situation. At this stage, the outcome of this crisis rests with the doctors. David may also seek to appoint a new second-in-command.



2. Contact director of NGO
As the local boss, he/she needs to be immediately informed of the situation. His/her contacts may also prove useful during this period.
3. Contact dean of faculty
As an employee of the school, Michael's situation must be made clear to the relevant parties back in Prague.
4. Comfort the patient
Michael is clearly scared and needs to see a friendly face. David should ideally visit him at least once a day, spend time with him and reassure him. Additionally, David should ask Michael who in his family he would like to be contacted.
5. Contact family member
This must be handled delicately. Michael's situation happened on your watch and the severity his condition is in-part David's fault. He must clearly explain the situation and provide the family member options – most likely flying out to Sri Lanka (Michael is from Austria) to be with David and fly him home when he recovers.



IMPACT

1. Fear and uncertainty amongst participants – Not only are the participants concerned for Michael's well-being but also their own. Dengue-carrying mosquitos could be anywhere, and this raises the fear of further infections in the group.

2. Stalling of the project – David has lost his second-in-command. Participants are encouraged to continue with their volunteering and content production, but Michael's condition is a constant distraction. Until he recovers it appears the direction and motivation of the project is lost.

3. Concern from Prague stakeholders
The university in Prague knows these projects are high risk – and they insist all participants sign waivers before departing – but a crisis of the severity is of great concern to them. David must remain in constant contact with them until Michael recovers.

LESSONS LEARNT

1. Better risk preparation
Provide more involved and detailed guidance on potential on-site risks prior to departure, and how to prevent these risks from arising in the first place. Candidates should also be made aware of how to identify symptoms of relevant tropical diseases

2. Better interpersonal communication
Both Michael and David should have communicated more effectively. Developing stronger bonds between group members prior to departure, including team-building or interpersonal trainings, may help with this. Michael's attitude towards his worsening health condition may also be due to his own fear of appearing weak or unfit to be David's second-in-command. He (and the others) should therefore be reassured from the beginning of the project that all successes and failures in the group are experienced and shared collectively, not individually. Do not blame yourself.

DO's

- Be prepared.
- Be communicative.
- Be vigilant.
- Be attentive.
- Be reassuring.
- Be clear-headed.
- Be calm.
- Be professional.

DON'T's

- Be unprepared.
- Be distant.
- Be lazy.
- Be uncaring.
- Be assuming.
- Be unclear.
- Be erratic.
- Be panicky.



STORIES FROM SLOVENIA

Written by Matic Fučka, Anže Alič and Juš Hladnik

STORY N.1

CAUSE

In the picturesque town of Vipavski Križ, a group of teenagers (up to 16 years old) embarked on a summer camp organized by a local youth organization called "VOZEL". The camp was organized with the help of the local church. The theme of the summer camp was: "The Chronicles of Narnia: The Voyage of the Dawn Treader". The camp aimed to provide a platform for personal growth via the ideas in the book. The camp also included a lot of outdoor and team building activities to make the teens more connected. All of the teens were sleeping at the camp in a tent. Usually there was always an adult that slept with them except for the last two days, as we had the idea to teach them some responsibility.

Amidst the last two days, a challenging situation unfolded. Two teenagers, Mark and Sara, who had developed a close bond during the camp, found themselves in a moment of intimacy where their condom broke. Fear and anxiety gripped them as they worried about the potential consequences, including the possibility of pregnancy.

SOLUTION

Understanding the urgency, the facilitators calmly approached the situation and ensured the young couple felt supported. They immediately provided Sara with the morning-after pill and offered a private space for her to gather her thoughts and emotions. Sensing the need for parental involvement, the facilitators assisted Mark and Sara in reaching out to their respective parents.

To Sarah's surprise, her parents responded with understanding and empathy when she shared the situation with them. They assured her that they were there for her, emphasizing the importance of responsible decision-making and the significance of open communication within the family. Sarah's parents recognized the vulnerability of the situation and reiterated their unconditional support for her. Their response alleviated Sarah's fears and strengthened her bond with her parents, as she realized that they were willing to provide guidance and help in challenging circumstances.

IMPACT

Sara, burdened with anxiety, was particularly concerned about her parents' reaction due to their traditional values. To her surprise, her parents responded with understanding and empathy. They assured her that they were there for her, emphasizing the importance of open communication and responsible decision-making. This support alleviated Sara's fears and strengthened her bond with her parents. Mark faced a similar reaction at home.





LESSONS LEARNT

This challenging situation provided valuable lessons for the youth organization and its facilitators. Firstly, it highlighted the significance of preparedness in addressing sensitive topics related to sexual health. They realized the importance of providing accurate information and access to necessary resources, such as the morning-after pill, to ensure the well-being of the youth in their care.

Additionally, the experience underscored the importance of creating a safe and non-judgmental environment where young individuals feel comfortable discussing sensitive issues. The facilitators acknowledged that trust and open communication were essential in providing effective support to adolescents navigating complex situations.

DO's

- prioritize the well-being and safety of the youth in all situations.
- maintain confidentiality and privacy when addressing sensitive matters.
- provide accurate and age-appropriate information on sexual health.
- encourage open communication and create a safe space for discussions.
- involve parents or guardians when necessary, ensuring their support and understanding.

DON'T's

- DON'T dismiss or downplay the concerns and anxieties of young individuals.
- DON'T make assumptions or judgments based on personal beliefs or biases.
- DON'T neglect the importance of providing access to necessary resources and information.
- DON'T force disclosure or breach confidentiality without a valid reason.
- DON'T underestimate the impact of a supportive and empathetic approach in difficult situations.

STORY N.2



CAUSE

As the staff at our summer camp in Marindo (Slovenia), we were thrilled to welcome a group of enthusiastic children aged 10 to 15 for an unforgettable experience. However, we quickly noticed a growing issue that concerned us deeply. The campers were excessively attached to their smartphones, immersing themselves in virtual worlds rather than engaging with the camp activities and building relationships with their peers. Recognizing the negative impact of this behavior, we decided to implement a new rule to limit smartphone usage to just 15 minutes in the afternoon, aiming to encourage the campers to disconnect from technology and fully embrace the wonders of the camp.

SOLUTION

To our surprise, the announcement of the smartphone restriction was met with frustration and resistance from the campers. We realized that our intentions, though noble, did not align with their expectations. Sensing the need for a compromise, we held a staff meeting to reevaluate our decision.

After thoughtful discussion, we came to the conclusion that a modification to the rule was necessary.

Considering the campers' desire to stay connected, we decided to extend the smartphone usage time to one hour each afternoon. We believed that this adjustment would strike a balance between technology and outdoor experiences, allowing the campers to enjoy their devices while still immersing themselves in the camp's activities and forming meaningful connections.



IMPACT

The impact of this change was remarkable. With an increased allowance of smartphone usage, the campers began to warm up to the idea of limited screen time. They discovered that they could still enjoy their devices without completely disconnecting from the real world. Social media became a means of sharing their camp experiences with friends and family, and capturing precious memories through photos became a cherished part of their camp journey.

What pleasantly surprised us was that the campers' appreciation for the natural beauty of Marindol grew exponentially. They eagerly participated in outdoor activities, embracing the wilderness, swimming in crystal-clear lakes, and fully immersing themselves in team-building exercises. As the days went by, the sense of camaraderie among the campers deepened, unburdened by the constant distraction of technology. The revised smartphone policy fostered a balance that allowed them to engage with both the digital and physical worlds.



LESSONS LEARNT

Through the challenges we faced during the implementation of smartphone restrictions, we, as the camp staff, learned invaluable lessons about youth work and creating a positive camp experience. We discovered the importance of balancing technological engagement with real-life interactions, understanding that complete deprivation might lead to resistance and dissatisfaction among the campers.

Flexibility and adaptability proved to be key factors in addressing the needs and preferences of young participants. By acknowledging the campers' desire to stay connected digitally, we were able to establish guidelines that allowed for responsible smartphone use while still emphasizing the significance of face-to-face communication and appreciation for nature.

DO's

- Engage in open and transparent communication with campers, explaining the reasons behind rule changes and actively seeking their input.
- Strike a balance between technology and outdoor activities, allowing campers to enjoy the benefits of both worlds.
- Be flexible and willing to modify rules if they prove to be overly restrictive or unpopular.
- Encourage campers to use technology responsibly and provide guidance on appropriate digital behaviour.

DON'T's

- Impose strict rules without considering the campers' perspectives and needs.
- Completely prohibit smartphone usage, as it may lead to resistance and negative experiences.
- Allow staff members to use smartphones when campers are not permitted to do so, as it creates a sense of unfairness and undermines the rules.

TICK OFF THE CHALLENGES: BE THE ROLE MODEL

Erasmus+ training course for youthworkers



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Európsky dialóg
Hlavná 22
Trnava 917 01
Slovakia

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