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Interview with Professionals in the socio educational field, FVMP, September 2023

The objective of the Interviews:

The primary goal of the Access project is to cultivate an educational framework in each participating nation that bolsters the participation, empowerment, and social commitment of young individuals in vulnerable scenarios.

Each nation involved has zeroed in on one of the trio of pivotal themes delineated by the EU Youth Strategy: Inclusion, Sustainability, and Digitalisation—with Spain focusing on Digitalisation.

As part of this project, our team is compiling a document that delves into and contrasts the various models and strategies employed in different countries to support at-risk youth.

These interviews aim to understand better the techniques that uplift the empowerment, societal involvement, and proactive engagement of youth in Spain. Specifically, we're eager to unearth detailed insights into the initiatives your organization has rolled out and to grasp your perspective on mitigating the factors driving youth toward social exclusion.

To accomplish this, we've tailored our questions to dig deeper into existing and potential programs and current resources or those required to boost youth empowerment.

Stakeholder Additions:

In this landscape, the FVMP has onboarded an exemplary educational and occupational institution—KOYNOS. Beyond aiding those with physical and mental disabilities, KOYNOS extends various support mechanisms, including occupational guidance and independent living. Recognizing that KOYNOS operates outside the demographic targeted by the MUSOL-FVMP tandem—namely youth threatened by social, economic, or ethnic exclusion—, we believe their insights, as professionals in the inclusive domain of varied disabilities, will be invaluable to the ACCESS project.

Moreover, we've engaged with a primary school renowned for its work with special needs children. To round out our perspective, we've also incorporated viewpoints from the regional department championing educational inclusion.

The ensuing segments will spotlight questions posed and answers gleaned from personalized discussions with experts from the special and occupational education center, educators dedicated to primary school inclusivity, and regional governmental policymakers.

Questions for the Lead of Independent Living at the Special Education and Occupational Centre

COULD YOU OUTLINE YOUR ROLE, OBJECTIVES, AND THE ACTIVITIES CONDUCTED WITHIN YOUR ORGANIZATION?

I oversee the Independent Living office within our social education center. Our primary mission is to enhance the quality of life for our users by fostering their autonomy by acquiring essential life skills. These skills enable them to thrive in a more inclusive and integrated community. Within the domain of independent living, we focus on improving communication and social skills and providing support in areas such as personal hygiene. Our department aims to instill the concept of a new independent home, even though life in this new environment alternates with periods spent in their original residences. This service operates year-round.

COULD YOU PROVIDE INSIGHTS INTO THE DEMOGRAPHICS OF THE YOUNG INDIVIDUALS ATTENDING YOUR CENTER?

Our center works with individuals aged 21 and older, with some users as old as 50. Our typical user profile comprises individuals with high support needs, encompassing severe physical or intellectual disabilities requiring constant assistance. These conditions include Down's Syndrome, Angelman's Syndrome, and various levels of oral communication deficits.

COULD YOU ELUCIDATE THE EXTENT OF YOUR EFFORTS IN FOSTERING SOCIAL INTEGRATION AND EMPOWERMENT AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE?

In our sheltered housing program, we aim to facilitate immersion in the broader community and society by dismantling existing barriers. Each user receives personalized counseling tailored to their specific needs. We establish individualized objectives within each residence focused on the individual and their family. Psychologists and educators conduct comprehensive assessments to guide this process. It is important to note that we actively engage our users in this initial groundwork. We collaborate with them through assemblies, consider their opinions, and enable them to allocate time for activities that align with their personal needs, be it reading, shopping, leisure, and more.

TO WHAT EXTENT ARE THE CENTER'S ACTIVITIES DRIVEN BY THE PREFERENCES AND DEMANDS OF YOUNG INDIVIDUALS? ARE THEIR NEEDS AND INTERESTS DEFINED BEFORE OR DURING THE EXERCISES?

As mentioned previously, we give paramount importance to the opinions and preferences of our users.

Questions for the Social Worker Specializing in Down Syndrome and Autism in Primary Education

FROM YOUR EXPERIENCE, WHAT ARE THE CURRENT BARRIERS THAT HINDER ACTIVE PARTICIPATION BY YOUNG INDIVIDUALS WITH DOWN SYNDROME AND AUTISM IN SOCIETY?

Please note that the interviewed worker believes our society imposes numerous obstacles on individuals with various disabilities, including those at our centre. These barriers encompass architectural limitations in urban infrastructure, social prejudices, and stigmas that often exclude these individuals from mainstream systems. Additionally, there are challenges in securing adequate financial support for non-profit organizations and special education centres, which require more resources from government authorities to sustain essential social services.

COULD YOU SHARE A POSITIVE EXAMPLE OF AN ACTIVITY OR PROGRAM THAT ACTIVELY PROMOTES, FACILITATES, AND ENCOURAGES THE PARTICIPATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE WITH DOWN SYNDROME AND AUTISM AS ENGAGED CITIZENS IN THEIR COMMUNITY AND SOCIETY AT LARGE?

Allowing our users free time dedicated to their interests has proven highly beneficial. However, concerning inclusion, we should highlight the community immersion that our center fosters. This participation includes young people daily shopping at neighborhood stores and participating in local cultural workshops. This approach enables our users and provides an opportunity for the broader community to engage with and understand an existing social reality they might not be fully aware of. We aim to work collectively as a community to build stronger bonds.

DO THE CORE THEMES OF THE EU YOUTH STRATEGY, NAMELY "INCLUSION, SUSTAINABILITY, AND DIGITALIZATION," PLAY A ROLE IN YOUR WORK?

While inclusion is our top priority, we also acknowledge the significance of environmental awareness and digitalization, as individuals must adapt to these aspects. Achieving social inclusion requires addressing these elements holistically.

WHAT SPECIFIC CONTRIBUTIONS DO YOU BELIEVE ARE NECESSARY FROM CURRENT POLICIES, WHETHER AT THE LOCAL, REGIONAL, OR NATIONAL LEVEL, TO ENHANCE YOUTH WORK WITH YOUNG PEOPLE AT RISK OF SOCIAL EXCLUSION?

Interview with professionals in the socio-educational field

We strongly advocate for increasing the visibility of individuals with disabilities to foster empathy within the community. It's crucial to instill values that prevent the erosion of our inherent sensitivity towards these issues during childhood but tend to lose as we grow older. Of course, this endeavor requires investment and support from governmental institutions.

PLEASE PROVIDE AN OVERVIEW OF YOUR ROLE, YOUR OBJECTIVES, AND THE ACTIVITIES CONDUCTED IN YOUR ORGANIZATION.

I serve as a specialized educator within an interdisciplinary classroom team under the leadership of the teacher who oversees pedagogical activities. My role involves providing support for planned activities and implementing targeted interventions to address behavioral challenges or anxiety in students that may affect their interactions within the learning environment.

COULD YOU DESCRIBE THE DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF THE YOUNG INDIVIDUALS WHO ATTEND YOUR CENTER?

Our center primarily caters to children with autism, typically between the ages of 4 and 12, as we are part of a primary school setting. These students exhibit developmental delays that prevent them from integrating into mainstream or typical educational environments, even with additional support. Their needs are exceptional, and some may present behaviors that could harm themselves or others due to the severity of their diagnosis. We aim to foster their autonomy, initially helping them adapt to their surroundings as a preliminary step towards integrating into regular educational services.

COULD YOU ELABORATE ON THE EXTENT TO WHICH YOU FOCUS ON THESE YOUNG INDIVIDUALS' SOCIAL INTEGRATION AND EMPOWERMENT?

Our primary emphasis is always on promoting each child's autonomy, enabling them to lead independent lives. We tailor our approach based on the degree of autism exhibited by each student, recognizing that progress rates may vary. Our overarching goal is to prepare them for a future that acknowledges the challenges posed by the severity of their diagnosis.

TO WHAT EXTENT DO THE ACTIVITIES AT YOUR CENTER ALIGN WITH THESE YOUNG INDIVIDUALS' SPECIFIC NEEDS AND INTERESTS? ARE THESE NEEDS AND INTERESTS DETERMINED BEFORE OR DURING THESE ACTIVITIES?

Our professional team conducts a comprehensive assessment of students with severe cases, identifying their strengths and weaknesses. Following this assessment, we develop an intervention

Interview with professionals in the socio-educational field

plan, addressing three educational objectives through a dynamic, interdisciplinary approach that involves collaboration with families and the broader academic community.

IN YOUR EXPERIENCE, WHAT ARE THE CURRENT CHALLENGES THAT HINDER THE ACTIVE PARTICIPATION OF THESE YOUNG INDIVIDUALS IN SOCIETY?

Numerous obstacles impede their active participation. Bureaucratic processes and administrative delays, especially in the diagnosis phase, can significantly affect their early intervention and development.

Delaying accurate diagnoses until age three is not uncommon, representing a missed opportunity for early stimulation. Additionally, lengthy waiting lists are a common issue, often resulting from a shortage of resources and hindering timely access to essential services.

COULD YOU SHARE AN EXAMPLE OF AN ACTIVITY OR PROGRAM THAT ACTIVELY SUPPORTS, FACILITATES, AND ENCOURAGES THE PARTICIPATION OF YOUNG INDIVIDUALS AS ACTIVE CITIZENS IN THEIR COMMUNITY AND SOCIETY?

We organize outings to public places like botanical gardens and cinemas, enabling them to explore the environment and normative spaces they would only typically access with our support. Additionally, we inform families about existing organizations that can continue fostering inclusion after their school careers.

DO THE PRIORITY THEMES OF THE EU YOUTH STRATEGY, NAMELY "INCLUSION, SUSTAINABILITY, OR DIGITALIZATION," PLAY A ROLE IN YOUR WORK?

Digitalization is particularly significant as our students are highly attracted to new technologies and applications that aid communication, a skill they often need to improve. Technology helps reduce frustration levels for many of our pupils.

WHAT CONTRIBUTIONS ARE NEEDED FROM CURRENT POLICIES AT VARIOUS LEVELS (LOCAL, REGIONAL, OR NATIONAL) TO ENHANCE YOUTH WORK WITH YOUNG PEOPLE AT RISK OF SOCIAL EXCLUSION

In addition to funding for schools and non-governmental organizations working with individuals with disabilities, companies should receive support to create adapted job opportunities for this part of the population, which OFTEN goes overlooked

Question for Regional Politicians on Educational Inclusion

COULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR ROLE, YOUR OBJECTIVES, AND THE ACTIVITIES WITHIN YOUR ORGANIZATION?

I am a Special Education teacher. Over my career, I've worked with adolescents with mental health issues, primary school children at risk of social exclusion, and students with special educational needs due to disabilities or severe behavioral disorders. I serve as a Technical Teaching Advisor in the General Directorate for Educational Innovation and Inclusion of the Regional Ministry of Education. In this role, I oversee many procedures related to student profiles, some of which I am researching.

TO WHAT EXTENT DOES YOUR WORK FOCUS ON THE SOCIAL INTEGRATION AND EMPOWERMENT OF YOUNG PEOPLE?

Inclusion is a fundamental right for the most vulnerable members of our society and a collective obligation. As a teacher, we initiate inclusion efforts when diversity emerges within our educational centers. These differences among students serve as opportunities to impart values that promote youth empowerment, encourage social commitment, and foster participation, preparing them for their roles as active citizens in the future.

TO WHAT EXTENT DO THE ACTIVITIES CONDUCTED BY YOUR ORGANIZATION RESPOND TO THE DEMANDS OF YOUNG PEOPLE? ARE THEIR NEEDS AND INTERESTS DEFINED BEFORE OR DURING THESE ACTIVITIES?

To ensure inclusivity, we prioritize incorporating students' perspectives. While soliciting students' opinions is common practice in primary education and increasingly in secondary education, there remains room for further improvement.

IN YOUR EXPERIENCE, WHAT OBSTACLES LIMIT THESE YOUNG PEOPLE FROM ACTIVELY PARTICIPATING IN SOCIETY?

A lack of values and social commitment often hinders their active participation.

COULD YOU PROVIDE AN EXAMPLE OF AN ACTIVITY OR PROGRAM THAT EFFECTIVELY SUPPORTS, FACILITATES, AND ENCOURAGES THE PARTICIPATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE AS ACTIVE CITIZENS IN THEIR COMMUNITY AND SOCIETY?

Interview with professionals in the socio-educational field

I'll discuss activities primarily implemented in primary education, but they can adapt to secondary education with appropriate material and additional dynamics. These activities include daily mini-assemblies addressing situations that require student debate, weekly assemblies addressing complex recurring topics from daily gatherings, viewing and reflecting on short films related to socially relevant issues, storytelling to encourage reflection on specific social situations, fostering a group environment conducive to debate and consensus, utilizing innovative team-based methodologies, role-playing exercises to raise awareness of particular issues, awareness-raising activities on topics of social interest promoting inclusion and group cohesion, and finally, emotional education and social skills development.

DO THE PRIORITY THEMES OF THE EU YOUTH STRATEGY, NAMELY "INCLUSION, SUSTAINABILITY, OR DIGITALIZATION," PLAY A ROLE IN YOUR WORK?

Yes, these are indeed priority areas in our work.

WHAT CONTRIBUTIONS ARE NEEDED FROM CURRENT POLICIES AT VARIOUS LEVELS (LOCAL, REGIONAL, OR NATIONAL) TO ENHANCE YOUTH WORK WITH YOUNG PEOPLE AT RISK OF SOCIAL EXCLUSION?

While addressing the contributions needed from current policies falls outside my specific field of action, it is undeniably ESSENTIAL to address the abovementioned aspects starting from childhood in schools. Doing so can cultivate a more critical, reflective, empathetic, understanding, tolerant, and socially committed society, ultimately reducing the risk of social exclusion in future generations.