

4 Case study RO

Titel: “Social services evaluation”



Introduction

The aim of the micro project was to provide specialized educational services to representatives of public institutions and nongovernmental organizations that offer support services in the community for disadvantaged groups. The micro project consisted of 3 large activities: organizing the learning group (including dissemination of the project through local mass-media, informal meetings with representatives from the municipality; dissemination of the application form, identification of participant's profile), training programme (including training sessions on evaluation and monitoring of social services, presentation of the LEVEL5 system, development of micro projects - one for each person participating in the training, according with the social services that it provides, debate) and evaluation of the project (initial and final evaluation).

The micro project is related to informal learning through the training programme developed and implemented. The training programme was sustained by trainers authorized by the Ministry of Education and Labor from Romania, specialists in the field of adult education and in the social sector. The learning objectives of the programme were: (1) to know the importance of social services qualitative assessment, (2) to be able to use the evaluation system LEVEL5, (3) to know the differences between the system LEVEL5 and other evaluation models.

Setting

The project took place in Timisoara, Romania, at the end of October 2010. The target group included social workers, psychologists, directors that work in different public institutions or NGO's from Timis County, Timisoara and Lugoj. The total number of participants at the informal learning programme was 13. The participants came from 7 different organizations: Caritas Foundation – women's victims of domestic violence and sexual abuse shelter, Probation Service of the Timisoara court, Pensioners Home, Lugoj Community Social Assistance center, ARAS Timisoara, AJPS Timis, Timisoara 89' Foundation. The age range of the participants was 24-52; all of the beneficiaries were university graduates and were directly involved in the evaluation of the social services provided by the institution in which they were working.

Project Activities

The project envisaged helping specialists to evaluate the impact of the provided social services in order to increase the quality of the social sector from Timisoara and Lugoj. In this sense, an informal learning programme was developed from specialists working in the social field. The micro project consisted of 3 large activities: organizing the learning group, training

programme and evaluation of the project. Firstly, an official invitation was sent to the representatives of over 50 public institutions and nongovernmental organizations from Timis County. Information about the project was disseminated also through local mass-media. In this sense a press release was sent to over 25 media contacts, including television, newspapers and radio stations. Informal meetings with representatives from the municipality, different stockholders and other interested entities were organized in order to present the project idea and promote the informal learning programme. From the management point of view, registration documents were produced and sent using different asynchronous communication methods. The registration documents were published also on the APoWeR website. The forms received were analyzed by the trainers and other specialists in order to create the learning group. At the end 13 applicants were selected to participate in the informal learning programme and the profile of the participants was created. The course materials were prepared and the training methods were developed. The programme was structured in 3 sessions: evaluation and monitoring of social services, presentation of LEVEL5 system and development of micro-projects for each organization attending the training. The first sessions included a debate about the quality of the social services and the importance of evaluation, quality standards required by the Ministry, criteria for becoming an authorized institution and authorizing the services provided and about the differences of quality seen by the specialist and by the beneficiary. The second session focused on the presentation of the LEVEL5 system. The participants had the chance to learn more about the idea that fundament the system, the main characteristics of the system and the benefits applicable. A special attention was given to the steps of the evaluation procedure. The last session of the informal learning programme gave the participants the possibility to apply the evaluation system to their own organization. The evaluation of the project consisted of two stages – initial and final evaluation and followed the procedure presented by the LEVEL5 system.

Level 5 Evaluation Scheme Applied to the Project

The selected topics were: Knowledge about monitoring and evaluation (cognitive dimension), Self Confidence - evaluation of a social service (attitude related topic) and Creation of evaluation tools (activity related topic). The evaluation methods used consist of one evaluation questionnaire that was applied before and after the learning programme. The questionnaire was structured in 3 parts, according to the selected topics.

In order to evaluate the cognitive dimension, the questionnaire was structured in 8 questions including the specific characteristics of monitoring and evaluation, the differences between monitoring and evaluation, the definition of result evaluation, the methods of evaluating the competences achieved by the beneficiary at the end of the project, the steps of a beneficiary competence assessment, the need of evaluating the social services, the meaning of an effective and efficient social service, the main qualitative indicators in the social domain. In order to evaluate the attitude of participants towards their degree of confidence in evaluating the provided social service, the questionnaire included 5 questions with 5 response choices each. The activity related topic was evaluated through an open question about the procedure that each of them would follow in order to create an evaluation instrument.

The results of the evaluation were included in a final report and sent to all the participants.

6 Project Impact

At the beginning of the project, most of the participants were unsure about approaching about evaluation of social services. They had some knowledge about what evaluation and monitoring is, but didn't know which are the qualitative indicators of evaluation and how all their information and knowledge can be applied in their line of work. The participants have a certain confidence concerning their capacity to develop and apply an evaluation system and tried in the past to evaluate the services provided. After the informal learning programme the participants achieved the necessary information about evaluation and monitor and were able to create their own evaluation tools.

The project helped the specialists working in the social domain to be more confident in their own skills and knowledge and to use all this in order to evaluate the impact of the social services provided. In this way, the project had a great impact among the public institutions and non-governmental organizations from Timisoara and Lugoj.

Discussion & Perspectives

The system proved to be very useful in this case because emphasizes the concrete results on these dimensions. The programme helped the participants to adopt a systematic approach when planning the evaluation process. The programme gave also the participants the possibility to learn more about monitoring and evaluation, practice and effective models of evaluation of social services. The professionals working within the programme are more aware about the necessity of educating the specialists in the social field about evaluation and monitoring.