

CASE STUDY

Erasmus Plus
GUIDE + Good Guidance Stories Project¹
Rinova

“Improving IAG² practice
through effective
partnership working and
operating within networks”

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² Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG)s

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Abstract

This case study has been produced to support the continuing professional development of information, advice and guidance (IAG) practitioners, Career Advisers and Youth Workers who want to improve their competence, efficiency and performance. In particular, it is suited to those who are providing IAG in a non-formal setting. The story is particularly relevant to those working with young people and delivering innovative employability programmes. Within this context, the case study gives some background information of a youth-led employability programme in London.

Keywords: Information, Advice and Guidance, youth-led, innovative employability programmes, continuing professional development in the non-formal learning sector, inter-active and peer learning.

Definition of Partnership: within this context a partnership is two or more organisations that come together to form a delivery model that offers funders the breadth and depth of experience to tackle multiple and complex issues. Such partnerships are normally formed for the basis of contract delivery and disbanded once the contract has completed or grant fund completed.

Definition of Networks: within this context a network is a local area or thematic group of organisations and/or key stakeholders that share an aim to improve the inter-connection between key areas of work. It is common for Networks to exist and be maintained outside of contracting or funding, however will add-value to contract and service delivery.

Introduction

It is the second delivery quarter, of the second year, of a five year long youth-led employability programme. Leo, an IAG practitioner employed on the project, has just come out of a delivery team meeting. At that meeting it has been agreed that he takes the lead on improving the inter-referral of young people between partner organisations delivering on the project, so that project performance and impact for the young person is improved. He has also been asked to develop an innovative approach to how the organisation could better enable the young people being supported through the programme, to develop their own networks

The Background

Young people in the UK are nearly three times more likely to be unemployed than the rest of the population: 16-24-year-olds are three times as likely to be jobless. More than half of those unemployed feel anxious about everyday life situations with many claiming to avoid meeting new people. Nearly six out of ten unemployed young people polled said that anxiety has stopped them from asking for help, while 41% said it stopped them from leaving the house. This is according to a survey of 2,265 16-25-year-olds published in a report by youth charity, the Prince's Trust. It is also reported that the number of British young people living in poverty will reach 5 million by the end of the decade.

Young people with higher educational aspirations have greater motivation and higher education attainment than their peers, as do those whose parents hold higher educational aspirations for them (Gutman and Akerman, 2008b). Educational and career aspirations developed during adolescence can have lifelong significance, influencing future occupational outcomes. (Schoon and Parsons, 2002). The UK Government wants all young people to fulfil their potential, regardless of family background or the place where they live. However, educational attainment remains lower in deprived areas and is strongly associated with area deprivation.

In the UK, there are a number of Government employment schemes, some which are compulsory for those claiming Job Seekers Allowance. For 16-24-year-olds, compulsory and voluntary options include the Work Experience Programme, the Help to Work Scheme, the Work Programme, the 'Work for Your Benefit' scheme – the Mandatory Work Activity Scheme, the New Enterprise Allowance, and traineeships, for example. The Big Lottery Fund, the largest distributor of good causes money from the National Lottery, has also launched Talent Match, a national scheme designed by young people for young people, with the aim of helping those aged 18-24 who are 'hidden' from the mainstream and/or struggling to find the right support and career opportunities. Talent Match projects are led by a cross-sector partnership with the key focus on employers, particularly from the private sector. This is to ensure that it meets local needs and that young people are given opportunities to improve their circumstances and their life chances. Talent Match differs from government programmes in that young people need to be genuinely involved throughout the design and delivery of each approach to maximize impact.

Leo: the Information, Advice and Guidance Practitioner

Leo is an IAG practitioner with a career background in Youth Work³, which influences how he delivers Information Advice and Guidance (IAG) in his current role, which focuses on working with young people who are NEET (not in employment, education or training). For most of his working life, Leo has worked in the Third Sector⁴ and has provided IAG in a non-formal setting, through his work as a Youth Worker, and now through his work on a London-wide youth-led employability programme, namely Talent Match London⁵. Being youth-led, Leo has drawn upon the principles of his youth-work approach to design a unique employability programme along with a group of young people who are engaged on the project. Additionally, Leo has included the project's 'Youth Board' in the design of the programme, as the Board has been established to steer and guide the project's delivery; ensuring that it remains youth-led.

Unlike almost all other employability programmes for young people, young people, in partnership with employers and the Third Sector, have designed Talent Match London. Further, the programme is not delivered through a 'payment by results' model, and encourages inter-referral between partners to ensure that the young people being supported gain access to a wide range of support, wrap-around support, and progressions that the project partnership offers. It has a genuine focus on enabling and empowering young people who face the biggest barriers to have more and better opportunities to get into sustainable jobs and careers. Essentially, this youth-led programme has been designed to provide not only the skills, but the confidence, resilience, networks, and the sustained backing that young people might need as they set out to navigate fulfilling career pathways.

Situation No 1: Partnership Working & Co-delivery Networks

Leo is passionate about helping young people access the very best support that will give them the chance to improve their life. He feels his background in Youth Work and his recent professional development as a Life Coach provides a refreshing and innovative approach to his IAG practice; fundamentally, he believes this will help the young people he supports take ownership of their 'Journey of Change'. Leo is committed to partnership working as he feels that this is the most effective way of getting good results for young people, especially those that are most vulnerable. However, Leo is finding that the legacy of 'payment by results' contracts is that partner organisations are reluctant to co-deliver on projects and fear losing their young person to another organisation. Leo says, "A number of the young people I support live complex lives, therefore, the support that they need cannot be provided by one organization. This is why we

need to work in partnership, especially so that young people can get the wrap-around support that they need, and be referred to organisations that can help them gain new skills and access to jobs – but this needs to happen in a seamless way. I spend a long time building a trust relationship with the young people I work with. So, when young people put their trust in me, I need to be sure that I am supporting each young person through their key transitions. I can only do that if I know who I am referring the young person to, and I have confidence in their service. How am I to do that if the organisation won't fully cooperate in co-delivery or participate in the inter-referral process? I find most take a short-sighted approach to supporting young people – most live chaotic lives, so the most we can do for them is to provide structure in our support."

³ Definition of Youth Work: defined as activities that intentionally seek to impact on young people through youth participation and empowerment.

⁴ Third Sector: the Voluntary and Community Sector including Charities, Social Enterprises and Community Interest Companies

⁵ Talent Match London is a Big Lottery Funded project led by London Youth

At one networking event, Leo took opportunity to speak with those who could provide the specialist support needed i.e. self-employment, however, found that the “service offer” was insufficiently flexible.

Linked to the above, Leo has experienced a number of situations where collaborative working and/or joint-delivery between partners would have added significant value to the project, and better outcomes for the young person. “I’ve been working with a number of young people who see self-employment as their opportunity to earn money and do what they love to do, however, right now, it would be best if we could have the specialist providers deliver on site, rather than have them go off to somewhere unfamiliar; which we know in London can be difficult due to ‘post code wars’ among gangs.

Comments and Discussion Topics

Talent Match London is not a ‘payment by results’ project, which is encouraging to Leo as he sees many opportunities resulting from this ‘fresh’ approach. So, Leo has attended several networking meetings organized by the Talent Match London project lead organisation. These events were designed to help facilitate the exchange of effective practice across the partnership. Additionally, encourage inter-referral and collaboration between partners.

At these events, Leo has used his own networking skills to establish links with those who he thought might prove to be good contacts within the partnership, including some specialist providers, and has been to an employer networking event, again hosted by the lead organisation.

Despite Leo’s best efforts to explore co-delivery with partners and encourage inter-referral of young people engaged on the programme, he has found the results have been disappointing.

Situation No 2: Helping Young People Develop Networks

Jamal is a participant engaged on the Talent Match London programme. He has been working with his IAG Adviser (Leo) for 12-months now, and has overcome some major barriers to get where he is today – ready for the world of work! His 'Journey of Change' has included exploring his personal goals and ambitions, particularly focusing on his untapped creative skills as an independent filmmaker. However, Jamal realises now that whilst new technologies and the low-cost of equipment and software means that low-budget film-making is more 'accessible', and that the Internet and social media provides a good platform for promoting his work, he needs to be better networked into the sector, and with some key people within the industry – Jamal says, "Basically, I need to know the right people, and to get the break that I need, I need to make sure that I can be in the right place at the right time. Problem is, I'm not used to moving in those kinds of circles – they're not the places that I normally do business – if you know what I mean. I need to be equipped with the knowledge and the know-how to go to those events and gatherings and make the right connections."

Leo, as his IAG Adviser, is finding that his IAG role is emerging into more of a 'Job Broker' role – simply, as the young people he supports just want to work, but don't have the work-based skills or experience to sustain employment.

So, Jamal and Leo have concluded that a practical solution is to take the issue of 'networking' to the Youth Board so that the matter can be explored and possible solutions come up with.

The major conclusion resulting from the meeting with the Youth Board was as follows: "It's true, there's a gap in the 'employability' service offer – basically, we (young people) need to be better networked into the world of work, which means we need opportunities to network with employers and key people. Most of us know how to get networked through social media, which is one thing, but when it comes to networking in a professional environment (an event for example), most of us would freeze. So, we need to know more about how to build our own professional/ employer networks and be effective at networking."

Comments and Discussion Topics

Leo is keen to explore how partners delivering on Talent Match London can effectively work together to explore and develop opportunities for young people, which includes, getting access to specialist support, industry connections, and to employers. However, as previously identified, this has proven challenging. Leo says, "It's understandable that individual partners focus on their own delivery, they've got targets and milestones to meet. However, just think how much more powerful the project would be if more of them operated in a more collaborative and collegial way."

So, as a result of meeting with the Youth Board, Jamal and Leo concluded that it would appear that there are opportunities to be explored on three levels:

- (i) What can the lead partner do to improve partnership working and/or tackle the need for young people to be better networked?
- (ii) How can the inter-referral process between partners be improved?
- (iii) What can be done to improve the networking capabilities of the young people on the programme – "Without it being too false or boring", says Jamal.

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