

SOLIDARITY TRACKS



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MAGAZIN FREEPASS

*For rediscovering,
empowering & enhance
the path to soft skills*





This magazine has been made during the Training Course “FREE PaSS For rediscovering, empowering and enhancing the path to soft skills” held by Solidarity Tracks organization through Erasmus + program.

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with Pierre**

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Editorial

From 18th to 30th of November 2014, a group of 34 Youth workers, mentors, supervisors and project managers engaged in non formal education and stemming from different countries from the European Union Eastern Europe and Caucasus met at Lefkas and took part in the Training Course "FREE PaSS For rediscovering, empowering & enhancing the path to soft skills". There were 11 intense days of seminar combining workshops, speeches of experts, cultural exchange and leisure time. The aim of this training was to exchange methods on how to follow and evaluate soft skills developed during non formal activities. As a result of our stay at Lefkas, we created an on-line pedagogical tool comprising multiples games and useful information aimed to develop soft skills with young people. In this magazine we tried to show our experience from Lefkas, explaining day by day our amazing time on this beautiful Island.

Participant's Diary

Day 1

The first day was full of practical information, rules and details that are very important for every project. Project coordinators organized several games for name remembering. As we were a quite big group, we spent almost the first half of day for getting to know each other with «icebreakers», team-building methods and other activities.

During the first day, we were informed about the 8 most important competences which should be improved during a learning process, and are also very important for youth pass creation.

Those are:

- 1) Communication in the mother tongue
- 2) Communication in foreign languages
- 3) Mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology
- 4) Digital competence
- 5) Learning to learn
- 6) Social and civic competences
- 7) Sense of initiative and entrepreneurship
- 8) Cultural awareness and expression

Every participant also had the possibility to present our sending organization with a few words, and at the same time we used to describe soft skills used in our own NGOs, activities and community life. After these presentations, everybody got interested and took part in the sharing process. After the first part of daily activity, we were able to invite a guest speaker (Viki Xirou), who lead training and workshop about soft skills, discovering and empowering them. Divided into small working groups, we discovered many common skills between us and our communities.

INTERCULTURAL NIGHT

Our international project had participants from 14 countries - so, what would be more beautiful than traveling around the world in one night? That's how we had the chance to know more about every culture - by "traveling" to each country. The intercultural night was one of the first informal group's meetings.

It was the night when we could dive into every country's culture by trying typical foods and drinks, as well as learning traditional dances.

The team of Moldova, Ukraine and Armenia impressed us with their traditional costumes, which made the atmosphere of our event even more special and got us into their culture.

Everyone involved in this project attended this event and as it was required to bring our best mood, we all enjoyed the activities and multinational food. We also were honored to have special guests from Solidarity Tracks and local people from Lefkada Municipality.

We are grateful for volunteer's work in organizing such a nice event!

Day 2

Our second day of the training course “Soft Skills” started with an amazingly funny laughter therapy provided by unpredictable Pierre, our participant from France. None of us was familiar with laughter therapy.

The presentation part was full of new information about other organizations and quite aroused our interest to find out about different methods of developing soft skills. It was an amazing experience, because if people share their experience it always opens new perspectives and the new ideas are popping up.

In the afternoon we continued our training course with Viki and a workshop in order to find out how our behavior describes some of our soft skills. Another memorable game of the day was about emotions shown by mimics and body language. It wasn't easy to guess right just like we cannot guess it in everyday situations.

Then we finished the day by assessing our achievements through writing down our feedback. We used a method where we painted our hand on a sheet of paper. Doing so we could give our impressions of the day on a scale from positive to negative.

We thank our cool, open-minded, active and friendly participants for their positive mood and motivation to work all together!

Day 5

The day started with a laughter session, which for many participants was a new kind of activity that aims at mobilizing the positive energy, refreshing one's mind and body and creating a good mood and preparing one's self for working. The laughter session was followed by the online workshop on “The effectiveness of personality tests for awareness of young people to improve their soft skills”. We were given some practical tools of self-assessment and peer assessment in the form of tests and some techniques on how to use them.

Another interesting and informative activity was the “World Cafe”. The aim of the activity was to provide the participants with useful information about EVS, Erasmus+ and types of trainings. The activity was in the type of interactive table discussions. During the discussions all of us shared our experiences in the above mentioned topics, got information and found the answers to our questions.

The second half of the day was interesting, important and active as well. We had a cultural activity while getting at the magical waterfalls and the beach at Nidri. It was a great opportunity to share, reflect, communicate and explore a different land, making a pause from the out of training room environment.

We were represented an innovative initiative regarding to ‘ecological’ concepts. We were taken to a wonderful place to see the “eco house” built by youth members, equipped with a solar system and bio gas production aimed for cooking in the kitchen as well as for growing a garden of fruits and vegetables. The way of making the house of clay, straw, water etc. was described in detail and attracted participants' attention. The project was aimed at building a youth eco hostel to promote the eco concept amongst people: Buildings of the sort are considered more efficient and healthy.

The day was concluded with a presentation on Solidarity Tracks' functions and structure, as well as working mechanisms and directions. Staff members and the volunteering team provided information on training courses, environmental education, green o'clock, time bank, orange radio net, as well as the youth e-club and the e-learning platform.

Day 6

We started this day with our positive and funny friend Pierre doing the Laughter therapy. Getting back to our training room we evaluated our previous day. Afterwards we had one of the nicest and most educative activities till then. We discussed about entrepreneurship. Some of us shared our own personal experience as entrepreneurs. We made simulations of jobs interviews. We discussed about the necessary soft skills for the applicants and recruiters for different jobs and situations. We found out that for the applicants it is very important to know that “the interview starts before the interview”. It means you must know what you apply for in order to adapt your CV and motivation letter according to the specifications (requirements) of that job. The hard skills are very important but we need to know about our strengths and soft skills when applying for a job. For the applicant, it is very important to show a vivid interest in the company where he/she applies. There are certain rules that the recruiters should follow, like giving clear information about the company, the position the applicant applies for, be comprehensive....During this activity of sharing our experiences and skills, we could analyze and write down the soft skills that we normally need for a job interview.

After the lunch we had another very important session about certification of soft skills. Different organizations and companies have different certification systems. Some of participants shared about the certification system they use in their NGO or company. Then we discussed about Youthpass, what it is, where we can find it and how we can fill it.

«Webinar» about europass CV followed the Youthpass session. The trainer explained the detailed structure of europass CV and its objectives. We tried to understand the advantages of europass format, but also how to develop it and the instructions of filling it. Our team tried to see some other ways of promoting ourselves. This effort included all the possible IC programs that could help us to develop a creative and impressive CV. There were given various examples by the participants themselves.

The end of that day was very important, because we did the middle evaluation of the training. It would be very hard to do it if we didn't have the very nice graphics about all our activities on the wall. All these creative and colorful graphics showed how we were softly developing our skills day by day, and how many activities were realized by us all.

We should mention that between our sessions we had very nice “energizers” to get energy to get back to work.

At the end we would like to say Thanks to our readers, organizers, everyone involved in this project and the people of this nice Ionian Island for making our days there perfect.



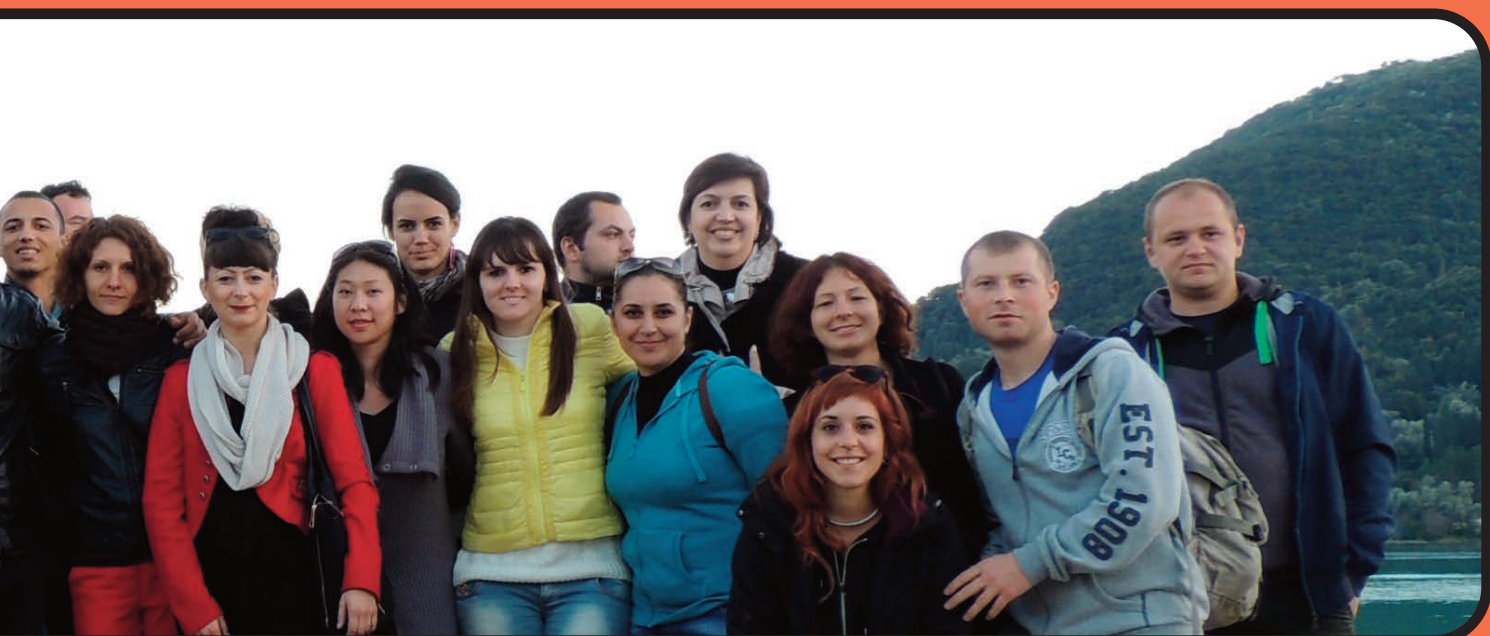
Day 7

The seventh day was full of different activities. As was customary the day started with Pierre and the laughing session, where all participants could put up their mood and then we went on to do some “energizer” in order to start a productive day.

Right after this activity, we all had to work on developing new form of certification methods. So the whole group was divided into 5 groups. Every group should try to brainstorm and create a new method of certification and, subsequently, ought to present to all. The first group suggested the creation of an online page titled «Skill confirmation». The idea about this method is that there is an on-line page with all necessary information about each particular participant and the other participants the project can visit this page and rate the skills of him/hers. The second group proposed a variety of methods could be such as video report, online test, “spy in the group”, “product”, and “portfolio”. The video report contains a short, but concentrated report of main activities of the day/week (if it is a long project). Online test is about the topic of the project. “Spy” is the role of person who observes the participants so he/she can draw up a report about everything that happened inside the group. “Product” depends on the topic of the project. It might be something useful which can represent the topic of the project. The main idea about “portfolio” is that each participant will have an online page with his/her own portfolio. The third group thought up created the “Participant Soft Skill Certificate”, where one can check and define their soft skills by themselves, or through team, trainer, work and friends contacts by online test. The fourth group proposed to create a Soft Skill commission. The fifth group suggested to develop Soft Skills through observation.

Afterwards, we were involved into team-building games, where everyone could feel the power of the team. The main point of this game was to see how participants could work with close eyes and without talking to each other and if we would be able to build the line from 1 to 15. The second task was to build the group in alphabetical order. After this game, we were as motivated as a real team building could be and could understand each other with closed eyes and without words.

The second part of the day, we played the game “Elena and Giannis”. The main idea of this game was to show that there is no right answer, as everyone made decisions based on their values and beliefs. First, you have to put your own priorities and then to make a group decision, which was not easy at all. Subsequent to this, everyone had a group discussion, where each of participants tried to convince each other. As a result, everyone understood how great the game for developing soft skills in real world and life is.



Day 8

On the eighth day of the training course, we started with the “Electroshock energizer” that excited us and put us in a very productive mode. Being prepared enough from the previous days, we began working on the group task of developing, monitoring and evaluating the youngster’s soft skills developed through non-formal educational activities.

While developing our tool, we had some core questions to point out: What will be the content of the tool? How will it look like? Why will we use it? Where will it be available and why do we need it? After intense group discussions, we designed 4 different tools: The first was named “ Soft Skill Box” - a multiplying tool based on games dedicated on each softs skills category; Second was an online individual game to train access and evaluate personal soft skills ; “The idea of the “Follow up” tool was to reflect and evaluate the knowledge acquired during formal and non-formal educational trainings; “Soft Skills platform” is a web-based tool, where everybody can find filtered information about what the soft skills are, how we can develop them in the variable/context of working with youth. After these debates, the last tool was planned to be accomplished during the next days of the training course “FREE PaSS For rediscovering, empowering & enhancing the path to soft skills”.

After lunch, we had some time to discover this magnificent island, even though the weather was cloudy; Some groups went round the shops in the city; the monastery on the outskirts of the city; some other were lucky to reach the nearby beaches; some of us tried to review their work for the organizations they represent. All of us enjoyed the beautiful landscape.

Day 9

On that day, we woke up and it was rainy. After a very tasty breakfast, we went to the working place. (Almost) everybody was fresh and relaxed after the Wednesday’s free afternoon.

The first activity of the day was a fancy “energizer”; when everybody tried to do as if they were an elephant, mixer, toast, James Bond, Marilyn Monroe, Charlie’s Angels, washing machine, etc. After this activity, everybody got recharged and was ready to start their daily task.

During the day, the participants worked out at least 30 tools related the 5 Soft Skills that we defined on the previous days. In the first session the 6 groups created games, activities and exercises related to the communication, interpersonal, decision making and lifelong learning skills. In despite of the too relaxed participants, there were created many good and surprising tools. We asked the groups what they thought about the group dynamics, and everybody felt it easier to work together day-by-day. The members of the group got closer to each other, so the cooperation was more produc-tive than on the other days.

In the afternoon, we started with an aggressive “energizer” that was related with the topic. It was very funny, and everybody liked it a lot. After this, the groups created two more tools bearing on the multiple skills.



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Sharing Categories
Protognoro
Soft Hohoho Tired
Playful methods Laughing
Emotional
Games
Formal Skills
Drawing Long Organization
Funky Wonderful

Laughter therapy with Pierre

Pierre was one of our French participants, a rigologist with a great sense of humor. He is a professional in using laughter as a therapy for overcoming the pain and the bad mood. Every morning, Pierre prepared for us a laughing session and these are our impressions:

“It is a very unique and useful way of exercising both your body and mind”

“We could increase our mood and do some “energizer” in order to start a productive day”

“It is a perfect method and we all recharged ourselves with positive emotions”

“It’s a new kind of activity that aims at getting the positive energy, refreshing your mind and body and creating a good mood and preparing yourself for working”



Interviews

I come from Poland and I'm the President of "International Support Center for Youth and Adults". In our organization, the main goal is the integration of children and youth with disability and the parents of these disabled youngsters in the local and international level. We have had a lot of projects concerning EVS, and now we are preparing to host four volunteers in two local organizations. We act as an umbrella for other organizations at Warsaw, and we cooperate with some organizations which take care about deaf and hard-of-hearing people. We are open to create new projects; we cooperate with many countries from the European Union and the partner countries, and we have sent a lot of participants (healthy and disabled) to take part in international activities.



Dorota Anna Milke

-Which do you think is the most important aspect to focus on, when you work with disabled people?

The most important to me is that healthy people can really learn a lot from other people's disabilities, definitely more than what the disabled can learn from the health, because the opportunity appears not so often for healthy people to meet, talk, and be and recognize the needs and treasures of disability persons. To my mind, the disabled are a little different. In their emotional life, they are sometimes more open, truer. That's when a lot of people can learn frankly, really a lot. Normally, just take the results of our projects: at the end, when we did the evaluation, a lot of healthy people said that it was the most important experience to be with deaf, because they could learn a lot about themselves. Yes, they learned about disabilities, of course, but they also learned a lot about themselves. So, this is a big opportunity for the whole society. I think it's very important not just to talk during the international activities about disability, but to be with them, too. That's a non-formal pattern to be educated about them.

-Why do you think this kind of trainings about soft skills might be interesting for those working in your activities?

I think soft skills are so common and it is so obvious that we all have them, that we don't think seriously about them, like 'It's OK, I'm just like this' but, for example, the disabled people sometimes haven't got good hard skills, because it's not possible for them, and participating in a training course of the sort is the only way that they can develop their soft skills. A lot of our rehabilitation activities are concerned only with soft skills, because they lead in the small associations and, for example, it's very difficult for them to show empathy, or to try to teach other people empathy for the disabilities. For example, we work on ways of deaf communication, because communication to them is of basic importance, and they lack it. We're still thinking about verbal communication like the only conceivable of communication way, but for them verbal communication is not the only one, because they can still communicate with other ways That's why soft skills are to me a vast field to discover and develop ourselves.

We had the opportunity to speak, to achieve new skills by playing games and to interact with one psychologist, Vicky Xirou who is also a Vocational Guidance Counselor and Adult Educator, working at the General Secretariat of Equality in a Counseling Centre against Violence on Women. We talked with her about Soft Skills.

-Could you give your own definition of Soft Skills.

There are many definitions. In my opinion, Soft Skills are behaviors connected with social and emotional skills that a person has to possess in order to lead a better personal and professional life.

-What are the differences between Soft Skills and Hard Skills?

Hard Skills are the technical skills, the knowledge of doing something. For example, if you study Computer Science you know how to program something and you practice these skills in your work.

Soft Skills express your personal attitude, your emotional and social skills.

-Can lacking of such skills generate problems to the most of the people?

Communicational skills are very important in working experience and in our personal, daily life. Moreover, it's necessary for a professional to be able to cooperate with anybody, because team-building is a key of success at work.

-How can we improve our Soft Skills?

Firstly, we have to look in ourselves, to recognize what are our weakness and our strengths. Then depending on where we want to express our soft skills (work or personal life, but I believe that both are connected) we must try to have experiences, to participate in trainings, by mentoring and/or coaching so as to develop our skills. We need to have chance of/for experience.



Viki Xirou





Credits

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Solidarity Tracks

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Erasmus+