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Project EmPoWering – Educational Path for Emotional Wellbeing

Short Report Output 1 - Innovative Emotional well-being Initiatives towards a mindset change

Which training opportunities for listening skills already exist in Europe? Before developing a new training for listening skills within the EmPoWering project, we wanted to learn about existing training opportunities. The initial project phase (leading to the development of Output 1 – Emotional Well-being Initiatives Toward a Mindset Change) was therefore conducted to identify emotional well-being models, training opportunities and needs, and to carry out a comparative analysis between the needs and the existing trainings to create a picture of what is going on in Europe in the field of emotional well-being.

The overview on emotional well-being initiatives took part in four steps.

First, we started with a mapping of knowledge in order to identify initiatives of emotional support and well-being that already provide training in listening skills. This resulted in an inventory of 256 different adults' educational opportunities, which offer training in emotional support, listening skills, suicide prevention, and other emergency services.

As a second step, we wanted to learn in detail about the existing training opportunities. We therefore developed an online survey and assessed how different organizations conduct their training and what elements are included. Between April and June 2016, a total of 92 organizations answered our survey. Most of these organizations were located in the four partner countries Germany (33%), the Netherlands (11%), Hungary (27%), and Italy (11%). The majority of these organizations were TES – Telephone Emergency Services (72%), but there were also other helplines (6%), non-governmental organizations (9%), governmental organizations (2%), and other organizations (11%) such as scientific, charitable, and business organizations present within our sample. The results showed that all organizations emphasized listening skills in their trainings and devoted a mean percentage of 50.9% of training time to these skills. The organizations provided trainings between 40 and more than 120 hours of training time, spread in time frames between 4 months and up to 2 years. Various training elements were important in the organizations' trainings, such as knowledge on psychological crisis and mental disorders, communication theories, mourning, and suicidal crisis. Skills were mostly taught via role-play, work in small groups, and telephone practice. The trainings from the organizations covered a broad range of theoretical foundations, of which humanist/client-centered and crisis intervention were most important. Only about half of the trainings provided were accredited. For all of these results there were only minor differences between TES and non-TES organizations.

Thirdly, we conducted another online survey to understand whether the trainings provided by different organizations actually fit with the trainings needs of participants (“training



needs analysis”). This enabled us to learn from both volunteers and professionals in different settings what they consider important elements of a good listener and to establish training needs to improve listening skills. For the training needs analysis we contacted potential participants via mailing lists, TES posts, and non-TES organizations.

More than 200 participants were recruited at various participatory events in the four partner countries. Between April and June 2016, a total of 790 participants (719 TES, 71 non-TES) responded to the online survey. The majority of participants were German (44%), other participants were from the Netherlands (15%), Hungary (13%), Italy (21%), and other countries such as France, Belgium, Switzerland, Austria, Finland, or Norway (together 7%). The mean age of participants was 56 years and most of them were female (76%). We showed the participants a list of forty skills or characteristics and asked them to rate their importance when training to become a good listener. The results demonstrated that six skills and characteristics were ranked as the most important ones: Empathy, Emotional Stability, Respect, Acceptance, Active Listening, and Leading Conversations. Similar to the survey on existing training opportunities, we further asked the participants of the trainings needs analysis about the training characteristics they consider as optimal for the training of a good listener.

As a fourth and last step of the initial project phase, we performed a comparative analysis to match the results of the previous steps and to reach conclusions with regard to the next phases of the project. Altogether, the answers of participants from the training needs analysis were vastly similar to the information given by the organizations on their existing training opportunities.

We therefore decided to develop a training according to the information obtained. For example, we decided to include a significant amount of small-group-work as well as telephone and face-to-face practice into our training, since these methods were considered the most important ones by all survey participants.

Furthermore, the listening skills were used as a basis for the development of the content of our training in the second project phase. Since Acceptance and Respect are highly overlapping constructs, we condensed them into one characteristic. To strengthen the training of specific skills and to provide listeners with more practical tools, we added Resource Activation as a topic to our training program based on empirical and theoretical considerations. The final listening skills that were chosen to be addressed by our training were: Empathy, Emotional Stability, Respect/Acceptance, Active Listening, Leading Conversations, and Resource Activation.

listening skills:

1. Empathy
2. Emotional Stability
3. Respect/Acceptance
4. Active Listening
5. Leading Conversations
6. Ressource Activation