



**The "Rubberball" Peer Educator
Training Project**
at Pro-tukipiste (Prostitute
Counselling Center) of Helsinki

Summary

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PRO·tukipiste

Introduction

Pro-tukipiste organized a peer educator (PE) training project during the spring of 2006. The project was a part of the Aura – Aypa project, which was a three year partnership project with A-klinikkasäätiö (A- Clinic Foundation) aimed at developing peer work and services for drug users. The target group of the Aura – Aypa project was the Russian speaking minority in Finland.

During the Rubberball¹ PE training project we trained eight women who were working as prostitutes. All the PE trainees were Russian speaking women, who were either living in Helsinki or staying in Helsinki with a tourist visa. The five training sessions provided information about themes connected to sex work and drug and alcohol abuse. After the training phase the peer educators “returned” to their “communities” and shared the information they learned during the training. Each peer educator interviewed from three to four prostitute women from their community using questionnaires gathering information connected with the themes from the training sessions. After the field phase the peer educators took part in an evaluation session and returned the filled questionnaires to Pro-tukipiste. The data from the interviews was then analyzed and the results were reported along with the evaluation of the project.

1. Planning the PE training project

The idea of organizing PE training for the clients of Pro-tukipiste had existed long before the actual planning period of the Rubberball project took place. Pro-tukipiste had gathered information concerning various possibilities in organizing peer work. The idea and concept of peer work is internationally well known and various training programs and projects have been carried out since the 1980’s. There is a vast amount of information available about peer work and it is highly recommendable that you explore all the possibilities before the actual planning of the PE training takes place.

The Rubberball PE training project followed the method of “Snowball programme” (Goosdeel, Hariga, Theys 1999). The snowball method was moderated to suite the needs of the clients of Pro-tukipiste. In Finland the A-Clinic Foundation had used the snowball method in PE training programmes for drug users and had good experiences and practical knowledge about the method. Based on the gathered information about peer work and the knowledge about the target group, Pro-tukipiste decided to carry out a training project including five training sessions, field phase and an evaluation session.

When planning a PE training you must first choose the target group: who are the people that you want to reach? Different kinds of peer educators reach different groups from the field. During the planning of the PE training project it is important to have updated information about the needs of the target group: what kind of information should the training sessions provide? You must consider which are the main problems and interests of the target group, and plan the training sessions so that the PE’s get information about topics which are relevant to them. That’s why it is significant to discuss with the target group about the needs for training during the planning phase. During the planning you must also determine the information you want to gather from the field by the

¹ The name “Rubberball” was chosen to the PE training project because the project was based on the snowball method (Goosdeel, Hariga, Theys 1999) and an essential part of the training was education on safe sex issues (word rubber refers to condoms).

interviews. The information the PE's gather from the field must be the kind of which benefits well being of the target group. The organizers also need to be open about the purposes the gathered information is used for.

After gathering information about the needs for training, you must consider who the instructors for the training sessions could be. In the Rubberball PE training we had different kinds of experts giving lessons to the trainees. For example the "Pregnancy and contraceptives" training session was held by a gynaecologist and the instructor for the "Drugs and alcohol" training was a doctor specialized in intoxicants. After deciding and contacting the instructors it is wise to have a discussion about the ideology of peer work and the meaning of the training with them. The instructors should get a clear idea what kind of information their lesson should contain. Also the concept of interactive training should be made clear to the instructors.

The employees working in the PE training project should also discuss their views and the objectives of peer work. The employees need to have a clear comprehension about the idea of peer work. The employees working in the PE training project should consider the PE trainees as their co-workers: the peer educators are able to reach the hard to reach groups, to whom the service providers would otherwise have no contact. The peer educators convey the knowledge about safe sex and other important issues to the field, as well as they provide information about the services available. After the field phase (and during the training) the PE's convey information also from the field to the service providers.

2. Recruitment

The recruitment of the trainees started about a month before the training took place. Pro-tukipiste had employed two Russian speaking employees for the Aura - Aypa project. During the planning period of the training the project workers took part in the basic work of Pro-tukipiste working in the drop-in services and doing outreach work in the streets and bars. Besides the project workers being already familiar with the clients, they also shared the same cultural background and native language with the target group. It was crucial for a successful recruitment that the project workers had obtained the trust of the target group before they started recruiting the trainees.

The recruitment was carried out along with outreach work and the drop-in services at Pro-tukipiste. The project workers provided information about the training and peer work and motivated the clients to take part in the project. There were also leaflets with information about the training. The registration to the training was carried out anonymously – the recruited clients registered using a pseudonym. Total of fifteen women registered to the training, but the final number of participants was eight. According to our experience it is wise to recruit a bit more potential trainees than you expect to take part in the training, because it's likely that everyone is not able to participate after all.

3. Training

The training period was carried out in four weeks. The trainees participated in training sessions once or twice a week. The sessions were held on weekdays and started at three o'clock in the afternoon. The time of day the trainings took place was decided after conversations with the recruited trainees. It is important that the training is held at a time of day which is convenient for the

trainees. Each session lasted about three hours, including a dinner and a coffee break. The training took place in the same premises as where the drop-in services of Pro-tukipiste are offered.

It is important that the training is executed in the native language of the trainees. In the Rubberball project the training sessions were either carried out in Russian or translated into Russian. Because all the employees participating in the training sessions couldn't speak or understand Russian, the interpreter translated the speech also from Russian into Finnish.

The atmosphere of the training sessions should be safe and intimate. The PE trainees should feel safe to speak openly about their experiences and be sure that the confidentiality is guaranteed. The number of the participants is best to be kept quite low. The recommendable number of trainees is between 8 and 12 (Goosdeel, Hariga, Theys 1999, 24).

The training sessions started with a dinner in which the trainees as well as all the employees and the day's instructor participated. An assessment of knowledge concerning the day's topic was carried out using a questionnaire which the trainees filled before the training. After the dinner there was a short introduction to the day's topic held by the project's main trainer. The actual lesson lasted about an hour. After the lesson there was time for discussion and questions.

The topics of the five training sessions:

- 1. Safe sex and sexually transmitted diseases**
- 2. Pregnancy and contraceptive methods**
- 3. Relaxation and well being**
- 4. Legislation and Finnish society**
- 5. Drugs and alcohol**

Besides the topics mentioned above, the training sessions included information about peer work and the interviews the peer educators were intended to make during the field phase. It would be a good idea to have you training session devoted solely to interview techniques, the idea of peer work and discussion about the field phase. This would ensure that all the interviews are made in the same way and that the PE's have a distinct idea about the whole concept of peer work.

The trainees were encouraged to actively participate in the training and to ask questions and share their experiences. The ideology of the PE training emphasizes the sharing of the experiences of the trainees as an important part of the training sessions. The trainees have a vast amount of practical knowledge concerning issues dealt in the training, and it's significant that they can share it with the other trainees as well as with the project workers.

4. The field phase

The field phase begins after the trainings are over and the peer educators "return" to their communities equipped with updated information and the questionnaires for interviews. In the Rubberball PE training project the field phase lasted a month. During the field phase each of the peer educators did three to four interviews. The questionnaires were nine pages long, including the questions, empty spaces for writing the answers and some instructions for the peer educator. There were about three to four questions about each topic from the training sessions. The interviews were made anonymously.

During the interviews the peer educator asks the questions and writes down the answers. The PE and the interviewee discuss the topics and the PE provides updated information about each topic to the interviewee. The PE also gives information about the services available and hands out various leaflets. In the Rubberball PE training project the PE's handed out leaflets from TAMPEP² project and some other materials. The PE's can also hand out free condoms to the interviewees to encourage them to participate in the interviews.

The interviews are relatively casual situations and often take place in homes or in cafés. The interviewees are usually friends of the PE's. The familiarity between the PE and the interviewee can cause multiple effects: on the other hand it can help to obtain the trust of the interviewee, but on the other hand it could threaten the anonymity of the interviewee. Thus, during the training, it is significant to emphasize the confidentiality of the interviews to the peer educators.

5. Session for evaluation

It is important to evaluate the project and to hear the views of the PE's as well as the employees working in the project. After the field phase the peer educators participate in an evaluation session. In the Rubberball PE training project's evaluation session the peer educators participated in a group discussion concerning the whole project. They also filled evaluation questionnaires. It is necessary to have an evaluation session also for the employees working in the project.

In the group discussion the PE's get a possibility to share their experiences as peer educators. For the service providers the evaluation session is a chance to hear what is going on in the field and what kind of things should be considered when organizing the following PE trainings.

The session for evaluation is also the occasion when the PE's return the filled questionnaires. In the Rubberball PE training the evaluation session was also an occasion when the PE's received diplomas for participation in the trainings and for working as peer educators. We also wanted to thank and reward the PE's with small gifts and gift vouchers. It is important that the peer educators are aware that their work is appreciated.

6. Gathering and analyzing data

The final phase of the PE training project is the gathering and analyzing the data. The project produces a great amount of data from the interviews and the evaluation discussions and questionnaires. It might be a good idea to have an employee who is able to concentrate mainly in the evaluation and analysis of the data. Reporting the results from the interviews as well as the evaluation of the project enables the development of following PE trainings. Reported information from the PE's and from the field also helps to develop better services for the target group.

Keep in mind when organizing peer educator trainings:

² TAMPEP = Transnational AIDS/ STD Prevention among Migrant Prostitutes in Europe / Project. Leaflets provide information about STD's and contraceptive methods.

Planning

- Plan the training with care in order to meet the needs of the target group.
- Consider the social and political circumstances which can affect the state of affairs among the target group.
- Gather information concerning the needs for training: what issues are relevant for the target group's well being?
- The trainers should be experts on the topics of the training sessions.
- Discuss the concept of peer work and PE training with the employees working in the project and with the trainers.
- Consider the role the trained PE's will have in your organization after the project.

Recruitment

- Successful recruitment is essential for the whole PE training project.
- The recruited trainees need to be part of the project's target group (e.g. same age group, same ethnical background).
- During recruitment the employees need to motivate potential trainees and gain trust of the target group.
- The recruitment is made anonymously; recruits can use a pseudonym.

Training sessions

- Keep the number of the PE trainees low: a group of 8 – 12 trainees is recommended.
- The atmosphere of the training sessions should be safe and intimate; confidentiality needs to be guaranteed.
- Prior to each training session, carry out an assessment of knowledge concerning the day's topic using a questionnaire.
- The trainings are interactive occasions: encourage the trainees to actively participate and share their expertise and experiences. Reserve time for discussion and questions.
- The training sessions are best to be carried out in the native language of the PE trainees.
- Devote you session solely to the idea of peer work and rehearsal of interview techniques.

The field phase

- The information the PE's gather from the field must be the kind of which benefits well being of the target group.
- Be open about the purposes the gathered information is used for.
- Emphasize the confidentiality of the interviews to the PE's.
- The interviews are made anonymously.

Evaluation and reporting

- Evaluate the project: have an evaluation session for the PE's after the field phase; have an evaluation session also for the employees.
- Report the results of the evaluation.
- Report the analyzed data from the field interviews.
- Reporting helps in organizing better PE trainings in the future and in developing better services for your clients.

The PE's should be considered as your co-workers. Show that their work is appreciated!

References:

Goosdeel, Alexis; Hariga, Fabienne; Theys, Dominique (1999):

“EURO-Boule de Neige. Methodological Snowball Handbook” Modus Vivendi asbl.