

NATIONAL REPORT

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Abeona

AN EFFECTIVE RESPONSE
TO CARE LEAVERS' PROFESSIONAL INTEGRATION



Erasmus+

FRANCE



La Plateforme Insertion



Federación de Entidades con Proyectos y Pisos Asistidos



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Introduction

The ABEONA project led by the Plateforme I, a GROUPE SOS organisation, is a programme developed for social workers. It addresses the professional integration of young people in the care of Child Protection services. ABEONA is a strategic partnership with Erasmus + which brings together a consortium of ten European partners – field organisations, federations, and universities – from six different countries (Poland, Austria, Spain, Germany, Belgium and France) spanning from September 2015 to September 2017. The project aims at tackling the issue of professional integration of young people within the care of Child Protection services, by reinforcing youth care workers' skills in professional support services through specific training programs.

Recent studies have shown that youngsters in Child Protection services programmes were more vulnerable, and needed to be accompanied through their transition into adulthood and professional integration in a more efficient manner. Indeed, these young people are confronted with socio-professional difficulties (lack of family support, school dropout, and low self-esteem) which strongly hinder their autonomy and the launch of their career.

The ABEONA programme has developed several focus areas, including the first phase of a social worker needs-assessment using analyses of national social policies in each country participating in the study, which were then outlined in a European report. The following phases of the programme addressed the needs identified during the first phase, through trainings, exchanges between the workers and the co-construction of tools for young people in Child Protection services. The use of co-constructed tools and peer-to-peer training on these tools aimed to raise awareness about professional integration in a playful way and empower the trainers to use tools. In fact, after 18 social workers gathered to build different tools for professional integration, each of them trained about 30 social workers in their country.

This report addresses the perceptions and feedback of the different stakeholders in the implementation of the ABEONA tools: do they allow the trainers to meet the social workers and the youngsters' expectations?

This document is comprised of one section about the French stakeholder's perception and one section on the European perception of the implementation of the ABEONA tools in the French institutions. The latter was drafted by a Belgian worker during an exchange between workers enrolled in the programme.

1) Social Worker's feedback on the programme and the ABEONA tools

This section was drafted based on surveys and interviews conducted with managers and social workers who participated in the ABEONA activities. Some of them were directly involved and took part in the exchanges between social workers and in the trainings on the ABEONA tools, while some participated indirectly by attending a training conducted by the workers who were directly involved.

Spin-off and application of the ABEONA tools

The site managers have emphasized that the topic of professional integration is increasingly at the forefront of local directives in public policies for youngsters, especially within governmental services such as Child Protection Services and Juvenile Court Protection Services. The ABEONA project is in line with a more general trend aiming to increase the focus on professional integration for youngsters among employees working in social services, particularly with youth who are soon to become independent, at least from the Ministry of Justice's perspective.

Each social worker who took part in the co-construction of the ABEONA tools in Belgium then organized a regional training day in order to present these tools to about ten social workers from different institutions. Overall, almost 30 social workers were trained in each country, which accounts for a total of approximately 150 social workers.

According to the *Service Accueil et Parcours Yvelynois (SAPY)* manager, the traditional trainings on professional integration are not always well-received amongst these professionals for several reasons, including their busy schedule. However, the ABEONA training garnered great interest from her entire team. She believes that they seemed to have adhered to the project because of the importance given to professional integration by the institution: "the teams will be aware of this issue if the department managers are". The concept of this project—improving the toolbox in order to tackle professional integration—garnered the interest of many across different management levels.

The employees who directly participated in the construction of the ABEONA tools came from various structures, and the teams integrated the tools differently. While the Arobase¹ teams are planning on systematically including the ABEONA tools in their counselling process by organizing, for example, new training days and a task force on professional integration to reflect on different ways to approach it, the SAPY workers only discussed the ABEONA tools and are not considering using them for the time being.

¹ Facility presented below

Generally speaking, the social workers who presented the ABEONA tools noticed people's enthusiasm; the overall atmosphere was positive and the trainers showed interest in acquiring new tools. However, the social workers who presented the tools were unable to find out if the trainees used the tools afterwards. In order to assess the use of the ABEONA tools, the trainees were given a survey to fill out. From the surveys and interviews that were conducted, the results showed that they did not have time to apply the ABEONA tools and that they need more time to master them, especially given the context which made it difficult to implement a professional integration tool. According to them, it would be more appropriate to tackle the subject of professional integration after the summer holidays. Despite the difficulties we encountered to collect the surveys, which could have implied a lack of interest on the issue of professional integration, all the respondents expressed the desire to be better-trained and to better address youth professional integration in their daily work. In this regard, the presentation of the ABEONA tools was directly useful to them.

However, some tools were more often used than others, such as the simplest to implement, and more commonly those that seemed the most playful, for example the particularly popular "how (not) to miss a job".

It also seems that the implementation of the tools depends on the feeling of the social worker and the way in which he considers his role. De facto, people working in education tend to be more aware of these issues and to use these tools on a regular basis. In a structure where there is a social worker dedicated to professional integration or a structure with a partnership with an Integration Manager, people will not feel the need to train the social workers in this topic, in light of the partnership and the "distribution of tasks" put into place. The social workers are nevertheless aware of these issues given the presence of a person dedicated to this issue. Not everyone realizes the large scope of professional integration, and there is still a lot of work to do in the field of social work.

Adapting the tools to the youth, and the youth's reactions

The training in Belgium allowed the social workers to discover a certain number of tools, not all of which were used, and not all of which had the same impact. However, in general, the social workers we met all highlighted the fact that taking ownership of such tools took a considerable amount of time. Most of them did not have time to implement them at all, or only with very few young people, which explains the limited feedback. The results below are the initial comments which do not necessarily allow us to draw conclusions since we have little feedback from young people. Additionally, some social workers indicated that the implementation period for the tools was not particularly conducive: the beginning of the year allows us to address the issue of professional integration and to build a project over the year to come.

It is worth noting that one social worker within MECS (*Maison d'Education à Caractère Social*) sensed that young people may not necessarily respond well to this type of tool in this facility, since young people do not always wish to be accompanied as they see it as a constraint. This was unlike what he observed in Germany, in an institution that took care of refugees, where minors seek out this type of guidance.

All the social workers noted that the concepts of these tools were interesting and they all said that tackling professional integration required having a wide variety of possibilities available. However, from an operational standpoint, the tools were not all seen as relevant for the audience in the different institutions: either because their youth were not mature enough or because they suffered from emotional issues. Indeed, sometimes, some of these drills require contextualizing some life events, which can be painful, and involves taking a step back to reflect on one's life.

Nevertheless, a first list of tools was identified from the surveys and interviews, which contains the same tools most used in the other countries that participated in the ABEONA project, namely :

- How (not) to miss a job

This tool consists of acting out / filming a mock job interview during which the social worker or several young people behave improperly for the job market. Then, the youth watch the video so they can observe how they behaved in order to highlight what they should avoid during a job interview. Debriefing the video allows them to emphasize the appropriate behaviour for the job market, and thanks to this counter-example, they can understand what an employer may expect from them.

This is the flagship tool of the ABEONA programme (the most popular). The feedback indicated that it was well-perceived in France among social workers. Whether it is used with a group of people or one person, it is perceived as playful, and thanks to the use of modern digital tools, it attracts many young people. It is possible to implement this tool collectively in a rather homogeneous group. This tool can be interesting because debriefing collectively allows the young people to compare themselves with each other and to draw lessons from different examples, while an individual debriefing offers the possibility to focus on details, and to recreate the exercise. This activity can be used in two different ways and both have advantages. A female social worker used a "real situation" with a group; she proposed for a group of young people to be in charge of the recruitment for a holiday camp. They were the ones in charge of picking the most convincing candidates, which empowered them and made them take on responsibilities. One social worker adds that this is in line with the legal framework in favour of personalised projects for the youth, and that working on professional integration individually is the best way to address the issue, given people's different backgrounds. This tool was particularly appreciated by social workers and young people thanks to its playfulness.

- The river.

This tool consists of deciphering the key moments of one's life using material conception, such as a drawing.

Its use is currently controversial among social workers. For some, it seems like this type of tool is useful for youth when they have already started soul-searching process. Indeed, it requires looking back at one's own life and on the disruptive elements which triggered significant changes. For teenagers with an "urban" background, it may seem like a childish drill: for this type of audience, the prop is not optimal to attract young people. However, this tool was used with young people who had just arrived in the facility, which allowed the staff to quickly take stock on the newcomer's background.

- The target

This tool consists of making one's networks tangible using a target, in order to identify the potential resources that the youth can take advantage of for his / her professional integration.

This tool is particularly useful to make visible and clarify what each person can bring to young people. The social workers mobilize their own network and give an overview of what different institutions can do. However, this easy drill can prove difficult for young people who have a hard time grasping the distance between the people they are in contact with.

- The modern dance

This tool was presented as a side note during the training in Belgium. It consists in the exteriorization of emotions through body expression; it allows young people to focus on their posture. This tool was not very positively received among social workers, since it was more difficult to put into place than the other tools. It is worth noting that the relationship of the social worker with young people is different depending on the countries, and this type of drill is relevant in countries where people are likely to use their body as a means of expression. French social workers indicated that this type of tools is not well received by the youth (teasing, embarrassment, etc.).

However, it is worth remembering these are only initial results and the tools were not put into place with enough young people to draw significant conclusions.

Recognizing the scope of professional integration

Professional integration of young people is an essential element for them to become autonomous and socially integrated. This issue is all the more crucial when dealing with young people who have social, economic and sometimes legal problems. These youth also often lack family support, which is why they are taken into the care of Child Protection

Services. Yet, the core activities of social workers, at least as it is perceived nowadays is focused on social, educative approaches, and professional integration is not a priority; it is sometimes not at all addressed.

There is, however, a growing trend of taking professional integration into account in the social sector and in the Child Protection Services and Juvenile Court Protection Services institutions, thanks to regional directives. Among the problems identified, the lack of training of social workers in this topic still remains an obstacle for practices to keep going in this direction. Thus, the ABEONA project aims at bridging this gap. In the end, it has met this objective, as it gave a reason to talk about professional integration among the teams involved in the project.

The trainings and discussions which followed put professional integration at the heart of the debate and allowed social workers to exchange and reflect collectively, although they did not necessarily have officially set timeslots for them to do so. The social workers even indicated that even if they have not yet used the tools, that having them allows them to address the issue of professional integration earlier and differently. Besides, they feel that there are existing resources and that even though they cannot be used as such and that they require time to be adapted to the situation and to the youth, they have a toolbox available and they feel less powerless.

Opening this type of project to different cultures allows the workers to observe other ways of addressing professional integration and to learn about the practices in other countries: this triggers new ideas and comparisons on the different working methods. For instance, according to one female social worker in France, there is a culturally induced distance between the social worker and the youth, which is not as significant in Spain where social workers are more likely to use tools involving body and art expression.

Drawing this comparison is useful to comprehend professional integration in a more global context and to take a step back on the guidance and support methods in place. The informal discussions between social workers allowed them to talk about these issues differently, and were, therefore, complementary to the theoretical training sessions. The observation of the countries' different practices, which took place during the workers' exchanges, is one of the best ways to become familiar with other working methods.

Interviews with the site managers indicate that the exchanges between workers from different European countries are particularly beneficial when it comes to raising awareness among social workers on the importance of this issue and the techniques necessary to address them with young people. Raising awareness on this issue among social workers seems all the more necessary, according to one female site manager: "young people will be aware of professional integration if social workers are". Following a similar logic, if team managers focus on it more, social workers will have more time to dedicate to this issue.

Creating a network of partners beyond the ABEONA project is an exciting idea for the teams, at all managerial levels. This would allow people to have more tools available, to raise awareness among their colleagues, to be trained better and above all, to be more useful to the people they are counselling.

The ABEONA project is a good way to talk about professional integration as an issue to take into account in the counsellors' daily work. Even though the general feedback was positive, several drawbacks were noted in during the reporting phase. The tools are not always adapted for teenagers and the analysis and assessment phases of the programme were sometimes a burden in the social workers' workload.

2) Presentation of the French facilities within the GROUPE SOS JEUNESSE, visited by a Belgium social worker

With 12,000 employees and 350 sites, GROUPE SOS is among the top social enterprises in Europe. For 30 years, it has been using economic efficiency in the service of public interest. Thus, it tackles current challenges by developing innovative solutions in its 5 core activities: YOUTH, EMPLOYMENT, SOLIDARITY, HEALTH, SENIORS. Each year, the actions of GROUPE SOS impact over one million people.

1) *Arobase - Maison d'Education à Caractère Sociale (MECS)*

The MECS Arobase, one of the facilities and services of Groupe SOS Jeunesse, is located in Goussainville, In the Val-d'Oise department of the Paris region.

It has 29 sites across different cities, and hosts girls and boys between 13 and 21 years old. Some youths are placed by Child Protection Services, while some are enrolled Juvenile Court Protection Services. Juveniles can go to school or not, and on average, they stay in the welfare home for a year.

This facility helps young people deal with social problems, including health, psychological and psychiatric support, fitness, other socio-cultural leisure activities, etc. Youths also have the opportunity to go on holidays, with the support team.

2) *Jeunes d'Avenir 93*

The *Jeunes d'Avenir 93* programme supports vulnerable youth in the process of professional and social integration in society. More precisely, it addresses young people between 16 and 25 years old taken into the care of Child Protection Services facilities in Seine Saint Denis who do not enrolled in school or training, and who are unemployed. This programme has been experimented for over three years now and it was co-designed by the Plateforme i, a GROUPE SOS organisation with an expertise in professional integration and educational staff. The team has one significant advantage: its mobility. When dealing with people who are not always responsive, being able to visit them where they live makes it easier to schedule an appointment and increases their likelihood to come to the appointment.

This programme allows young people to benefit from customized and personalized assistance. These people have gone astray, therefore, they need more support. This project is funded by *l'Initiative pour l'Emploi des Jeunes*, an assistance programme in line with the European framework which aims at fighting unemployment among young people, co-funded by the European Social Fund.

3) TEAME : Assisted entrepreneurship to foster job opportunities

A « TEAME », made up of 8 to 10 young people excluded from the employment market, is brought together for 3 months to create a pop-up company. In order to carry out this project, the young people are trained for three weeks by outside professionals who cover themes such as human resources, marketing, finance and logistics, and who can keep in touch with them throughout the programme.

Then, they are in charge of the project, they manage their company in their own way with the help of team of two coordinators. The aim of this innovative project is threefold: mobilize the young people for an ambitious challenge, give them autonomy so that they dare to take risks, and stimulate them by developing their skills. They also receive individual guidance to help them make their personal professional project come true.

4) Professional integration of young people under the care of Child Protection Services as seen by a Belgium practitioner: how to use the ABEONA tools in France ?

A) Professional integration and ABEONA tools:

Allowing the social workers to adapt the ABEONA to their needs:

Throughout the different phases of the ABEONA project, a team of 18 social workers gathered in Belgium in order to attend a training programme on professional integration tools for young people in the care of Child Protection Services. During the training session, each country representative presented their national tools to their European counterparts. Then, the two social workers who attended this co-training conducted a one-day training session in their own country on the tools that were presented to them by other social workers. After this training session, the Belgian social worker observed that the social workers have informal exchanges on these tools which give them the opportunity to maintain a dialogue on professional integration and to make sure it is taken into account when dealing with young people.

The various training tools are used individually or collectively by the social workers from different institutions.

The target and the river seem to be the most popular tools among the foyer Arobase social workers to work on professional integration individually with young people.

The facility's social workers often use the target and the river to tackle issues beyond socio-professional integration. As a consequence, they systematically adapt each tool both to the background of the young people and to their objectives at the time (reaching them, help them gain perspective, support them when they talk about their rough past, encourage them to continue their efforts in their training, etc.). For instance, the Polish river is a simplified version that overlooks the details of the young people's lives. The target can be used for deeper work phases, supporting young people as they reflect on their evolution, or during punctual phases of crisis. The target seems to be young workers' favourite tool because it better suits their work (easy to use, quick results, many ways to use it, etc.).

For collective use, the tool Jobtivity and the "how (not) to miss a job interview?" activity were the most frequently used. This exercise is particularly relevant for semi-autonomous young people, and when used at specific times. The tool becomes meaningful when the young people have the desire, the motivation, and the minimum skills required to get a job. The social workers observe that the prerequisites in terms of autonomy and motivation are crucial to conduct this activity. This exercise seems to be specifically relevant for young people living in group homes and who are well known by the social workers.

However, like any didactic and projective tool, it should be noted that the ABEONA tools should be used when the time is right, and in the appropriate situation. This means that social workers who are engrossed in their daily work had neither the time nor the appropriate work atmosphere to introduce this type of tool. The main remark participants made was related to the lack of training time for the Abeona tools. The situation in the field leaves little time for teamwork, thus trainers have little time to pass on and thoroughly explain the tools and techniques. This reality is impacted even further by seniority level, considering many of the social workers encountered from various institutions had little seniority. Experience allows these workers to reflect on the application of such tools and to better understand the challenges of their use. More importantly, getting to know this type of young audience requires spending a lot of time working with them, and demands an adaptation to the professional environment and to a team.

While professional integration is not necessarily addressed as such, young people's autonomy is a constant goal tackled through daily tasks (hygiene, cooking, chores, etc.). For example, the Belgian worker was particularly struck by an old-style vegetable garden: he deduced that the ABEONA tools are a work basis, which allows the workers to have wider perspectives and a broader way of thinking.

Young people's reaction towards the ABEONA tools:

Thanks to the few observation days in the facilities, we were able to observe how the young people in the care of Child Protection services received the ABEONA tools. Young people like the target, as it does not require any props and allows them to express themselves shortly after their arrival at the facility. This way, MNAs (unaccompanied minors)

can quickly engage in the use of this tool with a basic level of English. In addition, issues such as traumas do not hinder the process of the tool. The target fosters the expression of personal resources in little time and without a long-term relationship with the educator. “I was able to observe the application of this exercise with a young girl who had arrived three days before in the facility. She gave the female social worker a significant amount of information about her personal background because they had started the exchange with the target”. The visual representation used in the target activity gave her confidence and allowed them then to build a genogram. Thus, the educational team had the opportunity to detail the anamnesis, the medical history, of this young girl during the team meeting the next day.

The preparatory job interviews and the new perspectives offered by the tool “how to (not) miss a job” allowed the young people to introduce themselves differently, with a better master of their resume, better elocution, appropriate clothing and posture.

Not every young person received the tools the same way and the way they engaged in them depends on their personal background. There are various reasons why some young people may not adhere to the activities proposed, which include: bad experience with adults in the past, psychological trauma, uncertainty on an upcoming legal decision, lack of vocabulary, and a lack of trust in the social worker team.

Young people who have not gone through the intellectual journey that makes work meaningful often have difficulties engaging in tools specifically addressing professional integration (e.g. jobtivity).

The collective tools can prove inefficient in groups with too little diversity, in groups where too many of the young people have common socio-affective “burdens”.

B) Discovering practices that address professional integration

The social worker met with the female coordinators of TEAME 75 as well as seven young people who were at the office that day. He found that the TEAME concept empowers young people during three months by offering them very diverse experiences in line with a potential future job. The TEAME offers the opportunity to experiment different and very concrete realities, very close to the real labour market. They have the opportunity to take in the codes of the job market. Indeed, they are involved in a positive atmosphere that includes reflection, a capacity to listen, to express oneself, creation and action. This philosophy of “learning by doing” is a convincing experiment.

He will present this experiment to his colleagues and to the teams which work on semi-autonomy, among other subjects.

With regards to individual guidance for the young people who are part of the *Jeune d’avenir* programme, he particularly liked the fact that the young people have the Integration

Manager's phone number. Sustainable guidance for young people with socio-professional difficulties seems to be extremely valuable, especially if the Integration Manager becomes a focal point. It is worth noting that collaborating with various facilities is crucial to ensure a coordinated action and prevent young people from feeling lost with too many services offered.

Conclusion :

In France, the implementation of the Abeona's tools is at an early stage because social workers didn't have a lot of time to appropriate the tools. So the first conclusions that are present within this report are not definitive and obviously the use of the tools will evolve in the next months.

However, it's possible to affirm that the tools had been welcomed positively by the social workers because they lack of concrete ways to address vocational integration with youngsters in their daily work whereas it's a rising priority of local policies and very crucial for their integration and their future well-being. French Youth Workers particularly appreciated the fact that Abeona provides concrete tools that can be used directly.

Obviously, some tools had been more appreciated than others, above all ones which were funny and easy to adapt : "How (not) to miss a job" was considered really relevant, because applied in a collective way, it created a special occasion to deal with vocational integration topic and youngsters were pleased to discuss their ideas together.

Youth workers particularly appreciated the fact that Abeona's make them think out the box by discovering other professional practices. They had the possibility to look back after their daily practices and had the chance to confront their point of view with their European peers.

The Belgium social worker liked the fact of discovering the way that French social workers used to implement the tools, and he was pleased to observed practices and projects that don't exist in his country, he will share those with his Belgium colleagues in order to bring some new ideas and innovation in their daily practices.

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