

# SECOND NATIONAL REPORT

SEPTEMBER 2017

# Abeona

AN EFFECTIVE RESPONSE  
TO CARE LEAVERS' PROFESSIONAL INTEGRATION



## Erasmus+

# POLAND



La Plateforme Insertion



Federación de Entidades con Proyectos y Pisos Asistidos



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## Overview of the animation tools dissemination (Jakub Iwański)

### 1.1 Implementation of the tools.

The main recipients of Abeona's animation tools in Poland are the employees and wards of Robinson Crusoe Foundation. The implementation took place in 7 different cities for 9 groups of care leavers (138 people attended the workshops). The workshop for youth workers included the following tools: *Jobtivity* (Austria), *River* (Poland), *Relationships Map* (Germany), *How to (not!) miss your job interview* (France), *Blanco* (Belgium). *Jobtivity* (Austria) is a game based on a multipurpose framework. It's very flexible and allows to introduce in a game format topics like jobs, professional interests, types of jobs. *River* (Poland) is a much more in-depth tool allowing participants to map their resources resulting from experience as well as a young person's aspirations. It presents the basis on which a professional career can be built. *Relationships Map* (Germany) gives participants an insight into their environment and allows them to identify the key people supporting the process of entering the job market. *How to (not!) miss your job interview* (France) presents a serious situation in a grotesque way thus making it less stressful and more accessible. *Blanco* (Belgium) gives the initiative to the care leavers and teaches them to ask important, often difficult questions about relationships, fears, hopes and experiences. By encouraging them to invent new stories it lets the creative juices flow. The youth workers could choose a tool that suits the group they were working with best. After giving it some thought, they chose three: *Jobtivity* (Austria), *River* (Poland) and *Relationships Map* (Germany). Each training team used one, two or all three tools with varied intensity.

The workshop on Abeona animation tools was attended by Robinson Crusoe Foundation's employees and the employees of homes for children in Otwock. The latter were also given a free choice in how they use the tools, however we were not able to find out the details of the implementation process.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that we, the Foundation are considering taking up the challenge of implementing Belgian *Blanco* to integrate the whole Robinson community across Poland. The object of the game is to venture on an expedition and to free the goddess Abeona so that she can help participants gain independence. Each group will prepare knowledge-testing questions and skill-checking tasks for other groups pertaining to one of the important areas of self-reliance (nurturing relationships, showing initiative, knowledge

on foster care, finance management etc.). In meetings, the groups will solve the tasks they are given. By mastering knowledge from each area they will gain access to an artifact required to free the goddess Abeona. When the group acquires knowledge from all the areas, they will have collected all tools needed for completing the final assignment. After it has been completed the goddess will pay them back in good advice and valuable gifts (a personal message for each participant, prizes).

The trial version of the game was tested at the Foundation Summer Camp. The main point was for the care leavers to prepare tasks for themselves and the adults. The game took a few hours to complete and consisted of an off-road part and a board game with questions on self-reliance. In accordance with the *Blanco* method, it was the care leavers who created the content and chose the motor. The off-road part consisted of independent parts to be completed by the group, for example leading a blind-folded person through an obstacle course. After each part was completed, the group got an element of the puzzle.

The board game consisted of drawing lots with a character and trying to increase its competences in life's important areas. Each character had its own image and description. The important areas (housing, health, relations, education and career, finances) were measured on a 10 point scale called an independence barometer. The board had a multiple-round scheme similar to, for example, Monopoly. The result depended on the character's moves and reactions to the action cards (fate, investment, challenge, interaction and so forth). The player with a score of 10 in two areas and at least 6 in all other areas won. The participants were greatly impressed by the moving descriptions of the characters and imaginative action cards. The game will be refined for the following year.

## 1.2 Adaptation of the tools to the public

The tools used by YW were adjusted each time to fit a 4-hour workshop scenario. The adjustments were minor, for example in Otwock the professions used in the game were taken from the local job center's list of offers. There were also ideas for improvements: YW in Warsaw suggested that in *Jobtivity* each team could have 6 "lifelines":

- 1) Three chances to draw a new word and to choose the easier one
- 2) Two chances to ask another Robinson (ward) for help
- 3) One chance to change modes

The *River* was altered to include more life stages and not only professional life, but also important relationships in private life. Those were discussed within the group. The *Relationships Map* were drawn on large pieces of paper and discussed in pairs. Anyone could volunteer to present their map with to the whole group. The key element was giving the participants a chance to map out relationships with the people they could depended on, apart from mapping out relationships that were important in the context of professional life.

The YW were independent in selecting tools that best fit the needs of the group. Thus, they either used one, two or three of the tools.

All the tools were appreciated, and assessed as attractive and well-thought through. *Jobtivity* was used in seven groups, *River* in five groups, and *Map* in three groups. For the YW and youth from FRC the tools weren't different than what they use in every-day practice. The topic of jobs and work has also been present in the Foundation's program. In contrast, Abeona tools made a big and positive impression on the social workers in Otwock, who are not used to using this type of small, attractive structures. It is safe to assume that the tools would be as well-received in other places.

### **1.2.1 Usefulness of the tools**

It was obligatory for the YW from Robinson Crusoe Foundation to use at least one of the tools in their work with their groups. The YW did not find it to be a problem. Below is a quote from youth workers from Żory, who appreciated *Relationships Map*:

*“Considering the particular situation of our youth we thought it was really important for them to take part in this exercise. Every Robinson drew a map of their relationships. To our surprise, the exercise proved that the Robinsons actually have considerable networks of support and quite a few close people. Each Robinson divided their map into categories: family and non-family members, and some of them made a third category for other Robinsons ☺ Participants also created map legends, which showed what kind of support they can count on from which people. This revealed that they have many people around them who provide many kinds of support at the same time. The ending questions proved particularly*

*useful, as they allowed Robinsons to form new conclusions regarding their resources, which they then shared with the group. In our opinion the exercise is very empowering, because it shows the Robinsons that although they can't count on support from their closest family they still have many people around them who are there to provide help and support when it is needed."*

The *Jobtivity* tool was used for introducing various main topics of the 4-hour workshops. For example, in one group the topic of the workshop was healthcare, hence all the job titles in the game were connected to various healthcare specializations. In other groups *Jobtivity* was used as an introduction to a discussion on different professions. This is how youth workers from Szczecin described their experience with the game:

*"The exercise was exciting and showed that the youth's knowledge about different professions is uneven, so we used the exercise not only as entertainment, but also as an educational tool (eg. cosmetologist). To sum up, the Robinsons appreciated the game, they said it was attractive and dynamic. The way of presenting where no words can be used should dominate, they were a very fun element of the game."*

And the youth workers in Sieradz had this to add:

*"Everyone was keen to take part [in the game], there was a lot of fun and laughter. We used the game as an opportunity to talk about different professions. Some participants weren't sure what a certain profession entails, so we gave them some clues and then discussed it with the group."*

Apart from the Abeona tools the yearly program of the groups (called Vehicle of self-reliance) include exercises that develop skills for CV writing, job interviews, or bigger structures, like internships and simulation games. Abeona tools completed the existing program. One of the advantages of the tools is their varying degree of difficulty and complexity. *Jobtivity* for example is simple, short, and easy to play. Robinsons like to have fun. *Relationships Map* and *River* are more in-depth, but they provide an accessible way of mapping out resources (the *Map* usually takes less time). After completing them the care leavers was a little tired, but very satisfied.

### **1.2.2 Potential improvement of the tools**

The tools mentioned above have a considerable potential for creating further improvements, as it has already been pointed out during the exchange workshops in Belgium. They can be modified in a minor way to better suit certain needs (the games can be longer, shorter, the vocabulary can be adjusted) or taken apart completely. While they do not need to be improved, the tools can serve as an inspiration, and their main ideas can be used to create a completely new product. For example, the main concept of *Blanco* was used during a Robinson camp, and the *Relationships Map* can be used to map other resources. Lastly, the French comedy technique *How to (not) miss your job interview* can be used to encourage participants during particularly hard tasks. The main improvement potential of these tools lies in the possibility of using their main ideas as basis for new tools.

### 1.3 Vocational integration consciousness-raising

It is hard to estimate the impact of Abeona's tools on raising consciousness regarding Robinsons' vocational integration. Given the multitude of tools introduced to them the care leavers do not perceive them as special, just enlarging the workload around career. From our perspective the most groundbreaking experience is the program called Safe Internship, which gives youth the opportunity to work in a company for 2 weeks, to get to know its team and receive mentoring from one of the employees, so they can get the idea what it is like to have a job. That tool is used to recognize vocational preferences in real life and create a safe environment for young people to familiarize themselves with various workplaces. Some of interns are offered a job after their internship, however for us what is critical is the continuation of education and raising professional qualifications.

### 1.4 Knock-on effects of Abeona activities on youngsters

Certainly, approaching youth about career using group tasks and games encourages them to see new perspectives. However, it is important to remember that professional success depends on many factors, such as personal readiness, motivation, confidence, determination. That is why Foundation works on those competences that are so crucial on the journey to self-reliance. Robinsons that end up going to college and finding jobs praise the Foundation for giving them a sense of security, support from the likes of them and a

stepping stone when they were ready. The advantage of Abeona's tools is their diversity, that allows to apply them in the work with people on different levels of self-reliance.

### 1.5 Tools needed in structures

Our research concerning foster care points to a lack of mechanisms gathering, standardizing and verifying tools used in a process of gaining self-reliance by the youth. No institutions has yet made it their priority. Upcoming crises troubling Europe and global changes suggest that youngsters unprepared to function in such dynamically shifting world are in great danger of exclusion. In Poland, we are lacking systemic solutions grounded in effective methodology, instead the initiatives are highly dispersed and uncoordinated. What we need is a system that enables sharing information, linking together resultful initiatives and broadening the knowledge about care leavers, their needs and endeavors. Thanks to the Abeona project we can strengthen the initiatives that change the system and as a Foundation we are building the coalition in favor of self-reliance and we are also applying to become an institution certifying the position of the Self-Reliance Mentor.

## **Facts and figures about the structure (Jakub Iwański)**

### 2.1 Presentation of the structure

Robinson Crusoe Foundation is 15 years old. Despite being an expert organization it has been, since the very beginning, focused on participatory work with youth. The core of the Foundation's activity are summer and winter camps, year-round weekend courses (The Vehicle of Self-Reliance), Safe Internship Program, immersive economic simulation games. In addition to 9 teams of 2 YW located in various towns all over Poland the headquarters employ 5 people. The whole team gathers 3 times a year on seminars and during camps.

### 2.2 Overall view of the structure with figures

The community of Robinsons is comprised of around 180 care leavers, aged from 16 to 24 years old, participating in 9 support groups. Participation is facultative and usually lasts 2-3 years. Each year some of them leave and make room for newcomers. Foundation has around 23 employees, plus program board and management, made of 10 people working pro bono. All alumni are welcome to visit support group meetings and camps. Some of Vehicles' alumni

are offered to join the team as supporting staff or regular staff during summer and winter camps. Apart from that a team of business volunteers show up to support various events and offer legal or financial counseling.

### 2.3 Organization of the workers on the field

Foundation's employees (mostly YW) tend to work other jobs: in private companies, NGOs, municipal councils. Some of them are engaged in foster care as social workers or therapists, which adds to their work in Foundation but is not compulsory. In order to do well as a youth worker one needs life experience, candidness, a way of making a connection with people. Such a plethora of occupations gives way to multidirectional transfer of knowledge between the team members. In a way, Foundation employment of experts from various fields results in producing innovative, exciting and effective tools to work with care leavers. Their self-consciousness, professionalism and high internal motivation plays a huge role. After the tool exchange in Belgium we grew sure that similar qualities can be found among the YW from our partner organizations. Our YW gets a lot of freedom at the same time they are provided a lot of support from team members working in headquarters. The line of work is created by combining data gathered from youth and guidelines provided by management. Youth workers work out scenarios for their groups that they can carry out after consulting them with the coordinator. Every month they file a report, every six month they get a visit from the supervisor. Since scenarios are created bi-weekly, Foundation now has collected a big stock of them, available for every team to use, change and adapt to their own needs. The overall support group schedule is consulted by Vehicles' coordinator, who can also depute a specific topic to cover or a project to put through.

## **Analysis of a European Youth Worker exchange (Dr. Severine Thomas)**

### 3.1 Abeona tools in the structure

The Robinson Crusoe Foundation contributes with its different offers and concepts for young people in care and for their transition to adulthood a wide range of tools, some of

which were selected during the youth worker training in Belgium. Some others which were presented during the training were chosen by the Polish partners to supplement their portfolio of different methods to support youngsters or young adults in residential care. All of them are intended to strengthen the self-reliance of these young people.

### **3.1.1 How were the tools implemented in the hosting structure?**

The tools could be used by the team of the Robinson Crusoe Foundation during the group meetings. For the young people it is common to get in contact with different methods of group work. They are familiar with activities to support e. g. group learning, biographical work, self-experience and a culture of feedback. So the barrier to bring these young people in contact with new tools was not very high. Maybe this shall not apply for the majority of Polish care leavers.

### **3.1.2 Which tools have been used in this structure? Which one for group activities and which one for individual activities?**

From the tools presented during the youth worker training in Belgium the Polish partners used

- *Network Maps* (an adaption of network maps for professional integration see below)
- *Jobtivity* – game with the names of the professions
- *Blanco - Create your own game* (during the summer camp)
- *The river* – prepared by Polish team for the Abeona exchange then shown to the Polish YW

#### **3.1.2.1 Group activities - Regular Group Work**

The Robinson Crusoe Foundation offers group work in seven cities of Poland regularly every two weeks for four hours with about 15-20 young people. These groups (called Vehicles) are a very intensive setting of peer support and development of self-reliance. Discussions about vocational perspectives are a part of it. The groups are familiar with different types of social and other games. So for example *Jobtivity*, sometimes in adapted versions, could be used. But the impact of these tools hardly could be evaluated single. The effects always depend on the group atmosphere and the solidarity of the participants. The idea of the group work of the Robinson Crusoe Foundation is to strengthen the young people's competencies and

awareness of their resources, their constructive self-perception. Additionally the Robinson Crusoe Foundation integrated the experiences from the youth worker training in Belgium into their summer camp program. So the tools which are used more often are adapted every year to new findings and insights of the Robinson Crusoe Team and the needs of the group of care leavers. So the preparation of the camp bases on established tools and flexible elements regarding to the situation in the different local groups. In this year some elements of the Abeona tools were included.

### 3.1.2.2 Group activities – Summertime (schedule below)

2	17 VIII	Th.	„SPIDERS“ 01 (outdoor teambuilding)	1. Integration 2. Intro to Robinson’s University 3. recruitment	1. Forum 2. Traditional dances and disco	
+	3	18 VIII	Fr.	„SPIDERS“ 02 (outdoor teambuilding)	ROBINSON’S UNIVERSITY 1	Cultural exchange
4	19 VIII	Sa.	„SPIDERS“ 03 (outdoor teambuilding)	ROBINSON’S UNIVERSITY 2	SAILING - introduction	
5	20 VIII	Su.	SAILING/SPORT	ROBINSON’S UNIVERSITY 3	OUTDOOR and INDOOR GAMES Preparation	
6	21 VIII	Mo.	SAILING/SPORT	SIMULATION GAME: “Manufacture” Introduction	SIMULATION GAME: “Manufacture” Presenting	
7	22 VIII	Tu.	SAILING/SPORT	SIMULATION GAME: “Manufacture” Experimenting	SIMULATION GAME: “Manufacture” Earning points in outdoor game	
8	23 VIII	We.	SAILING/SPORT	SIMULATION GAME: “Manufacture” Production	„NIGHT SPIDERS“ 3 tasks	
9	24 VIII	Th.	OUTDOOR and INDOOR GAMES Preparation	SIMULATION GAME: “Manufacture” Preparations to the final	SIMULATION GAME: “Manufacture” Auction	
10	25 VIII	Fr.	Preparation of games by Youth	MASKS and SPORT	MASKS – ritual, ball, XV anniversary of FRC, arrival of volunteers	

Once more it is necessary to make clear, that the integration of care leavers into vocational education and employment is not depending on single tools, but is involved in a complex task of child care and additional offers of educational and peer-to-peer areas like the Robinson Crusoe group work. It seems to be very helpful to open spaces and settings to care leaver in which they can make different social experiences with adults and young people. This is a very important integral part to strengthen self-reliance. The program shown above builds a multi-dimensional perspective on the needs and wishes of young people in care. To explain some tools which are close to the Abeona tool-box it can be shown that care leavers

want to make different experiences (a) to grow from these challenges and that they are interested to learn (b) and able to work towards one goal together (c).

- a) Sailing – Learning and Growing from personal experience and challenge
- b) Robinson’s University – or a bigger *Jobtivity*
- c) Simulation production game « Manufacture » - or a complexer « How to make a good job»

### **3.1.2.3 Individual activities:**

Beside these wide-ranging types of group work the Robinson Crusoe Foundation also provides a really complex and intensive model of supported internships for young people in care called Safe Internship program. Young people could work in a supported internships and they get a scholarship for it. It is in-between a simulation game and a real employment situation. The young people from care sometimes are for the first time in contact with a real company and in contact with adults who are not their parents, social workers or teachers.

This model opens the opportunity to integrate tools from the Abeona project individually to the needs of each participant of this program. For example the network maps could be used to visualize the social environment of a young people – not only in general, but also regarding vocational options and sources of support in the period of transition from school to vocational education.

### **3.1.3 Which tools have been easily welcomed by the youngsters?**

*Jobtivity* was welcomed with enthusiasm and care leavers wanted and play it again. Other tools like *Map* and *River* were considered valuable but more difficult. The Robinsons were very pleased and proud of the *Blanco* game they had prepared for the camp itself, the staff and the volunteers and guests.

### **3.1.4 Which tools have been “rejected” by the youngsters?**

Nothing was rejected. Interesting thing is that the hardest task at the camp was to record a 20 second movie - a self-presentation with a self-made mascot. At first few people gave up, but then they tried. Making films is important for the purposes of internship documentation and self-presentation, for example during job interview. However, for some people facing the camera is very difficult. On the other hand at the end of the Manufacture game each

team created film advertising best product. The movies were fun and the best was a great comedy. Perhaps using the methodology of French tool *How to (not) miss your job interview* to the individual interview with mascot would be helpful.

### **3.1.5 Did the YW notice a change in the youngsters' behaviour especially on how they feel about their vocational integration?**

The young people supported by the Robinson Crusoe Foundation often are not have finished school. So for most of them the vocational integration is not on the agenda right at the moment. But the learning fields about employment situations like in the simulation games help them to get an idea of requirements of real working relations. For the youth workers who work in the groups the tools from the Abeona project could not be evaluated separately, because the young people in the groups get in contact with different tools at the same time and last but not least they know very well the use of social games and experiences in working groups. One of the summer camp participants said during the interview: *"Every Robinson group meeting lets you think about your career development."*

### **3.1.6 What were the feedbacks of the youngsters?**

About the *Jobtivity*:

*"I liked that game, it's useful to develop interests, it's engaging, you can support one another using your knowledge. Not very innovatory, showcases new jobs, some of which seem boring but they aren't, actually"*

About *Relationships Map*:

*"Valuable, but difficult task, because you have to choose who is actually close and supportive to you. I use to think - my family, but my friends turned out to be more important, cause I can always count on them"*

About *The River*:

*"Very educational, however also heavy exercise. It shows your past, what you are good at, what you enjoy, what are directions worth pursuing. It helps in realizing what you really want to do, in making your goals realistic, in scheduling your tasks, it shows you don't have to do it all at once. I hung it over my desk."*

## 3.2 Other vocational integration activities you discovered in the hosting country

### 3.2.1 What are the other Vocational Integration activities you discovered in the hosting country?

The exchange was focussed on the summer camp of the Robinson Crusoe Foundation. It is important to say that the camps are performed not only with staff members of the foundation, but also with volunteers from companies the foundation is working with. So the idea and success of the RCF integration activities is to arrange pedagogical settings to work on the individual skills of the young people and to support group learning and networking in combination with different accesses to real working fields and people with other professions who act as role models and share their experience about needs in different working places. So this model could be identified as social learning and developing self-reliance on one hand and a type of soft short-term vocational training on the other hand.

### 3.2.2 Why did you decide to analyse this one/these ones?

In the German system of child and youth care the connection to vocational integration is not structured very close. The focus in residential care is put to the work on the biographical experiences and results of a growing up at risk. The arguments to prefix the social support and psychological/therapeutical treatment in care in front of other topics like for example support in school or vocational education are different:

Residential care institutions/youth workers pursue the idea that first of all young people in care have to be stabilized in their social and mental situation. The school attendance often is not given priority. A common opinion is that young people can't be successful in school because they are engaged with their biographical experience so much that they can't concentrate on their school career (see Zeller 2012). From that point of view youth workers promote first the biographical handling process and the stabilization in the new environment of residential or foster care.

The truancy (regularly absence of school) of a group of young people who are coming in care supports this estimate. Difficulties in primary school or absence from school in middle school not uncommon are the reason for the first contacts to the child and youth care system. In school difficulties of families and significant behaviour of children become obvious very

quick and the German school system is not very tolerant towards social conspicuous during the daily teaching-practice. So the challenges in school for young people in care could be also reason in care to put educational topics behind. In this case the school system in Germany is selecting pupils with social or learning difficulties very early from regular lessons to special schools. A lot of care leavers make the experience of different changes of school and even from high school to specific schools because of family problems.

The third argument is regarding to the social background of families who are receiving child and youth care: A lot of families who have children in residential care have low income and low school or vocational qualification. A lot of families have no good accesses to the educational system. That's why young people in care are often not expected to have school success.

But as we know from German and international research for much of these young people good experiences in school could be a very strong vehicle to cope with their biographical and current social situation. But not in a few cases children from residential care are given through the different school levels till they end up in a special school, because their school career was not supported very intensive in care.

### **3.2.3 What did you learn, which of these activities you would like to implement in your country and why?**

For the Germany system of child and youth care it would be very progressive to link it stronger to the educational pathways. The option in Poland to live in residential care till the end of an apprenticeship or other vocational training would solve a big problem care leavers now have in the period of transition in Germany. Although the child and youth care acts includes the right to stay in care till the 21<sup>st</sup> birthday, those with special needs even till the 27<sup>st</sup> birthday, but both options in common will be not be exhausted. The main category to finish residential care is the majority (with eighteen years) complemented by the estimation of individual development and skills. If a young adult seems to be stable enough care will end – even if school or vocational education is not finished. One third of all care leavers get off the care system without being in school, training or apprenticeship. So the educational outcomes are influenced as well by the experiences of young people in care and they become fragile because of the structural challenges of transition from child and youth care

to other services on one side and at the same time the transition from school to vocational training. On average young people in Germany start their vocational education (dual apprenticeship, vocational school, vocational trainings or study at university) at the age of 19,4 years. So the junction in a vocational education takes place while a lot of young people are already out of the child and youth care system. There are other options of social pedagogy support afterwards, but these options are more loose and often not so holistic and youth-orientated.

From this perspective the Polish model gives us arguments to force claims for longer support for young people in care in Germany during school and vocational education. School success offers the chance to develop resilience. But being successful in school or vocational training needs a stable life situation and good social networks. From that point of view child and youth care should include, like the Robinson Crusoe Foundation is doing it, longer-term models of group work in single institutions of residential care or for foster children as well. And additionally young people in care need constant options of getting support. This could be offered by a guaranteed place close to the residential care institution or by a guaranteed ambulant support of a youth worker or personal advisor. The Polish models offer a lot of extraordinary approaches. They are an enrichment for the German discussion on transition from child and youth care, because they include ideas beside the common German structures of care thinking.

# Abeona

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TO CARE LEAVERS' PROFESSIONAL INTEGRATION