

User involvement as pathway to social inclusion

*A collection of Eurodiaconia member's
projects*

Eurodiaconia is a **dynamic**, Europe wide **community** of organisations founded in the **Christian faith** and working in the tradition of Diaconia, who are committed to a Europe of **solidarity, equality** and **justice**. As the **leading network of Diaconia in Europe**, we connect organisations, institutions and churches providing **social and health services and education** on a Christian value base in over 30 European countries.

We bring members together to **share practices, impact social policy** and **reflect on Diaconia in Europe today**.

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Introduction

Eurodiaconia is a network of 48 organisations in 32 countries, founded in the Christian faith and working in the tradition of diaconia. Representing over 30.000 local organisations, Eurodiaconia members provide social and healthcare services and promote social justice. Eurodiaconia members support the most vulnerable of our societies, working with people on the margins of society and experiencing social exclusion such as people with disabilities, homeless people, people far from the labour market, people experiencing poverty or material deprivation etc.

As a network of diaconal social service providers, Eurodiaconia and its members have been working on user participation, involvement and empowerment throughout the last years. Many social service users are experiencing some forms of vulnerability, facing individual or social barriers to leading an independent life and playing an active role in society. User involvement has therefore proven to be key to the provision of quality social services that can empower users and restore their dignity. In 2015, Eurodiaconia has published a toolkit on user participation and empowerment, which outlines key principles and conditions for successful user participation in social services.¹

Building on this previous work, this publication aims at providing some concrete examples of projects which are successfully using user involvement to empower vulnerable users and lead them towards social inclusion and independent lives. We are focusing on Eurodiaconia members' work with people experiencing poverty or social exclusion, in

which the active involvement of users plays a key role to improve their social inclusion. This publication therefore concentrates on projects directed towards people experiencing poverty and social exclusion, such as long-term unemployed or homeless people.

There are still high levels of poverty in the EU, as in 2016, 118 million people in the EU were at risk of poverty or social exclusion, representing 23,5% of the entire population.² This means that almost one in four persons in the EU experiences either monetary poverty, severe material deprivation, or is living in a household with very low work intensity. The impacts of poverty are numerous, leading in many cases to social exclusion, including isolation, a lack of social networks, decrease in self-confidence and self-esteem and restricted access to public services. Reducing poverty and social exclusion by 20 million people in or at risk of poverty and social exclusion³ was one of the key goals of the Europe 2020 strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. Unfortunately, the EU is very far from achieving this goal as numbers only recently dropped back to the baseline after increasing for several years.

Eurodiaconia member organisations are reaching out to those people experiencing poverty, helping also those who are very excluded from society and fall out of the scope of other support measures. All the projects presented in this publication have in common to include their users as actors of the project with the aim of empowering them and not to treat them only as beneficiaries. Eurodiaconia members throughout Europe consider user involvement as a key element

¹ Eurodiaconia, User Participation and Empowerment Toolkit, 2015 (<https://www.eurodiaconia.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/User-Participation-and-Empowerment-Toolkit.pdf>)

² Eurostat, People at risk of poverty and social exclusion, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/People_at_risk_of_poverty_or_social_exclusion#-

[Number_of_people_at_risk_of_poverty_or_social_exclusion](#)

³ Europe 2020 Strategy, https://ec.europa.eu/info/business-economy-euro/economic-and-fiscal-policy-coordination/eu-economic-governance-monitoring-prevention-correction/european-semester/framework/europe-2020-strategy_en

to foster social inclusion and have adapted their ways of working to better involve their users. This publication presents best practices from Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and Spain. The Italian project, from Diaconia Valdese, doesn't target people living in poverty but people experiencing social exclusion because of dementia. However, this project also sees user involvement as a tool of social inclusion, showing that this way of working and empowering people can and should be used in a wide variety of projects.

With this publication, Eurodiaconia aims to inspire other organisations within and outside its network to develop innovative ways of involving their users and develop their participation and ownership of the projects in order to be empowered and supported towards an independent life as active citizens. Furthermore, the network also wishes to draw the attention of policy makers and authorities to the importance of user involvement for social inclusion projects and those projects need for support.

Main messages

The active involvement of service users is seen as a key element to support social inclusion by all projects presented in this publication, with each of them having their specificities and different ways of doing. The showcased projects cover different countries and contexts showing that users' involvement can be replicated and adapted in different situations. The following points summarize some key messages and learnings drawn from the projects of this mapping.

- **User involvement needs a change of perspective:** To effectively involve users as a way to social inclusion a culture change is needed. Social workers and

volunteers need to understand that it is not about keeping users busy and involving them in some activities, but it is rather about recognizing the user as a person, which needs to be accompanied and empowered to take responsibility for his or her life. Eurodiaconia members do this by giving users an active role, perceiving them as peers, making them feel part of a community and trusting them that they know best about their needs and can take part in decision-making.

- **Offering a stable and secure environment:** Eurodiaconia members have observed that users who have experienced poverty and social exclusion need a stable and secure environment in the first place. When possible, this means primarily a stable accommodation, as can be provided through a housing first approach. Based on this it is easier for the person to open up, gain trust in the social worker and the community and take over responsibility for his or her own life.
- **Identifying themselves their needs:** Eurodiaconia members stress the importance of giving users the opportunity to identify their needs themselves. They recognise that users of services are the experts to identify their own needs. An accurate identification of needs leads to adapted and meaningful activities for the users, to increased acceptance of the support given and is a way to empower them. It is therefore a key element of success in the projects.
- **Taking part in decision-making:** Including users not only means making them actively participate in the activities, but including them in the decision-making, design, implementation and monitoring of the project. Participating in the

decision-making gives users a sense of ownership, increase their self-confidence and allow them to be heard. In particular the sense of ownership also significantly increases their acceptance of the project. For successful decision-making in a group, some member organisations have developed specific participative methods.

- **Create a feeling of belonging:** Persons having experienced poverty and social exclusion often don't know (anymore) how it feels to be part of a community or a team. Therefore, the projects run by Eurodiaconia members give a lot of importance to creating a social network around their users and make them feel part of a community or a team. This can be achieved by having social workers, volunteers and users doing the same work in a second-hand shop or by creating a meeting space where everyone is treated the same and can take part in shaping the space.
- **Support the decision-making:** Many users who have been experiencing social exclusion and poverty, have a very low self-esteem and difficulties evaluating their needs and taking decisions. Most projects therefore involve trained social workers to support users in learning to express their needs and wishes and also in putting them into practice.
- **User involvement needs time:** Close involvement of users in the projects, building trust, listen to users' needs and using participatory approaches to involve users at all stages of the project requires time. Furthermore, the inclusion process does not take place from one day to the other, but can also need a lot of time, which differs from person to person. Eurodiaconia members regretted that

project money is often linked to results that need to be visible after short periods of time, which can be very difficult. They therefore call for more time and longer funding periods to prove the success of their work.

- **Recognition of informal skills:** Several projects start with the assumption that everyone has skills and that the discovery and development of those skills can increase the self-esteem and support the social inclusion of the person. They therefore encourage their users to use their skills for example by teaching them to others. Furthermore, through their involvement in different activities and projects, users also gain new skills, such as selling things in a second-hand shop. Eurodiaconia members call for new ways to recognize those skills, which might allow certain users to enter the primary labour market and find a job.
- **Need of stable funding:** The path to social inclusion of many service users can be very long and take several years. Therefore, those projects need stable and long-term funding in order to offer high quality services and best support their users on their way towards social inclusion.

Case studies from Eurodiaconia members

Denmark

Kirkens Korshaer

KKK Bazaren, Second Hand Shop, Silkeborg

Project aim: The “KKK Bazaren” is a Second-Hand Shop run by Kirkens Korshaer in the town of Silkeborg. One of the objectives of the project is to involve people who are far away from the labour market, and therefore among the most excluded of society, to work as volunteers in the second-hand shop. By providing a place to work for people who are excluded from society, Kirkens Korshaer applies the motto “we are here, because no one else is”.

Project description: The “KKK Bazaren” opened in 2013. The second-hand shop is run by volunteers together with two social workers. Among the volunteers, 15 to 20 of them per year are vulnerable people themselves. They are excluded from the primary labour market and have the possibility of a work placement at KKK Bazaren, receiving a salary from Silkeborg municipality. Those volunteers are generally homeless people, drug addicts or persons that have recently left prison and experience social exclusion. Some of them are also users of the shelter in Silkeborg, which is also run by Kirkens Korshaer. The volunteers supported by the municipality usually stay in the project for a year, which can be expanded if the social worker finds it necessary. Despite their situation being different than the other volunteers, they are regarded being volunteers like the others, also doing the same tasks which includes the cleaning, collecting, and storing of the clothes. The volunteers are supervised and accompanied by two social workers trying to answer their needs.

Social inclusion and users’ involvement:

Working in the shop is a way of being reintegrated in society and therefore is an effective tool towards social inclusion. According to one of the social workers of KKK Bazaren, working in the second-hand shop increases the self-confidence of the volunteers. Being actively involved in a project gives a meaningful day to the volunteers and they can start to believe in themselves again, a feeling which can be deeply eroded for people experiencing deep social exclusion. Furthermore, volunteering in the KKK Bazaren increases the skills of the workers, which can be useful to transit to the primary labour market.

Challenges: For KKK Bazaren, the biggest challenge is the successful transition of the volunteers to the primary labour market at the end of the project. Although some volunteers find another job after their time in KKK Bazaren many of them still face complex problems, including alcohol and drug addictions.

Funding and future development: The KKK Bazaren project is financed partly by the Silkeborg commune and partly through the selling of the second-hand items. Reintroducing the profit made through the sales of the second-hand shop allows the project to be sustainable.

France

ABEJ solidarité

Youth Programme

Project aim: The aim of the youth programme run by ABEJ solidarité is to help young homeless people live autonomously in their own housing and reintegrate socially and professionally. The project is based on a housing first approach, which means that beneficiaries

of the programme are provided with a room or a flat in an ABEJ solidarité shelter or in the ABEJ solidarité transitional housing centre, which is the first step towards social inclusion. The programme is then designed to promote social inclusion through all the activities proposed during the week.

Project description: The experimental youth programme was launched in January 2016 by social workers. They wished to adapt the social work in the ABEJ solidarité homeless residential centre to the specific needs of youths, because they observed that young homeless people didn't want to join in the services that were offered. The programme targets 15 to 20 young people aged 18 to 25 and takes place on a voluntary basis. In this programme, young people's week is organised around three different kinds of activities. Users have the possibility to participate in leisure, cultural and sports activities, but in exchange, they have to fulfil two criteria: they must participate in one activity related to professional and social reintegration, and they have to volunteer on a project and thereby learn to give something back to society. In their volunteering, they can engage in the distribution of meals in other homeless shelters, do some cleaning or even be volunteers in another NGO. According to the social workers, involving the young people in volunteering is a way to help them reconnect with society. The programme gives them a framework to take their own decisions and to move step by step towards greater socio-economic inclusion. Every week, the young people, with the support of a social worker, meet together to decide, which collective and individual activities they want to engage in during the week. Through this process, the youths are directly involved in the decision-making, which improves their self-confidence.

Social inclusion and users' involvement: Two elements of the youth programme can

be considered key drivers of social inclusion: viewing the youths as actors of their own lives and encouraging them to be active members of society. A social worker in ABEJ solidarité explained that for most of the young people involved in the youth programme, being responsible for their own choices is new. They are not used to being trusted and having responsibilities. Indeed, those youths face deep social exclusion linked to their status of being homeless. Giving young people responsibilities over their own lives is a way to empower them and to increase their self-confidence, both of which are key elements to social inclusion. Furthermore, participating in socially useful activities can also be a way to feel included in society. For instance, being a volunteer in another NGO allows the young people to meet other people, to create a social network, and to acquire a sense of achievement in their activities.



Challenges: The biggest challenge of the project is linked to funding. For now, ABEJ solidarité needs to find funding year after year, as the programme has no long-term funding. Another challenge is the difficulty in encouraging interaction among the young participants of the programme. Indeed, they often come

from different backgrounds and even from different cultures - it can be difficult to get them to work together towards a common goal. Finally, finding places where the youths can volunteer is a challenge because some NGOs are reluctant to have young homeless people volunteering with them. This requires a lot of advocacy work from the manager of the Youth programme.



Funding and future development: During the first year of the project's development, the programme was funded by various French corporate foundations, such as the Monoprix Foundation and the Auchan Foundation. A donation from the Fondation de France allowed the programme to continue in 2017. Now, in 2018, the funding is being provided by the residential centre. ABEJ solidarité has reported that they will need to find new sources of funding if they want to keep the programme going over the long term.

Federation de l'Entraide Protestante

Episol, the Solidarity Grocery in Grenoble

Project aim: Episol is a solidarity grocery located in a socially mixed area of Grenoble. The aim of episol is to develop an alternative to food aid, to reduce social exclusion and precarity and to foster social cohesion. This corner shop provides a place where deprived people can buy food without being stigmatised because of their economic situation. Indeed, episol users can buy products at different prices depending on their income and no one can see at what price the user is buying the product. Episol is not only a shop, it is also a place of solidarity where users - always called members - can meet and be involved. As a matter of fact, one of its objectives is to involve members in the functioning of episol, and in that way to increase the social inclusion of its members and especially of the most excluded ones.

Project description: Episol is born in 2013 from the collaboration of four local actors in Grenoble working on social inclusion and among them the Protestant Diaconia in Grenoble, a member of the Fédération de l'Entraide Protestante (FEP). episol officially opened in 2015 after two years of preparatory work with all the actors involved in the project, including the inhabitants of the neighbourhood. The support given by the municipality has been a key element of episol's successful opening. At the root of the project, there is the wish to give a positive impulse for an alternative to the distribution of food for people experiencing poverty and without enough resources to buy food in a normal shop. In episol everyone is welcome to become a member as the aim is to mix different categories of population. However, to allow people with low income to become member of episol, different prices are proposed depending on the users' income.

The situation of the users is indicated on his/her card, so that no one can see at what price the user is buying the product. This system allows people with very low income to buy food in the same place than people with better income and give them an alternative to food banks. All products sold in episol are quality products coming as much as possible from the region. Relations with producers are transparent and prices are negotiated to be fair for producers as well as for episol members. Furthermore, episol promotes the idea of “living together” and allow people from different backgrounds to meet, which increases social cohesion and inclusion. Many users are also active



as volunteers in episol even if there is no differentiation between users and volunteers and everyone is considered as a member.

Social inclusion and users' involvement: During the two years of preparatory work, inhabitants of the neighbourhood and future members of the solidarity grocery have been actively involved in the reflexion around the project. The four associations at the genesis of the project organised workshops to reflect on all the aspects of the solidarity grocery

such as the choice of the supply chain, the differentiated prices in the shop and the economic and financial model. It is thanks to the collaboration with its future members that episol is the place it is today. Episol could not exist without the implication of its members. Since the opening of the solidarity grocery, members are actors of episol. Different activities are organised in the shop. For instance, workshops where members can meet, exchange their knowledge and learn from each other. In addition, members are encouraged to be volunteers in the shop for some hours. Every volunteer chooses the number of hours of volunteering. Volunteering some hours in the shop, especially for the most deprived person can be a way to break down the isolation and to be empowered.

User involvement is a key element of episol and a way to increase their social inclusion in society. episol allows people in poverty to buy quality and fresh food essential for living in dignity and strengthen their self-esteem. Being an episol member, through different levels of involvement in the shop, allows to foster one's social network, is a tool to break social isolation and therefore strengthens social inclusion of people living in poverty.

Challenges: Since its creation, episol is an effective alternative to food banks. However, Protestant Diaconia in Grenoble, realised that there is still a part of the population who can't buy products in episol even for the lower prices. To close the gap, the Protestant Diaconia in Grenoble decided to maintain also classical food distribution, which it sees as a challenge as food distribution is not a long-term solution to fight against social exclusion. The other challenge for episol is the constant research of funding. Even if the project is sustainable, episol needs financial support from different actors.

Funding and future development: Episol generates its own resources through the selling of products. However, these resources are still not enough for episol to be self-sufficient. episol has many financial supports from different actors such as Emmaus, Protestant Diaconia, the municipality of Grenoble, and the Region Auvergne-Rhone-Alpes.



Episol is a solidarity grocery in constant evolution. For instance, in 2017 episol launched a crowdfunding campaign to adapt the solidarity grocery to people with physical disability. In the following years, it is sure that members will come up with new ideas to further develop episol and promote social inclusion for all.

Germany

Heilig-Kreuz-Passion Congregation

*Gitschiner 15 - Centre for Health and Culture
– Against exclusion and poverty*

Project aim: The Centre for Health and Culture, mostly just called Gitschiner 15, which is related to the Heilig-Kreuz-Passion Congregation in Berlin, aims at fighting social exclusion of marginalized persons such as homeless people, people with low income or refugees. The centre provides services and opportunities to become active, mainly through artistic means. They offer opportunities which are usually difficult or impossible to access for marginalized or socially excluded persons. The users are invited to come with their own ideas of leisure activities and the centre provides them with a place to express themselves in a self-determined and self-organised way.

Project description: Gitschiner 15 opened its doors in 2000. It offers a space where marginalized people can become active in leisure activities individually or in group and always in a self-determined and self-organized way. To this aim, the Centre provides a wide range of facilities where cultural activities can take place. The Centre includes a library, a music room, a wood workshop, a self-help bicycle workshop, a cafeteria and a court-yard, which can be used as a meeting places, a relaxation room (for yoga, massage, breathing exercises), a large room which can be used as an art studio or for events and three internet workstations. Different activities are proposed, mainly thanks to external volunteers, who for example offer music lessons (piano, violin, drums, guitar), run a gospel choir, as well as yoga, meditation and other body experience classes. The art studio is at the heart of the project. There, users can paint on canvas and the paintings have already been exposed at several exhibitions in the centre, but also

internationally in London, Mumbai, Sidney, Melbourne and New York, as well as on local markets.

In addition to the cultural activities, the Centre offers a kitchen, showers, social counselling and once a week a mobile medical team with free consultation and treatment in cooperation with the Caritas Association for the Archdiocese of Berlin. The social counselling is funded through the FEAD project run with the Diakonie Berlin-Stadtmitte. Users are usually coming from institutions with which the Centre cooperates, such as homeless cafes, shelters and shelters for women, or because they have heard about the offer and want to join one particular activity. In the frame of the FEAD project, the social workers also do outreach work in the street but noted that it is more difficult to encourage persons living in the streets to come to the centre, although it is not impossible. Most users come in a first place to use the cultural activities, but once the trust is established, the social worker can also support them with their administrative difficulties.

Finally, the centre doesn't only provide a place to develop cultural activities, it also provides social work places for persons that are far from the labour market but benefit from reintegration measures from the job centre. Those persons can work for example in the cafeteria or the bicycle workshop.

Social inclusion and users' involvement:

The centre is used in a neighbourly way and is open to all kinds of people and initiatives. Therefore, not only socially excluded and marginalised persons are coming to the centre, which greatly supports social inclusion. Users of Gitschiner 15 are involved as actors of the project and can develop their own activities in a self-determined and self-organised way. The house is open to new ideas as this makes the

centre alive. The centre tries to be as open as possible to the ideas of its users and look at the possibility of the realisation of these ideas. Whoever comes with a new idea must participate in the realization and therefore in the implementation of the idea. Therefore, the proposal of a new idea goes hand in hand with active involvement of the users. The users are supported in the realization of their ideas through the social workers and skills training when appropriate.

Two examples illustrate this quite well. Someone had the idea to start a dance group. The centre provided space and time for it, but after a few courses, the participation declined and therefore the project has been discontinued. On the other hand, someone had the idea to redesign the court yard. For this purpose, a group has been formed, the redesigning of the court yard has started in spring. With this another new project, "the herb garden" emerged. With this way of working, users are empowered and given a place where they can express themselves.

Users (called visitors) are also included in the decision-making process through plenary democracy. The governance of the centre is structured through different plenaries and committees who take joint decisions at their level of responsibility. The steering committee meets once a week to discuss operational tasks. All staff of the house and the volunteers are involved in a "house plenary" once a month to decide on work priorities, events, problems or questions and many other issues. The visitor plenary takes place every three months and is open to all. The visitors can say which topics they would like to discuss ahead of the meeting. During the meeting information on the general development of the centre is shared and the visitors are encouraged to take decisions together as regards the interaction with each other and the

functioning of the centre. The plenary decided for example that smoking was not allowed anymore during lunch time. In addition, there are also smaller, thematic plenaries, such as the artists plenary, where decisions are taken on future exhibitions, wishes for materials can be presented and advice is given on the use of materials.

Challenges: The main challenge reported by the Heilig-Kreuz-Passion congregation is the limitation of the offer they can provide for budgetary and logistical reasons.

Funding and future development: The Centre for Health and Culture requires a budget of 50 000€ per year to cover the material costs. The project is mainly funded through donations, especially from the Church but also from the industry and private donors. Furthermore, one of the social workers of the Centre is financed through FEAD (the European Fund Aid for the Most Deprived).

The Netherlands

Diakonie of the Protestant Church of Amsterdam

Street Pastorate work with homeless people

Project aim: Through the work of its street Pastor, the Diakonie of the Protestant Church of Amsterdam works extensively with homeless people. The street Pastor's work aims at developing activities with the homeless, to listen to their needs, their story and provide them with a place where they can meet and participate in activities. One of the objectives is to break the isolation of homeless people and to increase their inclusion in society.

Project description: The work of the street Pastor of the Diakonie of the Protestant Church of Amsterdam exists for approximately 15

years. Since then, different activities have been developed with homeless people in Amsterdam to try answering to their needs. The activities developed by the street Pastor with and for homeless people vary in duration and in size, but they always respond to the needs and desires of the homeless involved. One of the ongoing activities in 2018, is a philosophy group. The group meets every Tuesday during a couple of hours and discusses different topics, which are decided by the group. This activity provides a place where homeless people are actors of their own lives, share their opinions, and create social links with other members of the group. As the philosophy group meets every week, this activity also gives a structure to the week of the members. The street Pastor personally follows the members of the group for example by sending reminder messages. In addition to the activities organised with and for homeless people, the street Pastor goes in the streets to speak and listen to homeless people. According to the street Pastor, going where the homeless are, is the best way to reach the most excluded ones, who won't come easily to the activities.

Social inclusion and users' involvement:

The street Pastor develops activities with and not only for homeless people. The homeless can propose ideas to the street Pastor and they will then analyse together if it can be implemented. In that way, activities directly answer to the wishes of users. Having a place to express oneself, to be listened to and not denied participation increases self-confidence and self-esteem which are key elements to foster participation in the society. Some homeless people are deeply involved in the activities and take initiatives to further develop them. For instance, one member of the philosophy group, took the initiative to come early every Tuesday morning to open the room in the building of the Diakonie of the

Protestant Church of Amsterdam, make coffee for the group and welcome the others when they arrive. Like this, the activities developed by the street Pastor give place to homeless people to participate as much as they want to.

Challenges: The street Pastor faces different challenges in developing activities for and with homeless people. One of the challenges raised is the little capacity of concentration of participants during the activities. In addition, even if the inclusion of homeless people in the activities is a way to increase their social inclusion, there are limitations. Indeed, according to the Street Pastor, it is hard to meaningfully increase the social inclusion of homeless people without working on the causes of why people are living in the street.

Funding and future development: The position of the street Pastor is not limited in time; therefore, the work of the street Pastor will continue in the future as long as there is a need to develop activities with and for homeless people.

Spain

Evangelical Spanish Church

Care for people in situations of or at risk of social exclusion

Several local associations and churches related to the Evangelical Spanish Church are running projects for social inclusion. The Camino Association in Alicante, the “Frater-Nadal” Servi Social Evangèlic in Rubí (near Barcelona) and the Protestant Social Action in Madrid, run similar projects in those three cities to care for people in situations of or at risk of social exclusion. As those projects have similar patterns, they will be presented together.

Project aim: The projects run by Camino Association, the Protestant Social Action and the “Frater-Nadal” Servi Social Evangèlic all have short term and long term aims. The first goal of the projects is to give an answer to the urgent needs of people at risk of social exclusion and therefore to offer immediate help by providing food, household goods and clothing. Next to these immediate actions, they help people in situation of exclusion to overcome their situation through different activities such as work training, psychological support, explanation of the social assistance mechanisms and accompaniment in personal processes. Finally, the services are involved in the creation of social networks with other associations.

Projects description: In the town of Rubí, Madrid and Alicante, the projects are opened to all persons experiencing social exclusion: families, lonely people, homeless people, migrants and others. Although the services are opened to everyone, the Camino Association reports that most of the users are women and migrants. To answer the needs of the most excluded, the three services have different activities. The most important activity is food and clothes collection campaigns mainly organised with the members of the protestant churches of the cities. Then, other activities are developed to further encourage social inclusion of users. The Camino Association, the Protestant Social Action and the “Frater-Nadal” Servi Social Evangèlic propose a wide range of activities depending on the need of their users. Those activities go from personal workshops for job training, to discussion groups on the issues of labour precariousness and housing energy poverty, including accompaniment in administrative or personal processes (hospitalization, courts etc). Those activities help users to take initiatives and to regain control over their lives, to make them

aware of their abilities and that they can contribute to the society and be part of the social fabric. In Rubí, “Frater-Nadal” Servi Social Evangèlic, welcomes a high number of as it is the only place in the town distributing food.

The three projects were developed at a similar period. The project run in Rubí exists since 1996, the service provided by the Protestant Social Action in Madrid opened in 1995 and the one in Alicante was founded in 2001.

Social inclusion and users’ involvement:

In the three projects, many users of the services are also actively participating in the collection and distribution of food and clothes. Each week, a group of users helps in the transportation of food from the warehouse to the place of delivery and prepares the packages that are later distributed to the users. Those groups change every week allowing as many users as possible to participate. The Camino Association expresses that through their user’s involvement in the collection and distribution, the users develop a sense of collaboration, a feeling of being part of a project helping other citizens and increase their self-esteem and empower them. Users involved in the services as volunteers receive regular and individualized support, they meet weekly with a supervisor to discuss the evolution of their needs and their work, and they receive training depending on the work to be done. Therefore, user’s involvement in the services is also a way for them to develop new skills.

Challenges: The services in Madrid, Alicante and Rubí face some challenges. A common challenge to the three services is the lack of funding to expand certain activities, such as for instance the training courses. The Protestant Social Action stresses that they don’t have enough resources to meet the needs of all their

users. Another challenge reported by Camino Association is the difficulty to overcome the feeling of defeat or hopelessness that many users have, and which affects their will to actively participate in the services and to change their situation.



Funding and future development: The services have different budgets depending on their size. For the year 2018, Camino Association has a budget of 13 000 euros, the Protestant Social Action in Madrid has a budget of 116 000 euros and the “Frater-Nadal” Servi Social Evangèlic in Rubí has a budget of 55 000 euros. The three projects are expected to continue the next years as there is no end date.

Italy

Diaconia Valdese, Rifugio Re Carlo Alberto

Out and About with dementia

The following project differs slightly from the previous ones with regard to its target group. Whereas all the other projects are focusing on people socially excluded because they

experience poverty, the Italian project targets people socially excluded due to dementia. Although the targeted population is different, user's involvement is also a core element of the project. This project has been included in the mapping to show that user's involvement can be applied in different contexts and towards different target groups.

Project aim: “Out and About with dementia” is a project run by Diaconia Valdese to increase the inclusion of people with dementia into Italian society. People with dementia are among the most marginalized, as many barriers exist preventing their involvement in society. These include lack of information about dementia and a misunderstanding of their behavioural changes leading to stigma and fear of them. Furthermore, their abilities and capacities as well as their social and economic values are underestimated by society, but also by themselves. Based on these assessments, Diaconia Valdese believes in the urgent necessity to create a dementia-friendly society for improving the social inclusion of people with dementia, through their empowerment, the development of activities to reduce stigma and increase the understanding of dementia and the involvement of people with dementia in local communities.

Project description: The Re Carlo Alberto Refuge, a centre run by Diaconia Valdese and specialized in the reception of people living with Alzheimer's or other forms of dementia, is at the origins of the project “Out and about with dementia”. It started as a pilot project in 2014 in the municipalities of Torre Pellice and Luserna San Giovanni and is an ongoing project. People with dementia participating in the project are mostly living in residential care or frequent day care facilities. More recently, persons living at home have been integrated in the project as well.

The starting point of the project is to respond



to the wishes of people with dementia, supported by their families and caregivers, to fully participate in society just like everyone else, and create a dementia-friendly society which permits this. The wishes of people with dementia include going on holidays, visit monuments, go to an exhibition or eat in a restaurant. The project has been developed based on the assessment that many visible and invisible barriers limit the participation of people with dementia and their families in normal community life. The main focus of the project is to improve services in the local community to make them dementia friendly. To achieve this, people with dementia, accompanied by social workers, visit services (such as banks, restaurants or supermarkets) and express the changes they would like to see. These are often very simple changes, that make orientation easier for a person with dementia, such as making signs more visible or the automatic opening of doors. Then, a collaboration with local communities' services is established and an action plan is drawn together. The evaluation of the improvement of the services is done through the experience sharing of people with dementia.

Through the dissemination of information and good practices, the project targets a wide range of businesses and associations to become more dementia-friendly. Finally, the

project also raises general awareness around dementia and shows the active role of people with dementia through the media.

Since the beginning of the project, 180 persons in all stages of dementia have been involved in the project working with 113 collaborating community, leisure and tourism services from the public, private, NGO and media sector.



Social inclusion and users' involvement:

Persons with dementia are not only beneficiaries but protagonists and architects of the project. The development of any activity begins with the identification of their own needs. They are indeed the experts on living with dementia and are therefore the best placed to identify their needs and how the services in a community could be more dementia-friendly. Once their needs are identified, they also contribute to the decision-making process, to the design and implementation of the project. To involve the persons with dementia as actors of the project, for example in decision-making, special participatory approaches and methodologies are developed. One of the methodologies used to involve them is the establishment of an Individual Care Plan (ICP). The ICP is developed by a multidisciplinary team of care workers, family members, physiotherapists, social educators, volunteers and nurses. The project team uses observation of the wellbeing and behaviour of the person with dementia during and after their involvement in an activity along with their expressed opinions where

these are possible, to supervise, adapt and improve the experience of their involvement. When the person with dementia cannot easily communicate with words, then the social workers of the project used other means of expression such as drawing or observing behaviours.

For the Diaconia Valdese, involving people with dementia is essential to make sure that their voice is heard. It is also an effective tool to empower them as they regain control over their own lives and are seen as actors of the community.

Challenges: Stigma and fear from the general population to meet persons with dementia was one of the biggest challenges at the beginning of the project. Many community organizations were fearful of meeting persons with dementia and requested that they were not present in initial contact or training. Therefore, an awareness raising work was done with the collaborators leading to the decrease of this request. Another important challenge of the project and of the involvement of persons with dementia is the progression of dementia. As a matter of fact, some persons involved at the beginning of the project are now in more advanced stage of dementia and cannot participate in the project anymore. Finally, a last challenge is the slow pace of the project, as it takes more time, when involving persons with dementia. This needs to be explained to the collaborating services which might be demanding.

Funding and future development: The project requires 15 000€ per year of direct funding. The project is funded through an Otto Per Mille grant, the European Foundations' Initiative on Dementia, crowdfunding, fundraising events and Diaconia Valdese's own resources, which include incomes such as client fees.

Conclusion

The publication has shown that a variety of Eurodiaconia members' projects targeting people experiencing poverty and social exclusion, successfully include their users in the provision of their services. This means that users are involved in the planning, implementation and monitoring of the project and their involvement plays a key role in fostering their social inclusion in various ways. When done successfully, user involvement in a project contributes to build self-confidence and self-esteem of the users, it breaks the isolation circle in which the vulnerable user can be, it is a tool of empowerment and gives a voice to people that are usually unheard.

The best practices presented in this mapping also show that effectively involving users requires a complete change of approach and thinking, as social workers and volunteers need to recognise the users as partners in a joint process. Involving users as actors of the project, rather than seeing them just as beneficiaries, therefore requires adapting the services accordingly. Several elements have proven to be crucial such as creating safe and stable environments, building trust, developing participatory methods and having an inclusive communication. Depending on the users' needs and the human and financial possibilities of the project, the nature of involvement is different in each project. Independently of the type of involvement, it has become apparent that decision-making and other processes always require more time when users are involved. It also requires the support of well-trained social workers who can accompany the users in their process and encourage them to have confidence in their abilities.

Some projects have been able to prove the success of their work to authorities, because

they were able to refer some of their users to the primary labour market and towards an independent life. This is however, not the primary aim of most of the projects, which mainly aim at lifting people out of precarious situations to restore their dignity and empower them to lead an independent life again.

Therefore, success should in those cases not be measured according to labour market integration, but according to the improvement of social relationships and overall wellbeing of the service users. The high vulnerability and degree of social exclusion means that visible results take a long time. Therefore, in order to be able to continue their work, those projects need long-term funding solutions and realistic result indicators, which take into account the high vulnerability of the users.

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