

## Sustaining Reforms – Panel Presentation

Building Bridges was not only a single 2-year project, but it was a collection of programmes from across 7 different countries, all working towards the same collaborative goals, but each having very unique features, and I would like to congratulate my colleagues on the project team for what has been an incredible success both locally and Europe-wide. Each of these individual programmes achieved something incredible. The role of the larger Building Bridges collaboration was to help individual programmes to learn from each other on how to develop successful interventions, on how to combat common challenges, achieve common goals, and create long-term sustainable impacts on the ground.

My role in the project has been to monitor and evaluate the extent to which these individual programmes are building sustainable features into their activities. The Building Bridges project itself is not – and should not be – a sustainable entity, but has been a vehicle by which to create individually sustainable programmes, and to provide guidance for others across Europe and the wider world on how to develop sustainable programmes, with sustainable impact and sustainable reform to build those bridges between victims and offenders, to build those bridges between those organisations working to support the social and emotional resettlement of offenders, and those organisations working to support the social and emotional recovery of victims of crime, and to build bridges between the world of restorative practice, and academic, scientific enquiry.

I think that the Building Bridges project has had a marvellous impact beyond its immediate objectives. Not only have our partners on the project set-up and implemented highly effective programmes that have had a positive social and emotional impact on well over 150 victims and offenders from across Europe, but they have succeeded in raising awareness of the value and importance of restorative practices, they have contributed to high-level scientific enquiry on the impact on – and experience of – participants in the restorative process, and they have established many positive and productive relationships with victim-support organisations, highlighting the value of their combined efforts, cooperation, and collaboration to achieve a common goal – minimising the social and emotional impacts of crime.

How can we continue to sustain these impacts and these changes, and how can new initiatives build on the experiences of the building bridges project to create programmes and initiate reforms that can offer sustainable impacts for the future?

4 things are critically important for us to consider. Firstly, the organisation who is initiating such a programme needs to have the strength, capacity and organisation-wide commitment to achieving a long-term goal. Everything that is done when setting up a building-bridges style programme needs to be done with the question in mind: “how will this action contribute to the long-term success of the programme”. Everything. Only with the full support of the organisation can you ensure that this long-term vision remains a priority and not only a possibility.

Secondly, the organisation needs to consider how it responds to the needs of other stakeholders. It sounds simply, but it is critical to know who are the stakeholders in your environment, and what are their needs? You may look through a Building Bridges programme example and think: “excellent, that’s what I want to do – I will transfer this from Germany, or Italy or the Czech Republic and I will set it up in Greece”. This will not work. Every programme will be different, dealing with very different stakeholder needs. A thorough and detailed analysis of those in your environment and how your

programme will respond to their needs is essential in establishing a programme with the potential for long-term impact and sustainability.

Thirdly, the organisation needs to consider how it can encourage other stakeholders to react to and engage with its activities. Lots of things that the organisation does in relation to the programme will have an affect or an impact in the outside world. What kind of reaction do you want from stakeholders? What kind of input do you need from them? When you communicate your idea to the ministry of justice, or to the director of prisons, or to the board of trustees at a national victim support organisation – what do you want them to do with this information? Ideally, you want all stakeholders to develop a strong emotional connection to the programme. How can you do this? Involving stakeholders, listening to their ideas, engaging them in the strategic design of your programme, encouraging a strong connection on a cognitive and emotional level, and fostering a culture of mutual trust and cooperation will go a very long-way towards helping you achieve your objectives in the long term. Equally, when you deliver an intervention, or produce a document or a flyer or a programme guide or any other concrete product, think about the quality, not just the concept. Imagine you were an outsider to this programme – look at the quality of what you are producing – is this quality enough to convince other people, who might not share your belief or enthusiasm, to take part in your programme or cooperate with you? Encouraging ownership of the programme from individuals and organisations external to your programme is absolutely essential to getting the programme off the ground and sustaining the programme for the benefit of victims and offenders in the future. In everything you do, consider how you can encourage others to share your enthusiasm, your ideas and your ownership.

Lastly, it is important to consider the policy environment that you are working in. This can be restrictive, but it can also provide opportunities and gateways. What are the policy goals and objectives in your country or region? How can you align your programme to meet these policy goals?

It takes more than a project or a programme to create a sustainable change or reform – particularly in areas so politically and emotionally sensitive as crime, punishment and victimisation. It takes a movement, and a movement can't easily be strategically planned, but there is plenty that you *can* do to create support, enthusiasm and ownership for victim-offender dialogues, to promote the value of restorative practices at local, regional, national and international levels. That is what we have been trying to achieve on this project, and I think I speak on behalf of my colleagues and partners on this project when I urge and encourage you to do the same.