

Newsletter Progress Project Building Bridges

Introduction

On March 12, 2015, the Interim Report regarding the status of the Building Bridges (BB) project has been submitted to the EU Project officer. The interim report addresses the progress as far as concrete project deliverables is concerned, as well as the financial status.

This 'Interim report' is an important milestone indicates that:

- We are halfway through our project time
- We are reaching the exiting phase in which the actual Building Bridges programme with victims and offenders will take place in 7 European countries, including the important evaluation of these trainings
- To execute these programmes quite some efforts have been spent on writing a facilitator guidebook, selecting and training facilitators, finding and preparing victims and offenders to participate in joint meetings

Aims of Building Bridges

Under the overall umbrella of Restorative Justice and Victim empathy, Building Bridges aims to:

- Promote victim's support, especially emotional support and restoration
- Promote restorative justice processes between offenders and victims in Europe
- Contribute to victim participation in European victim-offender programmes
- Contribute to working on changing value systems with offenders in the aftermath of crime
- Contribute to socially just communities in Europe

Looking Back

On March 6 – 8, 2014 we had our kick-off meeting in Zoetermeer (NL) where we met with a large group of representatives from the 9 partners (7 organizations who will run the training and 2 scientific partners). The partners come from Austria, Czech Republic, Germany, Great Britain, Hungary, Italy, Portugal, Spain and the Netherlands.

In this meeting we laid the foundation for the project collaboration for the next 2 years. The project itself has been discussed, including all the related EU regulations; clarifications have been given on many questions to reach a joint view on the project and the expected contributions from the partners. The majority of the partners had no experience with working in transnational projects. Running this project would open up new ways to work with offenders as well as victims, based on sharing all the knowledge gained in various existing programmes and supported by scientific evaluation.

An important issue has been discussing the differences with the Sycamore Three Project (STP). The BB project basically builds upon STP, but adds its own new content. The focus on victims, how to recruit them, how to motivate them, how to coach victims as well offenders at the same time and how this changes the whole set-up of the training is an important part of BB. The STP programme has

been run in various forms in Europe, and through BB we focus on including more victims in the programmes, thus making it a well facilitated combined victim – offender training. The scientific evaluation of these trainings will add valuable information that will support the aim to start BB programmes in other European countries.

With this kick-off meeting the first phase of the project started with Workstream 1: the Exploration Phase.

The second meeting took place in Hull (GB) in July 2014. At this meeting the results of the exploration work has been presented and discussed.

Three important documents have been produced and are available on the BB-website: a document ‘Exploring existing STPs for restorative justice in prisons in Europe and a literature review’ ([WS 1. D1.2 Methodology Paper](#)), a document that presents the results of 17 qualitative interviews with STP facilitators in Europe ([WS 1. D1.3a Research Report Interviews with facilitators](#)), and a document ‘Victim-Offender Encounters for Restorative Justice Dialogue: A Review’ ([WS 1. D1.3c VOM review](#)).

Based on this desk research we could move to Workstream 2: Facilitator and Preparation Phase. An essential subject was the writing of a guidebook for BB-facilitators. In Hull we discussed at length the content of the guidebook and writers of each chapter.

The third meeting took place in Leonberg (nearby Stuttgart, GE) on January 20-21, 2015. The main target was to finish Workstream 2 and the introduction of Workstream 3.

During Workstream 2 it has been quite a challenge to work together on one guidebook. We had to insert extra working sessions in the evenings to get the job fixed. The result is the document ‘A Guide to Establishing and Running the Building Bridges Programme’ and is available on the website as well ([Building Bridges Guidebook – 9-2-2015](#)).

Other crucial actions in this workstream dealt with how to find victims, offenders and facilitators, including the training of facilitators.

We had to discuss options to train facilitators in Spain and Portugal, as they had no experience in running an STP programme before. This was felt as an omission in the project plan. Fortunately, a solution has been found, but it caused some delay in a number of activities in these countries.

This brings us to Workstream 3: Implementation and Evaluation of Building Bridges. A total of 14 Building Bridges pilot programmes will take place during this workstream until August 2015. During and after the BB programmes questionnaires and other measuring methods will be used to evaluate the impact of BB on the participants.

What did the project partners gain so far?

Per partner it may differ a bit, but a number of positive results are:

- Learning from different and additional experiences of 9 partners (practical and scientific)
- Learning how to contribute together on common goals and follow timelines
- Generating support from and collaboration with various victim support groups as well as other partner and network organizations
- Organizing victim events under the banner of Building Bridges has increased the outreach into the victim environment

- The project helps in the area of capacity building, a prerequisite to deliver the project goals in the long term

The coming year

In July 2015 the partners will meet in Budapest to evaluate Workstream 3 and work towards the final conference in Rome in November 2015. At that conference we will introduce Building Bridges and its scientific evaluation to a broad audience, share our project experiences and outcomes, and motivate other organizations to make use of all the new knowledge and experiences, thus contributing to the restoration of victims and offenders.

Kick-off meeting, March 6 – 8, 2014, Zoetermeer.



This publication has been produced with the financial support of the JUST/2013/JPEN/AG Programme of the European Union. The contents of this publication are the sole responsibility of the author and can in no way be taken to reflect the views of the European Commission.