

WELCOME TO AIF!

Welcome to the first newsletter from the Alternative Future (AIF) partners!

The project, which is funded by the European Commission under the Rights, Equality and Citizenship programme, will run for two years, ending in December 2017. It aims to develop resources that will enable staff who work with young people in residential care to better understand how the experience of violence affects them, how gender impacts on perceptions and experience of violence, and how to support the young people more effectively. Ultimately, Alternative Future aims to reduce the risk of them becoming victims or perpetrators of violence in later life.

Six organisations are partners in the project. SURT (Fundació de dones) in Barcelona is the lead partner. SURT supports women who have been victims of abuse and has a strong track record in violence reduction approaches. The other partners are Animus (a provider of services to vulnerable children based in Sofia), Dissens (a gender education and research agency in Berlin), AMGI is a centre for masculinity research, education and psychosocial support, Innocenti (a child welfare and child policy organisation based in Florence) and Children in Scotland (the national network for child rights and wellbeing in Scotland).

AIF's work will be carried out initially by talking directly to young people in residential care. They will be presented with various scenarios

and asked for their views on each of these. We are also gathering information from the practitioners who work with them. Through this we will establish how this particularly vulnerable group of young people perceive violence and the nature of current knowledge and practice experience among care staff. We will use this information to develop a capacity building programme for staff which will be delivered later in the year through a series of seminars. We are just beginning the information gathering process which we intend to complete by the end of April 2016.

THE AIF WEBSITE

The project has its own website which is about to go live. Find it at <http://alternativefuture.eu>.

On the website you will find detailed information about the project as well as regular updates on partners' activity and relevant news items.

ROUNDUP OF PARTNER NEWS

AMGI

In Austria, the project work has started in the last few weeks.

The Province of Styria's Department for Social Affairs, Work and Integration is an associate partner in AIF and is supporting the project by co-financing and assisting the delivery of the project in Austria. The project partner in Austria, the Research Department of the Association for Men's and Gender Issues Styria (AMGI), has developed the first analysis instruments (guidelines, questionnaires) in close

cooperation with Dissens – Institute for Education and Research (Berlin). At the same time, first contacts with residential care facilities (RCF) were set up with the positive engagement of four different organisations. Three of the RCFs care for young people of both genders while the other mainly looks after young men. Two of the facilities are operated by the Province of Styria:

- One RCF cares for young men and women aged 11 – 18 who suffer alienation, eating disorders and/or violence. They offer different forms of living (e.g. living communities with single rooms for about 40 youth and assisted living), internal or external schools, job coaching and apprenticeships in internal training companies or external companies.
- The second has a similar caring concept focused on young men aged 15 – 18. They offer regular and integrated vocational education in internal training companies in nine different skilled trades.

The two other RCFs are run by different non-profit organisations:

- One provides 'Family Houses' which look after children aged three to 15. They offer middle and long term stays (from one to ten years).
- One RCF is a short term night shelter for homeless youth and young adults. Young people can stay overnight there (no more than 10 nights per month).

Meanwhile focus group interviews have already taken place in some of the RCFs.

Dissens

Dissens has also made active links with RCFs. The first facility (QueerLeben) is happy to work with the project, though the young people have voiced some hesitation because of the 'heaviness' of the topic.

The detailed programme for the young people's workshop has now been developed and we hope that the professionals involved will be reassured that we are looking for general perceptions rather than asking the young people to revisit difficult and traumatic life experiences. We've also offered to meet the young people for an initial 'getting to know each other' meeting.

Karuna is the second facility we've approached. It's a full-time care RCF for young people who abuse drugs or other substances and usually have other problems such as personality disorders, anxiety and relationship difficulties.

Once again staff have voiced concern about the possible impact that talking about issues of violence might have on the young people. We are dealing with these concerns by organising the group sessions so that both staff and young people can ask questions before the actual information gathering takes place. The staff in Karuna already use Trauma Pedagogic (see below) concepts in working with the young people so are equipped to anticipate and deal with the wounds that might be opened up by asking them to think about violence.

The practitioners gave us very positive feedback that our workshop concept is good and we have agreed not only on a date for the focus group with the professionals but also on a date for a first meeting with the young people where they will be able to ask us questions about the workshop. If they agree to participate, the actual workshop will take place at a second meeting.

In Germany, the term Trauma Pedagogy has been in use since the 1980s. It is now recognised as a specific therapeutic approach with accredited training. Its principles and practice methodologies will provide useful contextual knowledge as we develop the CBP.

SURT

Starting the project: Kick-off meeting in Barcelona and first contact with the Catalan RCFs.

On January 12th and 13th, 2016, SURT and its five partner organisations met in Barcelona for the Alternative Future kick-off meeting. The aim of the meeting was to get to know the partnership, to establish the common working standards for the two year project and to start the discussion on the first activity of the project, a Needs Assessment to determine and analyse gaps in residential care professionals' knowledge and, consequently, their practice. The meeting was really useful and the general evaluation of the participants was really positive.

On the second matter, SURT is glad to share that we already have the confirmation of three RCFs who are willing to participate to project. Last week the project team visited one of the centres. The visit was extremely positive and the project was really well received. Over the next few weeks, SURT will visit the other two centres and will arrange the schedule for implementing the Needs Assessment activities – the focus groups with professionals and with young people.

SURT is also working on the adaptation of the questionnaire and on setting up the criteria for the selection of the professionals to who it will be sent.

The SURT team is excited that we are about to begin the face-to-face work inside the RCFs and to get to know both the professionals working and the children living in them!

Animus

Together with the other partners of the project, and under the leadership of AMGI and Dissens, Animus Association Foundation (AAF) took part in the development of Needs Assessment methodology.

Currently, the AAF project team is translating and adapting the questionnaire for professionals, the guidelines and script documents for the focus groups with children and professionals respectively. Bulgaria is undergoing a process of deinstitutionalisation and is currently in the final phase of transition towards alternative

community based family-type care for children. From AAF we are looking forward to conduct the needs assessment activity from the Alternative Future project especially during this dynamic period of deinstitutionalisation.

AAF aims to conduct the needs assessment in three alternative care institutions and is currently finalising the selection of RCFs. We are striving to conduct the assessment in three different contexts and hope that the qualitative data that we gather will be diverse: one home for children without parental care that is currently transitioning to a centre for family-type accommodation; a residence dormitory operated by Concordia foundation that we often cooperate with; and a crisis centre for children who have been victims of violence.

Innocenti

We participated in a meeting led by the Florence municipality (which is an associate partner in the project) involving residential units that operate in the Florence area. We explained the project goals and invited them to participate. Some of the people present at the meeting expressed concerns about our approach as some of the children they cared for are not victims of violence. They were also concerned about the additional work that their participation in the project might involve. However, we received a positive response from two organisations that manage a number of residential facilities and we are meeting them next week to arrange the focus groups.

Children in Scotland

We are leading on project dissemination activities so have been working on drafting the project's informational materials and on editing this newsletter. We'll later be involved in the organisation of the seminars and events that are part of the work programme. As far as the data gathering is concerned we have received permission from the City of Edinburgh Council to carry out the Needs Assessment work within its RCFs. Edinburgh is the second largest municipality in Scotland with a diverse range of residential provision so should provide valuable information for the CBP.

We've also been working on ethics guidelines for the project and on the leaflets and consent forms for professionals and for young people.