

Cyprus: “Parenting in a multicultural complex society”

Introduction

This case study is based on a European project on parenting. It was an intergenerational learning project. The main aim was to empower parents to be able to assist their children to grow up, to know their children better, to be able to deal with problems that their children are facing, to help children with their school work, to give them skills to cooperate with the other children and school authorities, to be able to live in a multicultural society. The goal was also to mobilize all resources, local authorities, schools, tutors in adult education, the whole community for helping children integration.

Organization implementing the project

Name: Cyprus Adult Education Association (was partner in the project among 10 other countries)
Country: Cyprus
Web site: www.parenting-eu.com

Context

A growing number of immigrant children in the schools of the municipality of the town of Latsia, Nicosia; an increased number of children with antisocial behavior because of the complex society; the scarcity of information about children with disabilities and the lack of knowledge of teachers, parents and local authorities on how to deal with the above problems, motivated CAEA to be partner in the project. Statistically speaking, the Latsia community of 25,000 citizens is facing social and other problems as 85% of the citizens are refugees coming from 60 different communities, many living in refugee settlements. The target group in Cyprus was selected under certain criteria. Efforts were made that each participant represents a group of parents. We have 15 members with the following categories of parents:

- Large family parents with more than 4 children
- Single parent families
- Immigrated Cypriots families
- Parents of different nationalities
- Parents with low education
- Parents with children with low performance e.g. dyslexic
- Foreign worker parents
- Divorced parents
- Refugee parents

It was agreed that in these contexts parenting is a challenging task and parents would benefit from specific training. Special remarks were made concerning the multicultural society and the efforts needed to adapt to this society.

The Mayor of the municipality, the school administration and schools' parents committees cooperated closely during the project. The Mayor was also involved with the activities. The schools' headmasters and the parents committees selected the target group (15 parents in total) and they circulated information about the project and invited registrations.

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Action

The group of parents, together with the manager of the project, worked out a programme of activities. It was considered important to follow the needs and interests of the participants in order to have maximum success.

The main core of the plan of action consisted of discussions on various subjects chosen by the participants. The following subjects were chosen:

Problems of single parents

Xenophobia

Violence in the family

Conflict resolution

The role of the local authorities in a multicultural society

The role of the family in a multicultural society

Anorexia in adolescence

Overweight children

Diversity

Migration in Cyprus

The needs of immigrants in a society

Programmes for integration of immigrants in Cyprus

Volunteering as a value

Children's homework

Dangerous toys

Basic needs of children

The manager and two or three parents were responsible for providing expertise for each subject. Discussions were open to the public and the schools authorities kept informing the parents about the meetings.

During the meetings parents had the opportunity to come with their children. Childcare was provided.

The target group worked hard for the publication of the 80 page work entitled "*Parents in a multicultural European city*" produced in Greek and in English. Many articles from newspapers on intergenerational learning and family learning were included in the publication, alongside research findings about various problems that children and parents are facing today (dyslexia, overweight children, homework, handling career and children, children in large families etc.), articles that parents wrote and articles from international bibliography were all included in the publication. Two immigrant parents developed a section of the publication called "*How immigrants see Cypriots*".

Another important activity of the parents was the organization in Cyprus of an international symposium with 60 participants from 10 countries (partners and parents). It was an important cultural and educational activity and many organizational skills were developed. The parents group had 3 meetings before the Symposium. Parents worked in pairs and in groups to prepare the cultural activities (poems, dancing, traditional food, games etc.). Others worked out ways to better present the City Guide and the exhibition. Others worked for the study visits. More than 7-8 parents participated in the organized symposium and parents from Cyprus took part in another symposium in Italy.

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Suggestions were made by parents for improvements of the learning facilities of the municipality adult education centre. Also suggestions were made for the necessity of more immigrants to participate in the programmes.

Meetings took place in the city hall of the town. The authorities were happy to contribute to the success of the initiatives.

Outcomes and impact

The parents group in Cyprus were happy with the results of the project. A small group of parents managed to mobilize the necessary resources from various sectors. Local authorities had a crucial role. Tutors in adult education were mobilized to work more effectively with parents. Parents became more confident. Parents felt that they could have a role in a better society. The close Cyprus society is now more willing to accept immigrants and to contribute together to build the new multicultural society. Parents are more confident to guide and help their children in their development and in solving problems.

The parents target group decided to keep in touch and find ways to maintain the interest and the results. Follow up meetings will take place. The mayor of Latsia emphasized the role that local authorities can play in strengthening families and he promised support for parenting initiatives. The mayor assured the interest of the municipality for the development of the learning society. Suggestions were made by parents for improvement of the learning facilities of the municipality adult education centre. Also suggestions were made for the necessity of more immigrants to participate in the programmes.

A training module for the training of the tutors in adult education who are working with parents was developed. A short seminar with 10 tutors took place at the adult education centre of the municipality. The training is exemplary about the possible methodology of teaching and learning for adults.

A large group of parents and another of carers and stakeholders involved discussed the basic needs of the children in relation to parenting support. Meetings with key persons took place. Meetings with immigrants' organizations, meetings with trade union officers, meetings at welfare services responsible for children and parents also took place. Schools committees were mobilized to cooperate more closely with the school to identify early problems and find solutions. The schools administration and staff observed a positive change with more skillful parents, more interested in their children, more cooperative. Immigrant parents could see the interest and concern of the local authority and of the school administration.