

Young Mediators in Youth Work

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Change, transformation, and peace.

These are some of the words that the participants of the project "Mediation: a new tool for dealing with conflicts In Youth Work" stated when we asked them to define their experience during that week.

"Mediation: a new tool for dealing with conflicts In Youth Work" was a combined Training Course and Seminar with deepening elements on skills development. The aim was to raise awareness of mediation among youth workers. In order to do so, we first delivered an extensive introduction to learn and map out different mediation initiatives existing in the partner countries involved, then we taught theory and techniques of conflict and mediation through non-formal education methodologies; roll playing, debates, games, etc.

After the training there were a few conclusions to draw up. First, the power and potential of mediation and communication skills trainings for empowering people to handle conflicts. Whether people eventually want to become mediators or not, training in mediation and getting an in-depth view on it already have broad benefits. For example, it already helps people to work on their conflict management skills. Another benefit is that it helps transform the way people look at conflicts, changing from something negative and avoidable to an opportunity for change and something that we want to be handled in a constructive way.

Second, once participants knew more about mediation they started identifying new fields where mediation has a place. Using mediation among different organizations working in the same field and place in order to enhance the efficiency among them and promote inter-organizational collaboration, or appointing one mediator at each organization/project in order to prevent and handle conflicts within the team, are just some examples.

So, more education on mediation for the general public and more education on mediation for future mediations may increase the demand on the use of services. Because we value what we know and tend to undervalue what we ignore, mediation is still widely unknown among the general public.

Last but not least, the organization of this program was the result of an attempt to summarize and compile the very basic principles, theoretical inputs and skills that, from my point of view, young mediators need. To me, one of (if not the) most important aspects is attitude.

Becoming a mediator is about more than just acquiring knowledge on conflict, psychology and law. It's more than developing communication and psychological skills. It's about becoming capable of creating a safe space for the parties to reconstruct their relationship, and guiding people to transform their view of conflicts (and therefore also life) in a more positive and constructive way.

As a young mediator, it might be overwhelming and a bit frustrating in the beginning, to see so many new things to learn and so many old approaches, values, ideas, behaviours and patterns we want to transform (or at least rethink). Most of the time, personal transformation is the natural conclusion. So, support in the process of facing this challenge is important.

To get there, the journey is long. I would say endless. Conflicts are an inherent part of life, so there is a life-long process of learning how to mediate them and how to handle our own conflicts.

We may teach and learn theories, principles, skills, techniques and mediation processes. But there is no training that can teach of us the right attitude. As Jung says, *"to have a certain attitude means to be ready for something definite (...) The state of readiness that consists in a definite combination of psychic factors or contents, which will either determine action in this or that definite direction, or will comprehend an external stimulus in this or that definite way."*

So, one of the main lessons we try to give when training young mediators is to encourage people to acquire a pro-active attitude towards permanent self-development, constructive engagement in conflicts and faith in human capacity, to be responsible for creating and constructing their own lives and destinies. This subjacent attitude will be the foundations of our actions in our daily life, in the same way as this shall be the foundation of our work as mediators inside and outside mediation sessions.