



Designing better interventions
for the social inclusion and well-being
of the children of incarcerated parents



Erasmus+

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Recommendations on how to include children and youth in designing project proposals

The participation of children and young people, as well as the expression of opinions in various procedures, represent a topic that has been very relevant in recent decades. In accordance with international law, national regulations in the Republic of Serbia, as well as human rights standards (European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, UN Guidelines for Alternative Care, General Comments of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, Family Law, Law on Social Protection, etc.) children and young people have the right to participate and express their opinions regardless of age, because participation is achieved in accordance with developmental opportunities and their potential. The establishment of participatory practice, i.e., changing the attitudes towards young people, who we see as competent and capable of participating in the decision-making process, implies a paradigm shift in terms of commitment, tolerance, understanding, education, and adaptation. This implies that adults give up some of the power they have in order for children and young people to be actively involved in the process and to ensure that decisions are respected. On the other hand, it is very important to realize that different decision-makers should decide in the best interest of the child/young person, without being instructed by the adults involved in the decision-making process. This is precisely why, in order for young people to learn participation, it is important that they be involved in the decision-making process from childhood, as well as that they participate in the entire process, from the beginning.

Actions that allow young people to express themselves actually encourage young people and encourage their resilience.

Practice shows that children and young people are not sufficiently involved in initiatives and actions concerning the improvement of their position. In order to have a better insight into their needs and help them to improve their status, it is necessary to give them the opportunity and include them in the part of writing project proposals.

The inclusion of children and young people is a process that we could define through the following stages:

- Always have the best interest of a certain target group of young people before you
- Realistically define their needs through appropriate analysis
- Ensure the possibility to hear their suggestions on how to solve certain problems

- Create a proposal together and include them in the project proposal.

- Significantly observe who children and young people see as relevant actors in the implementation of activities and predict how those institutions/organizations or specific persons can be involved in writing the project proposal in the realization of the project.

We should certainly take into account the growth of the children/young people we include in this process, their past life experiences, plans, but on the other hand, we should take care that what we include in the project proposal is relevant, realistic, and useful.

In working with young people, the issue of establishing a relationship of trust is particularly sensitive, as part of which young people will say what their needs really are and how they see their problems, that is, solutions. An interesting model for researching the needs of young people and their proposed solutions is peer research, where young people can be trained to question other young people as interviewers and collect significant data based on that. This model is useful in the sense that the young interviewers are closer in age and experience to the young respondents and will therefore be more open and free in giving answers.

How to reach children and young people who would participate in writing the project proposal?

- it is important to have a good collaborative network (eg schools, various local organizations that work with children and youth, etc.) that can recommend children and youth that we would include in this process.

- The choice of professionals who will work with children and young people is also important because it should include experienced and sensitized employees who have awareness and knowledge about the needs of children and young people.

- NGOs that gather young people, youth organizations, student parliaments

Based on our work experience so far and what came out of the implementation of our project, including a set of workshops realized in Belgrade, our recommendations are:

- When planning initiatives for children and youth, the best interest of the target group of children and youth should be in the center of attention,

- Defining their needs through appropriate analysis of targeted research

- It is important to discuss and hear the suggestions of children and young people on how to solve certain problems and to try to include them in the project proposal.

- We should take into account the age of the children/young people we include in this process, their previous life experiences, plans and proposals

- Take care that what we include in the project proposal is relevant, realistic, useful and feasible.

- Consider who children and young people see as relevant actors in the implementation of activities

- Predict how those institutions/organizations or specific persons can be involved in writing the project proposal, and perhaps in its implementation.

- Establish a relationship of trust in which young people will say what their needs really are and how they see their problems, i.e. solutions.

- Apply, when possible, peer research as a model for researching the needs of young people and their proposed solutions, where young people can be trained to interview other young people and collect significant data based on that.

- Establish a good collaborative network (eg schools, various local organizations that work with children and youth, etc.), who can recommend children and youth to include in this process.

- The choice of professionals who will work with children and young people is also important because it should include experienced and sensitized experts who have awareness and knowledge about the needs of children and young people.

- Educate young people to work with young people.