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Good Practices of **ADULT LEARNERS' FORUM**



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Good Practices of
ADULT LEARNERS FORUM
from
Italy – Estonia – Spain – Greece – Portugal

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Andras (Tallin, Estonia)

Tecnopras s.a.s. (Passo Corese, Italy)

Federaciòn de Mujeres y Consumidores de Guadalajara (Guadalajara, Spain)

AidLearn (Lisbon, Portugal)

Olympiako kek (Pyrgos, Greece)

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Chapter I

PRESENTATION OF THE PROJECT

I. Adult Learners Forum

The globalization phenomenon as the global increasing connectivity, integration and interdependence in the economic, social, technological, cultural and political sectors improved the contacts between people from different countries, languages and cultures, but also put in evidence the differences between cultures. So the interaction between different cultures for business purposes, military cooperation, science, education, mass media, entertainment, tourism or simple pleasure, requires intercultural competences in order to people from one culture understand and feel comfortable when contacting other cultures. Intercultural learning is the tool to respond to new challenges and creating new opportunities for a European Commission in progress.

European citizens feel European integration and cooperation as something in the hands of distant institutions and politicians, dealing with economic issues and policies, that are far away from their daily living and which the general public can not see the immediate advantages. The European cooperation is possible through the commitment of institutions and persons at national and European level, for example mobility is already a reality with around 1.5 million students participating in Erasmus since programme began.

The Adult Learners Forum project started with the idea of cooperation and exchange of experiences between learners from different countries. The lack of joint discussions between learners has been constantly brought out as a weakness in adult training by learners from all countries. Therefore it is necessary to develop a partnership at national and European level involving adult learners where meetings, workshops and seminars will take place, to discuss learners' problems, hold dialogues with training providers and social partners, and make proposals for solving their problems.

ALF Project it is a Grundtvig 2 – Learning Partnerships project, financed by the Socrates Programme. The project started in August 2005 with 5 adult education institutions from Estonia, Italy, Portugal, Greece, and Spain. The ALF project will be developed in three years and every year all partners have to do the project renewal applications form, submitting it to their Socrates and Leonardo da Vinci National Agency.

ALF Project will allow adults' learners to strength their role as active citizens in society and to increase intercultural competences through the exchange of experiences for the duration of the transnational forums. During the development of

the ALF Project the learners will be involved in elaborating the ALF model, developing their networks, and disseminating the project outputs.

2. The Partnership

ALF project partnership is composed by 5 partners' institutions from Estonia, Greece, Spain, Italy and Portugal. All the institutions have extensive experience in providing courses in accordance with learners' needs and market demand and supporting active citizenship.

Association of Estonian Adult Educators – Andras (Estonia) is ALF project coordination. Andras was established as a nongovernmental institution in 1991 to unite the representatives of different branches of adult education in Estonia, represents for Estonian adult education in Europe and the rest of the World and aims to increase the competence of adult educators. Andras mission is to provide the prerequisites for lifelong learning in Estonia, to include the decision makers and all social partners in designing the educational environment, and to motivate learners in the learning process. Andras major activities are participating in the development of the educational policy; taking active part in promoting adult education and the concept of lifelong learning in Estonia, and also in designing the educational environment; organising events highlighting the value of education such as the Adult Learners Week and Adult Education Forum; participating in the execution of various international and European Social Fund projects; consulting member organisations and including them in the EU projects advancing the development of adult education.

Olympic Training and Development, Ltd. (Greece) is one of the ALF Project partners. The organisation was founded in 1995 in order to provide vocational training, life long learning & similar services (research, studies, seminars, conferences, training material, participation in integrated programmes & community initiatives). The company operates nation-wide, from the headquarters in Pyrgos, while there are branches in Patras, Lamia, Zakynthos and Tripoli. Main aim of the organisation is to contribute to social development contributing to the creation of preconditions that will lead to evolution with a perspective. In its 12 years of operation, Olympic Training Ltd. Contributes in a dynamic way to the development of life long learning, the introduction of up to date & innovative educational methods, as well as, to the promotion of applied research in the adult education field on local & international level.

Guadalajara Progressive Federation of Women and Consumers Associations (Spain) is a non profit organisation that includes seven associations of women of the province of Guadalajara. It is member since 1995 of the wider regional organisation FEPAMUC-CLM present in the region of Castilla La Mancha which is included in the national network of Progressive Women Associations placed in Madrid. It offers

lifelong learning non-formal to women in difficult situations in order to prepare them to go back to work or to start working for the first time. It is focussed on motivation and encouragement of women to women because role models are good way of strengthening the confidence of persons at risk. This organization work in ICT as a mean of communication within such a big province; as well as integrating the increasing numbers of people from other countries that are coming to work in the region.

Tecnopras s.a.s (Italy) is a company involved in technical consultancy and in human resources development. It provide several services concerning training (vocational training, lifelong learning), vocational guidance, balance of competences, promotion of quality in life and in work environments, psychological assistance for bullying and bossing in workplaces, coaching, training the trainers, training for social operators. It operates with the support of a professional network of partner organizations and their services are addressed on one side to entrepreneurs, managers and workers in general and on the other hand to disadvantaged people. The company offers a personalised and flexible support: it analyse thoroughly the request of the “client”, identify the strengths and weaknesses of the person/situation, agree operatively with the “client” his/her aims, then plan the most suitable solutions, strategy and instruments to support the process of change and activate the development of personal and/or professional competences and motivations. Tecnopras base their work on a psycho-sociological approach making use of different individual and group active techniques and interdisciplinary tools.

AidLearn, Human Resources Consulting, Lda. (Portugal) is a Portuguese service's private organisation, created by experienced professionals' women, that operates at national and transnational level. Its mission states the aims for contributing to a better qualification of Portuguese human resources by building up a learning organisation concerned with the equality of opportunities and social inclusion, providing quality and innovative services targeted to actual needs of organisations and individuals, namely deprived one, and by internally developing a strong commitment and team working among all its collaborators. AidLearn main intervention areas are related with organisational and personal development; diagnosis of learning needs; conception, delivering and evaluating learning tools, interventions and courses, including face to face and blended ones; as well as conceiving, executing and evaluating projects and research studies (at national and transnational levels) in the scope of the following fields: Entrepreneurship sciences, including human resources consultancy, training of trainers and teachers; informational technologies; health and safety; social services; environment, multiculturality and active citizenship. AidLearn works preferentially with SMEs and SMEs workers as well as deprived target groups as immigrants, unqualified women, unemployed persons, individuals in risk of social exclusion, namely youngsters and seniors. It is certified by the national institute for

the quality in the training field (IQF) and the work developed follows strictly the standards of quality required by that institute.

3. The Objectives of ALF

ALF Project main aim is to develop an Adult Learners Forum in countries involved on the project, establishing communication networks to exchange training experiences among learners at informal level. The ALF project will allow it's participants to improve their citizenship role in society and the cultural dialogue between European learners.

The ALF project also aim's to collect experiences and good practices in order to develop the Adult Learners Forum Model. The ALF Model will be a theoretical model that allows Adult Learners Forum to be disseminated all around Europe, bringing together European learners.

In the first year (August 2005 to July 2006) the ALF project objectives were to prepare an overview of the current situation of learners at partners' institutions field; to compile an ALF questionnaire and obtain information about learners' needs and expectations related to the forum; to inform and involve relevant social partners; to motivate and establish a network between learners.

To the second year (August 2006 to July 2007), ALF project aimed to develop the Adult Learners Forum Model, collecting experiences and good practices in partners countries, motivating and helping the learners to establish the national learners forum allowing experiences exchanges and to build the ALF Website.

At the last year (August 2007 to July 2008), ALF project will intent to accomplish the ALF Good Practices Handbook, to motivate the learners to continue the national learners forum and to organize and participating in the transnational Adult Learners Forum.

In all ALF stages the partners are engaging in dissemination actions that will give visibility to project aims and activities, in order to gain and motivate active learners and social partners to participate in the ALF project.

4. The Project Development

Adult Learners Forum project is structured to be developed in three years, each year have specific aims to be achieved according with a specific workplan. Since each year all partners have to do the project renewal applications form and final report to be presented to their National Agency the ALF project development is conditioned to the proposal approval.

4.1 The first year

The first year of ALF project was dedicated to build a questionnaire in order to obtain information about learners' needs and expectations related to the forum and an overview of the current situation of learners at partners' institutions field. During the first meeting ALF team prepared the questionnaire structure. After this meeting, AidLearn compile and build the ALF questionnaire in paper and electronic version and send it to the other partners.

The questionnaire had a first section to collect biographical data, such as gender, age, country, living area, status on employment and sector of activity. The second sections of the questionnaire was related with the main objective of ALF project and was focused on the following topics: motivation to learn again; benefits and obstacles to learning; training/education that should be available; improvements to adult learning courses; impact to return to learn in the learner families, colleagues, workmates and friends; importance of sharing learning experiences; and best way to share learning experiences.

The questionnaire was answered by 207 persons in all partners' countries, 19,8% in Estonia, 17,9% in Greece, 19,3% in Italy, 24,2% in Portugal and 18,8% in Spain. The group was composed by 62,8% females and 38,2% males.

Of the 207 respondents 32,4% lived in rural areas and 66,2% lived in urban areas, 33,3% were unemployed and 64,3% were employed in different sectors of activity.

When inquired about the motivation to return to learn almost half of the respondents answered to get new knowledge/skills.

The majority (43,0%) of the persons that answered the questionnaire consider that the main benefit of learning is acquiring new skills/knowledge and the mains obstacles are lack of spare time (12,1%) and lack of information about learning opportunities (9,7%).

The people interviewed indicated also the type of training/education courses that they think should be available to adults.

Flexible schedule is point by respondents as the most important improvement to adult learning courses (55,1%), followed by access to learning facilities (19,8%) and financial support to attend to training courses.

The results referring to the impact to return to learn in the learner families, colleagues, workmates and friends does not allow relevant conclusions.

Concerning to the importance of sharing learning experiences most respondents considered very important (46,4%) or important (31,9%) to share their learning experiences with other learners.

Regarding the best way to share learning experiences the results show that the learners considered the training courses as their preferable way to change experiences with other learners. According to the most significant results obtained in each country, the partners decided to implement Adult Learners Forum in different way. Taking into account the learners' needs, the partners were engaged in developing the

proposed national forum and involving relevant social partners into the project activities.

The project dissemination was developed by all partners through internet, publications in media, letters to social partners, presentations and leaflets. The first ALF year ended with the presentation of the final report to National Agency.

4.2 The second and the third year

In second and third year each partner country continued to increase their learners' network according to questionnaire results, developed the national ALF and establish the network for promoting the international ALF, that has been held as prototype in the last project plenary meeting.

All partners decided that the best way to carrying out the project goal was to engage in a variety of strategies to reach the learners in order to motivate them to establish each national forum. A common strategy implemented by all partners was to reserve some time during training courses to learners discuss adult learning matters and/or to organize some local meetings with learners aiming the same.

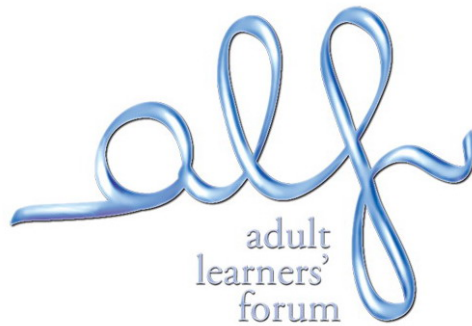
Nevertheless each partner developed also other strategies to engage learners in discussing questions concerning lifelong learning, therefore:

- *ANDRAS* implement the ALF project through their Annual Meeting with 56 membership organisations related with training issues; an e-mail list, publication of a project notebook to distribute to learners and social partners.
- *TECNOPRAS* decided to implement the project through conferences and seminars, professional contacts with public and private institutions and disseminated the project during the implementation of other national and European projects.
- *Olympic Training* put into action ALF project establishing contacts with public and private organisations during different work occasions enlarging their network; and published articles in their periodical newsletter.
- *Guadalajara Progressive Federation* developed ALF project through conferences, workshops, professional contacts with public and private institutions, participating in all educational forums that were available and publishing articles in local journals.
- *AidLearn* carried out the project activities using different methods such as a mailing list of professional contacts, seminars and conferences in which the organization was involved, producing and distributing a leaflet and producing and maintaining a blog.

4.3 The logo

During the second year we created a logo to identify the project. After the analysis of several proposals offered by a graphic professional, we choose a design that recalls “hand calligraphy”. In our view, in fact, hand calligraphy denotes a “running” interaction, communication produced directly by a human being towards other human beings. It’s a dynamic design that reflects the dynamic essence of the Adult Learners’ Forum.

Here is the logo that we decided to use in all the documents and works regarding the project:



4.4 Shots from the project experience



The first project work meeting (1st year), Tallin, November 2005



The fifth work meeting (2nd year), Rome, February 2007



The seventh work meeting (3rd year), Guadalajara, October 2007



The eighth work meeting (3rd year), Lisbon, April 2008

Chapter 2

THE MODEL OF THE ADULT LEARNERS' FORUM

1. Adult Learners Forum

According to Freire (1971) the consciousness raising is an educational process that allows the individual to develop a critic awareness that will activate an action of transformation.

A forum is a good system to actively engaged people in sharing information; gathering and giving counselling; and to find solution to common problems; providing a safe emotional space that allows their members to feel understand and support. Adult Learners Forum is a support group for training issues; ALF members provide each other with non-professional counselling regarding issues such as:

- motivation to learn again;
- benefits and obstacles to learning;
- training/education that should be available;
- improvements to adult learning courses;
- impact to return to learn in the learner families, colleagues, workmates and friends;
- importance of sharing learning experiences;
- best way to share learning experiences.

A forum sustains interpersonal contact among their members in a diversity of ways.

The most traditional way to carry out a forum is through face to face meeting that allow conversational interaction, however the forum group can maintain contact through newsletters, telephone chains, internet forums, mailing list or some groups are exclusive online.

2. Starting an Adult Learners' Forum

A forum is an organized community normally managed by their voluntary members; leading a forum is a hard work so it is important to share the leadership between some members, splitting the responsibilities of carrying out the contacts, activities and meetings.

The leader or leaders have to answer to the next questions in order to start a forum:

- Why are you forming a forum? This may be the most important question of all. What is the purpose of the group? Most groups want to educate and encourage members. Beyond that, do you want to spread awareness in your community? Are you interested in working to change national policies relating to adult

learning? This is the time to set your beginning goals for the group. It's best to start small and expand your goals as your members express an interest and show a willingness to participate in other areas.

- Who is to be included in this group? All adult learners participating in learning issues, or all adults?
- What is the forum format? Face to face meetings, newsletters, telephone chains, internet forums, mailing list or a group exclusive online? Or a mix of some of the above?
- When are you going to meet? Meetings can be quarterly, every other month, monthly, or even weekly. It's better to start with fewer meetings and increase the frequency as you are able and the need demands.
- Where are you going to meet? Some smaller groups meet in a home, but generally it's better to choose a public place. What community resources are available? Often state institutions will allow you to use one of their meeting rooms at no charge.
- How will you publicize the formation of the group? Through a mailing list, ad in newspapers, leaflets, posting notices in schools, churches, doctor offices and supermarkets?
- How will the group be led: by peer leadership, professional facilitation, shared leadership? How will group responsibilities be shared?
- Will it be an informal group or legally registered?

3. Steps to Take to Accomplish and Adult Learners' Forum

After answering the above questions and had defined the guidelines of the forum the leader should develop the next steps in order to define an accurate working plan:

- Talk with experienced group leaders
- Find out what they have found to be most effective
- Find out about available community resources
- Seek out opportunities to create strategic partnerships
- Form an organizing committee
- Arrange a planning meeting
- Establish the group's focus
- Define the aims and objectives of the group
- Decide who can join the group
- Define the group's relationship with professionals
- Establish the purpose of the first meeting
- Arrange a meeting to launch the group
- Publicize the launch meeting, targeting potential members
- Collect resource information and materials to display or exchange at the launch

4. Running an Adult Learners' Forum

Motivation is the key word to maintain a forum, in order to members participate in group activities and grow individually. Therefore, the forum leaders should pay attention to the following issues:

- Is the meeting content relevant to the members' needs?
 - Is the meeting location convenient and accessible to the majority of members?
 - Is the meeting schedule adequate for members?
 - Are members satisfied with the conduct of the group?
 - Are members satisfied with their level of participation in the group?
 - Have the members' needs changed?
 - How will the group publicize its availability to potential new members?
- It is important to define the forum rules clearly and make sure that everybody knows it, also establish the logistics aspects and take into account members' suggestions to the forum maintenance.

- Establish clear ground rules
 - Confidentiality: Keep discussions between group members only.
 - Respect: Let each person speak without interruption.
 - Guest speakers: Keep introductions short; let guest speakers present their topics.
 - Patience: Be patient towards group members, especially those in need.
 - Constructive discussion: Confine group discussions to issues specific to the group.
 - Finish meetings on time but let attendees arrive as they can.
- Select a meeting place, schedule and meeting format.
- Hold regular meetings.
- Solicit feedback from members on the effectiveness of the group.
- Make group decisions about changes, as necessary.
- Contact local professionals about being guest speaker
- Keep injecting fresh ideas, new guest speakers. Keep it lively and interesting, so the members look forward to getting together.

ALF forum is a space to share experiences and to develop strategies that allows an active citizenship regarding long life learning matters.

Adult Learners Forum project is structured to be developed in three years, each year have specific aims to be achieved according with a specific workplan. Since each year all partners have to do the project renewal applications form and final report to be presented to their National Agency the ALF project development is conditioned to the proposal approval.

Chapter 3

THE NATIONAL BEST PRACTICES

I. Andras – Estonia

1.1 Introduction

The idea of creating an adult learners' network in Estonia that would enable learners to support each other and share positive learning experience has now become three years old.

In contemporary society, importance of lifelong learning is a constant issue. The point is how to change this understanding from declarative announcements of politicians and decision makers into way of thinking that would influence people's everyday decisions. Danish researcher Knut Illeris (2003) claims that when speaking about the necessity of lifelong learning three aspects should be highlighted. First, the economical aspect – lifelong learning is the basis of economical wealth of a nation. Second, the social aspect – lifelong learning helps to find balance in the multicultural world. Only third - the individual aspect – willingness to learn helps to cope better with one's everyday life. It also means that there is a chance of external motivation prevailing, rejecting the internal one which is often unacknowledged, to the background.

P.Jarvis (1998), having treated adult learning in-depth, finds that social interaction is crucial in these processes. Experience plays a relevant role, too. Jarvis also distinguishes primary and secondary experience. Primary experience is received directly by senses; secondary, on the other hand, indirectly via linguistic communication. In secondary experience conversation and discussion come first. People learn from both.

One of the ideas behind the learners' forum is to assist the people interested in learning to find the inevitable inner motivation for successful learning process through communication with the people who already have found it, and thereby succeed in their own studies.

1.2 Description

In Estonia, the idea of the learners' forum stems from the tradition of organising adult learners' week in Estonia. The adult learners' week (ALW) has been held by Association of Estonian Adult Educators Andras (AEAE Andras) for ten years already. An objective of ALW is to value learning in adulthood and the learners nationally. One of ALW's activities is to select the learner, educator, education

friendly organisation and local government of the year. Each Estonian county (15 altogether) will attribute the same titles on county level. Thus 15 great learners are recognised each year from who one will become the learner of the year. Existence of these people became the foundation of the idea of potential learners reciprocal communication - them being the most convincing advocates of learning inviting everyone to learn.

The first meeting of the learner of the year award winners, initiated by AEAE Andras, took place in December 2005. Learners discussed about what kind of support an adult learner needs. In common discussions it was stated that the basis of everything is the individual's wish to change his life. After that family's and employer's positive attitude is inevitable. Communication with other people who learn the same way can also encourage and motivate not to stop.

As a result of this gathering an initiative group of learners was set up consisting of the people who were ready to contribute their time and energy for developing the new idea. The group involves people from all over Estonia. A challenge for the 17 people was the international ALF project within which a further development of the forums ideas regarding both the essence and form, was designed. A questionnaire was carried out among the learners that showed the wish to meet face-to-face. Discussions and work groups were started with an aim to facilitate and aid the emergence of local forums. Learners' meetings took place where people shared their learning journeys and listened to lectures about adult education and cooperation. Thanks to ALF's support adult learners' forums have emerged in many counties. Common grounds may vary – in Hiiu-maa the network is formed by the award winners, in Ida-Viru its the learning teachers!

During the discussions, seminars, workshops and internet environment it appeared that adult learner needs information, role models and motivation for formal and further education but also for self-improvement. Legally secured compensations and employer's encouragement are very important. In all that, learner's own contribution which is better achieved by having an own association, for example as a forum, is important. Different kinds of ALFs prove the fact that in coming to learning in adulthood it is the personal example that matters and that in case of setback and problems there is someone in similar position to rely upon.

The second over-Estonian adult learners' forum took place in December 2006 and new award winners joined in. The participants' next step was to discuss what each adult learner's role is in the process of making ALF's voice heard in the society. Well-known Estonian people spoke to the participants conveying supportive and appreciating message. One of the objectives of the 2nd forum was to present a common vision and mission carrying a certain message for the society at large.

In 2007 an over-Estonian e-mail list was created for information dissemination and exchange of ideas. The e-mail list is also an information intermediary and communication environment.

In 2007 a summer school of learners took place for three days where people from all over Estonia took part in it.

Objectives, vision and mission of the learners' forum were discussed and phrased by the end of the event. The vision of the learners' forum sees Estonia as a caring and sustainable learning-based society. The mission is to introduce and convey the best practice of lifelong learning.

Objectives:

- to achieve a support system enabling both to share positive experience and to counsel adults who are willing to learn;
- to create a network of adult learners uniting people with positive learning experience locally and nationally;
- greater involvement of Estonian population in lifelong learning.

In November 2007 the 3rd learners' forum (40 participants) was held, the subject of which being the importance of social networks in the globalising world. New award winners of the learner of the year joined and students of Estonian adult gymnasiums as a new target group. Adult gymnasiums are schools that offer possibility to learn for people who have dropped out of school but wish to complete their studies. Mostly it is young adults (age 18-25) for who learning is not a priority. In order to complete what is started and not to drop out again the support of learners' network would be immensely important.

For students of adult gymnasiums as the new target in ALF's further activities a training day was organised in March 2008.

1.3 Suggestions and comments

The advice resulting from Estonian experience is the following.

- The initiator and leader of the idea of local forum should be an educator or an education official in command of the information and being motivated to deal with the issue at least at the start.
- People whom we would like to involve have to be inspired and appreciated. Celebrity endorsement and involvement of well-known educators has worked in Estonia.
- The whole undertaking should not be taken too seriously – learning is fun and interesting and so is the cooperation. Importance of meetings can't be underestimated. It generates the interest to talk about certain issues and become inspired by sharing experience. ALF enables to value oneself, one's personal positive experience, and thereby support other people.
- As many people as possible should be involved – there's always some who will never become active participants. Estonian practice shows that 1/3 of the learners of the year find time and motivation to contribute seriously. Every year new people come and some earlier participants give up – this is a natural course of things.
- Estonia has started with national gatherings that have given life to initiative groups and local branches. It is also possible to start at the level of one group of learners or an organisation and develop cooperation with similar groups and

organisations, e.g. adult gymnasiums, study circles, training centres etc. There is a number of ways to implement ALF's ideas.

- The forum has to be an issue at every adult learners' event in order to find followers and allies.

In conclusion, it is a pleasure to state that there is an expanding network of ALF-aware people. Thanks to project partners we have counterparts in Italy, Portugal, Spain and Greece – people in one way or another attached to ALF.

Just like every undertaking based on citizen initiative, ALF will help to satisfy one of human's basic needs in the globalising and everchanging world - to relate; to be a part of the community.

1.4 Shots from the experience



Enthusiastic learners at the Learner's Summer School. August 2007



ALF in Tallinn. 30. November 2007



Group of Adult Gymnasium learners discussing about forum development. November 2007



All good ideas were put down. November 2007

2. Tecnopras s.a.s. – Italy

2.1 Introduction

We started the ALF experience with the learners in October 2006, 1 year after the beginning of the project. We had a 1st year of testing from October 2006 to July 2007 and a 2nd year of improvement from October 2007, with forecast conclusion in July 2008. The adult learning field that has been chosen for this application is theatre and learning of transversal competences by means of this art.

We have been elaborating the use of arts in education and in psychological consultancy for 15 years, starting in 1993 with movies and continuing in recent years with theatre and music-dance-therapy. We apply these methods to different type of people. Art methods are often used with disabled persons, but we have observed that people without disabilities have always enormous advantages when learning by means of art methods.

These are in fact active methods, therefore they involve completely the learner, both in mind, emotion and body. The “holistic learning” has proved to be very effective, especially when the objective is transversal competences (such as interpersonal skills, communication abilities, leadership, proactivity, spirit of initiative, cooperation abilities, assertiveness, etc.), self-consciousness and self-esteem, team work, motivation.

Among the different training opportunities that we offer annually, we have decided to choose the theatre because the adults participating in this laboratory showed great enthusiasm in the project idea, especially as it regards 3 possibilities: 1) organizing groups of discussion among learners and among learners and trainers; 2) experimenting the constitution and self-management of a forum that would be put together also learners of past years and of other classes; 3) finally, exchanging experiences and possible visits with foreign learners.

2.2 Target group

In the ALF course of theatre, the 1st year the group involved was constituted by 15 persons, 11 of which female and 4 male. Currently (2nd year) it is formed by 13 persons, 9 female and 4 male. The age is from 19 the youngest to 58 the oldest. The 3 youngest learners are university students, while all the other participants are differently employed. In general, as to the job situation 4 participants are self-employed, 5 are employed in private companies and 1 is employed in a NGO.

They all have enrolled in the course with the main aim of improving their competences and fostering personal development. A secondary but not irrelevant aim is the one of cultivating their passion for theatre, aspect that for some of them could become also the base for a professional choice, while for some other participants is

with no doubt the starting point for a recreational theatre activity that will continue after the end of the course.

The selection of the participants has been made after an individual interview and a group briefing. The principal criterion applied was personal motivation.

2.3 Description

The entire course has a duration of 3 years and started in October 2006, although the ALF experience was introduced at the beginning of the 2nd year in October 2007. It is held once a week. The first year the duration of a class was 4 hours, in the second year 5 hours, in the current year it is 6 hours. The learning path is articulated in several modules, concerning acting techniques, history of drama, dance, singing, self-drama, pantomime. From October to December the modules are structured with preparatory activities, while in January a play script is delivered to the participants and the modules become specifically focussed on activities relevant for the script actualization. In fact the annual course ends with a stage play that is usually presented at the end of June/beginning of July. Last year the drama on stage was Pirandello's play "The life that I gave you" (*La vita che ti diedi*). In the current year the learners are preparing the musical comedy "Barnum". A part from the technical articulation of the course, the learning path is framed by a psychological supervision which guarantees that the learning objectives are achieved and monitors the possible difficulties encountered by the participants, the learning problems and any psychological variable, interpersonal or individual. The technical modules of the course are delivered by trainers who are specialist in the field of theatre, under the coordination of an artistic director.

How has ALF been introduced in the learning activity? During spring 2006 we observed the course process and checked if there were all the elements that could support the "contamination" between the course and the ALF project. The type of learning activities, the course objectives, the motivation of the target group and the favourable opinion of the trainers convinced us that the experimentation with this course could be very positive. We decided that the best thing would have been to start the ALF with the beginning of the second course year in October 2006. During the first class we used 1 hour of the course to present the ALF project and the possible activities that could be organized for the learners and by the learners, including exchange using informatics and with foreign learners.

We also talked a bit about informal and non-formal education and about the advantage of acquiring the skill to plan one's own educational path and to self-manage the personal learning process. We distributed a document of 1 page with an outline of the project, the brochure and a questionnaire for the ex-ante evaluation of the competences, in order to check the learning progress during the year. We also ran a briefing session to collect the comments and suggestions from the learners about the ALF project, to check the activities that could be started immediately and to identify the possible leader(s) in the group to promote the creation of a forum and to

lead it. Since the participants already knew each other thanks to the first year of course in 2005-2006, it was easy to identify a learner who was willing to act as a leader and was acknowledged by the other participants. The first milestone agreed was a monthly meeting that would be organized by the learners themselves, in principle without trainers or external figures but in practice with the possibility to invite them according to the meeting agenda.

During the first year of ALF all the learners met every month by default, plus they organised spaced informal meetings in small groups, related to specific topics that they were interested to discuss. Some of the learners tried to create a web-log with the intention to share ideas and experiences but had no support from the rest of the group. The reason is that not all of the learners have easy access to Internet thus the possibility of communicating fluently using informatics is not shared. Anyway, for the current year they all have agreed about a web-log or a web-site in order to communicate and exchange experiences not as much among themselves as with foreign students.

An other problem here occurs that we are trying to solve: the language. In fact few of the participants speak fluent English, which can be used as vehicular language to communicate with other countries, some others speak basic English and some of them don't speak English at all. On the other side, since the partner countries are Spain, Portugal, Greece and Estonia, there could be also the possibility to use their languages, although only some Spanish is spoken by few learners.

An informal event that ALF learners use to discuss also education topics are lunch and dinner meetings. They try to involve in this occasion also learners from previous years and from other classes. The results are good since the "leisure" characteristic of the situation fosters the participation and the conviviality of the atmosphere helps to overcome barriers and to open a free exchange of ideas. We have also observed that in the ALF leadership is not a static position and that more leaders can coexist. In fact, according to the activities a different leader figure emerges, without negative competition in the group since they already work together on a shared project (the drama play) and have learnt to cooperate in view of a common goal.

This same attitude has been naturally transferred to the ALF, which represents the informal framework of the entire educational path, thus also a moment for strengthening the relational dimension of the learning group. On its side, more powerful the relational dimension is, stronger the motivation and opening to learning becomes. It's a kind of virtuous circle that reinforces both the elements of the circle: the learning dimension and the relational dimension.

2.4 Suggestions and comments

The plan for the current year in relation to the national ALF is articulated in several points.

The first one is the effort to spread the ALF philosophy and “programme” also to other groups of learners, using as means of diffusion the first ALF learners themselves. They are the best medium because are a living example of how ALF works, the opportunities that it offers, the results that it allows to reach, the personal development that it promotes.

An other aspect on which we are currently applying is the communication in foreign language, in order to make possible the exchange between the Italian learners and the partner countries' learners and, in this way, facilitate the creation of a transnational ALF.

The above implies that also the IT and Internet questions have to be dealt with in a serious way. In fact – although the ALF learners seem to prefer the face-to-face communication – the enlargement of the forum/s and the interaction with foreign countries requires IT tools such as web-logs, websites, email, chat, mailing lists, etc. For this reason we have asked the ALF learners to organize some briefings to discuss the difficulties they have in using the IT and to identify the possible solutions that can be applied to overcome them. The briefing sessions at the moment are still running because the learners have different situations and IT skills and it is not so easy to find a commonly shared solution. That is the reason why we have suggested to identify two or three different solutions that can be adopted by one or the other learner according to his/her specific situation in order to have anyway access to the Internet facilities.

2.5 Additional tools

During the accomplishment of ALF, Tecnopras developed two instruments to support the activities in different steps:

- a) a presentation of the project for the learners
- b) a questionnaire to evaluate the project effectiveness on learners.

Attachment 1: Presentation for the learners

ADULT LEARNERS FORUM

Let's communicate in a simple and pleasant way!!!



AS A START...

We are Italian and European, too. We live in Italy, but we also have **the right** to stay permanently or work in **any other** European country. Moreover, other European can come to live and work in our country.

For a smooth 'co-existence' of this kind, it would be more than useful for us to become aware of some **basic elements** concerning, for example, the Estonian, the Portuguese, the Greek or the Spanish, more specifically: their way of living, their habits, their customs and social behaviour. It goes without saying that these elements are greatly influenced by the concepts and values, which they hold about life.

But, how could we ever know their mentality unless **we communicate with them** in the first place? Inversely, how could **they** ever **learn about ours**?

From the work conditions in a European country to its history, from its language, jokes, myths and superstitions to its ways of entertainment, eating habits and dressing codes, everything becomes more meaningful to us once we **discover it by ourselves!**

Apart from books, magazines, radio or television, **the Internet is perhaps the most direct and amusing way** to get in touch with other cultures. With this EU Programme you will be given the opportunity to contact **real people** from other European countries once you get acquainted with exchanging information about yourselves on the Web.

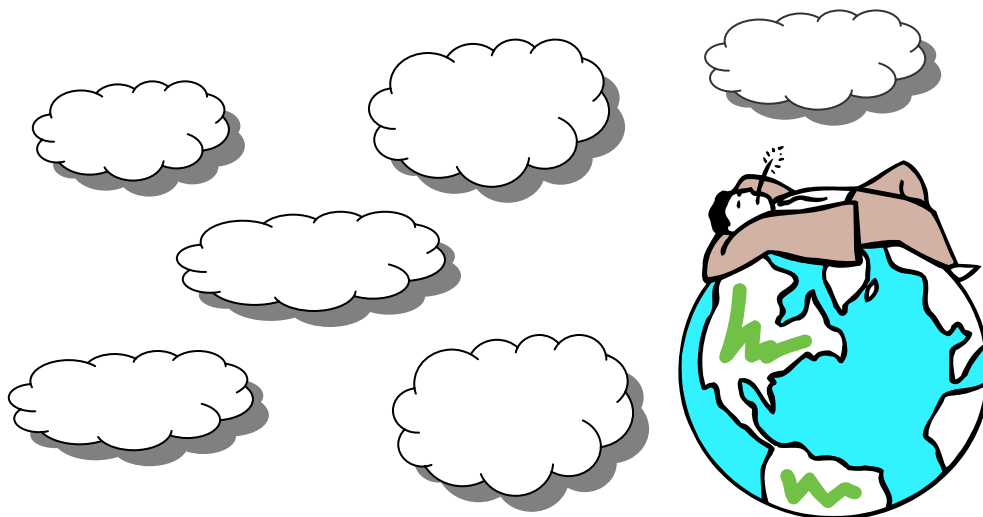
To this end, a special web page has been created, ready to host you and your effort: www.adult-learners-forum.com With the help of your tutors you will be able to experience direct contact, exchange pieces of information, photographs, comments, even small videos with the European friends you'll make! A web forum for the exchange with Italian and foreign students has been set off at the address <http://adultlearnersforum.freeforumlive.com>

A FEW WORDS ABOUT THE PROJECT

The title of the project is: "ALF - Adult Learners' Forum". In this project, Estonia (coordinating country) is represented by *Andras* (web address: www.andras.ee), Spain participates with the *Federacion Progresista de Asociaciones de Mujeres de Guadalaiaara* (web address: www.eapn-clm.org/entidades/entidad-5955), Greece is represented by *Olympic Training Ltd.* (web address: www.olympiakokek.gr), Portugal participates with *AidLern* (web address: www.aidlearn.com), while the Italian partner is a company, called *Tecnopras s.a.s* (web address: www.tecnopras.it & www.cinemapsiche.it).

Three times per year, several representatives of the foreign institutions and company, participating in the project, as well as a number of their students, pay a short visit to on another of the countries.

We wish you good luck and... let us all have fun learning at the same time!!!



Attachment 2: Questionnaire for evaluation of project effectiveness

LEARNERS' EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT EXPERIENCE

Name: _____ Age: _____ Date: _____

1) How much have you discovered of your way of learning when implementing the adult learners' forum?

poor

1	2	3	4	5
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 excellent

2) How much have you been able to learn about other groups' culture during the exchange with the students of other classes and/or institutions?

poor

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

 excellent

3) How much the project work has promoted the improvement of your ICT skills?

poor

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

 excellent

4) How much the project work has promoted the improvement of your language skills?

poor

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

 excellent

5) How could you describe the impact of each project activity on you? (max 3 choices)

a) Research and production of a publication

- ☐ My enthusiasm for knowing different point of views and people increased
- ☐ I have enlarged the consciousness of being a European citizen
- ☐ I have been motivated to attend new formal and informal training events in future
- ☐ I have understood the importance of ICT for contemporary life
- ☐ I have been pushed to learn better a foreign language
- ☐ I have made new friends
- ☐ I have learnt to self-managed my learning
- ☐ Other: _____

b) Theatre laboratory

- ☐ I understood new aspects of my personality
- ☐ I have developed my communication skills
- ☐ I am motivated to learn more about different aspects of culture
- ☐ I am more conscious of what being proactive and creative means
- ☐ My social life has improved
- ☐ I have understood that it is possible to learn also from non-traditional training events
- ☐ Not applicable (I didn't attend the laboratory)
- ☐ Other: _____

c) Study visit

- ☐ I am more enthusiastic of discovering different cultures
- ☐ I am more aware of Europe as a common country
- ☐ I have experimented my communication skills in a foreign language
- ☐ I am motivated to travel more in other countries
- ☐ I have made new foreign friends
- ☐ It has contributed to my personal growth
- ☐ Not applicable (I didn't go on a study visit)
- ☐ Other: _____

6) Which is the overall impression that you have had from the project experience in relation to your growth as person and as European citizen?

poor

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

 excellent

7) Other comments

2.6 Shots from the experience



A moment of the ALF laboratory during the second year



On the stage: the theatre production of the second year, June-July 2007



On the stage: the theatre production of the first year, June 2006



The group of learners and trainers of the third year

3. Olympic Training Ltd. – Pyrgos

3.1 Introduction

The knowledge Society is constantly developing, being a challenge for every educational institution: vast & expanding volumes of information need to be transformed into up to date knowledge & know-how.

Each educational organisation aims to transfer concrete educational contents and to contribute to the perception of change as dynamic life & work model. But this aim can not be achieved without its acceptance from the trainees.

Therefore, the role of the trainee is fundamental, so as each training organisation responds to beneficiaries' real needs. In this scope, paths of direct or indirect contact between the trainees and the training programs' developers of Olympic Training have been created. One of these paths was ALF, a project that has started running in 2005.

3.2 Target group

Target group of the project are all the trainees that participate in training programs organized by Olympic Training And Consulting Ltd. The trainees that have been chosen to participate in the ALF were persons with very different characteristics.

In the first year of initialization of ALF (2006-2007) two groups were actually formed. In the first group, were 20 young trainees that attended a cultural program (the title of the training program was "Creation of certified copies"). The majority of the trainees were young people with no previous working experience, with great interest in IT technologies and without clearly targeted work future. In the second group, were 20 unemployed women that participated in a program under the title "Manpower for the provision of services for the support and care of elder people". In this group all the trainees were women of low educational level and long time in unemployment. The main reason for the participation of these women in the training program was their need to socialize and feel active.

The second year (2007-2008), is the year that ALF is expanding. Three groups of unemployed trainees are being activated in ALF (not only in Pyrgos, but also in Ioannina and in Thessaloniki).

The selection of the participants was the result of the exploration of the opinion of different trainees on adult education.

Another selection criteria of the groups was their willingness to participate and discuss – exchange opinion on adult education, etc.

Up to now 80 trainees from Pyrgos and Ioannina have expressed their opinion and we hope to achieve greater expansion of ALF.

3.3 Description

The duration of the project is three years starting from October 2005. After the compilation of a questionnaire and the extraction of adult learners needs in order to participate in a forum, we took action in order to create the first Greek forum. We have organized a sensitization meeting and created an informative leaflet in order to activate our trainees in the forum. Though the topic of the forum was on a field that interested the trainees, and which they wanted to discuss, it was found that the creation of working groups beyond the training hours was not easy.

Furthermore, what we realized was the difficulty that trainees have in expressing their opinion in general fields (such as adult education). As it has been revealed, the learners need anonymity in order to give their true opinion about training programs.

Therefore, in order to activate our trainees and have a feedback about our programs, we have developed a certain methodology.

We decided to make a short presentation of ALF at the beginning of each training program and distribute informative leaflets. This way, each of our trainees was invited to participate, communicate and express his/her opinion.

If the trainers are not motivated to act on their own, we organize a two hour assignment in the frame of every training program with the cooperation of a trainer. In this assignment, we ask the trainees to answer a questionnaire under the guidance of their trainer. They can work in groups, paint, write a report or a poem, make patchwork with different ideas, cooperate and express their opinion on adult education.

The results of the questionnaire are being elaborated and we create a leaflet with illustrative trainees' opinions that we have gathered. These leaflets are used in order to motivate other learners by posing two questions:

- ✓ Do you agree with what other learners say?
- ✓ What is your opinion?

By creating this leaflet the trainees are motivated to expand their participation. They want to learn the comments that have been made by other trainees, and what are others' needs from adult education.

3. 4 Suggestions and comments

Tips for a successful Adult Learners Forum

- The trainers need to feel that their opinion counts and see that the training programs are being organised according to their needs and suggestions in order to continue expressing their opinion and become more and more active.
- The anticipation is a basic characteristic that needs to be taken into account. Trainees can be easily disappointed if they do not see any outcome from their effort. This is a crucial point as far as the dedication of an adult learner to the Forum is concerned.

- The role of the trainer is fundamental. A communicative trainer, whom the trainees trust and are inspired from, can indeed activate fruitful dialogue between the learners on adult education.
- Active participation of the trainers in every step of the forum in order to feel the joy of creating
- The trainees need to get feedback from the activities that are being initialised even if they do not participate so they will not lose track
- Dynamic (on going) evaluation of ALF – summarisation at the end of each meeting, and at the end of each course
- Interactive and cooperative activities

3.5 Additional Tool

Documents have been created in order to invite the Greek learners to join and participate in the forum.

Tool for the trainees

 1. Ideal classroom for the initialization of adult training programs 	 1. Ideal classroom for the initialization of adult training programs 
2. The ideal trainer - characteristics and behaviour  	2. The ideal trainer - characteristics and behaviour  
3. Exchange of trainees between European countries - participation in a seminar that the trainees are not only Greek but also people from other countries 	3. Exchange of trainees between European countries - participation in a seminar that the trainees are not only Greek but also people from other countries 
4. How do I comprehend myself, my role in a training program	4. How do adult trainees comprehend themselves, their role in a training program
5. What can I do in order to create - provoke the ideal educational circumstances 	5. What can each trainee do in order to create - provoke the ideal educational circumstances

Tool for the trainers

 1. Ideal classroom for the initialization of adult training programs 	Group of activities - Paintings (A3 dimension paper)
2. The ideal trainer - characteristics and behaviour  	Group of activities - acrostic
3. Exchange of trainees between European countries - participation in a seminar that the trainees are not only Greek but also people from other countries 	Expression of personal opinion from each trainee - creation of collage on billboard
4. How do adult trainees comprehend themselves, their role in a training program	Expression of personal opinion from each trainee - creation of collage on billboard
5. What can each trainee do in order to create - provoke the ideal educational circumstances	Expression of personal opinion from each trainee - creation of collage on billboard



adult
learners
forum
















ΕΠΙΧΕΙΡΗΣΗ ΚΑΙ ΠΟΛΙΤΙΚΟΕ
ΠΡΟΓΡΑΜΜΑ ΔΙΑ ΒΟΗΘΗΜΕΣ
GRUNDTVIG

Adult Learners Forum is a training Partnership between the following organizations:

ΑΕΕΑ
ANDRAS

ΑΕΕΑ
ANDRAS

ΑΕΕΑ
ANDRAS

ΑΕΕΑ
ANDRAS

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ANDRAS

ΑΕΕΑ
ANDRAS

What is ALF? «ALF Adult Learners Forum», is an educational partnership of institutions from 5 European countries (Ethiopia, Spain, Italy, Portugal and Greece) in which adult learners are activated in order to participate in a Forum How does it work? The trainees are being activated and create ALF so as to communicate with their European colleagues via their participation in meetings, seminars, laboratories and trainees exchange programs in regional and european level The ALF is the place where learners' meetings, workshops and seminars take place, where adult learners <u>discuss</u> their problems, hold dialogue with training providers and social partners, and make proposals for solving their problems. Members of the ALF are ■ unemployed ■ women - and ■ people that leave in disadvantaged areas and need help and support in order to become active European citizens	Objectives  ✓ to bring learners together and allow them to have an exchange of knowledge and experiences that constitutes an informal educational context ✓ collect and change experiences, methods and good practices for supporting active citizenship through adult learning ✓ to share the experiences of ALF among the partners and in the respective partners' network ✓ to establish permanently operating Adult Learners' Forum (ALF) in partner countries, that will ensure adult learners' position as active citizens in society and open the dialogue in different European countries. ✓ to work out the model of ALF on the basis of the practice and experiences of permanently working ALFs
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Εκπαίδευση και Πολιτισμός

Σωκράτης

Grundtvig

Adult Learners Forum (ALF), is an educational partnership, in which participate educational organizations from five European countries, (Estonia, Spain, Greece, Italy and Portugal) and adult learners in order to create a Forum.

In this forum, adult learners (you!):

- discuss
- are trying to find solutions in subjects – themes of adult education that they are concerned about
- cooperate – discuss with trainers

How?

A webpage has been created

www.adult-learners-forum.com

- in which you may find information about every educational organization – partner of the ALF
- and
- via which you may come in direct contact with all us!

Furthermore, in order to exchange opinion with Greek and foreign trainees an internet forum has been created:

<http://adultlearnersforum.freeforumlive.com/act?u=2&ak=8f7c0a>

There you may exchange opinion about :

- adult education and how there may be improvements on it,
- general subjects, such as traditions, culture, gastronomy, pictures ect

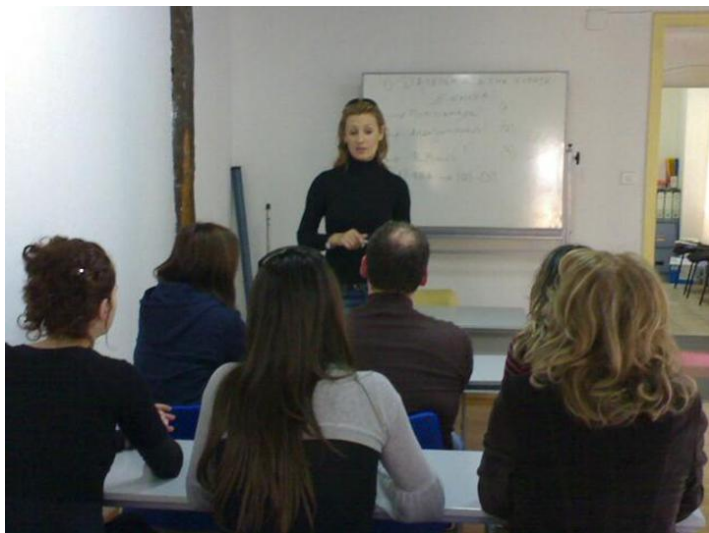
You are all invited to become a part of this forum!



3.6 Shots from the experience



Cultural mediators were the first group that has been informed about ALF project



Initiative group from the second year of the project



The role of the trainer is fundamental for the realisation of the assignment



In the classroom while adult learners are expressing their opinion on adult education

4. AidLearn Lda. – Portugal

4.1 Introduction

The Portuguese Adult Learners Forum started in October 2006 through the presentation of ALF project in the several training courses promoted by AidLearn. AidLearn has training courses in different areas, such as Training of Trainers, Informatics Communications Technologies, Labour Health and Welfare, Call Attendance and Leadership reaching 875 learners in different country regions (Lisbon, Centro, Alentejo and Algarve).

The learners participating in the Training of Trainers Courses were the most interested in ALF project, since the adult learning is a key subject to them. In Portugal it is necessary to have a formal certificate to be a trainer; this certificate is valid for 5 years and has two major requirements to be revalidated, namely the trainer need to provide 300 hours of training and to receive 60 hours of continuous training. These training courses focus on pedagogic issues, such as learning methods, how adults learn, how to better use the didactic resources available to trainers, how to elaborate learning objectives and course objectives, how to plan a training session and a training course, better ways to communicate and interact with the learners as individuals and group, elaborate and test a small training session, produce a training course proposal, and so on. That way, the trainees in these courses can have very different backgrounds and education, for instance we can have in the same group nurses, engineers, auto mechanics and psychologists; the main issue is how to teach their knowledge and competences to their learners. So, these courses can be very demanding and very interesting, and everybody learns a lot from each other, the exchange of experiences is very rich.

The Training of Trainers Course is ratified by a Public Organization (IEFP) responsible by employment and professional training policies that certificate the private organizations that want to provide these courses. This state institution requires the training organizations to follow a number of procedures in each course in order to guaranty the training quality and to attribute the professional certificate to the trainers that attend the training course. AidLearn is one of the private enterprises that follows that procedures and is in contact with the IEFP, so it provides the initial and continuous training courses for trainers.

4.2 Target group

The learners involved in ALF Project Forum participated in AidLearn initial and continuous training courses for trainers. Since these learners are trainers of adults they have a genuine interest in participating in this type of project; the trainer profession implies a very individual action, so a forum that allows an interactive

discussion with other professionals having and experiencing the same or similar problems is considered very interested by AidLearn learners / trainers.

In the 1st year the group involved was constituted by 14 persons, 7 female and 7 male. In the current year the ALF meetings were attended by 17 persons, 9 female and 8 males. The age scope varies between 23 years old and 65 and the learners have different academic backgrounds and professions. These heterogeneous experiences enrich ALF project allowing learners to enlarge their perspectives, strategies and problems solutions.

4.3 Description

The methodology followed during ALF Project consisted in presenting ALF project in the beginning of each training course and the possible activities that can be organized with the learners and by the learners in the scope of this project.

During the course several issues regarding lifelong learning are discussed with the training group, namely the importance of knowledge and new skills acquisition, the formal, non-formal and informal education, and also the importance of having the ability to plan their own learning path and self-managing their personal learning process.

At the end of each course AidLearn requires the learners to answer a training course evaluation questionnaire, ALF Project is once more discussed and comments and suggestions are collected from learners to understand the activities that are more suitable to the learners being involved in the adult learning discussion.

All AidLearn learners are invited to participate actively in ALF Project; the learners interested in developing activities in the scope of ALF Project are included in a mailing list and contacted to all ALF meetings taking place in AidLearn head office in after working hours. The meetings “*agenda*” is to discuss adult learning in order to learners’ share their experiences as much as trainees and trainers, and alternative strategies to deal with common problems that often arise in Adult Training are discussed. These meetings shouldn’t be very apart but can’t be very close to each other. If they are too apart, learners feel “out of touch”, and if they need to share some experience or ask some advice, they don’t do it. On the other hand, if they are very close together, we can end up with a group have nothing new to discuss – remember, usually they are trainers has an extra job so they don’t work all the time as trainer. We agreed in meetings face to face every two months and meanwhile we communicate by mail to the group.

Another strategy suggested by the learners is to have these meetings in an informal environment during lunches and dinners. This is a way to engage more people in ALF, since is usual to work until very late in Portugal, and to have meeting after hours is hard. But if the meeting is during dinner, it is easier to arrange time, and people feels more relaxed which facilitates communication.

4.4 Suggestions and comments

It is very important to have a training provider involved in this kind of project in order to facilitate the learners encounter, to provide a physical space to the meetings and to spread the ALF philosophy and “programme” to other groups of learners increasing the learners group in order to enlarge the scope of the discussion taking place in ALF meetings.

Another way to maintain the contact between learners and to motivate their continuous participation is to organize a mailing list with all the trainees interested in participating and promote the discussion through e-mail, being mandatory to “*reply to all*” in order to all group receive the e-mail messages, independently the number of times that each learner consult her/his e-mail.

The participation of learners in ALF project activities is many times constrained by professional and personnel issues; this does not mean that they given up but normally that they had other commitments, so it is important to keep contacting all the learners interested, promoting new meetings and giving feed-back about project activities development.

Planning the meetings taking into account the target group characteristics is another important aspect that will be fundamental to the successfully implementation of this kind of project; in Portuguese case having the meetings during lunches or dinner times was a successful strategy to engage the learners participation, also planning the meetings bimonthly and maintaining e-mail contact was another strategy that works very well with ALF Portuguese learners.

4.5 Shots from the experience



During a training class of continuous training of trainers, ALF first year



One of the ALF's meetings, during 2nd year, producing the Blog



One of the meetings, during dinner time



One of the meetings during 3rd year

5. Fepamuc Guadalajara – Spain

5.1 Introduction

The Spanish Adult Learners Forum started in October 2006 through the presentation of ALF project in the adult courses promoted by FEPAMUC. The Federation of women in Guadalajara started its activity among women with courses in different areas, such as English as a foreign language, and New Technologies in the field of adult education. There was a big demand on these fields and both of them were necessary for employment as a must.

The “Women’s Institute” that fund these courses issues a certificate that is useful for employment and professional curriculum of the people that attend the courses. On the other hand this State Institution decides the type of training and the number of hours to be given in each organization which does not always match with the demands of the learners.

All of them were fund by the Autonomous Regional Government of Guadalajara:” Junta de Comunidades de Castilla La Mancha”, through the Women Institute: “El Instituto de la Mujer”. The aim was to allow women to get the first contact with the new technological world in which we are .The courses rating from 10 to 20 hours were clearly insufficient to reach a certain level of command in the field.

Learners in these courses come from very different backgrounds and education; for instance There are nurses, teachers, truck drives, General Practitioners and psychologists as well as jobless women or put it this way “women without a paid job”. Their main issue was to acquire useful competences for their present job or to gain new skills to be promoted for a better one. So, these courses can be very demanding and very interesting as they have to be adjusted to individual needs as well as general instruction and everybody learns a lot from each other.

The assessment of these courses was done by the Women’s Institute at the end and the results of the questionnaires were not given back to the learners themselves or to their teachers so it was not possible to learn from experience. So FEPAMUC has to do its own assessment through discussions and questionnaires. Besides there was a policy of the Institute to control the attendance so the learners were not allowed in any case to do more than one course in the same year.

5.2 Target group

The learners involved in ALF Project Forum participated in FEPAMUC initial Evaluation of their interests and needs through the questionnaire provided and elaborated by ALF at international level. The questionnaire, focussed on their actual needs, gave them the opportunity to talk to their teachers about their fears, lacks, needs and strengths with a new point of view.

The learners were adults with different academic levels. The groups in Guadalajara have retired teachers, and other professional with a genuine interest in participating in this type of project for personal development; the groups in the rural areas with a lower academic level were more motivated to participate in order to socialise and to break the individual lack of communication of small communities.

Learners participating in the Courses came from five little “pueblos” in the North of Guadalajara, 200 kms from Madrid and from nine groups in Guadalajara, the capital of the province, 50kms from Madrid. The groups were constituted by ten adults each, almost all of them women. All of them were taking part in Internet and Office courses at beginner’s level. The age scope varies between 20 and 67 years old.

5.3 Description

In the 1st year the groups learned basic skills in the use of Internet and Office. All the groups were provided with enough information as to begging the use of them. After the course the learners express their needs for further instruction in all cases. There was a general reaction of frustration at the rule of “one person one course” issued by the Women’s Institute. ALF Project is once more discussed and comments and suggestions are collected from learners to find a way of fulfilling their needs.

Along the course several issues were discussed with the training group: the importance of knowledge and new skills acquisition being the most mentioned. At the end of each course FEPAMUC requires the learners to answer an evaluation questionnaire. All group learners were invited to participate actively in ALF Project; only few of them engaged in exchanging e-mails with their fellows. They expressed the need for “face to face” contact with other groups. So meetings every year were organised to visit rural areas in the province in order to meet other participants. After meetings they felt more like writing e-mails and sharing comments among them.

Another strategy used in these meetings has been to add a lecture on an interesting topic chosen by the learners: health talks by a doctor have been the most popular. Mainly in rural areas learners are aware of their lack of instruction on gender health issues and look forward to discuss their questions and worries with a professional in a relaxed atmosphere.

5.4 Suggestions and comments

At their face to face encounters, the learners have expressed their willingness of lifelong learning and the pleasure and fulfilment that comes from it. They have also agreed with the importance of maintaining the contact among learners and the key role played by the contact of highly motivated learners participating in the activities. The participation of learners in ALF project activities is not always satisfactory due to personal issues. The role and commitments of motherhood is said to be often the cause of lack of assistance. Encouragement from their partners and family was also

an important way of motivation. Good models from active and motivated learners were also found of interest.

E-mail contact was another strategy that worked very well for communication with learners from the capital but not in rural areas due to the lack of Internet facilities. We must not forget that Spain is one of the most expensive countries in Europe in hardware and software facilities.

Last but not least the example of our colleges from the participant countries has helped us to find ways of improving our knowledge and has awakened in our learners the desire of following in the same path.

5.5 Shots from the experience



Learners of the course of Spanish language for foreign people



A class of informatics with Dana – the Romanian teacher – tutoring the learners



A course for adult learners held in an ancient restored bakery



Learners of an Internet course

Chapter 4

CONCLUSIONS

After the completion of the project these are the conclusions we have drafted and the general recommendations we want to transmit.

ALF project is facilitating a learners' network that promote the cooperation and exchange of learning experiences between them. Training courses, based on active pedagogy, were the best way to learners sharing learning experiences, like it was pointed by the questionnaire results. The other ways suggested were not so efficient, because requires physical, psychological and time availability.

Therefore the partners involved in the ALF project decided to enlarge their strategies to determine which one has best results with the group in question. And that is the way to do it: create the forum, and it is the group who defines the best way to develop and maintain it.

Regardless of the way the forum will be accomplished, it is important that a trainer provider (person or organisation) takes the initiative; the resources to create a forum are easier found this way, because training providers have access to many learners, and also to rooms, computers, internet, all resources helpful in maintaining a forum. Also it is important to involve the training providers and make them understand the importance that sharing learning experiences between learners in enhancing the number of adult learners in training courses.

The forum shouldn't be assumed as a compulsory activity – learning is a pleasure, and participating in a forum is pleasant too, so maybe some people don't show this time but they are still interested and should be keep informed on the forum news, and they will be back some time – and that is perfectly ok. Remember: don't expect that all learners will come every time, but keep everybody informed on what is happening, and they will come when they can. The forum is only one way to develop the interaction between learners, and therefore, a way to learn from each other.

It is possible to promote and acknowledge the necessity of learning in adulthood via learners' forums. Seminars, round tables and focus groups enable to attract media attention both to existing problems and to help to recognise learners. Learners' participation in the project has given them confidence and encouraged to express their opinions. There was an understanding that an efficient learner can encourage and support other learners around them together with those who do not learn yet.

Learners' participation in the meetings was a new challenge for them, being the first possibility for communication in a foreign language and getting acquainted with cultures of other countries. It is in the face to face meeting that learners share and learn the most from each other.

Appendix

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Adult Learners' Forum is an educational Partnership of the below mentioned organizations:

Coordinator



ANDRAS

Association of Estonian Adult Educators ANDRAS (AEAE Andras)

Partners:



Federacion Progresista de Asociaciones de Mujeres y Consumidores de Guadalajara (ES)



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