

ELECT - European Learning communities for Training of People with Mental Illness

Progress Report

Public Part

Project information

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Executive Summary

The ELECT project's purpose is to create a set of supported education methods and tools for people who are recovering from mental illness and wanting to develop their personal qualifications, educational pathway and inclusion in the mainstream education and labour market. Special support and education is needed because people suffering from mental illness need different types of support than people with other disabilities. In general, persons who belong to the target group have a lower level of education than the average population.

The Lifelong Learning Programme, with its sub-programme Grundtvig, could be one of the first European development programmes to take into account the special needs and desires of people with mental illness in relation to adult education and training. The ELECT project promotes and develops the Clubhouse learning communities as mediating non-formal organisations to building bridges between people with mental illness and the formal educational and vocational training institutions.

The ELECT project has a large project consortium that includes European Clubhouses, Clubhouse Coalitions and Clubhouse training bases. The project coordinator is STAKES (National Research and Development Centre for Welfare and Health) from Finland. The elect project is divided into six different working groups (known as workpackages). These workpackages are: Management (WP1), Activation and Motivation (WP2), Support Methods for Education and Training (WP3), Training of Trainers (WP4), Quality and Evaluation (WP5) and Dissemination and Exploitation (WP6).

The ELECT project has produced several outcomes and results during the first reporting period. The project brochures, newsletters (1&2) and website (www.elect-project.eu) has been produced for the dissemination and exploitation of the project activities and results. The Work package 2 has planned and submitted two questionnaires to the project partners. The first questionnaire studied existing study activities in the European Clubhouses and the second questionnaire studied Clubhouse members' educational goals and needs. The Work package 3 has explored existing study support practices in Clubhouses and their co-operation with educational institutions by means of a questionnaire. The Work package 4 has planned a draft program of the Supported Education pilot course for trainers and peer trainers. The *Quality and Evaluation* workpackage has produced a detailed evaluation plan and the interim report of the project evaluation.

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1. Project Objectives

The ELECT project's purpose is to create a set of supported education methods and tools for people who are recovering from mental illness and wanting to develop their personal qualifications, educational pathway and inclusion in the mainstream education and labour market. The first phase in achieving this goal is to improve their basic skills and motivate them to take part in training or pre-training and learning-to-learn courses. The second phase is to develop on-site support methods for trainees whose studies have been interrupted or have not yet started because of a severe psychiatric disability. Methods are developed in co-operation with formal educational institutions and the informal Clubhouse training communities. In the third phase of the project, ELECT organizes supported education pilot courses for qualified trainers and peer trainers. After the pilot courses participants are equipped to create a curriculum of supported education for people recovering from long-term mental illness.

Concrete aims and objectives of the project

The ELECT project's long-term aims and periodical objectives until the end of 2009 are:

1. Creating more and better opportunities in Europe to enable people with mental health problems to access formal mainstream adult education and professional training institutions
 - 1.1 To enhance co-operation and awareness-raising activities between formal adult education and training institutions and non-formal Clubhouse learning communities
 - 1.2 To develop a set of support measures and tools for assisting the Clubhouse member trainees to study with success in formal educational institutions in co-operation with the institutions concerned
 - 1.3 To organise excursions or visits in formal educational and professional training institutions that have experience in educating people with mental health problems (e.g. in connection with Partnership meetings)
2. Strengthening the European Clubhouses as learning communities by further developing the education component of the Clubhouse model
 - 2.1 To identify the Clubhouse members' educational goals and career plans for building up individual learning pathways
 - 2.2 To improve Clubhouse members' basic skills and learning-to-learn abilities by activating and motivating trainees to take part in different kinds of short courses, e.g. in career guidance, ICT and languages
 - 2.3 To organise two European transnational short courses by using Computer Supported Collaborative Learning (CSCL)-technology
3. Improving the quality of pedagogical practices of the three European Clubhouse Training Bases in the field of Supported Education (training of trainers)
 - 3.1 To organise a Supported Education pilot course for trainers and peer trainers
 - 3.2 To create a curriculum of the Supported Education training course for the European Clubhouses

2. Project Approach

The ELECT project promotes learning opportunities and access to education and employment of people with long-term mental illness and improves their educational background and quality of life. The ELECT project supports, activates and motivates people recovering from mental illness to enter adult education, improve basic learning skills and create individual learning pathways that are oriented to mainstream education and employment. In general, persons who belong to the target group have a lower level of education than the average population.

By developing support methods for education, pre-training programmes and learning community support, the ELECT-project better the quality of lives of people with mental health problems and their access to mainstream adult education and training. Special support and education is needed because people suffering from mental illness need different types of support than people with other disabilities. Today's knowledge-based society and jobs require ever extensive knowledge, specialised skills and adaptation to continuous changes. Education enables individuals to gain access to meaningful employment, community integration and the fulfilment of their life goals.

According to a report by Bob Grove, Jenny Secker and Patience Seeböhm (editors) "New thinking about Mental Health and Employment" (Radcliffe Publishing, Oxford 2005) the need for professional training and support for employment are urgent in the UK: Most people who suffer from periods of mental ill health would like to work and yet less than 20% are in employment. For those with a diagnosis of schizophrenia the unemployment rate is nearer to 95%. People with mental health problems are the least employed of any group of disabled persons. **As for aspirations to education, while nearly 70% aspired to education and training, only 18% were in education;** likewise, the gaps between the number who wanted and the number who received help and support are similar. Respondents thought that the significant barriers to employment were lack of skills and qualifications (51%), a lack of work experience (54%), and a lack of appropriate support (53%) (ibid. pp. 12-14) The publication is full of information about the rationale and background for this project, which is in keeping with the kind of information coming out of **other European countries.**

Mental disorders are common to all countries and lead to significant human suffering and disabilities. People with these illnesses are subjected to social isolation, poor quality of life and increased mortality. According to the WHO, people suffering from mental illnesses are one of the most disadvantaged groups in all societies. People with mental illness often face stigma, discrimination, and violation of their human rights, which applies also in the domain of education and training.

The socio-constructive learning approach

The socio-constructivist learning theory and its practical applications have steered the development work in the project. It is based on the learner's active role and

commitment and it follows co-operative and collaborative principles, with activities taking place mostly in teams and small communities. In addition, learning takes place in simulated or real-life situations, which equal the actual context where the knowledge or learned skills will be applied. The whole concept of the Clubhouse as a learning community is based on the same principles (work-ordered day programme, peer support, learning in small groups, action learning, supported transitional employment in real workplaces etc).

One speciality and strength of the ELECT consortium is that all partners will give to the mental health rehabilitants (Clubhouse member trainees) and staff opportunities to participate in and contribute to all planning and realisation activities and meetings of the project. This is based on Clubhouse values and guiding principles of the international Clubhouse quality standards. Representatives of the Clubhouse member trainees have participated in all preparatory meetings of the consortium and contributed to the content of the project. Trainees and staff members also participate in evaluating the project. In addition, the participation of women and men has been balanced on an equal basis in all activities.

Clubhouses as project partners

Most European Clubhouses already have co-operation with some of the formal adult education institutes. Strengthening and developing the lifelong learning and education components of Clubhouse communities opens new alternative opportunities for people with mental health problems to access adult education. People suffering and recovering from mental illnesses have usually a lower level of education than the population average, and they urgently need special attention and support to fully realise their learning potentials. Clubhouses as a supportive innovation offer an alternative integrated pathway to people with mental illness for adult education and social inclusion in everyday life as equal citizens who are fully using their potential and are afforded their civil and human rights.

According to research the Clubhouse rehabilitation model, which has been developed in conjunction with and for people with mental illnesses, is a successful and cost-effective method, as compared with the more traditional ones that promote social inclusion by using different forms of psychosocial support, adult education, vocational pre-training and training and transitional employment. The first Clubhouse was opened in New York in 1948. Gradually this model developed into a human-rights-based and user-centred empowering member community. It was disseminated first in the USA where half of the world's estimated 450 Clubhouses are located. In Europe, dissemination has taken place rather slowly, with currently about 90–100 Clubhouses in existence, though the number is growing continuously.

3. Project Outcomes & Results

The elect project is divided into six different working groups (known as workpackages). These workpackages are: Management (WP1), Activation and Motivation (WP2), Support Methods for Education and Training (WP3), Training of Trainers (WP4), Quality and Evaluation (WP5) and Dissemination and Exploitation (WP6).

The Management workpackage has taken care of the overall financial management and administration of the project. STAKES as an organisation that is co-ordinating the project has been responsible for carrying out management tasks. STAKES has organised workpackage start-ups and facilitated detailed workplans as well as created internal action rules for the project consortium. STAKES has organised a steering group meeting, a project consortium meeting and co-organised another consortium meeting.

The Activation and Motivation workpackage's objective is to strengthen the European Clubhouses as learning communities by further developing the education component of the Clubhouse model. WP2 has planned and submitted two questionnaires to the project partners. The first questionnaire studied existing education activities in the European Clubhouses and the second questionnaire studied Clubhouse members' educational goals and needs.

The questionnaire on existing activities indicates that Clubhouses offer a wide range of formal and informal educational activities (e.g. tutoring & study groups). The most popular course topic was Computer Skills. Courses were most often provided by other Clubhouse members. Peer support seems to be a very important factor in educational activities.

The Clubhouse members' educational goals and needs questionnaire data has been collected and a content analysis will be carried out for WP2's final report. The questionnaire was organised by interviewing Clubhouse members at six Clubhouses. Every Clubhouse interviewed eight members, each with a different background. The questionnaire comprised 14 questions. All questionnaire forms and results are available from the website www.elect-project.eu.

In addition to previous questionnaires, WP2 is preparing a report on good practices. For this report, every workpackage partner organisation will describe two elements of their daily work: "how do we welcome people on the first day" and "how do we inspire people to take courses". Learning starts sometimes from the very bottom and it is very important to ask how people are welcomed into the community. Welcoming affects to the activation and motivation process. All WP2's findings will be summed up in their final report.

The Support methods for Education and Training workpackage aims at strengthening the European Clubhouses as learning communities by further developing the education component of the Clubhouse model. WP3 has explored existing study support practices in Clubhouses and their co-operation with educational institutions by means of a questionnaire. The results of the questionnaire

indicate that study support at the Clubhouses can be divided into six main categories: *information about education; contact with educational institutions; practical help; education or classes in the Clubhouse; tutoring (individual/groups); and study techniques*. The results show some common elements with the findings of WP2 but the point of view is different. WP2 has concentrated more on the in-house education and activation process, while WP3 has concentrated on the study support, which is targeted at helping people to study in educational institutions. WP3 will further explore the six elements identified and write a larger report based on them. The final product of WP3 will be a report on "Support Methods and Tools: assisting people with mental illnesses to study in educational institutions" (working title).

The *Training of trainers* workpackage's objective is to improve the quality of the pedagogical practices of the three European Clubhouse Training Bases in the field of Supported Education. WP4 has planned a draft program of the Supported Education pilot course for trainers and peer trainers. The pilot course is addressed to the project consortium partners and after the ELECT project it will be made available to other European Clubhouses. The pilot course will take place in London March 2009.

The main results for WP4 thus far are: a draft schedule for the pilot course, the pilot course application form and a plan for the next steps.

The *Quality and Evaluation* workpackage has produced a detailed evaluation plan and the interim report of the project evaluation. Evaluation questionnaires for the project participants will be submitted during the next reporting period.

The *Dissemination and Exploitation* workpackage has produced a project website (www.elect-project.eu), project brochures (in seven languages) and two project newsletters. All materials are available from the project website. Materials have been disseminated with the help of project consortium partners. The project management's mailing list consists of consortium partners and all European Clubhouses (n=90). The project has participated in Mental Health Europe's annual seminar and it will continue to disseminate and exploit activities in the European Clubhouse conference in December 2008.

4. Partnerships

The ELECT project has a large project consortium that includes European Clubhouses, Clubhouse Coalitions and Clubhouse training bases. The project co-ordinator is STAKES (National Research and Development Centre for Welfare and Health) from Finland.

STAKES co-ordinates the management and the dissemination activities of the ELECT project. STAKES is a government research institute that falls under the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health. Its core functions are research, development and information production. It also supports the Ministry in implementing national social policy strategies and guidelines. Since 1995 STAKES has participated continuously in European development programmes such as the European Social Fund, Health Promotion and Public Health, Employment, Leonardo da Vinci, EQUAL, eHealth, and Framework Programmes. Ersta Sköndal University College is responsible for the project evaluation.

The consortium includes:

1. STAKES - National Research and Development Centre for Welfare and Health. Finland (Applicant organisation).
2. Swedish Fountain House. Sweden (Lead partner of WP2)
3. Fountain House Fonden Denmark. (Lead partner of WP3)
4. Mosaic Clubhouse. United Kingdom (Lead partner of WP4)
5. Ersta Sköndal University College. Sweden (Lead partner WP5)
6. Paritaetischer Wohlfahrtsverband Bayern e.V. Sozialpsychiatrisches Zentrum „Haus an der Teutoburger Straße“. Clubhaus Schwalbennest and Clubhaus Lichtblick
7. Finnish Fountain House Coalition. Finland
8. Foundation Fountain, Fountain House in Oslo. Norway
9. Klúbburin Geysir. Iceland
10. Helsinki Clubhouses registered association. Finland
11. Stiftelsen Vänskap och arbete, Fontänhuset Org. Malmö
12. Caledonia Clubhouse. United Kingdom

Co-operation is based on regular partnership meetings (5 meetings over a 24-month period). The ELECT project has organised one steering group meeting for the lead partners of the workpackages and two project consortium meetings. All project partners have been able to take part in both consortium meetings. Meetings have been divided into general sessions and workshop sessions. General sessions have allowed partners to elaborate a vision for the ELECT project as a whole and to deepen their knowledge of relevant topics. Workshop sessions have been important for the implementation of the workpackage tasks.

The first ELECT consortium meeting had 39 participants, while the second gathered 60 participants. The project group comprises about 30 people. A part of the meeting programs has been open to other stakeholders and interested groups. The working groups are large because the ELECT consortium invites mental health rehabilitants into the project work on an equal footing with other workers. Clubhouse member

trainees and staff participate in and contribute to all planning and realisation activities and to the meetings of the project. This is based on Clubhouse values and the guiding principles of the international Clubhouse quality standards. Representatives of the Clubhouse member trainees have participated in all preparatory meetings of the consortium and contributed to the content of the project. Trainees and staff members are also participating in the evaluation of the project.

The working language of the consortium has been English. Some of the end products have been and will be translated into the partner organisations' languages (Swedish, Danish, Finnish, German, Norwegian, and Icelandic).

The communication between the consortium members is based on exploitation of interactive and collaborative internet technology. The project has created a blog, which allows partners to archive, share and comment on project documents. Exchanges of e-mails and telephone calls have been the main communication channels between the partners.

5. Plans for the Future

In the background of the ELECT project consortium is the "European Clubhouse Development Partnership (ECDP)", in which all consortium partners have been founding members. It was established in Stockholm City Hall on 19th March 2007. A special agreement was signed by all partners present at the meeting. The long-term goal is to establish a dedicated European Office to support the ICCD and ECDP in future development activities. All the above-mentioned illustrates that the ECDP will be a long-term network organisation and actor on the European stage, which will also actively be seeking new partners. It will take the lead in dissemination and exploitation activities based on the results and outcomes of the first ELECT project, which runs from 2007–2009.

The ECDP will continue the dissemination and exploitation activities also after the project has been completed. The ELECT consortium has established a website and internet-based communication system (blog), which can be beneficial even after the ELECT project. After the project, the ECDP and the European Development Office (soon to be established) will take care of the maintenance of website services. Electronic newsletters will be published during the ELECT project. Because the aim is to apply for funding for continuation projects to come after ELECT has completed its lifecycle, the responsibility to maintain website services will be moved to the new project consortium. During the ELECT project brochures and summaries of reports will be translated in all languages of consortium partners, and also in some other e.g. new Member States' languages for the dissemination purposes.

Every second year, the European Clubhouse Conference will be organised as a major event to disseminate and transfer the outcomes and good practices of the ELECT project in Europe (first in December 2008 and then in 2010). Also many other international organisations in the field of mental health policy are organising international conferences in Europe that will be used for dissemination purposes, e.g. the Mental Health Europe (MHE) organise every year a European Conference, where the identified good practices and other outcomes of the ELECT project will also be disseminated. Globally, the International Clubhouse Seminars will be used for the dissemination and transfer of the ELECT outcomes. The global co-ordinating organisation the "International Centre for Clubhouse Development" (ICCD) organises an International Clubhouse Seminar every second year (next is 2009 and again in 2011).

The training courses to be developed and piloted during the ELECT project will also be offered later by European Clubhouse Training Bases to the Clubhouse member trainees, and to the teaching trainers. In Europe today about 90–100 Clubhouses are functioning and it is calculated that on average 25 member trainees per Clubhouse will be potential students in the special courses over the next 5–6 years. This means about 1000 participants in these courses.

The number of participants in the Training-of-Trainers course (to be planned and piloted during the ELECT project) will be offered also after the project's end. We

calculate that on average, one trainer per annum from all Clubhouses would take part in the course, which means about 500 trainers participating over the next 5–6 years.

The consortium will continue its work by applying for new funding for European Clubhouse development activities, and in the context of these continued projects, these courses will be marketed and further developed to achieve these targets after the funding period. This will ensure the continued visibility of the outcomes in the long-term.

6. Contribution to EU policies

Promoting the full integration and participation of people with disabilities in all aspects of society is a key element of EU policies. Article 13 of the Treaty provides the legal basis for community action to combat discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation. However, the position of people with mental illness in Europe is isolated, and they are discriminated against in major areas of everyday life, in education and training too. The situation varies essentially from country to country, which makes European-wide interventions necessary. Disadvantaged and marginalised people with mental health problems should be taken into account more—for example through the EU open method of co-ordination—in ways that reveal the situation in all policy areas for these people, so that it is transparent and available for transnational review and discussion.

The Lifelong Learning Programme, with its sub-programme Grundtvig, could be one of the first European development programmes to take into account the special needs and desires of people with mental illness in relation to adult education and training. The ELECT project promotes and develops the Clubhouse learning communities as mediating non-formal organisations to building bridges between people with mental illness and the formal educational and vocational training institutions. People with mental illness need special support services to make the transition and continue successfully in mainstream adult education and vocational training. The identified, piloted and documented good practices and the pre-training programme that will come from the ELECT project would help in organising similar activities in other places, regions and countries.

The European Union has the possibility to push and accelerate the paradigmatic change which is going on in the field of mental health and social inclusion policy in Europe. Within the reforms of psychiatric services, many countries are moving away from the provision of mental health services through large psychiatric institutions (in some new Member States, such institutions still account for a large share of the mental health services infrastructure) towards community-based services. This goes hand in hand with instructing persons with mental illness—and their families and connected professionals—in active participation and empowerment strategies, with the aim of inclusion in mainstream education and employment in an open labour market. A study for the Commission, “Included in Society”, confirmed that the replacement of institutions by community-based alternatives in general provides opportunities for better quality of life for disabled people.

On 14 October 2005, the European Commission adopted for public discussion the green paper “Promoting the mental health of the population. Towards a strategy on mental health for the EU”. The green paper states that mental health is important for all European Union policy objectives (health, quality of life, economic and social welfare, transition to a knowledge society as stated in the Lisbon Agenda). One of the priorities identified in the green paper is to prevent major mental disorders and to support vulnerable groups. Another priority is to promote the social inclusion of people with mental health problems and to protect their fundamental rights and dignity.

The ELECT project proposal represents a first in terms of European education and training programmes that concentrate on developing the support structures, measures and tools for people with mental health problems. These possibilities, methods and learning communities in the Clubhouse settings have never before been analysed or promoted in the context of European adult education programmes. The ELECT Consortium Partners share the view that now it is time to include these disadvantaged people as a target group in the European educational and training programmes.

The ELECT project has several objectives in common with the European Social Fund. Both are committed to helping people improve their skills and, consequently, their job prospects. The ESF reinforces social inclusion by combating discrimination and facilitating access to the labour market for disadvantaged people. The ESF has launched a policy document "Addressing the needs of the people with disabilities in ESF programmes in the 2007–13 period". This document states that lifelong learning initiatives should systematically include a special focus on the needs of people with disabilities, and training providers should look proactively for potentially interested disabled people and widely advertise the Fund's activities to them.

The project is contributing to the enforcement of the guidelines by:

- UN Standard Rules for Equalisation of Opportunities of People with Disabilities;
- World Health Organisation's Mental Health Policy Declaration and Recommendations for Europe, approved in the WHO's European Ministerial Conference in Helsinki (January 2005),
- Council of Europe's Recommendation Rec(2006)5 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the Action Plan to promote the rights and full participation of people with disabilities in society: improving the quality of life of people with disabilities in Europe 2006-2015; and
- The European Community strategic guidelines on economic, social and territorial cohesion 2007-2013, approved 6th October, 2006. (OJ L 291, 21.10.2006, pp. 11-32).

