

Case Study 5: Support of Families and Social Inclusion in the Polička Region

Abstract

The case study is focused on the project *Support of Families and Social Inclusion in the Polička Region*, specifically on the support of families with special needs and families at risk of social exclusion. The project's activities respond to the lack of local activities for families of children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and the lack of support for families at risk of social exclusion. The aim of the activities was to improve the situation of these families through better availability and quality of social inclusion support for vulnerable families. For children and adolescents with ASD and their families, the aim was to create a space for leisure activities and sharing experiences. The definition of needs was carried out in the context of community planning of social services, a questionnaire survey and interviews with representatives of municipalities in the area. The project enabled the creation of a job position as a coordinator for families at risk of social exclusion. It also started the creation of a community and activities for children with ASD and their families.

Case Study Subject

The project and its activities deal with the problems of families of children with ASD and socially vulnerable families. The target groups lack a support network that would connect them to other actors and help them to remedy their problems at an early stage before they become larger. The aim of the activities is to improve the availability and quality of social inclusion services for families at risk of social exclusion. The activities support cooperation between schools and social services, better awareness of available help, motivation of families to be actively involved and strengthen their relationship with the labour market. For children and adolescents with ASD, activities aimed at developing social contacts are being prepared, and at the same time space is created for sharing and support among their caregivers. Community workers and coordinators play a key role – they connect families with support services and schools in the LAG region and organise joint activities.

LAG Poličsko and cooperation with actors in the area

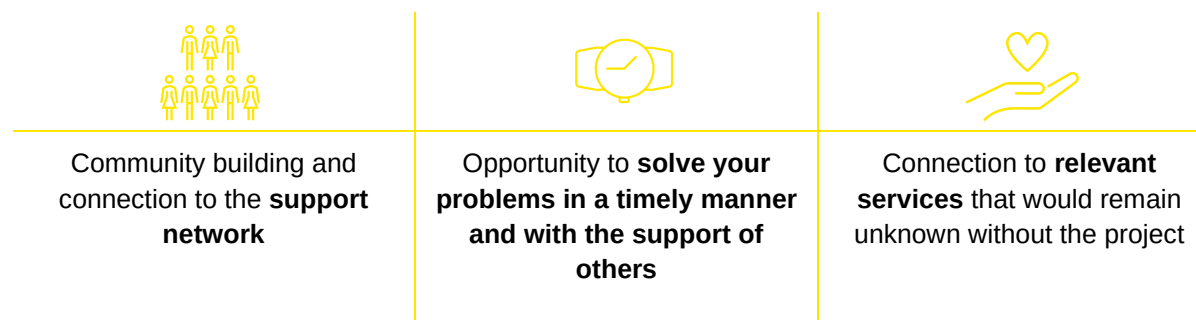
The project is implemented by local action group (LAG) Poličsko. The key activities on which this evaluation focuses are carried out by the LAG itself and its internal capacities, without a project partner. The LAG cooperates with various actors, such as representatives of municipalities, schools or non-profit organisations.

According to the representatives of the LAG, both models of cooperation (1) LAG announces call for small projects (2) LAG itself realizes complex project have their advantages. The model where other organizations apply for calls is especially suitable for investment projects such as the purchase of equipment or construction. These activities are normally carried out by local organizations, although there is more competition. On the contrary, the second model allows the LAG to take over the role of the applicant



and thus make support available to non-profit organizations, which often do not have sufficient capacity to submit a project independently.

The target group of the project's key activities **are families at risk of social exclusion and families of children with ASD**. The activities are focused on strengthening the community of families of children with ASD, creating leisure activities for children and creating a space for sharing experiences. For families at risk of social exclusion, this risk should be detected and prevented in time thanks to the coordinator and their cooperation with the Education and Social Departments. The diagram below shows the main benefits for the target group in the area of pro-family measures.



Example of good practice – creation of a job position as a coordinator for families on the border between the educational and social areas

One example of good practice is the establishment of systematic cooperation between LAGs and schools by using the experience from the implementation of local action planning (LAP), which focuses on the development of quality and inclusive education for children and pupils up to 15 years of age. Knowledge of the school environment proved to be essential not only for establishing contacts, but above all for a deeper understanding of the needs of families that were taken into account in the project. The practical outcome of this cooperation and understanding of the needs is the creation of a new job position of coordinator for families, which acts as a bridge between schools and other components of the support network in the area. The activity thus manages to **cover the grey zone between the school and the social area**.

Thanks to contact with schools, it identifies children at risk of social exclusion, contacts their families and offers them professional assistance in the form of links to the existing network of services and support institutions. This way, vulnerable families don't have to let their problems go as far and they can get help before the problems become bigger.



"The coordinator for schools, that's not something that would work everywhere either. I have been in the industry a bit and I have contacts all over the country, schools do not know such cooperation, that someone would help them. The schools are floundering in it themselves. Last time we also had a representative of the Mental Health Centre, and he kept repeating that schools must address the service and other social services. And I countered, we have so much experience with schools, and you want an awful lot from them. Schools have their own school system in which teachers have to orient themselves, and you still want them to be familiar with social services? You can be glad that there is a case manager who



will connect it and divide it. It seems to me that there is a shock between the reality of social services and education. We have it directly tangible in the territory."

- Representative of the cooperating organization

THE ADDED VALUE OF CLLD

- ▶ **Bottom-up definition of needs/themes**, where the LAG implementation team travels around the territory and asks the actors about their needs and interests. The role of the LAG is a keyrole already in the initiation phase of the projects, so that their settings correspond to the real needs of the territory. **The project responds flexibly to the specifics of the locality** and can also serve as an inspiration for better targeting of regional development policies in a broader context – at the level of regions or national strategies.
- ▶ **Emphasis is placed on community development and support**, as exemplified by activities for children with ASD and their parents. In addition to organizing leisure activities for children and adapting them to special needs and possibilities, the activity also includes family meetings and the creation of a community for sharing experiences. A healthy community core is most important for the sustainability of activities and their continuation.
- ▶ **Remediation of problems that are on the border between education and health care.** The proof is the job position of the coordinator, which captures vulnerable families through a network of schools and connects them to the social area.
- ▶ Compared to other projects, LEADER/CLLD projects have a **more strategic approach**, better targeting and a stronger impact on the community. Thanks to their anchoring in the territory, they contribute to the development of specific activities and at the same time to changes in the local functioning of public administration or social services. The project fills in the blanks, such as helping families whose children are still waiting for confirmation of the diagnosis of ASD.
- ▶ **Synergy effects of the implementation of activities within MAP and OPE+.** A telling example is the knowledge of the school environment, which was used in connecting to schools. The activities of the LAG are also complementary to those of other actors in the country.

- The choice of **co-operation actors** was perceived as positive. Given the long-term cooperation, the LAG knew what to expect from the partners. They trusted each other, which was beneficial for the cooperation.
- × One of the barriers to the implementation of the activities was **the reluctance of participants to sign attendance lists** and fill in personal data. Therefore, during the implementation of the activities, it was necessary to explain to the participants the purpose of signing attendance sheets and thus gain their trust in filling in personal data.

IMPLEMENTATION EXPERIENCE



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