

Youth Exchange
Group Leader

GO YEGL'ing!!

2010

Knowledge

Preparation Innovation

Responsibility *Friendship*

Energy Travel Activity

Diplomacy Role Model

Theresa Molloy R.I.P.
(30 /03/'90 – 17/11/'09)



Tá láinseáil na hirise seo ar mhalartaithe óige déanta i ndil chuimhne ar Theresa Molloy, cara linn a maraíodh go tragóideach i dtimpiste bhóthar Dé Máirt 17ú Samhain 2009. Cé go raibh Theresa óg sna mblianta (19), b' oibrí deonach iontach í don óige agus don pobail.

Níor dhiúltaigh sí iarratas ar chúnamh d'éinne riamh, ach go háirithe don Chlub Óige baile aici i Leitir Móir: Aos Óg na nOileán. Bhí tionchar agus toradh ar a cuid oibre i bhfad ó bhaile chomh maith, tríd an gceangal a bhí aici le Youth Work Ireland– Galway. Go bhfeicimid arís thú a Theresa, le cúnamh Dé.

This Youth Exchange Publication is dedicated to the memory of Theresa Molloy, who was tragically killed in a car accident on Tuesday 17th November 2009.

Though young in years (19), Theresa was an extraordinary 'Youth in the Community' volunteer worker, who gave selflessly of her time and of herself to all who requested help, especially within her own community of Ceantar na nOilean and her Youth Club: Aos Óg na nOileán in Leitir Móir, Co.Galway, Ireland. Her influence and help impacted much further afield, at a regional, national and even international level, through her involvement in Youthwork Ireland – Galway. Here's hoping that you're merely gone on an APV, to plan our next steps !!!
Rest in Peace Theresa....

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'Youth in Action' Programme



léargas



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**Do
you
want
to
be
YEGL'ed**

kidsinaction.gr/yegl
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The value of synergy – Making this publication a reality

What you hold in your hands is of a special nature! No, no we are not talking about what the paper is made of!

It's the collective and synergetic effort of more than 20 people coming from all the corners of the European continent. It's the most touch-and-feel outcome of a thoroughly planned and productively implemented training process. It's what demonstrates that joining (international) forces in the field of youth is the only way forward.



Image on this page ("puzzles") is courtesy of www.sxc.hu
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“Go YEG Ling” sought to bring forward the “lived experience”; stories of youth exchange group leaders while “on duty”. Their stories fill these pages.

The very act of writing them down will ensure better understanding for those having lived the experiences. It will also trigger inspiration for those who want to take a step forward and a community feeling among those thousands that have led youth groups in intercultural youth exchanges. All 3 being our purposes, inseparably.

Its strength is nurtured by the huge diversity of perspectives, achieved through the participation of youth leaders with different cultural and experiential backgrounds, in the overall process.

It's not a mono-dimensional but a multi-dimensional perspective on what a youth exchange group leader is, does and stands for; what challenges he/she faces and what measures are at hand; how important his/her role is and from where support can be drawn.

Our advice: don't read this book as if it is a carrier of a universal truth! Be in a dialogue with it as if it is a companion on an evening's seaside walk! Be open to the “talk” but always remember it's your mind and soul that needs to be applied, should you wish to go YEG Ling! Live the experience and be the one writing about it in a future publication such as this. Young people have a lot to gain, for sure! **For the moment, enjoy “listening”!**

Padraig Ó Sabhain – Athanasios (Sakis) Krezios

The YEGL Concept Revealed!

From an onomatological perspective, it sounds like the newest “www” trend, doesn’t it?.....**But it’s not.**



“YEGL” is the “liquidish” acronym for Youth Exchange Group Leadership. It’s also the name given to a long term educational activity implemented all over Europe, during 2008-09, that consisted of a:

- a) Residential training course, supported by the **“Youth in Action”** Programme, Action 4.3. 13/03/2008 – 20/03/2008, *Mt. Paggajo, Greece*. A “platform” for exchanging experiences, enhancing cooperation and developing youth exchange group leaders’ competencies such as learning facilitation, communication, team-work, theories and skill, etc.
- b) Period Of Practice (POP). 20/03/2008 – 15/05/2009. A set of activities to be undertaken by the participants of the “residential training course”. They had to: participate in a first aid seminar, lead a group in a youth exchange supported by the **“Youth in Action”** Programme and make efforts to strengthen the “network” created.
- c) Consolidation seminar, supported by the **“Youth in Action”** Programme, Action 4.3. 16 – 21/05/2009. *Conamara, Ireland*. During this seminar specialist inputs were delivered on child protection and intercultural issues. Participants were also encouraged to draw conclusions from their “POP” experience (and...put them “on paper”), to formulate suggestions for future developments and to design next steps towards strengthened youth exchange group leadership training.

Above all, “YEGL” became alive because its initiators strongly believe in further recognising and fostering the role of *leaders* as “(non-formal) learning catalysts” and “safety guarantors”.

In 2007 alone, more than 40,000 people, mostly aged 15 – 28, have participated in an international youth exchange supported by the “Youth in Action Programme”¹. Several thousands have taken part since the “Youth for Europe I” introduced in 1988². That’s a proof of the attractiveness of these activities for young people but also a call for increased support and attention for those *instrumental* figures called “youth leaders”.

They also unveil the immense potential for development of the young person in the personal and social sphere, through non-formal learning. Having this in mind but also being in possession of a great willingness that has been both shaped by our positive experiences and the success of the “YEGL” activity, the contributors of this publication and the process behind, are committed to promote quality youth exchange group leadership training all over Europe.

Padraig o’ Sabhain – Athanasios (Sakis) Krezios



¹ http://ec.europa.eu/youth/glance/doc/youth_in_action_figures/eac_statistics_2007_060209.pdf . For an overview of the 2000 – 2006 period, please consult: European Commission, *Final evaluation of the “YOUTH” Community action programme*, COM(2008) 398, final.
² The European Youth Foundation of the Council of Europe has been supporting similar activities since its establishment in 1972. Our concerns, explorations and findings of the “YEGL” process are adjustably applicable to its activities (while our minds draw great amounts of inspiration from its achievements).



There is a group of young people who are interested in music and they are willing to host a multilateral youth exchange on this topic. Until now they have participated in several youth exchanges abroad but never hosted one. Preparation is going well but now it's time to find partners...

The Good – Everything goes well

They make a description of the project and send an invitation to their partner network asking them to spread the information among their partners as well. This group of youngsters want to see how motivated and interested potential partners are on the topic, so they ask to send not only their explanation why they want to take part but also request of them, what might their possible contribution to the program be? Afterwards youngsters define the criteria that will help them to choose the best possible partners. When partners are chosen, they establish regular communication with them and before applying to their National Agency for a Youth in Action grant, they receive the originals of the official document (Part3), which confirm the commitment of the partner organizations. They also discuss (using internet facilities) the program of the project and together with the partner groups come up with the final version of it.

Fortunately the project is approved and the Advance Planning Visit (APV) is happening one month before the youth exchange. During the APV all partner groups are working together on the last details of the program, discussing and coming up with common agreements about safety issues, sharing tasks and responsibilities for last preparation month and for the youth exchange itself. After the APV, the active preparation period is happening, partners are actively in touch, they are preparing youngsters. Finally the youth exchange is on and youngsters can totally enjoy the activities.

Everything is going smoothly, hosts feel comfortable and safe, because other group leaders are contributing fully in the program, they are implementing the activities as discussed and agreed upon before and they are sharing different responsibilities. The exciting week of the youth exchange has passed but partners are still working on evaluation and giving feedback to the hosts, even more they are helping to fill in some parts of final report. Not only is the hosting organization ready to inform the local society about the project but also the partners are willing to share the positive experience they had. After such a great project all partners are willing to keep in touch and there are already some new ideas for further cooperation.

The Bad – Please never again!!!

The project description and program was made properly but was not disseminated properly amongst the partners to be. The group was not experienced in selecting partners and as a result, the emotional factor took the lead. Reasons such as; “*they are friends so let’s take them!*” were used. Groups were selected according to the nationality, “*It would be so cool to have some Xians here as well!*”, rather than by negotiation and discussion.

Fortunately the hosts could offer an Advance Planning Visit (APV) and that should / would bring the project flow back on the right road. Unfortunately two groups sent no leader to the APV. Also, two other persons there, said that while hey really appreciate the APV, they can’t come to the action itself. After APV the host group decided the program was quite clear for everyone and that there was no need for further information. The action started and...surprise...some leaders had no idea of the topic and the aim of the exchange at all.

Even worse they had no experience in leading a group. There was even one leader who didn’t know his participants at all. The exchange was a struggle for a good program from the very first day.



Ugly partnership – How can you do it to us???

After sending the invitation for the network contacts, they decided, in advance, to choose an old partner with whom they had made several exchanges in the past and for that reason they felt sure that things would go well with them, even if they were not that much connected / interested with the topic of the project. Besides, it would be a good opportunity to meet old friends.

During the preparations the old partner is not that much in touch and most of the time, they don't answer to the emails. However, the hosts have the phone number of several members of the old partner organization and are able to confirm, by phone, that they will send someone to APV.

On the APV the host people realize that old partner sent one of the guys that they have met before, a very nice old friend, but not the person that will lead the group on the exchange. During the APV the old friend is more interested in meeting with other old friends from the host organization than with other members from the partner organizations! Let alone the indifference for the project details...s/he won't be in the project itself anyway!!!

As a result of this, he was not focused on the tasks that each partner had to prepare between APV and the exchange. During this period, the communication with the old partner remained as it was before, no answers to mails, neither feedback about the preparations on their side. For that reason, once more the hosts were forced to call the old partner group to know how things were going on their side. A week before the exchange was due to start, the old partner group sent an e-mail informing the hosts that instead of the 5 expected youngsters they were only able to collect 3.

The exchange started, and on the night where each country had to make their cultural musical performance, as all the partners agreed on the APV, the old partner group leader informed the host organisation that it was not possible for his group to perform, because they hadn't the chance to prepare it with the 3 youngsters. Thus, they had nothing to show on that night. All the other partners did their presentations, but it was a big disappointment for the host organization, what the old friends did. In general the project went well enough despite that situation, however, for sure next time, the host organization will think twice before they invite the old partners back again.

The importance of one common ‘agreed’ language cannot be overstated. When on a youth project, the language is one of the major items that can separate us.

The working language of the project

Language Barriers can cause great difficulties in getting agreement on common contexts, concepts, aims and objectives and work practices to be employed on youth exchanges. This can result in slowing down the implementation of the entire project and breaking down the unity of the group or perhaps even prevent the participants from working all together. Language barriers are often the main reason that prevents the correct expression of ideas from within the partner groups

If I cannot talk to you, I cannot get to know you and cannot be your friend. For me, you might as well be both deaf and mute. The use of body language is not always a solution because the gestures might be misunderstood or not understood at all. Sometimes this is the only solution when communicating with disabled people, however, this should be the exception, rather than the rule.

Language barrier between organisers & participants

Organisers must have a good level of the agreed working language, in order to make the programme clear for everybody. Likewise, the participants should have at least a basic working knowledge of the language of the exchange.



Solutions

There are some simple steps that should be taken in order to ensure that the effectiveness of the exchange does not suffer from language difficulties. A common dictionary should be agreed and utilized as a reference point for all organizers and participants.

- Participants, if possible, should be housed in mixed rooms (participants of the same gender from various countries). This should foster more integration amongst the participants from different countries and encourage them to speak the agreed working language, rather than their own native tongue, as they most-likely would, if each national group were housed together.
- A language translator might be used, if necessary. The organizers might be in a position to get a student for free or find a young person who may be able to speak the other language e.g. one of the hosting group might have a friend who is a national of the group who are experiencing language difficulties and now lives in the host country.
- It will be very useful for the participants if the preparatory meetings are conducted in the commonly agreed language or if the sending organizations use some of the preparation money for language courses.
- The draft programme should have a short description of the daily programme in the mother tongue of all participating groups, so that the participants have the same understanding of the issues to be discussed and the programme events that are to take place
- A clear description of all emergency procedures / first-aid protocol and all food and accommodation arrangements should be available beforehand, in the languages of all participating groups.

ORGANIZER	APV LEADER	GROUP LEADER	PARTICIPANT
ORGANIZER	APV LEADER	GROUP LEADER	PARTICIPANT
ORGANIZER	APV LEADER	GROUP LEADER	PARTICIPANT

Illustration Created by Christos Athanasiadis, Greece

TABLE OF YEGL EMOTIONS

BEFORE THE STORM!!!

*'The time to repair the roof
is when the sun is shining'.*

John F. Kennedy

What is an APV?

An Advance Planning Visit (APV) is a meeting of all partner organizations in the host country. It takes place before the youth exchange, and it should suggestively take place at least one month before in order to maintain quality preparation. Usually, one leader and one participant per partner organisation attend the APV. Its' duration is usually of 2 full days, plus arrival and departure.

Why you should attend the APV?

We recommend that you attend the APV for the following reasons:

- * You have the chance to meet with the group leaders, in person.
- * You get familiar with the area where the activities will take place.
- * You can check out the accommodation facilities and other practicalities (TIP: If the youth exchange includes host families, you must meet with them during the APV)
- * It gives you the opportunity to discuss and try out all the facilities and provisions arranged by the host organization such as food, cleaning, bathrooms etc! and to talk about your participants' needs and how these needs will be taken care of (e.g. vegetarian food, allergies, health issues)
- * You can discuss with the other leaders about safety issues and together a "safety map" can be drawn and put in place. You can even talk about your participants and their needs when it comes to their safety (e.g. You might lead a group of young people with mental or physical disabilities, or you might even have in your group youngsters with psychological issues, fears or even coming from difficult social environments).

- * Rules can be discussed and applied after common agreement (for example with regards to alcohol consumption, drug use, safety)
- * You can ask questions and get clarification around the security measures (including insurance) to be undertaken by the hosts.
- * You will be introduced to the programme of activities and you will be able to give input and change it in agreement with the other group leaders if necessary. You can also suggest changes you might like, with the accommodation place, the timetable or a particular day of the project.
- * You'll have the chance to assess all possible risks on the spot and respond to them with the input of every leader.
- * You can collect photos and information to present to your group and the people back home involved in the youth exchange.
- * The APV also gives you the confidence and knowledge of practical travel arrangements before bringing the group (most probably using the same route/itinerary).
- * At the APV you can agree with the other group leaders on a common problem-solving strategy.
- * You can still have the time and the opportunity to withdraw from the youth exchange. Actually this is the main reason why an APV is so important, because it must ensure that everything during the youth exchange will work well. So, if issues arise during the APV, that you don't feel comfortable or confident about, then it is at this stage that you can cancel the participation in the project.
- * At the end of the APV there should always be an evaluation session (TIP: If not, ask for it!) where you can and you should discuss your fears (but also the positive points).
- * Do not be afraid to withdraw from a youth exchange, especially if the reasons are related to the safety and well being of the participants.
- * Speaking about costs, you will still be reimbursed for the APV ones, even if you decide (justifiably) to cancel the participation of your group.

And what if all the above
brought me doubts about the
Youth Exchange?

Personal Experiences of an APV

“During an APV that I attended in 2008 as a group leader, I met all the other group leaders and we worked together for 3 days in order to organize better the youth exchange. When time came for the youth exchange I realized that one of the group leaders had changed (in comparison to the APV). It seemed to me and also to the other group leaders that the new youth leader was not informed about the youth exchange and what was agreed at the APV. Furthermore as we realized during our leaders’ meeting, she was not known by her participants. The effect was that this group was not connected well and they were not paying attention to the group leader.

Because of the lack of information this group had to leave two days earlier from the youth exchange after they “tried hard” to change the programme so that it suits them better. This was not only frustrating for me and the other group leaders but also caused a lot of problems to the group dynamic.”

It is crucial that the APV and the youth exchange leader is the same person. That should be made clear by the hosts and also by the partners to whom the role is delegated.

“My organization agreed to participate in a youth exchange in Estonia. I was supposed to be the group leader. The youth exchange’s main idea was that the participants will travel around the country. In the APV we realized that in order to travel we had to change the accommodation place more than 4 times in a period of 10 days. Group leaders thought that travelling so much and changing the venues that often was not a good idea. Besides that, one of the places was not “good enough”. At that place two of the rooms were double with private toilet facilities. The other one was a big common sleeping room for fourteen people with a common toilet and shower outside the room. These facilities would have most probably caused friction between the groups. So all the group leaders with the host organization agreed on changing the programme and canceled two of the venues including the one mentioned.”

All the leaders during an APV can improve or change the programme, the facilities and all that might hinder their participants' well being.

Frequently Asked Questions Regarding Advance Planning Visits

1. Do I have to pay anything for the APV?

No. Your travel cost is reimbursed by 100% and also your accommodation and food facilities are covered. Personal expenses, are of course not reimbursed.

2. When should I buy the tickets for my group for the youth exchange?

It is recommended not to buy the tickets for your group before the APV. You can book them so you can present the travel expenses to the host organization and buy them after the APV when you will be sure about participating. If you buy the tickets before the APV and then you decide to withdraw, you risk losing a substantial amount of money.

3. What should I do if I attend the APV but I cannot finally lead the group to the youth exchange?

First of all find a trustworthy replacement. Then you should inform him/her about all the issues discussed and agreed during the APV. Make sure you hold a meeting with the participants and the new leader so they will have the chance to get to know each other (you should definitely be present at this meeting).

As well, inform the host organization about the change and apologize to them. Let them know that you are doing your best to find and prepare a proper substitute. They will appreciate your honesty and they will be ready to welcome the new leader. Ask the new leader to communicate with the hosts as soon as the briefing is done.

4. What if I am working with a group and I cannot attend the APV of a youth exchange that would be of great benefit to them?

If you can't attend the APV find another group leader from your organization who will make sure to inform you about all the information that will be discussed. You can ask him/her to bring up issues that you consider important. You should also keep in contact with the person that replaces you to discuss all aspects during the APV. If you will not be able to find a replacement, inform the host organization and ask them to keep in contact with you during the APV and to send you the report and the evaluation of the APV.



5. What if no APV is approved?

First of all you mail to all partner countries and inform them about the reasons why the APV was not approved (if you play host to the youth exchange). Ask for photos and information about the venue and activities. Suggest the hosts to upload all important material on their web site (or blog etc).

Most importantly keep in regular contact by phone, mail, fax and e-mail with the host organization and group leaders involved.

Since internet and technology can help us, you can even organize a live conference via Skype or messenger with all group leaders.

If you are to participate with a new partner (bi or tri-lateral) or group of

partners (multi-lateral) on an exchange and no APV is approved, then you must seriously question yourself about your continued participation. It's one thing to lead a youth group on exchange within a trusted partnership and to go there without an APV. You are operating blindly, but know and believe that you can trust the host to have everything arranged 100% efficiently. To do this without good knowledge of the hosts and the other participating groups would be foolish in the extreme. Remember that you might be leading a group of teenagers within any age range from 13 years to 28 years. You are operating as their leader, their parents, their brother / sister and their friend and should not put their welfare at risk. To lead a group on exchange within a new partnership and without an APV would be letting yourself and your group open to this, so quite simply, **DON'T DO IT !!!**

(It is better to have them disappointed and safe than to put them at risk – there will be many other exchanges – choose carefully).



i Learn

EVALUATION BEFORE, DURING AND AFTER

It's important to evaluate every step in the process of participating in a youth exchange either being a youth leader or a participant. Evaluation helps to become aware of the learning outcomes and gives the direction for improvement. It's necessary to keep in mind that evaluation needs to be a part of the youth exchange at the beginning, during and after the event.

EXAMPLE: You attend an international youth exchange and in the beginning it appears that the hosting organisation and their participants do not speak English. Due to grave communication problems the programme is not implemented the way it was planned already in APV.

OUTCOMES FROM THE EVALUATION:

- * Communication with hosting organisation needs to be clarified before attending the youth exchange. This is a platform for common understanding.
- * Due to the apparent problem, all the partners need to re-evaluate the situation and act towards the main aim of the youth exchange (always have plan B, for example: if language is a problem – find another way to communicate)
- * Talk to the participants, first in national groups and then the whole group in order to find the common understanding.
- * **NEVER GIVE UP!**

EXAMPLE: You attend a multilateral youth exchange leading a group of 5 people. There is a clear need for preparation and evaluation of the group and the youth leader. See the example below:

During the preparation phase I used a lot of the working materials, you can find on the www.salto-youth.net website such as check lists. I tried to be prepared as well as possible, but always I saved in the back of my mind that I need to involve the participants in every single step, right from the beginning.

During the action I encouraged them to participate as freely as possible, but also to be prepared for some “national group meetings” outside of the daily programme, to react to conflicts, sorrows etc!, but also to input some crazy / group gelling actions in addition. This was an agreement we made in the preparation phase in advance. I noticed that it is much easier to sleep peacefully, if you have the feeling deep inside, that you have always a plan B (even C and D) up your sleeve. Fortunately I didn't need extra plans often. Plan B is often sufficient to solve unforeseen problems.

After finishing every experience I try to develop a new plan for my future performance as a leader, it's an ongoing process of constant personal development. Therefore I use a personalised, adapted portfolio according to the European Portfolio for youth leaders and youth workers (see *“Further reading & references”*). I ask my participants to fill it in for me. I think the feedback you get is full with enormous important information about yourself and your performance there.

Then I compare it with my self-assessment of my performance and talk with my participants if there are some noticeable differences in how they saw me and my own self assessment. This qualitative feedback I make a few weeks later in a comfortable situation.

The most important tip I can offer is ALWAYS give your participants the feeling of being needed and respected and involve and encourage everybody in every single phase of the experience. Let them feel that they are all producers of the “product” that is the youth exchange and not only consumers!

OUTCOMES FROM THE EVALUATION:

- * Good group preparation leads to the possibility to prevent difficulties which may occur in the implementation phase
- * Regular group meetings during the youth exchange gives you the space for on-going assessment
- * Follow-up in the end of the youth exchange concludes the success of youth exchange
- * Self assessment is essential for improvement of your work in the future

- * Self assessment should follow the 8 Key Competencies for lifelong learning (see "Further reading & references") promoted by the YOUTHPASS guide of the EU, for example learning to learn, cultural awareness, social competencies.
- * While the leader should conduct a self assessment, the participants should be encouraged to do likewise.
- * The entire evaluation gives you the ingredients for a possible dissemination of results of the exchange.

DISSEMINATION

Dissemination can be an activity which comes from the learning processes during the phase of implementation. Even if you just share your experiences by talking to a person outside of the exchange, the dissemination process has begun.

The activities after the youth exchange:

- * A clear idea, what is the main aim and the message behind it?
- * Define target group to whom dissemination activities are planned for
- * Create the team which could involve professional supervision if needed
- * Make a big local impact, a possible regional one and maybe even national!
- * Create a time-schedule
- * Make it memorable

EXAMPLE:

1. You attend the international youth exchange and your group comes up with the certain idea for dissemination. The idea is to make a festival in a very rural area to raise awareness of the fair trade movement. The group finds an extra financial resource to organize the festival. It has a great potential for local community.

2. You attend the international youth exchange and your group decides to produce a booklet which consists of: general information about the Youth in Action Programme (YiA), the idea of the youth exchange, information about partner organizations and participants and about participating countries and diary/typed writings from participants. After printing them, they were spread throughout the participating countries.

GENERAL HINTS: Before the Youth Exchange

- * Group preparation is especially needed, historical and cultural background of the host country, details about the programme of the Youth Exchange (YE)
- * Get to know each other within the group, guidelines and rules. Discover participants needs and expectations.

DURING THE EXCHANGE

- * Find the time for regular feedback meetings with your group during the YE
- * Be aware of equal partnership and use the possibility to communicate with all the leaders in a YE
- * Be ready to evaluate your own skills as a group leader and be flexible

AFTER THE EXCHANGE

- * Evaluation after coming home (participants and self-assessment)
- * Spread the word
- * Nurture relationships between the partner organizations, leaders and the participating youth and others within your organization (or even, within the community).



LEADERS' SKA

(Skills, Knowledge and Attitude)

Introduction

Leaders' SKA is not a music performance made by youth leaders! In this chapter we would like to show our opinion about skills, knowledge and attitudes of a youth leader through short examples. Be sure the next pages are based on true stories.

Skills

It occurred that on a Youth Exchange a member of a participating group broke the agreed rules. This participant did wrong, but not as much as that which came afterwards. A leader of one of the other groups – (not the group of the misbehaving participant) thought that this behavior jeopardized the project. That is why s/he acted very directly and rude at the same time. His/her rage went out on the participant and the situation would have gone out of control if others hadn't intervened.

This kind of manner - we think - cannot be acceptable for a good youth leader. Even after these happenings, at the leaders' meeting the youth leader could not recognize the real problem of the situation. We believe, that there must be some skills, knowledge and attitudes that a youth leader should possess.

So if you want to achieve excellence in leading a group or at least to do your best, you should have several qualities. **We suggest the following ones as some of those basic qualities necessary:**

- * To be ready at all times for unexpected things and difficulties that might arise. So skills on crisis management are really a great advantage in cases where the situation is getting out of control.
- * To be creative, using new, interesting, artistic unusual methods, solutions to handle difficult situations or just to make daily routine of a project more attractive for the youth.
- * Even when it is hard and maybe boring, you are the one who should motivate and inspire your groups. Find your own style and methods in how to keep your youth motivated and involved in all parts of a project.

- * One of the key qualities necessary for the success of a project is your communication skills. You should not only be a good speaker, but more importantly, an active listener.
- * Your time and organizational management skills are important, so you can provide your youth with smoothly run activities.
- * A good sense of humor can help more than hundreds of clever words or prepared solutions.

Knowledge

Example of a “Badly implemented project”

A youth leader led a group of 7 participants (aged under 18 years) on a multilateral Youth Exchange in France about discrimination, xenophobia and racism. One month before the exchange Janis and one participant attended the advanced planning visit (APV) of the project. Together with the organisers they planned the programme and practicalities. This group prepared themselves for the project, but when they came to France, they realized on the very first day that the reality was totally different from the previously planned project. Thus the youngsters were not able to use the information that they had prepared and were not in a position to fulfill their expectations towards the theme of the project. As the program was badly implemented, all group leaders had to have a leaders meeting every night to plan the next day. Another difficulty faced by the participants was that of the common language. As the hosts were French, they and one more national group were communicating in French despite the fact that the other three groups couldn't communicate in French so they were all partly excluded.

As the program was badly organized and there were communication barriers, this group was pretty disappointed so the leader had to do his best and to do many extra tasks.

The Learning

If you realize that there is a badly implemented program or there is no program at all, you should be ready to contribute even more (suggestions for daily program, leading different activities, show initiative, etc) than was planned and agreed in the APV.

Your responsibility is to keep the group motivated, interested and safe

(physically and psychologically). So if the hosts haven't done their job to make all participants feel safe, comfortable and to facilitate their learning process, it is your opportunity / duty to work on it.

From our experiences we suggest for a youth leader to have the following knowledge:

- * You should know the working language of the project so you are able to follow and contribute in all parts of it. (preparation, implementation and evaluation)
- * To have knowledge in the methods of non-formal education is essential in case you have to take over some parts of the project or to show initiative.
- * You should know your group well so you are able to respond to their needs and wishes.
- * To be familiar with the project (programme, logistic, practicalities, culture of the host country, economical and medical issues, roles, etc). Your preparation is as important as during the implementation of the programme, so you are prepared for different unexpected situations.
- * To be ready to act fast and properly in medical emergency cases you should have knowledge of first aid.



Attitudes

“Under age behavior”

On a multilateral exchange that took place in Portugal, in the middle of the night, the host leader realized that an under age girl from a partner group was out of the camp.

After looking for her nearby, he realised that she was inside of a car with three other boys who were not from the project. He took her from the car and told the boys that if they came back he would call the police.

Back at the camp, the host leader spoke with the girl about the issue, giving her time and chance to explain the situation. The next day, during the leaders’ meeting, he explained to the others what happened during the night and told her leader that similar behavior will not be accepted. Such problems can sometimes happen while on youth exchanges, as they can also happen elsewhere, even at home.

Should such an event take place, the correct response of the youth leader is vital in handling the situation for the benefit of all concerned, not least the young girl in this scenario. The leader, on locating the young girl must remain calm and act with emotional intelligence in order to solve the problem. Even in such a difficult situation, the leader should be able to listen to all those involved, without over reacting.

As we can learn from this story, even while being responsible and knowing your group and the environment very well, it is impossible for any leader to monitor the entire group 24 hours a day. In fact such monitoring would stifle the personal growth of the young persons and also might put the leader at risk of an allegation of stalking being made against him / her. Of course the group leader on a Youth Exchange will have the welfare of the youth in his / her care as the highest priority, but the response made in the face of adversity or a crisis is what singles out the great leader.

So, when you are a leader you should be ready to act and face hard and unexpected situations, wherever. The following attitudes are really important:

- * Responsibility: Every leader should realize that their main task is to bring the youth back to their parents/guardians in at least as good a condition as when they set out. For that s/he should be alert and be responsible for the entire group, in order to ensure that they are always safe.
- * Share responsibility: Give tasks to the young people during the preparation for the exchange. Make them responsible and more involved in the process and they will be more motivated to respect the entire exchange project.
- * Self-confident: The leader should be a person with charisma, sure of his/her acts in order to show trust and give responsibility to the group.
- * Emotional intelligence: It is easy to handle situations when everything is going well, however it is hard to behave correctly when critical situations occur.



Open minded

As in the previous pages we could see that for a youth leader it is essential to be able to involve participants in the project and thus enable their gaining of non-formal knowledge. From a brief experience from one of our leader friends, we could learn how to behave well as a leader with his own group. It is also about communication, and communication always means sharing – sharing information with one another. So let's see how he behaved and led his group in Greece:

- * Before the project started he made it clear for his participants that he is first of equals
- * In the preparation period of the project he gathered as much information as possible about the project and the host country. He became the source of information for his participants.
- * Still at the preparation period, he began to share responsibility with participants. (He asked “Who will be responsible to make a dictionary for us?” and one youth agreed from the participants, etc).
- * In order to share responsibility during the exchange he began to share tasks, to put responsibility in practice.
“We are responsible for/to each other” The more, the better we can see.
- * After the exchange he did his own assessment, but let the participants assess the whole exchange. “The participants are most important and the Youth Exchange exists for them.”

From these points we can see there are several steps of getting the participants involved. These steps can be generalized as “Steps of Sharing”

We think this leader's experience can be used as an example of youth leader's general good behavior with participants, to be able to give them, experience and non-formal knowledge at the same time.

Age balance in youth exchanges

According to the Youth in Action Programme Guide, Youth Exchange participants can be aged between 13-30 years old. But what happens if this age difference is between the participants in a Youth Exchange or even in your group? How can you deal with problems that might occur?

What about age balance?

When we are talking about age balance in a Youth Exchange we mean that the range of the age of the participants must be limited. Keeping the age balance in your group or in a Youth Exchange can work very well for the group dynamic and make the implementation of the programme much easier.

According to the United Nations a young person who is under 18 years old is still referred to, as a child in the eyes of the law. Furthermore participants in a Youth Exchange who are under 18 years old have different needs and might have different life experiences compared to an adult participant.



Story No 1

“While leading a group of 16 year olds on a Youth Exchange, I came across an issue with age balance. The age range of the group was 16-25

years and the problem that I had from the APV was the legal drinking age. At the APV all the group leaders agreed that alcohol would not be allowed during the Youth Exchange.

On the second night some of the adult participants were found drinking alcohol inside the venue. That caused problems inside the group of younger people because they had been told that alcohol was not allowed for anybody. After the conversation that I had with my

participants I realized how unfair this behavior was and I asked for a group leaders meeting. At the meeting the leaders said that they were leading adult participants and they were trying to defend themselves by saying: “ We can’t do anything, they are adults”.

The host organization said that the exchange wasn’t about drinking and asked that the rules of the APV should be kept. Alcohol for the rest of the project was banned and all the participants kept this agreement. Due to the incident with alcohol the whole atmosphere of the Youth Exchange had been changed and the group split into two. Adults and Children.

This situation concerned three issues:

- * The alcohol issue itself
(legal drinking age in different countries, etc);
- * Rules commonly agreed were not upheld;
- * Different ages – different attitudes – different legal rights.

Story No 2

“During a Youth Exchange that I was involved as a group leader, I realized how some times participants can be role models for other participants. My group consisted of young people aged 15-17 years old.

The partner countries in total were five. Two of the country groups, as mine, had participants at the age of 15 years old. The other participants were older, aged between 22-25. During the project some of the activities involved extreme sports.

The older participants although they were enjoying themselves, stopped being together and created small groups with the younger ones, helping them to climb and giving them useful information about how to succeed in the tasks of the activities. The young participants started to feel more comfortable and actually started acting as the older ones, helping each other, especially the ones that couldn’t overcome the difficulties of the activity.

When we were back home, I received very good comments from the parents that they wanted to meet the older participants to thank them, since all they could hear was good comments about them.

So does age balance matter and why?

Age balance is a big issue and should be considered when you are leading a group on a Youth exchange. The age of participants does not only influence the preparation of your group legally, but it also raises personal issues (positive and negative ones) such as:

– Considering the child protection when you are taking a child abroad you must have a written consent from the parents or legal guardians. That gives you the permission to lead the group and makes you the legal guardian for the time abroad. If the age range is too wide then as their guardian you might face problems that could occur (e.g. trying to keep them away from alcohol while all the other participants can legally drink).

Of course issues such as this should be addressed on the APV (or even before this) and all partner groups must buy-in to and keep to the decisions agreed. When you are leading an adult group in a Youth Exchange in which there are both children and adult participants, you must take into account the behavior of your adult participants in front of the children.

- * Older participants can work as role models for the younger ones.
- * Children participants can learn from the older ones, from their experience and from their knowledge.



TO LOCAL IMPACT OR NOT?

What is local impact?

Local Impact is how a project can contribute to the community, where the exchange is happening. For example, when participants of a Youth Exchange come in contact with the local community:

- * Sharing of different experiences and cultures may happen
- * The local community comes in touch with the Youth in Action programme through the different activities.

Local impact can also contribute to the visibility(publicity) of the project and the Youth in Action programme.

Story 1: Youth Exchange in Austria

It was a really beautiful summer when we had a Youth Exchange in Eggenburg, Austria. We were participants and Youth Exchange group leaders from two different countries. By coincidence it happened that at the same time of the Youth Exchange there was also a big event in our hosting town. Some friends of our Austrian participants wanted their friends to go with them to a movie, which was being shown in the evening of this event. It was a German movie and not an English one, so other participants could not understand.

I – as the leader of the Austrian group - told them not to go, because this was also a rule of the Youth Exchange to stay together as a group and not to split up. And as it was a German movie, there was no way that the rest of the exchange participants could enjoy the movie. Our Austrian youngsters got really angry and they felt like captives in their own country. It was almost the end of the Youth Exchange because of this conflict.

What would you have done in this situation?

Would you think that it could be maybe better to have the next Youth Exchange a bit outside of your home town?

Or maybe even somewhere isolated from the locals, where no one and nothing can disturb the project?

Is it necessary to have contact with the locals at all?

Yes it is, not just because then the National Agency will probably approve your project more easily. Sometimes it is better for the group communication and for the group-building to stay in a more isolated place than in a city or town where is a lot of distraction and where the local participants can easily go home and meet regularly with their own local friends. But it is always important to have contact with the locals.

Why is it important to have contact with local's?

What the participants can gain from it?

- * to help reduce prejudice against others
- * to compare traditions – what is the same, what is different
- * to make friendships
- * to get a chance to know a new culture
- * to gain new knowledge
- * to break down barriers / borders
- * to broaden one's horizon
- * to foster a sense of European citizenship

What the locals can gain from it?

- * to get more open towards foreigners
- * to get some “fresh” ideas
- * to get the possibility to look over your own borders? – maybe some of the locals have never been out of their hometown, city, village
- * to get a knowledge of the “Youth in Action” programme
- * to spread the “youth message” throughout the project

As you can see, there's a lot to be gained for all involved, through keeping contact with locals.

But what is the best:

Do the youth Exchange in the city?

Or somewhere isolated in the wilderness?

YEGL:

No matter which place you choose there are always advantages and disadvantages. If you host the participants in the city, usually you have a lot of action around you and it is easy to make different activities, because there are a lot of things to do and to see. You can meet everywhere locals and start a conversation with them, even if it is just in a supermarket. And in case of an emergency the doctor is close.

Interviewer (1):

Sounds perfect, so where are the disadvantages of staying in the city?

YEGL:

Oh there could be a lot. There is so much input from outside that it is maybe hard to concentrate just on the Exchange. Because of having plenty of things to do, the group could possibly split.

For example: if you have free time some of the participants want to go to the pub, some to the cinema, some for shopping. And if you host or are hosted in a hometown of a partner organisation, probably the youngsters of the hosting organization will stay at home during the nights, going to school during the day and meeting their friends in the afternoon. This would not be good for the teamwork and group building.



And what about the benefits of staying in a more isolated place?

YEGL:

There is not so much input from outside, no distraction. So it is easier to create a team. The relationships can be closer. It is simply easier to concentrate on the Exchange.

But I guess, if you stay in the “wilderness” there are a lot of things to organise ?

YEGL:

Yes, there are. Because there is not so much action from around, so you have to be creative and organise a lot to keep the participants motivated. You need to be sure to be all the time mobile – in case of an emergency. And a big minus is, that you have less or possibly no contact with the locals.

It seems that the best would be to find a compromise between staying in town and going out of it, to balance it.

What you could do, is to stay somewhere in a more isolated place and organize some great trip to the next town or city. To make some intercultural evening with the local youngsters and inhabitants in general, where you can show traditional games, dances.

To make a welcome or farewell party or to invite the mayor for dinner.

There are a lot of things you can do to get in contact with the locals. Maybe even inform the media like newspapers.



Story 2: Youth Exchange in Spain

I once faced a similar situation. I was a group leader in a Youth Exchange that took place in a city in Spain. The participants were coming from 5 different countries and it was so obvious that they were sticking together; no overall “group” was actually built.

Because there were so many different opportunities and things to do, so many different clubs, each group went every night to different places. The Spanish youth went to school during the day, stayed for the night at home and met their own friends some days in the afternoon. So we saw them just for a couple of hours during the Exchange. While there, I wished we could have been somewhere up on a mountain, far from the civilization, where we had to deal with each other and build up a team.

And go just for 1 day or at night to the town nearby and have some fun TOGETHER.

Safety / First Aid

Safety and First-Aid might seem very good together as a content item within this publication at first glance. For the Youth Leader leading an exchange group however, they are almost poles apart in complexity. Let us deal with the simpler of the two straight off,

First – Aid:

Every Youth Leader, whether concerned with youth exchanges or not, should acquire and maintain a current First-Aid certificate and continuously upgrade it where possible. Short/basic first-aid courses are available locally in most countries, facilitated by recognised groups such as the Red Cross, the Order of Malta and the local Civil Defence. By attending a course with one of these, or similar organisations, one will be issued with a current First Aid Certificate, which normally has a shelf-life of two or three years. It is very important to update one's first aid skills regularly, not alone to refresh one's knowledge and memory of the basic techniques, but to also keep abreast of new first aid items, knowledge and techniques.

Of course, one should always possess and maintain a well stocked first aid kit and have it with him/her most of the time, and ALWAYS when attending/facilitating youth events, especially so when outside of your home (comfort) zone, where you will know who, when and where the local doctor is available. One can appreciate then the added need for adequate availability of knowledge, skill and a good first aid kit when one is facilitating a group of young people outside of his / her own country.

When on a Youth Exchange, the best advice is to have everyone in the group knowledgeable in current first aid practice, and to certainly have a well stocked first aid box and at least two persons in any group holding a current first aid certificate.

European Health Insurance Card:

Leaders should ensure that all members of the travelling group (and members of the organisation who might be on a waiting list to travel, should a member drop / pull out of the exchange), have an up-to-date European Health Insurance Card. This allows the holder to access health care services when travelling within other European Union or EEA countries or Switzerland. The card replaces the E111 system, is free of charge and it can be applied for online, taking a few weeks to process, at: (http://www.hse.ie/eng/services/Find_a_Service/entitlements/EHIC/) or at your nearest HSE health office. This is the website address for the card in Ireland, but this card is available all over Europe. "Don't leave home without it!"

Travel and Activity Insurance for Youth Exchanges

Leaders and participants should note that The Youth in Action Programme does not provide insurance cover for any activities under their funding structures, bar in certain cases for EVS projects. While directions are given that leaders / organisers / facilitators of projects should satisfy themselves that they have adequate cover, no direct / mandatory / obligatory orders are given. Travel Insurance costs are not allowed within the calculation to deduce the 70% of travel costs to agreed projects. Project insurance is a must for discussion at the APV. Often, the host organisation may be in a position to organise insurance cover for all participants at a very low cost.

Safety in leading a group, especially when outside of one's country is a much more complicated matter entirely. Safety is such a broad term, though in a simplified form what it means to the exchange youth leader is bringing / handing back every member of the group to their parents / home, in at least as good a condition as when they came under his / her care. To keep someone safe the first thing to realise is that you don't put him / her into a glass-case as you would perhaps a precious item, you need to allow / encourage and create with them, an environment in which they can 'safely' learn and develop themselves. To control someone to the extent of putting them into a glass-case environment is in fact to put them in danger of not developing a realisation of what is or is not safe for themselves and for others.

Safety

Safety comes from the attitudes within and, as youth leaders, we are a part of putting these attitudes in place, by our own everyday actions and reactions. This part explains why one should 'if possible' not take a young person on an exchange that they do not know. You cannot know their attitudes within, and thus you cannot know to what extent you can trust them to take responsibility for their own learning and ultimately their own safety and of the safety of those around them. No matter how well the exchange leader knows the individual members within his / her group, he needs to follow a series of checks and balances to ensure that the chances of an accident or a danger to the members of his/her/the group is kept to a minimum.

The following are at least some of these checks and balances:

(01) Every leader should draw up his own list and follow it always, much as with Kolb's Learning Cycle and Aristotle's achieving excellence out of habit and not by virtue. The Exchange Youth Leader needs to have a safety check list and to implement it completely, constantly review it, draw conclusions from the reviews and implement these conclusions (learnings).

(02) A critical element with regard to safety on a Youth Exchange is the host leader. You must know him/her and be in a position to trust them. You will have your own safety elements, but the host leader will be the person of power within the exchange and they will have the local knowledge and contacts. Thus if (after the A.P.V.) you still have reservations about his/her attitude and/or capabilities towards safety, then you should seriously consider not taking part in that particular exchange.

(03) Make sure that your organisation takes part in the Advance Planning Visit and that it is the same leader who goes on the visit that leads/accommodates/facilitates the group while on the actual exchange. If there is no APV and you do not know the host in person and / or many of the other organisations taking part, well enough to be comfortable in trusting them to look after your hosting, then don't go on the exchange.

For more comprehensive notes on safety issues which can be addressed through full participation on the APV, please see pages 10 through to 15 within this publication. While depending on various circumstances, this message can be put very crudely as :

No APV!

No Exchange!

No Thanks!

(04) Know your own participants well, before departing for an exchange. Have particularly good knowledge of any health issues / needs that they might have and have a contingency plan in place to address these needs, should it arise. If leading a group containing under 18's, the need to discuss with parents that you might need to 'act in loco parentis' might be a very real issue. Make sure that the participants bring all necessary medicines with them and that these are stored in an appropriately safe environment (temperature wise and safe keeping wise). To know of these needs before going on the APV will let you check it out during your visit. Therefore you should have at least one meeting with all the participants before going on the APV. Should a participant fail to attend this pre-APV meeting, do seriously consider not bringing them on the exchange.

Bring with you a list that will be of use in a time of crisis, a time when a prepared plan must swing into action, rather than one that sees you trying to make a plan up there and then. The list should contain:

- The contact names, phone numbers and address(es) for the host organisation of the Youth Exchange.
- The name and phone number (international codes included) for the contact person for your youth organisation at home. This person should also be in a position to contact the families of all members of the exchange party.
- The name and phone number of the contact person for your insurance company / needs.
- Emergency numbers of the emergency services in the hosting country.
- Contact details of your Embassy / Consulate in the hosting country.

Note: All of this information should be put together in one handy card and given to all of your youth workers involved in the exchange project

(05) Hand over responsibility for the exchange to the participants (as much as possible). Make them stakeholders in the project, agree boundaries (especially with safety in mind – critically address issues such as alcohol, drugs and substance use) and they will patrol this agreement much more effectively than a leader ever could. The chances are far greater that the participants will behave more to your approval /liking, if indeed they know what you expect of them. Only open communication can achieve this. You, as leader, also need to take on board what fears the participants might have and what they may want to get out of the exchange. Acting together, everything is possible, nothing is impossible.

(06) The number and ratio of leaders to participants always rests with you, no matter what the host group says. The safety of your group ultimately rests with you and the ratio of leaders to participants is a critical element with regards to the safety of the group, thus critical to you, more so than the wishes of the host organisation to maintain clean numbers. Do not be forced to ignore / lessen your own safety criteria for the sake of satisfying anyone else, don't do it. If you cannot agree numbers and ratios with the host organisation, then always err on the side of caution, even if this means non-participation. Always put safety first.

When dealing with youth that are under 18 years of age, this becomes more critical, as is the question of gender balance. If your group of participants is of mixed gender and are under the age of 18 years, then it is obligatory on you (at least for Irish National Groups), that at least one leader of both genders accompany the group.

Both leaders accompanying a mixed gender group of under 18 years must have completed their Child Protection Awareness Training and be familiar with reporting procedures of alleged suspected abuse, in the country to which they are travelling. These items must be clarified within the APV, or if possible, prior to this date.

Different countries have differing attitudes / standards when dealing with child protection issues. It cannot be over-stated that this subject needs to be addressed during the APV, in order to see clearly the attitudes and appreciation of the leaders from the other countries towards this issue. This is critically important if youth under 18 years of age are involved in the project.

You must satisfy yourself that procedures are in place to satisfactorily deal with a situation, should it arise. The reporting person in your own organisation might be in a position to help you in identifying what procedures are in place in the hosting country, before you ever leave home. To view the Guidelines for Good Practice with regards to 'Safety and protection of young people under the Youth in Action Programme (2007 – 2013), please visit http://ec.europa.eu/youth/pdf/doc1242_en.pdf

Finally, make sure that all travel arrangements to and from the exchange are indeed feasible, a major reason why the APV attendee from your organisation should be the same person to travel with the exchange group to the project. Have travelled the same route or at least through the same air/ferry ports and train stations previously. Ensure that enough time is available between flights, remembering that you will travel and clear customs etc! more slowly with a group of seven, than if alone. Also have in place your internal travel arrangements, prior to leaving your country and upon returning to your principal air/ferry port or train station. Know how your group are going to get home to their parents, families or friends.

The leader should, at all times, have an exit strategy or be able to get part of or all of his group home in an emergency. Know your routes, timetables and travel possibilities. To this end the leader of each exchange group should have at his/her disposal the possibility of buying travel tickets in an emergency, perhaps necessitating the carrying of a credit card with a limit of more than the travel costs for the entire group. The very least that the leader should have, in this regard, is somebody on standby at home with this facility /capability.

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European Union, SALTO YOUTH, www.salto-youth.net

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Pedagogy majors. I'm bitten by the “travel bug”, that
is, I keep visiting new countries and cultures and
eager to learn more about them. After taking part in
youth exchanges, I became more and more
enthusiastic to organise such events.



My name is Sérgio Vivo, from Lisbon-Portugal, I am
35 years old. I'm a founder and board member of a
youth NGO called "H2O", and I'm related to
international youth exchanges since 2002.

My name is Margaretha Seifferth. I m a 21 years old,
coming from Germany. I did my EVS in Latvia and
for the moment I work in Cyprus. Learning a lot in
a non-formal way during my EVS is the best thing
ever happened to me, till now!



Jesús Olmos Sanchez, 24, Spain, Youth Projects and Youth Exchanges, Youth Service, Murcia City Council



Laura Martínez Candel, 20, Spain, Youth Projects and Youth Exchanges, Youth Service, Murcia City Council



Sylvia Mück, born 1981 from Austria, has been working with kids and youth for 9 years in the catholic children and youth organisation of Austria. Teacher for economic subjects at the moment. Hobbies: swimming, reading, archery, skiing.



Maris Pajula is working as project coordinator in Tallinn Youth Work Centre and believes that good group leadership for intercultural youth exchanges is a key for a good and successful project!



Eneli Meresmaa, resource person in Tallinn Youth Work Centre, inspired by and gaining experiences from global education issues.



Olga Kiriakidou (born, June 1981) in Thessaloniki Greece. She can be found working with kids and youth in summer camps as an entertainer, working in clownery and circus techniques. Olga is an active member of the N.G.O.“ Kids In Action”, who are mainly active in animation and encouragement of children and European youth mobility programs. She has already published her first book for kids, a fairytale, guiding them through issues such as: the environment, teamwork and non-verbal communication.



Györk Fölöp (22), student of landscape planning, living in Gyor (Hungary), studying in Budapest, involved in university youth work and environmental protection projects, interested in leaders' Skills-Knowledge-Attitudes

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