СДРУЖЕНИЕ "НИЕ"
ASSOCIATION "NIE"

ЦЕНТЪР ЗА РАЗВИТИЕ
НА ЧОВЕШКИТЕ РЕСУРСИ

Erasmus+

MANUAL FOR BUILDING YOUTH-FRIENDLY ENVIRONMENT

"WE ACCEPT YOU"
YOUTH EXCHANGE
14-24 JULY
PROGLED BULGARIA
2024-3-BG01-KA152-YOU-00284535

WHAT IS IT ABOUT?

This handbook was created and designed by the participants of "We Accept You" project. It summarises their knowledge and gives practical tips on how to build youth-friendly environments in the institutions which are most visited by the youth. Our project aims to:

- build/rebuild the social skills of our youth
- build their public speaking skills
- reduce screen time;
- build self-confidence
- to improve their mental health

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SCHOOL EDUCATIONAL CENTERS

A perfect school should be a place where students feel safe, respected, and inspired to learn and grow—not only academically, but also emotionally and socially. It should be a welcoming environment where every individual is accepted regardless of their background, culture, religion, or abilities.

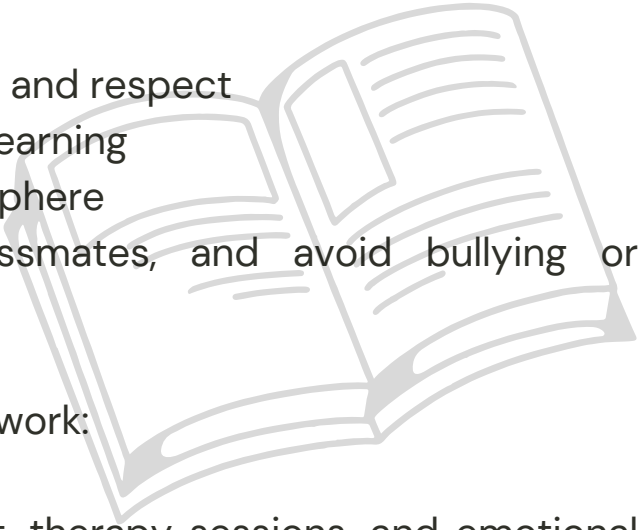
The building itself should be clean, modern, and filled with natural light. Classrooms should have comfortable chairs, flexible seating arrangements, and smart technologies like interactive whiteboards and tablets. There should be access to libraries, science labs, art and music rooms, and sports facilities. Quiet zones for individual study and relaxation areas for breaks should also be available. Green spaces, such as a garden or courtyard, can provide a peaceful environment and promote environmental awareness.

Teachers, school leaders, and all staff members play a key role in creating this positive environment. They should:

- Build strong, respectful relationships with students
- Show empathy and patience
- Encourage open discussions and critical thinking
- Create a safe space where students can express their opinions without fear
- Recognize different learning styles and adapt their teaching accordingly
- Support students' personal development, not just academic success

Students also have responsibilities. They should:

- Treat each other with kindness and respect
- Be active participants in their learning
- Help create an inclusive atmosphere
- Work together, support classmates, and avoid bullying or discrimination



Good practices to include in their work:

- Regular mental health support, therapy sessions, and emotional well-being workshops
- Creative teaching methods like project-based learning, group work, and hands-on activities
- Student clubs, competitions, and leadership opportunities (e.g. student council)
- Frequent school events that involve parents and the wider community
- A suggestion box or anonymous feedback system for students and staff
- Career guidance and future-planning support
- Lessons on life skills, financial literacy, and global citizenship
- Anti-bullying programs and peer mediation training
- Encouragement of volunteering and community service

Conclusion:

A perfect school doesn't mean it has to be rich or high-tech. It means creating a place where students feel happy, heard, and hopeful about their future. If schools focus on building strong relationships and supporting every student as a unique individual, they can truly make a difference in young people's lives.

YOUTH CENTERS

A perfect youth center should be a safe, welcoming, and inclusive space where young people feel comfortable, confident, and free to express themselves. The design should include both quiet zones for introverts and active areas for extroverts. It should offer modern, cozy spaces with soft furniture, natural light, and warm colors. Accessibility for people with disabilities and inclusivity across age, culture, and background are essential.

The center should provide diverse opportunities: sports facilities (like a gym and small stadium), hiking trips, art and handcraft workshops, informal educational events, and spaces for open discussions. Topics often avoided—such as legal issues, mental health, relationships, sexual education, and family matters—should be addressed in a safe and respectful way by trained professionals. Lectures on behavior, financial literacy, career exploration, and document literacy should also be offered regularly.

To create this atmosphere, staff must foster a non-judgmental culture and involve psychologists, tutors, and volunteers. They should actively invite guest speakers, including professionals and famous individuals, to inspire the youth. Government support and community involvement are also key. Most importantly, young people should be encouraged to participate in organizing activities, making the center truly theirs.

JOB CENTERS

Job centres are government-run offices found in towns and cities. Their main purpose is to help individuals find employment by providing job listings, guidance, and advice. In addition to job placement services, job centres are often responsible for administering unemployment benefits and supporting people who are currently out of work.

Although job centres serve an important function in society, many people experience frustration when using their services. Some of the most common issues include:

- Long waiting times: People often have to wait for hours before they are seen, which can be discouraging and stressful.
- Pressure to accept unsuitable jobs: Some job seekers report feeling rushed or pressured into accepting roles that do not suit their skills, interests, or personal circumstances.
- Confusing paperwork: Forms and administrative processes can be complex and difficult to understand, especially for those who may already be under stress.
- Lack of privacy: Conversations about personal circumstances often take place in open areas, making it hard for individuals to feel safe or respected.
- Understaffing: Many job centres do not have enough employees to effectively manage the number of people needing help.

- Overworked staff: Existing employees are often stretched too thin, leading to burnout and lower quality of service.
- Lack of trust and support: Job seekers may feel that staff members do not genuinely care about their well-being or future.
- Lack of diversity and empathy: Centres sometimes fail to reflect the diverse backgrounds of the people they serve, and staff may lack the training needed to respond with empathy and patience.

A reimagined, ideal job centre would address these issues directly. It would function not just as a place to find work, but as a supportive environment that empowers individuals. Some features of such a centre would include:

- A welcoming atmosphere where everyone feels respected and safe
- Use of user-friendly technology that simplifies the job search and application processes
- Staff who are well-trained, empathetic, and knowledgeable in career counselling and social support
- A focus on personalized guidance, tailored to each individual's needs, skills, and goals
- Access to a variety of resources, such as training programs, mental health support, and financial advice
- A strong sense of community and opportunity, helping people feel hopeful and motivated

Recognizing these challenges, institutions have started to take steps to improve job centres. Some of the key initiatives include:

- Requesting additional government funding to upgrade facilities and improve the overall experience for users

- Hiring more staff to reduce wait times and ensure more personalized attention for job seekers
- Implementing new rules focused on confidentiality and reducing unnecessary or confusing paperwork

To create long-term, sustainable change, job centres need to adopt certain best practices. Regular training programs for staff, focusing on:

- Building empathy
- Improving work ethic
- Developing patience and understanding
- Encouraging staff to see their role as not only administrative but also supportive and community-focused
- Promoting diversity and inclusion within the team, so job seekers can connect with people who understand their background and challenges

Job centres play a crucial role in helping people navigate unemployment and find new opportunities. However, to truly meet the needs of modern society, they must evolve. By addressing current weaknesses and adopting best practices, job centres can become spaces of genuine support and empowerment for all who walk through their doors.

CENTERS FOR SOCIAL SUPPORT

The appearance and physical design of the centre should immediately convey warmth and inclusivity:

- Cozy lounge areas for relaxation and socialization.
- Informational posters to educate visitors on rights, resources, and opportunities.
- Entertainment and enrichment: shelves with books, a music station with headphones, and a collection of board games.
- Water and food stations easily accessible throughout.
- Aesthetic and calming decoration that promotes a sense of peace and dignity.

Importantly, everything must be 100% accessible—including for people with disabilities, the elderly, and those with sensory sensitivities.

The centre should be structured like a village of care, offering everything someone might need in one place:

- Emotional Support Animal Room – A dedicated space with animals like bunnies to offer emotional relief and comfort.
- Psychologist Room – Private counseling space with trained professionals.
- Group Support Rooms – Rooms designated for peer groups experiencing similar struggles (e.g., grief, homelessness, recovery).
- Doctor's Room – On-site medical support for physical health needs

- Contact/Information Room – Staffed by specialists offering step-by-step guidance on accessing housing, legal help, employment, and more.
- Meditation and Yoga Room – A peaceful space for mindfulness and healing.
- Library with Computers – For study, job search, or personal growth.
- Canteen with Free Food – Nutritious meals served daily.
- Laundry Room and Showers – Clean facilities with access to hygiene products.
- Free Clothes Room – Gently used clothing for those in need.
- Donation Room – A space to manage incoming community donations.
- Dormitory Rooms – Clean, safe places to rest, organized by category of need (e.g., single parents, trauma survivors) with private bathrooms and toiletries.
- Free Daycare Centre – So parents can work, attend therapy, or rest knowing their children are cared for.

To truly empower individuals and families, the centre should offer dynamic programming that goes beyond just emergency aid:

- Therapy – Individual and group therapy sessions, including for trauma, addiction, and stress.
- Group Support Rooms – Rooms designated for peer groups experiencing similar struggles (e.g., grief, homelessness, recovery).
- Doctor's Room – On-site medical support for physical health needs.
- Contact/Information Room – Staffed by specialists offering step-by-step guidance on accessing housing, legal help, employment, and more.
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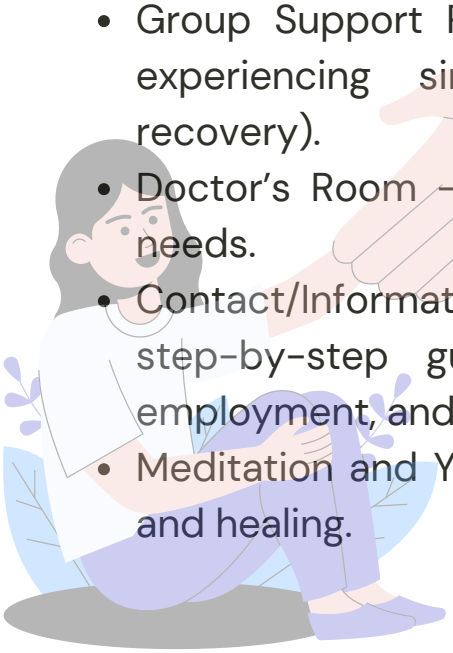

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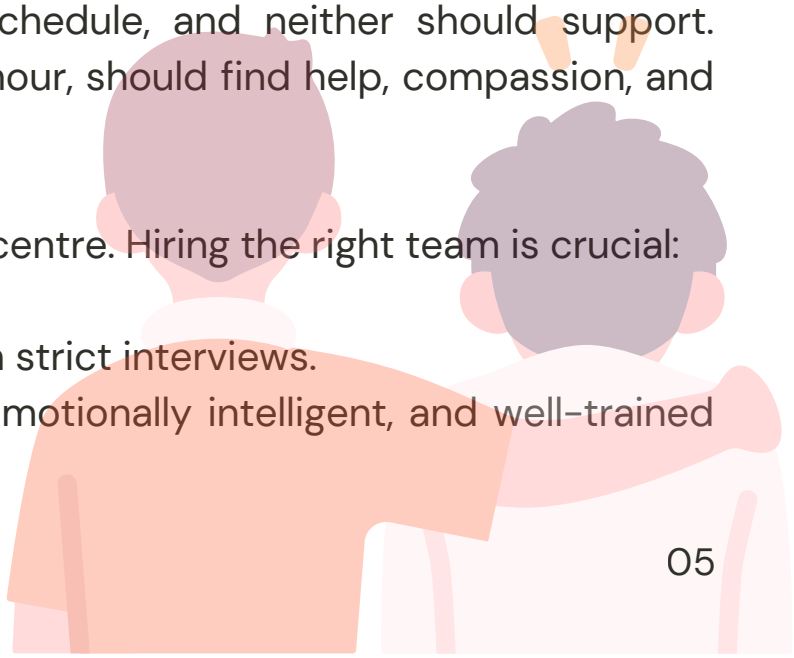
To truly empower individuals and families, the centre should offer dynamic programming that goes beyond just emergency aid:

- Therapy – Individual and group therapy sessions, including for trauma, addiction, and stress.
- Free Courses – Skills training, language classes, resume building workshops, and more to help people pursue job opportunities.

One of the most crucial elements: the centre must be open 24/7. Crises don't follow a 9–5 schedule, and neither should support. Every person, no matter the hour, should find help, compassion, and a warm welcome.

The staff are the heart of the centre. Hiring the right team is crucial:

- Carefully selected through strict interviews.
- Must be well-educated, emotionally intelligent, and well-trained for crisis response.



- All staff must demonstrate genuine empathy, respect, and professionalism.
- Workers should receive good salaries to promote retention, satisfaction, and dignity in their work.

Conclusion:

The perfect social centre is one that does not just meet needs—it restores hope. It is built on empathy, accessibility, professionalism, and community spirit. It bridges gaps between crisis and stability, loneliness and belonging, survival and thriving. With proper funding, dedicated staff, and community involvement, this vision of a compassionate, comprehensive social sanctuary is not only possible—it's essential.

PSYCHOLOGY SUPPORT CENTERS

When thinking about a center for psychological support, we believe the most important thing is that it feels welcoming not cold or clinical. A place where you can actually be yourself. It should feel safe and calm. For us that means nature sounds in the background, a calming soundscape that helps you breathe a bit easier. The space should be colourful, with plants around to bring in some life. Not everything has to be grey and sterile. There should be a lot of windows, so there is a lot of natural light. Other lighting in the space should be soft and no bright overhead lights.

Comfortable seating is a must. You shouldn't feel like you're in a waiting room at the dentist. There should be a lot of shared, open spaces too places where people can sit together or talk to bring in the comfort of a living room.

It would be great to have infographics and posters about mental health stuff that's clear and easy to understand. Something motivational too, something that reminds you you're not alone. We would also appreciate infographics recognising the diversity of people and how that can affect their needs.

And visible art. Art brings warmth and personality into a space. Overall it should feel like somewhere you'd want to hang out, not somewhere you'd want to escape from. That's the kind of place that helps people feel comfortable and confident.

The principles of the space should be visible somewhere on the walls; principles such as confidentiality, showing respect and showcasing the diversity of people.

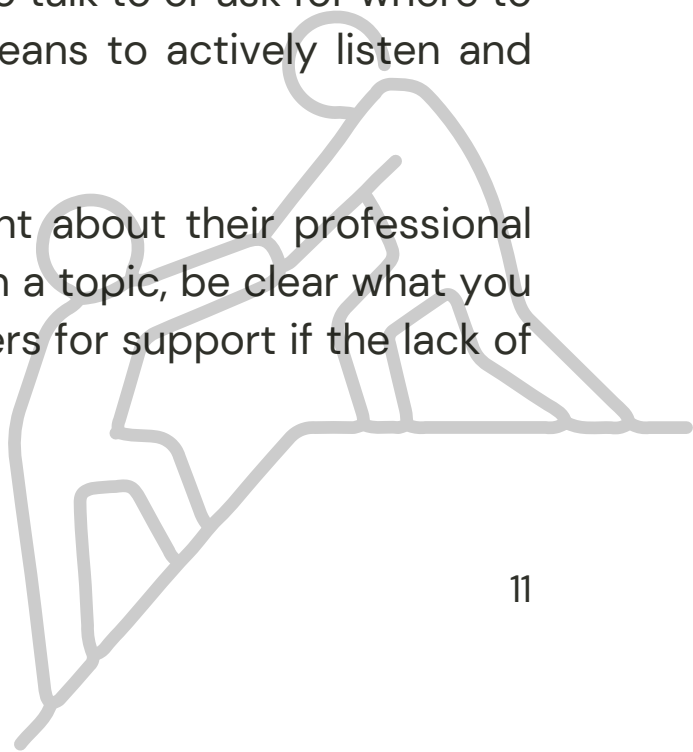
What should people working there do to achieve this?
They should be kind, patient, and good listeners. They need to respect privacy, create trust, and use calm voices. Staff should keep the environment clean and organized.

If the institution would have training sessions every now and again to keep the minds of the people working there open to learning more it would minimize the chance of discriminatory behaviour and prejudiced attitudes.

It would be good to have the option of switching specialists if it isn't a match with the one looking for support.

What good practices can they include in their work?
They can greet people warmly, offer water or tea, and let people speak without interrupting. Using relaxation techniques, respecting cultural differences, and using effective and empathetic communication to create trust is helpful. There should always be someone present to talk to or ask for where to go and they should know what it means to actively listen and show care.

The specialists should be transparent about their professional knowledge. If you are not confident in a topic, be clear what you do not know about and guide to others for support if the lack of knowledge becomes an issue.



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