



*s*tructures
*t*owards
*e*mancipation
*p*articipation and
*s*olidarity

Final Report on the STEPS Professional Advisory Group

Group co-ordinators:

Michael Langhanky, Anne Ernst

University of Applied Sciences for Social Work

Horner Weg 170, D – 22111 Hamburg

Tel. 0049 40 65591-488, Email: aernst@rauheshaus.de

Background

STEPS has established a group of 17 professionals from service-providing organisations and the local authority in Hamburg to monitor and evaluate the outcome of “STEPS” as social-service experts. The results of the meetings are reported back to the International Network.

Objectives of the Project:

Open discussion and exchange of demands, ideas and concerns concerning user-centred and community-based services.

Methodology:

The professional advisory group held discussions on the basis of professional input and daily experience. The project management also brought in the experience of the International STEPS partners.

In their half-day meetings the each group reflected on one main topic in the field of self-determination and participation of people with learning disabilities. The choice of topics was influenced by the discussions in the local Hamburg Partnership, the International STEPS Network and the advisory group of people with learning disabilities. The main topics were:

- Residential versus non-residential, community-based services
- Orientation towards the community, neighbourhood and people’s personal relations (according to the German ‘Sozialraum’ concept, which is translated as ‘social space’)
- Advocacy
- Service planning
- Education and employment/work
- Qualification/workforce development



*s*tructures
*t*owards
*e*mpowerment
*p*articipation and
*s*olidarity

In each session the group discussed joint recommendations which should be disseminated as the result of the professional group. The results are summarised in the paper “Inhaltliche Ergebnisse der STEPS-Mitarbeitergruppe” (see enclosure 1).

Margrit During, a member of the professional advisory group, took part at the last international STEPS conferences to present the group’s results to the STEPS partners (see enclosure 2).

Activities:

In the second year, the advisory group of professionals held four meetings:

- 20.10.03 Agenda for the second year of STEPS; “Person-centred planning” – experience from the local project in London
- 10.12.03 Community orientation/social space
- 28.01.04 Education, further education and employment of people with learning disabilities
- 06.05.04 Qualification of and demands on professionals

- May 2004 Magrit During visited Social Services at the Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea.
She presented the results of the group at the Fourth International STEPS Conference in London

- August 2004 Final meeting of the Hamburg partnership and the two STEPS advisory groups: The professional advisory group agreed on and presented the paper “Inhaltliche Ergebnisse der STEPS-Mitarbeitergruppe”: An evaluation of performance.



Achievements/Outcomes:

The STEPS-professional advisory group summarised its results in the aforementioned document “Inhaltliche Ergebnisse der STEPS-Mitarbeitergruppe”, which is published in German. In general, the professionals’ recommendations reaffirmed the recommendations of the International STEPS network and the users’ demands. The most important recommendations were:

Community-based, non-residential rather than residential:

The division of services in two systems (residential and non-residential services) – as in Germany, Spain and the Netherlands – should be replaced by a more flexible, user-oriented service system. In such a system, housing should be independent from support and care. Accordingly all people with learning disabilities – regardless of their degree of disability and needs– should be able to participate in mainstream and community-based services (as in Sweden, for example). Persons with high needs should not have to be dependant on residential services.

Quality assurance is more important in de-centralised services. People with learning disabilities should operate as ‘quality inspectors’ (as in England for example).

An attitude shift is necessary and could be made possible by changing the structures towards more person-centred services.

Orientation towards the community, neighbourhood and the people’s personal relations:

As in gender mainstreaming, community orientation should be a mainstream topic in disability services (housing, work/employment, education, leisure and health).

Each person with learning disability should have the opportunity to discover and to participate in his/her neighbourhood and the community. He/she should get necessary support to establish personal relationships (see local project in Hamburg). Integration in society through paid work and regular employment is very important.

Community orientation can only be realised in a community-based and mainstreaming service system. Each community needs to provide basic services for people with learning disabilities (as for other service users).



s tructures
t owards
e mancipation
p articipation and
s olidarity

Staff members should know their community and should be qualified in community work.

Advocacy:

In residential services, self-determination and participation cannot be fully realised. In this context, user advisory boards in residential services are important to strengthen the user's voice and should be comprehensively supported.

Advocacy should be organised independently of service-providing organisations and the local authorities. Advocacy should be organised by regional advisory offices or agencies, which would also take on the organisation of planning and controlling (see advisory offices from the Protestant Alsterdorf Foundation, Hamburg). They should co-operate with self-advocacy groups and legal guardians.

Service planning:

Person-centred planning methods help to learn about the user's interests and wishes. This enables staff to reflect on their daily work and routines and to extend the scope of their own actions. Education and work opportunities should be considered during the planning process.

Individual planning should be separated from the planning of services and approval of funds (see person-centred planning in London and seasonal meetings in Lidingö).

Education and work:

The integration in mainstream education and the labour market is one of the most important preconditions for participation in society. Accordingly, "special" systems for people with learning difficulties should be abolished. Instead, free choice and access should be guaranteed.

Education and work assistants could help people with learning disabilities to better manage their daily school or work life.

In the face of current labour market development in Europe, the danger of increasing exclusion from education and work in particular, should be recognised.



*s*tructures
*t*owards
*e*mancipation
*p*articipation and
*s*olidarity

Qualification/workforce development:

This topic was not discussed in detail. The group emphasised that discrimination is a social problem, which could not only be solved by the service-provider organisations. It should be tackled socially.

The attitude and practice in social services is primarily determined by service structures. Accordingly, the structures have to be changed to enhance self-determination and participation.

Education and further education should reflect the attitude and paradigm shift in services.

To reduce responsibility and to clarify the role of the professionals in the services, the group would welcome the inclusion of independent agencies in order to enable the promotion of the rights and wishes of people with learning difficulties.

Information on co-operation between the partners involved and other interest groups:

At the final meeting of the Hamburg partnership the professional advisory group evaluated its discussion process.

At the beginning of the project, all professionals were very hopeful about the project. In their point of view it was a success that an anti-discrimination project was initiated from the Hamburg service-providers and local authority. They had the impression that STEPS could start a positive change of service structures towards community-based services. They viewed the participation of staff members and people with learning disabilities very positively.

All participants highlighted the expert knowledge and competence, which came together and was exchanged in the professional group. Further benefit resulted from the international contacts of the professionals: In the first year the staff members from the Foundation Das Rauhe Haus and Alsterdorf organised exchanges and visits with the Swedish and the Dutch partners, which are planned to be continued. An employee from the Ministry of Social Welfare and the Family visited the London partnership and took part at the International STEPS Conference in London in May 2004.



*s*tructures
*t*owards
*e*mancipation
*p*articipation and
*s*olidarity

All professionals saw practical benefit in their daily work: They were able to bring new ideas and insights to improve the self-determination of people with learning disabilities into their respective services. In particular, they recommended the extension of staff and user participation in international projects to enable the knowledge and results of STEPS to be anchored in local participative structures and services.

The group would have liked to have had clearer objectives during the two year process.

The lack of clear objectives was negatively influenced by the withdrawal of the Ministry for Social Welfare and the Family from the local and international project, which minimised hope of initiating positive changes in Hamburg. Furthermore the group was not sufficiently integrated into the international network.

Nevertheless, the results of the professional group were comprehensively taken into account by the Hamburg partnership. It stressed again the importance of initiating with people with high needs who are risk being forgotten in residential homes.

In addition, the professional's focus was discussed at the London Conference.

The group would have been interested in continuing the process with two focal points:

- the development of a comprehensive strategy for changing the Hamburg services towards user-centred services and full participation of people with learning disabilities and
- regular participation at international level.

Forthcoming events:

Some participants of the professional advisory group plan to continue the international contacts on their own. Furthermore some would be interested to take part at a second International User Conference.



*s*tructures
*t*owards
*e*mancipation
*p*articipation and
*s*olidarity

Products developed and available:

- Paper "Inhaltliche Ergebnisse der STEPS-Mitarbeitergruppe"
- Presentation from Margrit During at the London Conference
- Presentations and minutes from the meetings
- Report of Sylvia Zwierlein: A delegation from the Protestant Foundation "Alsterdorf" visits Pameijerkeerring and OMIJ Rijnmond in Rotterdam
- Report: Staff members from the Foundation Das Rauhe Haus visit Lidingö

Anne Ernst

17. September 2004