

# **ADULTS MENTORING**

## **Recommendations for Policy makers and other interested organisations**

### **1. ABOUT THE PROJECT**

The project Adults mentoring - MENTORING AND GUIDANCE FOR ADULTS is a 24 months pilot project partially funded by the Leonardo da Vinci Programme of the European Commission that aims at developing a system for workplace mentoring for unemployed older people (50+).

Important tendency, marked in various reports of EU27, which led to the establishment of "Adults Mentoring" project, is that by 2050 the number of people over 50 in Europe will have doubled to 40% of the total population or 60% of the working age population.

In terms of that fact, the project is focused on the needs of older unemployed people and long term unemployed older people – who wish to update their professional skills and gain new practical knowledge. This result can be achieved by their participation in non-formal type of learning - Mentoring.

Within the project a system for workplace mentoring for unemployed older people was developed.

Older unemployed people were provided with innovative type of vocational guidance matching their knowledge and understanding.

The sustainability of the results is insured by revised and updated version of Code of Practice for Adults Mentoring.

This European project involves 6 partners from 4 European countries:

#### **Bulgaria**

- Municipality of Sliven (contractor)
- Euroconsulting Ltd. (co-ordinator)
- "Zgura M" Ltd.

#### **Slovenia**

- University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Education, Department of Social Pedagogy

#### **Poland**

- University of Lodz, Department of Special Education

## United Kingdom

- Edinburgh University Settlement Community Learning Centre

## 2. OLDER PEOPLE, BUSSINES AND THE COMMUNITY

Nowadays *"within the world of business, the main "responsibility" is considered to be economic prosperity. Alongside with that in the last decade, new trends are observed - companies focus their efforts in improving working conditions, environment and local community. A movement defining broader corporate responsibilities" <sup>1</sup>.*

### Corporate Social Responsibility <sup>2</sup>

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is about a commitment to the communities in which an organisation operates. It is an important contributor to long-term business success, and should be viewed in a strategic business sense rather than a charitable approach.<sup>3</sup>

While corporate philanthropy (generosity motivated purely to make the company look good or to create the right spin) for its own interest has its place, a well-defined and effective CSR campaign identifies and addresses issues that impact on both the company and the wider community.

Developing a strategic approach to employing old people and/or people with a disability, under the banner of Corporate Social Responsibility, makes a good business sense. Older people (or those with disabilities) have valuable skills to offer to the organisations, and show commitment and loyalty that are unsurpassed. The employment of these people has the power to improve staff morale, as well as improve customer loyalty and enhance the reputation of an organisation.

Changing attitudes comes down to raising awareness of ageing and disability issues. Employing older people or people with a disability as part of an effective Corporate Social Responsibility campaign can benefit the organisation, the employee and the wider community.

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<sup>1</sup> A brief history of social reporting; Business Respect, Issue Number 51, 9 Mar 2003 By Alice and John Tepper Marlin

<sup>2</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/csr/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/csr/index_en.htm)

<sup>3</sup> Definition of CSR on the European Commission web page "A concept whereby companies integrate social and environmental concerns in their business operations and in their interaction with their stakeholders on a voluntary basis"

Whether the total costs of employing an older worker outweigh the total benefits also depends on how costs and benefits are measured and defined. For example, in addition to the value of his output, the older worker may generate a benefit to the organization through the positive influence he has on the work habits and productivity of younger workers. While difficult to quantify, these less tangible, hidden benefits should be included in any cost/benefit accounting.

Employers can help by providing mentoring, work experience and internships for older people (many of them with disabilities), and will benefit from:

- less sick days,
- lower recruitment costs,
- increased work performance,
- increased worker morale,
- fewer workplace injuries.

Also, studies of work-loss due to illness show that workers aged 65 and over have attendance records equal to or better than most other age group of workers. Employees at 50+ have 52%<sup>4</sup> less sick days per year than do younger employees. Employees in this age group are also absent from work less often because of acute illnesses. Contrary to popular notions, older workers are safe workers; they have fewer workplace accidents than younger workers. Conducted studies find that workers over age 55 account for under 10% of all workplace injuries even though they make up almost 14% of the labour force<sup>5</sup>.

Following this direction – The personal and/or professional background of older people has provided them with specific qualifications, skills and abilities which need to be synchronized with the current requirement in an open labour market. The generation shift has determined new social, cultural and technical approaches. Working with and accepting older people or people with disabilities the following issues need to be considered.

### ***Businesses must prepare to meet the needs of an ageing population***

Although some businesses have been wary of the potential liabilities of an older workforce, many recognise that changing demographics present significant business opportunities. "Designing products, goods and services to take account of population ageing will be paramount in order to increase the length of disability-free life and meet the aspirations of the ageing population," writes Philip Taylor, executive director of the Cambridge Interdisciplinary Research Centre on Ageing.<sup>10</sup> From the provision of financial,

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<sup>4</sup> Sally Coberly, Deborah Newquist, 1984, Ageing, Hiring older workers - employer concerns

<sup>5</sup> Sally Coberly, Deborah Newquist, 1984, Ageing, Hiring older workers - employer concerns

healthcare, tourism and leisure services to the design of living spaces, working spaces, communities and transportation systems, business innovation can allow older people to remain independent for longer.

### **3. POLITICS AND EFFECTIVE AGE STRATEGY**

A key step in any effective age strategy is to introduce legislation that stimulates employment, qualification and re-qualification of the targeted group. This legislation is established by National governments, the EU (especially the European Commission with its various directives), but also the Businesses themselves through their corporate responsibility. The major instruments however in this initiative with a direct and immediate impact are governmental measures introduced through legislation. In addition, the national legislation provides (wanted or unwanted) a stimulation towards the business initiatives.

#### ***The EU has called for legislation to combat age discrimination***

The EU Employment Directive, issued in 2000, required all 15 EU Member States to introduce legislation prohibiting age discrimination by December 2006. In several countries, including the UK, Finland, Ireland and the Netherlands, voluntary codes protecting older workers have already been put in place.

### **4. PRACTICAL RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **A Methodology for communication and work with older people (in some cases and people with disabilities)**

- 1) Do not be afraid to ask questions about issues relating to the person, which are considered "uneasy matters". (For example: the age of the person, difficulties/lacks, disabilities, etc.).
- 2) Do not be embarrassed to use words describing actions, which are obviously not achievable for the person with a disability when talking with him/her. (For example: Saying to visually impaired person: "Did you **watch** that TV

broadcasting yesterday?" it is common to say "I watch TV", not "I **listen** to TV".

- 3) Let the employee inform the team about the specific characteristics concerning health and/or social status and their influence upon employability.
- 4) Do not enter into work placement adaptations without consulting in advance the employee they are targeted at.
- 5) When you, as a team leader, decide to set a task, which you think could be challenging for your employee due to their specific status, do not give up before consulting with the person and then jointly take the final decision.
- 6) When you set a task for your employee that requires collaboration with another member of the team, let your employee choose their co-workers.
- 7) During the team meetings or while making presentations/notices to your staff, ask your employee whether everything is clear. If the answer is "no", repeat the information, trying to speak more clearly and explain in more descriptive ways.
- 8) Do not show special attitudes or be patronizing towards your employee. No matter if it's face-to-face or in front of other colleagues.
- 9) Do not make excuses for particular mistakes or omissions by the employee while performing his/her tasks, excusing him/her because of their disability and/or age.
- 10) When setting a task for your employee, discuss in advance the time needed for its completion. In some cases it may take more time than usual.
- 11) When you intend to send your employee on a business trip, be sure in advance to consult with him/her their arrangements and the conditions for travelling.
- 12) If a business trip is planned ask your employee about any specific requirements or needs.
- 13) Do your best to predispose the employee to share without concern.
- 14) Let your employee share with clients/partners about his/her specific status, if they consider it necessary.
- 15) In the case that a problem caused by the specific status of your employee appears, discuss it with him/her before taking any consequent actions.
- 16) Let your employee work as independently as possible, without unnecessary supervision.