



Valuing older people’s skills and experience – Training peer facilitators

Summary and recommendations

The SLIC II Project

The SLIC II project, “Valuing older people’s skills and experience: Training Peer Facilitators”, addresses the issue of increasingly ageing societies and the promotion of active ageing. The SLIC II project builds on the previous SLIC I project (Sustainable Learning in the Community) where an innovative workshop model and a handbook on how to run this workshop were developed (www.slic-project.eu/outcomes/handbook). In the first SLIC project, 103 older learners from 6 countries took part in the workshops which aimed to help older adults to review their past experience and personal skills and to explore new opportunities for learning and volunteering.

Building on this experience, within the SLIC II project, five Peer Facilitator Training Courses were run in Austria, Germany, Hungary, Italy and Scotland and 61 peer facilitators were trained. As part of the training, 12 trial SLIC Workshops were run by peer facilitators in these same countries with 121 participants. Also, a trans-national peer facilitator meeting was run in Budapest with 39 participants, 23 of whom were trained peer facilitators.

The Peer Facilitator Training

The aim of the Peer Facilitator Training was to train older volunteers to conduct SLIC I workshops autonomously in organisations or in any other volunteering context. The ultimate aim was that peer facilitator trainees would run further SLIC Workshops with older people themselves, either in cooperation with organisations or from their own initiative.

The training takes eight and a half days in all and consists of:

2 days: Experiencing the SLIC Workshop

2 days: Running one’s own trial workshop together with other peer facilitators

4 days: Peer Facilitator Training including, communication, facilitation, background information as well as designing and planning a trial workshop

½ day: Debriefing and evaluation

A Handbook for Trainers, Materials for Trainees, Additional Exercises for the SLIC Workshop as well as the original **SLIC Handbook** are available on the Website: www.slic-project.eu



Individual facilitator work has helped me be more self-confident and strengthened my skills

I could put into practice what I learned

I could activate and involve participants

Results

The experience gained from the SLIC II Project has revealed that older people from different walks of life can be effectively trained as peer facilitators. The peer approach to the trial workshops, in which the facilitators and participants have similar outlooks, has been very successful and well received.

The benefits of participating in the Peer Facilitator Training for trainees were that they acquired new skills such as facilitation, communication and listening skills. Also, their participation led to increased self-confidence and enabled trainees to realise their potential. Finally, by running SLIC Workshops, peer facilitators had the opportunity to activate and encourage their peers to make a positive difference in their communities.

The benefit for organisations in running SLIC Workshops and training peer facilitators to run them was that they could strengthen community ties, improve their networking in their communities and contribute to active ageing within their local setting. Also, peer facilitators could use their informal contacts to engage with others less active than themselves to be active, by becoming volunteers.

Recommendations

While the benefits and feasibility of training peer facilitators was shown, it also became clear that a host of prerequisites need to be in place on different levels:

Running the Peer Facilitator Training

- **Comprehensive preparation and information:** Information meetings and personal exploration interviews can ensure that only those who are able attend the whole training and are suited to the training, participate. Also, written information and consent should be in place.
- **An interactive design that ensures a participatory approach to learning:** Getting to know each other through ice breakers has proved to be very helpful in order to create an atmosphere where exchange of personal information is encouraged. This also includes work in small groups and exercises fostering exchange and networking between peer facilitators. Having peer facilitators bring and try out their own exercises also proved to be a successful approach.
- **An experienced trainer, who acts as a model:** He or she should have an open and motivating personality, be responsive and interested in participants and be able to run the training flexibly.



I enjoyed getting to know other peer facilitators and their experiences

There was a perceptible gain in self-confidence both of peer facilitator trainees and participants

Exchange and creation of new motivating ideas

Running Trial Workshops

- **Flexible duration:** The SLIC Workshops can be planned flexibly from one day to two days of 6 hours each. The duration of the workshops will depend on the target group, the size of the group and the amount of exercises chosen by the peer facilitator.
- **Complete tool-kit with a variety of methods:** The SLIC Handbook as well as the SLIC Tool-kit provides a variety of exercises that peer facilitators can choose from to create an individual SLIC Workshop design. Simple tools and questionnaires, such as exercises where participants do not have to write, work well. These can also be used for older people who cannot write or who have difficulties with the language.
- **Adapt the extent of support to the abilities of the peer facilitators running the trial workshop:** Generally, as little as possible support should be offered, but as much as necessary. In some cases, it can be good to offer infrastructure and carry out organisation of the trial workshops, so that peer facilitators can concentrate on running them. In other cases, peer facilitators might be motivated to do all the planning and organisation and only contact trainers if they need help. Also, some peer facilitators might feel able to run a whole workshop alone with just one other peer. Others however might be challenged enough when running one exercise! Generally, it is possible to train less experienced peer facilitators, but in these cases more support needs to be in place.

Ensuring Sustainability

- **Promote local networking:** On one hand regional networking is very important for successful Peer Facilitator Training and its sustainability, on the other hand training peer facilitators and running SLIC Workshops can contribute substantially to networking on the community level. Through cooperating in running SLIC Workshops and training peer facilitators, organisations can also learn from each other and work together.
- **Ensure ownership:** From the beginning of the process, peer facilitators should bring in their own previous experience, interests and networks into the planning and running of the trial workshops. They should be encouraged to choose and contact their own target groups and design and run their workshops individually with respect to their objectives and needs and those of their target group.
- **Offer organisational support:** Organisations offering Peer Facilitator Training should offer a framework and infrastructure for SLIC Workshops and the Peer Facilitator Training. The follow-up and on-going support of peer facilitators as well as for participants of SLIC Workshops should be encouraged and ensured. Also, the earlier in the process organisations can offer trained peer facilitators concrete opportunities for running further workshops and supporting workshop participants, the better.

Structure of training



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