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INTERREG CENTRAL BALTIC PROGRAMME

RETHINK Project

FINAL EVALUATION REPORT

APRIL 2021



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1 Introduction; Project Background and Context

- 1.1 The rationale for the RETHINK project was initially based on research undertaken by the Research and Development Centre Linköping, based in the Ostgötland region of Sweden which identified an urgent need to find new and more effective ways of supporting the social and economic integration of the growing numbers of young people in the 18-29 age group who were experiencing mental health problems and difficulties. Linköping is a city of 150,000 people, 32,000 of whom are within the 18 - 29 age group and a major study by the regional public health agency had concluded that there has been a substantial increase in the numbers experiencing mental health problems, particularly young women. In 2016 34% of young people reported that mental ill health was having a negative impact on their living the lives the way they wanted against 23% in a similar study in 2002, including 42% of young women. The figures were particularly high among young people of a migrant background. A high proportion of the 1600 unemployed young people in Linköping were experiencing mental health problems as their main barrier to employment (Municipality of Linköping 'Mapping of the Unemployed with Social Benefits' study 2017).
- 1.2 The R&D Centre Linköping is a collaboration between 9 municipalities in the Ostgötland region and the University of Linköping and has close working relations with a network of public and private sector providers of care and social services within the region as well as with the national R&D Centre network in Sweden. The centre identified Zemgale Planning Region (ZPR) in Latvia as a suitable partner for exchanging best practice and jointly developing and testing new approaches to working with this target group through the project. ZPR is a regional public authority with responsibility for regional planning and development and the coordination of services including transport, education, social

services, environmental protection and business support. Its development council includes 22 municipalities. Available research strongly indicated similarly growing mental health needs and barriers to labour market integration were being experienced by young people in Zemgale region with 3,150 people being identified as experiencing mental disorders, 17.4% of whom were in the 18-29 age group. These figures were thought to be a considerable underestimate. A study by Zemgale Region in 2017 found that young people with mental health problems experienced particularly high unemployment, and that the barriers they faced included low self-esteem, poor educational attainment, poor social skills and limited social networks.

- 1.3 The overall aim of the RETHINK project identified in the project application was to;

‘Address the challenge posed by the social and economic exclusion of young people in the 18-30 age group with a history of mental health problems through the joint development and delivery of a holistic approach which will use a range of tools and interventions to promote integration which can be tailored to their specific individual needs.’

The application identified the following specific objectives for the project;

- Mapping the needs / barriers faced by young people in the target group within each region, together with services currently available and gaps in existing provision.
- Establishing a Stakeholder Forum for each region including representatives of community health and social services, education / training providers, NGOs and employers.
- Recruitment and training of 20 mentors / personal coaches (10 in each region) to support individual young people during the project, including professionals, volunteers, peer group and workplace mentors.
- Development of a joint education / training and support programme with personal action planning and a range of options including arts / creative activities, sports, excursions, volunteering, vocational taster courses and work experience.
- Piloting the programme by recruiting and training 40 young people in phases, 20 in each region.
- Evaluating the results, including through a survey of young people participating and Stakeholder Forum members.

- Mainstreaming and disseminating the results at regional, national and transnational levels.

The activities and timescales required to achieve these objectives were also described in the application, which was approved in the summer of 2019. The project began its work in August 2019.

- 1.4 In the next section, the aims and methodology used to evaluate the project will be summarised. This will be followed by an analysis of the main activities of the project, its main results and achievements, the efficiency of the processes adopted to achieve the objectives, and the effectiveness of the partnership and transnational working. Finally the impact achieved by the project will be assessed and this will be followed by some conclusions, including the implications of the project for future practice.

2. Evaluation Aims and Methodology

2.1 The aims and objectives of the project evaluation were described by an evaluation framework agreed by partners at the inception of the project. They were to;

- Assess the success of the project in achieving its objectives and projected outputs.
- Assess the efficiency of the processes put in place to achieve these outputs and to manage the project.
- Assess the effectiveness of the partnership and transnational working and the contributions from the individual partners.
- Inform funding bodies and other stakeholders of the project's results, and the actual and potential impact of the project.

2.2 The evaluation has involved;

(a) Analysis of the quantitative data relating to;

- Achievement of timescales set out in the Work Plan.
- Evidence of results identified and projected for each set of activities and Intellectual Outputs.

(a) Reviewing and analysing qualitative evidence in relation to;

- The project's effectiveness in meeting its objectives.
- The project's efficiency in meeting its objectives.
- The relevance of the project's activities to the needs identified.
- Valorisation activities.
- Value added to the project as a result of transnational activity.

2.3 The main evaluation activities and methodology have also included;

- Observation of partnership meetings. During the project to date, 1 partnership meeting has been held in Sweden and these have been supplemented by further virtual meetings since the onset of the COVID 19 crisis to plan the implementation of the project's activities.
- Questionnaires completed by each partner after partnership meetings.
- Reviews / interviews with each partner which have coincided with the partnership meetings. These have been supplemented by regular discussions with individual members of the different partners' teams.

2.4 The evaluation has also included detailed one to one and group feedback from beneficiaries in the Linkoping and Zemgale training programmes as well as from mentors supporting beneficiaries in these programmes and stakeholders. This information was gathered through individual questionnaires, interviews and group discussions and has played a key role in the assessment of the project's impact.

2.5 This report will bring evidence from these activities together as an overall assessment of the extent to which the project achieved the results anticipated at the time of the application as well as its actual and potential impact.

3. Project Activities

3.1 The main activities identified in the RETHINK application were as follows;

- The preparation of a Baseline Study / Needs Analysis analysing existing research on the project's target group in each region, the differences of existing services and provision available to support their social and economic inclusion, as well as gaps in this provision.
- Establishing a cross border network and a stakeholder forum in each region to provide feedback on the project's work and support dissemination and mainstreaming.
- Recruiting and training 20 mentors / personal coaches (10 in each region) to support individual young people during the project.
- Developing a joint education / training and support programme with personal action planning and a range of options tailored to the needs of individual learners.
- Piloting the programme by recruiting and training 40 young people, 20 in each region.
- Evaluating the results including through surveys of the young people participating in the pilot programme.
- Mainstreaming and Disseminating the results at regional, national and transnational levels.

3.2 Mapping / Needs Analysis Work

3.2.1 At the inaugural project steering group meeting held in Linköping in August 2019, a detailed work plan was agreed which included the

preparation of a Baseline Study / Needs Analysis as a priority and this work was carried out from September 2019 to February 2020. Each partner prepared a separate report based on an agreed template.

The Linköping report was prepared by the University of Linköping and this was supplemented by discussions with a range of professionals and a sample of young people within the target groups carried out by the project team. The main conclusions were that a high proportion of NEETS in the city were of migrant backgrounds and that 30% of the 18-25 group had psychiatrically related challenges.

The key characteristics and barriers faced by this group included poor personal organisation, personal hygiene / health care issues, low self-esteem, social isolation, language barriers and poor family support. The report referred to a wide range of professional services to support this group but they were uncoordinated and there was a lack of holistic, tailor made interventions to address the complex and differing needs of individuals.

- The Latvian baseline study identified many similar but also some different needs and barriers within the target group. They had practical needs such as personal hygiene, literacy, numeracy and problems handling money which limited their ability to live independently. They also had low self-esteem and motivation and poor social networks and tended to live with their families (who sometimes 'over cared' them reinforcing their isolation). Professional service provision was more limited than in Sweden and tended to be crisis orientated and training organisations agreed that most courses were too generic, and insufficiently tailored to the needs of young people with mental health problems.

3.2.2 Following an in-depth partner discussion at the March 2020 project steering group meeting, the Linköping team prepared a further joint report which identified the key issues that would need to be taken into account in the development of the training programme. These included the need for an in-depth initial assessment of each young person's needs in relation to their health capacity, aspirations, and wider support measures. The importance of engagement with the family was identified, as well as with other professionals already working with the individual young person and employer engagement and raising employer awareness were also seen as critical issues. The report argued for an individualised tailor made programme, with strong ongoing individual mentoring support and the fullest possible

involvement of the young people themselves in shaping a programme appropriate to their needs.

3.2.3 The needs analysis / baseline study work undertaken by the partners was of good quality and played an important part in informing the content of subsequent development work undertaken in the mentor and beneficiary learning programmes.

3.3 Cross Border Network / Stakeholder Forums

3.3.1 The project's cross border network was formally established at the inaugural project steering group meeting held in Linköping in August 2019. Each of the partners also established a Stakeholder Forum consisting of relevant municipality departments, health authorities, training providers, employers and NGOs who have been regularly consulted during the preparation and piloting of the project's products and have played a key role through the provision of feedback on the relevance of the project's products and activities and in supporting dissemination activities.

3.3.2 The Linköping forum includes over 20 representatives and has formally met on 6 occasions, primarily through virtual means due to the COVID 19 crisis. The ZPR forum includes 26 participants and has also met on 7 occasions. These bodies have played a particularly important role in recent months in disseminating the project's results and in supporting mainstreaming of its lessons and approach into the activities of relevant professional services supporting the target group, and this work appears likely to continue post project.

3.4 Mentor Training and Recruitment

3.4.1 Although the original project application identified the key role of mentoring in the project, it did not specify that a specific training programme for mentors would be developed.

However, ZPR in particular, felt that a specific mentor training programme for mentors working with the project's target group could

play an important role in helping to achieve the project's objectives and outcomes. They took the lead in the development of a detailed programme which included the following key features;

- A clear definition of the role of the mentor and the mentoring process which was defined as a time limited process of 6 – 9 months duration.
- Identification of the different stages of the mentoring process / intervention (Learning to be, Learning to live together, Learning to do and Learning to know) and supporting learner progression.
- A description of the needs and profile of the target group of young people with whom mentors would be working..
- Identification of recruitment criteria for mentors and how best to 'match' mentors and beneficiaries. The recruitment criteria included education / experience in a related area e.g. social work, teaching, medicine, psychology, youth work, as well as personal characteristics such as high motivation, personal maturity, relevant hobbies etc.
- The programme consisted of 28 hours of training (12 hours theoretical and 16 hours practical) and was delivered through individual and group sessions, both face to face and virtual and a WhatsApp group was established to enable mentors to share experience and support each other.

3.4.2 ZPR also developed a Digital Learning Platform to support the delivery of the mentor learning programme, and this was another outcome over and above those identified in the project application. The platform includes learning resources and was successfully used to pilot the mentor programme proving particularly useful in the context of the challenges posed by the COVID 19 crisis and the barriers it created to face to face learning.

The content is however, currently in Latvian and the partners have been considering the potential for translation into Swedish and English to enable it to be accessed more widely.

3.4.3 ZPR successfully recruited 10 mentors through contacts with stakeholders, NGOs, employers, Facebook and other sources. All completed the training programme and following the recruitment of young people for the main training programme, the 'matching' of mentors to beneficiaries was undertaken at a 4 day Summer School in August 2020.

3.4.4 In Linköping the training of mentors was less structured than in Zemgale, partly because mentors recruited had more experience, so that training had to be more tailored to the individual needs of the mentors. In addition group mentor training was delivered through 5 digital meetings which focused on issues such as the role of the mentor and working with people with mental health challenges and these sessions were backed up by learning resources and materials including video material. The recruitment criteria were similar to those used in Latvia and an agreement was drawn up with individual mentors which stipulated at least 12 mentor / mentee meetings during the course of the project. In practice, mentors and mentees met on average at least twice per month, initially face to face but in recent months virtually due to the COVID 19 crisis. 8 mentors were recruited, with 6 remaining throughout the project 'Matching' of mentors and mentees was undertaken with a similar care to that shown in Zemgale.

3.5 Young People's Education / Training and Support Programme

3.5.1 Following the mapping / needs analysis work and the production of the Baseline Study reports extensive discussions took place between the partners during the first 6 months of 2020 on the structure and content of the beneficiary training programme. Using the results of the mapping and in particular its identification of the key characteristics and needs of the target group, the partners agreed that the programme should include a number of common features including;

- A strong focus on addressing the social exclusion and marginalisation of the young people targeted.
- Key roles for case managers and mentors throughout the programme.
- The need for the programme to be flexible with a range of options which could be tailored to the specific needs of the individual learner. The options would include an emphasis on informal learning to engage learners as well as employability skills.
- The need for individual action planning and goal setting at the beginning of the programme and exit guidance / progression planning at the conclusion.

It was agreed that the length of participation in the programme would vary but that the average period would be 5 to 6 months.

3.5.2 Although these common elements were identified, the individual partners adopted distinct approaches to programme development and delivery.

- In Linköping, where the overall level of service provision for young people in the target group is more comprehensive (though fragmented) than in Zemgale, the focus has been on the most marginalised young people with psychiatric conditions often with limited family support or social networks. The project team recruited individual beneficiaries at an early stage and engaged them in mapping their needs, and used this information to identify the options / content within the learning programme. The programme therefore appeared to be relatively unstructured in its early stages but that was 'firmed up' as the piloting of the programme progresses. A graphic illustration of the Linköping programme is provided below in Fig.1.
- In Zemgale the target group for the project was a little broader including both young people with psychiatric conditions and young people with learning disabilities, although all experienced similar levels of social exclusion. The overall programme and approach was more structured with an initial formal mentoring training programme preceding the recruitment of beneficiaries, matching them with mentors leading to the main beneficiary training programme. The structure of the programme is illustrated graphically in Fig.2 below

FIG 1 – LINKÖPING BENEFICIARY TRAINING PROGRAMME



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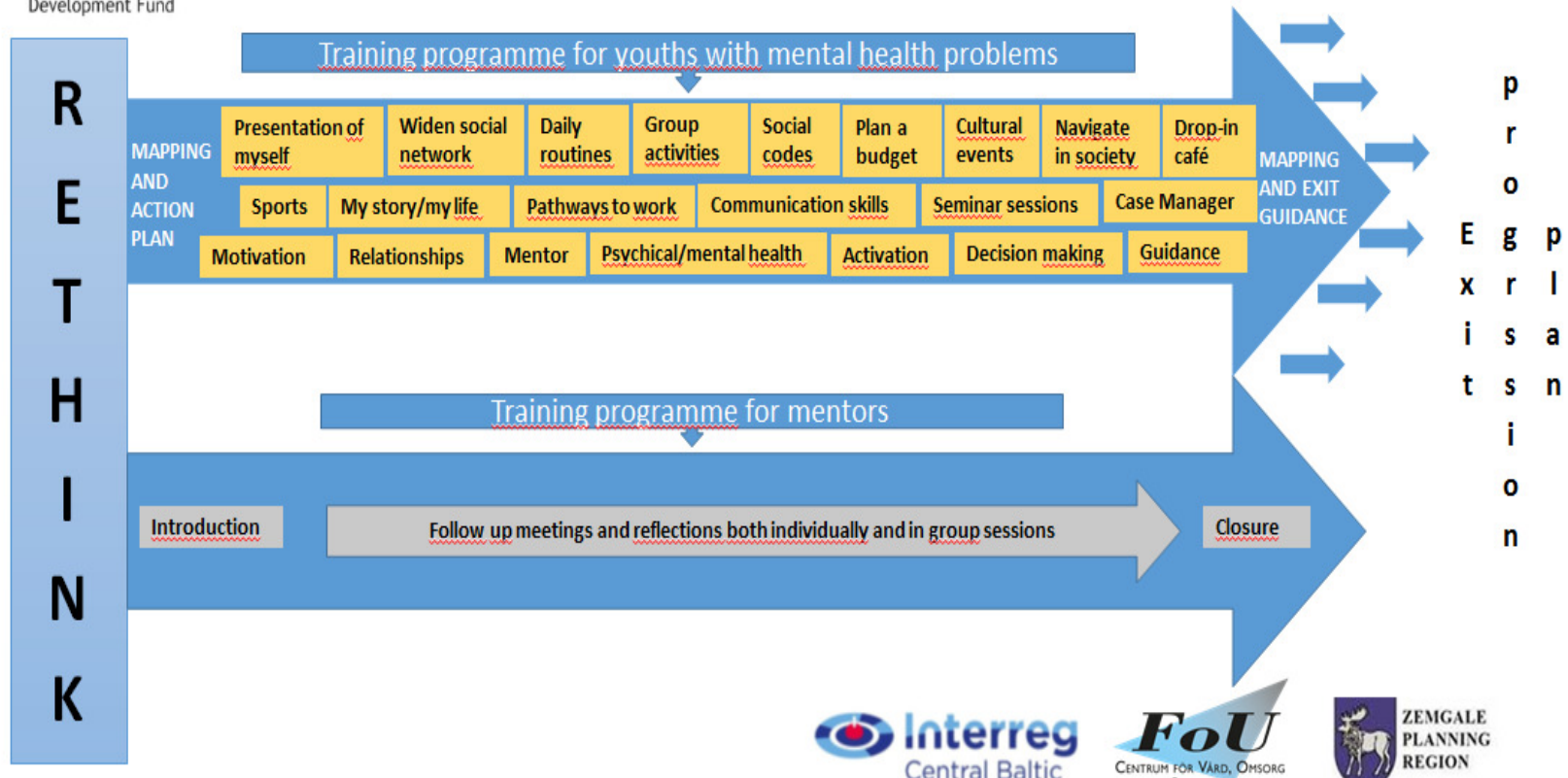
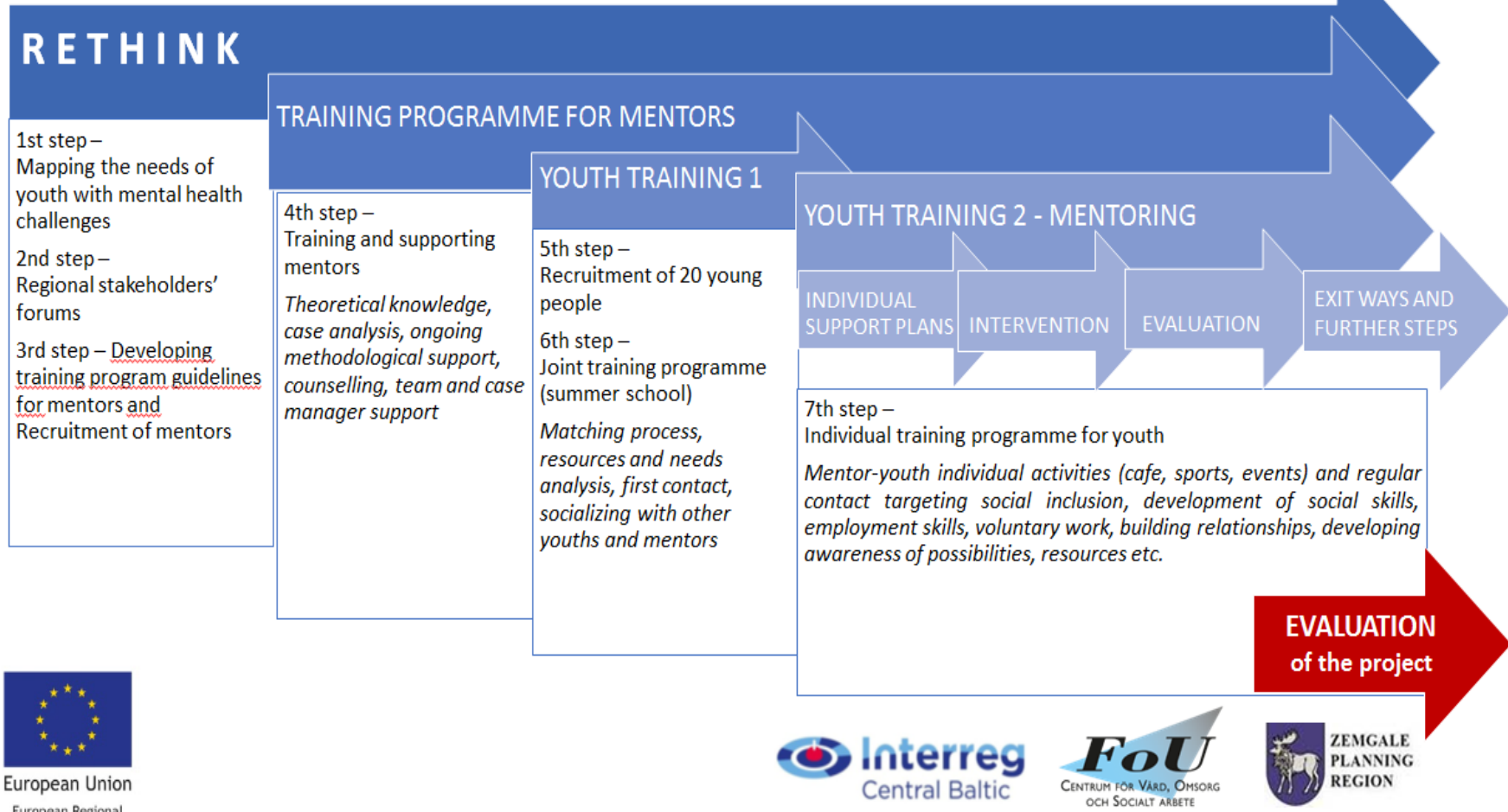


FIG 2 – ZEMGALE TRAINING PROGRAMME

Summary of the Latvian Rethink model



3.6 Piloting the Programme

3.6.1 The distinct but complementary approaches of the partners to the development of the content of the training programme was also reflected in their approaches to piloting the mentoring and beneficiary training programmes. In Linköping, the initial batch of 4 mentors and 10 beneficiaries was recruited at an early stage, in March 2020, with the remainder being recruited over the following 3 to 4 months, making 8 mentors and 20 beneficiaries in all. The mentors were recruited from volunteers; they were overwhelmingly female, aged 40+ and had career backgrounds in teaching and human relations. The training of mentors used elements of the mentor training programme developed through the project and was delivered through both individual and group training sessions, primarily through 5 digital meetings focusing on issues such as the role of the mentor and living with mental health problems. The course was supported by audio visual learning materials and resources and links.

The beneficiary training programme began in Spring 2020 with a strong emphasis on group based empowerment; weekly activities included , a drop in café, physical training on yoga mats, cooking, singing, painting, drama exercises, walks and 'picnics on the hill'. Initially, due to the serious mental health issues experienced by some of the young people concerned and the impact of the COVID crisis, difficulties were experienced in maintaining consistent engagement and attendance, but this improved during the summer and into the autumn, and engagement with the group was having clearly beneficial impacts on many of the individuals within it. With the imposition of greater restrictions on individual movement due to the crisis from November 2020, the training programme refocused with the introduction of weekly digital group meetings which were responsive to the interests of the group members and included discussions on music, movies, books, pets, staying healthy and other themes. Individual beneficiaries continued to meet their mentors outdoors where possible and / or on a digital basis.

3.6.2 In Zemgale, 10 mentors and 20 beneficiaries were recruited from August 2020 onwards. The matching of mentors and beneficiaries took place during a 4 day summer camp in the last week of August which also included a range of workshops based on informal learning activities including art and dance therapy and ergo therapy. Personal action plans for beneficiaries were also developed based

on interests such as arts / creative activities, sport, volunteering, vocational tasters and work experience.

The subsequent training programme has consisted of a combination of individual and group based learning based on the UNESCO learning pillars of 'Learning to be', 'Learning to Live Together', 'Learning to do' and ' Learning to Know'. It has included activities to promote personal and social skills e.g. healthy cooking and eating, independent shopping, physical exercise, understanding social boundaries, family and romantic relationships as well as employment / career related areas such as voluntary work experience, job interviews and CV preparation training. As in Linköping there was a greater reliance on virtual contact with beneficiaries due to COVID restrictions in recent months but all beneficiaries have received exit / next steps guidance.

3.6.3 The pilot programme is now complete and the partners, individually and collectively have undertaken a thorough evaluation of the results, including in depth analysis of feedback from mentors and beneficiaries participating in the programme. Further details of this work will be provided in the 'Results and Achievements' and 'Impact' sections of this report. They have already played an important role in the project's dissemination and mainstreaming activities.

3.7 Dissemination and Mainstreaming

3.7.1 The COVID 19 crisis has created obvious barriers to many dissemination activities but the project has nevertheless concluded a robust dissemination and mainstreaming programme.

3.7.2 A dissemination framework was agreed at the beginning of the project together with a dissemination tool which was used by the partners to record their dissemination activities throughout the period of the project. Reference has already been made to the impact of the Stakeholder Forums established by each partner in their regions and the role that they have played in supporting dissemination but the partners have in addition undertaken a wide range of activities resulting in a substantial mainstreaming and dissemination impact being achieved at regional, national and international levels through the project.

3.7.3 More details will be provided later in the report, but brief examples are the presentations made by ZPR to their development council which represents 22 municipalities in the region, to national Latvian stakeholders meetings which include representatives of the country's Ministry of Welfare, and other government ministries, and the highly successful dissemination event organised by the partnership in April 2021 which was attended by 65 representatives of stakeholder organisations from the 2 regions and countries as well as the secretariat of the Central Baltic Interreg Programme.

4. Results and Achievements of the Project

4.1 The project has achieved its overriding aim of addressing the social and economic exclusion of young people with a history of mental health problems through the development of new tools and interventions to promote integration which can be tailored to individual needs. It has also successfully piloted these and delivered positive outcomes for mentors and young people participating in the pilot programme whilst disseminating and mainstreaming its activities and results to ensure wider take up of the approach and tools developed post project.

4.2 In relation to the specific objectives of the project, the results were as follows;

4.2.1 Development of a Cross Border Network for promoting the integration of young people with a history of mental health problems. This was established by the partners at the beginning of the project and has been developed into an effective vehicle for sharing knowledge and expertise, providing feedback on the relevance and effectiveness of products and tools developed and supporting dissemination and mainstreaming. Each of the partners established a Stakeholder Forum which included representatives of municipalities, professionals working with the target group, training providers, employers and NGOs; they included 20 members in Linköping and 26 in Zemgale. The Forums were strongly represented at the project's final dissemination event and will continue post project to support mainstreaming of the approaches and products developed through the project.

4.2.2 **Development of Training and support Programme for Young People with Mental Health challenges.**

Although the partners adopted distinct approaches to the development of their training programmes, programmes implemented included common elements including a strong focus on mentoring and personal action planning, a flexible curriculum capable of being tailored to the specific needs of individual beneficiaries, an emphasis on informal education to promote engagement and address social exclusion / isolation, and a clear exit / progression strategy. Even though the implementation and piloting of the programme was constrained by the COVID crisis which limited face to face and in person group work with

beneficiaries and between beneficiaries and mentors, the structure and content of the programme has been demonstrated to be effective in working with the project's target group.

4.2.3 Piloting and Implementation of the Training and Support Programme

The piloting of the programme was an overall success despite the difficulties created by the COVID crisis. Overall 40 out of a forecast 40 beneficiaries were recruited and trained supported by 18 out of a forecast 20 mentors. Due both to reduced in person contact due to COVID and the health challenges faced by many beneficiaries, participation on the part of some was inconsistent but in surveys undertaken towards the end of the pilot programme the feedback was overwhelmingly positive. In Linköping 83% of beneficiaries scored the project at between 7 and 10 out of 10 whether the project had made a big difference to them (0 – no help at all, 10 – big difference) and approval of the mentoring aspect of the project was over 90%. A high proportion of beneficiaries experienced reduced social exclusion through the development of personal and social skills including through group work with other beneficiaries and work with their mentors. 3 received workplace training which will continue after the end of the project. In Zemgale the overall positive approval rate for the project was over 90%, including for the mentoring element and a significant proportion of beneficiaries achieved both reduced social and economic exclusion, with 6 participating in work experience placements and 5 obtaining employment.

4.3 Additional Results

The project achieved additional results which were over and above the objectives identified in the original project application. These were;

4.3.1 Development of Mentor Training Programme

As indicated earlier, ZPR took the lead role in this work and the programme formed a key component of their delivery of the project as a whole. Detailed feedback was obtained from mentors and this was extremely positive about the importance of the training programme in preparing them for their work with beneficiaries; the wider impact of mentoring in the project is discussed later in this report. Linköping also developed a mentor training programme less

structured than the ZPR programme and this too received positive feedback from mentors undertaking the training.

4.3.2 Development of Digital Learning Platform

The learning platform was developed by ZPR to support the delivery of the mentor training programme and the beneficiary training programme and proved particularly useful in the context of the challenges posed by the COVID crisis which reduced opportunities for face to face training. It already hosts substantial content and learning resources and could provide an important resource and tool in mainstreaming the project's approach and products after INTERREG funding ends. The content is currently in Latvian but could be much more widely used if it is translated into Swedish, English and other languages within the programme area, and the partners are currently discussing this as part of their post project dissemination plans.

4.4 Dissemination and Mainstreaming

4.4.1 Despite the difficulties created by the COVID crisis, the project has put a strong emphasis on dissemination and mainstreaming results in this area.

In addition to establishing its Stakeholder Forum, the Linköping team organised a regional network meeting in May 2020 attended by 10 agencies, including municipalities, health authorities and NGOs. Presentations on the project have also been made to care providers (verksamhetsrad IFO / social psykiatri / EKB) within the Municipality of Linköping and to the R&D Centre Network. An article was published on the municipality website Linweb which reached 9,000 – 10,000 staff.

4.4.2 As indicated, ZPR have established a Stakeholder Forum with 26 members which has been kept regularly informed on the progress of the project. Regular presentations and updates have also been given to the ZPR Development Council which includes representatives of 22 municipalities as well as on the ZPR web page. The Project Manager made a presentation on the work of the project at an international conference 'Quality of Social Services and

inclusion measures in the regions – opportunities and challenges’ in January 2020 which was attended by 77 delegates.

ZPR has also made a series of presentations on the project’s work and results to national stakeholder meetings organised by the Ministry of Welfare and to the Development Council of Social Service in Latvia (SPAP).

4.3.3 The partners also organised a highly successful joint dissemination seminar on 7th April 2021 which was attended by 65 representatives of over 30 organisations, including both regional and national bodies. The level of response achieved provides grounds for optimism regarding the potential for mainstreaming the products and results of the project. The project has substantially exceeded its original target of 140 people participating in the project.

5. Efficiency in Achieving Objectives and Results; Project Management

- 5.1 In the original RETHINK application the R&D Centre Linkoping were identified as managers and coordinators of the project. This role has included;
- Organising a Project Initiation meeting and workshop in Linkoping in August 2019 and preparing a draft Project Workplan which allocated roles and responsibilities to each partner and established timetables for the delivery of key activities and outputs. This was agreed and finalised at the meeting.
 - Drawing up contracts with each partner.
 - Establishing financial systems to ensure that expenditure is eligible with full transaction records maintained for audit purposes.
 - Providing a secretariat for the project, organising transnational partnership meetings, preparing agendas and minutes and ensuring that both partners are kept up to date with project developments.
 - Monitoring progress towards the achievement of project objectives and outputs.
 - Ensuring that monitoring reports are completed and submitted within agreed timescales to the Central Baltic Interreg programme management authority.
- 5.2 Overall, the feedback from the two project partner organisations is that they consider the project management systems and implementation to have been effective . The planning and running of the Project Initiation meeting went smoothly and the initial project workplan identifying objectives, outputs and partner responsibilities was thoroughly prepared beforehand and agreed following discussion at the meeting. The contracting process between the partners was also completed within an acceptable timescale.
- 5.3 The main challenges experienced have been due to the COVID 19 crisis which has meant that no face to face meetings have been possible between the partners since the inaugural meeting over 18 months ago. The R&D Centre Linkoping has organised a series of steering group and workshop meetings using ZOOM which were held on a bi monthly basis during most of 2020 and a monthly basis since November 2020. The centre has also prepared and circulated minutes of these meetings identifying agreed actions and responsibilities and timescales for implementing them. This has enabled the partners to maintain the overall momentum of the project and has been particularly valuable over the last 6 months in enabling joint analysis of the results of the pilot programmes and

planning final dissemination and mainstreaming strategies and events.

- 5.4 There is a strong commitment within the partnership to continue the cross border partnership and continue dissemination and mainstreaming activity after the period of the project funding. This will include a particular focus on the key products and outcomes of the project including the roles of case management and mentoring in working with the target group, and the need for flexible, tailor made and person centred packages of training and support to address social and economic exclusion rather than an exclusive emphasis on multiple and often fragmented professional interventions. The partners are also working together in a current Erasmus project with a different target group, and this will facilitate continuing cooperation in relation to the results of this project.

6. Partnership and Transnationality

- 6.1 The key to evaluating the effectiveness of partnership and transnationality within the project will be an assessment of the extent to which partnership working has helped the project to achieve its forecast objectives and results.
- 6.2 On this basis the partnership and transnationality have been relatively successful. Both the partners believe that the partnership has been helpful in raising mutual awareness and understanding of the needs of the target group of young people with mental health challenges in each region and country and of services currently available to support them. The exchange of experience and expertise has been positive, with ZPR for instance, taking the lead in the development of the mentor training programme and the digital platform, both of which are additional outputs to those identified in the original application. The partners have also worked together effectively on the development of products, particularly the beneficiary training programme, and have agreed key features of the programme such as the need for a holistic and flexible structure, a range of learning options which can be tailored to needs of the individual learner, the importance of initial mapping / action planning work with learners and the central role of mentoring support
- 6.3 However, the partners' approaches have also diverged significantly. This can partly be explained by the different levels of service provision in each region and country; whilst Linköping and Sweden have a relatively high level of provision and a well- established range of services, Zemgale and Latvia are in the process of de-institutionalising provision and building up community based services. ZPR also decided to focus on a slightly broader target group including young people with learning disabilities as well as those experiencing mental health challenges, on the grounds that all were experiencing social and economic exclusion.
- 6.4 Both partners placed a strong emphasis on the role of mentors in working with the young people concerned and contrasted the effectiveness of this compared to the almost exclusively professional interventions that they had previously experienced. ZPR adopted a structured approach to mentor training by developing a new programme supplemented by practical training through its summer school at which 'matching' with beneficiaries was organised. It also recruited mentors from related professional backgrounds. Linköping recruited volunteer mentors and developed a training programme tailored to the needs and previous experience

of the individuals concerned using Skype and practical evening sessions.

- 6.5 The partners also had differing approaches to the development and piloting of the beneficiary training programme. Linköping recruited beneficiaries at a relatively early stage and built the programme around the individual and collective mapping of their needs and preferences, whilst ZPR adopted a staged approach with the recruitment and training of beneficiaries following the recruitment and training of mentors. Nevertheless there is substantial evidence of an ongoing sharing of experience during the course of the project which has resulted in each partner influencing the practice of the other.
- 6.6 The variation in methodologies and approach adopted by the partners has had a positive impact on the project as a whole. The partners have collaborated closely in jointly analysing the results of the piloting and in the development of joint dissemination and mainstreaming strategies and events during the concluding phase of the project. This culminated in a successful final dissemination event organised virtually in early April 2021 which was attended by stakeholders at local, regional and national levels in the partner countries. As indicated earlier, there is a commitment within the cross border network established through the project to continue this work post project.

7. Impact

7.1 Evaluation of the impact of the project covered;

- (i) Young people who participated in the pilot training programme
- (ii) Mentors participating in mentor training programmes and in providing support to beneficiaries in their training programme
- (iii) The partner organisations themselves and the extent to which the outputs and products developed are being mainstreamed, as well as other stakeholders at local / regional and national levels.

7.2 Impact on Young People Participating

7.2.1 The RETHINK application set target indicators of 90% of young people participating achieving a positive outcome (completion of course, access to volunteering / work experience or employment) and 90% confirming that the project has made a positive contribution to their social / economic integration. These targets were largely achieved, although there was some negative impact from the COVID 19 pandemic crisis; in particular;

- 36 out of 40 beneficiaries achieved a positive outcome through completion of the course or 90%.
- Other positive outcomes included beneficiaries developing communication and social skills, motivational and problem solving skills and practical life and creative skills such as learning to cook, drama, photography, foreign languages, shopping independently etc. Beneficiaries also learned CV preparation and job interview skills, 14 undertook voluntary / work experience, study visits and 5 obtained employment.
- Overall 91% of beneficiaries confirmed that the project had made a positive contribution to their social or economic inclusion and some of the individual comments made during the feedback are revealing;

“The project is so much better than I expected it to be. Not so much learning, more personal development”.

“The meetings made me come out from my apartment which was positive for me because I have been stuck in my home. I met new people, in combination with my mentor and am sleeping better. I am out more often than before”.

“Good to get social contact”.

7.2.2. For many beneficiaries the greatest benefit of the project was the opportunity to socialise with people in their own age group (the ZPR organised Summer Camp appears to have been particularly successful in this) as well as the opportunity to develop new skills to support their personal development ;

“ I learned to talk...look in the eyes. I’m learning English now .I’m very keen to change my life, although a lot of things have changed already”.

“ I learned to take pictures, prepare my CV. I tried to get a job in a shop, but it didn’t work out. I volunteered, participated in some activities. There was a chance to travel a little around Latvia.I learned to ride a horse, to keep myself in the saddle. I liked to be able to talk about my problems, and talk to a mentor.”

“ I met a career counsellor at the camp. For the first time in life, I was a judge at a marching sports competition organised by my mentor in Dobele.”

“ I liked the opportunity to improve my skills in photography, and to participate in the competition where I got 1st place. I liked riding horses ,grooming them, feeding them, and also learning to ride. It was fun and useful. Also meetings with my mentor in a cafe when we talked about life, problems and the future.”

7.2.3 The role played by mentors was particularly valued by beneficiaries;

“Through my mentor I get another perspective on myself and what is expected”.

“I felt much more self-secure on the work interview thanks to my mentor”.

“It works well with my mentor. We meet once every week, walk, talk or play a game”.

“ I believe there is certainly need for a mentor. There are people who need more, including help with even everyday tasks. Other times

you need a little push, that you are called and somebody says, 'Let's go! Let's go!' “

7.3 Mentor Impact

7.3.1 The partners also organised feedback on impact from mentors through questionnaires and interviews. The mentoring element of the project was viewed as highly successful by the beneficiary mentees with 92% feeling 'positive' or 'very positive' about the benefits of having a mentor during the project.

7.3.2 The mentors themselves emphasised the importance of the mentor training programmes in helping them to understand their roles as mentors.

“Regardless of your background or frame of reference, it was very good that we got clear directives about the role. A mentor is not a treatment but it is easy to take on a bigger role when you want to help someone. I took the role of a listener, a supportive adult. The expectations were clear about the role. I have been humble and open to try”.

“I liked the learning process very much. I liked it that we also learned from the experience of colleagues”.

“The training course was an opportunity to understand my role and tasks and try to follow it all the time”.

7.3.3 The recruitment of mentors with the appropriate range of skills and aptitudes was critical as was the 'matching' of mentors and mentees. In this respect, the summer school organised by ZPR appears to have been particularly successful, in that it linked the matching process to group activities and training of the beneficiaries. The fact that mentors were able to establish in person relationships prior to the COVID 19 restrictions was also seen as

vital, as these relationships would have proved difficult to establish on a purely remote basis.

- 7.3.4 Overall, the mentors were highly positive about their experience of the project and felt that they had had a positive impact on the lives of their mentees. A number of them emphasised that the learning was a two way process and that they had learned a lot from the experience;

“I started as a mentor before Christmas. I have met my mentee outdoors every week. We have barbecued and played a lot of games. He said at first that he didn’t want to do things but my experience is that he has been open to doing things. It feels like we have established a really good contact.

I have learned a lot myself by being a mentor. When you go into a project you need to be humble, it’s a process of trial and error”.

A number also emphasised that they benefitted a lot from other mentors and from supporting each other.

There was also a recognition that the nature of the mentor / mentee relationship is distinct from the professional / client relationship;

“Sometimes we seem to be doing such simple things; but at some point you know it’s a little different, a little more personal than other jobs, because there’s a personal contact with every young person”.

7.4 Impact on the Partner Organisations

- 7.4.1 An explicit goal of the project was to develop a new approach and robust products to implement it which could be used to change practice and improve opportunities available to support the social and economic inclusion of young people with mental health challenges and barriers both within the partners’ own regions and in the Central Baltic Interreg programme area.

- 7.4.2 The project has already had a significant impact on the partner organisations themselves although the full impact is only likely to be experienced when the results of the final dissemination and mainstreaming programme become evident.

- The R&D Centre Linköping project team has identified a growing cohort of young people in the 18 – 30 age group including a high proportion of young migrants and women who suffer from mental ill health which results in their social and economic marginalisation. Even though they are supported by a range of professional services, the services concerned are often fragmented and crisis orientated and fail to provide the holistic or consistent support to facilitate progression. The Linköping team recognise that they could have sought a greater engagement of existing services at an earlier stage in the project, but this engagement has increased since then and there was a strong presence of mental health professionals and management at the project’s recent final dissemination event. The project also developed a regional network of stakeholder organisations to support the exchange of experience, dissemination and mainstreaming. There is already evidence that mainstream services are looking at ways in which the key lessons of the project could be incorporated into the practice of community based mental health services in Linköping and neighbouring municipalities.

- ZPR represent 22 municipalities in their region and they have used the project to develop a model for community based intervention for work with young people experiencing mental ill health and for young people with learning difficulties. This is part of the process of deinstitutionalising services and developing local services to support the most vulnerable groups in the community. Throughout the project there has been a high level of dissemination actively involving municipalities but also national government departments and stakeholder groups and this provides grounds for optimism that the project’s products and methodologies will be mainstreamed as part of the new service delivery structures and mechanisms being developed.

7.5. Impact on Other Stakeholders

- 7.5.1 ZPR also obtained feedback from the project team and from stakeholders. The project team identified the central role played by mentoring in the overall approach of the project and particular aspects of this which were critical to a successful outcome. They

included the importance of a careful selection of participants, both mentors and young people to ensure that they are suitable , the need for sensitive handling of the matching of mentors and mentees, and the need to respond promptly to changes or failures

in the dynamics of cooperation. Other issues included the availability and usage of information about the medical condition of mentees i.e. confidentiality issues and the extent to which information should be shared with the mentor to enable him or her to fulfil the role effectively.

7.5.2. Other stakeholders consulted included 9 people including 6 social workers from 6 municipalities and 1 parent. All of them viewed the project positively, marking it 4 or 5 on a scale of 1 to 5. The individual support plans drawn up the mentors and mentees were also deemed to be in line with the mentees' needs. The intervention phase was also mainly evaluated as successful, with the most important aspects being seen as enhanced socialising and improved social skills, learning together and getting out of the everyday environment. All 9 stakeholders consulted confirmed that they would be prepared to use a mentoring service for young people in the future and the social workers argued that this service should be included in a national or local government funded basket of services for this target group.

8. Conclusions

8.1 Overall, and despite the difficulties created by the COVID pandemic, the project has achieved the main objectives in the original

RETHINK application and in the project workplan agreed at its inception. In particular, it has;

- Developed a Cross Border Network and regional partnership networks / Stakeholder Forums which have played an active role in supporting the project's development work and in dissemination activities and appear likely to continue to support the mainstreaming of its key products and methodology.
- Developed the key elements of a transferable training and support programme for young people with mental health challenges including personal action planning, mentoring support, a flexible curriculum with a range of options which can be tailored to individual learner needs and an exit/ progression strategy.
- Piloted the programme by recruiting 40 young people out of a forecast of 40 supported by 18 mentors out of a forecast of 20. 36 of the young people completed the programme, meeting the forecast objective of 90% achieving a positive outcome.
- Disseminated the project's activities and results primarily at regional, but also at national and in some cases transnational levels. The project comfortably exceeded its target of 140 people participating in its work.

8.2 The project has produced additional results which were not included in the original project application through;

- The development of mentor training programmes, particularly focussed on the needs of the project's target group.
- The development of a digital platform to support the delivery of the mentor and beneficiary training programmes. This has only been piloted in Latvia to date but has the potential of much wider use.

8.3 However, the project has achieved significantly more than its immediate objectives, in that its methodology and approach have considerable implications for the future practice of professionals and services working with young people with mental health challenges. The mapping exercise undertaken separately and jointly by the partners early in the project found that current service provision tends to be relatively fragmented and crisis orientated and that many

young people receiving these services experience social isolation and exclusion and a sense of powerlessness.

The project has shown that these issues can be addressed, and existing services can be supported through;

- A person centred approach. Each beneficiary participated in the development of a personal action plan which identified individual goals. The training and support programme was flexible and could be tailored to the needs of the individual learner. It's also included a clear exit / progression plan.
- Mentoring. The role of the mentor is quite different from that of professionals in that they are often volunteers and can relate to the individual young person in a very different way, acting as a coach, adviser and motivator. The project showed that the selection process for mentors with appropriate backgrounds and attitudes is critical, as well as training to ensure that mentors fully understand their role and the needs of the particular target group with whom they are working. It also showed that a facility for mentors to share experiences and support each other can add value to the overall mentoring process.
- Actions to address the social exclusion and isolation of young people concerned which can be a pre-requisite to addressing their wider economic exclusion. In addition to the mentoring and personal coaching, the group activities organised through the training programme, both in person and virtual, had a significant impact in building the confidence and communication skills of participants.
- An emphasis on informal education linked to vocational and volunteer work experience options. The training programme included a flexible range of options, such as cookery, drama, yoga / sports, art, photography, dance, which were designed to engage the young people concerned and develop their social and communication skills. However, voluntary and work experience placements, and employability skills training options were also available for young people who were ready to pursue these options.

- Case Management. Both partners identified case managers for each young person whose role was to oversee the range of interventions being offered as part of a more holistic approach to addressing the needs of each individual. The case manager liaises with other professionals involved and also supervises the work of the mentor.
- 8.4 A key issue for the partners in the immediate post project phase will be to engage with established mental health services and professional disciplines to consider how the project's approach to these issues can be incorporated into more mainstream practice. This is not likely to be straightforward as they will challenge some professional orthodoxies, but if some of the project's lessons can be embraced by mainstream services then they could play an important part in complementing existing provision and tackling the social and economic exclusion of this target group.