# Evaluation of the pilot in Vidzeme, Latvia

How did you organize the pilot?

The initial discussion about the need for additional knowledge (materials, methods, instruments) in social service provision was during the exchange of experience visit in Tallin, Village of Hope (SEMPRE partners). Social service providers were willing to have some professional training in Vidzeme. They acknowledged that there is a lack of educational/ professional training opportunities in region, close to their working/ living places. In Sempre project we started to work in three places – Koceni, Priekuļi and Alsviķi.

Training process was organized in response to the needs of social providers in surrounding municipalities. Kick-off seminar (half a day) was organized in those 3 places. However, the following 2 days teaching seminars, one midway seminar, again 2 days teaching seminars and Final seminar was organized in different places (in response to the ongoing events) (See Figure 1).

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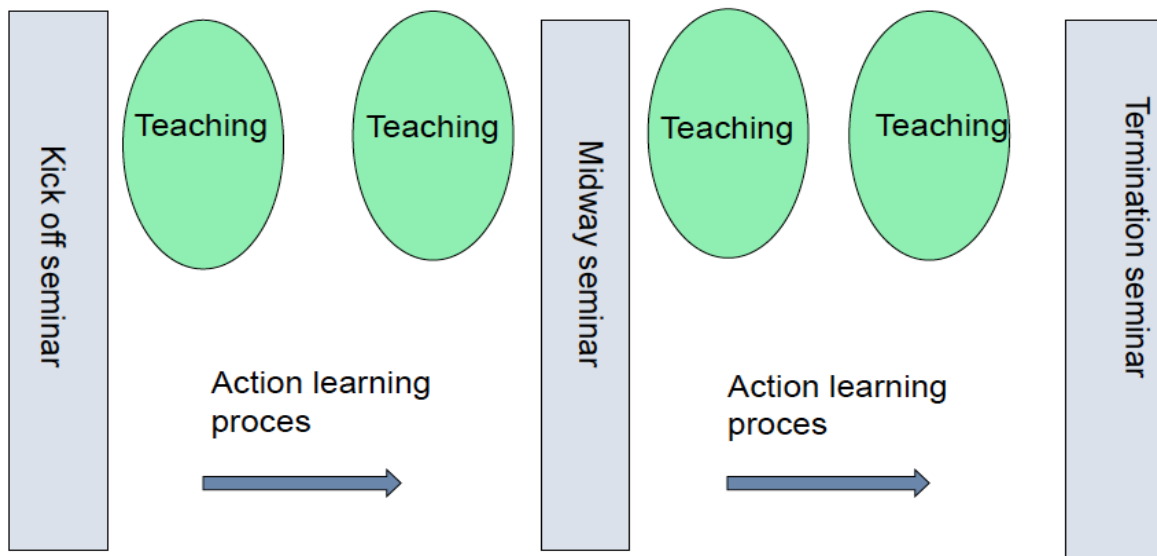
In the Kick-off seminar the participants were trained by Gundi Johannsen (SEMPRE partner from Denmark) the Action learning method. They were asked to define their own problem and defined exactly what they would like to change in their own organization. They were trained to work in group of 4 persons in their organization. Until the first learning group meeting there was created a common "google drive" folder for materials, Script and other relevant information.

Due to the fact that the most of participants were willing to work on deinstitutionalization process and new social service development for persons with intellectual disabilities (ID), e.g., group houses, day care centers, socialization arrangements, communication etc., the first learning group meeting was organized in Riga – at organization of Independent living. In the first round they were visiting different services for persons with ID. Afterwards they were working in their learning groups on their own problems, taking into consideration what they heard. Two experts: Ergotherapist, the leader of organization were assisting in the learning process.

Second learning day was organized in Maarja village, Estonia, - education, employment/ employability and living services for persons with ID. It was organized in similar way. First part, exchange of experience- visit in Maarja village. Second half of the day was organized in 2 parallel sessions. One session was organized for managers, politicians, responsible authorities from Vidzeme planning region with representative from Ministry of Welfare (responsible for service development and DI plan). It was organized in order to "break the ice" between State and local authorities that could not go on because of difference in understanding how to proceed with service development. Our goal was to create more neutral environment, to use the well-known Maarja village practice as best example in service development (story of its start and how they have grown to respectful place in local rural community). Other group - social service providers were working on their progress with defined problems they chose. We asked to lead the process lecturer in social work from Riga Stradins University, to help with tools/ knowledge. The aim of this learning session was to discuss the difficulties that are faced by social service providers and what are needed from us as process facilitators. Special team –building training activity was held in order to warm up the participants.

Midway seminar was organized in Valmiera – at Vidzeme of Applied Sciences. The aim was to discuss the progress and hear the presentations from the groups.

Two learning days were organized in Liepaja. It was study visit in Saldus municipality (rural local municipality with comprehensive services for different end-user groups: disadvantaged youth, persons with intellectual disabilities, elderly. It was an important insight into social practice with similar local financial/ practical situation to our learning groups. Learning groups were visiting also Liepaja city example of Day care center and group housing which one of few examples that is provided by municipality (not by NGO).

Second learning day was in-class group work on their defined problems. In between in-class learning group meetings individual support meetings were organized at their organizations by themselves.

At the closing termination seminar all groups presented their cases and results.

How many participants did you have and what were their background?

There were 6 groups in the Empowerment training module. Priekuļi worked in learning group of 6 person (they changed some times), Cēsis group – 4 persons, Valka – 2 persons working in group, Koceni – 3 persons, Smiltene grup – 2 persons, Aslviki – 1 person, Mazsalaca group – 1 person, in total: **19 persons**. Valmiera and Amata groups started the training module, but did not managed to finish it and could not present their final presentations. In the later stage also joined Aloja (2 persons), Rauna (1 person) and Alūksne group (2 persons), but they also did not continue and did not managed to finish the training.

Specific learning sessions were joined also by other representatives from participated organizations (even though they were not representing the specific learning group). As they were the manager level staff – authorities, politicians, we could not restrict their participation in the learning process.

For this reason we had to be rather flexible in organization of learning activities in learning groups (see previously mentioned example in Maarja village, we just organized a special session for politicians, managers and ministry of welfare separately). As a special case shall be mentioned Alsviki "learning group" at the boarding school for youth with intellectual and functional disabilities. There were many persons (**21 person**) participating in the first meeting but were not very active later on. In the end only headmaster participated at following activities and presented the results. He explained that there were ongoing the changes in organization – and several persons being actively involved in Empowerment training, are not working anymore at the institution.

So 37 persons were joining the Empowerment training activities for 1 or 2 times but did not come to an end with the presentation of their work.

All of the participants are social service providers representing different organizations of Vidzeme region (mainly municipalities, NGOs and Alsviki professional school for youth with ID). Most of them are social workers or professionals working in social service provision for end-users.

How did you use the different tools and materials?

- **Script** – we developed rather detailed script, according to the template. It worked very well, but we had to update it and make some minor changes after the first and second learning session in order to be more responsive to their needs. We also had to be rather flexible with time lines as it was summer period and it was very hard to mobilize groups to work on.
- **Films:** Gundi showed the film to the group and it was explained, translated. It was very helpful.
- **Presentations:** we (facilitators) prepared additional presentation tools (on communication, social work) and were giving mutual reflections on how we see they are working on. We were additionally preparing learning material on different topics that could be helpful for their cases/ problems. They wanted to have more presentations on special professional

topics. So we managed to have some experts to come with some additional examples that were used as learning material. It was rather difficult to motivate (encourage) to search for the materials and to find their own techniques etc. Language barrier might be the main reason. Therefore they appreciated the study visits and exchange of best practices, and in-class training at these places as a way of "presentation" in action learning process. When the most of them were studying there were no practical examples and it is very hard to work without an "imagination" what is expected from them in service development process. So there were the need to combine teaching process and their own learning process in empowerment training.

- **Action learning concept**: the SEMPRE train the trainer materials and readings were used for application of action learning method. They could not understand it from the beginning but only recognized the usefulness of it in the end. The principle of it worked in all cases (19) but not all of them were well-organized or with enough supportive resources. For some groups it was hard to work in groups in their working environment. They agreed that learning group meetings were useful periodically for exchange with other groups and also for getting additional supportive resources.

- **Action learning templates**: action learning templates were working well with some minor changes and corrections (to be more precise in our language usage). Our social work terminology is different from English and still not alive, making it difficult to understand.

How did the concept work as a whole?

1. The concept was interesting, absolutely new for them and they agreed that there was enough time to think about what they learned between the learning group meetings. They very much appreciated the way of implementing it: the diversity of tools that were applied, combining both theory/ practice, exchange of experience etc. Fulfilled and responsive content mobilized them to try and work on their problems.

2. It was rather hard for them to understand what is expected from them in the beginning. It was still rather hard in application of action learning method to engage the end-users. Understanding of the end-user involvement in the social service development need longer period of time. Too many barriers (personal, cultural, traditional, environmental etc.) are set in the minds of social service providers that cannot be changed with one training module. However, the process was initiated and they really tried to involve the end-users in their work more actively.

3. Participants would like to have Empowerment training as a module offered on specific themes (e.g., communication, inter-cross sectional organizational cooperation, specific themes about person's of ID needs (sexuality, aggression, care, self-help, independent living as part of quality of life framework). It would be good if they were engaged in the development of the training module and Script (in similar way like we did in Denmark), if it is possible. They would be more evolved in definition of themes.

Proposals for the final concept:

The module shall be planned in longer time period (one semester). Empowerment tools and action learning method can be explained in one day in the beginning, but still have to be repeated again and again during the time. It is rather new concept and quite hard in its implementation. They are very trained to be the decision makers – decide over the other's lives, and it is rather hard to them to apply the humanistic view, which is a new in our post-soviet tradition. A theory would help more but again language barrier is an obstacle to obtain the information and read original texts. Quite a lot of work was spent on translation and summarizing the different materials. There were sort of two parallel working methods: (1) we were working with their mind-sets, on the one hand – had to change the directions from seeing the end-user's as pure recipients of social services (stereotypical view of seeing the end-users as not being able to act) to think of person as able to act in one or another way. It would be more easier to work with the groups if they were more skilled on humanistic, human right, justice approaches. (2) their own organizational social work practices are rather inflexible, hierarchical dependent, very diverse in availability of resources. Therefore, it was very important to understand each groups realistic area of action – how far they can work with their problems and what can/ cannot be solved in terminated period of time. Action learning method is helpful for the concrete definition of problem, its focus and concrete actions in process. In the final presentations it was interesting that all of them came with their new ideas or proposals how to continue. They had developed new visions and are willing to use this method in their daily work practice in the future.