

A best practice example of a 'NEETS' social and professional integration in Seine et Marne (outskirts of Paris, France)



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A France Bénévolat project that involves volunteers to support the social inclusion of 'NEETS' (Youth not in Education, Employment or Training). Has been co-financed by the Île de France Region through the European social Fund.

France has around 1.900.000 'NEETS'. The initial objective of the project was to reintegrate in the city of Chelles 20 young "NEETS" into society.

After one year, the volunteers of France bénévolat Seine et Marne succeeded in reintegrating 85 of them and to incorporate them in the circle of training, employment and also as volunteers in other districts and as a source of supports to other young people facing similar challenges.

« Confidence, mutual respect, kindness, solidarity », have become the 4 key words of success

The story goes as follow :

1° The observance period

France Bénévolat obtained premises at the heart of where 'NEETS' were living where they were observed for a few weeks and were questioned and even challenged about their motives for being there: What is France Bénévolat doing here? Do they want to spy on us? Are they working for the government, for the police? Are they disguised social workers?

When the young people discovered that the France Bénévolat team didn't belong to these different categories but were volunteers (elderly ones and young adults) and had come to them only with no other purpose but to listen to them and to help them and that even one of the volunteers had themselves once been a NEET then they were slowly accepted allowing the work to start. There were still some challenges for some parts such as for example to get the identities or to sign the attendance sheet was not an option for many of the young people as they felt that as an intrusion into their private life.

2° Building collective projects

The team started to work with the two most reluctant 'NEETS' with the objective of bringing them to success. Confidence was built by showing that they were cared for and considered important and not just ignored and invisible in society. They accepted to become 'NEETS' Ambassadors, becoming examples for the others, spokespeople of what could become possible. They became free to choose what seemed possible to them. They started to value their new skills by accepting sometimes to fail. They took part in various projects like career forums, architecture projects, fashion shows, becoming self entrepreneurs, or having missions in other associations.

On their way to success, they constructed first collective life projects with the France bénévolat volunteers and then their own life project. Every step was based on carefully listening to their request, in taking them seriously, in always being kind. The main practice was to do together and not separately. The goal was to fundamentally change attitudes from «we are useless and there is nothing to expect from life» to «we can show how useful we can be and how much we can give» The collective projects were rather basic such as in a food bank or in a home for elderly people. Individual projects were not so successful.

3° Individual coaching

The team and in particular the team leader, Nathalie Tisserand, took care of every 'NEET' individually in order to clarify their situation like taking them to a Town Hall, to Court if they had committed an offence, to guidance counsellors, to training sessions, etc.

With this, the France bénévolat team slowly shifted from addressing urgent issues to a more peaceful pace where personal methodologies could be set up for feeling better in society, for helping younger ones to stay in school instead of dropping out, or even for supporting them in their studies.

Along the way, these 'NEETS' have made some remarks regarding the team such as : «by being with us, you serve a real purpose and are not wasting your time», or «you are going to teach us how to be nice» or «we want to find a job and arrive smiling each morning».

The premises have become permanent and the 'NEETS' are in charge of its opening and management with the France bénévolat team.

All this work has enabled them to acquire new competences, to understand society's codes, to resocialize and ultimately to become proactive within society. They have even become quite demanding as far as well doing, well behaving and respecting new codes are concerned as if they were discovering a new world where they could find their own place.

The success of this social integration is based on mutual trust and respect, on kindness without prior consideration of their past, on openness and sincerity and working together as a harmonious team

4° Valorisation of their efforts in every possible way

See examples below

Some prevailing characteristics

1) Resourcefulness

It is incredible how resourceful young people who become 'NEETS' can be. They learn to survive in a hostile environment giving them a capacity that other young people in more fortunate situations have. They can learn to change their destructive vision of life into a creative vision of a society which they can in turn help change in a positive way. What also helps and speeds up the process is that their competences in ICT can often be high.

2) A total solidarity of the group especially concerning the integration procedures for themselves and for the younger ones.

Very strong solidarity as a group including those with special needs. Once a situation of trust is established then it is amazing how generous and helpful they can become.

3) A paradoxical relationship to the notion of authority

- A total allergy to any kind of external authority.
- A powerful relationship to the internal authority of the group, very structured, even brutal as far as younger ones are concerned(« it is for their own good »). They consider that they are doing useful peer support.
- An acceptance without any problem of an adult's authority if they have confidence in them. They need to feel a certain degree of charisma and empathy and feel that they are not being judged/ evaluated and that they are really being really listened to.

4) A reference to the future :

Paradoxical behaviours : When they came to the France bénévolat premises, the young people had not entirely lost hope in the future but they no longer believed in it. But the very beginning of a success, of a valorisation give them back confidence. A simple smile can help them a lot.

5) Their relation to work

They seem to have less difficulty in finding a job, but again, in a paradoxical manner :

- Small precarious jobs when they need money but which have no integrative nor socialising value.
- Genuine choices of training after a strong and hard support from the France bénévolat team. They consider this training as a first step towards employment.

6) Volunteering, a first sign of identity and of appreciation

After a first long and complex phase of rebuilding reciprocal links between them and adults (the team) they feel a social acknowledgement when adults come to them (the team) for free and without being paid. (« I must have a certain value because they are interested in myself, for myself, without expecting anything from me.

The volunteers slowly but surely appear as « protective figures »

They « sign moral contracts » with the 'NEETS'. These contracts are often fragile. (« *you shall no longer mess around* » or « *obviously I don't want to disappoint you* »

7) The concept of Ambassadors : a major issue

Gradually the most involved 'NEETS' were asked to give a hand to the France bénévolat team. These were nominated « Ambassadors » by Nathalie Tisserand , the president of FB77. These Ambassadors who are now 7 feel fully integrated in the France bénévolat team and behave as « big brothers », « mediators », « potential multipliers for other districts ».

They even have elaborated a charter which they have signed. For them, this signature is a way to show that they now belong fully to their society.

8) A great facility to show gratitude

A simple « thank you » and acknowledgement for what they have done was before so unusual to them that it made and makes them feel very good. The Volunteer Passport award ceremony that they get plays an important role in their acceptance of society