

## **REPORT: MIND PROJECT MEETING IN LATVIA**

### Preparation and organisation of the MIND project partners' meeting and presentation of family mediation method in Latvia

The preparations had started in October after the meeting in Slovenia. The date of the MIND project meeting in Latvia has been fixed for 30<sup>tieth</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup> of October, 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> of November 2006.

At the working meeting we have agreed on the concept of the family mediation presentation. Participants in project from part of Society Skalbes have decided to organise the conference on the first part of day approximately 4 hours long with a coffee break.

A major part of preparations of the meeting was concentrated in finding the potential persons and organisations which would be interested in the method of family mediation. We have focused mostly on people and organisations where the family mediation could be and needed to be introduced, because there is only one pilot-project of family mediation in Ministry of Children and Family and one NGO which works in a field of legal mediation. From all the gathered information we have established a list of individuals and organisations that we have sent the invitation to in the first part of October. Invited persons were different professionals: specialists from Children Court, social workers, psychologists. We also had invited state officials (Ministry of Children and Family, Welfare Department of Riga city).

Invitations were sent to approximately 50 individuals or organisations, 35 by e-mail, and 15 by post. The interest and response for the seminary was quite big. The most frequent questions people asked were about the fee for the seminar and three-week training in Italy. In all we have sent around 20 e-mail answering to peoples questions.

Along with the invitation we have also sent program of the seminar. The preparations therefore included also a composition of invitation and program.

For the partners of the MIND project we have found hotel and made a reservation for three nights and changed the reservations when we got the exact dates of arrivals. We prepared an agenda for the partners including the schedule of focus groups, lunches and diners, and have organised everything necessary for the realisation of the program. We organised a travel by bus from Riga to Vilnius and informed project partners in Lithuania about arriving date and time.

The preparation for the place of the seminar were oriented in finding the adequate conference room (big enough for 40 people and still in the budget), so we made reservation for the conference room (coffee break (tea, coffee, snacks) was organized by the owners of the location).

The preparations have also included the translation of presentations for seminar (H. Van den Steen).

The Mind project, family mediation method and the role of the Society Skalbes in the project was presented to all invited people.

We have also sent the press release and invitation to the seminar by e-mail to more than 10 newspapers, radios and television houses. One journalist from a leading newspaper has attended the seminar.

A week before the seminar was dedicated to last minute preparations for the seminar. We have searched the legal frame on mediation in Latvia and have invited the experts in this field to the seminar (coordinator of pilot-project about family mediation in Ministry of Children and Family, director of Welfare department of Riga city). We prepared info material for participants and journalist.

### FOCUS GROUP, 31/10/2006

This focus group was focused on the seminar and its preparations. All partners were present except partner from Lithuania.

In the beginning Dace Beināre presented the preparation and organisation of the seminar next day. Also Michel Pardaens introduced himself. We presented the structure of the participants and their previous experience with the mediation. Family mediation in Latvia is practically unknown, only few organisations already perform mediation in their work, that's why this seminar is very important in starting to inform specialists and society about family mediation. At the focus group we discussed the program of the seminar, especially changes related to presentation of Michel Pardaens. We agreed that form of free discussion would be the most appropriate considering the little information about family mediation in Latvia, so the participants could ask any questions about it.

Also we agreed on the travel plan to Vilnius, Lithuania for the next seminar on 4<sup>th</sup> on November.

An important topic was three-week training for mediators in Lucca, Italy. As all the organisational things were cleared out, the discussion was focused on the criteria for selection of the candidates for the training. There were already following criteria defined for selection of the training candidates: objective, like university degree, knowledge of English, knowledge of computer, previous experience in the field, time to spend in Italy in training, and subjective like motivation for work, performing the family mediation in the future etc.

### Presentation of family mediation, 1/11/2006

The seminar started at 9 o'clock with the registration of the participants. 33 participants have applied for the seminar, but only 28 persons have actually attended the presentation. From that we see that the participation percent was high. Individuals of different professions have attended to the seminar: counsellors, social workers, presidents of different associations working in social field, psychologists, already working mediator. The participants came mainly from NGO's, public institutes and Centres for social work.

The main part of the seminar started at 9h30.

The program of the seminar:

Dace Beināre presented the MIND project partners and organisers and shortly presented the purpose of the seminar and MIND project, and organisation "Skalbes", followed by the presentations of the leading partner organisation from Italy and partner organisation from Slovenia. As nobody from Lithuanian partners could attend the seminar, Inese Ruka briefly presented their organisation.

Then director of Riga City Well-fare department presented "Cooperation between Riga City and NGOs in administration of social service".

The next presentation was from "Cietušo atbalsta centrs" ("Centre of Victims' Support") – organisation who uses legal mediation.

The next presentation was a speaker Nikola Dzina, coordinator from Children and Family Ministry pilot project "Mediation for solving family conflicts" – she presented results of 1 year long work with families, and pointed out the big interest for this service.

Discussions partly continued in a coffee break.

After coffee break Michel Pardaens from Belgium started a discussion about family mediation and answered on participants' questions. This part was very successful because the participants were highly enthusiastic and interested in questioning and listening. Among all the questions about family mediation there were few concerning the three-week training: course, program of the training, criteria for selection of the candidates, the date to apply for the training. All the participants filled out the questionnaires regarding evaluation of the seminar and their interest to participate in training in Italy.

### **Evaluation focus group, 1/11/2006**

After the seminar the partners have gathered for the evaluation focus group. We have stated that the seminar was well organised, the participants were interested in the given information. In Latvia only few people do mediation and even few of specialists of social field are common with mediation or recognize it, it means there is going to be a lot of information work to familiarize people in Latvia with family mediation.

We also shortly discussed the feed-back from participants' questionnaires – practically all of them said they wanted to receive further information about family mediation in Latvia.

The criteria for the selection of the candidates for training in Italy has to be determined as soon as possible, as there is little time left and the candidates must be informed as soon as possible – it was decided to leave this topic for focus group in Lithuania, so all the partners could discuss and decide.