



Roma mentoring

Roma mentoring is implemented by NGO Association for Probation and Mediation in Justice (SPJ) in co-operation with the Czech Probation and Mediation Service (PMS).

I. Idea

Roma mentoring is intended for members of the Roma minority who have received and serve alternative sentence or measure (e.g. community service sentence, conditional sentence with supervision) and are therefore clients of the Czech Probation and Mediation Service (PMS). Aim of the scheme is to encourage clients to fulfill obligations related to serving the alternative sentence (measure) and to lower risks of re-offending and social exclusion. The scheme improves effective work with clients as it increases their legal awareness and ability to make informed decisions. The Mentor method is based on the inclusion of community in the process of offenders' social reintegration. The mentoring service is provided by Roma mentor: trained layman, an adult from the Roma community who has expressed an interest in helping other Roma.

II. Goals

- Improve the effectiveness of work with Roma clients of PMS, who received (or could receive) or serve (or will serve) the alternative sentence or measure.
- Increase the number of Roma clients of PMS who fulfill the obligations related to serving the alternative sentence (measure) and therefore lower risks of their re-offending and social exclusion.
- Increases legal awareness of the members of Roma community and their ability to make informed decisions and solve their situation without risking (another) conflict with the law.

III. Implementation

Roma mentoring is **provided by Roma mentor** (*further we will use the term "mentor (he)" meaning both mentor-man and mentor-woman*): an adult from the Roma community who has expressed an interest in helping other Roma. Mentor is not a professional – he is a trained layman who graduated Mentor training by SPJ lasting 100 hours (60 hrs. of theory + 40 hrs. of practices). Theory includes methodology of mentors work, basics of the law, social work and effective communication, during practices mentors work with the clients of PMS under the supervision. After practices mentors pass the exam and receive the certificate. Qualification criteria for mentor: he is a member of Roma community, at least 18 years of age, has no criminal record and completed the Mentor training.

Mentors work as intermediaries between the PMS and the client (*further we will use the term "client (he)" meaning both client-man and client-woman*). Method of their work is based on motivating and guidance of the clients and inclusion of community in the process of offenders' social reintegration.

Most common mentors' tasks:

- Encouraging clients to fulfill obligations related to serving the alternative sentence (measure).
- Giving information about obligations ensuing from the sentence (measure) imposed and about the consequences of failing to fulfill them.
- House calls to clients.
- Assisting and supporting clients in their search for jobs, homes etc.
- Linking clients with other providers of professional services in the region.
- Accompanying clients to the PMS centre.
- Assisting clients in communicating with the authorities.
- Assisting in settling debts (e.g. through repayment schedules).
- Helping the PMS to understand the Roma community.
- Co-operation with community service providers.



Mentors receive a monthly group supervisions with a professional from SPJ (supervisor) to discuss cases and solve possible difficulties. The supervisor guarantees the quality of provided service in the region and assures proceeding of the professional growth of the mentors.

Close cooperation between the mentor and the probation officer is essential for the delivery of the alternative sentence/measure. It is very important to adjust respecting and equal relationship between Roma mentors and probation officers, with open mind to new methods and approaches (which is also the task of the supervisor). PMS officers choose suitable clients and they cooperate with mentors during the whole case. The PMS staff every 2 months evaluates effectiveness of mentor interventions and whole Roma mentoring scheme (standard evidence is used to track and increase impact of the program).

Most common cases in which is the scheme used

The PMS requests mentoring assistance for clients:

- who have **difficulty co-operating** with the PMS or fail to respond to the PMS' call altogether. In such cases, clients may have alternative sentences or measures changed to imprisonment. Therefore, the mentoring service is seen as the client's last resort, allowing him to get an explanation of what might happen and how he could avert the situation from someone with the same language and cultural background.
- with established contact with a probation officer who have **difficulty complying with the alternative sentence** rules or other conditions set by the court or public prosecutor.
- who do co-operate but **face a very high risk of social exclusion**. This includes, for instance, long-term unemployed clients, clients residing in socially excluded areas, juveniles, etc.
- PMS staff also use mentors when supervision by a probation officer is imposed under Act No. 218/2003 Coll. (Juvenile Justice Act).

IV. Key aspects

Roma mentoring has a positive impact in field of crime prevention and social integration of Roma minority because of its primary focus in lowering risk of social exclusion and re-offending of PMS's clients. The mentor work increases the client's social skills and boosts the client's self-confidence and social orientation. The mentor service is influential to whole community - it increases trust in relevant authorities, increases socio-economic standard of families and increases quality of family social ties.

Corner-stone of Roma mentoring is the participation of the members of the same (Roma) community in providing of the service. In Czech Republic, Roma mentoring is unique service in the field of crime and social exclusion prevention that uses potential of the Roma minority. The success of the scheme is based on cultural, language and ethnic closeness between mentor and his client. It enables the mentor to gain client's trust, communicate with him in his own language (both metaphorically and literally), effectively motivate him to fulfill alternative sentence or measure and link the client with other providers of professional services in the region. In Czech Republic exist many barriers that obstruct the communication between members of Roma minority and representatives of majority: distrust of Roma people in "white" officials, their little legal awareness and esteem for education, prejudices on both sides etc. Roma mentor, as member of the same community and a layman standing aside the state institution structure, is able to break through these barriers and make the communicational "bridge" between both sides. Mentor improves the knowledge of Roma people about their rights and obligations within the state legal system and therewithal helps PMS officers to orientate themselves in the Roma community, in relationships of its members and its system of values.

Success of Roma mentoring stands and falls with the personality of Roma mentor. Mentors are usually active individuals, with a strong interest to help the people of their own community. They are



men and women of different ages and professions, who are respected figures in the local Roma community and who often act as a positive model of social reintegration. When working with clients, the mentors can rely on their deep knowledge of the people and relationships within the community, often they personally know the particular client and his family and social background.

Roma mentoring also helps to increase the potential of Roma community, as it gives the Roma people who haven't attained vocational education the opportunity to participate on social work for their own community. During the Mentor training they get the basics of law and social work, during their work with clients and supervisions they improve their skills and professionally, personally grow and improve their position on job market.

V. Organizational aspects

Organization of Roma mentoring is provided by team consisting of project leader, coordinator and administrator.

When recruiting potential mentors (Mentor training participants), team cooperates with local PMS centers, municipal offices (Roma advisors, crime prevention managers), local Roma organizations and activists.

Mentor training contains of 60 hours of theory (which is provided by 2 trainers and usually divided to 3 three-day sessions, 20 hours each) and 40 hours of practices.

Roma mentors work with clients in the field, approx. 15 hours/month – this number comes from the mentors' time capacity, keeping the quality of the service and prevention of burn-out syndrome.

Group supervisions for mentors are provided monthly by supervisors in every region. One supervisor works with approx. 8-12 mentors. Mentors are obliged to attend supervision once a month during the practices and once every 2 months after finishing the Mentor training. Every 3 month the supervision is provided together with PMS officers, which is very helpful for maintaining the close cooperative relationship between Roma mentors and PMS officers.

PMS officers choose suitable clients, cooperate with mentors during the whole case and every 2 months evaluates effectiveness of mentor interventions and whole Roma mentoring scheme.

VII. Short history of realization

The basic concept of mentoring service has been inspired by the experience of the Danish Department of Prisons and Probation and was adapted by SPJ to the conditions of the Czech Republic in pilot project in 2004-2005 in South and Middle Bohemia Regions.

In 2005-2008 was developed standard system which was implemented and extended to other regions and cities in the Czech Republic. Until now, 132 Roma mentors were trained in 9 regions of Southern, Northern, Middle, Eastern and Western Bohemia and in the capital of Prague and city of Ostrava. The mentors cooperated with 29 centers of PMS and they provided the mentor service to more than 1100 Roma clients of PMS. According to evaluation of PMS officers, the long-term average success of mentors' intervention exceeds 50% (Without intervention of the Roma mentors, not less than 75% of the clients would not fulfilled the obligations related to alternative sentence/measure and therefore judge would changed the alternative sentence to imprisonment, which would increased the risk of re-offending and social exclusion of these clients.).

In 2006 – 2008, Roma mentoring was successfully applied on another target group - Roma families in critical social situation from which a child could be send to institutional care (pilot project Empowering of Family implemented in 5 cities of Southern Bohemia Region).

Currently there are around 70 active Roma mentors who cooperate with centers of PMS in 22 cities in 8 regions of Czech Republic.



In June 2009 Roma mentoring received special mention of the Crystal Scales of Justice Prize during the annual meeting of Justice Forum in Brussels. The prize is aimed at discovering and promoting innovative and effective practices, in order to improve the operation of the public system of criminal justice in the Member States of the European Union and the Council of Europe.

In September 2011 visited Czech Republic Dr David Baxter from Cranfield School of Management to interview people who participate in realization of Roma mentoring (project leader, coordinator, Roma Mentors, PMS officer) to investigate the success factors for innovation in the justice area (topics of interest included offender management, community crime reduction, and victim support). Roma Mentoring was chosen as one of the 4 case studies of this research: one in the Czech Republic, one in the Netherlands, and two in the UK (<http://www.steria.com/uk/cranfield-report>).

VIII. Future perspectives

Mentoring is a key activity of SPJ, so SPJ seeks to ensure sustainability and continuation of Roma mentoring. The Scheme has a strong support from Czech Probation and Mediation Service and also from the Crime Prevention Department of Czech Ministry of Interior: in 2009 Roma mentoring was included in Program of Crime and Extremism Prevention "Dawn". SPJ received a donation from European Social Fund for project Roma Helps Roma which will make possible to implement Roma mentoring in all above named regions till 2013 (duration of the project is 30 months).

In 2011, SPJ decide to use the skills of Roma mentors in monitoring hate crime and hate violence cases in Usti Region, finding and helping the victims (pilot project Hate Crime/Violence Monitoring in Usti Region, funded by Stiftung EVZ, Germany).

From the long-term view we see the main acquisition of Roma mentoring in using Roma mentors as cross cultural mediators between Roma clients and state officials or providers of social services, between Roma minority and majority.

To know more about Roma mentoring please contact:

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