

Understanding My Journey Case Study – STRIM

When it comes to developing one's social competences, mediation and communication skills are only a part of a package. Recently we took part in a project "Understanding My Journey" that helps to develop and practice many more skills useful for young people. "Understanding My Journey: Soft Skills Development for Young People" (UMJ) was a three year (Feb-2018 – Nov-2020) educational project implemented by non-governmental organisations in 7 countries: Croatia, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Poland, Portugal and the UK. The aim of the project was to develop tools to support young people and youth workers in the process of conscious and structured soft skills development.

As a result of the cooperation, the following results and tools are now available: Interpreting Soft Skills: Research to identify soft skills for young people's personal and professional development, the Understanding My Journey Toolkit, the Understanding My Journey App, and the Understanding My Journey Practitioners Guidebook.

Association for Youth Development and Integration STRIM had a chance to test those tools in our work with EVS/ESC volunteers. ESC – European Solidarity Corps (previously known as European Voluntary Service – EVS) is a program that allows young people under 30 years old to travel abroad for up to a year and engage in voluntary and social actions in the country of their choosing. During their stay, they receive mentorship and are guided throughout the process of soft skills development. As a result, they receive a special certificate confirming the development of those skills called "Youthpass", which allows them to map 8 specific competences that they may have developed.

The UMJ Toolkit has wonderfully complemented the work with volunteers on their soft skills development. ESC coordinators from STRIM and associated organisation have used the Toolkit as a guiding map for the volunteers to follow. When volunteers had to work on their own projects (whether it was a social action, exhibition or other activity) they were encouraged to monitor the process using UMJ Toolkit. Thanks to that approach, they were more conscious of the steps they are taking and the effect such initiatives have on them as people. It was also easier for them to monitor and map their development during the whole ESC project as they had a point of reference in the Toolkit. The Toolkit allows to immediately check how does a given action in the 'outside' world influence and individual in the scope of their soft skills. It also supports self-evaluation and helps to take an educated look back to see the distance travelled and the real development that one has made while working on their soft skills.

As a result, our volunteers were much more conscious of their soft skills development during the whole ESC project. It helped them not only to better evaluate themselves and complete their Youthpass certificate, but also to be more aware of their strengths. And for young people entering job market immediately after ESC, there are hardly any more valuable things than that.