Youth Center Probishtip

Name of the organisation
Здружение на граѓани ГРИТ Пробиштип

Website of the organisation
http://gritngo.nicepage.io/

Location of the organisation
ul. Nada Mihajlova br. 34, 2210 Probishtip, North Macedonia

E-mail address of the organisation
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Good practice aspect(s)/themes of youth work
- Active citizenship/activism
- Youth work in rural areas

Good practice category
A practice of processes and methods

Good practice aim & purpose
The primary aim and purpose of this practice was to empower young people in the local community of Probishtip in North Macedonia. The goal was to provide them with the necessary tools, knowledge, and opportunities for personal and professional development, with a special focus on nurturing active citizenship among young people within the local community.

Good practice description
This practice is rooted in the participation of volunteers in the Erasmus+ program and the European Voluntary Service (EVS) in Slovakia. This experience equipped a young person of Probishtip with valuable skills and perspectives, so upon returning to her hometown, she initiated local projects, including “My Space” which aimed to mobilize young people to hold decision-makers and politicians accountable for their pre-electoral promises. This project successfully empowered 20 young individuals with activism skills, leading to impactful guerilla actions and productive meetings with municipal youth officers. The organization, GRIT, continued working on the process of opening a youth center, as mandated by North Macedonia’s Law for Youth Policy and Participation. Despite numerous challenges and limited resources, the young activists managed to successfully open the first youth center in the East region and the fifth in the entire country.

The Youth Center initiative started with activities that led to opening this question in the community supported by a foreign donor (Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation) through the below-mentioned project “Support for electoral reforms”- initiative “My Space”. As per the country Law for youth policy and participation, the municipal Youth Center is managed in collaboration with the municipality with the chosen (through an open call) organization (in this case GRIT). Therefore, the resources for the Youth Center are shared between the municipality (which has provided a budget for the employment of one youth worker for the first year, coverage of utility costs, and minimum

requirements for activities and equipment for the normal functioning of the Youth Center), for the implementation of the yearly program we had support of 10 000 EUR from the municipality, the rest of the activities and resources are provided by the organization (GRIT) that manages the Youth Center, through donor projects. Another resource when opening the youth center was the Agency for Youth and Sport which provided the Youth Center with basic equipment when it started (2 laptops, desks, chairs, lazy begs, and a printer). And, last but not least resource was the local young people who volunteered their time and agreed to do the renovation of the space. (painting and decorations of the walls, and space, in January 2023)

The Youth center provides various valuable services for the young people from the town. It is a place where they can spend quality free time by being engaged in programs of non-formal and informal education, volunteering opportunities (young people get to be part of the processes and activities within the organization), we offer mentoring support, access to information for educational and development activities, and we also serve as a channel for connecting young people with influential and recognized professionals on local, national and international level.

The center is open for young people to always come and share their ideas. What we practice when young people visit the youth center is to ask them what they think about the activities that we plan or the ones that we already have implemented. That is how we collect direct feedback from them. Besides this, we also are opening the space for the young people to suggest ideas that we will support them to implement. For example, the volunteers that were engaged in the Youth Center during the last semester have had their own clubs according to their interests and knowledge (literacy club, IT club, theater club), young people that come are encouraged and supported to transform their ideas into projects that they will apply for funding. We often collect opinions from young people about certain topics or activities that we want to implement and provide for them through social media accounts (ex. questions and answers on Instagram Story)

The main connection between “My Space” and the Youth Center is that “My Space” was the reason the youth center was brought into existence. The initiative “My Space” informed the youth of the town about the concept of having a municipal youth center, it has given the young people an insight into what activities such a place can offer and why it will be worth advocating for. As part of this initiative, the initial meeting between the municipal representatives and the young people in the town has happened and the voices of the local young people were heard and responded to. This initiative also included filming and sharing on social media a few short videos of young people that explain what will be the benefits of the youth center for the local youth. The end of this initiative was concluded with a specific outcome which was a meeting between representatives from the organization GRIT, Municipality representatives, the Prime minister’s advisor on youth, and representatives from the Agency of Youth and Sport, on which the possibilities and opportunities for collaboration and support were discussed and the process was initiated.

This Youth center is what we call a Municipal youth center. As most of the youth centers that existed before the Law for Youth Participation and Policy, were project-funded and supported, this is a whole new concept that is based on collaboration between the local government and the civic sector. As explained above the whole procedure for establishing these youth centers is going through the local government and the mayors. The City Council is making a decision to provide a space where the Youth center will be located, the decision to open a youth center, and then an open call for organizations that will manage the youth center. After an organization is selected the organization, in this case GRIT, signed an agreement (on 3-5 years) with the mayor and we started to implement the

work program that we submitted in our application and was approved by the city council.

The municipality does not have a direct role in running the center. However, GRIT is submitting a yearly program and budget for the Youth Center that needs to be approved by the City Council, as the municipality is partially providing the budget for the functioning of the Youth Center. GRIT on the other hand is responsible for employing the staff that works in the Youth Center, and it also provides quarterly reports on the work done in the Youth Center and also a final Narrative and Financial Report at the end of the year.

Good practice result & concrete effects
The concrete effects of implementing our good practice have been significant:

- In January 2023, successful opening of the Youth Center, which is now managed by the organization, GRIT.
- The center currently employs one trained youth worker and one trainee.
- It offers a wide range of activities designed to foster the personal and professional development of local youth.
- We've engaged 6 local young volunteers, 1 foreign volunteer, and 2 trainees, providing them with valuable opportunities to develop skills and actively participate in decision-making processes.
- We actively promoted the center's activities within local schools, encouraging more young people to get involved.
- Our youth center maintains an active Instagram profile, serving as the primary communication channel with local young people.
- Importantly, many of the young participants in our activities have had the chance to experience such opportunities for the very first time, enabling them to connect with peers from our community and beyond.

Good practice chapter of the European Charter on Local Youth Work
Organisation and practice