

A university-social service collaboration: design, development and evaluation of a training program to enhance friendships

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Introduction: Despite people with intellectual disability (ID) positively value having friendships, research suggests that they usually have reduced social networks, and these are often composed of family members and/or professionals. We present the collaborative experience between the University of Girona and a social service oriented to the ordinary job inclusion of people with ID. We designed, developed and evaluated a Training Program (TP) aimed at enhancing the construction of social networks and friendships among young people with ID. This experience attempts to link the university students' learning with the real needs of their work field, incorporating dynamics of collaboration between the academic and professional fields.

Method: Some Social Education students and some service users with ID identified –through focus groups- the skills needed to establish and maintain friendships. The first ones developed, with guidance from university professors and service professionals, some of the 12 sessions of the TP. A master student and a service professional developed the program at the university twice and evaluated its outcomes.

Results: The participants agree on the usefulness of the TP through expressing their desire to put into practice many of the worked aspects. They positively value using videos related to the different worked topics. The themes that most value working are: taking care of the relationship and maintaining it, friendship values, and conflict solving strategies.

Conclusions: It is a collaborative experience that benefits all the participants. University students design contextualised proposals, favouring their motivation. They approach their professional field in a practical way. The youth with ID increases their probability of having greater success in their present and future friendships. Service professionals learn new and different work dynamics and methodologies. However, we should consider increasing the participation of university students, allowing them to collaborate as trainers in the different sessions of the TP.

Key words: University-social service collaboration, social skills, friendship.