

UNIC

towards User-centred funding models for long term Care

UNIC 2nd Belgian Transferability Workshop:

Service providers as social entrepreneurs through a personal budgets model

07/12/22 – Hybrid

Report

This event was the 2nd on a series of 3 regional transferability workshops in Belgium. EASPD opened the meeting with an explanation of the UNIC project and pointed out that the goal of this workshop is to raise awareness on personal budgets and how this funding model guarantees more freedom in decision making following the service users' needs and wishes.

The main target group of this event were service providers for persons with disabilities and 3 service providers from Flanders using a personal budget funding model since 2016 joined EASPD's office to share their experiences. The event started with a brief introduction from HUBBIE on the model in Flanders and how in practical terms service providers moved from a traditional funding system to a personal budget one. And it continued with Vlaams Welzijnsverbond explaining how this transition opened new opportunities for service providers, following an entrepreneurial mindset, followed by Dominiek Savio highlighting the challenges that service providers face and how can public authorities support them to overcome these. Lastly, DFI closed the event with a presentation of the Service Delivery Tool, a self-assessment questionnaire to support service providers reflect on the way their service is organized and delivered and how they can move towards more person-centred forms of support.

Key points from the discussion:

- In Flanders: in the traditional funding model service providers were receiving subsidies and they had a permit from the government to provide care and support for a specific amount of service users. The amount they were receiving was fixed and the same amount of subsidy for each person and the service users was participating in a part of the costs.
- In Flanders with the introduction of the personal budgets model, the budget goes directly to the service users and the budget depends on the amount of care and support the person needs and the intensity of the care. The service providers don't have a limit on the people they will support and on the disability they have. The costs of housing and living are not included in the budget and there are paid directly by the person.
- The experience shared by HUBBIE was the possibility with the personal budgets model to merge with another organisation and that provide them with more expertise and the possibility to deliver a larger

and more flexible offer for the users of the services, a more stable organization to deal with the financial and other impacts and a stronger position in Brussels.

- They are now supporting more than 350 persons with disabilities in Brussels, with various support needs and in different settings, they can support people in their own environment, house, community and they even offer support to persons with disabilities in prison. They also support mainstream services in adapting their services to people with disabilities as well as reaching neighborhoods and engaging with them to promote inclusion.
- Implementing the personal budget model brings a huge change for existing social services. The mindset of social entrepreneurship is key to implement the personal budget system. It brings positive effects such as more choice in the offer of services, more freedom and the possibility of a broader target group when it comes to service users.
- In practice there are still open questions about the new system: confusion on how to organise the budget, existing sectoral boundaries, caution towards the new system of personal budget, questions about marketing, efficiency and collaboration.
- Personal budgets provide a more client focused, sharper and more transparent mission, service providers are offering services on demand, rather than standardised services.
- However, the insufficient financial resources and long waiting times for some target groups in receiving their personal budget create challenges also to the service provision.
- The financial resources for service providers are depending on the number of contracts they will have with their clients. Due to the waiting lists, service providers are not sure when they will get a new client with a budget; or they have a client who is waiting for their support, but has no appropriate budget. This causes financial uncertainty.
- This may also increase the ‘competition’ between service providers. Some service providers are tempted to support people with disabilities (with a budget) for which they don’t have the necessary competence/experience/expertise.
- The implementation of the personal budget system can also have an impact on the relationship between the person with disability/familial network and the service provider. The system of personal budget is rather a complex system and it requires some skills of the people with disabilities or their familial network (e.g. knowledge about the system). Some people can negotiate their service offer but others cannot, and this creates inequality and mistrust to the service provider.
- Some things to consider when implementing a personal budget model:
 - Reduce the complexity of the system and invest further in information initiatives to increase the knowledge about the system. As well as facilitate access to ‘assistant organisations’ who support people in understanding and managing their budget.
 - Rethink the rules of a system, since it shall support in improving the financial position/income for people with disabilities, so they can fully participate in the society on an equal basis and ensure that the support and care will be affordable.
- Ensuring the quality of service provision is crucial when introducing a personal budgets system. The UNIC partners have developed the Service Delivery Tool which is a questionnaire that service providers can use to reflect on the quality of the service they provide and identify how to offer more person-centred care and support.