

## **News 10**

Understanding the barriers to learning

**As part of our project, partners are exploring the key themes of:**

Barriers for learning for non-traditional learners:

For the purpose of our project, our young people are learners who are those that for various reasons have become “disadvantaged” in that they encounter obstacles created by society that restrict access to resources, benefits and opportunities. The structural causes that underlie disadvantage include disability, race, ethnicity, gender, religion, indigenous or national origin, labour force status (employed or unemployed), income status and geographical location (remoteness from urban-based services) and low educational attainment or at risk of anti-social behaviour.

The concept of disadvantaged, in respect of learning, is not centred primarily on those structural causes cited above but focused on denied access to the opportunities needed for self-sufficiency. People see themselves as disadvantaged to the extent that they are denied access to the same opportunities found useful by the majority of society. These include such tangible things as health, education, employment and capital and more personal issues such as autonomy, responsibility and self-respect.

A major feature of “disadvantage” therefore is the presence of barriers to self-sufficiency. These barriers are the ways in which people are denied access to needed tools to support their development, and include:

**Unavailability of Resources:** Resources (employment, training, business capital, etc.) may be unavailable in sufficient quality or quantity to certain groups.

**Inaccessibility of Resources:** Even if available, resources could still be inaccessible to certain groups, because of cost, poor design or distance.

**Society’s Regard for a Group:** Disadvantaged groups are often unappreciated & devalued by wider society.

**Institutionalised responses** (government, programs, agencies, systems etc.) to the needs of certain groups may be inadequate or counterproductive.

The labour efforts or other forms of contribution of some groups may be undervalued in the marketplace.

Overcoming disadvantage in terms of learning and employment, therefore, means overcoming or removing the barriers to self-sufficiency or self-determination. This can take many forms, depending on the pattern presented but would include enabling or empowering the learner’s own efforts to develop the opportunities or resources needed for their own self-sufficiency.

A key theme in our project will be to provide an EU-wide context for a comparative analysis report that details the use of gaming and teaching methodologies and pedagogies used by partner states in supporting a variety of disadvantaged learners through the use of various types of games. In this respect, we have developed a ten point plan that we believe will turn disadvantage into “advantages”. This is represented in the form of a mnemonic.

**Autonomy:** Disadvantaged young people must be allowed and encouraged to develop their skills in ways that are true to their principles, ideals, and capabilities. They should not be denied access to informal learning if that is their chosen path. The opportunity to develop their talents must also be

available. We hope to test this notion through the use of engaging young people through games.

**Development incentives:** Disadvantaged people need support in their efforts to achieve self-sufficiency in terms of education, training and employment. Too many existing resources, alleged to serve a disadvantaged group, in fact perform a disservice, by reinforcing dependency or by falling short of expectations, thereby compromising the reality of self-development.

**Vision:** Disadvantaged young people need to know about opportunities available to them and to know how to use them to promote their own skills and development.

**Access to opportunities:** It is important to present young people with opportunities that broaden their horizons and that lead to the development and advancement of the young person based on merit, and the freedom and means to pursue work, education or training opportunities in a supported environment.

**Networks:** People in similar situations need each other to form a base of support for creating, using, and maintaining the tools for self-sufficiency.

**Taking responsibility for decision-making:** Disadvantaged young people should not be deprived the opportunity to participate in decisions that affect their own livelihood and well-being.

**Access to education:** Education that enables progression should enhance the values of someone's own culture and be relevant to the values of other segments of society, to their own potential for development, and to employment opportunities.

**Growth:** Enabling the development of the young person that leads to positive life and career changes

**Emotional Energy:** To grow towards self-sufficiency, disadvantaged young people require the sort of personal and emotional energy that comes from self-respect. We need to support young people to reconsider their role in society, perhaps seeing themselves as leaders and drivers of this new world order instead of being a vital and necessary drain on limited resources.

**Support systems that are responsive:** These include accessible transportation, safety and security, food and clothing, strong neighbourhoods, social services, advocacy and influence, and social, recreational, and aesthetic opportunities for young people.