

„Healthy life - first steps in creating happy future (Healthylife)

No. LLI-329)

THE RECOMMENDATIONS, RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS OF STUDY

"HEALTHY LIFE"

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Visaginas house of Creativity in Lithuania and Local municipality of Dagda in Latvia under the project “Healthy Life - The First Steps to Happy Future”/ Healthylife, LLI-329, funded from Interreg V-A Latvia–Lithuania Programme 2014–2020, conducted a study “Healthy Life“. The purpose of this study is to identify and determine the level of knowledge healthy lifestyles and environmental awareness among at-risk children and youth.

Tasks are:

1. Determine the importance of a healthy lifestyle for the youth: active lifestyle, knowledge about healthy eating, etc.
2. Find out what percentage of young people involved in sports, what conditions are needed for effective fitness,
3. To analyze the respondents' opinion about smoking, alcohol consumption and drugs, to find out at what level children and youth are aware of the negative influence of psychotropic substance on the human body.

The target group of the survey – at-risk youngsters and children between the ages of 10 to 18 years, who were attendees at Visaginas house of Creativity in Lithuania and Dagda Secondary school in Latvia. International researches states that at - risk children and young people (from families with small incomes, or from single-parent families, children with developmental problems) do not get enough information about the impact and influence of bad habits on the body, care less about their health, they are more at risk of substance use. Also it should be noted that children at risk are less informed about the importance of ecology in the modern world, the impact of human actions on the environment.

A total of 158 young people aged 10 to 18 were surveyed. 80 respondents from Dagda district (Latvia) and 78 respondents from Visaginas district (Lithuania) was involved in the study.

1. Analyzing demographic data, it was noted that older respondents in Lithuania are more active in participating in surveys. However, there is a decrease in male participation in the general sample. The results of many studies suggest that involving boys in different activities is more difficult. And the results of the study in Latvia showed that 68 of the respondents involved in the study, was noted that they are Latvians by nationality. At the same time, 43 questionnaires were completed in Latvian, and 37 in Russian. This means that, despite the fact that most students recognize themselves as Latvians, almost half of them are more comfortable using Russian, which is obviously also their family language. ***It is recommended that non-formal education program developers note to these results and to include more innovative methods and activities in order to interest the target group in participating in programs and note to possible linguistic barriers.***

2. **Knowledge about healthy eating.** When assessing respondents' answers about the rules of healthy eating, it was observed that in Lithuania Visaginas district about $\frac{1}{3}$ of all surveyed young people think that they need to eat less than three times, while in Latvia Dagda district $\frac{1}{4}$ of the surveyed young people only partly agree or disagree that having breakfast is a healthy eating habit indicates the need to focus on this issue working out the non-formal education program "Healthy food". Young people consider energy drinks harmful and are aware of their influence on a person's health. However, it is not a small part of the surveyed young people partly agree that energy drinks are not harmful and think that they can be used without problems. Study data show that the highest risk group for using energy drinks are young people aged 10 to 16 - about $\frac{1}{3}$ of all surveyed young people do not consider the use of energy drinks a bad habit for their health. These results should be taken seriously. In Lithuanian the results of the survey indicate that there is a certain lack of knowledge about the composition of foodstuffs, which is why it is necessary to deepen the knowledge of the respondents about this. In Latvian the most of respondents believe that the use of fruit and vegetables twice a week is sufficient. The special attention should be paid to this tendency as well. Almost all young people agree with the statement that the use of sweets and sweetened carbonated beverages can cause overweight and obesity. Hence we may conclude that both boys and girls mostly understand the risks of using these products. It can be assumed that the majority of respondents who have participated in the survey have heard about the principles of healthy eating, but they have not fully absorbed them. ***Some of the young people need additional information about the main principles of healthy and balanced eating, negative effects of unnecessary dieting, importance of physical activities and they need experience in making a menu and planning physical activities as a part of daily routine.***

3. **Knowledge about active lifestyles and sports.** The most of the respondents of the study in their free time do sports or engage in physical activities, dance, do creative work, do voluntary work. More than half of the respondents both Dagda and Visaginas districts think that has enough opportunities for doing sports and physical activities. However in terms of leisure time, more than half of the respondents spend doing non-active activities, such as for example: sitting at the computer, watching TV or not showing specific activities. It can be concluded that the young people involved in the study lack information about the amount of physical activity required in everyday life. Received data show that the surveyed the young people do not have enough understanding of the possible consequences of sedentary life and point to the need to include in the non-formal education program issues that would enable students to understand that the time spent on the TV and computer reduces the ability to engage in physical activities, and communicate

face-to-face with friends and family members. ***Therefore including the issue of the influence of physical activity on human health in the content of non-formal education programs would be an important contribution to forming young people's habits of healthy lifestyle.***

4. **Knowledge about harmful habits.** Young people in Dagda district and Visaginas district are well aware of the harmful effects of smoking and also avoid this harmful habit in their daily lives. At the same time, there is a dangerous trend that should be addressed in non-formal education programs that young people have tried to smoke a water pipe and electronic cigarettes. In general, it should be concluded that alcohol, drugs and psychoactive substances (marijuana, ecstasy, amphetamine, heroin, spice, etc.) are not common among young people in both districts. At the same time, it is argued that the results of many studies show that the influence of parents on children is the main reason young people then choose to use psychoactive substances. ***Therefore education on harmful habits is advisable for children and young people at risk for families. The fact that in a small town 1 young person (a 15-16 year old girl) has used drugs once or twice in life and 1 young person (a 13-14 year old boy) admit that drugs are freely available to him, is a dangerous signal and should be given serious attention within the framework of the project's non-formal education programs.***

5. **Knowledge about ecology.** Young people general understanding of the world's major ecological problems is insufficient both Dagda and Visaginas districts. Almost all respondents named only some and rather homogenous versions: air pollution, waste. Some also mentioned forest fires as well as climate change. Almost all of the respondents who participated in the survey say that it is important to sort the waste, but waste are not sorted in more than half of respondents, who participated in the survey, families. Unfortunately, only a tenth of the respondents sort waste themselves. It means that young people's green thinking should be developed. Concerning specific environment pollutants, young people think that the pollution of the environment is mostly contaminated by exhaust gases, household chemistry, polymers, wood, coal, gasoline burning, and also gas heating. It means that young people in Visaginas and Dagda have general understanding of the ways in which the environment is contaminated. It is important that young people themselves participate in the preservation of the environment and think about ecology. The total number of choices for answers is rather similar. Among the young people who completed questionnaire, the most popular choice was the *sort waste, the resource saving*. The young people's opinion about responsibility to take care of environmental protection, is not unambiguous. Most of the young people want to share the responsibility, because they choose the answer: *"I believe that both the government and the citizens take care about protection of the environment"*. Other respondents

believe that the protection of the environment is every citizen's responsibility. Differences in opinion are observed in the choice of the answer "*I believe that the government is mainly concerned with environmental protection*". However, two thirds of 15-18 years old respondents of Visaginas district did not answer this question. ***Consequently, when summarizing the results of the study, it should be emphasized that, in order to promote the knowledge of the younger generation in the field of ecology and understanding of sustainable development, it is important for all stakeholders to understand the prospects and perspectives of ecological education as well as education for sustainable development. It is important that the educational process is based on the wishes and interests of society and the parties involved.***

Main conclusions

1. Non-formal education program developers must to include more innovative methods and activities in order to interest the target group in participating in programs and note to possible linguistic barrier.
2. A healthy lifestyle is important for young people, but there is not enough knowledge about rational nutrition, regular nutrition and product selection;
3. The majority of surveyed young people are engaged in sports, however including the issue of the influence of physical activity on human health in the content of non-formal education programs would be an important contribution to forming young poeple' habits of healthy lifestyle;
4. Young people who are involved in the study are aware of the effects of harmful habits on the human body, just do not properly assess the emerging innovations in this market;
5. In order to promote the knowledge of the younger generation in the field of ecology and understanding of sustainable development, it is important for all stakeholders to understand the prospects and perspectives of ecological education as well as education for sustainable development.

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