

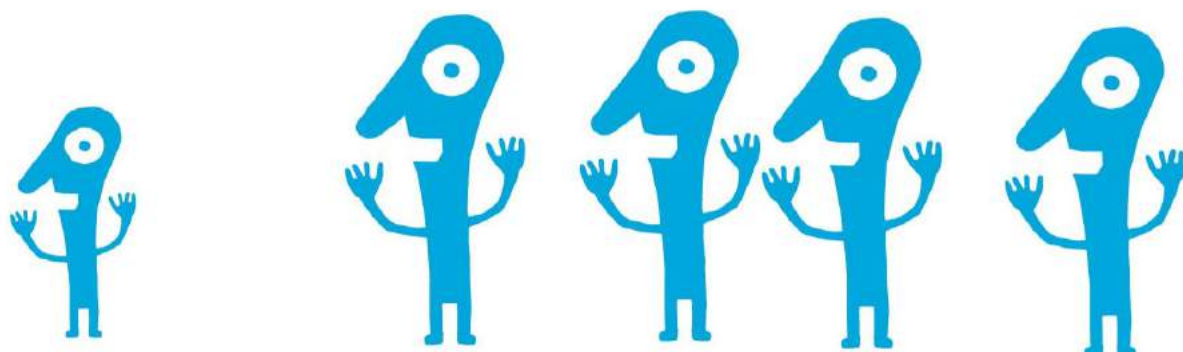
Stories of Social Investment and Innovation

People's Voice Media / Work Package 5: User Voice



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Introduction

‘Stories of Social Investment and Innovation’ is a summative report from Work Package 5: User Voice. User involvement runs through the heart of the Innovative Social Investment: Strengthening communities in Europe (InnoSI) project, and the core aim of Work Package 5 was to gather ‘User Voice’ on a range of social investment and innovation programmes from across Europe. Using Community Reporting practices, we worked with 11 different ‘User Voice’ groups from across 10 countries (Finland, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Spain, Sweden and the UK) and supported people to tell their stories in relation to topics such as family life, unemployment, education, and integration into society. These user-created stories not only provide a diverse range of ‘bottom-up’ insights about people’s lived experience of social investment and innovation programmes, but they also give information about the wider contexts of their lives, the challenges that they face and their hopes and aspirations. The report documents the activities of the work package, in relation to the two core deliverables - 5.1: Recruitment and training of Community Reporters and 5.2: Analysis of Community Reporter material. This report contains an analysis of the ‘User Voice’ stories gathered and links to the various digital outputs produced during the work package.

The report is divided into three main sections. The main body of this report commences with section 1 – ‘What is Community Reporting?’ – that provides a comprehensive overview of Community Reporting and how it was utilised as part of the InnoSI project. The reports continues onto section 2 - ‘Collating Stories’ – that documents how the ‘User Voice’ stories were captured in terms of the design and delivery of bespoke Community Reporting programmes and the key actors involved in this process. It also summarises the key deliverables from this stage of the work package. Following this, section 3 – ‘Curating Stories’ – focuses on the analysis on the ‘User Voice’ stories collated and how they have be packaged for Impact (Work Package 6) and Dissemination (Work Package 7). This section provides an outline of our curation process, individual summative reports on each of the ‘User Voice’ story collections and links to a range of digital outputs. The conclusion of the report highlights the key learning from this work package and the Community Reporter activities that have continued as a result of it.



The key outcomes and outputs of Work Package 5: User Voice are:

- 100 x **Community Reporters** trained across 10 different European countries
- 25 x **Insight Advocate Trainers** trained
- 118 x 'User Voice' **stories** collated on topics and themes pertinent to social investment and innovation programmes
- Online 'User Voice' **story bank** collated at www.communityreporter.net/innosi
- 1 x **individual summative report** for each of the 11 x 'User Voice' story collections
- A range of **packaged insights** from the 'User Voice' stories that include:
 - A **geo-map** of 'Stories of Social Investment and Innovation'
 - A 'User Voice' **thematically edited film** on the topic of 'Peer Support Networks and Social Connections'
 - 11 x **feature stories** (subtitled in English) for each 'User Voice' story collection
 - 1 x **playlists of extracts** for each of the 11 x 'User Voice' story collections
 - 1 x **word cloud** of tags produced for each of the 11 x 'User Voice' story collections



Part One: Community Reporting



What is Community Reporting?

Community Reporting is a storytelling movement that was started in 2007 by People's Voice Media, and it uses digital tools such as portable and pocket technologies to support people to tell their own stories in their own ways. Using the Internet to share these stories with others, we are able to connect them with the people, groups and organisations who are in a position to make positive social change.

Central to Community Reporting is the belief that people telling authentic stories about their own lived experience offers a valuable understanding of their lives. Through creating spaces in which people can describe their own realities, Community Reporting provides opportunities in which people can:

- Find their voice
- Challenge perceptions
- Be part of a conversation of change

The Institute of Community Reporters (the ICR) was established in 2012 and is responsible for developing the Community Reporting storytelling movement across the UK, Europe and the World. It supports its Community Reporters (i.e. grassroots storytellers), Trainers (i.e. facilitators of Community Reporting programmes) and Social Licensees (i.e. local organisations who support Community Reporting in their area) to run Community Reporting activities and to maintain the values of our practice.



Models of Community Reporting

We believe in achieving positive change for communities by bringing peoples' portrayals of lived experiences together to influence change from the ground up. Through collating and curating stories from our growing network of Community Reporters, we seek to inform policy, processes and practice. To achieve this, we have three interlinked models of Community Reporting – **Storytelling, Co-Production and Insight.**

Community Reporting for Storytelling provides people with the knowledge and skills to become responsible storytellers and to have their say on the issues and topics that are pertinent to them. **Community Reporting for Co-Production** uses different forms of digital media to present a range of perspectives on a subject matter, creating a dialogue between various points of view on a topic. **Community Reporting for Insight** uses people’s experiences to provide rich qualitative data to projects, taking the insights from their stories to identify themes, inform findings of wider studies and positively impact on local agendas, policies and service design. These models of Community Reporting inform our programme design and can be used independently of each other, or brought together (as the diagram below shows) to create multifaceted storytelling experiences.

Diagram 1.1: Models of Community Reporting



The stories collated via these models form the basis of our **curation activities**. This process involves the layered analysis of individual and groups of stories, accompanied by a series of packaging activities (i.e. feature article writing, edited films, word clouds etc.). Once stories have been curated, we seek to mobilise the knowledge in them by connecting the packaged content with the people, groups and organisations with the power to make positive social change.

Community Reporting and InnoSI

For the InnoSI project we adopted our Community Reporting for Insight model and as the following section of this report outlines, designed bespoke Community Reporting programmes using this approach. We used the Insight model to collate ‘User Voice’ and grassroots perspectives on a diverse range of issues and topics, from unemployment through to thoughts on wellbeing, that related thematically or topically to the case studies and social investment projects being examined via traditional social science research techniques in Work Package 4. The purpose of this alternative method of engaging users in the research process was to provide insights into their wider lives and experiences, and enable people to tell their own stories in their own ways. Unlike structured interviews or focus groups in which participants will answer and discuss a range of predetermined questions, the model of Community Reporting for Insight is much looser in that it provides a space for people to talk about a broad topic or theme how they want to. Within InnoSI this meant that people were provided with a topic that was loosely related to one of the case

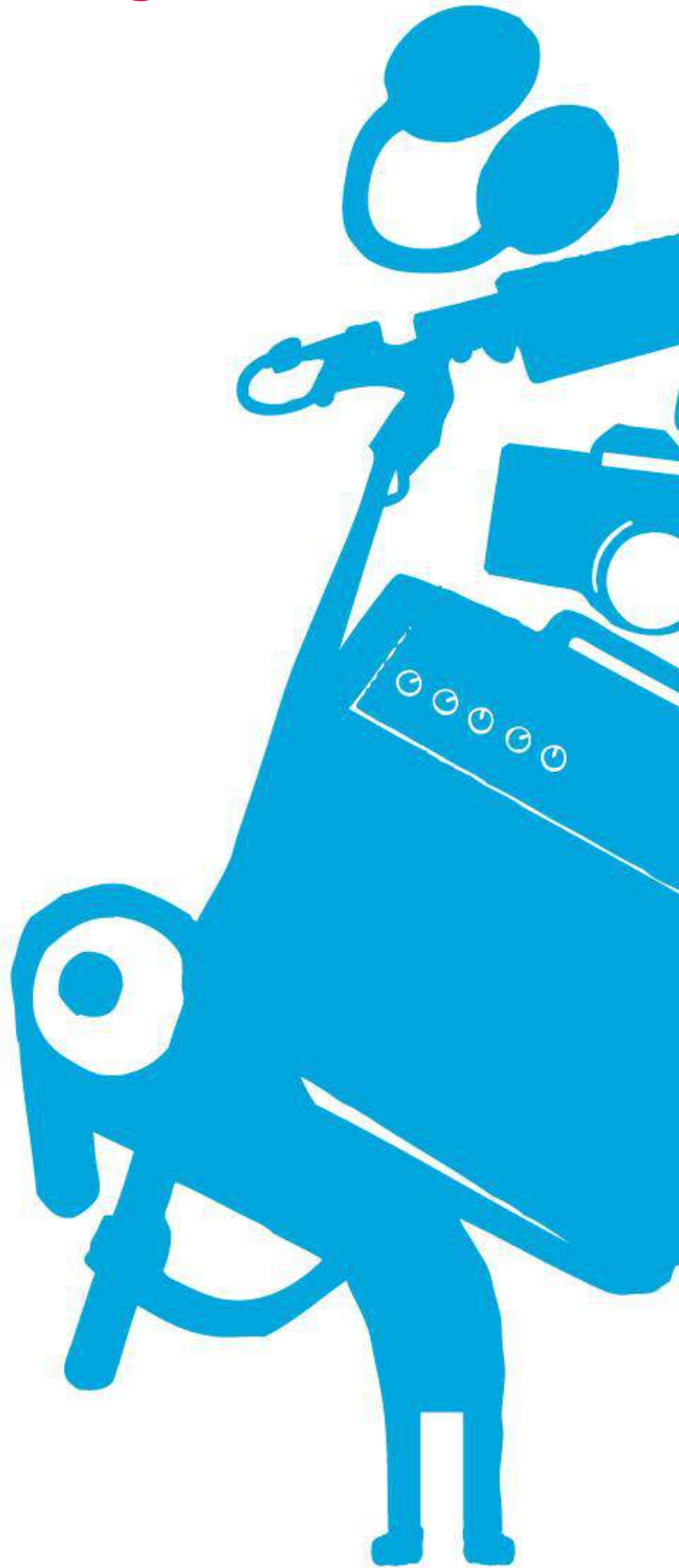
studies/social investment projects being examined in Work Package 4 (i.e. Family Life in relation to the Troubled Families programme), and were supported to find their own way of talking about this topic. Within the Community Reporting for Insight model we have three main ways of supporting this process of user-led storytelling:

- **Snapshot Stories:** These stories engage people in talking about their opinions on a particular topic. Rather than the more detailed and nuanced understandings that the latter two techniques provide, this method aims to gather quick insights into the topic and can be used as a 'starter' storytelling activity to engage people in telling their own stories. As part of this technique an open question is asked to an individual and they respond to it with their opinion. The question is determined with the Community Reporters. This technique provided some useful insights into perceptions of [gender equality in the workplace](#) in the Community Reporter programme run in Athens, Greece.
- **Dialogue Interviews:** These are peer-to-peer 'interviews' that do not have pre-determined questions. Instead, an opening question (i.e. a conversation starter) is asked which enables the storyteller to start to tell their story and then the Community Reporter recording the story may then ask any questions within this storytelling process that naturally occurs to them. In essence, the structure of this practice mimics our day-to-day conversations, and rather than having a set list of questions, the questions and interactions that take place are those what naturally occur as the story progresses. An example of this technique is [Marja's story](#) about community activities in Kainuu, Finland.
- **Personal Monologues:** In this type of story, people record themselves talking about a particular topic, experience, life journey etc. These stories are planned in a variety of different ways such as mind-mapping exercises, journey story maps, story and ideas boards, and story element planning sheets. These tools enable people to gather their ideas and structure their thoughts in their own ways before they tell their story. An example of this practice is [Jorge's story](#) about unemployment in Spain.

Our method aims to enable people to give a 360 degrees understanding of their world in accordance to a particular theme or topic, rather than just focusing on the theme or topic on which we are collating insights. In order to run these programmes, as outlined in the following section of the report, we worked with our existing ICR network of trainers and social licensees in addition to the Partners and local case studies that are involved and connected with the InnoSI project.



Part Two: Collating Stories



How We Collated Stories

Working with the Academic and Impact Partners involved in the InnoSI project we collated 'User Voice' from 11 of the social investment case studies examined in the project from all 10 of the participating countries. In total, 118 'User Voice' stories were collated on topics and themes relating to different social investment and innovation programmes from across Europe.

As part of this story collation process we trained 100 x Silver Community Reporters via a series of 2-day training programmes. These individuals are now all registered members of the ICR with user accounts on www.communityreporter.net. In addition to this, we trained 25 x Insight Advocate Trainers, who as well as being Silver Community Reporters also attended a 1-day Training-The-Trainer programme in which they acquired the capacities to support the training and development of Community Reporters in their area to tell, capture and share insight stories from their communities. All of these participants are now members of the ICR and have Community Reporter badges.



Phase One: Programme Design & Planning

Using our modular-based curriculum we designed a 2-Day Community Reporting for Insight programme that was specific for the needs of the InnoSI project and was used in order to collate 'User Voice' for Work Package 5. This programme focused on using pocket and mobile technology to support storytelling for insight practices.

As part of this bespoke programme, people who are beneficiaries/participants or in some way connected with a selection of the InnoSI case study projects were trained as Silver Community Reporters. They used Community Reporting practices and the inbuilt audio and video recorders on smartphones and tablets to record and share their own and other people's stories in relation to social investment and innovation projects. The programme explored storytelling techniques, how to use basic digital tools to record audio and/or video clips, core Community Reporting practices and values, how to share stories online and how to support their own and other people's learning through peer review techniques. The core goal of this 2-Day Community Reporting for Insight programme was to provide a space in which people could tell their own stories of social investment programmes whilst developing the digital literacies required to record these and share them online. An overview of the training days is provided in the following table.

Table 2.1: Overview of the 2-Day Community Reporting for Insight Programme

Day One	Day Two
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction to the programme • Icebreaker • Exploring storytelling practices • Exploring equipment and digital literacies • Recording snapshot stories • Responsible storytelling and consent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preparing own stories • Recording own stories • Peer review of stories • Sharing stories online • What's next? • Certificates, Badges & Celebration of achievements

We also developed a 1-Day Training-The-Trainer programme that provided people who had existing facilitation and basic digital skills with the necessary capacities to co-deliver and re-deliver the aforementioned 2-Day Community Reporting for Insight programme. By the end of the training day, participants became Insight Advocate Trainers as well as Community Reporters themselves. This 1-Day Training-The-Trainer programme was only delivered when necessary – either due to language barriers, training needs or to enhance sustainability of this practice in a local context. The structure of the 1-Day programme included:

- Exploring the 2-Day Community Reporting for Insight training pack and resources
- Exploring participants learning needs and good facilitation techniques
- Using digital tools to record video and/or audio stories, and how to share them online
- Practicing facilitating an activity from the training pack
- Planning to deliver / re-deliver the training in local context

In essence, when the ICR did not have a Trainer within People’s Voice Media’s staff corpus or within its existing network of Trainers from its Social Licensees, we worked with the case studies being examined, other local organisations, the Impact Partners and/or Academic Partners to develop their staff as Insight Advocate Trainers. With this training, the Insight Advocate Trainers supported People’s Voice Media to deliver the 2-Day Community Reporting for Insight programmes and in one instance, independently re-delivered the programme to new trainee Community Reporters with remote support from People’s Voice Media. These Insight Advocate Trainers are now, in a number of cases, supporting the on-going development of the Community Reporters they helped to train. As part of both of these programmes’ design we created some new activities and new resources (video tutorials, presentations, task sheets etc.) that are largely icon driven based on symbols commonly associated with the international language/interface of the Internet. This approach supported the delivery of the programmes across multiple countries with participants who spoke a



range of languages. The Academic Partners also translated the core training resources into the languages spoken in the participating countries. This created a multilingual set of training resources so that the training was more bespoke and suitable to the contexts in which it was delivered.

Some of these new resources and activities were tested out with groups that the ICR and its existing Social Licensees were working with at the time. We also 'workshopped' the resources and activities with our existing network of Trainers. Feedback from both Community Reporters and Trainers was used to refine them further. Based on this feedback, the functionality of the www.communityreporter.net site was also adapted in order to accommodate its usage as a story bank for the project. This included adapting the meta-data settings when users upload stories, the search functions of the site, and post-programme support elements such as a resource bank, online learning materials and group messaging functions.

The Academic and Impact Partners took a lead role in recruiting participants for the programmes, alongside other local organisations. In order to support them to recruit participants for both the 2-Day Community Reporting for Insight programme and 1-Day Training-The Trainer programme, we developed a series of communication materials that include:

- A project information sheet for partners (e.g. local case study projects, organisations at a local level that can support recruitment)
- Project information sheets for participants (e.g. an outline of what the 2-day Community Reporting for Insight programme or the 1-Day Training-The-Trainer programme offers them)
- A3 and A4 poster designs
- Sign-up sheets for participants
- A 15 second, audio-visual social media sting

With the programmes' materials all in place, we then developed the capacity of our network of ICR Trainers to deliver the programmes developed for InnoSI. This included delivering face-to-face and remote training with our Trainers. For UK-based ICR Trainers this involved a 1-day training programme followed by a series of remote sessions, shadowing opportunities and one-to-one meetings. For non-UK based ICR Trainers a remote training programme was devised that included Skype sessions, independent study, interactive activities and online group discussions. We also met with our Germany-based Trainers



face-to-face to support their on-going development. We felt that this was vital as they would be responsible for recruiting participants for and delivering a 2-Day Community Reporting for Insight programme independently of other local partners connected to the InnoSI project, such as the Academic or Impact Partners (see next section for further details).

Phase Two: Programme Delivery

In terms of the delivery of the Community Reporting for Insight and Training-The-Trainer programmes the coordination, logistical planning and delivery included:

- 1. Liaising with the Academic Partners and selecting the case studies:** We circulated an e-mailer (linked to a [blog post](#) on the InnoSI website) to Academic Partners that outlined how we would use Community Reporting for Insight practices in order to capture user voice. Following this, we sent individual emails to arrange initial meetings and discussions about how the user voice element would work within their case studies' context. The meetings and discussions were largely held remotely via applications such as Skype and Google Hangouts, and during them we co-selected which case study social investment programme that the 'User Voice' would focus on.
- 2. Identifying the training needs and allocating resources:** Following the initial meetings and discussions, we sent the Academic Partners a 'Training Needs' questionnaire that when completed was used to assess the training needs of the groups we were set to work with and also the venue facilities available. This questionnaire enabled us to allocate the correct resourcing to each programme, such as the allocation of ICR Trainers, training resources and communication materials. From this information training dates were confirmed and it was decided whether or not the additional 1-Day Training-The-Trainer was required. The Academic Partners supported this process through on-going dialogue and local updates.
- 3. Delivery of the Community Reporter and Training-The-Trainer programmes:** Prior to the training being delivered, Training Briefing documents were sent to relevant stakeholders and the details for the delivery of the programmes were confirmed. This process resulted in the delivery of 11 x 2-Day Community Reporting for Insight programmes and 3 x 1-Day Training-The-Trainer programmes.

Table 2.2: Community Reporter and Training-The-Trainer programmes delivered

Country	Case Study	Programme(s)	Training Team
The Netherlands	Social diverse residential and working neighbourhoods	2-Day CR 1-Day Trainer	ICR Trainer (PVM)
Finland	Youth Guarantee Co-Design of Services	2-Day CR (x2)* 1-Day Trainer	ICR Trainer (PVM)
Spain	The "Forgotten Generation"	2-Day CR	ICR Trainer (PVM) + ICR Support
Poland	Social activity of Elderly People	2-Day CR	ICR Trainer (PVM)
Hungary	Social land programme	2-Day CR	ICR Network Trainer (Freelance)
Italy	ECEC services in Emilia-Romagna	2-Day CR 1-Day Trainer	ICR Trainer (PVM) + ICR Support
Greece	Women's participation in Trade Unions	2-Day CR	ICR Trainer (PVM) + ICR Support
United Kingdom	Troubled families	2-Day CR	ICR Trainer (PVM)
Germany	Refugee's labor market integration	2-Day CR	ICR Network Trainer (Freelance)
Sweden	Education Reform	2-Day CR	ICR Network Trainer (Freelance)

* One programme was delivered by an Insight Advocate Trainer with remote support from PVM.

Recruiting Community Reporters

The InnoSI Partners played a key role in recruiting people to participate in the 2-Day Community Reporting for Insight programmes. We purposefully had a relatively open and fluid criterion for people who could participate. The people who took part in the programmes belonged to one or more of the following groups:

- Direct beneficiaries of the case study/social investment project that the programme was linked to (i.e. service users)
- Peers of the direct beneficiaries of the case study/social investment project that the programme was linked to (i.e. friends and families)
- Professionals from the case study/social investment project that the programme was linked to (i.e. educators)
- People living in the same geography of the case study/social investment project that the programme was linked to (i.e. residents and community members)
- People from the same demographic of the direct beneficiaries of the case study/social investment project that the programme was linked to (i.e. potential direct beneficiaries)
- People experiencing the issues or the impact of the issues that the case study/social investment project that the programme was linked to seeks to address (i.e. unemployment)

There were no other pre-requisites for participating in the programmes, and the group sizes across programmes ranged from 3 people to groups of 15+. It is important to note that our method does not claim to provide a true representative sample for 'User Voice' on a specific social investment programme or policy, but rather individuals' stories of their own experience that can be used to provide insight into their lives, experiences and perspectives.

Key Achievements and Deliverables

The key achievements from this part of Work Package 5 are as follows:

- 100 x Community Reporters trained across 10 different European countries
- 25 x Insight Advocate Trainers trained
- 118 x 'User Voice' stories collated
- An online 'User Voice' story bank collated on www.communityreporter.net/innosi



Our Storytelling Practice

The approach we take to support people to tell and share stories of lived experience is fundamental to all of our Community Reporting programmes. We don't have a defined way in which people tell their stories, as we believe that the person telling the story knows the best way to tell it. Instead, we have a range of activities through which people are introduced to different storytelling tools. Using some or none of these, people create their own structures for their stories and tell them in the way that they want to. At the core of this are three central approaches: (1) Creating supportive learning environments, (2) Embedding responsible storytelling practices and (3) Enabling sustainable storytelling.

Supportive Learning Environments

It is really important that the learning environments of our Community Reporting programmes are tailored to the needs of our participants so that people can be confident enough to try to new things and be empowered to share their ideas and opinions. The ICR Trainers create these environments through a range of facilitation techniques.

Removing hierarchy is at the core of this practice. Within our Community Reporting programmes there are no experts, only people with a range of capacities. Rather than starting with the areas that people need to develop (i.e. digital skills such as how to edit a video), we start with what people already know and build their learning from there. We encourage people to share their knowledge, skills and experience with others and as such, advocate peer-to-peer learning and support. It is important that our ICR Trainers are part of the storytelling movement themselves and that they share their own stories. Our ICR Trainers regularly participate in the storytelling activities in the Community Reporting programmes so that the conversations that take place are more peer-to-peer than trainer-to-trainee. Furthermore, it is important that we provide opportunities for everyone to have their say. This involves listening to people and ensuring that people feel that their lived experience is a valid and valued story to share. Through constructing these supportive learning environments we create storytelling spaces in which people feel secure enough to share their authentic stories within a group setting and also with others online.

A crucial element in this process is selecting the most suitable ICR Trainer and support team (where necessary) to deliver the Community Reporting programmes. During InnoSI this had an additional complication due to the multilingual nature of the project and the diversity of training needs of the participants. Therefore, in addition to allocating specific Community Reporting programmes to People's Voice Media's core team of ICR Trainers and delivering 1-Day Training-The-Trainer programmes to support delivery and on-going development, in some instances we worked with ICR Trainers and Community Reporters from our wider network. These instances included:

- **Spain:** A core ICR Trainer worked alongside 2 x ICR Trainers from Intras, a Spanish Social Licensee, to deliver the 2-Day Community Reporting programme in Valencia. They provided translation during the sessions, ensuring that the participants fully understood the activities and could communicate with the lead ICR Trainer.
- **Hungary:** A Hungarian ICR Network Trainer delivered the 2-Day programme in Szolnok. In addition to the language skills he possessed, the trainer also had experience of working with the demographic that the programme engaged with.

- **Italy:** A core ICR Trainer worked alongside 1 x ICR Member who had recently become an Insight Advocate Trainer. The ICR Member provided language support (i.e. translation) during the sessions as they were a native Italian speaker, as well as providing key insights into Italian culture that were pertinent to the training environment.
- **Greece:** A core ICR Trainer worked alongside 1 x ICR Community Reporter originally from Greece who is fluent in English. This individual provided language support during the sessions for the ICR Trainer, assisted in translating some of the resources for the programme and also in communicating the content of the stories gathered to the ICR Trainer during the programme and People's Voice Media's team post-programme.
- **Germany:** A German ICR Network Trainer delivered the 2-Day programme in Ingolstadt, alongside another ICR Network Trainer from the city who worked on the programme on a voluntary basis. Although many of the participants were originally from a range of countries and did not speak German as their first language, German was the language they were either currently learning or had learned whilst living in Germany. More so, both of the ICR Network Trainers had significant experience of delivering Community Reporting programmes to refugee groups and adapted some of the activities in-line with this experience (i.e. using role play to communicate messages rather than handouts or spoken communication). The training was delivered in Ingolstadt as the participants of the case study project located in Muenster (MAMBA) had limited availability. However, our ICR Network Trainers had an established relationship with the refugee community in Ingolstadt and therefore the programme was delivered there. Through working with our ICR Network Trainers, People's Voice Media coordinated the delivery of this programme independently of the case study project but with an equivalent demographic. The Academic Partner supported translation and other activities related to the programme's delivery.
- **Sweden:** An English ICR Network Trainer delivered the 2-Day programme in Karlstad as although the participants had many different native languages, a large percentage of them could communicate well in English. This ICR Network Trainer was also selected due to his experience of working with young people and delivering training within school settings.



Responsible Storytelling

In order to ensure that we have a degree of consistency within our practice of Community Reporting, techniques and discussions around responsible storytelling are embedded into all of

our programmes. This core module explores the ethics and values of Community Reporting, the type of content that people's stories should and shouldn't include, an exploration of permissions and consent, and how people can keep both themselves and others safe in online and offline environments.

Following the delivery of a carousel-style activity that provides opportunities for people to think about the aforementioned topics, our ICR Trainers facilitate a reflective discussion with the Community Reporter group. During these reflective discussions a Community Reporting Best Practice Guide is produced that outlines a 'code of conduct' for that specific group of Community Reporters. This Best Practice Guide will have the core principles and values of Community Reporting within it, but it will also be nuanced enough to be inclusive and accommodating for the local context in which the Community Reporters will operate. In terms of the InnoSI project, each group of Community Reporters produced their own Best Practice Guide that took into consideration cultural factors (i.e. what is respectful within their communities), the legalities of their country (i.e. issues of consent) and who they are and how they will be using Community Reporting (i.e. what is 'safe' to them). Underpinning all of these Best Practice Guides were two key factors:

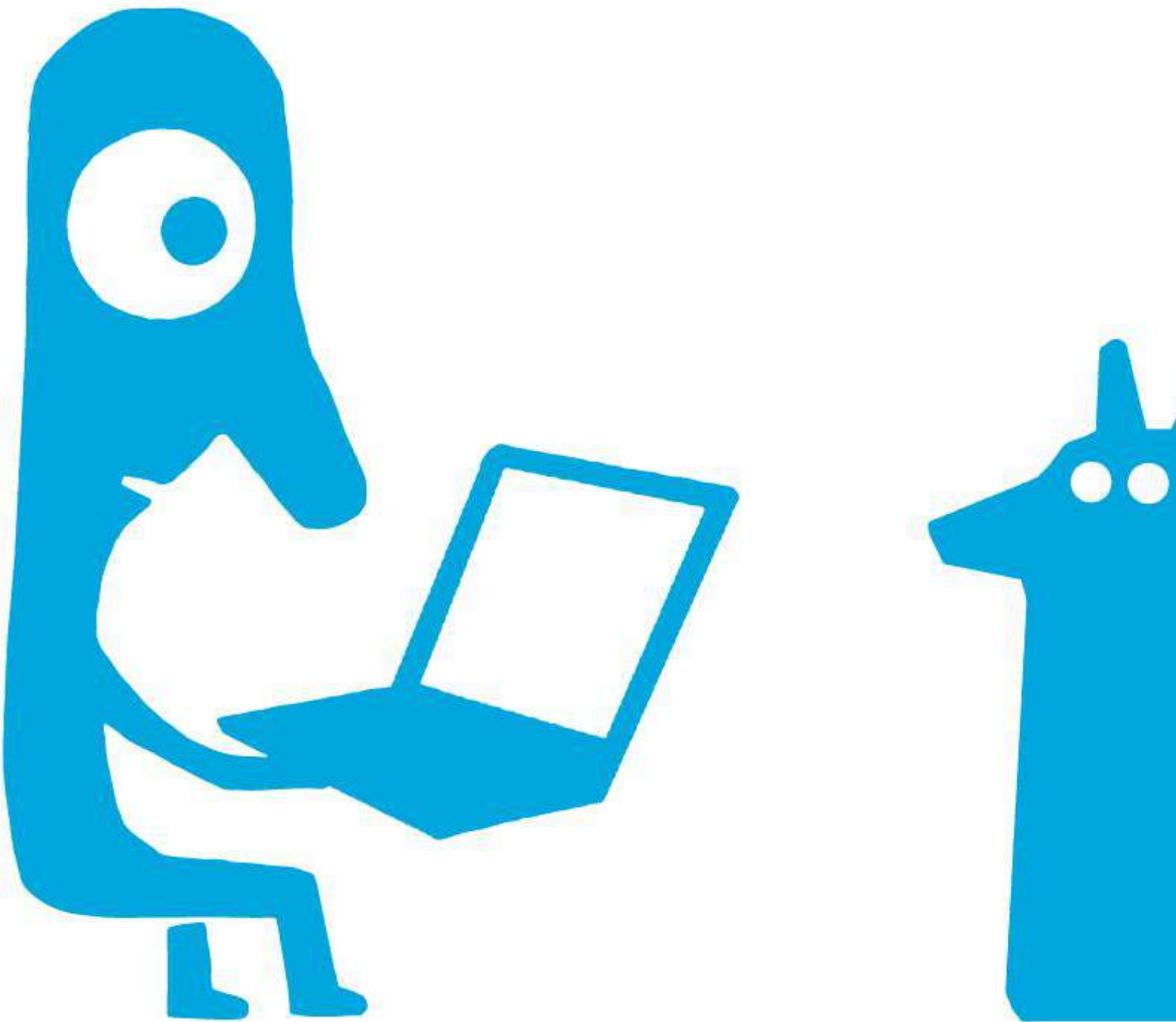
- **Awareness of the project:** Everyone who contributed a story was made aware of the project that they were contributing their story to, why the stories were being gathered and how they would be used.
- **Consent:** Written consent using our Community Reporter consent form was collected from every person who shared a story as part of the InnoSI project.



Sustainable Storytelling

Our Community Reporting programmes equip people with the necessary skills, knowledge and experience to continue to share their stories post-programme. We do this through making the technical aspects of the training accessible and through making use of the equipment that people already have access to (i.e. their own smartphones, tablets, cameras etc.). Furthermore, through ensuring all Community Reporters are registered on www.communityreporter.net they then have access to a range of post-programme support tools such as resources, learning modules and communication tools to support them to continue their storytelling activities. At the end of each of the programmes that we delivered, a group action plan was produced. This group action plan outlined how the Community Reporters could continue telling their stories and gather other peoples. It also identified the support they would need to do this. People's Voice Media are continuing to work with local Partners in many of the participating countries to implement these plans, which so far has included providing remote training, starting to redevelop the German version of www.communityreporter.net, having online communications with groups and supporting the coordination of offline meet-ups for Community Reporters.

Part Three: Curating Stories



How We Curated Stories

Within the context of the Internet and the digital age, the term ‘content curation’ is broadly used to describe the process for gathering, organising and presenting information in relation to a specific subject. Similarly, when we use the expression – curated stories – we are using it as an umbrella term that accounts for a layered analysis process that is accompanied by a series of packaging activities in order to present back the key findings across a collection of individual stories. We do this in order to better understand similar or sometimes seemingly incongruent stories within the wider context that they are told, and to find ways of exhibiting this understanding via digital and online tools that make it easier for people to share and use.

Whilst the specific analytical activities we undertake and the ways in which we present back the understandings from the stories is variable, our practice of story curation is underpinned by a core aim of maintaining the authenticity and voice evident within the individual stories being curated. To do this we have adopted a 2-step review process that seeks to verify the authenticity of the findings and their re-presentation during the curation process. This 2-step review process involves:

1. **Community Reporter/ICR Trainer Review** – A Community Reporter who contributed a story to the set of stories being curated or an ICR Trainer who was present when the stories were being told, assesses the curated findings to see if they are in-line with what they felt themselves and/or others were trying to communicate.
2. **Independent Review** – An individual who has no immediate connection to the stories being curated (i.e. they did not contribute a story themselves and/or were not present when the stories were being told), assesses the curated findings to see if they are in-line with what they feel the individual stories communicated upon viewing them.

These validated findings can then be used to create social change by informing service design and delivery, research findings and reports, and policy papers and reforms.



The ICR Analysis Process

There are three stages in the analysis process through which a set of findings emerged. The first stage of the process is the ‘Topic’ level and this stage is concerned with identifying the subject matter(s) in a story. This primary analysis phase is based on a basic textual analysis process in which the metadata such as the categories and tags attached to a story are used to identify what it

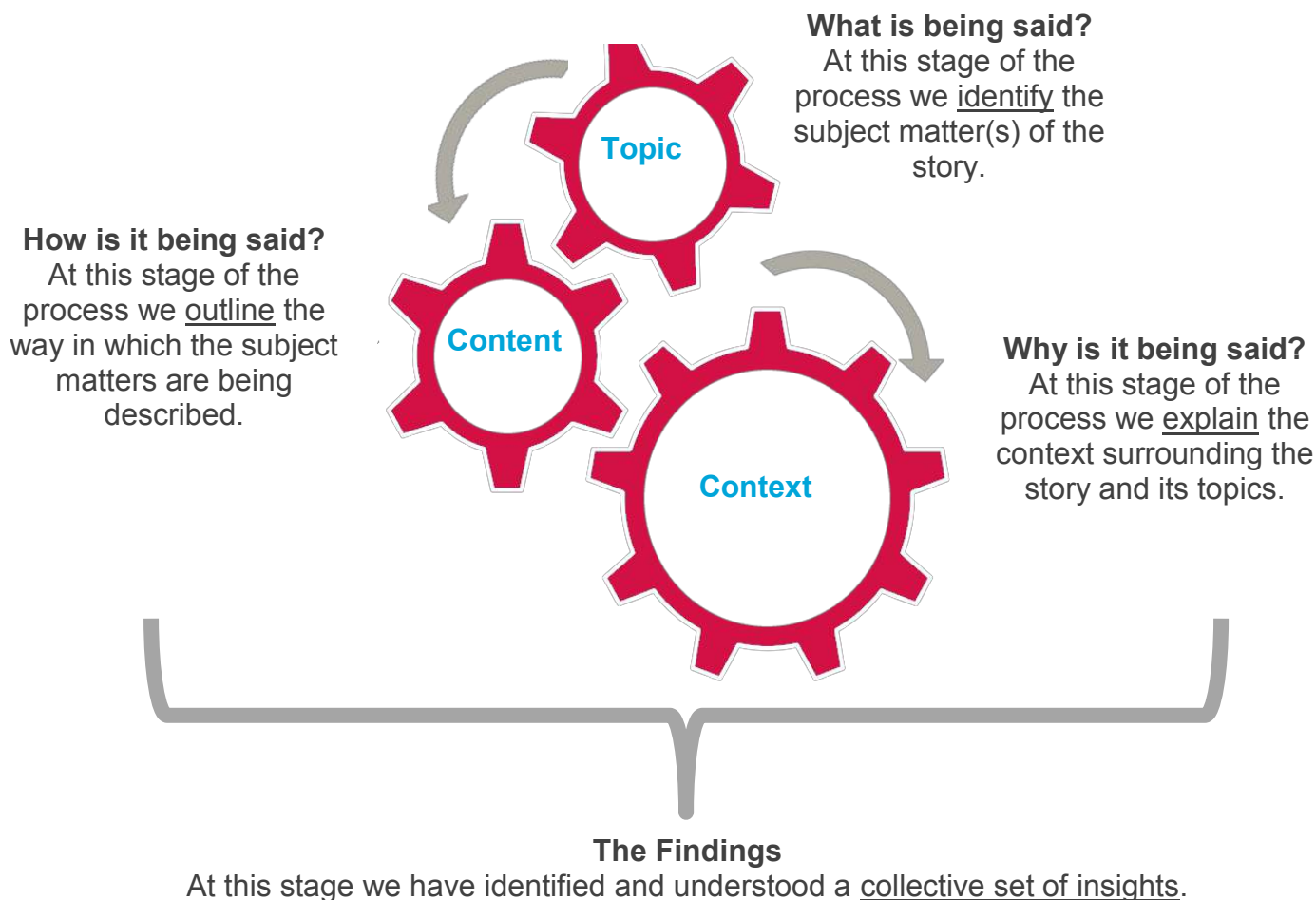
is about (i.e. Work etc.). Through looking at the subject matters evident within a set of stories the broad themes across them begin to emerge.

The second stage of the process is the 'Content' level and this stage is concerned with outlining the way in which the subject matters are being described. This secondary analysis phase uses a more interpretative textual analysis approach to situate the subject matters within the perspective they were told through looking at them in more detail (i.e. listening to the stories and enunciations, reading their descriptions, observing body language etc.). Through this an understanding of the emergent themes is gained and trends can begin to be deciphered (i.e. Many of the stories are about the lack of work in a village).

The third stage of the process is the 'Context' level and this stage of analysis is concerned with explaining the wider context in which story is being told. This final analysis phase relates the trends to the wider circumstances that surround the story and places them within the environments in which they were told (i.e. In the stories people living in the village are talking about their experiences of unemployment since their local factory closed last year where many of them were employed). Within this stage, the understandings gauged from the stories can be related to (where relevant) existing evaluation and/or conceptual frameworks.

As depicted in the diagram below, this process results in the identification and understanding of a key set of themes and trends from a collection of stories that can be synthesised into a collective set of insights. These insights are not a set of judgements or a critical evaluation of the stories, but rather an objective presentation of the findings that emerge from the stories during the analysis process.

Diagram 3.1: The ICR Analysis Process



The Packaging of Insights

The ways in which the insights are packaged for digital distribution are determined by the specific plans we and/or our Partners' have to mobilise the knowledge. Packaging options include:

- **Word clouds** – a visual representation of the topics evident within a set of stories
- **Extracts** – short snippets that present the key point from an individual story
- **Feature stories** – selection of an individual story that is representative of a wider collection of stories
- **Feature articles** – written pieces on communityreporter.net about a set of individual stories and the findings in them
- **Thematic edits** – extracts from individual stories on a specific theme edited together to create an overview story
- **Reports** – detailed written analysis on a set of stories, coupled with digital content and visualisations
- **Presentations** – a mixture of text, images and audio-visual content combined into slides
- **Geo-maps** – Interactive maps with stories embedded

Curating User Voice for InnoSI

Working with the 11 sets of 'User Voice' stories collated during the InnoSI project, the curation process involved 5 phases – Preparing Stories for Analysis, Topic Analysis, Content Analysis, Context Analysis and Key Findings. Within this process, we have been able to provide a micro, meso and macro level curation of the 'User Voice' stories. The diagram below outlines this process in more detail.

Diagram 3.2: The InnoSI Curation Process




1. PREPARING STORIES FOR ANALYSIS

This phase combines the metadata that individual Community Reporters attached to their stories (i.e. user-generated data) with information from academic partners involved in the project (i.e. external information) in order to provide the Curator with a detailed understanding of the stories.

When sharing their stories on communityreporter.net, the Community Reporters' contributed to the curation process by categorising, tagging, geo-tagging and writing descriptions for their stories. This process was completed in English with the aid of multilingual Trainers and Support Staff in the sessions. In order to understand the stories further (due to the multilingual nature of the them) and to package them for mobilisation, a set of curation documents was sent to and completed by the Academic Partners.

The documents asked for the following for each collection of stories:

- Detailed **descriptions** of the content for each individual story
- Additional **tags** for each individual story

- 
- The identification of any **InnoSI key themes** evident in each individual story
 - The selection of a **short extract** from each individual story that is representative of the key message from it
 - The selection of a **feature story** that represents the broad themes and trends from the collection of stories being curated
 - A set of **subtitles** for the feature story to make them more accessible
 - An **overview of the case study** to which the 'User Voice' relates

2. TOPIC ANALYSIS

The tags given by the Community Reporters combined with tags suggested by Academic Partners provide a sense of the broad themes across a selection of stories. Through combining both sets of tags we created word clouds that visually represent these themes. As part of this process, similar words (i.e. youth, young people, young) were grouped under one designated term to provide a true quantitative (and then visual) representation of the emergent themes.

3. CONTENT ANALYSIS

Using the descriptions written by the Community Reporters with the detailed descriptions provided by the Academic Partners, a set of key trends were identified from each collection of stories. These trends provide a nuanced understanding of the themes identified in the topic analysis stage. The trends that have emerged within each collection are represented in digital form as YouTube playlists of story extracts. The story extracts situate the topics of the stories within the sentence(s) that they were spoken about. These extracts also provide other key details needed to understand the stories, such as enunciation, body language etc. Based on these trends, a representative feature story was selected.

4. CONTEXT ANALYSIS

Using the overview information of the case study provided, the themes and trends gathered from each collection of stories during phases 2 and 3 were situated within their wider context and also in relation to the key themes of the InnoSI project (i.e. Regional and local implementation of social investment policies, Financial and regulatory innovation, The role of social innovation in the design and implementation of social investment policies, Early intervention and life-course perspectives and Personalisation). This resulted in the individual summative reports on the 'User Voice' collections that are contained in this larger report.

5. KEY FINDINGS

The final stage involved synthesising the understandings gained from across the different collections of 'User Voice' stories to create a pan-European set of collective insights. This resulted in a Thematic Edit of a collection of story extracts in-line with a theme that materialised from the 'User Voice' stories.

It is important to note that in-line with the collation process, the curation of the stories does not purport to provide a representative set of findings from a representative sample of 'users' of a particular case study/social investment project. Instead the curation process brings together the key points and messages from the Community Reporters' individual accounts of their own realities in ways that are easy to access, present and share. Furthermore, the curation of the stories does not seek to appraise the stories and the insights within them, but rather to impartially summarise the key themes and trends that emerge from them when looked at as a collection of stories.

As summarised in the table below, this process has resulted in a number of outputs at micro, meso and macro levels. This packaged content will be utilised by the Impact Partners in Work Package 6, by the Dissemination team in Work Package 7, and distributed to all Project Partners via digital channels to enhance access and shareability. In October 2016 we attended a meeting held by Euclid for the Impact Partners to present drafts of these outputs so that Impact Partners could factor the packaged content into their impact plans.

Table 3.1: Packaged Insight from InnoSI ‘User Voice’

Level	Description	Packaged Content
Micro	Individual stories detailing people’s own lived experiences in relation to Social Investment programmes and initiatives.	Individual stories Subtitled feature stories Categories, tags & geo-tags attributed to individual stories Story descriptions
Meso	Analysis and curation of collections of stories based on the Social Investment programme/initiative they relate to.	Tag clouds Individual summative reports of the ‘User Voice’ collections Playlists of extracts Feature stories
Macro	Synthesis of findings from the analysis and curation of the collection of stories to gage a pan-European perspective and insight into user experience of Social Investment programmes and initiatives.	Geo-map of stories WP5 Summative Report ‘User Voice’ thematic edit Story bank

In order to verify the curation of the stories in terms of preserving the authenticity of the individual stories, 2 people who have not participated in the curation process have reviewed each of the following individual summative reports of the ‘User Voice’ collections. The first person was either a Community Reporter who had contributed a story or someone who was present within the Community Reporting programmes whilst the stories were being told. The second person is a person who is completely independent of the storytelling context.

Where possible both reviewers have been a native speaker of the language used in the stories, and when this has not been possible, reviewers have relied on the curation documents provided by Academic Partners and the meta-data attached to the stories by the Community Reporters themselves to guide them. In seeking congruence between the Curator and two types of reviewers we can be confident that the messages and ideas communicated in the individual stories are upheld in the curation process and in the packaged insights.

[Click here](#) to see the geo-map of feature stories and extracts from all of the ‘User Voice’ collections, or scan this QR code.



Stories of Family Life

Exploring the experiences of families in Manchester

The UK [Troubled Families programme](#) is a national, systematic approach for working with families that are experiencing multiple problems. The method that the Troubled Families programme advocates is the adoption a ‘whole family’ working approach that puts family intervention at the heart of the support services whilst still addressing specific problems experienced by individuals within the family unit such as low attendance at school or unemployment. Previous support service provision had failed families with complex needs because it was provided in silos and in a reactive manner. It has been funded partially via a payment-by-results model that was ‘designed to incentivise an outcomes-based approach’.

To gather user voice on this programme we worked with a small group of families from Manchester who have experienced support provision as part of this new approach. Their stories provide rich insights into their experiences of family life, identifying some of the issues they are facing (i.e. health problems), support they are accessing and seeking (i.e. peer support networks), and also their thoughts on the future (i.e. studies).



The importance of listening to people

In her story, [JL](#), a mother of four children aged 5 to 12 from Manchester, UK, explains how social services came to her home and suggested that attending a parenting programme would help her become a better parent. JL did feel that she needed some support, stating, “*that’s why I was on the parenting course, to find help*”, but this was not to be the case. She felt that rather than trying to support her individual needs as a parent, the programme instead was more concerned with following guidelines set out in an American book on which the programme was based. JL found the course “*quite patronising*” and she “*didn’t really get much from it*”. She explains how attendees were rewarded with stickers for making contributions in-line with the programme’s teachings, and how she felt that she was treated like “*a school child*” and was “*presented with a load of rules*”. However, JL did value the social interactions that the course provided between herself, the other attendees and trainers.

Much of the sentiment in JL’s story is echoed by [Clara](#), another mother from Manchester, UK, who too has received interventions and support from social services. In her story, Clara explains how she feels that the attitudes of the professionals who are involved in her family undermine her own abilities and “*tell her what to do*”. This behaviour makes Clara feel like the professionals think she “*doesn’t know her left from her right*”. Clara’s daughter, Vanessa, a teenager studying to become a social worker herself, agrees that the top-down approach by professionals involved in both her mother’s and JL’s stories, is not necessarily the most effective way to build relationships with

people. In her story, [Vanessa](#) explains how she would like more of a “*friendship*” with her social worker, rather than it being “*strictly professional*”.

Understanding the complexities of people’s lives

JL, Clara and Vanessa’s stories give us an insight into what their families’ lives are like and their individual experiences of support provision. What is clear from their stories, is that the issues in their lives are multiple and complex. When [JL](#) talks about her family life we gain an understanding of the difficulties that she faces that include a custody battle, her child’s on-going health issues and a close family relative’s substance abuse problem. She also details how these issues impacted on her own mental health and contributed to a breakdown. Similarly, [Clara](#) recalls how social services became involved in her family life, due to an accident involving one of her children. During this moment of crisis it was felt that another child’s existing chronic health needs were not being met. Clara says that she feels “*bad*” about this intervention as she wasn’t “*given the chance to express herself*”, resulting in continued professional involvement in the family’s life.

The value of peer support networks

Whilst much of the interventions and support provided to these individuals has been seen negatively, the intervention that the family worker made for Vanessa, in terms of providing her with a mentor (a less top-down intervention), was well-received. In her story, [Vanessa](#) describes how she has a range of caring responsibilities within the family for her younger siblings and how this puts “*pressure*” on her. To ease this, the mentor has arranged for Vanessa to participate in a range of activities, providing her with some space and time for herself. As Vanessa describes, “*I think that was good because it gave me a break as well. It gave me a break away from my family, my sisters and college. I think that was a really big help.*” What Vanessa’s story suggests, is that support services can play a pivotal role in helping people to overcome the challenges in their lives, providing that the support being provided is in-line with what the individual’s needs and wants are.

In the cases where these families have not found support via more formal routes such as public services, they have instead relied on their peer support networks. In [JL’s](#) story, she states that if it wouldn’t have been for her family and their support, that she would have “*sunk*” due to the pressures she was facing. Similarly, [Clara](#) found support in the congregation at her church. Talking about this she says, they’ve provided her with “*a lot of support*” and that “*they’ve always been there for [her], more than the other professionals*”. The importance of these informal networks of support that family and friends provide is evident in a number of our Community Reporters’ stories gathered as part of the InnoSI project. For example, [Jorge](#) who lives in Valencia, Spain explains how it is family members who are supporting people who are unemployed, not Government provision and [Sofia](#) (Athens, Greece), shared a story with us about a friend who is overcoming an abusive past partially due to the encouragement she has received from friends in terms of publishing her poetry.

[Click here](#) or scan the QR code to view the extracts from this ‘User Voice’ collection.



InnoSI Themes

A key message from these stories is that **personalisation** is vital for support provision to be effective. The families who have shared their experiences with us, suggest that they would like support services and interventions to be much more person-centred and specific to their needs. A large part of [JL's](#) frustrations with the parenting programme was that she wanted something "*more personal*" than what was being provided, and Clara's frustration with the interventions being made in her family is very similar – she expressed how she just wanted her needs to be listened to. From these people's stories, the most effective interventions and support services are those that have been provided in dialogue with the recipients. [Vanessa's](#) experience with the family worker who "*took an interest in [her]*" and was instrumental in arranging her mentoring programme, is an example of this approach. This story highlights the effectiveness of the 'whole family' approach advocated by Troubled Families programme and the value in **early stage interventions** to mitigate the intergenerational transfer of issues and disadvantage.

Summary of Insights

- **The Bigger Picture:** Recipients value whole family and interconnected support provision when it is done in-line with their individual needs.
- **Personalisation:** Interventions and support services should be provided through dialogue with the recipients of it in order to personalise the provision. In essence, through co-design people can be engaged and empowered to be the catalyst of change in their own lives.
- **Peer Support:** When support provision provided by formal structures and/or Government programmes are found lacking by their beneficiaries, these people are then likely to seek the support needed through their peers. These peer networks provide valuable forms of support for people.

[Click here](#) or scan the QR code to view the feature story for this collection of user voice stories.



Stories of Unemployment

Exploring the experiences of the “Lost Generation” and the economic crisis in Spain

Spain is one of the countries in Europe most significantly affected by the 2008 economic crisis, with its impact still being acutely felt by people today. The term “Lost Generation” is one that is used to describe a huge proportion of Spain’s youth population who neither work nor study. Experts say that the archetypal young person from the “Lost Generation” is a product of an education that fails to adequately prepare them for the job market. However, the issue of unemployment is not one that just affects young people or those with limited education, and many people within Spanish society have felt the negative consequences of the crisis.

To gather user voice on this topic we collated stories from a group of participants from Valencia who have and are experiencing unemployment and the issues around it. Some of the people who shared their stories with us fall into “The Lost Generation” age demographic, and others are older. Their stories provide an understanding of the worries and concerns (i.e. issues around exploitation and retirement) that people in Valencia have about the on-going consequences of the financial crisis. The stories told also give an insight into what life is like for people who are unemployed (i.e. relying on soup kitchens) and how they feel about the situation that they and others are in (i.e. unfair). Although many of these stories depict a bleak reality for their storytellers, within some of the stories there is an air of optimism and hope for the future.



An unfair system

In [David's](#) story he describes how in 2005 he was studying technical architecture. He had started doing work placements arranged by the Polytechnic University of Valencia and at that point in time companies needed architects. He recalls receiving many calls offering him good roles at a good pay. However, when he finished his degree this scenario completely changed and he has not worked as an architect since 2009. Whilst there are opportunities for other kinds of work, they tend to be illegal, and with a 3-year-old child, David does not see this as a viable option.

[Antonio's](#) story depicts a very similar situation. In his story, he describes how after 3 years of being unemployed he went to Toronto on a tourist visa but worked without a contract. After 6 months he returned to Valencia where he has worked in sporadic jobs but under bad conditions. He accepted these jobs and their conditions because he needed the work and if he didn't take the job then someone else in a situation like his would. As [Juan Carlos](#) describes, after the crisis a lot of people with significant work experience were fired and young people like him and Antonio find it impossible to compete with them. This situation has left Juan Carlo feeling powerless. He worries that the time he has spent being unemployed will also affect his pension.

The exploitative conditions of the labour market are echoed in some people's stories about employment support services. In [Jorge's](#) story he accounts for how "*irresponsible acts [by] economic and political leaders*" has left a large number of people who were employed in construction industry, like him, without jobs. He describes how the support provided by employment services is disingenuous. He says that they offer "*false job experience schemes to avoid paying unemployment or other benefits*" and that "*very scant social protection offered by the system*". [Juan Carlos](#), who describes the unemployment support as "useless", echoes these sentiments and [Yolanda](#) says that society would be in "*harmony*" if there were not so much exploitation and social unfairness.

Coping with unemployment

The people that shared their stories with us explained what life is like being unemployed in Spain. [David](#) talks about how his wife is opening up a second hand clothes shop, but realistically they need two incomes in order to pay the bills. He describes how he would need to move abroad to find work in his field. [Antonio](#) explains how he lives on 200€ a month and eats in soup kitchens. [Abu](#), an older man originally from Morocco, describes how he too survives by accessing soup kitchens. Since 2008, Abu has struggled financially. He initially coped by asking family for money, but he has now stopped relying on them. Although he doesn't currently get any kind of economic help, he was told by the local services that he would receive a non-contributive pension for the rest of his life. According to [Jorge](#), a lot of people in his situation are reliant on their families for support. He says that people like him survive because of "*help from the family, which is something that is rarely known or discussed*". With state interventions found lacking, people like Jorge and Abu have no alternative other than to turn to their families for support. In the UK 'User Voice' stories, [JL](#) expresses a similar reliance on family when social services' provision wasn't useful.

There's still hope

Despite the negative situations described in these stories, the people telling them still have hope and ideas for the future. [Jorge](#), for example, finishes his story on an optimistic note, declaring, "*we still have time to change things around*". He describes how knowledge sharing initiatives may help pass down information from the older generations to the younger generations, so that the experience that people like he has can be put to use "*at the service of society*". In another story, [Juan Carlos](#) describes how he started volunteering at soup kitchen whilst unemployed. He was nervous about this at the start because he didn't know if he would be able to cope with the sadness. However, he is now a coordinator on Friday afternoon and helps other people by accompanying them to talk to social services. Sharing his knowledge with others makes him happy, and he is also now studying social education which is good for him as he now has an objective to achieve.

[Click here](#) or scan the QR code to view the extracts from this 'User Voice' collection



InnoSI Themes

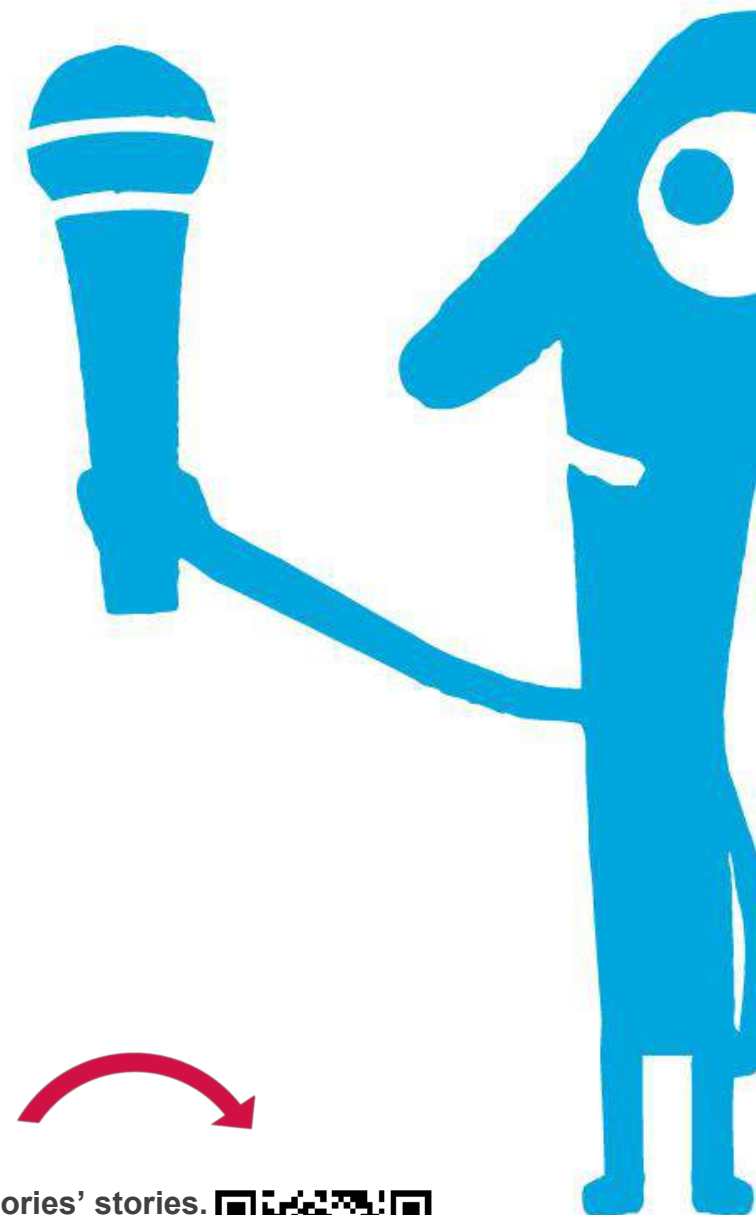
The experiences of unemployment depicted in the stories suggest a strong need for social innovation in both the **design and implementation of social investment policies**. The people's stories indicate that much of the support provision being provided, particularly by the Government, is not necessarily meeting their needs. In his story, [Jorge](#) describes an idea about how society can better make use of people's skills to share knowledge via an association or through using digital tools. Engaging service users in collaboratively generating solutions and ideas for services (as the [co-design work in Kainuu](#) advocates) can play a key role in creating investment policies that address people's needs in more meaningful ways.

Projects or initiatives that meet the multiple needs of people often contain elements of social innovation. The soup kitchen that [Juan Carlos](#) describes seems to be offering this multifaceted support. The soup kitchen provides people experiencing poverty with food, but also through Juan Carlos's knowledge and support it could also assist them in overcoming issues in their lives. Similarly, in reference to a co-design initiative in Kainuu, [Markuu](#) describes how his volunteer IT tutor role helps to reduce other people's digital exclusion whilst also increasing his social inclusion.

Summary of Insights

- **The role of the family:** The pivotal role that families play in supporting people is highlighted in these stories. The insights in these stories suggest that the family is not just offering emotional and wellbeing support, but also financial support. Both [Jorge's](#) and [Abu's](#) stories identify how their families have assisted them financially and what is particularly interesting about their stories is their ages; neither of the storytellers fall into the 'youth' bracket.
- **Sharing knowledge and supporting others:** Both [Juan Carlos's](#) and [Jorge's](#) stories advocate the need for individuals within society to share their knowledge to support others regardless of the adversities that they themselves are facing. Whilst needing support themselves, these individuals also want to give to other people. This reciprocal support culture is one that the social investment projects in various [residential neighbourhoods in Utrecht](#) are also fostering.

[Click here](#) or scan the QR code to view the feature story for this collection of 'User Voice' stories' stories.



Stories of Finding Work

Exploring the experiences of young people in gaining employment, work experience and training

To increase young people's involvement in Finnish society a national policy titled the "Youth Guarantee" was devised and then implemented together with young people and various organisations. It aims to help young people gain access to education and employment. As part of this, every young person under 25 and recently graduated people under 30 are offered a job, a work trial, a study place, or a course of workshops or rehabilitation, within three months of becoming unemployed. Furthermore, every young person leaving comprehensive school is guaranteed a place to study in an upper secondary or vocational school, in an apprenticeship, workshop, rehabilitation, or elsewhere. There is no legislation on the Youth Guarantee. Instead it is a 'service promise' that different actors are committed to supporting.

Students at Turku University of Applied Sciences were trained as Silver Community Reporters by an Insight Advocate Trainer and with remote support from People's Voice Media. They then used these skills to collate stories relating to 'Youth Guarantee' policy from other young people. In these stories the young people talked about their experiences of unemployment (i.e. benefits, disability), the support they'd received (i.e. internships), their current and future plans (i.e. studies) and how they are or were feeling at different stages in their lives (i.e. empowerment).



Experiences of support

The various ways in which the young people who have contributed their stories have been supported in finding work or further learning opportunities, demonstrates how the 'Youth Guarantee' policy works. For example, one [young man](#) describes how he got support from Ohjaamo - a one-stop shop where multiple actors and services are available under the same roof – in order to access employment, whilst another [young man](#) details how with the help of a youth worker he was able to find a job. Similarly, a [young woman](#) accounts for how a youth worker also assisted her in getting a place in Jokipaja workshop, where she is now on probationary employment that should lead into permanent work. Whilst she was initially concerned that the support may "mess with [her] income support" and that she feels that the support available in Turku is not as good in other places, she is still states that she is "very satisfied with being at this workshop and how everything worked out".

For another [young woman](#) the employment office has provided her support in range of ways. For example, when she wanted to gain an internship in a kindergarten and once she had located a suitable one the paperwork was “*all worked out very fast*” by the employment office. She was also offered a work preparation course that paid her additional money which she needed as she was “*not living with [her] parents any more*”. She describes how when she was unemployed, the employment “*always found her something to do*”. What these stories illustrate is the diversity of ways that young people in Finland are being included into the labour market, and the multiplicity of actors that are involved in providing this support. In stark contrast to the ‘User Voice’ stories from [Valencia, Spain](#), the support provision being offered here is largely viewed in a positive light.

Empowerment through work and training

Through supporting people into employment and meaningful training opportunities, the provision on offer is empowering people in their lives. A [young man](#) states that one of the interventions made by the support provision was a “*lifesaver*” as he had “*no activities in [his] life before this*”. Similarly, a [young woman](#) who applied to the Jokipaja workshop in November 2015 states how it has helped her find “*rhythm [in] her life*” and that she is now “*in evening school*” and is “*really happy*”. Talking about her experiences of trying to get onto a study programme on care assistance, a [young woman](#) describes how she applied to schools in Helsinki, Tampere and Vaasa but wasn’t accepted. However, this year she applied through the Opintopolku project and was accepted into Vaasa. She states that she was a bit “*surprised*” as she “*didn’t take the test in Vaasa*” but was still accepted and she describes how she is excited to begin her studies.

In addition to learning opportunities, support back into the workplace is also seen as an empowering experience. In one story, a [young woman](#) describes how she was unemployed for one year after graduation. On the day the story was captured, the young woman had decided to go to Ohjaamo to receive some support and on the same day she had been given a job interview and has another option lined up. She describes how she has a “*really good feeling for coming here*”. In another story, a [young woman](#) describes how she got her first Summer job and how this experience made her feel like “*a grown-up*” due to her financial independence. Similarly, another [young woman](#) describes her pride as she starts “*adulthood*” in paid work after years of sacrifices.

Working with the individual

From these stories a strong sense of working with the individual and understanding their circumstances is key to providing meaningful support. A [young man](#) supported by the policy into employment explains that he is “*really happy that they were interested in what [he] would like to do and that what kind of a job would fit [him]*”. This approach is even more important when working with young people with complex needs. The stories of a [young woman with disabilities](#) and a [young woman](#) recovering from a mental health condition are exemplars of this. Both have needed particularly personalised support to integrate into work and society in general, from group workshops, educational programmes and internships. These personalised interventions have “*brought meaning*” to their lives and “*helped [them] a lot*”.

When people’s are not listened – as was expressed by JL and Clara in the ‘[User Voice stories from the United Kingdom](#)’ – people become frustrated about the service provision on offer. A young mother, for example, describes her experience with the employment office as being “*discouraging*”. This was largely because she felt that they didn’t understand her needs or ambitions and made “*outrageous*” remarks about her goals. She says that the work that was being offered came with conditions that would make her financially worse off than she was on benefits, however through her own “*persistence*” she has proven them wrong and found meaningful work.

[Click here](#) or scan the QR code to view the extracts from this ‘User Voice’ collection.



InnoSI Themes

The stories explored here are examples of how the 'Youth Guarantee' national policy that is focused on addressing social and labour market exclusion are **implemented on a local basis**. Although this is a 'top-down' intervention, a diversified and multi-professional mode of action is offered to beneficiaries, resulting in **choices** of provision packages that are tailored to the needs of the young people. As the stories demonstrate, the range of support from [job search support](#) to [group support sessions](#), to [study options](#) and [work placements](#), the goal is to support people into [meaningful employment](#).

Most of the experiences of young people in these stories are positive and through the various **personalised** interventions being made and support services being accessed, they are being empowered to make changes in their **life course perspectives**. For example, the [young woman](#) who talks about her experiences with the employment office, describes how they are always just a conversation away if she needs any more support in finding work. This experience largely contrasts that of the 'User Voice' stories collated by people who have accessed support from the UK's '[Troubled Families](#)' programme. [JL](#), a parent who had accessed provision as part of this top-down national programme, explains how the support was not tailored to meet her specific needs. Looking at the 'User Voice' from both these programmes it becomes evident that national, top-down policies and programmes do provide meaningful interventions when **personalisation** is at the heart of their implementation.

Summary of Insights

- **Meeting the needs of individuals:** Support provision is at its best when it is bespoke to the needs of the people who are accessing it. As demonstrated in most of these young people's stories, when personalisation is at the heart of investment programmes they have the potential to contribute to people's lives in significant and meaningful ways.
- **Empowerment:** When support is provided in meaningful ways it empowers people, supporting them to have a stronger sense of self and their value to society. In these stories, the young people's [pride in securing work](#) and becoming '[adults](#)' is articulated.

[Click here](#) or scan the QR code to view the feature story for this collection of 'User Voice' stories.



Stories of Women in the Workplace

Exploring the experiences of women in the labour market and trade unions

The Greek project 'Promotion and strengthening of women's participation in trade unions and their representation bodies' aims to promote and ensure the active participation of women workers in positions of responsibility at all levels and in all types of trade unions. The INE (Labour Institute) have delivered activities, which focus on the broader social education of women, in order for them to become key actors for the promotion of women's issues via the trade unions. Innovative approaches taken in this project include counseling services and information dissemination on labour issues for women.

Working with a group of women from in and around Athens who are involved in trade unions, we collated a range of personal stories about their own and other people's experiences within the workplace, and the impact that the services provided by the trade unions have had on their lives. In these stories they talk about specific support available (i.e. counseling), issues within the workplace (i.e. discrimination) and their ambitions for the future (i.e. career pathways).



Wellbeing and the workplace

A number of the women's stories focus on wellbeing and how this relates to the workplace. [Eleni's](#) story is about her role as a career counsellor. She talks about her concerns for people who are trying to re-enter the job market. She tells the story of an immigrant who was fired from her role and how this incident impacted on the individual's mental health. Eleni feels that counselling can help people to "see things differently". Similarly, [Areti](#) recalls a story of her friend who decided to leave her studies to pursue a career ambition. However, this venture didn't go according to plan and it left her with symptoms of anxiety. Through accessing cognitive therapy sessions, seminars and counselling services, the friend is working her way through these issues. The general sentiment is that accessing counselling and similar support services in which people can discuss their issues with others is beneficial for women's overall wellbeing, and therefore could contribute to progressing their position and roles within the workplace. Parallels can be drawn between the perspective presented in these stories and the story of a [young woman](#) recovering from a severe mental health condition from Swedish 'User Voice' stories. In this story, the woman describes how attending a young person's meeting group has "brought meaning to [her] life" and that she is looking forward to getting her school results and moving into a work placement. In all of these instances 'talking' therapies have supported people on their route to wellbeing.

Approaching the topic of wellbeing from a different angle, Sofia talks about how peer support and encouragement from friends helped a woman she knows overcome issues she had developed from being raised in a troubled and abusive family environment. In this story, [Sofia](#) explains how whilst the woman was experiencing a negative period of mental health due to her past, her friends support her to publish poems that she had previously written. Upon winning awards for the poems and having her achievements acknowledged, the friend is now moving on with her life. What this demonstrates is the diversity of different types of therapy or cathartic experiences that can support people to be empowered. Such support enables people to work through the challenges that they are encountering in their lives.

Overcoming challenges through positive thinking

Speaking about overcoming challenges related to work, [Popi](#) recalls how after struggling to secure permanent employment, she found a job placement advertisement in a local newspaper and applied. 20 years later Popi is still working for this company and this employment has enabled her to complete her graduate and post-graduate studies. Her message from the story is to not give up hope and do not be stopped by “*obstacles, difficulties or disappointments*”. Congruently, [Eleni's](#) message from her story about career counseling is that positive thinking is key to supporting people to overcome difficulties.

In her role at work, [Anna](#) supports people who are experiencing problems within the workplace. She describes how she advocates having a positive attitude when handling problems such as disputes. For Anna, it is important to remember that there are “*beautiful things in life*” and to not always be focused on money or problems. Embracing a positive attitude towards challenges seems to be driving [Maria](#) onwards in her career plans. In her story, Maria describes how she has taken a risk in seeking a different career path than she originally intended and that goes against her family's expectations. However, although she was 34 she “*didn't give up hope*” and rather than sticking to what she was already good at, she thought she would try a new career in hairdressing that she “*will be better at*”. Similarly, [Christina](#) received some confidence-building support and then was able to find a role in which she feels more empowered and respected.

Gender differences in the workplace?

A few of the snapshot stories told by these women focus on the topic of equality in the workplace. In [Maria's](#) story she explains how she thinks that gender discrimination in the workplace in Greece is a “*critical issue*”. Building on this point, [Eleni](#) describes how she feels that this inequality is brought about because of differences in pay and access to opportunities “*especially in the private sector*”. However, one [woman](#) says how in her organisation there are no big issues between the genders and that emphasis is given to the skills that women tend to possess, such as creative thinking and creativity. This approach supports women to maximize their contribution to the organisation and be very productive. Another [woman](#) draws on her experience as a counsellor for abused women to say that it is easier for a woman to talk to another woman about her problems, as in general, women tend to face similar issues in the workplace and in balancing work and home life. The implication is that men do not face similar issues.

[Click here](#) or scan the QR code to view the extracts from this ‘User Voice’ collection.



InnoSI Themes

A key theme that emerges from these stories is that the support available in order to progress women's roles in the workplace is personalised. The **personalisation** of support can be a factor that enables people to take more control of their own lives, as is evidenced in [Maria's](#) story in which she rejects family pressures and makes her own decisions about her future. Similarly, through receiving mentoring from a person tasked with promoting equality in the workplace, [Christina](#) is now in a new role where she feels more confident and is finding it easier to handle workplace problems.

The insight from these stories draws parallels between this project that aims to empower women in the workplace, and the 'Youth Guarantee' scheme in Sweden that seeks to include young people more in society through education and work. The stories gathered in relation to the 'Youth Guarantee' initiative also focus on the **range of choices support** provided through [educational workshops](#), support in [searching for work](#) and [rehabilitation](#) etc. Although the type of support provision offered is different, the stories suggest that the impact on people's lives is similar. In essence, both programmes are reducing people's exclusion and disadvantage relating to the labour markets and seem to have significant impact on these individuals' **life course perspectives**.

Summary of Insights

- **Bespoke support:** The range of support available such as counselling, confidence-building, cognitive therapy etc. has provided choices for the women in these stories. Through providing options, people are then in a position to make a decision about what support would be best for them and thus the support becomes more meaningful.
- **Empowerment:** Through this bespoke support, it is clear from these women's stories that the various support and interventions they have accessed or received (either through formal structures or their peers), has empowered them to be the catalyst of change in their own lives.

[Click here](#) or scan the QR code to view the feature story for this collection of 'User Voice' stories.



Stories of Agriculture

Exploring the experiences of participants and observers of Social Land Programmes

Hungarian social land programmes help socially disadvantaged people with no financial means to engage with farming and to acquire the skills and resources needed in order to engage in household type agricultural activities. The land programmes support unemployed participants to produce agricultural products and acquire the competencies needed to sustain this activity. The main objective of the program is to strengthen independence, self-sufficiency and to decrease poverty by strengthening and recreating agricultural activities in rural areas.

To gather user voice on this topic we collated stories from a group of participants from various social land programmes in Hungary, and also students who had been researching and observing the programmes. Their stories provide an understanding of what the social land programmes bring to the communities in which they are run (i.e. rural), the types of agricultural activities they provide (i.e. rearing chickens) and the impact that they have had on people's lives (i.e. self-supporting).



Overcoming disadvantage and economic struggles

[Pálma](#) describes how in the village of Homrogd there are about 1000 inhabitants and around 60% of these people live in a disadvantaged situation. She describes how the local government combined the cultivation of people's own gardens with parts of the village's land. The crops produced as part of this cultivation are utilised by the families involved in the social land programme, and also shared with the community via the school and other local institutions. More so, unemployed people in the area participate in these activities through a public work programme, meaning that people with very little qualifications now have work and this has reduced unemployment in the area. The scenario is very similar in Magyargéc village. In his story [Imre](#), a participant and coordinator of the village's programme, describes how the programme is giving work opportunities to local people. Both [Pálma](#) and [Imre](#) talk about the social land programme in combination with a public work programme that is more widespread in the country. The public work programme is a government initiative to increase employment by instead of providing unemployment benefit, they give public work, which, in villages, is mostly agricultural work organised by the local government on their land. The social land programme, on the other hand, is done in people's own gardens and they are not paid for it. However, it does interlink with the public work programme as through the social land programme people can apply for funding for tools that can be used in the public work programme. Therefore, due to the interconnectedness of the two initiatives that support disadvantaged communities at a local level, people generally discuss them as the same activity.

Speaking about how the social land programme specifically supports people at a local level, the [daughter](#) of the one the participants in the social land programme in Jászladány explains that

whilst she doesn't know much about the programme, she does know that it saves her family money. The eggs produced by the chickens that they keep as part of the programme are used to cook with and they pass any left over onto other people. Her mother, [Zita](#), echoes this and says that "*there are always eggs and there is something to cook even at the end of the month*". From these stories we can see how for these participants the programmes are providing routes out of poverty by providing job opportunities for people and food.

A local community approach

The vision for the social land programmes was that they would be organised 'bottom-up' and their activities designed and carried out at a local level. On a national level, the programme is organised by State Secretariat for Social Affairs and Social Integration of the Ministry of Human Resource Development. At a local level the participating municipality decrees regulate the projects.

A sense of local ownership of the programmes does come out from the most of the stories collated. [Zita](#) describes how in Jászladány over 30 families received chickens and feed as part of the programme. At their own homes they rear the chickens, using them to produce eggs and also to eat. In her story recorded with her daughter, [Zita](#), describes how in the future, "*more people will take part in it*" as it is "*quite effective*". Similarly, [Imre](#) talks about how the expertise of local people is used to maintain the agricultural activities. In his village the local government do not have the finances available to purchase a secondary tractor that is needed due to the workload so instead they are using more traditional methods such as horses. This relies on the horsemanship skills of a Roma man who lives in the village. He takes care of the horses so that they can transport the goods from and to the fields. This 'bottom-up' approach and emphasis on community participation is similar to the social investment programme on the co-design of services in Kainuu, Finland. One of the practitioners working on this project, [Hannu](#), describes how it is important to support people so that they can look after both themselves and others in their communities.

A [student researcher](#) who has been observing the social land programmes stated that he was surprised to see the one in Panyola being successful, as the one from his own village had failed. Part of its success, is the relationship that the local people have with the Mayor. He describes how the people are on first name terms with him and the connection is closer. They refer to him as "*Zoli from the next street*" and the Mayor seems actively involved in supporting the villagers in the social land programme.

Becoming sustainable

A key aim of the social land programme was to create entrepreneurial municipalities instead of provider municipalities; in essence, creating sustainable ventures that local people are empowered to run themselves to meet their own needs rather than relying on municipality support provision. This goal is expressed in a number of the stories in this set.

[Imre](#) describes how their social land programme through its combination with the public work programme is on its way to becoming self-sustaining. According to [Imre](#), the current yield from the agricultural activities is enough for the village and its institutions. They have established an animal husbandry that is currently providing meat for festivals, but if they establish a slaughterhouse they will also be able to use this meat products from it for public institutions (i.e. schools). [Pálma](#) too echoes this drive for sustainability in her story on Homrogd's social land programme.

[Click here](#) or scan the QR code to view the extracts from this 'User Voice' collection.



InnoSI Themes

The social land programmes that the people in these stories talk about are a prime example of **regional and local implementation of a social investment policy**. It started as an experimental project in the 1990s, with the legal background of it being created with Act III 1993 Section 47. Local governments must formulate a decree outlining how the programme with work locally before being able to set it up in their area, and then families must sign contracts in order to receive the benefits provided by the programme. The stories of [Imre](#), [Zita](#) and her [daughter](#) all outline these benefits of the programmes at a local level, which include employment, food, opportunities and subsidies. Furthermore, many of the stories, such as [Zsolt's](#) recollection of the participation of the local Mayor and [Imre's](#) account of how local people's knowledge and skills are at the heart of what they are doing, suggest that there is real localised implementation and backing for this national programme. Through interlinking this initiative to the more widespread public work programme, communities are using agriculture as a means to alleviate poverty.

Summary of Insights

- **Responding to People's Needs:** It is important that social investment programmes are designed in accordance to people's needs. These people's stories about the social land programmes in their villages suggest that the issues facing the rural communities they belong to (i.e. poverty and unemployment), are being addressed from the agricultural activities that these programmes initiate.
- **Empowering People:** From these stories a sense of local ownership of the initiative comes through. People's stories indicate that they are empowered to cultivate their own land in order for it to provide for the people who live there, whether than be through livestock or other produce. This enablement and local empowerment seems to be a key driving force in making the programme's agricultural activities sustainable.

[Click here](#) or scan the QR code to view the feature story for this collection of 'User Voice' stories.



together to overcome social issues within the area and to encourage the participation and development of vulnerable people.

Many of people who shared their stories of living in these socially diverse neighbourhoods chose to speak a lot about their role within the area, suggesting that this is an important part of how they see their identity in the place in which they live. [Arina](#) describes in her story how she has a job within the Majella Wonen project and that she is “*proud*” of this achievement. As explored later, this is one of the steps in Arina’s journey that the Majella Wonen project has contributed to in order to support her on her life course. A [resident](#) of the ‘t Groene Sticht details how she work as a Postwoman and at a food store whilst living in the neighbourhood. She describes how this enabled her to meet people from the area and learn more about her fellow residents. In a story from another User Voice set, [Markuu](#) (Kainuu, Finland) describes a similar scenario. In his story he says that he lives alone but his role as a voluntary IT teacher for older people in his community has given him “*an opportunity to meet other people easily*”.

The importance of social responsibility

In neighbourhoods like ‘t Groene Sticht and Majella Wonen there are both people who are vulnerable and need support, and people who occupy a support-giving position. Whilst people in these neighbourhoods demand something from the area (i.e. housing, work, social support etc.), they also want to give something back. [Suzy](#) is a young woman who lives in Majella Wonen and in her story she describes how she used to live in temporary ‘anti-squat’ housing which meant that she had to move frequently. She says how she is “*looking forward*” to supporting the former homeless people who are now moving into the area to “*reintegrate into normal life*”. This gives her “*a lot of energy*” and is a key part in enabling her to feel that she belongs in society.

[Maria](#), who lives in ‘t Groene Sticht, is also equally keen to ‘give’ to her community. She lives in a flat and uses her balcony to grow vegetables. Her next step is to begin to share her knowledge with children and adults in her neighbourhood. Similarly, [Carlijn](#) describes how she is now using her experience of mental health illness to help set up a business that informs people about mental health issues. She also describes how the outdoor spaces in ‘t Groene Sticht provide places at which people can come together for parties and sports. The sentiment of these stories is also expressed in a ‘t Groene Sticht [resident’s](#) story. She says that she feels responsible for the collective of people in her neighbourhood, who she has met whilst in communal areas and through work. As the stories suggest, these neighbourhoods are cultivating spaces in which the residents actively participate in their community. This is something that other people in the ‘User Voice’ stories collated would also like the opportunity to do. For example, [Mohamed](#) (Ingolstadt, Germany) describes how having settled in, in Ingolstadt that he now wants to give back to German society.

Changing relationships

Within this collection of stories, a trend is that people’s lives undergo significant changes when their key relationships with other people change. In his story, [Isaak](#) talks about how he found himself living alone after his children had grown-up. He found that he had time and space to himself, and he got to like it. This situation changed when his son became a father and moved back home after the breakdown of a relationship. This changed Isaak’s “*perspective of being free*” as he was now had more of a role as a father and grandfather. In her story, the ‘t Groene Sticht [resident](#) indicates that her break-up with a partner who she still lives with, is a factor in her forthcoming move to Amsterdam. What is suggested from these stories is that with life transitions and events, people’s connections towards both their homes and neighbourhoods change.

[Click here](#) or scan the QR code to view the extracts from this ‘User Voice’ collection.



InnoSI Themes

The ways in which these residential and working neighbourhoods make interventions in the people's lives explored in these stories seem to have had a significant impact on their **life-course perspective**. For example, [Arina](#) describes how the Majella Wonen project has supported her development in many ways. Firstly, she has found employment within the project and is enrolling in a forthcoming education programme. Secondly, her new home in Majella Wonen is not shared accommodation and therefore she will be able to have children stay over with her.

From Arina's story we can gather that she has had a "*difficult path*" to get to where she is now and the interventions that can be attributed to the Majella Wonen project have provided support along this journey. With this support in place and positive prospects, the cycle of intergenerational transfer of poverty could be broken. Congruently, [Suzy's](#) experience of temporary housing was alleviated by the Majella Wonen project. She is now keen to use her skills to help support new people moving into the area who have experienced housing issues and to support them to integrate with the community there.

Summary of Insights

- **Meeting People:** It is important that neighbourhoods provide spaces and opportunities where residents can meet one another, share social time and get to know each other better. This helps to create a stronger sense of community, and enhances social connections.
- **Social Responsibility:** Fostering a notion of 'social responsibility' within neighbourhoods strengthens people's ties to the area and creates communities that are willing to 'give' as well as 'receive'. This could lead to people becoming less reliant on service provision and more on the resources within their own communities.

[Click here](#) or scan the QR code to view the feature story for this collection of 'User Voice' stories.



Stories of Co-design

Exploring the experiences of people's participation in the design of service provision

The region of Kainuu faces multiple significant challenges. The remote area suffers from depopulation and has an ageing population. The Kainuu region has seen a decline in entrepreneurial activity and has the second highest unemployment levels in Finland. In order to overcome these issues an experimental project was launched in April 2014 and will continue until the end of 2017. This project seeks to bring together the municipality and other service providers together with the people who live in the area to co-design new user-driven services and business models. In essence, the project brings together citizens, public, private and third sector representative to promote wellbeing in the region and raise the quality of local service provision.

Working with a range of people from Kainuu, including young people and older people, we gathered a range of stories about what life was like in the area. In these stories, the people talked about their communities and what supported their well-being. This included digital inclusion projects, volunteering and the role of clubhouses. People also spoke about some of the problems that they faced (i.e. alcohol and exclusion) and also who provided them with support (i.e. family and friends).



Life in Kainuu

[Elizabeth](#) lives in Ristijärvi, Kainuu, which is an area where a lot of older people live. She feels that more permanent residents and entrepreneurship is what Kainuu needs in order to be revived. She describes that seniors get good care in the area but she does feel that more resources are needed for social and health care services. Due to transport issues she knows that by the time she loses her driving license, she must move into the town centre to access the things that she needs as she currently lives 22km outside of it.

The rural nature of the Kainuu region and the implications of this on mobility are one of the things that the Culture Guide activity, described by [Aila](#), is trying to overcome. The Culture Guide activity supports people to access cultural events. In Aila's story she talks about how she helped to set it up in her area of Sotkamo by getting a local association to administer the grant funding that was

available for the activity. Aila got “700 euros to start the activity in the year 2014” and has helped to build its popularity. The activity is run by volunteers who act as ‘Cultural Guides’ and they arrange visits to the theatre and galleries for people “*who don’t go to events*”. The guide is a community member who “*gives a person a ride or comes along with the person to a cultural event*”. Aila is happy to be a part of this, as she believes that “*culture brings wellbeing and it belongs to everyone*”.

Participation in services

Initiatives and services that involve the people living in the region in meaningful ways in their design and delivery are at the core of the experimental programme that is being piloted in the Kainuu region. Another issue facing the aging the community is digital exclusion. [Pirkko](#) describes how digital support for pensioners is particularly needed since “*a lot of services have become online*”. Herself and other senior teachers run a group that supports people to develop digital skills such as “*how to attach a photo to a message, how to download apps [and] how to use touch screen*”. Pirkko describes how it is her own children who helped to gain these skills that she is now passing them on to others.

[Markku](#) has also been supporting seniors with IT at a clubhouse Tönäri. Although the clubhouse has some paid members of the staff, it is volunteers like him who run activities such as the IT club. In his story Markku describes how he is “*happy that [people] learn new skills*” at the sessions but also because he lives alone, volunteering give him “*an opportunity to meet other people easily*”. [Juhani](#) also goes to this clubhouse and he says it has supported him at a difficult time in his life when nothing seemed to be “*meaningful*”. He describes how he got involved in activities which enabled him to get new friends, and now he is a trusted member at the clubhouse and responsible for certain tasks such as mentoring new members. Describing his experiences of working on the co-design of services in the area, [Hannu](#) states how it is important that people “*need to have something to do*”, such as a job or hobby and have “*social communication and networks with other people*” in order to support their own wellbeing. As Hannu describes, services alone can’t keep people well; people also need to “*help themselves and help the others*”. The clubhouse activities and [Aila’s](#) Culture Guide initiative are representative of this reciprocal approach to service provision.

Peer support

As Hannu articulated, people need activities within their lives that support them to make social connections. [Marja’s](#) story about the craft workshops she attends explains why these activities are so important to people. In her story, she tells that when she retired her husband died unexpectedly and her daughter also moved away. This left her with “*so much time and [she] didn’t quite know what to do with it*”. For Marja, the workshops provided a lifeline to her and it enabled her to get “*some order and routines into [her] life*”. As she describes, the importance of these types of groups is not necessarily the activity, but the social ties – “*People come to groups not just to craft but also to meet other people and keep up social relations*”.

In his story, a local tourist guide [Vesa](#) describes how he likes to come together with other people and that they are trying to build a strong sense of community in Kainuu. This sense of community has been particularly important in helping [Toni](#) to turn his life around. In his story, he describes how he always felt excluded. As a teenager, Toni’s parents divorced and he started to use alcohol that led to him getting into problems with society. Nowadays however, through support from his friends and his current employer he is in a better place, and now he wants to give back to society and support other young people who are experiencing the types of problems he did.

[Click here](#) or scan the QR code to view the extracts from this ‘User Voice’ collection.



InnoSI Themes

The Local Government Act and Regional Self-Government Experiment Act underpins this new regional experiment that provides the backdrop of these stories. Promoting participative citizenship is a key part of both of these acts, and the user-centred service development that is being piloted in Kainuu is helping to achieve this. In some ways, this approach of **implementing national policy and law at local and regional levels** to create self-supporting communities is similar to the [residential and working neighbourhoods in the Netherlands](#). The key difference between them is the scope and geographies of the areas in which these social investment programmes are based.

In the other Finnish case study programme, the Youth Guarantee, the **personalisation** of the support provision was implemented by [offering people choices](#). In the case of the Kainuu regional experiment, personalisation is brought about in a much more bottom-up way through co-design and active participation. This process is a key part of the community projects being described in these stories. For example, [Aila](#) was instrumental in bringing the Cultural Guides programme to her area. Such interventions are changing people's **life courses** at different stages of their lives, whether it be supporting people out of [crime](#) or [reducing social isolation](#).

Summary of Insights

- **Reducing social isolation:** Many of the initiatives explored in these stories support people to be more socially included, whether it be [clubhouse membership](#), [digital inclusion workshops](#), [crafting activities](#) or [cultural visits](#), the purpose is to bring people together to share experiences in social settings.
- **Supporting people to support others:** The stories detail the different ways in which people are being enabled to support themselves and others in their community. A sense of pride and achievement from helping other people in their communities is found in these stories. This sentiment is similar to the 'User Voice' stories from the Netherlands provided by [Arina](#) and [Suzy](#).

[Click here](#) or scan the QR code to view the feature story for this collection of 'User Voice' stories



Stories of Social Activities

Exploring the experiences of older people who participate in social activities

The Government Programme for the Elderly Social Activity (ASOS) is one of the contributing programmes to the senior policy in Poland. The main objective of the programme is to improve the quality and standard of living for the elderly, and to dignify aging through social activity. It has four key priority areas: education of older adults; intergenerational social activities such as recreation activities for grandparents and grandchildren; participation of older adults in social activities such as gardening, interaction through learning, physical exercises with a group; and recruiting older adults as volunteers to support others within their community. The programme is a response to the challenges faced by this age demographic and the social pressures in Poland. The population boom in the 1950s means that many of people born in this era are entering the 60+ age bracket and therefore this policy is designed to enable them to age well.

Working with a group of older people who accessed different provision as part of the Association of Towarzystwo Edukacyjne Wiedza Powszechna's elderly social activities programmes, we gathered stories about their experiences of what such activities were like. In their stories, the people describe the variety of classes available (i.e. Nordic walking), how accessing such classes has changed their perceptions, and the benefits of such activities (i.e. health.). The stories also explain the key influencers in engaging older people in these activities (i.e. the teacher) and also what barriers they have experienced in getting other older people involved in their communities.



Changing perceptions

A key theme to emerge from the stories is that participating in activities such as educational classes and fitness sessions has changed how the participants see themselves. For example, talking about a language class that they access, [a woman and man](#) explain that many in the group did not expect to learn much at their age, but they did and they surprised themselves. As [Jerzy](#) explains, he didn't "*suppose that at this age [he could] still learn and expand [his] knowledge*". Similarly, [Wanda](#) who is also involved with the ASOS scheme describes how it has given her a new lease of life. Wanda has had the opportunity to take part in different activities such as language lessons, financial and legal aid sessions and physical exercise activities. The experience has enabled her to develop new hobbies and discuss different topics during the sessions.

Similarly, [Elzbieta](#), who attends cultural activities and takes part in debates through the ASOS programme, details how such opportunities enable her to share her opinions with others.

In terms of physical activities, [Barbara](#) describes how before attending the Nordic walking classes that she didn't do any sport, but now she has become a big fan of sport. She explains that when she has a "day off" she now goes [Nordic walking independently](#). Talking about her involvement in the initiative, [Elzbieta](#) has also tried out new sporting activities such as the Nordic walking and other group physical exercise classes. She describes how this has made her more active. Similarly, [Helena](#) describes how it has had a great "influence on her life" and that having a purposeful activity to participate in has motivated her to be more active. A key part in these people gaining the confidence and motivation to try new things can be attributed to the facilitators of the activities. As [Barbara](#), [Helena](#) and [Jerzy](#) outline, it is with support and encouragement from their tutors that have spurred them on in their pursuits.

Increasing social inclusion

In addition to providing new learning opportunities and the chance to be more physically active, the stories suggest that the ASOS initiative is also about providing spaces for people to interact. A [woman](#) describes that whilst the activities help to keep her health in a good condition, another important part of the programme for her is that it gives her contact with other people and this is helping her to be more tolerant and patient. In her story, [Elzbieta](#) describes how she moved to Gdansk in 2013 and had no friends. Through the Internet she found out about the range of classes available and in these classes she has been able to meet "wonderful people". As a result, both her [fitness and mental wellbeing](#) has been improved. Similarly, [Jola](#) explains how getting involved in local initiatives has enabled her to meet new people. In essence the participants of the programme in Gdansk have fostered strong social connections and a network of support amongst themselves that they encourage others, including their own families, to become a part of.

As other 'User Voice' collections also demonstrate, such as the [co-design of services](#) in Kainuu, Finland and the [socially diverse neighbourhoods](#) in Utrecht, the Netherlands, providing spaces in which people can meet helps to strengthen communities. One of the [women](#) in Gdansk describes how having initially took part in a project for seniors who wanted to spend time being active and creative that she then went on to voluntarily organise activities herself. She describes how she participated in intergenerational community integration workshops in how to make jewellery and glass painting, and has since organised meet-ups, such as cinema trips, for retirees in the area. This blurring of the line between a consumer of service to someone who is helping deliver a service or informal community support for themselves and others, is something that is evident in [Juhani's](#) story from Kainuu, Finland. In this story he describes how he originally went to a clubhouse at a time when his wellbeing was not too good, and after receiving support there from other people he is now mentoring new members.

Barriers to strong communities

Whilst most of the stories reference a strong sense of community, a couple of the contributions acknowledge the barriers to engaging people in supporting their community and its members. For example, one [woman](#) recalls a situation in which a member of her community needed some assistance after breaking a hand. Whilst other residents were aware of this, none were happy to help her for the 2 months that it took to heal. Similarly, another [woman](#) wanted to make better use of a communal basement but struggled to engage people living in the building in this idea. This highlights that providing provision for people to access is only one step of the journey to creating stronger communities, efforts must also be made in supporting people to support themselves.

[Click here](#) or scan the QR code to view the extracts from this 'User Voice' collection.



InnoSI themes

The ASOS programme is the first public intervention made by central government in Poland, in order to improve the seniors' quality of life by encouraging them to be more active and better integrated into the society. The programme is a Government initiative that is implemented **at regional and local levels** by a range of actors such as public institutions, non-Governmental organisations and community groups.

The stories gathered detail a range of activities that the programme provides, suggesting that **personalisation** is a key aspect. The diversity of activities on offer to the older people in these stories provides them with different **choices** concerning the types of support provision and opportunities that they would like. The delivery of the programme is in some ways similar to how the '[Youth Guarantee](#)' is being delivered in Finland; whilst it is a top-down, Government programme, key to it is individual choice and options for the people it is supporting. More so, the ASOS programme in some cases it seems to have been the impetus behind people becoming more involved in their communities [through volunteering and providing activities for others](#) within their communities to engage with.

Summary of Insights

- **Providing new opportunities:** A key message from these stories is that the activities of the ASOS programme have provided the people who have shared their stories with us, the opportunity to try out new experiences. This has included the chance to [learn different languages](#) and engaging with different [physical activities](#). These opportunities have helped people to think differently about themselves and own capacities.
- **Creating stronger social ties:** Whilst the activities being provided have many benefits such as gaining new skills and better health, one thing that links all of the activities together is that they provide older people with opportunities to [meet other people](#). It is through these activities that older people can feel more socially included and can contribute to creating stronger communities.

[Click here](#) or scan the QR code to view the feature story for this collection of 'User Voice' stories.



Stories of Early Childhood Education and Care Services

Exploring the experiences of professionals in innovative ECEC services

The Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) services in the Emilia-Romagna region of Italy have undergone a period of innovation and transformation from the 1990s onwards. This process has involved experimenting with new types of services in order to meet the changing needs of families. This has included creating centres for both children and parents, establishing children's spaces and delivering learning in small education groups. There has also been changing patterns in welfare policies due to constraints on public expenditure that has led to the emergence of innovative partnership between public and private actors (with a relevant presence of Social Economy actors (i.e. social cooperatives)). The results of this have been a diversification in the models adopted and in how the ECEC service provision is delivered. Increasing of accessibility and quality of ECEC services provision has been possible through a pro-active engagement with local actors, including children, their families and the communities in which they are living. The innovation partnership provides further improvements in term of flexibility in opening times of centers, combining ECEC with relevant healthcare provision, and greater respect of diversity

Working with professionals from these ECEC services such as Educators, Centre Managers and Pedagogy Coordinators, we gathered a range of stories about what the service provision is like and what it offers to children and their families. In the stories, people spoke a lot about the environment, and how the outdoors and nature could be used as part of children's and families' learning experiences. They also talked about the fundamental approaches and aspects of the pedagogical practices that they use (i.e. discovery and dialogue) and the results of this (i.e. independence and connection).



The value of outdoor learning environments

Nature is seen by many of the ECEC service workers as being essential to a child's development and learning, and is incorporated into how they deliver the ECEC provision. [Anna](#) explains how the school she works at took part in an experimental project that involved them taking the children to spend a morning in the woods every two weeks, regardless of the weather. For Anna this was a success, and at the request of the older children and their parents, they are now spending more time doing activities in the wood. [Erica](#), an educator at a nursery in the city, shares these feelings. In her story she explains that the nursery has a large garden where herself, other educators and children spend a lot of time in. She thinks that is important for children who live in cities to experience nature everyday, and would like to see [the garden area used even](#) more than it currently is.

[Ilaria](#) also values the green space at the children's centre that she works at and would also like to see more activities organised in the garden. She states how she sees the children when they are inside, go to the windows to look out. Through experiencing nature, she feels the children's learning could also be improved. Commenting on how engagement with nature can support development, [Silvia](#) explains that if spaces are managed wrongly it can hinder a child's growth. Therefore, it is beneficial for children to freely engage with nature and explore more. Similarly, [Cristiana](#) states that educators and parents should not be afraid to let children experience the environment and they must instead trust them to explore. She argues that natural materials available to children to play with will feed their imagination.

Growing independence

Activities such as these contribute towards growing the children's independence. Recounting a story about an activity in which children and educators went looking for a bear in the woods, [Marika](#) – a research student – describes how the children were independent in their tasks and that they knew the importance of working together to achieve their goal. She also notes how the children and adults both seemed to enjoy this experience.

Outside of nature-based learning, [Ilaria](#) feels that it is important to allow children to argue providing that they are safe and there is no physical fighting. She says that these experiences aid the child's development as they learn for themselves how to manage negative emotions such as anger and also the consequences of acting in anger. Ilaria feels that children need opportunities to develop the skills that they need to govern such feelings and emotions. Denying children of such a learning opportunity may be more detrimental in the longer term as [Silvia's](#) story demonstrates. Silvia works with older children, aged six to eighteen years old, and she has noticed that they find it difficult to join groups and share whilst in them. She feels that it is important that children learn how to independently handle life scenarios earlier on, so that these skills can be built upon, as they grow older. [Elena's](#) story indicates how this can be achieved via an approach in which adults stay neutral on issues and let children manage arguments by themselves.

Creating dialogue

Many of the professionals who shared their stories with us, spoke about how dialogue with families is key to the innovation and developments within their services. [Chiara](#) perceives her centre as offering a growth and dialogue experience for the children, parents and educators. One of the key aims of the centre is that it provides “*quality time*” in which children, parents and educators can have a good time together. [Poala](#) describes how the storytelling activities at her centre provide a space in which the educators and families can share their experiences of educating children. Similarly, [Anna](#) suggests that it is through dialogue and co-working with professionals from other sectors, that they are able to find the rights answers to the children's growth. At her centre, [Agnese](#) has observed that sometimes the way the educators behave should be adjusted to be more in-line with open dialogue techniques and in order to support a “*welcoming approach*”. She would like to see her educators become closer to the families and see things from their perspective so that they can better evaluate their needs. In her story, [Chiara](#), who has worked in ECEC for several years, talks about how since becoming a mother herself that she has become “*more empathetic towards other parents*” that she works with. In essence, the experience of motherhood has changed her perceptions and the ways that she looks at things. What these stories suggest is that the combination of professional and family perspectives on children's development is central to creating on-going improvements in ECEC services that are responsive to the current needs of people, families and society.

[Click here](#) or scan the QR code to view the extracts from this ‘User Voice’ collection.



InnoSI themes

The stories gathered detail a number of approaches and innovations within the ECEC services in Emilia-Romagna region that are aiming to enhance the **life course perspectives** of both the children and the parents/families who they work with. The **early interventions** being made are quite diverse but a commonality between them is the focus on outdoor learning and the role of nature in children's development. Stories such as [Anna's](#), [Erica's](#) and [Marika's](#) highlight how such learning environments are empowering children to become more independent and are fostering new ways of supporting skills, knowledge and social development of children.

A crucial part of supporting such development is the dialogue that the ECEC services described in these stories have or are seeking to develop with the parents and families of the children who they work with. As [Erica's](#) and [Chiara's](#) stories particularly articulate, in fostering such relationships with children's parents and families, they are able to understand their needs better and thus make their service provision much more **personalised**. In essence, there is a strong sense from the stories that parents are participating in the way in which the ECEC services are being designed.

Summary of Insights

- **Enabling rather fixing:** A key message that is prevalent in [Ilaria's](#), [Silvia's](#) and [Elena's](#) stories is that the learning environments that are created in the ECEC should promote enablement. To do this, they advocate a practice that puts the onus on the children to overcome challenges rather than the adults 'fixing' the issue. This develops many skills that the children will need throughout life.
- **Combining different expertise:** Many of the stories acknowledge that the professional expertise of the Educators, Centre Managers and Pedagogy Coordinators is only part of the answer to support children to develop in a positive way. The professionals themselves advocate dialogue with the parents and families of the children in order to learn from their experiential understandings.

[Click here](#) or scan the QR code to view the feature story for this collection of 'User Voice' stories.



Stories of School

Exploring the experiences of education reform from students' and their teacher's perspectives

The Swedish school reform is a national programme for children and young people aged 7 – 16 that have newly arrived to Sweden and do not speak Swedish. The reform states that all schools must chart all newly arrived students' prior knowledge and experience. The purpose of this is to better plan the student's education based on their individual circumstances. The reform also seeks to integrate newly arrived students more quickly into mainstream Swedish school education than it was previously done.

To gather user voice on this topic we worked with a group of newly arrived students who attend a school in Karlstad and their language teacher. Their stories provide an understanding of what the education reform is like from both a users' and practitioners' perspectives. These stories explore the students' feelings about their first days at school in Sweden (i.e. shy), how they have found the process of joining a new education system (i.e. supportive) and some of the barriers they have faced or may face in the future (i.e. language and communication).



Settling in

Many of the students' stories explore their first experiences of Swedish school and how they have settled in. The students' stories acknowledge the difficulties experienced because of the significant language barrier between them and the people in their new school. None of the students spoke Swedish before they started school and so this communication difficulty did hinder them from settling in straight away. In ['Keep Positive'](#) a teenager talks about how she tries to keep positive in order to overcome the frustration she feels when she doesn't understand something. The teenager in ['My Story'](#) explains how not knowing the language was "so difficult" and that she was "so shy". She explains how she felt excluded from jokes in the classroom as she couldn't understand them or why people were laughing.

The teenager in the ['Adjusting to school in Sweden'](#) story echoes these feelings. She describes that she "cried" and was "shy" at first. She felt that she was "unknown" and had "nobody around". The young person who narrates the ['My experience of school in Sweden'](#) also explains how they

didn't talk much at first, and mostly listened. However, through making many friends and starting to learn the language, he is now settling in. The teenager in '[My experience in Sweden](#)' also says that learning the language is key to settling in and that newly arriving students should learn it as quickly as possible. This advice is also given by the teenager in the '[Adjusting to school in Sweden](#)' story who says that it would be easier to get know people if you knew the language, so learning the language is really important. In the 'User Voice' stories from [refugees' experiences](#) in Germany, [Ismael](#) talks about how not speaking German made settling in "difficult" because he could not "communicate with people". However, learning German has now enabled him to feel part of German society and the "concerns of the people living [in Germany]" are also now his concerns. What this suggests is that developing strong social ties is key to people settling in to new areas.

Developing positive relationships with teachers

Although many of the student's stories explore the difficulties they encountered with the language barrier and in settling in, they still all describe their experience at school in Sweden in positive terms. A teenager who shared the second '[My experience of school in Sweden](#)' details how it was hard at first because no-one spoke English, but that she "still liked it more in Sweden" than in her home country. Explaining her reasons for this, she details how the teachers were "supportive" and helped her to "get along in the class."

Many of the other stories also highlight the pivotal role of the teachers in welcoming the new arrivals to the school. For example, the teenager in the '[Adjusting to school in Sweden](#)' story referred to the staff as "very nice". In '[Changing Schools](#)', the teenager describes how he felt respected by the teachers and that they understood how it was hard for him to "move from [his] land and learn many different stuff". In the '[My experience of school in Sweden](#)' the narrator talks about how a teacher setting him homework has helped him to learn. The teenager in '[My experience in Sweden](#)' says that the teachers are "kind" and that instead of hitting students for not doing their homework that they instead take the time to talk to them. These stories suggest that when people move to new places and countries, feeling wanted by the people in the community they are going to be a part of is key to settling in. This is echoed by some of the stories from refugees in Germany such as [Hossam](#) who talks about the "warm welcome" that the German people have given him.

Language barriers to social barriers

In [Linda's](#) story she explains how whilst the reform is positive in getting the students into Swedish mainstream education that it does only provides a "small window of opportunity" for them to learn the language. She says that the students learn socialising language relatively quickly (i.e. what they use with friends to create social ties), but she feels learning the language of and diversity of subjects in Swedish education takes much longer. For example, as one of the [student's](#) says, in Sweden you get to study and learn about all religions instead of just one. In Linda's opinion the limited period of integration into the education system means that new arrivals may be at a disadvantage educationally. She feels that they might not reach their full potential and that consequently they may struggle to find a "role in society". This may result in them being "at the bottom" of society and thus reduce their social mobility.

[Click here](#) or scan the QR code to view the extracts from this 'User Voice' collection.



InnoSI Themes

The reassuring nature of the teaching staff (as explored in the '[My experience of school in Sweden](#)' and '[Adjusting to school in Sweden](#)' stories), and their ability (as described in the '[Changing Schools](#)' story), to understand the student's as individuals, has enabled them to settle in. Through this process of **personalisation** via getting to know the students and assisting them to settle into the school in a number of ways (i.e. being supportive, setting homework and taking time to consider the difficulties involved in moving country), the teachers have created a welcoming environment in which the students can tap into their own capacities and develop.

The education reform in Sweden is also an example of the **early intervention and life-course perspectives** theme within social investment programmes and policies. In engaging with new arrivals as individuals and making the most of their prior knowledge, the reform seeks to quickly integrate the students in society. However, as [Linda](#) explains, this aim may not be working in practice, as whilst it does assist the students to become socially included quickly, it does not give enough time for students to develop their education skills to their fullest capacity. This may result in them being socially excluded in the longer term as may not be able to find a meaningful role due to educational disadvantage.

Summary of Insights

- **Reciprocal Effort:** In order to 'fit in' somewhere it is important that people develop meaningful relationships and social ties with the people around them. In a new country, a key part of this is learning the language in order to communicate. It is also important that the experience of meeting the people who already occupy those spaces are positive. This helps to ease the transition.
- **More Time:** Positive interventions made within restrictive timeframes can ultimately have negative consequences. In the longer term the value of the intervention may be lost due to the lack of time given in order to see it flourish.

[Click here](#) or scan the QR code to view the feature story for this collection of 'User Voice' stories.



Stories of Integration

Exploring the experiences of refugees and immigrants integration into the labour market, education & training environments and society

Although immigration rates in Germany have been constantly high for decades, particularly since 2015, many immigrants still face problems integrating into social and economic life. Refugees especially are confronted with a rather restrictive legislation regarding residence and working permissions. Without a residence permit it is hard to get a job and many employers do not want to hire refugees because of bureaucratic hurdles and refugees' uncertain future prospects. Due to this, refugees need special support and consultancy for labour market integration. A number of projects and initiatives to support this integration have been established across Germany, including the MAMBA scheme in Muenster.

To gather insights into refugees and immigrants' integration into the labour market and Germany society in general, we worked with a group of people from a range of different countries including Syria, Afghanistan and Romania who are now currently living in Ingolstadt. Their stories of integration focus on their journey to becoming part of German society and what they have done to integrate, such as learn the language, access the education system and try to find work. Their stories details some of the challenges involved in this process such as asylum regulations and restrictions, and also how certain elements of the system can be problematic or frustrating (i.e. food stamps). Their stories also touch upon why they came to Germany and what they aspire to do in the future.



Integrating into Germany society

In his story, [Hossam](#) describes how he came to Germany with his family to start a new life away from the war and suffering in Syria. He now has some good friends in Germany, including German friends, and that since arriving, he and his family have been given everything they need to make their new start in Germany. [Mohamed](#) is also originally from Syria and too fled the war. He too is appreciative of the freedom, peace and friendliness of German society, and his goal is to study and give something back to Germany. [Ismael](#), who two years ago also moved to Ingolstadt to again flee the war in Syria, has also had a positive experience of integrating into German society. In his story Ismael describes how although he had to repeat his 11th Grade in Germany and he

initially struggled to communicate because he didn't speak the language, he now speaks fluent German and feels much more like he belongs in society. Talking about his interest in German social and political issues, he says that *"I am a part of this society and I have to participate now... what happens affects me as well although I'm not German"*. His goal is become a computer scientist. Ismael's story highlights the importance of learning the language of the society that you are integrating into in order to communicate and settle in. This sentiment is echoed in many of the young people's stories from Sweden, who describe how [learning Swedish](#) helped them to settle into a new school in a new country.

What emerges from these stories is that the people telling their stories of integration want to be a real part of the society that they are coming into. Looking at the insights we gathered from the [young people's integration into the Swedish education system](#), we can see how it is important for newcomers to society to feel welcomed and that they have the opportunity to develop and give their capacities to the country that they have moved to. [Oana](#), who herself moved to Germany from Romania and now works with unaccompanied migrant children, describes how it is important that society is patient with newcomers. She explains that people don't really understand how difficult life in Germany can be for these young people, and that satisfying their *"material needs"* is not enough. People need the support and affections of family and friends to feel like they belong somewhere. Oana argues that is only when people *"feel respected and loved"* that they will be successful.

Barriers to integration

In another story [Oana](#) describes how feeling unwelcome can affect people's integration into society. Speaking specifically about young men, Oana suggests that they feel that they have restraints on them when being in public as everybody looks at them. Shaked who is originally from Afghanistan, describes some of the difficulties for refugees who are integrating into German society in his stories. Before fleeing the war and coming to Germany, [Shaked](#) had been working for Coca-Cola and finding work there was quite easy. However, this has become much more difficult in Germany because his high school diploma and legal documents were not accepted. He also describes how having not permanent residence and not identity card hinders him in finding employment. These factors and the declining of his application in 2016 have had implications on how much he can settle into German society. [Shaked](#) describes how he is unable to find work, attend language courses or find vocational courses, and he has had to teach himself German without any help. In his story, he describes how he survives on food stamps and that this makes him feel *"shameful"* and *"tiny"*. Similarly, although [Mohamed](#) is keen to give back to German society, but a lack of residence permit is preventing him from accessing educational programmes that will enable him to do this.

Working life

Refugees who have found work, such as [Mohammed](#) who is a heating installer, seem to be more positive about their integration into society. Mohammed plans to continue his training with the company that he is with and progress his career. Similarly, [Hossam](#) who is a professional dancer, has been able to find work as a dancer at a festival and wants to pay Germany society back for what it has provided to his family through his art. This suggests that through having a role in society in which their capacities are recognised, people feel much more valued and want to give back more. This is echoed in some ways by the 'User Voice' stories on [neighbourhoods in the Netherlands](#) in which people, such as [Dirk](#) and [Arina](#), take pride in their jobs and roles in society.

[Click here](#) or scan the QR code to view the extracts from this 'User Voice' collection.



InnoSI themes

Early stage interventions can change people's **life course perspectives**. Without such interventions it is likely that the social disadvantages people face will increase through their lives, and can also result in the intergenerational transfer of poverty and disadvantage. As [Ismael's](#) and [Mohammed's](#) stories demonstrate, access to education and work training programmes have supported them to become a positive part of German society. Despite the situations that have caused these young men to flee their home countries, their stories suggest that the plans that they have for their futures seem much more positive and will enable them to use their skills to positively benefit German society. Similarly, [Hossam's](#) positive integration into German society through being able to use his artistic practice at a festival and through making good friends, could have positive implications for his whole family. In both [Shaked's](#) story and [Mohamed's](#) account of his life in Germany, we are told about the various restrictions they are facing that are disabling their integration into German society. Since these stories were collated Shaked has been granted the right to stay in Germany and has been supported in this battle through local support of individuals and services. Without such intervention and support it can be difficult for people to overcome the challenges that they are facing and change their life course.

Summary of Insights

- **Giving back:** Access to support that meets their material needs, a good network of peer and family support and work, training, education opportunities are all contributing factors to making people feel welcomed and valued in society. When newcomers to societies are enabled to fully integrate, they feel a strong sense of wanting to 'give something back'.
- **Restricting Integration:** When there are restrictions put on people that create barriers to them fully engaging in society as other people do (i.e. work restrictions, different economical support such as food stamps rather than employment benefits etc.), people find integrating into society much more difficult. [Shaked's](#) experience particularly highlights how such barriers can have an impact on people's sense of identity and their overall wellbeing.

[Click here](#) or scan the QR code to view the feature story for this collection of 'User Voice' stories.



Summary of Insights

The ‘User Voice’ stories collated and curated provide a wide range of insights into people’s lives across Europe and how these relate to social investment programmes and associated policies. The stories not only detail accounts of people’s lived experiences of support provision, projects and initiatives but also the wider contexts of their lives. From these stories, the insights can be broadly categorised into four key areas: Regional and local implementation of social investment policies, Personalisation, Early interventions and life course perspectives and Peer support networks and social connections.

Regional and local implementation of social investment policies

A number of the social investment programmes that the ‘User Voice’ stories relate to are examples of regional and local implementation of national policies. The [social land programme in Hungary](#) that provides support via agriculture for people experiencing social disadvantage is a key example of this model. The ‘User Voice’ stories from this programme explain the benefits that people’s communities see from this national initiative. For example, [Imre](#) explains how the social land programme provides employment opportunities for people in his village in combination with the government’s more widespread public work programme. Furthermore, in some instances it is highlighted how [local people’s knowledge and skills](#) are at the heart of what is being achieved through the national programme. In a similar way, the national [Youth Guarantee initiative](#) in Finland makes the most of local service provision and actors to provide support to young people who are not in education, employment or training at a local level.

In the case of the [co-design of services](#) scheme in Kainuu and the [socially diverse residential and working neighbourhoods](#) in Utrecht, national policies and law are key in supporting such initiatives. National Finnish law in terms of both The Local Government Act and Regional Self-Government Experiment Act underpins the Kainuu regional experiment by promoting participative citizenship. In some ways, this approach is similar to the neighbourhoods being created in Utrecht as various social support and welfare acts and law underpin them. Many of the stories from both of these ‘User Voice’ collections communicate a strong sense of community in the places the storytellers live. [Vesa’s](#) story about life in Kainuu and the ‘t Groene Sticht [resident’s](#) story about her feelings towards other people who live in the neighbourhood, are examples of this.

Personalisation

Regardless of whether or not the social investment programme is national, regional or local, the ‘User Voice’ stories suggest that personalisation is key to providing services and support provision that is meaningful to individuals. When the support provision is not personalised and therefore does not meet people’s needs, people tend to express frustration with it like in [JL’s](#) story about [family services](#) in the UK, and [Jorge’s](#) story about [unemployment support](#) in Spain.

The ‘User Voice’ stories suggest that personalisation can be achieved in a number of different ways. In reference to the [ASOS programme](#) in Poland and the [Youth Guarantee](#) initiative in Finland, personalisation is realised by offering people different choices. With the ASOS programme, this is done through the diversity of activities on offer to the older people such as the opportunity to [learn different languages](#) or engage with [different physical activities](#). In the case of the Youth Guarantee, a range of support provision is offered to young people to support them into work such as [job search support](#), [group support sessions](#), [study options](#) and [work placements](#). Although both of these programmes are ‘top-down’ interventions, the diversity of choice available enables individuals to tailor the support provision they receive in order to meet their needs.

Enabling people to develop the capacities to be the catalysts of change in their own lives and manage the issues that they encounter is another key part of personalisation. Looking at the stories from [women in trade unions](#) in Greece, we can see how the support being provided is enabling them to take more control of their own lives. For example, in [Maria's](#) story she explains how she has rejected family pressure and is now making her own decisions about her future. Similarly, through receiving mentoring, [Christina](#) is now finding it easier to handle workplace problems. In the [Early Childhood Education and Care Services](#) in Bologna, the educators explain how the learning environments that are created in the ECEC services should promote enablement. As [Ilaria's](#), [Silvia's](#) and [Elena's](#) stories suggest, they advocate a practice that puts the onus on the children to overcome challenges rather than adults 'fixing' the issue. This practice supports the children to develop the skills that they will need to navigate the world and their futures.

In the case of the [Kainuu regional pilot into service design](#), personalisation is brought about through co-design and active participation. This process is a key part of the community projects being described in these stories as detailed by [Pirkko](#) and [Markuu](#) in their stories about supporting others to develop digital skills, [Juhani's](#) story about mentoring new clubhouse members and [Aila's](#) story about the culture guide initiative she helped to set-up. Similarly, the professionals involved in the ECEC services in Bologna explain how their perspectives are only one part of understanding how to provide quality learning environments for children. As [Erica's](#) and [Chiara's](#) stories articulate, the centres are seeking to develop dialogue with the parents and families of the children who they work with in order to influence the ECEC services they provide.



Early intervention and life course perspectives

Early interventions can change people's life course perspectives. Without such interventions it is likely that the social disadvantages people face will continue throughout their lives, and can also result in the intergenerational transfer of poverty and disadvantage. Looking at [Vanessa's](#) experience of [family life](#) in the UK, we can see how a family worker who "took an interest in [her]", was instrumental in arranging a mentoring programme that is enabling Vanessa to better communicate her own needs. Similarly, the support that [Arina](#) has received from the [Majella Wonen project](#) in Utrecht has enabled her to secure employment and also housing that is suitable for her children to visit and to stay over at. Such interventions help to mitigate the intergenerational transfer of issues and disadvantage.

Looking at the stories from [refugees in Germany](#) we can also see how this can be achieved. Access to support provision in terms of education and training programmes have supported [Ismael](#) and [Mohammed](#) to integrate positively into German society. Their stories suggest that their future plans are much more positive than the situations that caused them to flee their home countries, and that they are planning to use their skills to positively benefit German society. The early interventions being made with the [education reform](#) in Sweden are also trying to support

newcomers to the country to integrate, not just in terms of schooling but also in society. The education reform seeks to understand the new arrivals as individuals and make the most of their prior knowledge in order to quickly integrate them into mainstream educational classes. However, as [Linda](#) – a teacher involved in implementing the reform – explains, this haste may not provide enough time for students to develop their education skills to their fullest capacity and have an unintended negative impact on their life course perspective.

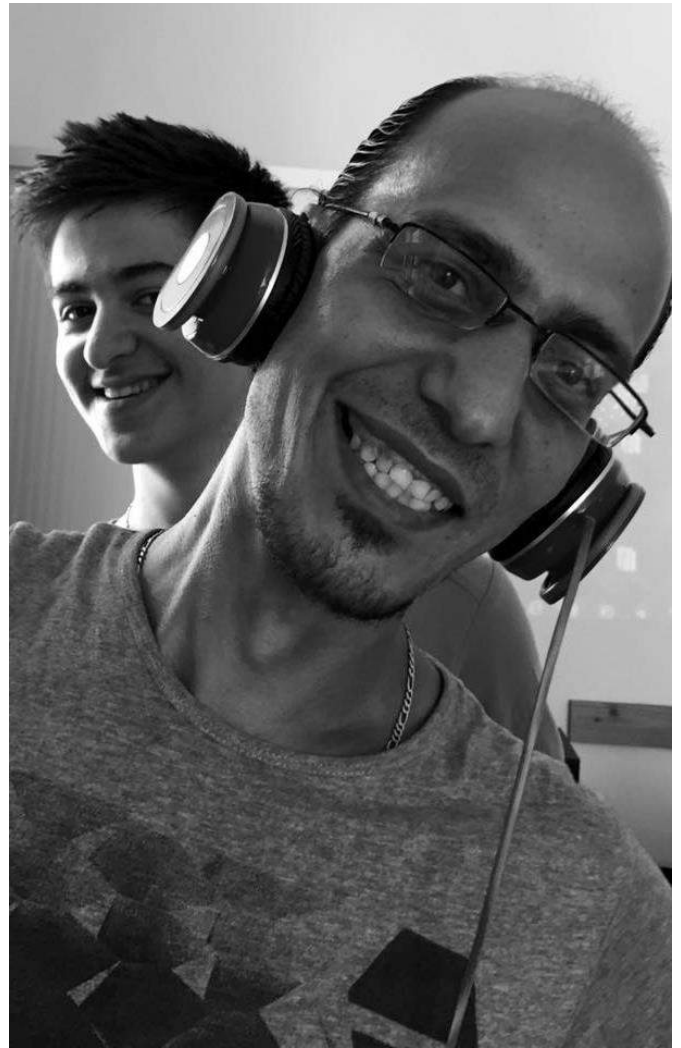
Peer support networks and social connections

From across the ‘User Voice’ story collections a key message is that formalised support provision alone is only part of the solution in enabling people and communities to overcome the challenges that they are encountering; another core component of this is peer support networks and social connections. This is particularly true when individuals feel that the support provision available to them is not adequate to their needs. In instances such as this, people have discussed the important role that their **family** plays in assisting them. Talking about the financial crisis in Spain, both [Jorge](#) and [Abu](#) describe the pivotal role that their families have played in supporting them not just in terms of emotional and wellbeing support, but also financial support. Since 2008, Abu has struggled financially. He initially coped by asking family for money, but he has now stopped relying on them. Similarly, Jorge describes how people like him survive because of “*help from the family, which is something that is rarely known or discussed*”. With state interventions found lacking, people like Jorge and Abu have no alternative other than to turn to their families for support. In the UK, [JL](#) expresses a similar reliance on family when service provision wasn’t particularly helpful in assisting her with the complexities that were affecting her family life.

Outside of the family, a key component of peer support networks are people’s **friends**. Talking about their experiences of life in Kainuu, Finland both [Juhani](#) and [Toni](#) indicate that it was with the support of friends that they have overcome the difficulties they were experiencing. Similarly, [Sofia](#) from Greece shared a story about a friend who is overcoming an abusive past partially due to the encouragement she has received from friends in terms of publishing her poetry and [Clara](#) from the UK explains in her story how she has received support from the members of the congregation at her church who have “*always been there for [her], more than the other professionals*”. The value of social connections seems to be particularly important for **older people**. Whilst speaking about her craft class in Kainuu, [Marja](#) describes how she had become quite socially isolated after retiring, her husband’s unexpected death and her daughter leaving home. The class provides her with “*some order and routines in [her] life*”, and her and others go to the group “*not just to craft but also to meet other people and keep up social relations*”. Similarly, [Jerzy](#) describes how the ASOS activities in Gdansk enabled him to “*expand the number of friends*” he has, and in her story, [Elzbieta](#) describes how she moved to Gdansk in 2013 and through the ASOS activities she has been able to meet “*wonderful people*”.



Another group to which social ties are particularly significant is **newcomers** to communities. Many of the young people living in Karlstad who contributed their stories about their integration into the Swedish education system noted the value of making friends as part of this journey. A key part of this process was learning the language so that they could communicate with other young people. For example, the teenager in the '[Adjusting to school in Sweden](#)' story says that it would be easier to get know people if you can talk to them, so learning the language is really important. This sentiment is echoed by the young person in the '[My experience of school in Sweden](#)', and the young person in the '[Changing Schools](#)' story explains how his friends are supporting him to settle into school in Sweden. The experiences of these young people are also reflected in the stories of refugees who are now living in Ingolstadt, Germany. In his story, [Hossam](#) describes how he now has some good friends in Germany, including German friends, and that this has enabled him to settle down. Similarly, [Ismael](#), who initially struggled to communicate because he didn't speak the language, now speaks fluent German and feels much more like he belongs in society. It is important, as [Oana](#) who works with unaccompanied migrant children describes, that society is patient with newcomers as it is only when people "*feel respected and loved*" that they will become a real part of the society they are entering.



Providing **spaces** for social interactions to occur and for people to meet others and get to know them better can encourage the growth of peer and community networks of support. A number of the social investment programmes explored as part of InnoSI are providing these environments, such as the [clubhouses in Kainuu](#) and the [workshops in the ASOS programme](#). The diverse residential and working neighbourhoods in Utrecht are also an example of this. As [Carlijn](#) describes, the outdoor spaces in 't Groene Sticht provide places at which people can come together for parties and sports. Similarly, part of the innovation in the Early Childhood Education and Care Services in Bologna is providing spaces in which the educators and families can come together to find the rights answers to the children's growth. In her story, [Poala](#) describes how storytelling activities can support this, and [Agnese](#) advocates open dialogue as a way of educators becoming closer to the families. Through combing professional services and interventions alongside the strengthening of a community's existing resources and support networks, social investment programmes can create sustainable and meaningful positive change for people and communities. As [Hannu](#), one of the facilitators of the co-design process in Kainuu states, services alone can't keep people well; people also need to "*help themselves and help others*".

[Click here](#) or scan the QR code to view a film of 'User Voice' extracts on this theme.



Wider Impact

Supporting individuals and sustainability

Engaging people in Community Reporting activities as part of InnoSI contributes to the strong element of user involvement and voice that runs through the wider project. For the individuals who have participated in the Community Reporting activities it has also been an enabling experience. Participants from Kainuu for example have sent feedback that describes how “*the days were so empowering*” and how they have been given “*tools to improve [their] skills*”. Similarly, a participant from the Athens programme stated how the activities have “*given them the confidence to use their voice*”. Furthermore, feedback ascertained by Universitat Politècnica de València from the participants following the delivery of the Community Reporting programme suggests that the experience of sharing their stories of unemployment had been cathartic. In essence, the storytelling activities were emotional and it has provided them with some release.

Since the delivery of the 2-Day Community Reporting for Insight and 1-Day Training-The-Trainer programmes, a number of subsequent Community Reporting activities have taken place. Following the delivery of the training programme in Kainuu, one of the Insight Advocate Trainers from the programme utilised their skills to re-deliver another programme in Turku with students at Turku University of Applied Sciences. People’s Voice Media provided them with remote support. These students started by sharing stories about their own experiences of education. These stories did not contribute to the analysis presented in this report, but the students once trained did use their skills to gather stories from users of the Youth Guarantee initiative. In total they gathered 14 stories of young people’s experiences of being unemployed and the support they have received.

Following the delivery of the programme in Utrecht, one of the Community Reporters who attended the training has since posted a further 2 stories about people’s lives in the ‘t Groene Sticht neighbourhood, and in the United Kingdom during the subsequent post-programme meet-up a Community Reporter recorded and shared another story about their experiences of support provision. These stories have been included in the analysis presented in this report. Additionally, a Community Reporter from the group trained in Gdansk has shared a video that visually shows clips of the activities that older people involved in the ASOS programme engage with. In Germany, following the programme, the Community Reporters based in Ingolstadt have posted stories about other aspects of their lives. So far, they have shared a further 9 stories. These additional stories from Gdansk and Ingolstadt have not included in the analysis in this report, as they were not necessarily related to the insights being gathered for the InnoSI project, but are still examples of stories of people’s lived experiences and are accessible on www.communityreporter.net

The Ingolstadt ‘User Voice’ group are now in the process of setting-up a self-led Community Reporter group in their area. One of the Community Reporters who speaks English is coordinating this with the local organisation at which the training was delivered and is liaising with People’s Voice Media regarding further on-going support. So far this support has included creating tutorial videos about key technical skills such as how to share stories on the website. In the near future, further online training modules will be available to this group and all other Community Reporters that cover the technical skills involved in recording stories. Furthermore, People’s Voice Media is currently working with the Germany-based ICR Trainers to re-develop the German version of www.communityreporter.net so that the home page has the same functions as the UK site such as feature stories and projects. The website redevelopment should be completed by the end of 2016.

In Utrecht we are currently liaising with HU University of Applied Sciences in order to sustain Community Reporting in the 't Groene Sticht area and other places in city, and are hoping to establish a social licensee in the area who can provide the localised support needed to maintain a network of Community Reporters. In Hungary the situation is slightly more complex as the Community Reporters live in different rural communities. The group with the support of the ICR Trainer set-up a Facebook group in order to continue to communicate, and via this group and translation from the Hungarian ICR Trainer, People's Voice Media is offering online support and encouragement. We are also using this method in Ingolstadt as the group also has a Facebook page that they use to share information. This is where some of the online tutorial videos have been distributed as well as via email. What we have learned from this experience is that different post-programme support is needed for each group of Community Reporters in order for them to sustain their storytelling activities. A key element of this is a degree of local support. This has come in a number of forms such as ICR Trainers providing the translation needed for communications or delivery of further training programmes, and the support of local organisations in providing venues for meet-ups. It is these local connections we will be hoping to strengthen in the coming months in order to further support sustainable storytelling activities.

Furthermore, members of the ICR network who we involved in this project are also using the skills and knowledge from the programmes in their current work. For example, Fundación INTRAS who supported the Valencia programme are now using their experience from co-delivering the training to inform the practice of gathering stories for another project that seeks to capture stories of disadvantaged youth. People's Voice Media are also now involved in an Erasmus project on the topic of curating stories. This project involves Intras and also the Italian organisation – COSV – who supported the delivery of the programme in Bologna, as well as partners from Germany, Poland and Sweden. As part of this project we have shared our practice of curation and the InnoSI curation results, and these are informing the development of Level 2 and Level 4 accredited curation programmes. In the UK, we are now using our model of Community Reporting for Insight and our curation processes that were refined during the InnoSI project to provide 'User Voice' insights that will inform the public service reforms taking place in Greater Manchester. As part of this, we have shared the Stories of Family Life analysis as [a feature story](#) with the team responsible for the local implementation of the Troubled Families programme. Working with other work packages within the InnoSI project, in the coming months we will be building on these activities and support the further dissemination of the Community Reporter materials in order to create impact.



Digital and online content links

- InnoSI 'User Voice' [story bank](#)
- Playlist of [Feature Stories](#) from each 'User Voice' story collection
- Stories of [Family Life](#) playlist of extracts
- Stories of [Unemployment](#) playlist of extracts
- Stories of [Finding Work](#) playlist of extracts
- Stories of [Women in the Workplace](#) playlist of extracts
- Stories of [Agriculture](#) playlist of extracts
- Stories of [Our Neighbourhood](#) playlist of extracts
- Stories of Co-Design playlist of extracts
- Stories of [Social Activities](#) playlist of extracts
- Stories of [Early Children Education and Care Services](#) playlist of extracts
- Stories of [School](#) playlist of extracts
- Stories of [Integration](#) playlist of extracts
- [Geo-map](#) of 'User Voice' extracts and feature stories
- Peer support networks and social connections [thematic edit](#) overview film