

ATK from the city to the countryside

A LEADER project is addressing the social and psychological impacts of rural poverty in Belgium.

EAFRD-funded projects

Country: Belgium

Location: De Kempen

Programming period: 2014-2020

RDP Priority: P6. Social inclusion and local development

Focus Area: Local development

Measures: M19. LEADER CLLD

Funding:	Total budget	101 000 (EUR)
	EAFRD	32 825 (EUR)
	National/regional	32 825 (EUR)
	Private/own	35 350 (EUR)

Timeframe: 01.01.2017-30.06.2018

Project promoter: ArmenTeKort vzw

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Summary

ArmenTeKort (ATK) is a non-profit organisation aiming to end poverty. It has created a volunteer buddy system to enhance and strengthen the self-esteem of those who live in rural poverty. Following training focussed on empowerment techniques, each buddy gets matched with someone living in poverty with whom they then meet every week for two years. The buddy is a confidant and a motivator and the system has had good results in urban areas. ATK wanted to see whether it could be translated to rural areas, where the social dynamics of poverty play out a little differently. Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) funds provided by the Kempen Zuid Local Action Group helped ATK to successfully test the suitability of this approach in the Campine region.



Project results

- By June 2018, ATK was providing support to 36 people in poverty, had established 15 partnerships with local organisations and had delivered 28 communication actions and 50 outreach actions.
- Most participants were satisfied with the support provided. They were also very happy about the fact that a buddy is a volunteer, meaning someone who wants to make time for them.

Lessons & Recommendations

- ATK found it particularly difficult to reach out to the farming community.
- ATK believes that it is possible to transfer the 'buddy system' to other communities facing poverty.



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Context

When it comes to poverty, a lot of the attention goes towards the big cities in Belgium. However, financial hardship is also quite common in the countryside. As the problem tends to be hidden, people who live in poverty can experience shame and isolation and may have very limited options for support. This creates a vicious circle of increasing loneliness and a growing lack of self-esteem, which can impede their ability to seek help and improve their situation in the long term.

While other organisations try to get people back to work, give practical help or support financially, the goal of the ArmenTeKort (ATK) non-profit organisation is to improve the self-esteem of people in poverty, enabling them to reach out and take advantage of these other forms of assistance. LEADER (Liaison Entre Actions de Développement de l'Économie Rurale) support provided by the 'Kempen Zuid' Local Action Group helped ATK to implement this novel approach in the Campine region.

Objectives

This project set up a 'buddy system' in The Campine (De Kempen), a rural area in Belgium that sits on and across the Dutch border. The aim was to examine whether the system - previously only trialled in urban areas - also works in a rural environment.

Activities

January to March 2017:

- Hiring and training local employees.
- Starting partnerships with key organisations (Sociaal Huis Geel, Welzijnszorg Kempen, Boeren Op Een Kruispunt) to find a location for ATK in Geel. This was provided by DGK, a division of the Social House in Geel.
- Planning for the upcoming year and a half.

April to October 2017:

- Planning a communications campaign, together with a local journalist, to announce the start of the project across various local print, broadcast and social media channels.
- Recruiting a team of local buddies. Reaching out to local clubs to speak about poverty and the project. Identifying people in

poverty through local organisations.

- Setting up a mailbox action addressed to farmers. ATK wrote a letter to every farmer in Geel to let them know about the project and to ask them if they wanted to participate as a volunteer or as someone who is struggling.
- Organising five information sessions to inform potential volunteers about the buddy system. Running the first empowerment training with 13 local participants.
- Matching the first group of buddies with people living in poverty. The coordinator makes the matches considering preferences in gender and age, character, interests, etc. It is important that the duo has a good rapport otherwise the 'buddyship' will not last.

October 2017 to January 2018:

- Starting partnerships with social housing estates in the smaller towns of the area (Meerhout, Laakdal, Olen, Kasterlee, Lille) and with the CAW De Kempen organisation.
- Sending an email to farmers through the contact list of the Boeren op een Kruispunt organisation (Farmers at Crossroads) in order to try again to reach farmers.
- Organising a second communication campaign to recruit buddies, a second training programme (with 10 recruited buddies) and a second round of matching this group of buddies with people living in poverty.
- Follow-up and coaching of the buddy duos through regular contact between the coordinator and each pair. The coordinator gathers data as part of the programme's impact evaluation.

February 2018 to June 2018

- Planning a further expansion in De Kempen by exploring different possibilities and fundraising options together with key stakeholders.
- A third round of buddy recruiting, training, matchmaking and follow-up.
- Assessing aspects of the buddy system's implementation.



Main results

By June 2018:

- 36 people in poverty were receiving buddy support.
- 15 partnerships with local organisations were established.
- 28 communication actions about poverty and 50 outreach actions were implemented.
- Most of the buddies were satisfied with the support that they received and the opportunity that the 'buddyship' provided, for both recipient and volunteer.

Key lessons

- ATK tried to reach farmers in financial need but this was unsuccessful. ATK was an outsider to the farming community and had very little knowledge of that world. Thus, it was hard for ATK to gain the trust of the farmers, even when they partnered with the Farmers at Crossroads organisation.
- Overall, ATK believes that it is possible to transfer the 'buddy system' to other communities facing poverty. This project was an experiment and had only previously been implemented in urban areas but the experience in De Kempen showed that the essentials of the approach (good training for the buddies, a system based on empowerment and consistent follow-up for the pair) are universal.

Additional information:

www.amentekort.be/



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