

INYI Community Project Review

“Programa Escolhas”: Promoting the inclusion of children and youth

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In early September (2014), I had the grateful opportunity to visit and learn about initiatives offered by Programa Escolhas. My visit was made possible with the partnership and collaboration between Dr. Nazilla Khanlou, from York University and Mr. Pedro Calado, the National Coordinator of Programa Escolhas. Funding was given by FAPESP (São Paulo Research Foundation).

The Programa Escolhas is a national Portuguese program that aims to promote the social inclusion of children and young people who come from vulnerable socioeconomic backgrounds - mainly immigrants and ethnic minorities. Since 2001, this program has been funding, supporting and guiding hundreds of projects in multicultural communities, often located in disadvantaged neighborhoods. One of the main initiatives of these projects is to have staff onboard from these communities themselves (called *dinamizadores* in Portuguese). By doing this, the programs have the ability to more easily attract children, youth and families to learn about the projects and get involved. Another form of inclusion is that all coordinators and staff know and refer to participants directly by their names.

During my visit, Ms. Tatiana Gomes, team member of Programa escolhas’ coordination of the Lisbon area, introduced me to three projects that are carried out on the outskirts of Lisbon: “Novos Desafios” (New challenges), “Viv@cidade” and “Take.it”. The project “Novos Desafios” is located in Mira-Sintra and is carried out in *Casa Seis* (House Six). It aims to develop activities with children and adolescents focusing on informatics, tutoring, physical activities, folk dancing and sports entertainment. By giving opportunity to minority groups, such as African immigrants and European gypsies, this project involves parents and families by integrating them within the community. During the visit, we could also see the physical place of Casa Seis, which has classrooms, an informatics room, sports areas, as well as the manual products from youth’s classes - which use colors to represent their cultural background. We also had the opportunity to watch a class and be introduced to some participants who told us about their daily schedule and feelings about the project. The coordination group also presented the goals of the program, and a summary of the hundred activities they developed on the project.

The second project visited was “Viv@cidade”, located at Agualva-Cacém. This project has developed many activities focusing on tutoring, informatics opportunities, sports (soccer mainly), youth’s empowerment, job assistance help, and campaigns such as “Graffiti as an art, not a vandalism”. It has partnered with a children’s board that is accompanied on this project, which focuses on young people who have committed an offense. In our visit, the Viv@cidade’s coordinator showed us the activities that have been developed and their temporary location. We were also told about the difficulties children had gone through, as well as the feelings they had about the project being a safe environment for them.

The last project we explored was called “Take.it”. It is located close to a very touristic area next to Lisbon, and is also known as a problematic place for drug dealing. The acronym “Take.it” means Talent and Arts with *Kreatividade* and *Empreendedorismo* (*Talentos e Artes com Kreatividade e Empreendedorismo* in Portuguese). This project is located in two units within two neighborhoods, which are directed by the same coordinator. Two teams support each unit giving assistance for different youth populations, older than 18 years. The main initiative for this project is to develop activities involving art, drama, media and music, created by the youth themselves as a way to develop empowerment. During our visit we had the opportunity to discuss the activities with some youth, who showed their accomplishments through the project’s activities, in both the project’s house as well as in the community. One of the units was comprised of two small rooms that house hundreds of youth participants, but the project’s activities are not only located inside. Similar to the other projects of Programa Escolhas, the power of

this project is that it provides an alternative for youth to occupy their free time with positive activities that give them responsibilities, empowerment and pleasure.

I would like to thank the Programa Escolhas, especially Mr. Pedro Calado and Ms. Tatiana Gomes, for the opportunity to learn about these projects. I would also like to congratulate and commend the coordinators and staff members for the commitment they have for the projects' goals, and for their enthusiasm with every single participant.

For further information on Programa Escolhas please see (<http://www.programaescolhas.pt/>).

References

Nazilla Khanlou. International Network on Youth Integration. Volume 2, issue 2, 2011.

Programa Escolhas. Escolhas. Special edition, n.24, março 2013.

Websites of the projects visited:

Novos Desafios: <http://www.youtube.com/user/novosdesafiose5g>

Viv@Cidade: <https://www.facebook.com/VivaCidade.AgualvaCacem>

Take.it: <http://www.youtube.com/user/TE5G>