



**European Crime Prevention Award
and
EUCPN Best Practice Conference 2011**

Project Entry Form

The theme for this year's European Crime Prevention Award and EUCPN's Best Practice Conference is: ***"Sport, science and art in the prevention of crime among children and youth"***.

Because of the theme of the competition and general subject of the trio, projects should be linked with:

- activities of allowing young people avoiding the risks of crime or move away of it
- creating the system which allows juvenile to the creative development and which is choice to the juvenile delinquency
- education and related fields (i.e. sport, art, science) used in the crime prevention system

The list is not exhaustive. The projects may address any question relevant to this year's theme.

Please complete the attached form (the boxes are expandable). Note that the last point is for a one-page description of your project.

Entries should be in English, but may be accompanied by a version of the entry in the national language if wished. Each country may enter one project as its ECPA entry and up to two other projects to be presented at the conference. Projects should be submitted only through the National Representatives. The full ECPA rules can be found at www.eucpn.org

Deadline for entries is **October 15th, 2011**.

Send your entry or entries to: eucpn@mswia.gov.pl.

If you have any questions, please contact eucpn@mswia.gov.pl.



ECPA/BPC 2011

Please answer the following questions in English.

1. *Is this your country's ECPA entry or is it an additional project? (Only one ECPA entry per country plus up to two other projects.)*

This is Finland's ECPA entry.

2. *What is the title of the project?*

Icehearts –A Sport-Based Life Skills Programme for Adolescent Boys

3. *Please give a short general description of the project.*

Icehearts is a preventive social work model that has been developed in Finland in 1996. It is a third sector programme that is independent of local government. The core aim of the programme is to provide long-term professional support for boys who, at age six, have been recognised by social workers and kindergarten personnel as being at high risk of marginalisation. The programme is led by a mentor who commits himself to work with the boys for a period 12 years. The mentors are paid adults who have a degree in social or youth work.

The concrete activity in the programme is to train the boys in some team sport, such as ice-hockey, football or floorball (a type of indoor hockey). Each sports team consists of ten at-risk boys and is expanded to include a total of 20-25 boys. A typical Iceheart team member is a boy with an immigrant background and/or who comes from a single parent family or from a large family that cannot provide resources for leisure time activities. The programme proceeds in six chronological stages based on the age of the boys (the stages are described in section 5).

While the team sport is a core activity, the mentors are available for the boys and their families also in a wide range of other settings, including home, school, sports training and camps, and other leisure time activities. The mentors may talk frequently on the telephone with the parents, teachers and the boys themselves; they will also organise meetings with the parties involved whenever needed. Furthermore, the mentors give special support in the class room and even provide home-schooling when needed.

4. *Please describe the objective(s) of the project.*

The role of physical exercise and sports is to prevent obesity and encourage a healthy lifestyle. However, Icehearts is not concerned with the development or promotion of sport as an end itself or with providing sports and physical activities as a diversion from or alternative to time spend in criminal activity. Rather, sport is used as a means of establishing relationships with at-risk children and their families. The programme also aims at preventing circumstances that would lead to the taking of the child into custody by the child welfare authorities. Other objectives are to decrease inequality, prevent truancy and drop-outs as well as to help ensure a peaceful and orderly school environment.

5. *How was the project implemented?*



The project has been developed in Finland in 1996. Currently there are eleven sport teams in action, two of which have been recently founded. There are 174 boys participating in the nine operating teams. Each team organises annually a sports camp for the children during holiday season. Smaller camps are provided for the children in need of extra support.

In addition to sport, the concrete activities and support mechanisms of Icehearts vary extensively depending on the age group of the boys and their individual-level needs. The programme implementation proceeds in six stages that are described in the following.

Stage 1: Kindergarten/preschool (age: 6)

At the first stage of the programme, municipal social and educational officials point out a geographical area with an increased number of children with various problems. A new mentor will be assigned to the area. In the beginning, he works two days a week with an already operating Icehearts team while an experienced mentor tutors him. Simultaneously, he gets acquainted with the social and educational professionals in his operating area and starts to build his networks for the future. An Icehearts representative contacts the kindergartens in the area and introduces the programme and related activities to the officials and employees. The mentor gets to know both the personnel and the children. The kindergarten teachers identify children that they think would have the greatest benefit from the activity.

The core of the team, roughly ten boys, is selected together with the personnel. After this, a letter will be sent to the parents of the selected child asking whether the family will give a permission for the child to participate. The mentor meets personally with the parents of each participating boy. The social capacity of the team is taken into account when the team is assembled. This means that the amount of high-risk boys is limited to ten so that the basic operation of the team is possible. The other half of the team consists of boys with less challenging backgrounds and lesser problems. This is also because these boys are expected to be positive social role models for the at-risk boys. The decision of joining the team is made by the child's parents or other legal guardian together with the mentor. The core group of the team is now selected and the activities may begin.

In preventing marginalisation, early stage interventions and a long-term support from a safe adult are key issues. According to research, childhood behaviour problems, hyperactivity and emotional problems predict later alcohol problems and criminality. About four per cent of Finnish boys experience these problems in their childhood. As adults this group commits a large proportion cent of the criminal offences in their age group. This is the main reason why the boys join the team when six to seven years of age.

During the first year, meetings are organised once or twice a week to ensure the commitment of the child and his family to the activities. The first year focuses on general physical exercise and not much emphasis is put on the specific sport.

Stage 2: Starting grammar school (age 7)

The core team has been selected. The mentor works to support his team in one of the central large schools in the area, where most of the team's children are located. It is possible to place boys with special needs to the school where the Icehearts programme will take place. When the boys start school, the mentor supports them both during the school day and during the afternoons by organising meaningful leisure time activities. The supportive measures during school hours are planned individually for each boy together with the school personnel and the parents. About half of the mentor's working hours are spent in



the class room. During the first years, school work is a central part of the mentor's work. However, the mentor is not a teacher, a recess supervisor or a school helper, but a special adult that offers extra support for those children in the need for it.

In the afternoons, the role of the mentor is to organise meaningful, structured and supervised group activities for the boys. During the first years the activities are mostly in the form of playing that aims at teaching social skills and team work to the children. There are as few rules as possible since the mentor has to be able to stick to them.

Stage 3: Grammar school (ages 8-11)

The first year of grammar school is over. The support measures are intensified together with the school and parents. The afternoon activities are slowly modified to team actions and a suitable sport is selected for the team. During the first school year the activities have already been established and the school, the parents and the boys already know what Icehearts is about.

The main features of the programme remain the same during the next two to three years. Individual support measures are planned and carried out according to individual needs. This means that some team members are only taking part in the training sessions twice a week, some only in the individually targeted interventions and support measures and some others in both types of activity.

The mentor provides focused small-group education sessions for those children in need. Children who have difficulties with social interaction or learning are asked to join these activities. The mentor cooperates closely with the teachers and school officials in order to plan suitable leisure time activities for each child that offer maximum support. During these processes the mentor gets acquainted with the child, his family, and with other people that work with the child. If needed, the mentor will provide home-schooling for children with a shortened school day (granted because of behavioural, mental problems etc.)

Supervised after-school activities for the team members will continue for at least three years. During this time the mentor will work to strengthen the networks and cooperation with the boy's family and officials.

Stage 4: Preparation of the transition from grammar school to high school (ages 11 to 13)

Towards the end of the seventh year of activities, the mentor begins preparations for escorting the child to the next educational level in a near future. The role of the mentor is to act as link between the personnel of the new school and the families of the children. The team sport activities continue and Icehearts tournaments are arranged and played every year.

The operations of the team are centred on the selected sport. The role of the mentor in school work has changed from a constant supporter to a person who offers help and support when needed. The mentor builds networks with the personnel in the future high school to ensure that all support measures needed are available.

Stage 5: High school (ages 13 to 15)

The mentor starts cooperation with the high school in order to escort the boys to the next educational level as smoothly as possible. In high school the programme concentrates on offering various individual support measures for the boys. For example, alcohol, drug and sex education is provided. Boys are supported to stay with the team and to continue a sports



hobby. The concrete work is concentrated on working with individual challenges. A typical issue is how to ensure that school studies proceed swiftly. The mentor also offers help in deciding on future education possibilities.

Stage 6: Attaining independence (ages 16 to 18)

In its final phase, the Icehearts programme deals with finding and carrying out future solutions for education and work. Individual solutions for education and work are planned and carried out. The boys are supported to take responsibility for their own life and actions while the Icehearts team continues to serve as a source for friends and support. Tight cooperation is carried out with parents, upper secondary schools, social services, housing services, employment offices etc.

6. Were partners involved in planning and/or development and/or implementation of the project? If so, who were they, and what were their roles?

The Icehearts model is based on multi-professional cooperation between various officials and actors. Thus, the cooperation networks are vast. The parents of the boys that and the boys themselves are naturally the most important partners in the programme. On the municipality level the kindergartens, schools, social workers and child welfare services are the most important networks.

Basically the mentor works with all people that have an effect on the child's development and well-being. In all his actions the mentor highlights the best interest of the child. The mentor has an especially important role as establishing contacts between the school and the families. The mentor, when invited, takes part in all meetings and measures of support that are aimed at the child in question. The most important role of the mentor in these gatherings is to reassure the family and the boy that the meeting has been arranged according to the child's best interest.

7. How did you build in plans to measure the performance of the project? Has the project been evaluated? How, and by whom?

The Icehearts model has been researched in six studies. Most of the studies have asked the children's parents and various interest groups involved in the programme about their views on the effectiveness and importance of the model. The experiences of the Icehearts boys have also been examined in one case. These studies have found that multi-professional cooperation between Icehearts, school and social services is important, that the boys themselves are eager to take part in the programme and that the parents see the Icehearts model to be a good one and to have enhanced their parenthood and parenting skills.

Three personal letters of feedback on Icehearts have been sent to the competition by experienced child services workers and a special education teacher. While these statements are not based on documented data they should be taken into account when assessing Icehearts' effectiveness. Their message is uniform: Icehearts is a meaningful model of operation both to the children and to their families. The actions prevent marginalisation for example by decreasing the amount of children taken into custody. For example, an official working at the child services in Hakunila states that Icehearts has provided children with meaningful guided leisure time activities. In addition, Icehearts has helped to prevent child custody cases and other drastic measures. Also the parents have given positive feedback of



the model. According to these statements and discussions with officials it has been estimated that Icehearts activities prevent the marginalisation of 2 to 3 boys in one operating sports team (a team has 10 to 20 players).

8. What were the results? How far were the objectives of the project achieved?

The effectiveness of the *Icehearts* model on the lives of individual boys is promising and drop-outs from the programme are rare. Of the 17 boys of the first team established in 1996 altogether 12 boys completed the whole 12-year programme. Three out of the five quitters left the programme because of moving away from the area and only two quit because of other reasons. Thus, the activities tend to create a strong commitment not only in the mentor but also in the boys involved. Every single one of the boys that "graduated" the first team successfully found their way into secondary level education. This suggests that the model really prevents social marginalisation of the boys and through this also reduces later criminal activity.

9. Are there reports or documents available on the project? In print or on the Web? Please, give references to the most relevant ones.

Web: www.icehearts.fi

All documents about Icehearts are in Finnish:

Aronniemi and Levola (2007). Tutkimus sosiaalisen urheiluseura Iceheartsin vaikutuksista lapsiin ja perheisiin. [A study on the effects of Icehearts on children and families.] Diakoniammattikorkeakoulun sosionomi (AMK) opinnäytetyö.

Eera Oy (2011). Yhteiskunnallisen yrittämisen rahastomalli. Loppuraportti. [The model of social entrepreneurship fund. Final report.]

von Herten and Paananen (2005). Liikunnasta eväitä elämään. Urban II Icehearts – liikunnallisen kasvatusprojektin arviointi. [An evaluation of a educational sport project.] Loppuraportti. NetEffect.

Saine and Kallionpää (2011): Icehearts-toiminta poikien tukena, vanhempien näkökulma. [Icehearts as a supportive action in boys' lives. Perspectives from the parents.] Metropolian sosionomi (AMK) opinnäytetyö.

Sillman and Strömdahl (2011). Icehearts yhteistyössä koulun ja kodin kanssa – ei neuvota vaan kysytään neuvoa. [Icehearts cooperations with school and home] Metropolian sosionomi (AMK) opinnäytetyö.

Vartiamäki (2008). Lasten kasvatuksellinen erityistuki alakoulussa: Icehearts – toimintamalli. [Educational special support in elementary school: the Icehearts model.] Laurea-ammattikorkeakoulun terveyden edistämisen koulutusohjelman opinnäytetyö.

Åstrand, Riikka (2007). Harrastustoiminta syrjäytymisen ehkäisijänä - tapaustutkimus Suvelan sirkuksesta ja Iceheartsista. [Leisure time hobbies as a means to prevent



marginalisation. A case study on Suvela circus and Icehearts.] Soveltavan kasvatustieteen pro gradu-tutkielma, Helsingin yliopisto.

10. Please, write a one page description of the project:

A number of studies have found that childhood conduct problems predict antisocial and criminal behaviour in adolescence and adulthood. These problems occur with greater frequency in disadvantaged communities. According to Hutchings (2006), certain family characteristics such as low income, low education level, isolation, teenage pregnancy, high stress levels, single parenthood, depression, parental psychiatric illness or criminal history, and inconsistent, or harsh, parenting practices put children at high risk of developing conduct disorder and aggravating social problems.

A longitudinal study found that 23% of Finnish males born in 1981 committed at least one police recorded offence (other than a minor traffic violation) between ages 16 to 20. However, a small group of them (consisting of only four per cent of them) were responsible for over seventy per cent of all the recorded crimes. A high level of offending was predicted by various observations made when the boys were 8. Living in nonintact family, low parental education level, parent reports of conduct problems, and teacher reports of problems predicted a high level of offenses. Also self-reports of bullying others predicted violent offenses.¹ Thus, there is an urgent need to find effective methods to prevent children's social marginalisation and to come to grips with their conduct problems.

Icehearts is a preventive social work model aimed at adolescent boys with a high risk of marginalisation. It is a third sector programme targeting the children who are most in need of adult support, many of whom are found among children living in single parent homes, growing up in poverty, having an immigrant background or with other risk-factors. The core aim of Icehearts is to provide long-term professional support for boys who, at age six, have been recognised as being at high risk for marginalisation. The programme is led by paid male mentors who have a degree in social or youth work. The mentors commit themselves to the boys for twelve years.

The concrete activity in the programme is to train the boys in some team sport, such as ice hockey, football or floorball, but the mentors are also available for the boys and their families in a wide range of other settings, including home, school, sports training and camps, and other leisure time activities. Icehearts does not only focus on diverting young people away from crime and anti-social behaviour but also gives them tools to empower themselves and to have a brighter future. The mentors talk frequently on the telephone with the parents, teachers and boys themselves and organise meetings with the parties involved whenever needed. The mentors also provide special support in the class room and even home-schooling when needed.

Each sports team consists of approximately ten at-risk boys and is enlarged to include a total of 20-25 boys. The social capacity of the team is taken into account when the team is assembled. This means that the amount of high-risk boys is limited to ten so that the basic operation of the team is possible. The other half of the team consists of boys with less challenging backgrounds. The decision of joining the team is made by the child's parents or legal guardian together with the mentor. The programme proceeds in six chronological stages in relation to the age group of the boys.

The Icehearts model is able to keep the boys intensely involved for a long time. Of the 17 boys of the first team established in 1996, 12 boys completed the

¹ Sourander A, Elonheimo H. et al. Childhood predictors of male criminality: a prospective population-based follow-up study from age 8 to late adolescence. *J Am Acad Child Adolesc Psychiatry*. 2006 May;45(5):578-86.



whole 12-year programme and only two boys left quit because of other reasons than moving away from the area. Every single one of the boys that "graduated" the first team successfully found their way into secondary level education. This suggests that the model prevents social marginalisation of boys and through this also reduces later criminal activity. Based on the assessments by professional and experienced child welfare workers and educators, it can be estimated that Icehearts activities prevent the marginalisation of 2 to 3 boys in one operating sports team.