

How did I become a European trainer ?

When the editorial team asked me to write an article about this subject, my first thought was: 'So I am a European trainer then?' Maybe this reaction is strange, as I have given training courses at European level since 1996. On the other hand there are still so many possibilities to be a trainer at European level that I haven't tried (or had the chance to try). Until now I thought that this would disqualify me for the title 'European trainer'.

But maybe I should start from the beginning, the first time I stood in front of a group. I was 17, had been back in Germany for almost one year following my exchange year in Norway and was trying to tell an international group of exchange students what life in Germany was like. I had no idea about methods, no idea what I was supposed to do and I absolutely loved it. During the following years I got more and more involved in the exchange organisation that got me into this experience: AFS Germany, in the European youth circus better known as EFIL (European Federation for Intercultural Learning). After several years of local and regional level work I decided that I needed another challenge and became a member of AFS Germany's working group on training. This was about 6 years ago and I am still a member of the group and deeply indebted to the experience in training that I got there. We have two official meetings a year, during which we train ourselves (often with input from trainers from outside the organisation) and discuss matters related to the working group. As a group we are not only responsible for organising training activities, but we also take care of the methods for the two national AFS meetings every year.

Still, this didn't bring me to the European level that I wanted to reach. Because my interests shifted with the years, I took a two-year break from AFS and became a board member of IGLYO (International Lesbian and Gay Youth Organisation). Amongst a lot of (and at times too many) other things, I was responsible for the organisation of several week-long seminars at European level. These training events were really different from the ones I was used to! First of all I had to deal with a budget. In AFS this was taken care of by the board and the secretariat. In IGLYO I was the treasurer and on a lot of occasions the secretariat as well! I did work with international groups with AFS, but those were all well-prepared participants who had been subject to loads of intercultural learning games before they even set foot on German ground. Now I was dealing with a group of young lesbians and gays who sometimes were in a foreign country for the first time, a lot of times had never met so many lesbians and gay men in one room in their entire life and had never heard of intercultural learning. On top of this I had hardly ever prepared anything that lasted longer than a weekend. What can I say, I learned a lot, especially about how different training can be in different organisations and settings.

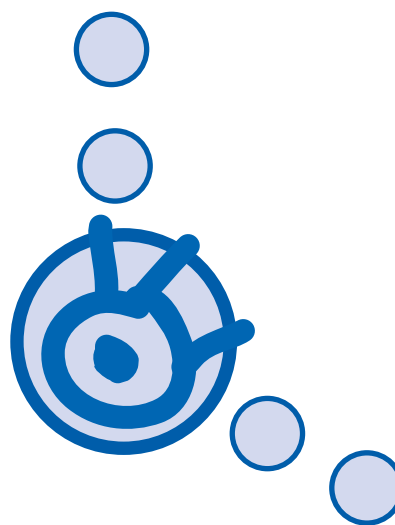
The rest of the story is simple: Training remains to be my passion and going on with training activities also after I left the board of IGLYO was natural for me. I joined the pool of trainers of the European Youth Forum and the Council of Europe Youth Directorate. It is not always easy to be a trainer at European level if

you are not active in the European umbrella of your organisation, but given the fact that I have been asked to write this article, I seem to have come a long way.

Maybe some last hints for those of you who want to become a European trainer. The most important thing is that others know that you want to be one. The fact that you are reading Coyote right now is a good sign. Stay put and most of all, take every opportunity you can to learn, stand in front of a group and get good feedback to help you further. Good luck!

Oh and one more thing: don't trust anyone who thinks that you are not a European trainer, not even yourself.

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by Henrike Eisfeld

