

Elisabeta-Elena Balasoiu

2017-2018 'Travel and Research Award' Winner

Report

The Travel and Research Award that was offered to me by Royal Holloway, University of London enabled me to undertake my first independent project. In December 2017 I designed and organised an **educational voluntary project for delinquent boys** in Bucharest, the capital of Romania.

Romania is a place where young people with criminal records face more stigma and do not benefit of the same effective support than they do in Britain. I studied BSc Criminology and Sociology at Royal Holloway, University of London, and by undertaking this project I have gained a good overview and understanding of cultural differences, and how they impact on the rehabilitation and reintegration of vulnerable young men.

For the realisation of this project, I collaborated with the 'Success in Education and Sport' organisation, with whose help I recruited 25 male participants aged between 13 and 17 with a range of complex needs (such as experience of being into care, being in a youth correctional facility, marginalised ethnic minorities). The above-mentioned charity also facilitated the classroom spaces for the running of the workshops and sessions.

The project was structured as following: creative workshops in the morning, living skills sessions and support provision in the afternoon. The creative workshops were based on arts and crafts in the first week, film displays in the second week and creative writing (poetry), contemporary music and photography during the third week.

What was the most fascinating about this project is that **the creative workshops explored topics such as LGBT rights, religious differences, nationality and ethnicity, thus promoting equality and diversity**. For example, during the film display workshops, the participants watched 'Tomboy' (2011) and 'Zeitgeist' (2007). After the participants watched 'Requiem for a dream' (2000), the discussion that followed about the risks associated with drug taking was very interesting and engaging.

The living skills sessions explored topics like the management of anger through art and sports, behaviours that hurt others, self-awareness, living independently, and communication skills. They were usually draw upon what had been discussed during the creative workshops.

The support provision was offered when required by participants and it covered a variety of topics, depending on the participants' needs, such as help with courses enrolment, applications, thinking about career paths, psychological issues, difficulties in making friends, and any other form of advice offered to the individuals who asked for it.

At the end of the project, myself and the charity I was working with organised a ceremony party where all the candidates were congratulated for the participating in the project and were offered one free educational course of their choice (e.g. Food Hygiene, Bartender, Customer Services) by a local partner.

The project has successfully realised its aims to engage the participants and elicit themes relating to identity creation, life transformation and experience by constructing an innovative creative methodology (creative writing, music, arts, photography, crafts).

The personal benefits of this project are immeasurable. As far as I am aware, there has never been a similar educational project for delinquent boys done in Romania before, that used a creative arts-based methodology with the purpose of rehabilitation. As I am interested in doing research about this vulnerable group in the future, not only will this project make me stand out in future applications, but it also represents valuable working experience with vulnerable young men and proof of my ability to design educational projects.

Last but not least, I would like to thank Royal Holloway, University of London for the funding without which I would have not been able to cover the expenses associated with this project.

Written by Elisabeta-Elena Balasoiu

BSc Criminology and Sociology graduate

Royal Holloway, University of London

(elisabeta.balasoiu@gmail.com)