The "Dreamcatcher" project:
What, How and Why

What?

"Dreamcatcher" ("Acchiappasogni") is a center for counseling and clinical help for boys and girls aged 14 to 20 years old and for significant adults of their close network (parents, teachers, educators, etc.) located in the city of Forlì (Italy). The center is a point of reference and access for any types of problems and requests for help by young people, with free access and no costs, and actively collaborates, in a synergic way, with a broader local partnership addressing the condition of this target group. It offers young people counseling and support in case of crisis situations, psychological and emotional pain, and other difficulties, such as eating disorders and substance-related issues[1]. Young people can find professionals from various disciplines that can help them cope with their distress.

The Service offers a first phase of reception within the counseling Center and, when needed, a subsequent phase of taking charge within the Clinical area through the following activities: counseling and support interviews (for teenagers, parents, etc.); psychological, medical and nutritional interventions for adolescents; psychotherapy for teenagers and their parents[2].

How?

The "Dreamcatcher" project aims to promote, maintain and recover adolescents' well-being and health by experimenting multidisciplinary and multisectoral integrated approaches to complex problems and by promoting networking with local institutions (public and private), which, in various ways, deal with adolescents. A key feature of the project is the effort to accommodate to different types of requests for help from adolescents. To ensure such a broad approach, a single point of access has been devised, with free services from a multidisciplinary team that works in synergy with various services and organisations of the territory of Forlì (schools, municipal administrations, third sector, etc.).

The project is based on the participation of various professionals, with different expertise (e.g. medical, psychological, pedagogical), and belonging to different sectors of the Local Health Services (e.g. Mental Health, Addiction Centre, Counselling Centre). These professionals (two psychotherapists, two psychiatrists, an infant neuropsychiatrist, a pediatrician expert in nutritional problems, a specialist in Food Science, an educator, a nurse, a health assistant), devote some of their weekly working hours to the activities of Dreamcatcher. Such

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[6]   From Ravani, Boni, Massa, Raffuzzi (stesura del 2/11/2013) "Spazio giovani e Acchiappasogni: Organigramma e funzionigramma"

[7]   Regione Emilia Romagna – sito internet http://www.informafamiglie.it/forli/verso-ladolescenza/centri-giovani/centro-di-ascolto-lacchiappasogni

organization allows to offer a range of services capable to address all forms of adolescents' discomfort and requests for support.

Dreamcatcher professionals also participate in a technical-specialist partnership, the *Adolescence Network*, which brings together all the professionals and practitioners (within health services, social services, educational and recreational services, sports associations, youth organisations, etc.) working with adolescents in the local area.

The *Adolescent Network*, established firstly in 2002, has the task of promoting an integrated inter-sectoral approach to prevention and well-being promotion for this target, by improving the collaboration among local Services (health, educational, social, recreational, sports, etc.), institutions, associations and volunteers, contributing to strengthening the resources of the territory and community building efforts[3].

Why?

In 2013, the Emilia Romagna Region approved the regional guidelines "Promotion of wellbeing and risk prevention in adolescence: Project Adolescence". The guidelines were defined through a collaborative process of need analysis, involving representatives of Services and professionals addressing the target population (from different sectors: local administrations, schools, health services, community/third sector organisations, prefecture, juvenile justice, the Regional Ombudsperson/Authority for Child Rights, university). The guidelines consider young generations as a precious resource for the entire community, where adolescents are seen as rights owners and full citizens. The guidelines underline also the importance of networking between different services and stakeholders as a means to enhance collective competences to address the problems experienced by adolescents in the current complex world.

The guidelines also highlight the need to create, within health services, a space devoted to adolescents, that should not be characterized by the specificity of the problem and interventions offered (i.e. problem-focused) (e.g., pregnancy, sexuality, substance abuse, psychopathology, etc.), but which should be characterized instead by a multi-professional approach (including first reception, diagnosis, treatment) in order to address the specific needs of adolescents who ask for support (i.e. adolescent-focused).

To ensure such multi-professional approach, collaboration and synergy across the different sectors of the Local Health Services and other community stakeholders (school, local authorities, University, occupational services, judicial system, associations, volunteer organisations, third sector) is fundamental.

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[10] A cura del Dott. Ravani, Dott. Boni, Dott.ssa Massa, Dott.ssa Raffuzzi (stesura del 2/11/2013) "Spazio giovani e Acchiappasogni: Organigramma e funzionigramma"

From the interviews collected, it appears that the original networking approach developed by Dreamcatcher operators, and used both internally, in the workgroup, and when working with other community stakeholders, is now firmly rooted so that it can be reproduced also in contexts that, in various ways, collaborate with the project:

"Our network approach is both in the workgroup, in terms of horizontality and in a broader vision of communities, with all the connections of the Adolescence Network and with the various agencies in the territory ...". APPA03

For this reason we can say that network is an essential and characterizing aspect of this project.

From the interviews we could detect a multitude of connections that the project has been able to establish within the local community of Forlì. For example, **schools** are a key interlocutor of Dreamcatcher. Young people learn about Dreamcatcher through health education projects carried out by professionals of the adolescent counseling services (focused sexuality issues), with which the local schools have established a fruitful collaboration over the last decades. Local schools participate in socio-educational, sexual education and health promotion projects, and through this established collaboration it is possible for them to refer teenagers who are in trouble to the health services. As emphasized by the project manager:

"It is an absolutely worthwhile experience of collaboration, of over ten years, and it's a thorough work conducted with schools, of mutual knowledge between healthcare professionals and the the school." APPA02

The **third sector** (volunteer organisations) and **associations** (sports, recreational, etc.) have become, over time, important partners of Dreamcatcher in the Forlì territory. Indeed, with these organizations, there is a mutual exchange of information, opportunities and specific interventions based on the needs that arise. As reported by one professional, for example, during a clinical consultation the professional may consider to suggest an adolescent to refer to an aggregation center run by an operator with whom he has developed over time a trustful and collaborative relationship in management of cases. And yet, another professional reports a specific case of a teenager, followed by Dreamcatcher with a nutritional and psychological intervention, to whom she suggested to participate in the Start Up project (a project which introduces young people into work organisations to help them approach the world of work) so that they can experience a new environment, protected by the supervision of qualified operators.

The strength of this collaboration between the Dreamcatcher and the various partners of the local community is testified by the ability of the members to identify clear and shared objectives, as well as roles and activities that every member of the partnership can propose for the target of adolescents:

"... in reality in the network, this is the fundamental thing, we are the nodes of the network ... that is, I'm related to you and to other people .." APPA02

Among the activities proposed by the Dreamcatcher, as a member of the Adolescent Network, there are also conferences and events aimed at young people, with the active participation of many local organizations that have collaborated in their implementation:

"Over the years, we have organized conferences, in collaboration with all the partners of the Adolescence Network, which attracted a large audience, including a conference on the impact of new technologies on young people. Another important initiative concerned the relationship between teenagers and the school" ARA03

"For example, we have provided a very nice demonstration of the creativity of young people by pooling together a variety of resources. [...] for example, the councilor of the municipality offers the venue , the school offers some materials, and to assemble the show you find volunteer human resources [...]the young people who attended the course of carpentry were the ones who set up the structures for the event ". APPA03

The network of relationships that Dreamcatcher has built thus allows to mobilise community resources and skills, for planning and interventions aimed at addressing the needs of adolescents, consistently with the asset based approach. The local partnership has different functions, which include, among others, providing information on Dreamcatcher activities and services, in the management of complex cases, for example by collaborating with other services and organisations to support young people, by organizing events in collaboration with schools, the municipality, the various local authorities, and the adolescents themselves:

"... all the operators know (the project) and therefore they are already in contact with us so they can send the teenager, ...this project is well-known but certainly there is room for improvement by spreading the information on our activities and services [...] then we also organize initiatives with the Adolescence Network, like IOKreo, and we organized conferences so when we do participate in these public events we talk about the network, we talk about the Dreamcatcher. " APPA03

The story behind the development of the Map

As described in the theoretical introduction, in order to conduct the analysis of the context you can use different qualitative and quantitative tools such as interviews (open, semi-structured and structured), focus groups, questionnaires, observation grids, etc. For example, during the analysis of the Dreamcatcher project network, we decided to use qualitative tools: a semi-structured interview and a focus group. Following the preliminary data collection, we learned about the periodic meetings that the Dreamcatcher team organized with the members of the Adolescent Network in order to map and monitor the resources and connections present in the community. During the focus group and interviews, it emerged clearly the need to have a general framework that could clarify to us the numerous links and complex partnerships established by the operators. This led to the idea of asking the operators to draw the graphic map of the network that the project had established with the community. The

question, used as an "icebreaker" game at the beginning of a focus group, was formulated as follows: "*During the previous interviews, many stories emerged describing your network within this community. This network appears to be very complex and for this reason I ask you to help me and try to shape this network by creating a map together using paper and pen. So think of all the actors involved in your projects, or the links with the professionals and with the organisations present in this area*". At the end of the session the participants commented on the usefulness of this activity of creating the map also for themselves (and not only for the researchers). The request to make their network graphically visible, so that it could be clear and usable for the interviewer, elicited in the participants a meta cognitive process with respect to their network. The participants were able to reflect on their connections with the territory, they were able to "see" how the resources available in their community could be made tangible. Through the group process, new nodes and new bridges emerged within the network that were not perceived so clearly before the activity. This experience gave rise to the intuition of creating an artifact based on the network maps of two Italian projects.

Why the map as an Assets Based Artefact

The map is an easy-to-use tool, which can be used individually by operators, but which leads to better results if used in groups (with the professional team, for example). It provides operators the opportunity to reflect on their partnerships and the networking activity, the connections that they have created over the years and how they have managed to bring them forward, to the possible partnerships to be developed. Moreover, when you recognize the nodes of the network, you can also deepen the analysis of their functions: are these nodes informative with respect to specific activities? Are they partners who support the projects on a financial level? Or do they actively collaborate in their implementation? This map therefore makes it possible to make visible the numerous connections and to enhance the resources and potentials present in the reference context (community) through a methodology consistent with the asset based approach.

Why the "Dreamcatcher" approach can be considered an Assets Based Approach

The theoretical perspective of the "Dreamcatcher" project professionals on adolescent development is informed by different approaches, among which prominent inputs have been found in the work of some well-known adolescent experts in Italy (e.g. psychotherapists like Charmet, Recalcati). These authors underlined the complexity of this developmental phase, which brings with it not only the typical changes in puberty, but also those imposed by society, and emerging from new needs for young people:

"It changes the perception of the world around and within themselves … The emotions multiply, complicate and everything, between discoveries, adventures, pitfalls seems confused. To understand today's teenagers itis not enough to rely on their own experience, society has profoundly changed, teenagers grow in the shadow of strong narcissistic and consumerist ideals and, therefore, they risk becoming disillusioned by the expectations set in growing older. Parents are in trouble, though, with respect to previous generations, they set up less conflicting relationships with their children. " (Charmet)

"Today, the developmental scissors increasingly distance puberty and adolescence: puberty seems to impose new precocity - girls and 10-11-year-olds behave like real teenagers - while adolescence seems to never end. This phase-out is indicative of a profound contradiction that characterizes the condition of our youth. On the one hand, they are thrown with great anticipation over their mental age into a world full of information, knowledge, feelings, and opportunities, but on the other hand, they are left alone by adults. Today's young people are experiencing an unprecedented individual and mass freedom. But this new freedom does not match any promise about the future. The old generation has deserted its educational role and has given young people a mutilated freedom. The alluring offer of ever-new sensations has multiplied almost to the dramatic absence of prospects in life. Here is the portrait of the new discomfort of youth: our children are exposed to a continual bombing of stimulation and, on the other hand, adults overlook their educational task. " (Recalcati)

Moreover, the Dreamcatcher operators embraced the theoretical and methodological guidelines established by the Project "Adolescence" ("Progetto Adolescenza"), approved in 2013 by the Region Emilia Romagna, which propose a specific approach to professionals, educators and other operators working with teenagers. The project focuses on **adolescents** and on the local **networks** between services, institutions and people that work with adolescents in the whole regional area (including already existing networks, that need be strengthened, or new ones); the main aim of the project is to create an inter-sectoral integration among different services (health, educational and social) active in the local communities, following common guidelines to promote adolescents wellbeing. To reach this aim, "Adolescence Project" provides also support to families and parents, and recognizes them as key stakeholders of the local community. The idea behind the project is that in order to promote adolescents' well-being we need a community that cares about young people and that is able to collaborate. Thus, strengthening partnership and community building are key methodologies through which the project operates at the local and regional level.

The **guidelines** ("Well-being promotion and risk prevention in adolescence: The 'project adolescence'. Regional guidelines", 2013) underline the importance of an approach based on **proximity and flexibility** in working with adolescents. They have been promoted and supported in their approval by the Department of Health Policies and the Department of Social Policies of the Region Emilia Romagna.

The approach of the Regional service is coherent with assets-based approaches, as it focuses on raising awareness on adolescents as a resource for the whole community; peer education is a typical approach used in the regional context to empower young people, allowing them to discover their competences and skills and value them as useful and precious for the entire community. This approach modifies the roles and the relationships between "users" and "providers". Active methods to involve young people and community members in the planning and implementation of projects and/or interventions are supported. Active participation in the creation of projects let adolescents and the community itself (including young people) identify their abilities and skills and use them to increase community well-being.

It is clear that the project uses an Asset Based Approach to implement its actions through a well structured network with their stakeholder that actively participates sharing community resources.