



Innovative Educational Strategies for Social Partners/EYEO 2007

Country: Lithuania

Organisation: Centre for Equality Advancement – CEA: www.gap.lt and the Office of Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson (OEEO)

Contact: Virginija Aleksejune, Executive Director, CEA – virginija@gap.lt
Julija Sartuch, Executive Director, OEEO – julija.sartuch@lrs.lt

Partners involved: Art2B – Public Relations and film Productions Company

Target Group: General public and media professionals

Programme Description:

The 2007 European Year of Equal Opportunities for All gave Lithuania an impetus to improve the national understanding of minority groups who face discrimination in Lithuanian society. *Centre for Equality Advancement Project, IESSP:* From April 2006 to December 2007 the CEA focused primarily on the broadcast of fifty-two topical chat shows, transmitted weekly on prime time television. The shows discussed and revealed the plight of varied sections of Lithuanian society that suffer from discrimination. A survey of audience reactions to the programmes was carried out with calls received from the general public. Each show was preceded and followed by television news' segments, internet portal articles, and magazine editorials that shed more light on the topics discussed. The project's success and its ability to create a national dialogue were also reliant upon a wide reaching media awareness campaign. Postcards and posters were produced and distributed containing specific branding that brought the CEA's objectives into the public domain. Finally, CEA's staff organised seminars, discussing diversity, throughout Lithuania with media professionals, students and decision makers in the private and public sectors. These seminars hoped to share information and equally to prepare the way for a new attitude and way of reporting issues of discrimination. *The Office of Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson's EYEO Project:* From September 2007 to January 2008 the OEEO worked with their partners Art2b to infiltrate the television sector and thus enhance understanding of discrimination issues. Seventeen social documentaries were shot and aired on prime time national television. The programmes introduced the most topical issues in different areas of discrimination, presenting life stories of those who face discrimination and comments and views of experts, human rights activists, decision makers, and the general public. Simultaneously, radio programmes and an awareness-raising campaign were launched to reach different age groups across a large percentage of the population of Lithuania. Television adverts (and outdoor posters with the same concept) were produced in which a black and white heart is seen beating on the screen, red text then appears naming groups at risk of discrimination. A voice over finally asked: "Are we really so different?"

Challenge: CEA found that the media were often more interested in sensationalism and not very receptive or educated about the sensitive issues being raised.

Solution: There was no quick solution but rather than presuming the media would be a useful ally CEA often had to focus more on educating them. By doing this CEA hoped that their attitudes and therefore their style of reporting might change.

Challenge: Sexual orientation is still a highly stigmatised subject in Lithuania. It was difficult for the OEEO to find participants for television documentaries.

Solution: Participants were found and it was the first time the rights of the LGBT community were professionally and objectively presented in Lithuanian mass media.

Impact and Success Stories:

- Viewing figures during the first fourteen programmes of the CEA's TV show reached a total of 5.81 million.
- It was felt that the mass media became more sensitive to problems of discrimination after these campaigns and that their subsequent reports were more socially responsible.

"Answers were not provided but the uncomfortable truth, which most parts of society choose not to notice, was denuded and offered for discussion." Devidas, a protagonist in one of OEEO's TV shows about discrimination against the physically disabled

"Involving the media in the process of educating the population and disseminating information is crucial." Virginija Aleksejune, Executive Director, CEA