

StayOn_

A more inclusive, active
and creative world!

Impact Assessment Report

TRAIN-THE-COACHES PROGRAM

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stay-on.eu



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1. INTRODUCTION

StayOn is a transnational project coordinated through the cooperation of eight European partners whose ultimate objective is to create conditions that enable young people to "stay on" rural areas by ensuring access to opportunities, benefits, services, and jobs. With this impact assessment report, we intend to measure and assess StayOn train-the-coaches program's impact to improve it. This report is to be read as part of the project's "Impact management and research" work package, representing a systematic effort to provide credible evidence on the causal impact of interventions meant to integrate young adults, and NEETs¹ especially in the labor market.

The work package is managed by the European Center for Social Finance (ECSF). It encompasses a series of activities, including developing a Theory of Change and related impact management framework, creating periodic impact evaluations, and learning to inform decision-making within and among the organizations involved.

This report proceeds as follows. After a brief introduction, Section 2 briefly describes the train-the-coaches program implemented by BB Consulting (Slovenia). In Section 3, the report focuses on detailing the methodology used to conduct the evaluation. Section 4 presents the results, while Section 5 interprets them and discusses the lessons learned to facilitate the translation of findings into practice for the project's partners.

2. TRAIN-THE-COACHES PROGRAM

The train-the-coaches program included the design, development and implementation of the following activities:

- **group supervision:** regular monthly sessions open to all coaches to exchange their experiences and tackle common issues in coaching;
- **individual supervision:** on demand 1:1 coaching supervision session for coaches focusing on the development of their coaching skills;
- **national supervision:** on demand coaching supervisions offered to teams of national coaches focusing on resolving an issue specific to their practice;
- 2-day **online coaching boot camp** in the middle of the project to onboard new coaches, discuss open issues and plan the way forward;
- a **train-the-coaches manual** that provides written guidelines to support the work of StayOn coaches;
- three in-person **knowledge transfer workshops:**
 - knowledge transfer workshop I (Ribno, Slovenia, March 2022) focused on the use of StayOn coaching framework and toolkit;
 - knowledge transfer workshop II (Kells, Ireland, October 2022) focused on the use of the development game "The Shapers" and transfer of best practices to support coaches in their fieldwork;
 - knowledge transfer workshop III (Lomza and Warsaw, Poland, September 2023) focused on the evaluation of progress and definition of next steps for coaching;

¹ Young persons not engaged in education, employment or training.

- two **coaching surveys** to gather feedback from StayOn coaches on the train-the-coaches program.

The main goal of coaching in the context of StayOn is to support young people on their journey to employment/self-employment through the whole StayOn process:

- training, where they gain new skills and knowledge to improve their future career options; and also
- community shaping process, where they further explore their ideas for developing opportunities for youth in their communities.

The StayOn coaching process is aimed at developing a goal-oriented mindset with participants. The suggested methods to be used by coaches range from SMART goal methodology to dialogue groups. All sessions have a suggested outline to follow. However, these guidelines can be adjusted according to the coach's judgment to best use the process for the participants.

The coach's role is to support the participants to make a change, learn something new and/or achieve their goals. The essence of coaching is not giving answers to participants but instead guiding them with curiosity and empathy to help them find answers on their own. Coaches in the StayOn project lead participants through the process of training & community involvement, help them identify their potential, and support them in overcoming obstacles to their empowerment.

Through the StayOn project, participants receive, on average, four individual coaching hours, mainly over a series of four sessions with the coach. Coaching sessions are divided into three main categories: I) introductory / starting session; II) implementation support / intermediate session; and III) follow-up/closing session. The coaches and coachees meet preferably in person, but some meetings also take place online. In order to create a relationship and create a more substantial impact, the coachees are encouraged to meet regularly and with a defined development goal, which also supports their training in the context of the StayOn project (or further).

3. METHODS

Focus group design

A focus group collects qualitative data by gathering individuals together to discuss a specific topic in a permissive, nonthreatening environment. The purpose is to understand better how people feel or think about an issue, idea, product, or service. Questions are open-ended to stimulate an informal discussion with participants to understand their perceptions, beliefs, fears, questions, and information needs. Participants are selected because they have specific characteristics in common (here: StayOn coaches who participated in the train-the-coaches program offered by BB Consulting) that relate to the focus group topic. The moderator creates a permissive environment that encourages participants to share perceptions and points of view. The aim is to generate a maximum number of different ideas and opinions. The group discussion is conducted in a semi-structured manner so that researchers can identify trends and patterns in perceptions (Krueger & Casey, 2015).

Researchers at the ECSF created the focus group implementation concept that covers 45 minutes and is divided into four parts, as shown in Table 1. Furthermore, the moderator was provided with a script, available in the appendix of this report.

Table 1. Focus group implementation concept

PARTS	AIM AND CONTENT	METHOD AND TOOLS	TIME (in min.)
Part I	Setting the stage: Introductions and creation of a welcoming, safe and open space	Zoom	10 in total
Participants arrive	- Moderator allows coaches to arrive and settle in the virtual room	/	~5
Welcome and moderator's introduction (<i>see script if needed</i>)	- Moderator introduces him/herself (briefly) - Moderator explains the purpose of the focus group ² and the process, including the "rules" ³ - Moderator starts the recording	/	~2
Icebreaker and participants' introductions (<i>see script if needed</i>)	- Getting a sense of who is in the room, moderator asks: "Could you please briefly introduce yourself and tell us from which organization and country you are from?" - Coaches' introductions	/	~3
Part II	Getting feedback on the effects on the coaches	Zoom	15 in total
Getting feedback on the effects of the train-the-coaches program on the coaches	- Thinking back on your coaching process what are the three main lessons learned for you as a coach? - Where did you get the information about the coaching process and/or methodology in the StayOn project? Was getting information easy? - How do you rate the support of the BB Consulting team in the train-the-coaches program from 1 to 5? Can you share any specific examples of how the program helped or didn't help? - What type of support did you miss in the StayOn coaching process?	/	~15

² The aim of this focus group is to assess the StayOn Train-the-coaches program provided by BB Consulting.

³ The focus group will be recorded, however it remains confidential and all information collected will be anonymized for the report. The latter will describe what has been said and not who said it. The researcher is the only person who will have access to the recording. Given these conditions, participants should openly share opinions in a proactive manner.

	- What would you recommend to add to the train-the-coaches program offered by BB Consulting in the future?		
Part III	Effects on young participants	Zoom	10 in total
Getting feedback on the effects of coaching on the young participants (NEETs and/or students)	- In your opinion, what was the main value of the coaching process for the young participants (NEETs and/or students) in your country? - How did coaching support the participants in the StayOn project?	/	~10
Part IV	Ideas generation for the future and conclusion	Zoom	10 in total
Generating ideas for new services in the future and concluding the focus group	- Do you think you will use coaching as a method in your future work? - To whom would you recommend coaching in the future? - Closing comments and overall impression - Time for questions - Moderator stops the recording, goodbyes	/	~10

Strategy and data analysis

Analysis of the data collected co-occurred with data collection. Researchers at the ECSF were responsible for analyzing the data further using a combination of approaches but roughly orienting themselves on Krueger's (1994) five key stages: familiarization, identifying a thematic framework, indexing, charting, mapping, and interpretation. The last two steps required active participation by the project partners.

4. FINDINGS

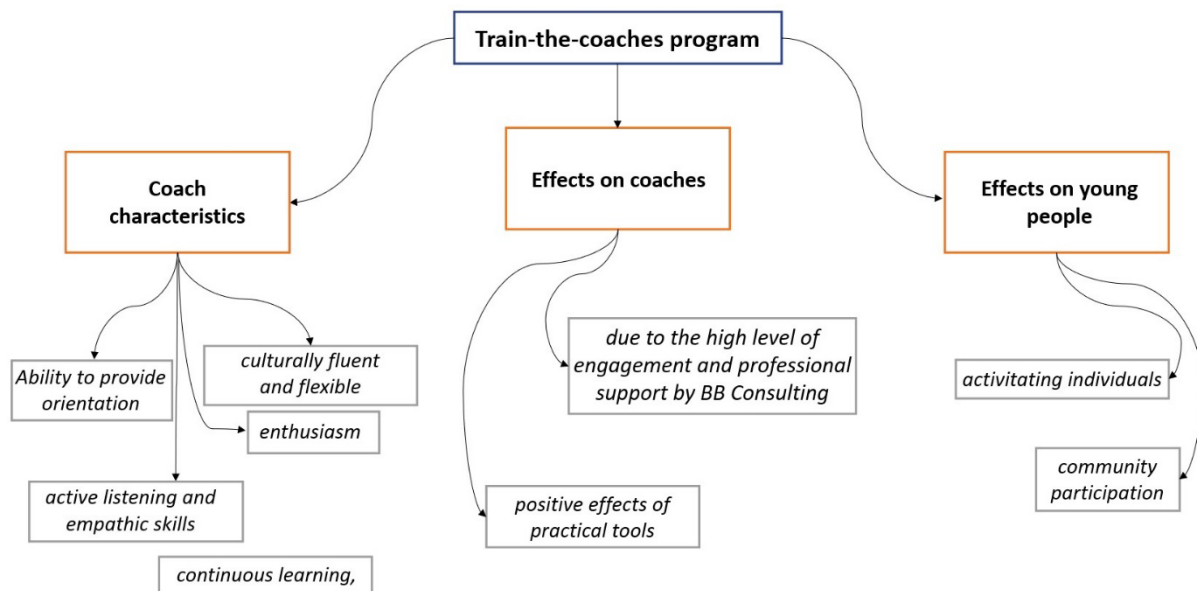
Procedure

The focus group took place in two separate sessions to accommodate the participants' availability. The initial session was held on November 15, 2023, and the second on the same date, both conducted online and lasting approximately 45 minutes each. The total number of participants across both sessions was seven. The sessions were moderated in English via Zoom, recorded and transcribed to use the data best for the evaluation (the participants have been informed about the recording in advance). All information collected has been anonymized for the report. It has been ensured and conveyed to the participants that the focus groups, despite the recording, remained a safe space to express their opinions openly.

Themes

Several themes emerged from the three categories identified: coach characteristics, effects on the coaches, and effects on young people. These are described in the following paragraphs and summarized in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Categories and themes that emerged from the focus group.



Coach characteristics

During the focus group discussion, the participants conferred many positive characteristics that they considered essential for a successful coach. The **ability to provide orientation** describes the uniqueness of coaching as a process where individuals must arrive at their own conclusions and, therefore, the nuanced role of the coach in orienting without providing direct counseling. This might involve the capacity to facilitate self-discovery and promote empowerment.

Several participants reflected on their personal growth in **active listening and empathic skills**, attributing improvements to their new coaching experiences. They also noted a significant transformation in their ability to connect emotionally with others. Recognizing and nurturing these interpersonal skills is crucial for effective coaching interactions. Participants highlighted the value of empathy learned through coaching, aiding in understanding and managing conflicts. Incorporating features that foster empathy can enhance the coaching on participants' impact.

Participants highlighted the need for coaches to be **culturally fluent and flexible**, especially when dealing with diverse groups or individuals who may not immediately engage. Flexibility is identified as a key factor in managing individuals who may not be initially active and when dealing with the dynamic nature of participant engagement. Therefore, developments to the train-the-coaches program could include resources that enhance cultural awareness for coaches and provide strategies for diversity management.

The need for ***continuous learning*** was discussed and considered crucial in the ever-evolving field of coaching. A participant shared insights on the necessity of implementing new coaching techniques. This reflects a continuous learning process in coaching. On a related note, participants in the focus group also discussed the significance of building a community of knowledge to facilitate continuous learning. Within this theme, participants discussed the importance of networking with coaches since the beginning of the project. Lack of access to international participants in the initial stages was noted as a challenge. The emphasis on early networking and group supervision highlights the need for a strong support system at the project's outset. Insights on the challenges faced due to limited access to international participants indicate potential areas for improvement in project management and communication strategies. Additionally, with the purpose of continuous learning, participants in the focus group suggested the set up of a long-term network that is not time-bound. This insight can be valuable for project planners, suggesting a consideration for long-term sustainability and potential avenues for project extension.

Finally, ***enthusiasm*** was highlighted as a critical aspect of coaching, particularly when working with diverse groups. Even with diverse participant energy levels, practical tips for energizing sessions contribute to coaches' ability to maintain a positive and motivating coaching environment. Incorporating adaptable coaching frameworks can address the challenges posed by diverse participant groups.

Effects on coaches

The participants expressed a high level of enthusiasm and satisfaction regarding the train-the-coaches program offered by BB Consulting. The use of the term "fantastic" suggests a strong positive sentiment. The ***benefits of a systematic approach*** to coaching, involving structured meetings were noted by the participants with an emphasis on individual sessions to address specific issues. Incorporating reflective exercises for personal development aligns with the holistic nature of coaching. Participants expressed a sense of regret for not utilizing single coaching sessions more frequently.

The participants also highlighted the positive effects derived from the ***high level of engagement and professional support by BB Consulting***. The term "very, very supportive" emphasizes the positive impact of these interactions. The acknowledgment of BB Consulting providing professional assistance, especially in challenging situations, establishes them as a reliable and valuable resource. The emphasis on punctuality suggests that BB Consulting is not only supportive but also reliable and efficient. Punctuality is a crucial aspect in a collaborative project setting. The mention of being able to call them anytime and receiving quick responses emphasizes their accessibility and responsiveness. The mention of "positive vibes" in communication, including emails, suggests that BB Consulting not only provides information but does so in a way that motivates and uplifts the coaches with motivational communication. The development of family-like relations within the project, attributed partly to BB Consulting, highlights the human aspect of the collaboration. This can contribute to a more supportive and understanding working environment. The acknowledgment that BB Consulting assisted in onboarding, even during busy periods, indicates a hands-on and supportive approach.

This shows a commitment to the success of the entire coaching team. The appreciation for the flexibility and room for maneuver provided by BB Consulting indicates a coaching approach tailored to the unique needs of each coach. This flexibility fosters creativity and individuality in coaching strategies. This sentiment suggests a recognition, post-coaching, of the potential benefits that might have enhanced the coaching experience and outcomes. Despite the overwhelmingly positive insights about the support received, the use of the term "renovated confrontation" introduces an interesting concept, possibly indicating a desire for support that includes also critical feedback with constructive criticism.

The participants also acknowledged the positive effects of *tools* such as the coaching manual and "The Shapers" card game on their work. One participant even compared the manual to the Bible suggesting the manual to be a fundamental and comprehensive guide. The use of "The Shapers" card game for ice-breaking activities is highlighted as a strategy to build a sense of community. The reference to sustaining motivation indicates that BB Consulting's tools have a lasting impact on the engagement levels of the coaching participants. Participants gave the highest ranking for BB Consulting's support during the project. Within this theme, participants in the focus group advocated for tools that are universally useful for specific groups (e.g., migrants).

Effects on young people

The participants in the focus group highlighted the utility of coaching tools in *activating individuals* to create CVs and pursue mini-goals. The emphasis is on activating minds, particularly among those perceived as more passive. This aligns with the participants' perspective that providing opportunities, such as training or connecting with potential employers, is a valuable aspect of coaching. Coaching was perceived as a significant factor in building self-confidence. This includes preparing for job interviews, expressing oneself in groups, and overcoming shyness. The features that cater to building self-confidence, such as interview preparation modules, public speaking exercises, and strategies to overcome social reservations are crucial for participants to actively pursue job opportunities and personal growth.

The discussion also revolved around the importance of participants engaging in community events, including social gatherings, to foster *community participation* and become more politically engaged. This goes beyond conventional job-related skills and aligns with the broader idea that coaching should empower individuals in various aspects of their lives.

5. MAIN MESSAGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion, the participants in the coaching program shared profound positive insights about the train-the-coaches program. The main development messages expressed by the focus group’s participants and related recommendations are listed in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Summary of main messages and recommendations

MESSAGE	RECOMMENDATION
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BB Consulting provided a high level of engagement and professional support to the StayOn coaches. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include critical feedback with constructive criticism in your offer.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continuous learning is considered crucial in the ever-evolving field of coaching. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide coaches with early networking opportunities since the project's outset. • Set up of a long-term coaches network that is not time-bound.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are positive effects linked to tools such as the coaching manual and “The Shapers” card game on the coaches’ work. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design and develop tools that are universally useful for specific groups (e.g., migrants).

REFERENCES

Krueger, R. A. (1994). *Focus groups: A practical guide for applied research*. SAGE Publications.

Krueger, R. A., & Casey, M. A. (2015). *Focus groups: A practical guide for applied research* (5th Edition). SAGE Publications.

APPENDIX: Focus Group Moderator Script

Part I: Welcome and moderator's introduction

Moderator: Hi everybody, and welcome! My name is Mine Tülü and I collaborate with the European Center for Social Finance. We're a competence center of Munich Business School in Germany, and we help several organizations in Europe evaluate their services and make them better. So, this is precisely why we're here today. I'd like to get your feedback on the train-the-coaches program offered by BB Consulting to learn how it can be improved in the future.

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this focus group. I have a few guidelines and rules to facilitate our discussion:

1. The focus group will last about 45 minutes and will be roughly divided into 4 parts.
2. I want you to do the talking and we'd like everyone to participate. I may call on you if I haven't heard from you in a while.
3. There are no right or wrong answers. Every person's experiences and opinions are important. Speak up whether you agree or disagree. We expect and want to hear a wide range of views and don't anticipate consensus, just sharing. You can address each other if you like. We are only here to assist in the discussion.
4. I emphasize that what is said in this room should remain here. I will record this session. However, it remains confidential and all information collected will be anonymized for the report. We don't identify anyone by name in our findings. Therefore, you will remain anonymous. The recording won't be shared with anyone besides researchers at the European Center for Social Finance.

Are there any questions?

Very well. Let's get started... [***Start recording.***]

Part I: Icebreaker and participants' introductions

Moderator: Could you please briefly introduce yourself and tell us from which organization and country you are from?

Parts II-IV: General recommendations

Helpful probes include:

- Can you talk about that more?
- Could you help me understand what you mean?
- Can you give an example?

Strategies to facilitate the discussion:

- Summarize the main idea of the feedback at the end of each question.
- Reflect the main idea back to the group "Just so I understand, what you are saying is...?"
- Self-appointed experts: "Thank you. What do other people think?" Or "Does

anybody else have a different thought/strategy?"

- The dominator: "Let's have some other comments." Stand behind the dominator while addressing the group to elicit participation from others.
- The shy participant: Make eye contact; call on them; smile at them.
- The participant who talks very quietly: Ask them to repeat their response more loudly.
- If the conversation gets off-topic, restate the purpose of the research

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