

The Opportunity – Fall report 2022

Summary

The second job-training of The Opportunity happened during the period of September 5th - October 21st. Directorate of Labour, referred 27 men aged 30 and under to The Opportunity, who had all in common that they had been on the unemployment register for a long time and were also of foreign origin. During The Opportunity we spoke mostly English. Eleven out of 27 participated in the course for some time, but only five of them graduated. Nine individuals, who came for one to three interviews, decided on their own to not participate. Some were not invited because of an overruling problem, mostly caused by an unresolved addiction. Seven of those who were invited did not attend, or declined to have an interview.



For the first three weeks, the course was held in Reykjavík where the focus was on team building, outdoor activities, physical exercise and education about Icelandic society (its history, culture and politics). The focus was on factors that create opportunities in the Icelandic labour market and in Icelandic society.

During these weeks, quite a bit of tension was created in the group, as some of the 11 who had started, showed weak attendance. Those ones were given a chance to improve, but it still caused turbulence among others.

So, only eight of us including 6 participants, went to Bifröst The University and Campus an one hour and half from Reykjavik. At this time, Directorate of Labour considered that this was too small of a group in terms of expenses. They thought it was right to cancel the stay in Bifröst. We decided not to, as most people showed great persistence and had been looking forward to the next step of development. We representatives thought we had the greatest responsibility towards them and wanted to stick to our plan.

Practical training took place at Bifröst; renovations of the old road shop Hreðavatnsskáli and services at the country hotel Hraunsnef.

From late October the participants had been in daily contact and support in their job search and other follow-up. Three have received employment contracts and one is almost employed. One is far from the labour market, but a solution is being worked on in cooperation with the social services.

An independent sociologist evaluated the satisfaction, experience of the participants who graduated. They turned out to be satisfied and, as a rule, both the activities as a whole and their individual components receive a good rating. No one gave The Opportunity or its individual elements a neutral or negative rating, and The Opportunity received a rating of 4.4 out of a possible 5, as can be seen in the evaluation report on The Opportunities website - www.taekifaerið.is (English version is available).

After the completion of this second job-training of The Opportunity, the wide gap becomes apparent to all of us, between the young people of foreign origin who came to Iceland in search of work and a better life, and the Icelanders and thus Icelandic society. The

participants have little or no interest in learning Icelandic, despite the fact that they have lived here for several years, because no one speaks Icelandic to them and they feel that Icelanders do not pay attention to them. They feel that they are seen as workers only and not as individuals who want to share their experiences, lives and feelings with others. Currently, 23% of the labour market is of foreign origin, mostly in the service sector, and therefore most of them manage with English and even Polish. Iceland, which has a reputation as a country of opportunities, must decide how to accommodate and welcome people so that they do not remain stuck in poverty, hopelessness and depression which seems all too easy in our welfare society.

There is a great need to invest in young people that have a high risk of staying in long-term poverty and marginalization.

Now seven of the first course and three (hopefully four) of the current group are working. We have achieved success in this development period and are prepared to follow the participants until they are integrated into Icelandic society.

Below we elaborate on different aspects, such as the staff, the content of the course in Reykjavík, the job-training in Bifröst and the financing of the job. We will also go over the plan for the next year and how we have been applying for funding.

The staff and partners



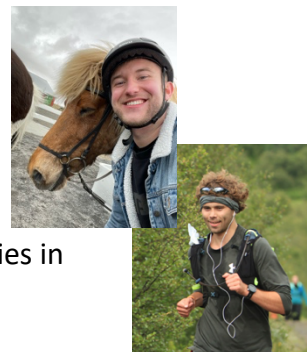
Björk Vilhelmsdóttir a social worker is head of The Opportunity, who executed the planning and took care of the educational part of the course. She conducted all interviews with participants before and during the course and did all individual interviews. She has also been in charge of their follow-ups.

Jón Eypór Helgason is an electrician who is in charge of the practical training. He has been an outstanding role model for the participants. He provided workshops on masculinity and connected the group with SÁÁ (addiction rehab) and the 12-step meetings. Jón proved to be exceptionally good when difficulties arose due to drug use.

Elisabeth Nienhuis or **Lisa** is a Dutch actor and a master's student in psychology. She provided physical development and outdoor activities at Borgarfjörður. She has been an invaluable support to the boys who sought her help a lot. She also offered some theatrical expression and art workshops.

Kacper Barwiak is a peer advisor for The Opportunity. He participated in the first group and this time he was quite involved in the beginning of the courses in Reykjavík. He also came to Bifröst for a weekend with the group.

Eggert Arason was responsible for outdoor activities and physical activity in Reykjavík, where the emphasis was on free use of various facilities in nature and the urban community.



Brynja Brynjarsdóttir and **Jóhann Harðarsson** the owners and operators of Hotel Hraunsnef and the road shop Hreðavatnsskáli provided practical guidance in the job- training. Their contribution has been great in ways of cooperation and efficiency. They have built their business little by little and the participants have seen that it is possible to run a business without an office, fancy work clothes or expensive vehicles. Brynja was also the group's cook for lunch on weekdays.



During an anonymous evaluation survey, the participants were asked about the supportiveness of the staff of The Opportunity. The participants gave the Opportunity staff a score of 4.2 out of a possible five. In other words, participants were satisfied with the staff and felt they were very helpful. Remarkably, none of the participants gave the staff a neutral or negative rating.

Course on Icelandic society, team building and outdoor activities – Reykjavík 5th of September – 27th of September.

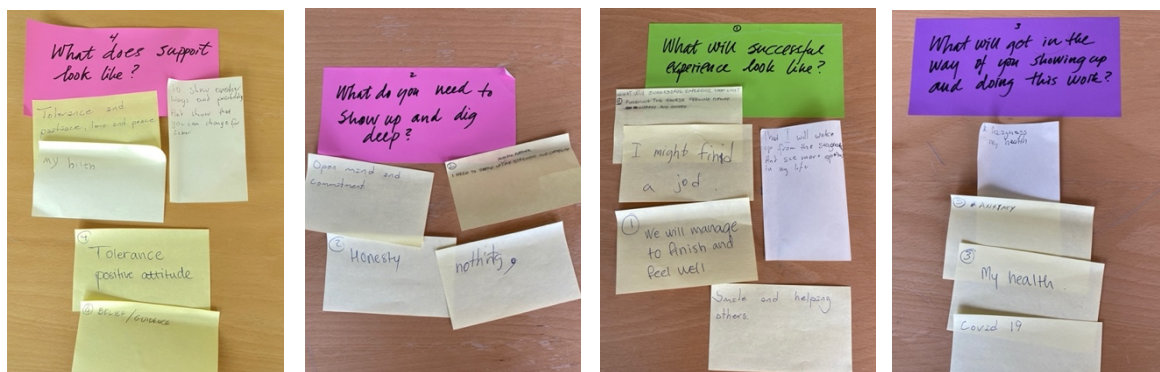
Námsflokkar (alternative for dropout students) in Reykjavík offered The Opportunity their facilities where we have been feeling at home. We appreciate their invaluable support and friendship.

We have worked there each weekday from 1 to 4 p.m. Then we scheduled the outdoor activities and physical exercise during four of the weekdays, from 4 to 6 p.m.

Björk has been mainly in charge of teaching, but also Jón Eypór and external teaching partners have been present, under who; Sveinn Rúnar, MD, who dealt with addictions and sleep disorders, and Karl, program manager of SÁÁ (addiction rehab).

We have visited other places as well. We, for example, went to art museums. the Maritime Museum and some of the nature pearls around Reykjavík.

Ragnhildur Vigfúsdóttir took care of the coaching in the first week of the preparatory. She helps the group, as the members, to set goals for common months.



As mentioned, the topics of education in Reykjavik were mainly about Icelandic society and the labour market. The education was adapted to participants' interests and experiences. The labour market education focussed on how to do job interviews, CVs, salary structures

and the importance of working in a job that is recognized in the labour market. The latter has been particularly important to speak about, since the participants have had experiences with black working market. In Bifröst, we did two “real” job interviews with them, and we completed all’s CVs further.

Participants gave the preparatory course in Reykjavík a 4.0 (this spring it was 4.6) out of a possible 5.0, as shown in Table 1 in the attached evaluation report. No one thought the preparatory course was bad or very bad.

The average of responses to the question of whether the duration of the preparation course was appropriate is 2.8 (last spring it was 2.4). In other words, participants generally agreed that the course was reasonably long and no one thought it was too short. An open question asked participants what they liked and disliked about the preparatory course. According to the numerical evaluation, participants were generally satisfied; they said the course was "great", that one had a "good time", "liked almost everything" and that the staff treated participants with an open mind. More answers can be found in the evaluation report.

Bifröst 28th of September – 21st of October

The purpose of leaving home was to distance oneself from the situation and envision ways to change. The group all lived in student apartments, where everyone had their own bedroom, toilet and shower. All meals were shared and took place in the building where Björk, Jón Eypór and Lisa lived. The group shared cooking with varying degrees of success ;-). It proved important to eat together so that the whole group could come together and discuss daily issues.

The participants were asked to rate the job-training offered at Bifröst as a whole. The average mark of the job training was the same as the average mark of the preparatory course in Reykjavík, which was 4.0 (last spring it was 4.4). None of the participants thought the job training was bad or very bad, and on average the participants thought the stay was good. Regarding the duration of the stay in Bifröst, the average of the answers was 2.8, which means that, in general, the participants felt that the stay was more or less reasonably long and no one would have liked the stay to be shorter or much shorter.

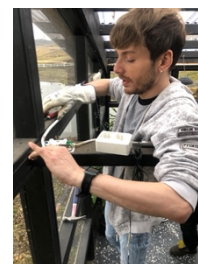
In an evaluation survey, participants were asked to indicate in their own words what they thought was good and/or bad about their stay at Bifröst. The responses were generally positive, with respondents saying, among other things, that they "liked everything about the stay", that they had "a good time", and that the stay was "cosy". Two of the participants are glad they had access to a pool and gym, and one says it was soothing to get out into nature. Another praises the staff and says it was "amazing".



Job-training in Hreðavatnsskáli and Hotel Hraunsnef.

Practical training usually took place in the old buildings at Hreðavatnsskáli. This fall, the group worked on the demolition of an old shed and on the construction of a new. This project gave a good overview of their skills. Jón Eypór proved to be a patient instructor and came home happy every day having counted the fingers of the participants who had all tried the circular saws and other "real" tools. Jón in Hraunsnefi also took an active part in the training of the participants, showing them various farm chores, such as herding sheep.

One participant had studied electrical engineering in his home country but had never worked in this profession. He was given several assignments to try out his old profession and was very successful. At the end of his training, he was hired by local electric contractor. He also began an evaluation process of his studies in cooperation with Electrical VET Centre. When he has gained sufficient work experience, he will undergo a validation to be license electrician.



All participants tried a hotel job at Hraunsnef, mostly cleaning rooms. No one was interested in such jobs in the future, but they performed well nonetheless.

The participants were also asked to indicate in their own words what they liked and/or disliked about the training. The responses are consistent with the numerical assessment that job training was generally good. It is said that it was beneficial to get this work experience and see how houses are built, and that it was helpful to get away from everyday life and have time to think about life and about oneself.

Participants graduated with a letter of recommendation that they used in their job search. It highlights their strengths and clearly tells about their participation in the job-training and what they had worked on.

Leisure and outdoor activities



Bifröst have excellent facilities for all kinds of leisure and outdoor activities. The participants used the fitness facilities led by Lisa. She also offered daily walks in nature. The group had access to the student facilities, which included a billiards table, table soccer, darts and being able to watch movies on a big screen.

In Reykjavík, the emphasis was on outdoor activities and 2 hours of hiking four times a week. We hiked in and outside Reykjavík and played various games in the city parks and the harbour area. Of course, we went for swimming a lot since the goal is to build soul and body in Icelandic society ;-)



Financing and functioning

Participation in The Opportunity has been free of charge for participants as the Opportunity was funded both by official and private funds.

Fastland, accounting and management consulting, takes care of the finances of The Opportunity. It is important that there is full confidentiality in the handling of funds when activities depend on grants.

The main expenses, or almost 75% of it, go to salaries and salary-related costs, although the employees' salaries are very modest. The next biggest part goes to transportation, which takes almost 7% of the costs. About 5% is used on both rent in Bifröst and food costs for

hungry young men. This is followed by leisure, insurance, financial services and other items.

Acknowledgments

Recently the Opportunity received good recognition when 3 staff members of The Opportunity, Björk, Jón Eyþór and Kacper, were invited to the European Union conference this December. The conference is titled: *‘Different youth work approaches for different NEET situations’*. The conference will be held in Istanbul, Turkey, and all travel costs, food and accommodation will be paid for. It is an honour for The Opportunity to be chosen for this conference, where representatives of member states share innovations in the field. See more here: <https://www.salto-youth.net/tools/european-training-calendar/training/conference-on-track-6-reunion-different-youth-work-approaches-for-different-neet-situations.10510/>

On top of that, an international research project of the EEA states in collaboration with research centers and universities in Eastern Europe, called *‘Lost millennials’* (www.lostmillennials.eu) has decided to evaluate The Opportunity as a successful innovation in service to the NEET group.

Next courses in 2023

If funding can be secured, we would like to offer two courses in 2023. In the future, we will continue to focus on the NEET group, but from all genders.

Spring Semester 2023. The course, Icelandic Society and the Labour Market will be held in Reykjavík during the four weeks from January 16th to February 10th. Those who need and request special job-training will be offered advanced courses and job-training in Bifröst. The plan provides for 5-6 weeks of training there between February 13th and March 17th. After that, participants will receive support in finding jobs that suit them.

Fall semester 2023. There will be a similar arrangement to the spring course; 4 weeks in Reykjavík in the period September 11th - October 6th, followed by job training and follow-up courses in Bifröst from October 9th for 5-6 weeks.

We us at the Opportunity and Directorate of labour thinks it important that about 15 participants attend the first course in Reykjavík and that no fewer than 6 participants attend the follow-up course and job training at Bifröst.

Björk, Jón Eyþór, Lisa and Kacper are all very interested in continuing to work at The Opportunity. But without additional funding, the courses cannot continue. Now we are working on grant applications both for official and private funds. The staff will explore other possible grants through international cooperation when we present our project in Istanbul next December.

Final words

We at the Opportunity are stubborn and persistent and we know it is a great need for further development of our project as other new approach in work with young NEET people.

Therefore, we will continue the development of the Opportunity. It is necessary to try a larger group, without compromising the possibility of in-depth support for participants. We also want to open it for all gender.



We are now working on a modified arrangement in cooperation with Directorate of Labour, where the job-training at Bifröst will be only for those who want and need such training. Then we can have more participants in the courses in Reykjavik.

It is important to present the opportunity not only as job-training, but as life training. In fact, attitude development takes place throughout the work period, emphasizing responsibility for one's own life.

But we shouldn't forget the positives when talking about things that can be improved. Here are some gems from the fall participants that also appear in the evaluation report:

- *'Sincere thanks to all of you who supported us';*
- *'The was nothing I disliked. The course is off to a good start, I am very impressed with the philosophy behind it and believe that the activity will become stronger in the future';*
- *'I liked the Opportunity because I learned many different things there. It was useful in various ways';*
- *'I have been very happy with The Opportunity and I think it is a unique opportunity for people who have lost their jobs'.*