

# Potrzeby edukacyjno-zawodowe dorosłych

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## The future of social workers involving people with disabilities in community activities between artists and art therapists

Przyszłość pracowników socjalnych angażujących osoby niepełnosprawne w działania społeczne między artystami i arteterapeutami

**Słowa kluczowe:** szkolenie Care-Arts, sztuki ekspresyjne, narzędzia reminiscencyjne, laboratorium społeczne, uczenie się nieformalne, arteterapia, dialog międzypokoleniowy.

**Streszczenie:** Ten artykuł został opracowany w ramach projektu Erasmus KA2 dotyczącego małych partnerstw w edukacji dorosłych, realizowanego zarówno na Litwie, jak i we Włoszech w okresie od stycznia 2023 do grudnia 2024 roku. Projekt zgromadził edukatorów dorosłych, pracowników socjalnych, artystów i arteterapeutów w celu opracowania innowacyjnego szkolenia dla osób starszych powyżej 60. roku życia, wykorzystującego połączenie narzędzi reminiscencyjnych i umiejętności artystycznych.

Szkolenie Care-Arts (w formie stacjonarnej) stanowi laboratorium społeczne oparte na uczeniu się nieformalnym dzięki metodologii wykorzystującej sztuki ekspresyjne (fotografia, sztuki wizualne, muzyka, teatr). W proces tworzenia tego szkolenia zaangażowane były różne grupy zawodowe: psychologowie stosujący metody terapii ekspresyjnej, edukatorzy, eksperci w dziedzinie fotografii i sztuk ekspresyjnych, trenerzy z doświadczeniem w edukacji dorosłych oraz artyści.

Projekt badał związki między wspomnieniami, kreatywnością a dobrostanem, koncentrując się na następujących celach: zmniejszenie izolacji osób starszych oraz zwiększenie ich uczestnictwa w życiu społecznym; rozwój kompetencji osobistych i umiejętności (poznawczych, społecznych, komunikacyjnych) oraz tworzenie dialogu międzypokoleniowego pomiędzy seniorami a ich rodzinami; budowanie sieci sąsiedzkich i wspólnot lokalnych (wsparcie między obywatelami i rodzinami zamieszkującymi dane terytorium) oraz zaangażowanie seniorów w inne inicjatywy kulturalne i społeczne oferowane przez lokalne instytucje i organizacje (np. kluby społeczne).

**Key words:** Care-Arts Training, Expressive Arts, Reminiscence Tools, Social Laboratory, Informal Learning, Art Therapy, Intergenerational Dialogue.

**Abstract:** This paper is produced as part of an Erasmus KA2 small-scale partnerships in adult education project realised in Lithuania and in Italy, in the period January 23 – December 24. The

project brought together adult educators, social workers, artists and art therapists to develop innovative training for older people +60 using a combination of reminiscence tools and artistic skills. The Care-Arts training (face to face) is a social laboratory based on informal learning thanks to a methodology based on expressive arts (photography, visual art, music, theatre). The creation of this training involved various professional figures (psychologists using expressive therapy methodology, educators, experts in photography and expressive arts, trainers experienced in adult education, artists). The project explored the links between memories, creativity, and well-being with the objectives of reduction of seniors' isolation and improvement of their social participation; the improvement of personal competence and abilities (cognitive, social, communicative) and the creation of the intergenerational dialogue between seniors and their relatives; the generation of neighbourhood networks, local communities (support between citizens and families living on the territory) and the engagement of seniors in other cultural and social opportunities offered by local entities (i.e. social clubs).

## Introduction to the Welcoming Communities

In recent years, the concept of a "welcoming community" has gained significant attention in academic and policy circles. A welcoming community is a place where all individuals feel accepted, valued, and supported, regardless of their backgrounds or identities. These communities are characterized by their commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion, and they strive to create a sense of belonging and connection among residents.

The arts have been recognised as a powerful tool for promoting a sense of community and inclusiveness in welcoming communities. Through various art forms, such as visual art, photography, painting, and theatre, individuals are able to express themselves and share their experiences with others. The arts provide a means of communication that transcends language barriers, and they offer a way for individuals to connect with each other on a deeper level.

In the context of welcoming communities, the arts can play a critical role in promoting intercultural understanding and dialogue. By showcasing the diverse cultural traditions and experiences of different groups, the arts can help break down stereotypes and foster greater empathy and understanding. The arts also provide a way for individuals to explore and celebrate their own cultural identities, while learning about and appreciating the identities of others.

In addition to promoting intercultural dialogue, the arts can also help foster a sense of belonging and connection among residents. By creating shared experiences and fostering a sense of community ownership, the arts can help break down social isolation and create a sense of shared purpose and identity. This is particularly important in welcoming communities, where residents may come from a wide range of backgrounds and may not have established social networks.

In conclusion, the arts have a critical role to play in fostering a sense of community and inclusiveness especially in welcoming communities. By providing a means of

communication, promoting intercultural understanding, and fostering a sense of belonging and connection, the arts can help create a more equitable and inclusive society for all. As such, it is important for policymakers and community leaders to recognize the value of the arts in building welcoming communities, and to invest in arts programming and initiatives that promote diversity, equity, and inclusion.

## Using different form of arts

The use of different art forms such as photography, visual art, painting, and theatre can be a powerful tool for community building and engagement. This paper delves into the ways in which each of these art forms can be used to explore different aspects of the territory and its services and create a sense of shared identity and purpose.

Photography can be used to document and showcase the different aspects of a community, including its people, places, and events. It can also be used as a means of self-expression and to capture personal experiences and stories. By involving residents in the process of taking and sharing photographs, this art form can help to build relationships and a sense of belonging.

Visual art, such as sculpture or installation art, can be used to create public spaces that reflect the history, culture, and values of the community. By involving residents in the creation of public art, they can feel a sense of ownership and pride in their community.

Painting is another art form that can be used to foster community building. Painting workshops can be a means of creative expression and a way to bring people together in a shared activity. By focusing on a specific theme or subject, such as a community event or a cultural tradition, painting can help to strengthen the sense of community and shared identity.

Theatre can also be used to create a sense of community and inclusiveness. By involving residents in the creation and performance of plays and other theatrical productions, it can help to build relationships and a sense of shared purpose. Theatre can also be used to explore social issues and to promote cross-cultural understanding.

Regardless of the art form used, it is essential to involve residents in the creation and interpretation of the art. This can help to build trust and empowerment in the community. By involving residents, the art can reflect their lived experiences, culture, and values. This approach can help to ensure that the art is culturally relevant and meaningful to the community.

In conclusion, the use of different art forms can be an effective tool for community building and engagement. Each art form provides unique opportunities for self-expression, creativity, and personal growth. By involving residents in the creation and interpretation of the art, it can help to build relationships, foster a sense of

belonging, and promote cross-cultural understanding. Additionally, art can be used to explore and understand the territory and its services, and to create a more inclusive and welcoming community.

### **The active training process**

The active training process is a structured approach to using the arts to build a welcoming community. This process involves several steps that focus on identifying and engaging members of the community, creating opportunities for participation and collaboration, and evaluating the impact of the arts on community building and engagement.

The first step in the active training process is to identify and engage with members of the community. This involves reaching out to community leaders, organizations, and residents to understand their needs and interests. It is essential to establish relationships with these individuals to create a sense of trust and collaboration. This step also involves identifying the community's assets, such as its cultural heritage, history, and natural resources.

The next step is to create opportunities for participation and collaboration. This involves developing art projects and activities that involve the community members in a collaborative and creative process. It is essential to involve community members in the selection, design, and implementation of the art projects. This process can include different art forms, such as visual art, painting, photography, and theatre. The use of different art forms can help create a sense of shared identity and purpose among community members.

The third step in the active training process is to evaluate the impact of the arts on community building and engagement. This involves measuring the effectiveness of the art projects and activities on the community's sense of belonging and connectedness. It is essential to gather feedback from community members to assess the impact of the art projects on their lives and the community as a whole.

In addition to these steps, ongoing training and support for residents are crucial to sustaining a welcoming community. It is essential to provide ongoing opportunities for learning and skill development to community members. This process can include training in different art forms, project management, and community leadership.

Community organisations also play a vital role in promoting and sustaining a welcoming community. These organisations can provide support, resources, and advocacy for community members. They can also serve as a catalyst for community action and collaboration.

Overall, the active training process is a powerful tool for using the arts to build a welcoming community. It involves a collaborative and creative process that fosters a sense of shared identity and purpose among community members. The use of different art forms can help community members explore different aspects of the

territory and its services, and create a more inclusive and welcoming community. Ongoing training and support and the involvement of community organisations are essential to sustaining this process and creating a lasting impact.

## **Content of the proposed activity**

The training realised 5 modules of contents:

1. Getting to know each other: ice-breaking expressive activities, to introduce participants, to create relationships, to stimulate brain areas connected with language, emotions, and memory.
2. Working around the social isolation and the concept of Overcoming;
- 3+4. Creation of laboratory-based activity on expressive arts to tell about the perception of isolation and to think in a positive perspective (seniors not alone but in a cooperative context);
5. Building a welcoming community: laboratories open to the community with senior's active trainers. The activity will define the target, tools, timing, domains of change to be checked; method to collect stories, establish the most significant elements, to share and discuss their values even with stakeholders. Partners of the project defined territories were testing a Training Manual and selecting seniors together with social services. The Training Manual provided individual empowerment and social generativity, with positive consequences on seniors and on the awareness of their own value and potential, with an indirect extended social benefit. The inter-institutional networks created also will acquire awareness and a systemic *modus operandi* that can be reproduced in other contexts. Prometeo supported the definition of the layout, creation of images, charts and tables. Saules Stygos explored further possibilities to reach more content taken from different experiences in Lithuania and in Italy.

## **Description of the activity**

The objective extended beyond the mere collection and reporting of stories; it encompassed the opportunity to derive insights from these narratives, with a particular focus on understanding their commonalities and distinctions. This methodology served as a valuable tool for unravelling the "how" and "when" of change, providing valuable insights for future applications in diverse contexts.

The training program's primary goal was to combat social isolation and foster social inclusion. It operated as a social laboratory, rooted in informal learning, which concurrently encouraged reminiscence and artistic skills. Its purpose is to empower individuals aged over 65 to explore novel forms of expression, share their life experiences, and engage their relatives and communities.

The training pilot group aimed to achieve the following objectives:

- Explore and describe the phenomenon of “social isolation” experienced by seniors.
- Investigate perceptions of the impact of participating in the training on well-being and mental-physical health, as reported by the participants.
- Identify measures that can effectively reduce social isolation and promote social involvement, as viewed from the perspectives of seniors and their relatives.

During the Covid lockdown, in some instances, seniors and their relatives initiated communication groups on social networks. These groups provided a platform for regular video calls and the exchange of photos. The period of physical separation ignited an interest in exploring family histories and stories, fostering intergenerational exchanges. This is why we have chosen photos as the central tool in our training program. Photos served as remarkable conversation starters; describing images initiates dialogue, stimulates memory, and encourages the sharing of stories.

Personal photos are used to introduce seniors, establish connections, prompt reflections on their isolation, and help them cope with their fears. Throughout the training activities, seniors actively create their own photos, contributing to the development of a collection that communicates the essence of the training. These „photos within photos” bring together old and new images, capturing the transformative journey that participants undergo.

### **Results of the participants PRE / POST the LAB survey**

A survey was prepared and 25 seniors per country were enrolled to answer this survey. In Italy, we had 76% female respondent's and 24% males, while the 68% of them was living with a family member or anyway with another person and the 23% was living alone. We covered a large range of ages, (see Picture 1) where normally the 89% of them stay in face with their friends, and where they are mostly autonomous in their daily life.

The 88% of them had the possibility to remain in touch with family members and friends, and only the 32% of them experienced a higher level of loneliness during the period of lockdown.

#### **Answers about: What helped you to feel good every day and stay healthy?**

Being on the phone or making video calls;

Talking to my husband and practising singing also at home;

Reading a book, walking;

Singing and reading a book;

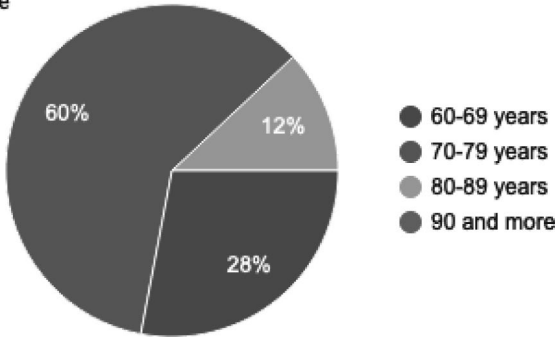
Walking with my dog;

Singing in the choir, reading a book;  
 Walking a lot and talking on the phone;  
 Talking to my family;  
 I don't know, I read a lot of books, nothing special;  
 Talking to my son and grandchildren, they live far away from here;  
 I go shopping and distract myself;  
 Gardening in my house and visiting friends;  
 To take care of my animals;  
 To continue to have my normal life;  
 Stay with friends;  
 To remain healthy;  
 To have a walk with my caregiver;  
 Doing small works at home;  
 To do social activities with my she-friends;  
 To make the normal daily activities.

**Answers about: During the last 4 weeks what activities did you do that made you feel better?**

## 2. Age:

25 response



Picture 1<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Project "The future of social workers involving people with disabilities in community activities between artist and art's therapists", 2022-1-LT01-KA210-ADU-000080790 (<https://fsw.altervista.org/>).

Singing and reading a book, taking walks and chatting with the family;  
Talking on the phone or video call;  
Singing in the choir, reading lots of book, listen to music;  
Talking with my family, singing, reading books;  
Talking to my son and grandchildren;  
I wait for the weekly choir rehearsals, I meet a lot of people there;  
I read magazines;  
Visiting with my grandsons;  
Shopping and some works inside home;  
Gardening, shopping, cooking;  
Play cards;  
Watching TV and listening to music;  
To the bar with friends;  
Being useful to the community;  
Nothing in special;  
To feel that I'm still healthy.

### Post Lab survey

The Post Lab survey resulted from the group of 25 seniors who attended the **Welcoming Community Lab** highlight a significant shift in how they perceived and expressed their experiences. Before the lab, their responses tended to focus more on individual feelings and personal emotions, such as being relaxed, happy, or simply satisfied. However, after participating in the community-oriented activities, their reflections revealed a stronger collective perspective, emphasising social connections, shared memories, and a sense of belonging.

A key transformation observed in the responses is how happiness and well-being are now linked to the presence and engagement of others rather than being solely personal emotions. For instance, instead of simply stating, "I was happy," participants later expressed their joy in relation to the group: **"I was happy because I met so many people and felt useful,"** or **"It was nice to see that we all have memories to share, we felt even more united as a group."** The sense of **"we" replaced "I"** in many of the statements, showing a growing awareness of the collective experience.

Several responses also highlighted the power of shared storytelling and cultural exchange. Participants reflected on how discussing personal memories, books,



and songs brought them closer to one another: **“It was interesting, talking I discovered and rediscovered new things about myself and discovering the memories of others,”** or **“It was nice to share one’s memories with others and also to talk about them, it’s as if they gained a new strength.”**

This demonstrates that the Lab was not only a space for socialization but also a setting where personal narratives gained value through communal reflection.

We experienced an emerging recognition of the importance of continuity in such activities. Statements like **“I felt very good, I find that similar things should be done more frequently, we would find that we are very similar and have the same concerns,”** suggested that participants saw these moments of interaction as meaningful opportunities to **reinforce social ties and foster collective understanding.**

**Answer about: What helped you feel good every day and stay healthy despite the restrictions of the past due to the pandemic?**

The friendship of relatives;

A walk on the village and meeting with friends;

A care giver;

Some public activities in the village;

Meeting with friends and doing our usual activities for the church;

To have people at home;

To work inside home;

The visit of my grandsons;

To have the loved ones around;

To do the normal life;

To be in good health and good mood;

The relaxing life and no problems;

Being able to go out freely and walk;

Being able to see my friends and have coffee with them;

Talking on the phone or video calling;

Not having worries, the rest doesn’t worry me much;

Talking to my family on the phone and visiting them, reading books;

My family, even going out for shopping became a nice thing after the pandemic;

Staying with friends;

Staying alive in the community;

Stay free to do my activities;

Nothing special, just feeling healthy;

Stay with my close friends and relatives;

I saw sunlight and I'm fine;

Talking with my husband and family (our children and grandchildren live far away from us), reading books and distracting ourselves.

**Do you mind writing a short paragraph about how did you feel at the end of the social activity during the Lab / Pilot Group?**

I felt relaxed;

I was happy;

Curiosity and the feeling to do more;

I was happy because I met so many people and felt useful;

I was happy for the meeting with my friends;

In good mood;

I felt as usual;

Everything was ok;

I was happy because so many people around;

I was satisfied;

I felt good, so good time spent with friends;

I was good and happy;

Good, I had fun and felt listened to;

Good, it was fun and I talked with others about personal things;

I think not everyone is interested in the things I think;

I felt very good, I find that similar things should be done more frequently, we would find that we are very similar and have the same concerns;

It was interesting, I talked about my memories;

It was very interesting, I also liked the part where I talked about my favourite book;

It was funny, something different;

It was nice to see that we all have memories to share, we felt even more united as a group;

It was interesting, talking I discovered and rediscovered new things about myself and discovering the memories of others;

I was satisfied with the activity;

We started talking about songs and memories;

I was happy because I saw so many friends around me;

The group was fine and the speakers were brilliant;

I was happy to be there for the memories to share;

It was nice to share one's memories with others and also to talk about them, it's as if they gained a new strength.

## Recommendations

Working with seniors can be a rewarding and enriching experience, but it also requires specialised skills and knowledge. At the end of the project and research we thought to release a bunch of recommendations for workers who work with seniors (we used "you" in the final version) and those who use active training through different art forms, such as photography, visual art, painting, and theatre:

**Get to know the territory:** Make an effort to learn about the community where seniors live, including local services and resources that may be available to them. This can help you connecting seniors with the support they need and can demonstrate your knowledge and commitment to their well-being.

**Be patient and understanding:** Seniors may have different needs and experiences than younger people, and it's important to be patient and understanding when working with them. Listen to their stories and experiences, and be willing to adjust your approach to meet their unique needs.

**Use a variety of art forms:** Seniors may have different preferences and abilities when it comes to art forms. By using a variety of approaches, you can ensure that everyone has an opportunity to participate and express themselves.

**Emphasise process over product:** The focus of active training with art forms should be on the creative process, not on the final product. Encourage seniors to explore their creativity and express themselves, regardless of the quality or outcome of their work.

**Create a safe and supportive environment:** Make sure that seniors feel comfortable and supported in the environment where you're working with them. This can help foster trust and open communication.

**Be flexible and adaptable:** Seniors may have changing needs or abilities, and it's important to be flexible and adaptable to their needs. Be willing to modify your approach or activities as necessary to accommodate their preferences.

Foster social connections: Social isolation is a common issue among seniors, and it's important to foster social connections as part of your work. Encourage seniors to interact with one another and to form meaningful connections through art and other activities.

Focus on strengths and abilities: Seniors may have different abilities and challenges, but it's important to focus on their strengths and abilities rather than their limitations. Encourage seniors to explore their talents and passions, and to express themselves through their creative work.

Encourage physical activity: Physical activity is an important aspect of healthy aging, and it can also enhance creativity and cognitive function. Encourage seniors to participate in movement activities that are appropriate for their abilities and interests.

Practice self-care: Working with seniors can be emotionally challenging, and it's important to practice self-care to avoid burnout. Make sure to prioritise your own well-being by taking breaks, engaging in self-care activities, and seeking support when needed.

In conclusion, this paper emphasizes the potential of the arts to foster a sense of community, belonging, and inclusiveness among residents. By involving residents in the creation and interpretation of the art, community organizations can create opportunities for participation and collaboration and build a sense of shared identity and purpose. The paper highlights the importance of ongoing training and support for residents and the need for community organisations to prioritise the needs and perspectives of residents in their efforts to build a welcoming community. By continuing to explore and incorporate the arts into their work, community organisations can create more inclusive and welcoming communities and help residents thrive.

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