

# **Mental Matters**

**Supporting young people  
with mental health issues**



## **3 Practices to Support Young People with Mental Health Issues**



Co-funded by  
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# DISCLAIMER

“**Mental Matters**” is a European project carried out by the following organizations:

- Gemeinsam Leben & Lernen in Europa – Germany
- Pista Mágica – Portugal
- Sosiaalipedagogiikan säätiö – Finland

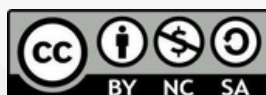
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# INTRODUCTION



## What is Mental Matters ?

Mental Matters is a European Erasmus+ project that **focuses on supporting young people with mental health challenges**. It combines **volunteering, peer education, and non-formal learning to create inclusive opportunities** where young people can gain stability, confidence, and social participation. At the same time, the project strengthens the **skills of youth workers and develops practical tools for organisations to improve their services**.

## Who are the partners ?

The project brings together three organisations from different countries: **Gemeinsam leben und lernen in Europa e.V. from Germany, Sosiaalipedagogiikan säätiö from Finland, and Pista Mágica – Associação from Portugal**. Each partner contributes unique expertise, from inclusive volunteering and peer education to Culture House houses and impact measurement, making the cooperation a rich exchange of approaches.

## What are the objectives ?

- **Implement and adapt good practices** for supporting young people with mental health issues.
- **Improve the skills, methods, and tools of youth workers**.
- **Promote active participation and civic engagement** through volunteering.
- **Develop funding and marketing strategies** to ensure long-term sustainability.
- Strengthen the **mental health and well-being** of young people in non-formal settings.



# WHAT IS THE E-BOOK ABOUT?

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The E-BOOK “**Mental Matters – 3 Practices to Support Young People with Mental Health Issues**” brings together and presents the best practices developed by the **three project partners in the field of youth mental health promotion**.

Each partner selected their most effective methods and, in **June, September, and November 2025**, implemented workshops and job-shadowing weeks in their respective countries. During these activities, the other partners were able to attend, observe the methodologies in context, and deepen their understanding of each practice.

To support this exchange, partners used their “**learning journals**”, a **tool co-created within the project and included at the end of this E-BOOK**. The journals guided participants through structured reflection exercises and enabled the collection of comparable information, which was later compiled and synthesized in this publication.

As a result, this E-BOOK gathers **detailed descriptions of all methodologies shared among partners, along with their notes from the job-shadowing weeks**. These reflections highlight what was new or particularly impactful for each partner and explain how they plan to integrate the acquired insights into their own work and organizational practices.

Available as a free digital resource, this E-BOOK illustrates **how volunteering can promote mental well-being and aims to inspire other NGOs to adopt similar approaches in their own contexts**.



# MAIN PROBLEMS TO TACKLE

**Young people** today face increasing mental health challenges, yet access to support remains limited. **Long waiting lists and insufficient services** often delay treatment, and **many interventions rely heavily** on medication rather than incorporating community-based or alternative approaches. At the same time, **funding for mental health programs is frequently cut, creating urgent needs for mitigation and sustainable solutions.**

There are, however, promising opportunities to address these gaps. **Community and cultural models** can actively engage young people, foster peer mentoring, and involve local communities in support processes. **Volunteering** can also be a **powerful tool** when integrated into **professional care**, and working closely with mental health professionals can help ensure it is recognized as a meaningful form of advocacy and support.

**Preventive programs** are essential to reduce the long-term impact of mental health issues, while **inclusivity and accessibility** must be prioritized to ensure **tools, programs, and communication** reach all youth. Professionals and organizations also need opportunities to learn innovative methods and adopt best practices.

Finally, effectively sharing **lived experiences can raise awareness, reduce stigma, and strengthen community understanding of youth mental health.**

By integrating **early prevention, community engagement, volunteer support, and innovative approaches**, we can develop mental health solutions for young people that are more inclusive, effective, and sustainable. This **E-BOOK aims to showcase three good practices that bring together all of these key elements.**



# GOOD PRACTICE 1: CULTURE HOUSE MODEL BY SOSPED (FINLAND)

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## CULTURE HOUSE MODEL

Each culture house is, to some extent, unique. They differ in **name, location, operational environment,** and the **chain of decisions and historical developments** that have shaped them. The **number of staff and participants, their level of experience and expertise, the content of group activities,** and even **operational practices** can vary.

Significant **differences of opinion** may exist in important **operational details,** especially in relation to **stakeholders and project funders.** Every **participant and staff member** also has their own **perspective and experience** of what the workshop's reality is like. This **multiplicity of narratives and voices** reflects the **real-life complexity of the field.** Close collaboration between workshops, **shared principles,** and **clear communication, both internal and external** ensure that this diversity is not a problem but a strength.

Functional peer support **empowers participants to better utilize their own abilities in pursuing life goals.** The model helps improve quality of life, expand social networks, and encourages pursuit of education or employment, or resumption of interrupted studies.

The Culture House Model offers an alternative to traditional outpatient rehabilitation. While it is not therapy or treatment, the activity itself is therapeutic and rehabilitative. The method is based on structured functional peer support, **also known as the GFP model, which provides one of the theoretical frameworks for the Culture House Model.** It can also be adapted to other groups with **special needs,** such as people with developmental disabilities, the elderly, prisoners, or immigrants. Each workshop is unique in content and form. This text outlines key practices and structures that allow creativity to flourish, and every workshop is encouraged to apply the model according to its participants' needs.

## TARGET GROUP

The **Culture House Model trains young adults (ages 18–35)** undergoing mental health challenges to lead activity-based peer groups. This strengths-based model helps participants discover tools for improving life management, functioning, and social relationships. **The goal is to create a community and a low-threshold meeting place where meaningful activity is the central unifying factor.**

Culture houses offer a **space where individuals, despite mental health challenges, can focus on their strengths and capabilities.** Peer support is based not on shared diagnoses but on shared interests. The approach strengthens participants' healthy side and empowering traits. Activities are entirely user-led: peer instructors design and run groups, and all participants influence the community and its content.





**Culture houses offer a meaningful life through voluntary participation and peer community.** Hope and improved self-esteem foster present-moment confidence and belief in the future. Peer tutors experience real success, learn to plan and execute activities, and take part in meetings and decisions. **The goal is to support everyone in finding their own individual path.** The core of the model lies in the attitude and approach: participants are listened to from the first meeting, and open dialogue is key.

## OUTREACH AND PARTICIPATION

Some Culture houses share premises with other organizations such as Clubhouses, youth centers, or NGO collaboration hubs, while others have their own dedicated spaces. The model is not tied to any specific background organization, all implementers can access the support of the nationwide Culture House Network. The network includes staff representatives and meets regularly to develop local and national operations.

**Peer tutor recruitment starts with outreach and communication through partners.** Staff visit local mental health services and organizations to present the workshop to staff and potential participants. No diagnosis, referral, or medical recommendation is required, an individual's own experience of mental strain, interest in the activities, and willingness to participate is sufficient. Commitment to the community's values and principles is essential.

When a **potential participant contacts the workshop, a visit is scheduled. During the visit, they decide how much they want to share about their mental health. Instead of focusing on the illness, they are asked:** *What are you interested in? What's important to you? What would you like to learn or teach others?*

The approach emphasizes strengths and motivation to join the community.

The visit **includes a tour, introductions to staff and activities, and a form to complete. From the start, the atmosphere is encouraging: mental health challenges are not permanent, and recovery is possible.** Creative, inspiring, and meaningful lives are within reach. Culture houses offer creativity, joy, peer support, and self-directed rehabilitation.

Participation can take the form of group membership, peer tutor training, or both. **Each person chooses their level and frequency of participation.**

There are no penalties for absence, and people can just observe if needed. The space also serves as a shared living room, visiting just for coffee or company is encouraged. Everyone's presence is valued.





## FIRST MEETING FORM

### Culture House Workshop Initial Interview

Answering the questions is voluntary, and all provided information is confidential.

My contact information may be used for communication related to the activities.

Text Box 4

### How did you hear about us?

[Text field]

### What kind of skills, interests, and hobbies do you have?

[Text field]

### How would you like to participate in the Culture House Workshop activities? Are you interested in group activities, peer instructor training, or both?

[Text field]

### Would you like to share any health-related issues that may affect your participation in the Culture House Workshop?

[Text field]

### A relative or contact person we may reach out to if concerns arise; name and contact information:

[Text field]

### What are your plans for the near future?

[Text field]

### Is there anything else you would like to share with us?

[Text field]

By signing below, I give my consent for the above-mentioned information to be used and stored in a personal data register, as described in the register and privacy policy, for the duration of my participation in the Culture House Workshop. I have the right to request a copy of any documents or records concerning me at any time. I commit to acting in a confidential and respectful manner during the workshop activities.

Place and date:

[Text field]

Interviewee

[Signature or name]

Interviewer

[Signature or name]



When you stop attending the Culture House Workshop, please answer the following questions.

**DATE:**

[Text field]

**What is the reason you have stopped or are planning to stop attending the Culture House Workshop? (You may choose one or more):**

- a) I have received a study place.
- b) I have found paid work. Full-time / part-time.
- c) I have received a placement in an internship, work trial, rehabilitative work activity, or similar.
- d) I am having / expecting a child.
- e) I have found other meaningful activities. Volunteering / hobbies / another similar place I attend.
- f) I have found that the Culture House Workshop is not a suitable place for me.
- g) My health has deteriorated to the point that I no longer feel able to attend the Culture House Workshop.
- h) My health has improved to the point that I no longer feel I need the activities at the Culture House Workshop.
- i) I am moving to another locality or farther away from the Culture House Workshop.
- j) I am turning 36 and am not working as a peer instructor.

**Please remember that all matters concerning Culture House Workshop participants are confidential and must not be shared with outsiders. Thank you for your contribution to the Culture House Workshop activities, and all the best for your future!**





## STAFF

A wide range of professionals can be involved in supporting individual well-being, community engagement, and social inclusion through various services, projects, and events. Many of them work in **culture houses** (*kulttuuripajat*), where creative and participatory activities are used as tools for empowerment and rehabilitation:

PROFESSION	TYPICAL EDUCATION	CORE COMPETENCIES
Social Worker	Higher university degree (e.g. MSocSc)	Social services, crisis work
Youth Worker	Degree in youth and community work	Group facilitation, youth support
Psychologist	Master's degree in Psychology	Mental health, psychological assessment
Musician	Music education	Creativity, music work, performance
Bachelor of Social Services (Sosionomi)	UAS degree (University of Applied Sciences)	Social guidance, community work
Event Organizer	UAS degree (e.g. Bachelor of Hospitality Management)	Project management, production, communication
IT Specialist	UAS or university-level degree	Technical skills, digital solutions
Expert by Experience	Training for experts by experience	Peer support, sharing experiential knowledge

## INFRASTRUCTURE

Culture Houses can be located in shared facilities (e.g. youth centers or NGO hubs) or their own premises.

The space should be welcoming, flexible, and safe, a place that feels like a mix between a community living room and a creative workshop. Participants co-design and renovate the space with staff, ensuring a sense of ownership and involvement from the beginning. The workshop's rules are also created together with peer tutors.

Weekly schedules are often planned to leave Mondays for administrative tasks, staff meetings, supervision, and planning.







When it comes to **peer tutor training** usually consists of six **4-hour sessions covering essentials of group facilitation, local workshop practices, planning, self-awareness, communication, well-being, and social skills**. Around 10 participants join at a time, and new training sessions are organized based on local demand. Afterward, a graduation ceremony is held, and certificates are awarded.

Peer tutors commit to **facilitating for a set number of sessions, usually five**. They can work alone or in pairs. Each tutor is assigned a staff contact to support planning and material needs. **A group planning form is often used. After the five sessions, there is a break week, which includes evaluation, planning the next cycle, supervision, and possibly recreational activities based on the instructors' preferences.**

Peer tutor well-being is a priority. The aim is to support, not exhaust, them. Staff may assist in sessions if requested. Peer tutors plan the content, but responsibility for challenges always lies with staff. A debriefing is offered after sessions, either regularly or as needed. **Most workshops also use self-assessment forms to reflect on performance and adjust future sessions. The debriefing can be guided by this form.**

Peer supervision allows peer tutors to reflect on challenging situations, raise questions, and celebrate successes. It is led by staff or an external supervisor. **All tutors are invited, regardless of experience level. In some workshops, plans for the next cycle are prepared beforehand and finalized during supervision. Staff then handle communication and registration.**

Participant-driven innovation means using individuals' ideas to develop services and improve client orientation. Networks, skills, and intrinsic motivation are key.

**Because creativity and development are led by participants, the workshop can respond naturally to their interests, and attract newcomers. Peer groups are often built around specific activities, but the flexible model enables the creation of new, timely groups.** The model seeks to answer: How can services be developed for people whose illness makes them unlikely to request support? The answer lies in offering spaces for participants to express what kind of support and activity they want.

The model is free to use, with no licenses or usage restrictions.





## PEER TUTOR TRAINING

Culture House Virta, Autumn 2024

### PROGRAM

#### 1st SESSION (4h)

- The Culture House model
- The role of a peer tutor
- Your own areas of interest

#### 2nd SESSION (4h)

- Your own skills and strengths
- What makes a good tutor?
- Planning your own group begins

#### 3rd SESSION (4h)

- Values
- Preparations before running a group
- Structure and content of a group session
- Planning your own group continues

#### 4th SESSION (4h)

- The tutor's interaction skills
- Including newcomers

#### 5th SESSION (4h)

- Stress management
- Challenging situations in a group and how to solve them
- The ABCs of leading a group
- Planning the Christmas party program

#### 6th SESSION (4h)

- Your own resources
- Equipment and safety at the Culture House
- Preparing the Christmas party program

#### 7th SESSION (4h)

- Strength from dreams
- Feedback
- Graduation as part of Virta's Christmas party (party continues until 18:00)





## CONTENT AND GOALS OF THE PEER TUTOR TRAINING (30 HOURS / 1 ECTS)

The main goal of the peer tutor training is to provide the participant with sufficient knowledge, skills, and confidence to start facilitating their own group according to the Culture House model. The training content covers both the practical actions related to group facilitation and the internal personal growth needed to become a group tutor.





## COMMUNITY RULES

The Culture House Virta (Tampere) has developed the following community rules through collective decision-making:

### 1. Everyone is welcome.

- The space is free from discrimination. Everyone is respected as they are.
- Do not exclude or shame others through words or actions.

### 2. We act together.

- Include everyone in activities and discussions. Ensure all voices are heard.
- Activities are planned and carried out collectively.

### 3. We are polite.

- Greet everyone. Help others. Listen and share speaking turns.
- Respect everyone's social boundaries, including outside the workshop.

### 4. We value diversity.

- Do not make assumptions about gender, sexuality, culture, or values.
- No hate speech of any kind.

### 5. Confidentiality is essential.

- Do not talk about others or reveal who attends without permission.

### 6. Participation is voluntary.

- Everyone's energy and ability varies. No one needs to explain their well-being.

### 7. Respect personal space.

- No touching or photographing without consent. Don't pry into personal matters.

### 8. Stay sober.

- Arrive sober. Substance use is not glorified or encouraged.

### 9. Care for the space.

- Clean up after yourself. Help maintain tidiness and functionality.

### 10. Making mistakes is human.

- Mistakes happen. Address them respectfully. Apologize and learn if needed.

Everyone shares responsibility for maintaining a safe space. In difficult situations:

1. Try to resolve things immediately (e.g., ask to change the topic).
2. Talk to a staff member if needed.
3. If unresolved, a group discussion with all parties will be held.



## FUNDING



The financial resources for Sosped's Culture House Houses include both one-time and ongoing costs. STEA (Funding Centre for Social Welfare and Health Organisations) provides funding for development projects, such as the establishment of new Culture Houses and multi-year project funding (e.g., a three-year grant for Culture House Casa in Turku from 2023 to 2025). Meanwhile, municipalities and local governments offer ongoing support by funding premises, covering operational costs, and collaborating with regional services.

The Sosped Foundation coordinates continuous activities including staff salaries, peer tutor training, and maintenance to ensure services remain free and accessible. While peer facilitators and volunteers contribute through their participation, the financial sustainability relies on a combination of temporary project grants and stable, ongoing funding from local authorities and partners.

- STEA supports development projects and the establishment of new Culture Houses.
- Municipalities and local authorities provide premises, fund operational costs, and collaborate with regional services.
- The Sosped Foundation is responsible for staffing, peer tutor training, and the continuity of services.
- Peer tutors and volunteers organize group activities and offer peer support.
- Collaborating partners (e.g., youth and social services, mental health care, third sector organizations) help expand the activities, provide networks and facilities, and support promotion.

Put this, **Funding Centre for Social Welfare and Health Organisations (STEA)** is a government aid authority operating in connection with the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health. STEA is responsible for processing applications, preparing funding proposals, and disbursing grants awarded by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health to social welfare and health organisations. STEA also oversees the use of the grants and evaluates the outcomes of the activities funded by them. Among the activities it supports, STEA provides funding for culture houses, which promote well-being and social inclusion through creative and participatory activities.

Culture houses may also occasionally seek funding from local decision-makers and various regional stakeholders, such as municipalities, foundations, or other community-based organizations, in order to supplement their financial resources, strengthen local cooperation, and ensure the continuity and accessibility of their activities within the community.

These funding opportunities provided by STEA and local or regional stakeholders enable the operation of culture house groups by covering essential costs such as materials, supplies, and the salaries of staff members, thereby ensuring that the workshops can run effectively and offer consistent, high-quality support to participants.





## CHALLENGES

Challenges in implementing the **Culture House Model** are addressed through embracing diversity and complexity as strengths, maintaining clear and open communication internally and externally, and fostering close collaboration among stakeholders.

The model relies on participant-driven innovation to adapt activities to the needs and interests of participants, ensuring relevance and engagement. **Staff provide essential support and supervision to peer tutors to manage difficulties and maintain quality.**

Establishing shared community rules through collective decision-making helps maintain a safe, inclusive, and respectful environment. **Stable funding and strong local partnerships support continuity and resource availability, while connection to a national network offers mutual support and knowledge exchange to overcome operational challenges.**

## SUCCESS FACTORS

Successful implementation of the **Culture House Model** requires a strong commitment to core values such as **peer-led empowerment, voluntary participation, equality, openness, and creativity; availability of motivated peer tutors with lived mental health experience; supportive and skilled staff from diverse professional backgrounds; an adequate, welcoming physical space; clear organizational structures for onboarding, training, supervision, and evaluation; inclusive, low-threshold outreach and recruitment; stable and diverse funding sources; active local ownership and community involvement in shaping the culture and space; flexibility to adapt practices to local needs; and connection to a broader network for mutual support, altogether fostering a participant-centered, creative, and collaborative environment rather than relying on rigid protocols.**

## IMPACT

Sosped Foundation's seven culture houses supported a total of 1,178 young people aged 18–35 experiencing mental health challenges. These workshops saw 9,309 visits, hosted 3,242 communal group sessions, and recorded 6,858 individual participations in various events. Peer instructors contributed 4,363 hours of volunteer work. As a result, 81% of participants reported improved mental health, and 79% felt less lonely.

This form is for providing feedback on the groups at Kulttuuripaja Virta – your feedback is especially important for the peer facilitators! Thank you for your time!

1. Group name
2. What was good about the group?
3. What was good about the group?
4. How could the group's activities be improved?
5. How would you describe the atmosphere in the group?
6. How well did the peer facilitator succeed in leading the group?
7. Other comments or wishes regarding future sessions:



## TRANSFERABILITY



To successfully replicate the Culture House Model (Kulttuuripajamalli), one must adopt a participant-centered, co-creative, and recovery-oriented mindset, grounded in a clear understanding of its core values, flexible structure, and participant-driven approach. The model emphasizes facilitating spaces for empowerment, creativity, and peer connection rather than following strict protocols.

While each Culture House is unique and adapted to local needs, successful implementation depends on having the right people, shared values, support structures, and community partnerships, always guided by the principle of support through shared activity, not shared illness. Additionally, there are key principles and practical considerations that anyone aiming to implement a similar model should be aware of.

### **1. PEER-LED, STRENGTHS-BASED APPROACH**

At the heart of the Culture House Model is the belief that everyone has strengths, creativity, and potential, even when struggling with mental health challenges. The model trains young adults (from the age of 18–35) with lived experience of mental strain to become peer tutors who lead activity-based groups (e.g. music, crafts, gaming, film). Participation is always voluntary and based on interest, not diagnosis.

### **2. FOCUS ON EMPOWERMENT, NOT TREATMENT**

Although the activities are rehabilitative and therapeutic in effect, they are not medical therapy or treatment. Instead, they offer low-threshold, meaningful, and creative peer support, providing participants with new roles, community, and purpose. This requires an attitude shift among implementers; participants are not patients, but equals and co-creators.

### **3. FLEXIBLE BUT STRUCTURED**

Each Culture House adapts the model based on its participants, staff, space, and community context, while still maintaining shared principles like openness, voluntary participation, confidentiality, and co-creation. A national Culture House Network offers mutual support and coordination across locations, but each house operates independently.

### **4. PROFESSIONAL AND PEER COLLABORATION**

Staff play a key supporting role, facilitating, mentoring, and ensuring safety, while peer tutors lead the activities. Staff backgrounds vary (e.g. social workers, youth workers, psychologists, musicians, event coordinators), and all must value open dialogue, equality, and creativity.

### **5. INCLUSIVE RECRUITMENT AND PARTICIPATION**

No referrals or diagnoses are needed. Anyone experiencing mental strain can join, as long as they align with the values of the community. Outreach is typically done through local mental health services, youth work, NGOs, and social media. People can attend groups, hang out, or train as peer tutors, depending on their readiness.

### **6. CLEAR PROCESSES FOR ONBOARDING AND SUPPORT**

New participants start with a first visit, where they learn about the space and decide their own level of involvement. Peer tutors receive structured training, plan their own groups, and have regular supervision with staff. The model includes planning tools, evaluation methods, and group debriefing to ensure reflection and quality.



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## **7. OPEN USE AND NO LICENSING**

One of the model's strengths is its open accessibility: it can be freely used and adapted by any organization interested in rehabilitation-focused peer activity. No licensing or commercial permission is needed, just commitment to its core principles and values.

## **8. SUSTAINABLE FUNDING IS CRUCIAL**

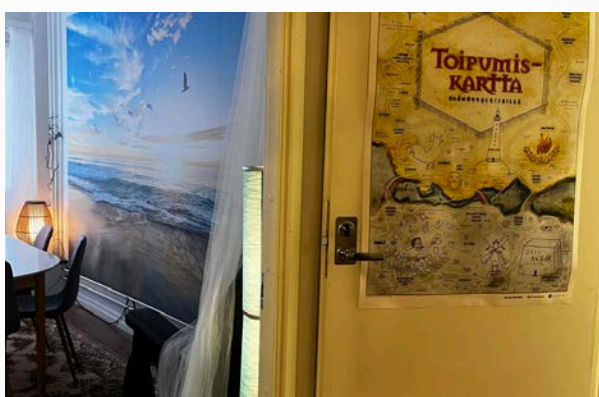
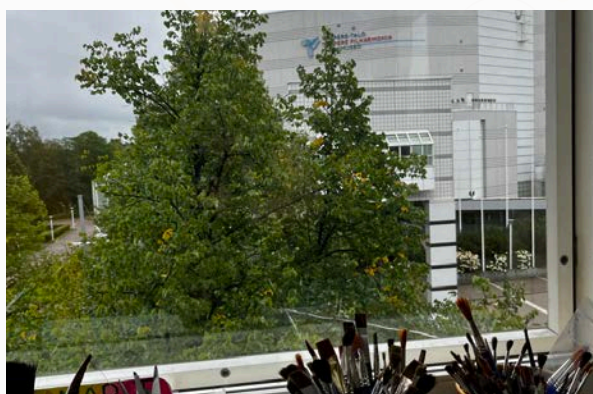
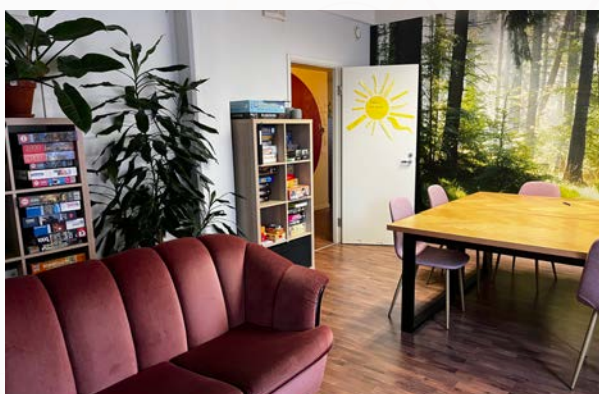
Funding is typically a combination of national grants (e.g. STEA in Finland), municipal support, and in-kind contributions from local stakeholders. A stable funding base is needed for staff salaries, materials, rent, and group activities. Having local ownership and cross-sectoral cooperation is key to sustainability.

## **9. THE PHYSICAL SPACE MATTERS**

Culture Houses can be located in shared facilities (e.g. youth centers or NGO hubs) or their own premises. The space should be welcoming, flexible, and safe, a place that feels like a mix between a community living room and a creative workshop.

## **10. BUILD THE CULTURE TOGETHER**

Community rules, values, and even renovations are co-created with participants, fostering ownership from the beginning. Everyone's voice matters, and mistakes are part of learning. The community aims to be inclusive, respectful, and non-hierarchical.



# GOOD PRACTICE 1: LEARNING JOURNAL NOTES

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## NAME OF THE JOB SHADOWING ACTIVITY

We visited the Culture House Model in Helsinki (“Kupla”) and Tampere (“Virta”) in June 2025.

## WHAT DID WE LEARN? IN WHAT WAY WAS IT NEW?

The **first topic** we explored was the structure and operations of the **Culture House Model**. We were particularly curious to understand how it functioned, who could participate, what kinds of activities were offered, and the role of the staff members. What struck us most was that the **Culture Houses operate continuously throughout the year and are open to young people aged 18–35**.

*For us, Pista Mágica, this stands in contrast to the way we operate, as our work with young people depends entirely on project approvals, and we do not have a permanent physical space to welcome beneficiaries. As a result, our scheduling and staff allocation are always tied to the specific requirements of each project. We also found it fascinating that the model includes young people up to the age of 35, since solutions for those in their later young adult years are often lacking.*

The **second topic** we explored was the range of activities and group dynamics within the Culture House Model. We learned that each Culture House offers **its own set of activities, which evolve according to the interests of the young people involved**. Typically, activities change every six weeks, with one week dedicated specifically to planning. Young participants are free to create and join groups based on their preferences.

*This approach resonates with Pista Mágica’s methodology; for instance, in our “Supported Volunteering Methodology”, we also select volunteering activities aligned with young people’s interests. Later, they are encouraged to design their own “happiness projects” around chosen themes. Often, these projects are developed collaboratively in groups, fostering skills that are very similar to those nurtured within the Culture Houses.*





During the **Job Shadowing process**, we were particularly interested in understanding how Culture Houses interact with their surrounding stakeholders and how they foster synergies. We learned that Culture Houses benefit from a broad network of stakeholders and that professionals in the mental health field refer many young people.

*This approach is very similar to the “Supported Volunteering Methodology,” as Pista Mágica also develops its projects in close collaboration with its stakeholder network, which plays a key role in identifying potential beneficiaries.*



Later, we learned about the **registration process for young people and the type of information required for onboarding in the Culture Houses**. In general, this involves interviews and forms.

*This differs from Pista Mágica’s approach with the “Supported Volunteering Methodology.” In our case, beneficiaries are identified by stakeholders, and Pista Mágica organizes an introductory session to the project, during which young people are invited to take part.*

After learning about the Culture House’s sign-up and onboarding process, **we explored the precautions taken before a young person can fully join, as well as the rules in place to ensure everyone’s safety**. In this context, we discussed the concept of “Safe Spaces,” which is a cornerstone of the Culture House approach.

*Similarly, our “Supported Volunteering Methodology” seeks to apply the same principles by fostering spaces for open dialogue and respectful communication, while also ensuring great care with personal information. Moreover, we make a continuous effort to adapt all activities to the specific needs of participants.*





**Peer tutoring** is one of the most interesting concepts associated with Culture Houses. Here, we learned about their essential skills, how they are trained, and how they are engaged after training. Thanks to that, we could see the benefits of this role for young people. The training involves group reflections that allow young participants to understand their strengths, fears, and how they can tackle them to enhance their peer tutor role. We also understood that creating a common ground when it comes to safe spaces is very important.

*In our “Supported Volunteering Methodology”, we also try to promote these genres of training activities, but are more focused on the role of being a volunteer. We also try to create common ground by, for example, having young people decide on the rules that will allow the creation of safe spaces.*

Later, we also reflected on what should be avoided when implementing a concept like the “Culture Houses.” For us, it became clear that the **rules of safe spaces must always be respected and that participants need to demonstrate commitment.** It is equally important to recognize the limits of what Culture Houses can provide. In extreme situations, it may be necessary to activate other stakeholders and support networks, such as mental health professionals.

*The same applies to the “Supported Volunteering Methodology,” where we have also faced crises that required referring participants to the appropriate support services. Knowing your limits, as an entity, is a strength and the only way to keep participants safe.*



Finally, **we reflected on some of the challenges faced** by the “Culture Houses.” One of the main difficulties lies in reaching diverse target groups.

*This also happens with our “Supported Volunteering Methodology”, which, so far, has only been tested with relatively homogeneous groups (e.g., people with anxiety and/or depression, young people, people with disabilities, or elderly people). We have never experimented with intergenerational or mixed-background groups, for example, bringing together young and elderly participants. Therefore, we have not yet fully explored the potential of applying the methodology in contexts involving people from diverse backgrounds.*





## WHAT WAS THE MOST IMPRESSIVE ASPECT?

For us, the most **touching aspect was seeing how young people truly felt at home and included**. Everyone seemed to feel safe, and when we had the chance to join the activities, it was clear that participation could take many forms. Some chose to actively engage, while others simply felt comfortable being in the same space without interacting directly. Each person was free to choose their own way of participating, and that choice was always respected.

The physical environment itself also contributed to this sense of belonging. **The walls were filled with artwork created by the beneficiaries, and there were plenty of cozy spaces to sit and relax**. We even had the privilege of attending the celebration of **Culture House Virta's anniversary**. The event brought together several generations of participants, some of whom shared their poetry and music. In conversations with the staff, we could sense the long journey they had taken, and it became clear that the Culture Houses have played a truly meaningful role in the lives of many young people.

This was also impoverished in the talks we had with young people, **where we could hear how deeply the "Culture Houses" have influenced their lives**. Many of them spoke with a sense of relief and gratitude about having a safe space where they can simply be themselves. As one person said, *"Culture house is so important in my life: Here I am having a safe place, where we can express our feelings, anxiety, and problematic things, and nearly everyone understands what I am talking about, and doesn't judge me"*.

Another shared, *"This place has given me the energy to move further. There is no rush, no pressure to improve; it gives your mind a rest and the freedom to move forward. I also discovered that I have something to offer. I realised I have skills, I can work and get better at it"*.

Others reflected on how unique it felt to do something simply because they enjoyed it, rather than because it might be useful in the future: *"Usually everything you do is judged by, is it useful for you in the future. Here it is about the moment, and if you like to do it. By focusing on the NOW, you are doing something for your future"*.

Someone else summarised it beautifully: *"The pressure from society is so strong, even from an early age, it's a cult of having to have success."*

We were also impressed by the way the houses organise their activities. Every peer tutor has the role of **"steering the group into the light,"** but what struck us most was how accessible this role is, anyone with a genuine interest in a topic can start a workshop, even on something they'd like to learn themselves. The process becomes a shared exploration; for instance, one person began a "meme" production workshop simply out of curiosity, and the group learned together how to create them.

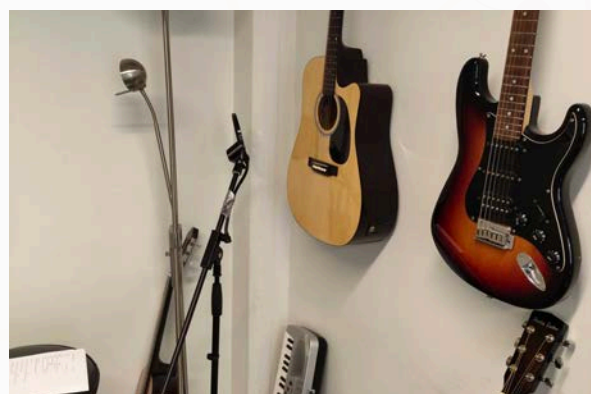
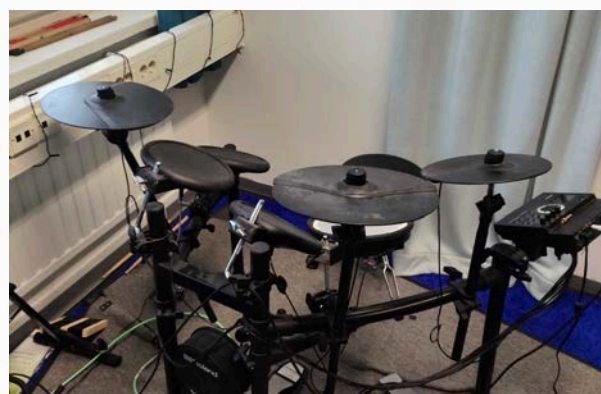
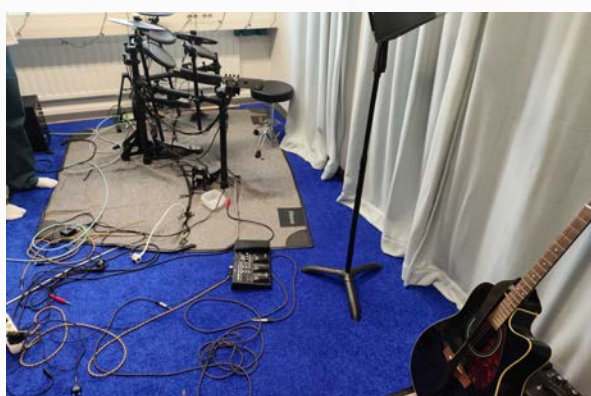
**The staff members, on the other hand, work mostly in the background**. They provide materials, listen when needed (though not as therapists), introduce new visitors, step in if something goes wrong, and handle the administrative side of things. But it's the visitors who are the real driving force behind the activities. **The staff create the conditions for things to happen, but the energy and ideas come from the participants themselves**. This balance gives everyone a sense of ownership and trust, everything feels possible, and everyone is encouraged to take initiative.





There are also a few **simple but powerful rules that maintain respect and safety**. If someone says, "Please stop this," for example, about a certain topic of conversation, it must be respected, and if you want to continue, you find another place or time for it. **Another meaningful principle is that visitors are not asked about their diagnosis; it's enough that they come because they're having a challenging time. There's no need to justify or prove their situation.**

Overall, what touched me most was how this place encourages people to do things, to express themselves, to explore, to rest, to grow, without judgment or pressure. **It's a space where being present is valued as much as moving forward, and where everyone, in their own way, finds light and connection.**





## WHAT WILL I USE IN MY OWN WORK OR LIFE? HOW?

By having the opportunity to learn more about the “Culture House” model, **we came into contact with “Peer Tutoring” and how this can be very empowering for young people.**

The training itself has many interesting aspects related to non-formal learning (e.g., the utilization of movies and documentaries for self and group reflection) that can be of use for us, both **Pista Mágica and Gemeinsam leben und lernen in Europa e.V.**

In **Pista Mágica**, such learning will be implemented in our **“Supported Volunteering Methodology”**. This methodology has 4 phases, one of them being dedicated to training in themes such as self-knowledge, empathy, and volunteering. As such, we’ll include dynamics such as the utilization of documentaries and “feeling cards”.

**We [Gemeinsam leben und lernen in Europa e.V.]** will also utilize some of these methods in our own training. **We’ll also include the “Work and culture of our organisation” session in our teamer and general onboarding training.**

**We [Pista Mágica]**, also don’t have a role like the **peer tutor** in our “Supported Volunteering Methodology”. **We believe that incorporating the concept of “mentor” into our methodology could be very interesting.**

This mentor could be someone who has already gone through the 4 phases of the methodology, and who is invited to participate in the activities of other groups who are still in the initial phases. In fact, in the first phase of the methodology, which is based on training (self-knowledge, empathy, and volunteering), **young people have to identify their mentors.**

Another young person in a similar situation has great potential as a mentor. They could use their experience to inspire other young people and even support them in creating their own happiness projects (phase 3 of the “Supported Volunteering Methodology”).

**The various activities offered in Culture Houses (e.g., jewelry workshops) can also serve as examples of “Happiness Projects” (3rd phase of the methodology) that young people can create within their community.** Activities such as “coffee painting” are highly original, and they might motivate young people to do things they never thought possible.

**We [Gemeinsam leben und lernen in Europa e.V.] will also utilize these ideas to implement new activities in our community center, such as:**

- Group “Doing my official/ bureaucratic work
- Happy weekend-team
- Meme production workshop
- Music painting session
- Postcrossing.com: writing letters to strangers, Culture House provides envelopes and stamps
- Bullet journaling
- Watch movies and talk about them
- Knitting
- Reading group
- Coffee painting

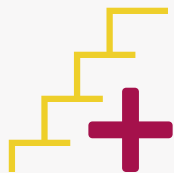


**GOOD PRACTICE**  
**VOLUNTEERING**  
**(PORTUGAL)**

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**2: SUPPORTED**  
**METHODOLOGY**





## SUPPORTED VOLUNTEERING METHODOLOGY

This methodology focuses on **group work with people in similar vulnerable situations and offers personalized support for volunteers, tailored to their abilities, needs, and interests.** It has four main phases: **(a) Training of (future) volunteers; (b) Generic Volunteer Activities; (c) Happiness Projects (Individual or Community); (d) Specific Volunteer Activities.**

## TARGET GROUP

The beneficiaries of this methodology are individuals in vulnerable situations, regardless of their social, economic, or psychological condition. **The methodology is adaptable to different age groups and contexts, and has already been implemented with youth at risk of social exclusion, people with disabilities, individuals with depressive and anxiety disorders, and senior populations, among others.**

The “Supported Volunteering Methodology” was designed to **transform volunteering into a truly accessible and inclusive practice, open to all individuals regardless of their personal characteristics, circumstances, or social contexts.** Groups at risk of social exclusion, who often have limited access to volunteering, are typically confined to the role of passive beneficiaries, without the opportunity to become active agents of change within their communities. **The Pista Mágica approach is based on the conviction that every individual possesses unique talents waiting to be discovered and shared.** In this context, the role of the intervention is to support participants in exploring and applying these talents, enabling them to generate positive and transformative impact in society. Through this methodology, participants **develop skills, acquire essential knowledge and tools, and are empowered for active, meaningful, and profoundly transformative civic and social engagement, becoming protagonists of their own stories of change.**





## OUTREACH AND PARTICIPATION

We reach young people through collaboration with other **community entities and projects, such as schools and municipalities, that request the intervention of Pista Mágica**. The aim is to raise awareness among young people and empower them through the practice of volunteering.

To inform and motivate young people to participate, a preparatory session (**Session 0**) is **initially conducted with the group, with the objectives of (1) clarifying the purpose of the project and the role of each participant, and (2) exploring the concept of a talented individual or change-maker and the characteristics that define them**. At the end of this session, the young people are invited to embark on this journey, being challenged to actively engage in volunteering, fostering personal skill development, and generating a positive impact within the community.

The Pista Mágica intervention is always carried out in collaboration with other institutions, organizations, and community-based projects that implement programs for the intervention or support of individuals in vulnerable situations. These partnerships include, for example: **Schools, Family Health Units, Municipal Councils, Private Social Solidarity Institutions (such as day centers, residential facilities for older adults, and shelters for children and young people), Associations, among others**.

## STAFF

In the implementation and dissemination of the “Supported Volunteering Methodology”, professionals from various fields **within the Social and Human Sciences are involved, including Social Educators, Psychologists, Psychopedagogues, Anthropologists, and professionals from the fields of Communication, European Studies, and Criminology**. The number of staff members will vary depending on the number of participants and their specific needs, as people have different degrees of autonomy. Usually, at least 2 full-time staff members are required for a group of 30 people. If the beneficiaries are people with mental health challenges, it’s advised that at least one of these staff members is either a psychologist or an occupational therapist.

The development and implementation of the “**Supported Volunteering Methodology**” **requires professionals** with a personal and ethical profile deeply committed to the values of **inclusion, empathy, and human dignity**. These professionals should possess relational and communication skills that enable them to build trusting relationships, foster dialogue, and facilitate processes of personal and collective growth. They must also demonstrate mediation skills, active listening, and sensitivity to effectively engage with contexts of vulnerability, recognizing the transformative potential of each individual.

Beyond technical and methodological expertise, they must cultivate a reflective, ethical, and collaborative attitude, guided by authenticity, respect, and social commitment. Professional practice should be grounded in a humanistic and participatory vision that values diversity and acknowledges every person as an active agent of change, regardless of who they are. **By combining scientific knowledge, socio-emotional competencies, and a genuine sense of purpose, these professionals become facilitators of empowerment processes, promoting the development of skills, autonomy, and positive transformation, both among participants and within the communities in which they operate.**



## INFRASTRUCTURE

In terms of physical spaces used, the “Supported Volunteering Methodology” is characterized by its flexibility and adaptability to different contexts. **The spaces may vary, provided that they offer suitable conditions to accommodate groups of approximately 15 to 20 participants, ensuring a spacious, private, and supportive environment conducive to creating a safe space built on trust and closeness.** Such an environment is essential for all participants to feel comfortable and encouraged to share their opinions, experiences, and perspectives.

Commonly used spaces include **classrooms, auditoriums, youth center rooms, training rooms, and, in some cases, outdoor areas**, which can be adapted according to the needs and dynamics of the activities or volunteering experiences. In essence, **any space can be considered appropriate for the intervention**, as long as it guarantees the conditions of safety, confidentiality, and comfort necessary for the well-being and active participation of all involved.

Usually, many of these spaces are assigned to Pista Mágica according to the partnerships that were established. For example, if a **health center wishes to implement the methodology with their patients, they usually provide a space.**

## FUNDING

The funding of the activity typically results from a combination of **available grant opportunities and/or the interest of entities willing to support the intervention.** Funding sources depend on several factors, such as: the existing diagnoses made by stakeholders; the social issue identified, and the potential of the methodology to provide added value compared to existing solutions; the severity of the social challenge; and the specificity of the target groups.

Consequently, the “Supported Volunteering Methodology” **may be integrated into national or international projects, in which case it is financed through the respective project budgets. Alternatively, Pista Mágica may be commissioned by local entities to implement the methodology, with funding provided directly by these organizations.**

In all cases, the central objective remains unchanged: to ensure the sustainability and continuity of an accessible, inclusive, and transformative volunteering practice that promotes active engagement and fosters the development of both individuals and communities.

Regarding the costs associated with the implementation of the methodology, these may vary significantly, taking the form of either a one-time payment or ongoing payments, depending on the contractual arrangements with the respective entity or project.

In some cases, funding is continuous and accompanies the entire process of development and mobilization of the methodology, ensuring resources throughout all phases of the intervention. In other cases, payment is made as a single installment, with Pista Mágica being responsible for strategically managing the resources throughout the entire process, thereby ensuring the sustainability and quality of the intervention. As such, most expenses are related to:



- Human Resources (e.g., at least 2 full-time staff members are needed just to implement the methodology; additional staff to support the measurement of the impact of the initiative; a communication staff member to support the activities whenever needed, take pictures, and make videos);
- Transportation to the stakeholders' facilities, when appropriate;
- Transportation to the volunteering activities, for both the team members and the participants;
- Volunteering insurance for participants;
- Computers and projectors;
- Printing and making of passports, a tool created for the methodology by Pista Mágica;
- Various other supplies (e.g., sheets of paper, markers, pencils, painter's tape, post-its, hula hoops, balls);
- Snacks and coffee breaks for the participants;
- Coffee break for the final recognition event.



## MATERIALS

Regarding the **materials, equipment, and digital tools to be used**, their selection depends on the individual and collective characteristics of the group, as the entire intervention is adapted according to the specific needs of the participants. Examples of material resources include **digital equipment, such as computers and projectors, which are primarily used during the initial training sessions**. Subsequently, other materials, more **playful and interactive**, are determined by the type of group dynamics exercises implemented, ensuring that the resources adequately support the pedagogical and participatory objectives of the methodology. Some of these materials are created entirely from scratch by Pista Mágica, such as the **“passport”, a small, handmade notebook that accompanies beneficiaries throughout the entire implementation of the methodology. In this passport, participants record elements from both the training phase (Phase 1) and the general volunteering activities (Phase 2)**. They use it to identify their key characteristics, their teams, and their mentors. It also serves as a space to reflect on their main challenges and describe the qualities of the “ideal volunteer,” encouraging deeper self-reflection on their own profiles and how they fit within the volunteering context.

Often, the passport also includes pages dedicated to reflections on the volunteering activities themselves, what participants enjoyed most and what obstacles they encountered.

In addition to the passport, Pista Mágica utilizes other materials, such as:

- Visual aids such as cards listing traits like friendly, understanding, aggressive, patient, impulsive, responsible, or creative (e.g. to identify their main characteristics);
- Sheets with people or objects’ silhouettes, for team-building dynamics (e.g. a group having to cut a figure together) and for the identification of fears exercise (e.g. they colour the sheet when they relate to someone else’s fears);
- List of sentences with statements about volunteering, where participants have to say if they agree or disagree with;
- Blank A4/A3 sheets so participants can draw avatars or other figures according to the exercises at hand (e.g., drawing the “perfect” volunteer);
- Black A3 sheets, utilized for certain dynamics, whenever needed;
- Blob tree sheets (created in the 80’s by Pip Wilson and Ian Long; are useful to help participants identify how they felt during the volunteering activities);
- Different A3/A4 sheets are utilized for the drafting of “Individual Happiness Projects”;
- Recurring materials, such as markers, pencils, painter’s tape, post-its, hula hoops, balls, and so on.



## IMPLEMENTATION

The Supported Volunteering Methodology is structured into four complementary phases, designed to transform individuals in vulnerable situations into active agents of change, fostering personal development, civic competencies, and community integration through volunteering

### PHASE (A) – VOLUNTEER TRAINING

This phase prepares participants for volunteering, promoting empowerment and self-awareness. Structured around three core themes, Self-Knowledge, Empathy, and Volunteering, the training employs Non-Formal Education methods, emphasizing active participation, group dynamics, videos, and practical exercises. Specific sessions include:

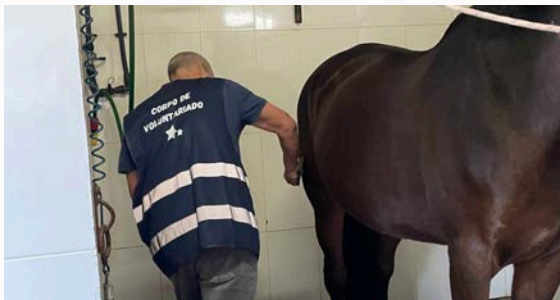
- **Session 0: Motivation and project introduction, exploring the concept of a “talented individual.”**
- **Session 1: Self-Knowledge, identification of personal talents and support networks.**
- **Session 2: Empathy, developing the ability to understand others and overcome obstacles with the support of the team and mentors.**
- **Session 3: Volunteering, exploring skills, rights, and responsibilities of volunteers, preparing participants for practical engagement in volunteering activities.**



## PHASE (B) – GENERIC VOLUNTEERING ACTIVITIES (GVA)

In this phase, volunteers participate in various types of volunteering to identify what motivates them the most and their role within the community. This phase includes:

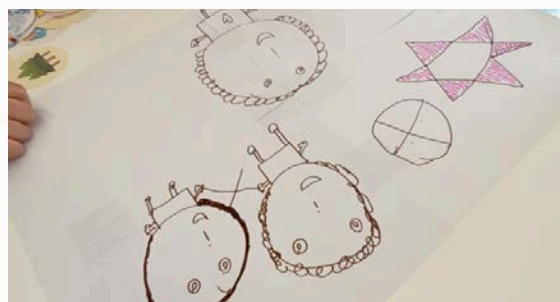
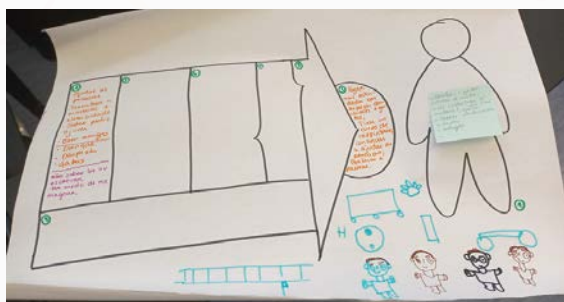
- **Presentation of opportunities:** Introduction to hosting organizations, schedules, available positions, and volunteer interests, with an organized timetable.
- **Transportation and meeting points:** Flexibility in travel arrangements while ensuring safety and promoting team bonding.
- **Activity support and motivation:** Supervision, guidance, and mediation as needed, gradually fostering autonomy and reinforcing positive engagement.
- **Impact recording and recognition:** Documentation of hours, activities completed, and community impact, culminating in a wrap-up session with reflection and individual evaluation.



## PHASE (C) – HAPPINESS PROJECTS (INDIVIDUAL AND COMMUNITY)

Following the experimentation phase, participants develop Happiness Projects:

- **Individual Happiness Project (IHP):** Centered on Person-Centered Planning (PCP), focusing on personal dreams, aspirations, and life goals, promoting community integration and personal development through informal and confidential sessions.
- **Community Happiness Project (CHP):** Developed collectively by the group, identifying community needs and proposing volunteer-based solutions through eight stages: motivate, choose, plan, organize and operationalize, involve, execute, evaluate, and celebrate.



## PHASE (D) – SPECIFIC VOLUNTEERING ACTIVITIES (SVA)

This phase implements the Happiness Projects, either through integration into volunteering opportunities (individual or group) or by carrying out the designed community projects. Key aspects include:

- Respecting the shared interests of volunteers choosing similar activities to enhance adaptation and cooperation.
- Formalizing volunteering agreements between organizations and volunteers, with initial guidance from facilitators when necessary.
- Active engagement of volunteers, ensuring understanding of duties and responsibilities, and promoting gradual, sustainable adaptation.



In summary, the “Supported Volunteering Methodology” combines training, practical experimentation, and meaningful project development, fostering autonomy, socio-emotional skills, and positive community impact, ultimately transforming participants into active agents of change.



## LENGTH

The length and frequency of the “Supported Volunteering Methodology” depend on the organization using it and the specific needs of the people taking part.

This method is **flexible and adaptable**. It can be adjusted to fit both the goals of the organization and the situation of the participants, making it possible to create a personalized program for each case.

The process can be **carried out in different ways**:

- Step by step, following all phases from (a) to (d), or
- In a modular way, by choosing to start with or skip certain phases, depending on the context and goals of the project.

Because of this flexibility, the method can be used in many formats, from **long-term programs with weekly sessions over several months to intensive “bootcamp” style programs that take place over one focused week of continuous work**. Usually, a long-term intervention will last at least 12 months, while a “Bootcamp” might last between 1 and 3 weeks.

Throughout the implementation of the methodology, the team meets weekly to share experiences, adjust the intervention, and prepare or adapt the materials required for each subsequent session. The central objective is to allocate dedicated time for the preparation of the upcoming session, ensuring that the planning of activities occurs continuously and progressively, taking into account the characteristics and evolving needs demonstrated by the group throughout the process.

## CHALLENGES

One of the **primary challenges encountered during the implementation of the practice was ensuring adequate transportation logistics**. In relation to older adults, an additional obstacle emerged due to the existence of organizational biases that **underestimated their capabilities and potential for active participation**. Furthermore, the instructional materials were not always immediately adapted to participants’ specific needs, requiring continuous refinement and adjustment between sessions. Another relevant challenge involved the inclusion of individuals with disabilities who required personal assistance, as well as engagement with young people in at-risk contexts, which frequently demanded conflict mediation and emotional regulation strategies.

To overcome these challenges, **collaborative partnerships were essential**. At the time, a partner organization provided access to a vehicle, albeit such support remained exceptional. **Regarding institutional prejudice, direct collaboration and awareness-raising efforts were undertaken to foster trust and to demonstrate the competence and commitment of participants**, leading to a gradual change in organizational attitudes. For participants with disabilities, external networks were mobilized to secure the necessary personal support and ensure inclusive participation. Concerning the engagement with young people, emphasis was placed on team-based approaches and open communication, both within the facilitation team and directly with the youth, to strengthen mutual understanding, cooperation, and emotional management.



## SUCCESS FACTORS

The effectiveness of the practice stems from a balanced combination **of a human-centered approach and a solid methodological foundation**. Specific training in the methodology and the use of **non-formal education** principles allows activities to be conducted in a structured yet flexible way, adaptable to the needs of each group. The facilitators' informal posture, combined with an attitude of respect and professionalism, helps create an atmosphere of closeness and emotional safety.

A **genuine belief in each participant's potential is one of the core pillars of this practice**. This trust is reflected in the ability to build meaningful relationships within clear boundaries, fostering engagement and motivation. Empathy, clear communication, and genuine availability further strengthen this bond, creating space for all participants to feel valued and heard.

At the same time, **flexibility and adaptability, both individual and collective, are essential to respond effectively to diverse contexts and profiles**. Continuous awareness of one's own biases, along with the deliberate effort to deconstruct them, encourages a more inclusive and reflective practice. Finally, **openness to teamwork and the creation of regular spaces for collective reflection and sharing enhance group cohesion and the overall quality of the intervention**.

The trainer(s) **should be well-qualified, possessing a strong understanding of non-formal education methods** (e.g., discussions, participatory conversations) and **informal learning approaches**. They should also be familiar with practical facilitation tools such as **energizers and icebreakers**. Equally important is their ability to adapt these methods to the specific context and participants, while establishing clear group agreements based on mutual respect and cooperation. This combination helps create an atmosphere in which participants feel comfortable, engaged, and safe to contribute.

Together, these factors result in a practice that combines human sensitivity with technical rigor, fostering an environment of trust, mutual learning, and personal development.

## IMPACT

Regarding the evidence of impact, the "Supported Volunteering Methodology" incorporates systematic mechanisms for feedback collection, results monitoring, and comprehensive evaluation of the intervention's overall impact. **Following phase (b), the Generic Volunteering Activities, a wrap-up session is conducted, during which both quantitative and qualitative results are presented and discussed**, including the number of volunteers involved, the number of activities implemented, the total hours dedicated, and the number of people or entities benefiting from the intervention.

This session also serves as a **space for collective and individual reflection, inviting participants to share what they most appreciated, what they least enjoyed, the main challenges they faced, and the key lessons they learned**.

At the end of the process, **a final comprehensive evaluation is carried out to assess the overall impact of the methodology's implementation**, the extent to which the intervention met the needs and objectives of the participants and partner entities, the suitability of the materials used, and identify potential areas for improvement in future implementations.



In addition, **testimonials from volunteers are collected either through evaluation questionnaires administered after the intervention or through in-person follow-up visits conducted by the Pista Mágica team at the implementation sites**, ensuring an in-depth understanding of participants' perspectives and lived experiences throughout the process.

By **2024**, the methodology had been implemented with approximately **222 participants**, resulting in a total of **4382 hours of volunteering** and an **estimated 30279.62€** in benefits returned to local communities (based on Portuguese minimum wage of 2025).

In terms of **results for the participants, one can mention the following, per project:**

- **CARRY Project**, funded by BPI and the "la Caixa" Foundation, was implemented in the municipalities of Gondomar and Porto with 42 at-risk youth (aged 10 to 19). The project enabled: increased youth community participation (998 hours of volunteering and 21 community entrepreneurship projects created); development of relational, social, behavioral, and emotional skills among the youth, resulting in improvements in communication and socialization strategies; and greater community engagement, motivation regarding their vocation, and professional guidance.
- **VolunTalento Project**, funded by POISE, Portugal Social Innovation, was implemented in Vila Nova de Gaia and focused on people with disabilities. It resulted in increased civic and community participation, and 85% of participants understood the value of volunteering for the common good. There was also an improvement in relational and socio-professional skills for 85% of participants.
- **VES Project** (Social Emergency Volunteering), funded by POISE, resulted in increased civic and community participation of 28 socially vulnerable youth (101 hours of volunteering).
- **VoluntariaMente Project**, funded by the Active Citizens program, recorded personal skills development, increased community participation, a sense of belonging and personal fulfillment, well-being, and enjoyment in daily activities, as well as perceived lower levels of anxiety during volunteering activities. A clinical study also reported improvements in symptoms of anxiety and depression.
- **(Re)Forma de Estar Project**, implemented in Gondomar, with funding from the BPI Fundação "la Caixa" Seniores 2023 Award and in partnership with the Associação Mutualista de Gondomar (AMUT). The main objective was to promote more active ageing, increasing the civic participation of senior citizens through volunteering and the creation of community projects. Participants showed notable improvements in personal skills, social engagement, and community involvement, with the most significant gains in perceived community usefulness and sense of belonging, alongside reductions in loneliness.



## STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT

Pista Mágica (PM) has **17 years of experience**, marked by collaborative work with various organizations. It actively participates in nine national, European, and global networks, such as Cidade Social, the Portuguese Confederation of Volunteering, ESLIDER, the Portuguese Platform of Non-Governmental Organizations for Development, Município Amigo do Desporto, ANIMAR, Setor3, the International Association for Volunteer Effort, FORUM, and the Centre for European Volunteering, contributing to working groups and joint initiatives.

Pista Mágica **joins consortia in community projects and provides regular services to at least 26 public entities, mainly municipalities** (e.g., 17 municipalities in the Porto Metropolitan Area, Cascais, Almada, Braga).

Pista Mágica's projects are **designed based on assessments conducted by municipalities and local partners, considering the specific characteristics and challenges of each territory**. Many organizations are also involved in identifying beneficiaries (e.g., health centers, schools, inclusion centers...) or facilitating activities (e.g., organizations offering volunteering opportunities).

Additionally, Pista Mágica **receives social investment from municipalities and creates Monitoring Committees to ensure technical validation and dissemination of its projects** (e.g., Volunteer and Go, Gambling Free Feed, Geração V, Vol'Mig, Oficina de Voluntariado).

The association also maintains formal partnerships, **such as a loan agreement with the Municipality of Gondomar, protocols with the National Institute for Rehabilitation and the Polytechnic of Porto, and is integrated into local social networks in Porto and Gondomar** (e.g., Rio Tinto). It regularly participates in events and lectures, promoting knowledge and the outcomes of its work.

Pista Mágica has built and maintained this strong collaborative network by **combining strategic planning, active engagement, and sustained communication**. The organization's goal has always been to create a supportive system connecting municipalities, NGOs, volunteer organizations, and international networks, allowing the sharing of resources, best practices, and joint opportunities.

To build this network, Pista Mágica first identified relevant stakeholders and partners aligned with its mission. This is seen, for example, during the strategic planning of the organization, where stakeholders are asked to contribute and influence Pista Mágica's trajectory for the following years.

Pista Mágica also engaged with these entities through active participation in events, joining formal networks, and by contributing to working groups, thereby establishing credibility and trust. Collaborative projects allowed the organization to create tangible outcomes, further strengthening relationships. Formal agreements, including protocols, consortia partnerships, and loan contracts, helped solidify these collaborations, like mentioned previously.

**Maintaining the network involves ongoing, mutually beneficial engagement.** As such, Pista Mágica ensures regular communication through meetings, newsletters, and online platforms, while Monitoring Committees and assessment mechanisms provide technical validation and continuous improvement of joint initiatives. By producing accessible materials, e-learning courses, and promoting project results through events and lectures, the organization keeps partners informed, engaged, and invested in its mission.



This approach has enabled Pista Mágica to collaborate with **more than 26 public entities**, participate in nine national and international networks, and sustain long-term partnerships that support community projects, volunteering opportunities, and capacity-building initiatives.

**When it comes to the methodology, this network is essential. Pista Mágica does not directly provide volunteering opportunities or access to beneficiaries, so it relies on partnerships with local entities for recruitment and identifying suitable volunteering opportunities.** For recruitment, it collaborates with schools, health centers, and inclusion centers, presenting its “Supported Volunteering Methodology” and activity calendar to explore stakeholders’ interest. These partners often provide access to beneficiaries and spaces for the training phase. When identifying volunteering opportunities, Pista Mágica contacts local volunteer banks and other organizations in the locality. Pista Mágica ensures these community organizations can accommodate volunteers from marginalized groups and meet their specific needs.

## TRANSFERABILITY

Replicating the “Supported Volunteering Methodology” **requires a profound understanding of its humanistic, participatory, and adaptive nature.** More than a set of procedures, this methodology represents a relational and transformative process, centred on people and their inherent capacities.

Implementation teams must comprise professionals **with backgrounds in the Social and Human Sciences, equipped with both technical and relational competencies that enable them to intervene with sensitivity, empathy, and ethical awareness.**

These professionals must recognise that they are working with individuals in situations of vulnerability, **not as recipients of assistance, but as protagonists of their own processes of change. Their role is to act as facilitators, supporting, accompanying, and creating the conditions for each person to discover and nurture their potential, finding in volunteering a meaningful sense of purpose and belonging.**

The intervention should be **flexible and continuously adapted to the characteristics, needs, and pace of each group and individual.** This requires an ongoing exercise of active listening, reflection, and adjustment, ensuring that the process remains aligned with the principles of inclusion, dignity, and active participation.

Moreover, organisations seeking to **replicate this methodology should understand the importance of network-based collaboration and interinstitutional partnerships. Cooperation with schools, municipalities, social institutions, and other community actors is crucial to ensuring the sustainability, impact, and coherence of the intervention.**

Finally, those who wish to implement this practice must do so with a deep sense of mission and social commitment, acknowledging that genuine transformation occurs when every person is seen, heard, and valued, not merely as a beneficiary, but as an active agent of change in their own life and within their community.



For the “Supported Volunteering Methodology” to be **implemented effectively and to generate transformative impacts, it is essential to ensure several preconditions before mobilization.** First, the implementing organization should fully embrace and support the core values of the methodology, inclusion, empowerment, respect for human dignity, and recognition of participants as protagonists of their own change, thus guaranteeing organizational support and the sustainability of the intervention.

**Strategic planning should be clearly defined beforehand, including the establishment of objectives, identification of target groups, allocation of human and material resources, and coordination with relevant community partners.** The intervention also requires an appropriate physical and logistical structure, with safe, spacious, private, and accessible spaces that foster trust and closeness between participants and facilitators, as well as suitable materials and transportation for the planned activities.

**Participant selection and sensitization should be carried out carefully, ensuring that groups fully benefit from the intervention and that the process remains inclusive and participatory.**

Concurrently, **mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation must be established from the outset, including impact indicators and feedback collection tools, to track the project’s development and allow for continuous adjustments.** Finally, the team must be prepared to adapt the methodology to the specific needs and rhythms of each group or individual, ensuring that participants’ autonomy and protagonism are always respected and strengthened.

## TESTIMONIALS

The following three videos present testimonials collected within the scope of different projects, VoluntariaMente, VolunTalento, and (Re)Forma de Estar, all of which are grounded in the implementation of the Supported Volunteering Methodology across distinct contexts and with diverse target groups.

The VoluntariaMente project engaged individuals experiencing mood disorders, namely anxiety and depression, fostering emotional well-being, a renewed sense of purpose, and the recovery of self-confidence through volunteering. - <https://youtu.be/5OuLu6roQkM>

VolunTalento focused on people with disabilities and/or impairments, enhancing their personal and social skills while reinforcing their active and participatory role within the community. - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iwLmEqxzhoo>

The (Re)Forma de Estar project involved senior participants, valuing their life experience, promoting active aging, and strengthening civic and community participation through meaningful and inclusive volunteering practices. - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MVB2093JjU0&t=129s>

**Together, these testimonies illustrate the deeply transformative nature of the methodology, highlighting how Supported Volunteering serves as a powerful instrument for empowerment, inclusion, and human development, built upon relationships of trust, purpose, and shared social responsibility.**

# GOOD PRACTICE 2: LEARNING

## JOURNAL NOTES

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## NAME OF THE JOB SHADOWING ACTIVITY

“Supported Volunteering Methodology” being applied in a bootcamp with young people, in Porto, Portugal. Visited in September 2025.

## WHAT DID WE LEARN? IN WHAT WAY WAS IT NEW?

At an initial stage, we, **SOSPED and Gemeinsam leben und lernen in Europa e.V.** had the opportunity to learn more about **Pista Mágica as an organization.**

We [**Gemeinsam leben und lernen in Europa e.V.**] noted that Pista Mágica shares very similar goals and values with our own organization. We were particularly impressed by the fact that Pista Mágica **does not rely primarily on European funding.** Most of its income comes from **municipalities or paid services, while European projects serve mainly as an important complement.** These projects are used to demonstrate the effectiveness and relevance of Pista Mágica’s approaches, allowing municipalities to access proven models without bearing the full development costs.

We also learned that investing in **relationships, especially with administrative staff in municipalities, is crucial, even though it may take years to yield results.** Stakeholders are deeply involved in **Pista Mágica’s work and strategic planning processes, as the organization regularly conducts SWOT analyses and develops long-term strategic plans.**

Typically, **their process begins with presenting an idea to different stakeholders and local donors, then securing resources for a pilot phase.** Whenever possible, they involve potential stakeholders in implementation, as well.

Funding often results from **long-term networking, trust-building, and sustained investment in relationships.** One effective strategy is to identify awards directed at municipalities: when a municipality receives recognition for a project, it becomes more likely to fund it over the long term or to integrate it into regular services.

Another key lesson was the importance of ensuring that **decision-makers can publicly benefit from their involvement, for instance, through media coverage or positive imagery, while maintaining strict political neutrality.**

Finally, Pista Mágica has a **robust evaluation system in place for all its projects,** enabling it to provide solid evidence of impact through impressive data, figures, and research. This allows the organization to highlight the key success factors behind its work succinctly.



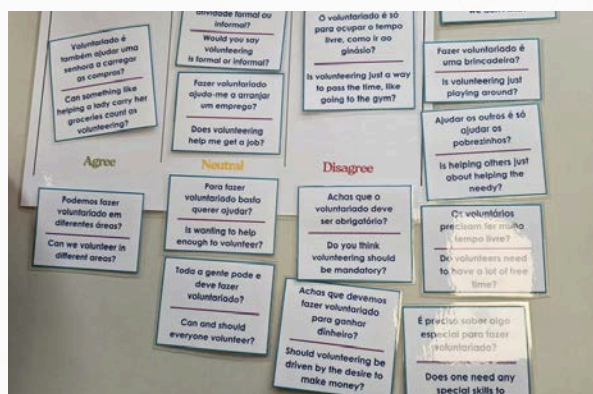


After this stage, we had the opportunity to learn about the **“Supported Volunteering Methodology”** and how it is applied during bootcamps designed for young people from socially excluded backgrounds. These bootcamps typically focus on the first two phases of the methodology: **Phase 1 – Training** and **Phase 2 – Generic Volunteering Activities**.

### Phase 1 – Training

We [Gemeinsam leben und lernen in Europa e.V.] found the exercises within this phase particularly engaging and effective. Some notable examples include:

- **Hula-Hoop Exercise:** A dynamic team-building activity that encourages cooperation, creative problem-solving, and effective communication.
- **“Who Am I?” Exercise:** Helps participants identify their personal strengths, resources, and the network connections they can rely on.
- **Empathy and Talking About Fears:** Participants openly discuss their fears, which helps create trust and a deeper group connection. This exercise requires a skilled facilitator who can ensure balanced participation and guide the discussion if some participants dominate or share experiences that differ greatly from others’ realities. (For instance, one participant from a private school spoke at length about her fear of choosing the wrong university, while others were struggling to stay in regular education.)
- **Team-Building Exercises:** For example, groups of five are blindfolded and asked to create a star shape using a rope, which reinforces the importance of communication, collaboration, and finding joint solutions.
- **“The Perfect Volunteer” Exercise:** A small group activity that combines reflection and creativity, as participants identify the key traits of an ideal volunteer.





During this phase, we [**Gemeinsam leben und lernen in Europa e.V.**] observed that the same principles applied as in “**Culture Houses**”: everyone should feel safe, be respected, and avoid judgment. **Adults are expected to engage with young people on an equal level and take them seriously.** These rules are applied consistently, and any deviations are addressed openly or, if needed, in one-on-one conversations.

Although English was not spoken by most participants, **a few helped with translations and actively involved us in understanding what was happening. This shifted their role slightly, allowing them to act as supporters.**

Not understanding everything encouraged closer observation of group dynamics. **It was impressive to see this diverse group, comprising participants from different institutions and private schools, develop team-building skills and socialize in a short time.**

This success resulted not only from well-chosen activities but also from the **Pista Mágica’s trainer’s expertise.** The method allowed participants to step out of their usual roles, focus on their strengths, and broaden their perspectives.

Importantly, we [**Gemeinsam leben und lernen in Europa e.V.**], noticed that the “Supported Volunteering Methodology” does not treat participants as children to be controlled. Instead, it relies on **joint agreements, flexibility, and recognition** that some participants may need small breaks to manage anxieties and maintain energy for group activities. After two days, the group dynamic was very positive, and nearly all participants were interacting with each other.

We [**SOSPED**], also particularly valued the “**Empathy**” part of the training sessions, as it’s a word that is not commonly used in Finland, but is a tool that we use in this line of field working with people with mental health challenges.

One of the great things we noticed was how participants **stayed motivated to take part in the activities while still feeling free to be themselves, joking around, socializing, and just having fun with each other.** They were engaged and active, but in a relaxed way that didn’t feel forced or overly serious. It showed that when people feel comfortable and accepted, they’re more likely to take part fully and bring their own personality into the mix, which makes the whole experience more genuine and enjoyable for everyone.

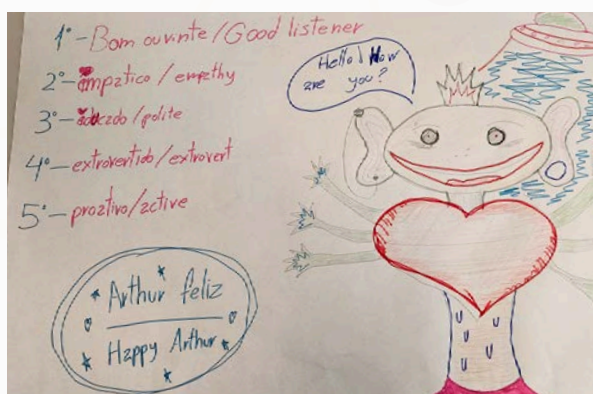
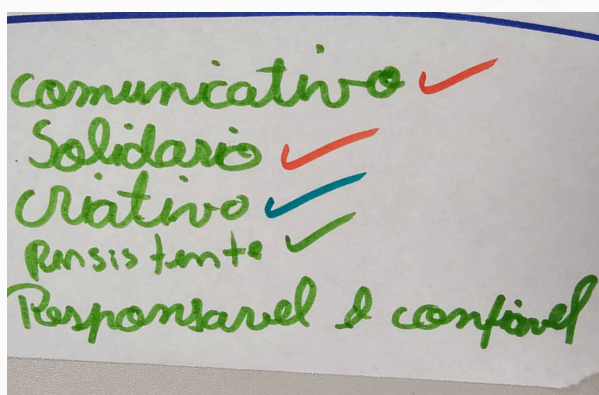




We [Gemeinsam leben und lernen in Europa e.V.] noted that, however, some challenges arose during the activity regarding group dynamics and communication. **Certain issues were not openly addressed at the time, and some important information was not shared in advance, which made it more difficult to fully anticipate and respond to specific needs.**

Additionally, the roles and responsibilities between certain parts were not entirely clear from the outset, which created some difficulties in implementing the intended approach in practice. For us, [Gemeinsam leben und lernen in Europa e.V.], this shows that, **when supporting adults do not follow the established rules and have undesirable behaviours** (e.g. active listening, not using smartphone during sessions), it makes **it very difficult for the trainer to enforce the guidelines and maintain group cohesion.**

And it was clear, the trainer must have experience working with young people from challenging backgrounds and possess strong self-confidence. If a trainer is hesitant or uncomfortable, as was the case with one of the co-trainers, participants are less likely to respect them or follow instructions.

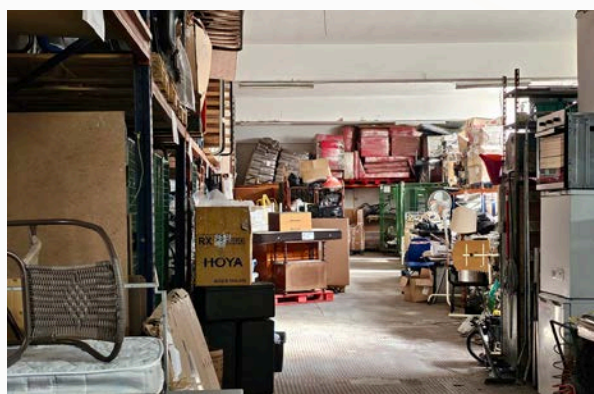




## Phase 2 – Generic Volunteering Activities

We [**Gemeinsam leben und lernen in Europa e.V. and SOSPED**] also had the opportunity to volunteer alongside young participants in several community-based activities, such as:

- **Food Bank:** The activity began with a Kahoot quiz about the food bank's operations and statistics, followed by a discussion. **The partners were impressed by the scale and organization of the distribution process.** The mixed teams worked quickly and efficiently, sometimes even outperforming a corporate volunteer group present at the same time. **Some young participants even joined the corporate teams spontaneously.**
- **X-Ray Sorting:** An innovative fundraising activity involving the collection and sorting of donated X-rays from medical offices, which can later be recycled to generate income. This innovative method of fundraising would not be possible in Germany due to data protection laws.
- **CASA:** Participants packed food bags, sorted donations, and cleaned the premises. **Although the work was somewhat repetitive, it offered a sense of purpose and contribution.** The partners noted that while it is challenging to find suitable short-term volunteer activities for large groups, opportunities involving direct interaction with people, animals, or nature could further enrich the experience. **Nonetheless, the young participants demonstrated great motivation and worked very hard throughout.**





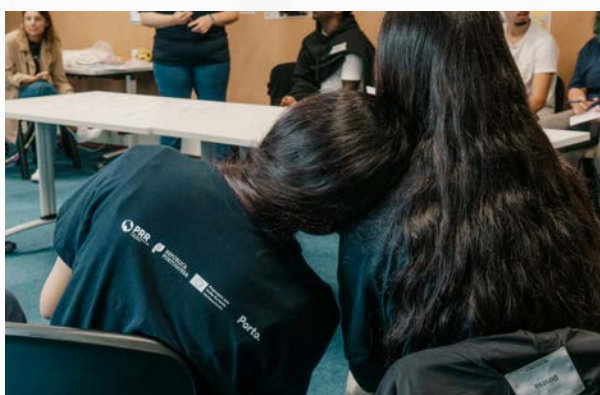
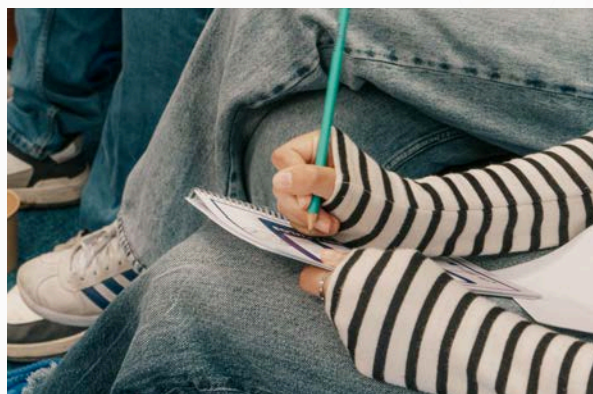
At the end of the week, it was also possible for them to participate in a recognition session with the mayor of the municipality, which was an important part of the whole experience.

We [SOSPED] learned that involving young people in volunteering can be much more impactful than we initially thought. It's not only about helping others or contributing to a good cause, but it's also a powerful tool for personal growth and mental well-being. What became clear through this process was the profound impact that volunteering has on young people, both emotionally and psychologically, but

What was empowering to witness was the extent to which volunteering seemed to reduce feelings of loneliness and provided a sense of emotional stability, especially among young people during uncertain or difficult life phases. Some of them described feeling part of something bigger and meaningful, and how important that sense of belonging was to them.

We [SOSPED] also discovered that volunteering naturally pushes young people out of their comfort zones, in ways that traditional learning environments often don't. Through real-life experiences like teamwork, public speaking, or problem-solving, they developed resilience, empathy, and confidence, not as abstract skills, but as traits. It wasn't just about volunteering; it was about discovering who they are and what they're capable of.

Ultimately, what we learned was that volunteering doesn't just benefit communities, it transforms the volunteers themselves. It helps young people feel seen, needed, and hopeful.





## WHAT WAS THE MOST IMPRESSIVE ASPECT?

We, [SOSPED and Gemeinsam leben und lernen in Europa e.V.] observed how participants were encouraged to take initiative, and what was especially impressive was that many of them did so spontaneously.

They didn't just follow instructions; they came up with ideas, started conversations, and took action naturally. This kind of engagement showed that when people feel trusted and supported, they are more likely to step up and contribute in meaningful ways.

Most of the time, young people interacted warmly with each other, showing their strengths and abilities while working hard in the activities. Some of them faced challenging personal situations, and life within the institution was not always easy, yet they managed to participate actively and support one another.

There were also honest discussions about fears and worries, as well as reflections on advice or expectations that others say are "good for you," even when the person doesn't feel that way. It became clear that what is meant to help can sometimes feel like pressure or stress, and recognizing this openly helped participants feel understood and less alone with difficult feelings.

The empowering nature of the approach truly made a difference. Pista Mágica's trainer played a key role, striking the right balance between empowering participants and enforcing rules.

She was understanding but firm when needed, communicated restrictions clearly, and took the youngsters seriously, all of which contributed to a supportive and structured environment where everyone could thrive.





## WHAT WILL I USE IN MY OWN WORK OR LIFE? HOW?

For us [SOSPED], the learnings from the “Supported Volunteering Methodology” were the most impactful. The concept of “empathy” was truly important, especially when utilized as a tool in conversations. One should be able to listen and understand how others feel, to build trust and better connections, both at work and in everyday life.

We [SOSPED] also plan to use activities that genuinely benefit society and the local community, but we’ll always make sure to follow all the safety rules; that’s key to keeping everyone safe and things running smoothly. We [SOSPED] won’t forget the value of teamwork and building a good vibe in the group, because solid team activities help people get to know each other, build trust, and work together better, which shows up clearly in how well the team performs and how connected everyone feels.

We [Gemeinsam leben und lernen in Europa e.V.] were both inspired by Pista Mágica as an organization overall, and their “Supported Volunteering Methodology”.

We aim to start a strategic plan on how to exchange goods and services with stakeholders such as the municipalities, hoping that they will be interested in paying for services. This will be important, as we’re going to investigate if it is possible to run the intergenerational center of the city once the funding runs out, and get the facility for free, as we are running the center as an exchange. We’ll also look into awards for community in their line of work (e.g., being an inclusive community).

We [Gemeinsam leben und lernen in Europa e.V.] will present the two projects to “Rotary” and see if they have ideas for funding. We also plan to involve decision makers more in the progress of running projects, and communicate that the EU pays for pilots.

We will also utilize some of the exercises of “Phase 1 - Training” from “Supported Volunteering Methodology” in our own training for young people, for example, in the project “FutureMe”. Energizers, for example, can set the tone of every workshop, and the job shadowing of the “Supported Volunteering Methodology” made it clear how important it is to have different methods for various target groups, ages, and sizes of participants.

Regarding that, we [Gemeinsam leben und lernen in Europa e.V.] will also pay careful attention to word choice, opting to replace terms like “rules” with alternatives such as “agreements,” which emphasize cooperation and mutual understanding rather than imposition. Additionally, we will explore the possibility of organizing volunteer taster sessions for groups in their city, drawing inspiration from “Phase 2 – Generic Volunteering Activities”.



# GOOD PRACTICE 3: HOW TO INVOLVE YOUNG VOLUNTEERS IN NGO ACTIVITIES (GERMANY)

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## INCLUSIVE VOLUNTEERING PATHWAY

We don't use a special method to **involve people with mental health issues**—we simply treat them like anyone else who wants to volunteer.

In a personal talk, **we ask about their abilities and possible triggers so we can match them to a volunteering role where they feel safe, valued, and able to contribute.** From there, volunteers and youth workers can engage through different training programmes depending on their needs and interests:

- **Inclusion Buddies (IMProVE 2.0):** The **Inclusion Buddies programme** trains volunteers to accompany people with disabilities into volunteering so they feel supported, safe, and able to make a meaningful contribution. Through clear role descriptions, structured training modules and ongoing support, Inclusion Buddies help break down barriers and normalize inclusive volunteering across communities.
- **FutureMe-Training:** The **FutureMe training programme** equips youth workers and young people with essential “skills for the future” – such as resilience, critical thinking, emotional intelligence, and adaptability – to help them navigate an uncertain and rapidly changing world. It is offered as both face-to-face training and self-paced eTraining, ensuring that future-readiness and future-thinking become core competencies in **European youth work.**



- **ProVol:** The **ProVol training programme** promotes more professional and effective volunteer work by training both volunteers and volunteer coordinators in areas such as team organisation, project management, and recognising competencies gained through volunteering. **It helps NGOs work more efficiently while also strengthening the employability and personal development of volunteers by making their skills and experiences more visible and transferable to the job market.**
- **Simple Mixed podcast:** The Simply Mixed podcast is run by volunteers, including **two volunteer hosts with disabilities**, who lead authentic conversations about real-life experiences warmly and honestly. The podcast team also includes volunteers with different **mental health challenges, ensuring diverse voices, lived experiences, and genuine representation.**
- **Community room:** Our community room is also a volunteer programme where people can help **run activities, welcome newcomers, and create their own events or workshops.** It provides a friendly space to try new roles, build connections, and contribute to the community in a flexible and meaningful way.

## TARGET GROUP

The beneficiaries of this methodology are **young people with or without mental health challenges or disabilities, youth workers (with or without disabilities or mental health challenges), other NGOs working on inclusion and community engagement, and other volunteer centres that wish to build more inclusive practices.** And of course, or anyone who is interested in meeting people from a wide variety of backgrounds in order to learn with, from, and about each other. In general our approach is: With everyone, for everyone.

The specific groups were chosen because **our practice promotes inclusive volunteering, and we aim to support both individuals who need help and the organisations or workers who support them.** We want everyone—regardless of ability, health, or background—to have a meaningful role in community participation.



## OUTREACH AND PARTICIPATION

We share a **monthly flyer designed** by volunteers on social media (**Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn, and WhatsApp community**), and we use targeted sub-WhatsApp channels for regular events where we interact with participants and volunteers. We also issue press releases in local newspapers to reach a broader not-so-young audience. Our volunteers attend **German and integration courses**, for example, to learn about our services. We inform professionals working in the field of inclusion and integration about our work and services so that they can pass on the information to their clients. We have a strong network in the region. In addition, **all services and dates are listed on our website**. But the most successful method is word of mouth: our volunteers, visitors, and participants spread positive word about us.

We invite them **to first visit our community space** and try the activity that interests them the most, to experience the atmosphere before committing. Because **we are flexible and supported by a welcoming volunteer network, people find it easy to join us**. Our wide variety of initiatives naturally attracts different interests.

We collaborate with a diverse variety of institutions such as **Caritas, Food Bank, Catholic Adult Education (KEB), University of Passau, neighboring districts**, various community organisations, language centres, and schools, among others. And we are part of the Working Group for mental health in the region of lower Bavaria: here all professionals working in the field of mental health are gathering regularly.

## STAFF

All programmes are coordinated by our managers, **who have many years of experience in the field of adult education and youth work**. But for the community room activities, **Inclusion Buddies and Simple Mixed podcast**, no specific professional background is required. For **FutureMe**, facilitators should ideally have some experience as educators, or trainers or youth workers.

While **professional/technical skills may be useful for certain tasks**, we primarily consider soft skills aligned with our organisational values: empathy, collaboration, open-mindedness, creativity, reliability, and motivation for social engagement and inclusion.

## INFRASTRUCTURE

We use our **community room located in the historic city center of Passau for weekly events from Monday to Friday**. For specific **project related workshops/trainings/seminars**, we coordinate directly with **partner institutions** and receive space from them when needed. We also have an **office for employees/volunteers** working on local and international projects and for meetings with press and formal visitors.



## FUNDING

Our activities are funded through a mixed model, mainly supported by European projects:

- Membership fees – 3.87%
- EU/National Grants – 75.42%
- Grants from local authorities – 3.41%
- Subsidies (Bufdi allowance) – 5.84%
- Training allowance – 2.00%
- Grants (other) – 6.71%
- Fines – 3.41%
- Other income from non-material activity – 0.31%

These are ongoing costs and ongoing income sources, continuing as long as we have Erasmus+ projects and volunteers contributing their time and know-how.

## MATERIALS

Materials depend on training size and location—usually our office space, flipchart, and printed materials are enough for onboarding. Trainers also have the option to use laptops and projectors, but keep hands-on, practical learning methods as our core approach. However, we are currently transitioning part of our training to a **digital LMS platform** in order to have a less time-consuming onboarding process, and that can be imparted remotely when needed, as well as reaching more and more participants.



## IMPLEMENTATION

All training and programmes are promoted through social media and other **PR-activities first**. When someone shows interest, we arrange a meeting where our **Managing Director, Perdita Wingerter, explains the programme, expectations, and options**. Then both parties agreed on time commitment for **training and volunteering**, and later on, how often the volunteer can support the activities.

The programmes continue as long as people are interested and willing to contribute. There is no fixed end; it is an open, ongoing pathway.

Each **programme has a set of regular activities with an existing plan**, and many projects already have a dedicated team managing them. Participants either follow the programme's structured tasks or receive assignments directly from the coordinators. In addition, **we hold bi-weekly internal meetings to review responsibilities, request support when needed, and coordinate teamwork**. Our secretary, Thomas, **monitors volunteer tasks and assigns activities** based on availability through our active WhatsApp community, ensuring that responsibilities are clear, communication is open, and tasks are smoothly passed on whenever needed.

## CHALLENGES

**Ownership and reliability can be challenging—volunteers are highly valuable but cannot always commit 100%**. Unexpected expenses are also difficult because our funding depends mainly on Erasmus projects, and different investors require different financial structures. And our kind of work doesn't attract many donations.

We make sure that **responsibilities are shared across several people and that backup support is always available**. We also diversify funding sources whenever possible and maintain good communication with partners to manage financial uncertainties more effectively.



## SUCCESS FACTORS

Our trainings are **well structured, our trainers are engaging, and our activities are interactive rather than purely digital.** We intentionally create a welcoming, warm atmosphere where everyone feels included.

We have testimonies from migrants and former participants who **began as volunteers and now have professional positions due to the skills, confidence, and experience gained with us.** We also have results and evaluations from international collaborations and impact measurement tools to demonstrate effectiveness. For our projects and innovative approaches, we have won many awards on the **local, national, and international levels.** E.g. for our Improve project on inclusive volunteering, the **European Innovation Teaching Award of the European Commission.**



## STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT & NETWORKING

Our main partners include **Caritas, Food Bank, Catholic Adult Education (KEB), University of Passau, various district administrations, local community organisations, language schools, and cultural institutions**. Additionally, we cooperate **with international networks through Erasmus+ projects** and partner NGOs working in volunteering, inclusion, and youth engagement.

Our networks developed organically through long-term collaboration, shared social impact goals, and **continuous engagement in local and EU-level projects**. We maintain relationships through **regular communication, joint activities, co-hosted events, resource sharing, and transparent partnership practices**. Trust and mutual benefit are key, and we prioritize ongoing relationship-building rather than one-time cooperation.

Partners support us in multiple ways: **helping us reach and recruit new participants; sharing resources and professional expertise; amplifying communication through their channels; and offering co-funding or logistical support when needed**.

## TRANSFERABILITY

This **methodology works best when relationships are built with empathy and authenticity rather than treating volunteering as a transactional action**. The practice should remain flexible—**allowing participants to choose activities that fit their abilities and interests**—and focused on building a community atmosphere of inclusion and trust rather than rigid performance or output metrics. A key element is maintaining horizontal power structures where volunteers feel ownership and co-creation.



For a successful implementation, we recommend:

- **A safe, welcoming, and non-judgmental environment.**
- **A coordinating person or team who can communicate with warmth and clarity.**
- **Set up expectations and responsibilities from the beginning**
- **Soft-skill-based leadership (empathy, patience, active listening).**
- **Consistent but low-pressure communication channels.**
- **Willingness to adapt the programme to local cultural and social contexts.**
- **Access to at least one physical community-oriented space or a digital equivalent.**

## TESTIMONIALS

*"I enjoyed the ProVol 2023 online training a lot. It was a global course with participants from different countries. We learned theory and practice of project coordination through group work and case studies. We also designed our own projects and events for volunteers and got individual feedback. The course gave me a portfolio of ready-to-use project activities. I recommend this course to anyone who wants to learn or improve their project management skills in volunteering."* - Natalia Shulgina, Germany/Russia

*"As a participant of this training, I found all the topics useful and can participate as a volunteer in her or his life and for me. As I have newly started my work as a volunteer in Germany, all topics were important and related to my work and it showed me the way how it will be? How can my volunteering be useful and effective? And What should I pay attention to as a volunteer?"* - Zainab Yousofi, Germany/Afghanistan

*"As Volunteer Coordinators we are architects of a more resilient and compassionate society. With the youth we stitch together the fabric of equality and solidarity leaving a mark on the community. We are shaping the future for a more inclusive world. As long as there are volunteers, there will be inclusion and help to community."* - Panoulis Panagiotis Kalaitzis, Greece



# GOOD PRACTICE 3: LEARNING

## JOURNAL NOTES

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## NAME OF THE JOB SHADOWING ACTIVITY

We had a chance to see how to involve young volunteers in NGO Activities, during November 2025, in Passau, by visiting GLL's office.

## WHAT DID WE LEARN? IN WHAT WAY WAS IT NEW?

During our job-shadowing experience with the **Mental Matters project in Passau, Germany, we, SOSPED and Pista Mágica**, had the opportunity to learn closely about the work and evolution of the host organization, **Gemeinsam leben und lernen in Europa e.V. (GLL)**.

Perdita Wingerter, **the leader of GLL**, organized the week together with staff, students, and volunteers, providing us with informative and creative workshops and opportunities to familiarize ourselves with their various projects, learning methods, and volunteer training programs. **We gained insight into their working culture, the division of work between professionals, interns, and volunteers, the content of their work and networks, and the financing of different programmes.** We also had numerous opportunities to meet their volunteers and other participants in activities.

The organisation's roots go back to the **EQUAL project**, which supported job placement and qualifications of disadvantaged target groups. Later, GLL became involved in film festivals with a local partner, who eventually sought to organize an inclusive film festival. Recognizing the need for a formal structure, they founded their NGO; initially very modest, requiring seven people and a symbolic financial contribution.

For the first two and a half years, Perdita even used her own money to keep the organisation alive. Space was essential, though initially, they could afford only materials. **Only in the last seven years were they able to secure salaries for one full-time and one part-time paid staff member, mainly through European projects, while the rest of the work is carried out by volunteers and interns.**

Throughout the shadowing, we observed how much the organisation has grown and diversified. **Every two years, they organize a local volunteer fair, and since 2010, they have run Tatennetz**, an online volunteer-matching platform used by both volunteers and volunteer-involving organisations. With this platform, it's easy to understand GLL's efforts to use easy, clear language, both online and offline. The **Tatennetz platform**, for example, allows users to choose between standard and easy language.

They **currently work with around 120 volunteers**. Volunteers discover the organisation through diverse channels: **newspapers, peer networks, national portals, university, workshops, QR codes, social media, testimonials, leaflets, counselling services, volunteering fairs, and professional mental health networks.**





Their approach to volunteer onboarding is highly structured: it includes time-tracking, documentation, clear communication of the organisational vision, and individual conversations with each new volunteer. **They believe that “everyone can do everything,” as long as autonomy levels are assessed, highlighting the importance of interviews and a personalised approach; a methodology similar to Pista Mágica’s “Supported Volunteering Methodology”.**

GLL uses various tools for planning and internal communication, **including a hierarchy of objectives connecting key (vision), strategic, and operational objectives, job description templates, and the persona method to define target groups humanly**, by building relatable characters representing larger audiences.

We learned about many of their creative projects. **“Suitcase of My Life”** brings young people and older adults together to exchange stories, creating symbolic “suitcases” filled with meaningful objects.

**“Talk With Me”** designed for **migrants, was adapted when young volunteers requested peers closer to their age instead of older volunteers**. The meetings take place weekly for ten weeks, beginning with prompts such as pictures that participants bring, supported by full training and a toolbox. There’s also a **Talkbox, which supports volunteers working with young migrants, helps lower language barriers and facilitates engagement**. In **SOSPED**, the Talkbox idea was put into practice immediately after the job shadowing trip by compiling a set of picture cards to help new participants in **Culture House Virta** communicate and express what kind of activities they would be interested in.

Other initiatives include the international project **“Remember to Act”** where young people research the lives of Holocaust victims; **“Wake Up! Young Europeans Becoming Change Makers for a Better Europe”** which invites young people to develop projects promoting volunteering, community building, and democracy; workshops during the **“Week of Democracy”** dependent on partnerships; **“ProVol,”** a comprehensive volunteer and coordinator training programme with taster sessions and project development opportunities, similar to Pista Mágica’s **“Supported Volunteering Methodology”**; and monthly cultural events where migrants or refugees present their culture through activities like cooking or dancing.

Inclusive volunteering was a central theme throughout the shadowing, particularly under the Improve project. Perdita explained that during **“ProVol” training**, they realized the language used was too complex for some participants, prompting more intentional work with people with intellectual disabilities. When applying for **Erasmus+ funding**, they encountered resistance from families and some NGOs, highlighting the importance of working alongside organisations and parents to support volunteer autonomy. **Role models are crucial, which led to the creation of a booklet with real-life examples of volunteers with disabilities engaged in meaningful volunteer tasks.**





The **“Inclusion Buddy”** concept supports volunteers needing additional help. **Buddies undergo 12 hours of training on boundaries, responsibility, trust, and the organisation’s empowerment philosophy.** They learn about the NGO, its participants, and expectations, and support volunteers only within the voluntary sector, not replacing staff. **Commitment typically lasts six months, with confidentiality agreements, participation declarations, image rights documents, volunteer insurance, and partnership contracts required.** Before launching the program, the organisation designs volunteer roles and builds relationships with hosting NGOs. We also learned the interactive exercises utilized in the **Inclusion Buddy training**, which include simulations of restricted mobility for participants with no disabilities. These were especially powerful, evoking empathy and illustrating dependence on support.

We also explored their digital work and training tools. **“ProVol Digital”** supports professionals in volunteer management, while **“professional-volunteering.eu”** hosts resources from **“Improve 2.0.”** The **“Future Me”** project trains youth workers to teach **“Future Skills”** to young people, enhancing resilience; it began with face-to-face training and will expand online. On here, the **Passau Learning Quest, part of the “Future Me” training for young volunteers**, was another creative learning method, teaching young people to navigate society without constant digital connectivity, explore the local environment, and identify edible plants.

We observed inclusive **volunteering counselling, where the team actively contacts people with various disabilities and mental health conditions.** They use questionnaires to match interests and target groups, but find it challenging. GLL also supports organisations wishing to become inclusive, though participation depends on motivated contacts. The **“Check My City”** activity highlighted barriers in the city due to professionals who shield rather than empower people with disabilities.

We participated in awareness-raising activities for the International Day of People with Disabilities (5.5.), including sensory-limiting parcours and hands-on activities like blindfolded bread-making. They ensure **people with disabilities are present to promote visibility and agency.** One public debate, moderated by a person with a disability, had an audience of **approximately 60% people with disabilities or mental health issues, significantly shifting the discussion and awareness of accessibility.**

GLL is active in media and storytelling. Within the project **“Wake Up**, they created the youth podcast **“WakeUP! Food for brain”** during the pandemic, with **accessible language and an intentionally all-female production team to increase representation**, addressing important societal issues in an easy-to-understand way. More recently, the new **“Simply Mixed”** podcast allows **people with disabilities or mental health challenges to take control of production**, with episodes under thirty minutes on travel, fashion, or personal stories, planned for expansion across Europe through hands-on guidelines on how to produce an inclusive podcast.

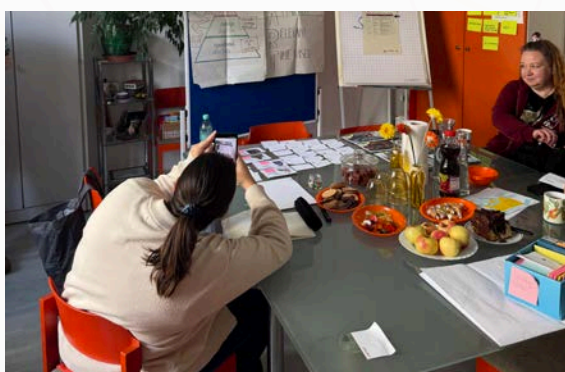




We also engaged in community centre activities: preparing a 'leftover dinner' with participants from diverse backgrounds and a game night where people taught others their games. Communication was seamless despite language barriers, creating enjoyment and connection.

Challenges were evident: clear communication of activities is difficult, and the organisation must constantly advocate within professional networks to demonstrate the value of volunteering for people with mental health conditions. Some professionals see long-term volunteering as incompatible with their approach or fear funding competition, hindering collaboration.

Overall, this job-shadowing experience provided deep insight into inclusive volunteer management, creative community projects, and the balance between supporting autonomy and navigating systemic barriers. It was inspiring to see how structured processes, practical tools, and a strong values-based approach foster a more inclusive culture of volunteering.





## WHAT WAS THE MOST IMPRESSIVE/TOUCHING/INTERESTING ASPECT?

The most impressive, touching, and interesting aspects of our job-shadowing experience at GLL were closely connected to the people, the community atmosphere, and the organisation's inclusive approach.

For us [SOSPED], the core of the week were the meetings around inspirational themes with partners and volunteers, conducted in a very discussive and conversational atmosphere, with enough time for questions. The most touching aspects, however, were the personal stories of the participants, hearing how each individual had found their way to GLL volunteering activities and how everyone was involved, contributing their unique talents and interests. **While the work and volunteering activities have clear structures, every participant, internship student, or volunteer had the freedom to work creatively in planning and implementing their own responsibilities and tasks.** GLL truly embodies inclusivity, with participants and volunteers from diverse backgrounds, including migrants, people with disabilities, and those facing mental health challenges. Equality and diversity were present in all activities and projects.

The organisation's **commitment to inclusion**, especially of minorities and people in vulnerable life situations, was evident across all operations. The boldness with which GLL takes a stand for a fairer and more equal world left a strong impression. Historical atrocities were never glossed over; instead, GLL actively took a stand against racism, exemplified in the project **"Remember to act," which highlighted the experiences of Holocaust victims.**

Among the most inspiring initiatives was a photo exhibition at the community space, where the people of Passau defended democracy and a humanistic worldview through their own faces and statements. Participants with migrant backgrounds expressed feeling safe in GLL activities, citing the organisation's open stance against racism and the inclusivity of its community space.

The atmosphere in the GLL **community space, combined with the energy and good mood of participants, immediately drew us in. Monday's Leftover Dinner** provided a particularly communal experience. **Participants each contributed food, and the evening's meal was planned collaboratively based on the available ingredients.** Cooking together, **we used English, German, and even sign language to communicate, as participants came from at least six different countries.** The relaxed environment encouraged **everyone to speak without fear of mistakes, while unintentional humour lightened the atmosphere and strengthened solidarity.** Eating the meal together, including dessert, created cheerful, inclusive interaction, and the collective cleanup further reinforced the sense of community.





We **[SOSPED]** also enjoyed the discussions with **podcast volunteers**. They were particularly **inspiring and touching**. They shared personal life stories and experiences in volunteering, explaining the contents of the **“Simply Mixed” podcast** episodes and the broader significance of inclusive volunteer work in their lives. Through GLL activities, they have been able to influence inclusivity in Passau, including engaging in discussions about accessible spaces with the mayor. They organized activities such as **blindfolded walking, wheelchair parcours, and panel discussions with politicians, which made the need for inclusive measures tangible**. Notably, thanks to their perseverance, inclusive accessibility measures were implemented outside Passau railway station, easing navigation for visually impaired people.

For us **[Pista Mágica]**, the most remarkable experience **was the community centre itself, which provided a safe space for participants to share aspects of their lives, food, games, and personal stories, without fear of judgment**. The **sense of comfort and trust among participants was evident in conversations during the leftover dinner**, where discussions naturally expanded to city life, personal experiences, and student life. The game night similarly **showcased engagement and enjoyment, with participants laughing, sharing stories, and finding ways to communicate across language barriers**. Such interactions were only possible in a safe environment, particularly important for target groups, **including young people with mental health challenges**.

Overall, the combination of structured **volunteer opportunities, personal freedom, safe spaces, and a strong, inclusive ethos left a lasting impression**. The week highlighted how GLL’s approach enables participants to engage meaningfully, build community, and contribute creatively, all while fostering diversity, equality, and inclusion.





## WHAT WILL I USE IN MY OWN WORK OR LIFE? HOW?

We [SOSPED] think that job shadowing in Passau **strengthened our professional skills and ideas, and clarified the importance and need of structures and planning in organizing all work and volunteering programmes.** The most important thing is always to first consider the key objective and vision; why we are doing something. **Whose needs are we organizing activities for, and what is the goal?** Once this vision has been clarified, we can focus on planning the strategy and methods for achieving the goals in line with the vision. **After the strategic objectives, it is time for the operational objectives and plan of action, i.e., the implementation phase. When planning any activity, keep in mind that it must be SMART: Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Time-based.**

We [SOSPED] have shared **our job shadowing experiences and the good practices learned in GLL with our own team in Culture House.** We told them, among other things, how easy language is taken into account in all GLL communications, and that **we would like to further refine our communications to make them more accessible by using clear language.** We are striving to do so, but we could be even more systematic in making all communications and materials more inclusive with easy language. **We brought up things like Talkbox cards to support spontaneous conversation, and leftover dinners, which we may not be able to organize every month like in GLL, but which would be a great addition to Culture House's activities a couple of times a year to increase community spirit.**

We [SOSPED] are going to listen to podcasts **“Wake up!” and “Simply Mixed”** to keep hearing the good ideas and experiences of GLL’s volunteers and to activate our German language skills, which we got to use during my job shadowing week after a long time.

Our discussions with the partners and, e.g. the exercises of **Inclusion Buddy training** also made us [SOSPED] think about personal and professional boundaries, and things that give us strength to support others. **It is also important to take care of yourself while taking care of others. Inspiring people requires an enthusiastic facilitator and coordinator, as emotional states are easily transferred from one person to another in interpersonal interactions, even without noticing.**

In face-to-face communication, it is also important to take **non-verbal communication into account.** When you are calm and communicate calmly, you create a peaceful and safe atmosphere around you. When you are nervous and tired, you create a negative atmosphere around you, whereas when you are enthusiastic and energetic, you can inspire participation and joy in others.

As a volunteer in Finland told us years ago: **You can only inspire others if you are inspired yourself.** In Passau, we [SOSPED] gained new inspiration for our own work. It is really important that professionals also have opportunities to share their expertise and experiences internationally. **Mental Matters' job shadowing responded to this need in a multifaceted and inspiring way.**





When it comes to us, **Pista Mágica**, there are many aspects we would like to use in our organization.

**Starting with our “Supported Volunteering Methodology”:**

The “*Suitcase of My Life*” tool could be highly valuable within our methodology. We have already tested it with both young people and older adults, and we **[Pista Mágica]** would now like to explore its applicability in mixed, intergenerational groups.

The community centre’s Cultural Evenings also provided useful inspiration for a recently approved project in which we **[Pista Mágica]** will test the “*Supported Volunteering Methodology*” with migrants.

The “*TalkBox*” can be integrated into the training phase of the methodology, when participants are first getting to know one another. We **[Pista Mágica]** also believe it could be adapted to support the development of participants’ Happiness Projects, which take place during the third phase.

The “*Improve*” project and the “*Inclusion Buddy*” concept were among the most interesting ideas for us **[Pista Mágica]**.

**They can be incorporated into Phase 4 of the methodology, when participants carry out their Happiness Projects through volunteering.** At this stage, many volunteers act more autonomously, and the presence of “*Inclusion Buddies*” can provide reassurance, especially for participants who doubt their abilities or hesitate to attend certain activities alone.

We **[Pista Mágica]** were also impressed by the “*Future Me*” approach. Its emphasis on practical future skills is particularly relevant for strengthening young people’s resilience and confidence. We **[Pista Mágica]** see strong potential to include exercises focused on these skills during Phase 1 (training) of the methodology.

GLL also mentioned **having a handbook with successful stories of volunteers with disabilities, complemented by the perspectives of host organisations. This resource is especially relevant to our work**, as we **[Pista Mágica]** often need to explain to potential host entities the benefits of including diverse volunteer profiles.

**Regarding other areas of Pista Mágica’s work:**

One of our main areas of activity involves preparing and implementing volunteering programmes. This often requires training and supporting volunteer coordinators and teams, frequently combined with consultancy.

We **[Pista Mágica]** plan to use the “*ProVol*” **Handbook to strengthen our training sessions, particularly with regard to practical exercises (e.g., communication exercises).** Their hierarchy-of-objectives model, linking key vision objectives with strategic and operational ones, was also insightful. Additionally, their use of job description templates and the persona method, which humanises target groups by creating relatable characters, will be useful for our work.

We **[Pista Mágica]** are also planning to launch our own podcast in 2026. **Learning how “Simply Mixed” and “WakeUp” organise their podcasts gave us valuable ideas on structuring the process, involving volunteers, and choosing appropriate platforms.**



# CONCLUSION:

## From Crisis to Contribution

The mental health crisis among **young people in Europe** is not just a challenge for healthcare systems; it is a call to action for our entire society. As this E-BOOK demonstrates, the solution does not lie solely in clinical settings but also in the heart of our communities—in **youth centers, volunteer organizations, and peer groups**.

The three practices outlined here—the **Culture House model from Finland, the Supported Volunteering methodology from Portugal, and the Inclusive Volunteering Pathway from Germany**—offer more than just technical guidelines. They represent a fundamental shift in perspective. Instead of **viewing young people with mental health issues merely as vulnerable individuals in need of protection, these models recognize them as capable, resilient contributors who can shape their own recovery**.

Whether through the safe, creative sanctuary and the peer-tutor programme of a Culture House, the structured empowerment of inclusive volunteering, or the support of a Volunteer Inclusion Buddy, or the data-backed impact of supported volunteering, each approach proves that active participation is a powerful form of therapy. **By providing low-threshold access to volunteering, non-formal education, and peer-tutoring, we give young people the most vital tool for their well-being: a sense of purpose and belonging**.

We hope this E-BOOK serves not as a final report, but as a flexible toolkit for youth workers, NGOs, and policymakers across Europe. The methods described here are adaptable, scalable, and deeply human. By implementing them, we do not just support young people to survive their challenges; we empower them to become the architects of their own future and vital assets to our civil society.

Let us move forward with the conviction that **every young person, regardless of their mental health status, has a valuable contribution to make—if only we provide the right space for them to shine**.





# WHO ARE THE ORGANIZATIONS?

## GEMEINSAM LEBEN UND LERNEN IN EUROPA E.V.

- **Number of staff members:**
  - 2 paid staff members, 3 national volunteers, 4 fixed volunteer staff, 2-3 interns, and around 80 volunteers in projects.
- **Longevity:**
  - Since 2008.
- **Main activities:**
  - Volunteer counselling, volunteer matching, volunteer (coordinator) training
  - Promotion of volunteering, active citizenship, integration, inclusion, equality, and democracy.
  - Initiating and implementing volunteer-led projects in the field of integration, inclusion, equality, and democracy.
  - Running an intercultural and intergenerational center.
- **Target groups:**
  - Disadvantaged people (e.g. migrants, refugees, people with disabilities, ...);
  - Women;
  - Seniors;
  - Young people;
  - General public;
    - Their principle: WITH EVERYONE FOR EVERYONE.
- **Number of people reached:**
  - Around 3000 - 4000 people.
- **Number of projects implemented**
  - Right now, they have 4 European projects and 25 local projects, and ongoing activities.
  - Additionally, they had implemented 38 European projects and 60 local projects and events (e.g. film festivals).



- **Examples of publications**
  - Project websites:
    - [https://gemeinsam-in-europa.de/unsere\\_webseiten](https://gemeinsam-in-europa.de/unsere_webseiten)
  - Our publications:
    - [https://gemeinsam-in-europa.de/unsere\\_publicationen](https://gemeinsam-in-europa.de/unsere_publicationen)
  
- **Experience in the youth and mental health fields**
  - We have a youth organisation and student branch
  - A youth representative in our board plus 4 younger people in our board
  - Young people as active volunteers in nearly all projects
  - Youth projects like “FutureMe”, “Talk with me”, Suitcase of my life, WakeUP! Young Europeans becoming change makers, Upraise: Youth for Social Change
  - Inclusive volunteering projects like Improve 2.0., All inclusive podcast project, Mental Matters
  - People with disabilities or mental health issues as active volunteers in our head office or in our projects
  
- **Authors of the E-Book**
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## PISTA MÁGICA - ASSOCIAÇÃO

- **Number of staff members:**
  - 13 staff members, 2 interns.
- **Longevity:**
  - Since 2008.
- **Main activities:**
  - **Volunteering School:** Personalized training of people involved in the practice of Volunteering, whether through training, workshops, lectures, consultancy, and creation of intellectual products.
  - **Volunteering Factory:** Operationalization of Volunteer Programs, from their planning to their implementation on the ground, through strategic support for the promotion of organized and effective volunteering.
  - **Supported Volunteering Methodology:** Implementation of initiatives that use Volunteering as a tool for social inclusion, through the discovery and enhancement of talents, to increase the civic and social participation of the people involved.
- **Target groups:**
  - Technical staff from local authorities;
  - Technical staff from non-governmental organisations;
  - Educators;
  - Teachers;
  - Volunteer managers;
  - Volunteers;
    - We also work with socially vulnerable groups, such as institutionalised young people, young people living in social housing, people with disabilities, and people with mental health problems.
    - In all the responses and solutions, we involve not only civil society in the solution, but also all the different elements that make it up (the general population, educational bodies, institutions, non-governmental organisations, etc.).
- **Number of people reached:**
  - We have directly reached more than 38.000 people as of 2024.



- **Number of projects implemented:**
  - More than 21 at the national and international levels.
  
- **Examples of publications:**
  - National publications can be found here: <https://www.pista-magica.pt/publicacoes-gratuitas/>
  - International Projects' products can be found here: <https://www.pista-magica.pt/conexao-erasmus-2/>
  
- **Experience in the youth and mental health fields:**
  - Pista Mágica (PM) works both directly and indirectly with and for young people aged 30 and under. It supports youth professionals (youth workers, educators, technical staff) and implements initiatives specifically targeting young people.
  - As a **Volunteering School**, PM promotes Education for Volunteering in schools, NGOs, and youth centers, and helps organizations become autonomous in volunteer promotion. It was the first Portuguese organization to publish a children's book on volunteering – *"We All Have Wings, But Only Volunteers Can Fly"*, recommended by the National Reading Plan – accompanied by a pedagogical manual for parents and educators.
  - Since 2020, PM has focused on addressing young people's challenges through volunteer programs that empower them as key actors. It has implemented three Municipal Volunteering Academies involving youth from 17 municipalities, offering training and intensive community-based volunteering experiences.
  - In **2022, PM created a methodology using volunteering as a tool for social inclusion**, tested through bootcamps and projects for at-risk youth, and by supporting municipalities and NGOs in creating youth volunteering programs.
  - Internationally, PM has taken part in four Erasmus+ projects in the youth field, developing training materials and digital platforms on volunteer management and youth engagement.



- In relation to mental health, PM participated in the European project **“Volunteer and Go”** (focused on inclusive volunteering and safe spaces for young people) and implemented the national project **“VoluntariaMente”**, applying the Supported Volunteering Methodology with individuals facing anxiety and depression. PM believes that volunteering and mental health are deeply connected, as volunteering fosters purpose, social connection, and self-esteem.

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## SOSPED

- **Number of staff members:**
  - 40 staff members.
- **Longevity:**
  - Since 1984.
- **Main activities:**
  - **Culture houses.** Sosped has seven (peer-led) Culture Houses across Finland, providing creative and community-based activities for young adults (aged 18–35) facing mental health challenges. Activities are led by peer tutors with support of professionals and include art, music, drama, media, board games, sports, knitting etc. All activities are always based on participation and voluntary involvement.
  - **Gambling addiction program.** The Pelirajaton program offers both individual and group-based peer support for people affected by gambling problems. We also engage in preventive work with youth and professionals.
  - **Romance scam recovery program.** Finland's first peer-based support initiative for people who have experienced online romance scams. The service includes confidential support, awareness materials, and collaboration with professionals.
  - **Digital addiction program.** This program targeted support and information for individuals affected by digital dependence:
    - **Digipelirajaton:** For people struggling with problematic gaming
    - **Somerajaton:** For those dealing with compulsive use of social media
      - These programs include workshops, peer groups, online meetups, digital detox weekends, and awareness-building materials, particularly for youth and young adults (aged 18–35).
  - **Inclusive media for all.** Nationwide project that promotes equality and participation by offering easy-to-use, hands-on media education tools and workshops for professionals working with vulnerable adults, helping them strengthen media literacy, self-expression, and confidence.



- **Target groups:**
  - People in Finland who are facing one or more of the following: mental health issues, social exclusion/isolation, behavioural/digital addictions (gambling, gaming, social media), victims of online fraud.
  - Young adults (18-35) in creative peer-led community settings; their family/friends who are affected; people with disabilities or other barriers; people recovering from addiction.
- **Number of people reached:**
  - 42,346 participants in our programs and activities.
  - 339 volunteers supporting peer-led work.
  - 40 employees across Finland.
  - 45 trained experts by lived experience who share their personal stories in media and train professionals.
  - Dozens of peer groups and events each month, both onsite and online.
- **Number of projects implemented:**
  - Approximately 45 different projects.
- **Examples of publications:**

NAME	LANGUAGE	ISBN/DOI/LINK
Wallenius, M., Ferretti, N., Svačina, G., Vesela, V., Villante, C. ja Volpi, I. (2024). Voimauttavat yhteisöt (Finnish), Zplnomocneni komunit (Czech), Empoderar Comunidades (Portuguese), Responsabilizzare le communita' A Favore dei giovani (Italian)	Finnish, Chech, Italian, Portuguese	ISBN 978-952-65549-0-7 (pehmeäkantinen) ISBN 978-952-65549-1-4 (PDF)



NAME	LANGUAGE	ISBN/DOI/LINK
Salonen, S., & Kotilainen, S. (2024). Kohti eettistä kestävyttä tekoälylukutaitojen kansatutkimuksessa. <i>Aikuiskasvatus</i> , 44(4), 242-254.	Finnish	<a href="https://doi.org/10.33336/aik.141641">https://doi.org/10.33336/aik.141641</a>
Voimauttavat yhteisöt - kysymyskortit  Empowering communities -question cards	Finnish, Portuguese	<a href="https://empow.eu/wp-content/uploads/sites/23/2024/08/Kysymyskortit-2.pdf">https://empow.eu/wp-content/uploads/sites/23/2024/08/Kysymyskortit-2.pdf</a>  <a href="https://empow.eu/wp-content/uploads/sites/23/2024/09/Question-cards_portuguese.pdf">https://empow.eu/wp-content/uploads/sites/23/2024/09/Question-cards_portuguese.pdf</a>
Hylkilä, K., Männikkö, N., Peltonen, A., Castrén, S., Mustonen, T., Konttila, J., Männistö, M., Kääriäinen, M. (2024). Association between problematic social networking site use and social well-being among young adults: A systematic review. <i>Journal of Affective Disorders Reports</i> , Volume 16,100775.	English	<a href="https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadr.2024.100775">https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadr.2024.100775</a>



NAME	LANGUAGE	ISBN/DOI/LINK
<p>Vainio, J., Hylkilä, K., Männikkö, N., Mustonen, T., Kääriäinen, M., Konttila, J., Peltonen, A., Karhulahti, V.-M., &amp; Castrén, S. (2024). Perceptions of health changes and support for self-limiting social media use among young adults in Finland—A qualitative study. <i>Psychology of Popular Media</i>, 13(4), 571–580.</p>	<p>English</p>	<p><a href="https://doi.org/10.33336/aik.141641">https://doi.org/10.33336/aik.141641</a></p>
<p>Hylkilä, K., Männikkö, N., Castrén, S., Mustonen, T., Peltonen, A., Konttila, J., Männistö, M., Kääriäinen, M. (2023). Association between psychosocial well-being and problematic social media use among Finnish young adults: A cross-sectional study. <i>Telematics and Informatics</i>, 81,101996.</p>	<p>English</p>	<p><a href="https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tele.2023.101996">https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tele.2023.101996</a>.</p>
<p>Voices of Culture – Structured Dialogue between the European Commission and the cultural sector: Youth, Mental Health and Culture, Brainstorming meeting and co-writing the report, 2022.</p>	<p>English</p>	<p><a href="https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/culture/docs/voices-of-culture/voices-of-culture-brainstorming-report-youth-mental-health-culture-2022_en.pdf">https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/culture/docs/voices-of-culture/voices-of-culture-brainstorming-report-youth-mental-health-culture-2022_en.pdf</a></p>



NAME	LANGUAGE	ISBN/DOI/LINK
<p>Castrén S, Mustonen T, Hylkilä K, Männikkö N, Kääriäinen M, Raitasalo K. (2022). Risk Factors for Excessive Social Media Use Differ from Those of Gambling and Gaming in Finnish Youth. <i>International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health</i>. 2022; 19(4):2406.</p>	<p>English</p>	<p><a href="https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph19042406">https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph19042406</a></p>
<p>Männikkö, N., Mustonen, T., Tanner, N. et al. (2021). Effectiveness of a Brief Group Intervention Program for Young Adults with Gaming-Related Problems. <i>Int J Ment Health Addiction</i>.</p>	<p>English</p>	<p><a href="https://doi.org/10.1007/s11469-021-00559-2">https://doi.org/10.1007/s11469-021-00559-2</a></p>
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NAME	LANGUAGE	ISBN/DOI/LINK
<p>Mustonen, T., &amp; Männikkö, N. (several chapters) in H. Alho, M. Aalto, S. Castrén, &amp; M. Pajula (Eds.). Peliriippuvuus. Duodecim, Helsinki (2022). (Engl. Gaming addiction)</p>	Finnish	<p><a href="https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph19042406">https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph19042406</a></p>
<p>Männikkö, N., Mustonen, T., Tanner, N. et al. (2021). Effectiveness of a Brief Group Intervention Program for Young Adults with Gaming-Related Problems. Int J Ment Health Addiction.</p>	English	<p><a href="https://doi.org/10.1080/10550887.2022.2030640">https://doi.org/10.1080/10550887.2022.2030640</a></p>
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NAME	LANGUAGE	ISBN/DOI/LINK
<p>Salonen, S. (2021). Inklusiivinen mediakasvatus sosiaalipedagogiikan käytännöissä. Pro gradu. Tampereen yliopisto.</p>	<p>Finnish</p>	<p><a href="https://urn.fi/URN:NBN:fi:tuni-202105134949">https://urn.fi/URN:NBN:fi:tuni-202105134949</a></p>
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<p>Kuuluvainen, S., &amp; Mustonen, T. (2019). Digitaalinen viihdepelaaminen ja digipeliriippuvuus. Katsaus pelaamisen eri ulottuvuuksiin (2nd ed.). Sosped-säätiö, Helsinki. (Engl. Digital gaming and gaming addiction. An overview of the different dimensions of gaming)</p>	<p>Finnish</p>	<p>978-952-68636-4-1 (knitted) 978-952-68636-5-8 (PDF)</p>



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<p>Heinänen, O. et al. (Eds.) (2019). Peli kesken - Kokemustarinoita ongelmallisesta digipelaamisesta. Sosiaalipedagogiikan säätiö, Helsinki. (Engl. Game in progress - Experience stories about problematic digital gaming)</p>	Finnish	<p>978-952-68636-6-5 (knitted) 978-952-68636-7-2 (PDF)</p>
<p>Niemi, T. (2017). Vertaistuestako apu ongelmalliseen digipelaamiseen? Sosiaalipedagogiikan säätiö, Helsinki. (Engl. Does peer support provide help to problematic digital gaming?)</p>	Finnish	<p>978-952-68636-2-7 (knitted) 978-952-68636-3-4 (PDF)</p>
<p>900 000 suomalaista - Tarinoita rahapelaamisesta (Engl. 900,000 Finns - Stories about gambling)</p>	Finnish	978-982-68636-0-3



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<p>Minun kulttuuripajani - tarinoita toivosta, kohtaamisesta ja mielenterveydestä (Engl. My culture House - stories about hope, encounter and mental health)</p>	<p>Finnish</p>	<p>978-952-93-7680-3 (stifted) 978-952-93-7681-0 (PDF)</p>
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- **Experience in the youth and mental health fields:**

- Sosped Foundation has substantial experience working with young adults (particularly 18-35) facing mental-health challenges, social exclusion, and behavioural/digital concerns.
- They operate multiple national programmes, have large participation numbers, and employ peer-led, community-based, creative approaches.
- While publicly reported outcome data is less detailed in the sources I found, their work aligns with recognized good practices for youth wellbeing and mental-health support (peer support, low threshold, participation, creativity).

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# Mental Matters

Supporting young people  
with mental health issues



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