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Project: "Establishment of a transnational network of adult education providers for the promotion of social inclusion of vulnerable groups" – STEP UP

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Good practices – Poland & EU countries

Consortium partner: Bielskie Stowarzyszenie Artystyczne
Teatr Grodzki



1. "CITIZENS COMMUNITY SOAP OPERA"

Good practice implemented by Citizens Theatre – a theatre company in Glasgow, UK which presents a mixture of contemporary versions of classic plays and new Scottish drama and runs a wide support program for people - in the local community of all ages.

This good practice has been tested in work with The Community Collective - a theatre group for adults run for 21 years on a weekly basis. Prior to the pandemic, the group met for 2 hours once a week, and under pandemic restrictions, the workshops were run online, through Zoom for 1 hour and 15 minutes.

The group consists of people who have retired; people who have had addiction issues; have experienced the criminal justice system' students; people who face the asylum process; people with mental health issues and those that are long term unemployed. Up to 30 people attend each session.

Good practice description

At the start the leaders discuss with participants their favourite characters from a TV soap opera and situations they can recall. Then, the participants return with an insight into their character and a little bit of background history (this needs to be flexible, as the story progresses). Next, the leaders offer up a situation for the characters to respond to, for instance a shop being broken into, community centre closing, a birthday celebration (the suggestions usually get braver as it is continued). The participants are supposed to keep a simple diary of their character, so they remember the continuity of the narrative and their characters attitudes to other characters. It was stated this was not taking place during the time of COVID and it was not to be referred to.

The participants started off as one big group but then it turned out it was more satisfying in 'break out rooms', where people got more chance to contribute and explore their character further.

After a while, the participants were asked to prepare a phone call or a letter they have previously sent or received that would give a deeper insight into their 'characters' private life, the cast member then performed their own piece to the group. We gave them a few days to prepare this monologue, but some people presented one more spontaneously.

Everyone wanted particularly narratives complete ie: who stole the mystical mask, did the community centre get to stay open, who really owned the big house? The final part of the workshop cycle was creating a trailer/advert for the soap. Everyone took part in this but it was cleverly put together by a member of the group, who had this particular film/IT skill.

The National Lottery and Community Fund were the funding sources used for the implementation of this good practice.

Impact

According to the trainers from Citizens Theatre, this exercise is about escaping your current situation, relating in a different way to other people. Fantasy, freedom to play somebody else, what's going on in their world, not yours. What is particularly important, this method works well for a drop-in group, characters might not appear one week and return the next, even though they are not present they can still influence the story.

This good practice was implemented by two experienced community drama trainers who lead the group. They regularly employ freelance specialist artists, i.e.: movement, songwriting, mask work etc. As they are part of a major producing theatre, they also ask directors and those working with the productions to share their practice.

The leaders of the group noted that this method proved to be highly engaging and attractive for participants and helped them to express themselves and make relations with the others. It was a valuable opportunity for everyone to show their work and feel a sense of achievement and gratification. It provided an environment, with the creative process of theatre at its core, where everyone's contribution is valued.

- **More information**

<https://www.citz.co.uk/about>

<https://youtu.be/vCLNPVR8cBo>

2. „LIVING LIBRARY“

Good practice implemented by Divadlo bez domova from Bratislava, Slovakia – a non-profit organization working with homeless and socially, physically or emotionally handicapped people.

This good practice has been tested in work with the above mentioned target groups Divadlo bez domova works with on a regular basis. Moreover, school children and youth have been also invited to participate in this special educational and emotional experience.

The method refers to the social function of libraries, which give people access to stories, knowledge and information gathered in book collections. In case of a “living library”, the visitors don't read books, but people – they listen to unusual stories, talk with interesting persons, whom they perhaps would never meet in their daily life. These persons are also a source of stories, knowledge and information to be discovered.

Good practice description

This method creates a unique space for an open conversation, where everything can be asked. A special space must be prepared with separated spots for “readers” and “books” to sit down and spend some time together in a quiet and comfortable environment. Also, some kind of a catalogue,

with all “book” titles should be prepared. It includes a short explanation of each “book”, meant for the “readers”, to get an impression of what is available. Moreover, all people - “books” should be trained beforehand, so they know what to expect and how to behave/react during the meetings with the “readers”. It is good to practice the conversation with them, before they meet the “readers”. The length of “reading” the “book” in “Living Library” should be determined and respected. Physical and mental safety of the participants of the “Living Library” is very important. The “readers” need to register, and all “books” have a personal volunteer guide which keeps an eye on the conversation from a short distance. Contact details of “books” are never shared with outside parties.

This method can be also implemented in the virtual space, e.g. zoom, where participants can be divided into different rooms, each shared by a “book” and a “reader”.

The “Living library” has been used by Divadlo bez domova staff members - experienced educators at the occasion of various workshops and training events as part of their regular activities. For instance, it was educational part of visit in the City museum of Bratislava (project financed by the City of Bratislava) or workshops for pupils from elementary schools (project financed by Metropolitan institute of Bratislava).

Impact

The use of this good practice proved to be very effective in shaping attitudes of openness and acceptance towards 'otherness' and passing knowledge and experience of people exposed to discrimination, stereotyping, prejudices and exclusion. “Living Library” offer its visitors the chance to step into the world of another person. It highly contributes to promoting respect for Human Rights.

According to the founder and leader of Divadlo bez domova, this method helped their staff to learn truly about life of homeless people and to discover things they have in common with their students (for instance similar passion for arts, similar dreams or goals) which contributed to mutual understanding and effective cooperation.

3. „JULIE STORY“

Good practice implemented by Acta community theatre from Bristol, UK which engages people without privilege, who are not connected to the cultural life of local community – isolated older people, migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, vulnerable young people, disabled people, people living outside the City Centre.

This good practice has been tested in work with the above mentioned target groups acta community theatre works with on a regular basis and financed through the resources obtained from grants and donations to implement Acta`s mission.

Good practice description

This exercise serves for creating stories from scratch. It is very helpful in supporting community theatre projects and working out the scenario of a play together with all the participants.

At the beginning just blank piece of paper and the group are needed. The leader starts with drawing a sketchy figure of a person in the middle of the flipchart and asks the group to give it a name. The name is written down above the drawing. Next questions follow about the age, profession, place of living, neighbours/relatives/other persons accompanying the newly created hero/heroine and the answers are also written down. More drawings – illustrations can be added as well to enrich the presentation of the world in which the character lives. The more details gathered the better. Another type of questions also appear – the trainer suggests for instance that one day something extraordinary and unexpected happened and affected this fictional reality. In response, the audience can decide for example that flood came and it caused sequence of events and specific reactions and actions of the characters brought to life by the group. The participants give their answers spontaneously, without thinking too much. The main aim of this first stage of the exercise is to gather information which can be further used in developing a theatrical performance. The group members are then invited to work in sub-groups and improvise around selected topics, relations between characters and specific situations which emerged from previous brainstorming. It can be decided that individual scenes created by sub-groups will be then put together and combined into one show.

Impact

This good practice has been used by acta staff members - experienced theatre instructors at the occasion of various workshops and training events as part of their regular activities meant for supporting vulnerable people. These were, among the others: mixed community groups (various ages, all living in the same area of Bristol), a group of Somalian women, groups of refugees, groups of migrant women and a group of women who are survivors of domestic violence.

According to the long-standing experience of acta educators, “Julie Story” works very well at the initial stage of the theatrical performance creation. It is a playful way of engaging workshop participants in expressing their ideas and feeling free to be creative. Thanks to this method all group members have the sense of ownership of the story jointly devised. Thus, they gain self-confidence and are better prepared to face new challenges not only in theatre, but also in their everyday life.

Acta has shared this good practice with many organizations and theatre companies over the years. Some of them have been also using it successfully. For instance, Grodzki Theatre from Poland introduced “July Story” technique to their integration and intergenerational theatre group of adults which gathers people with mental, sensory and physical disabilities. In result a puppet show was created.

Another example is Yalla Arts – a non-profit art organisation in Devon in England, which used this method to help create a story with a group of migrant women.

- **More information**

<https://www.acta-bristol.com/>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-L_HE9qOZeY

4. “OBJECT TRANSFORMATIONS”

Good practice implemented by two freelance art instructors who work with little kids and their parents. It is a very effective warm-up technique suitable for all age groups. It can be just a short playful exercise, but it can also develop into a more engaging theatrical adventure.

This technique has been used as part of regular creative activities offered by Parents Clubs in Krakow which are financed by City Council.

Good practice description

This exercise serves for encouraging people to open up and to experiment freely and spontaneously with objects and materials of everyday use. Like the objects they play with, the participants also change their life roles and face new challenges.

The participants sit or stand in a circle surrounding different objects gathered in the middle. These can be for instance pillows of different size, some string, plastic bags, and toilet paper tubes. The leaders invite group members to choose an object and to act with it as with a new-born character. The participants can do it all together or one by one. It can be proposed to guess what creature each participant brings to life. Thus, natural interactions/communication between people happens and new personages are defined and named. It is also interesting and funny for participants to learn what other people think about their animation actions. It often happens that someone thinks that his/her character is for example a donkey in an obvious way, while the rest of the group sees an elephant or a soldier in it. When all the participants have their figures created, the leaders start narrating the actions to be performed by everyone. For instance, they ask all objects-characters to march alternately fast and slowly around the space or to show how they sleep and what they see in their dreams. Then, more complicated tasks are introduced, for example meeting each other and fighting or doing things together. At the end the group is invited to reflect on the experience and discuss their feelings raised by it.

Impact

This exercise proved to be of a highly integrative and developmental power, even though it might be perceived as something bizarre at the beginning. It allows people to relax and express feelings and emotions through playing. Something that seems to be just fun, often becomes an important experience of recognizing own limits and deficits, as well as hidden potential and capacities. According to workshop participants, it helps to step out of the usual way of behaving and reacting to challenges. In the same time, this activity creates a safe and comfortable environment to make

contacts and to cooperate with the others. The use of objects reduces tension and keeps attention away from those who “are on stage”.

The authors of this good practice emphasized in particular that the focus should not be on performing and competitiveness but on a spontaneous creativity. According to their experience, such approach results in overcoming personal barriers and building bridges between people.

5. „JUST PAINT !“

Good practice implemented by “ADA” Association from Bielsko-Biala, Poland, which supports persons with various disabilities and their families.

This good practice has been tested in work with the above mentioned target groups “ADA” works with on a regular basis and financed through the resources obtained from grants and donations to implement Association`s mission.

Good practice description

The implementation of this activity needs some preparations and arrangements. In the case of ADA, a group of adults who care for their disabled family members were invited to an open-air painting session for the whole day. At that time a few qualified tutors were taking care of the disabled persons and provided them with playful activities, so as to guarantee workshop participants a really quiet time.

The group was taken to an isolated area outdoor, where painting equipment and materials waited for them – easel, paintbrushes and paint in a variety of colours. Everyone was supposed just to paint with no directions or tasks given throughout the day. There was a qualified tutor with them – a graduate of the Academy of Fine Arts but she was not teaching participants how to paint, just being at their disposal if they needed some help or advice. The important aspect of this activity is that participants don`t feel like trainees – pupils but are given time and space to be freely creative, to explore art on their own.

Impact

This practice uses a very simple concept, yet it brings tangible results, according to testimonies of the workshop participants. First of all, it is an unusual occasion to break away from daily routine and to detach from serious worries, problems and heavy duties. However, the workshop participants are not only resting and relaxing. In fact, they undertake a huge amount of work, while letting themselves to paint with an unrestricted freedom. They have to make many decisions on their own and find courage to take up new challenges. So, apart from the obvious therapeutic results, this activity has also an important educational character.

6. „FAIRY TALES FROM PRISON“

Good practice implemented by “They is Us” Foundation from Hajnowka, Poland, in cooperation with the local men`s prison. The regular creative activities in prison were conducted by different art teachers employed by the Foundation and by a radio journalist at the invitation of prison authorities.

Good practice description

The workshops run in prison consisted of a few stages. The first goal was to gain confidence of prisoners, so they were invited to a range of handcraft classes and other creative activities. Next, the group of men interested in continuing workshop experience was given a task to read aloud and record popular tales to be then played over the P.A. system (local radio) in prison. The next step was to announce a competition for prisoners to write a fairy tale and a number of texts were created in result. They were afterwards recorded by inmates themselves and some of them dedicated their stories to their children. Three CDs with original tales written and read by prisoners were published at the end of the workshop experience.

Impact

This good practice proved to be a very effective way of engaging inmates in creative activities which gave them hope for better future and new goals in life. The workshops had an important educational and self-development value. Some of the prisoners had problems with reading and pronouncing specific words and thanks to the project they improved their literacy skills and verbal communication competencies. They become more active and took various initiatives on their own, like for instance recording fairy tales for children from the orphanage.

The workshops also had an impact on external target groups. The recorded tales reached prisoners families and contributed to enhancing family relationships in some cases. Also, the prison authorities decided to buy sound equipment for further development of radio activities inside prison.

7. „Creative Writing and Art“

Good practice implemented by Hammersmith & Fulham Council from London, UK (<https://www.lbhf.gov.uk/>) meant for exploring storytelling through the means of creative writing and art. It provides participants with the means of creative expression through a variety of verbal and visual methods. They will have the opportunity to work in experimental ways as well as using analytical skills to develop their own projects.

This good practice has been tested in work with different target groups and proved to be effective in supporting social inclusion of vulnerable people.

Good practice description

Introduction to creative writing

Writing Task 1

Show the participants photographs of six different people (appendix) and ask them to pick one to write about. Ask the participants to write responses to the following questions about the character they have picked:

- How old is your character?
- Where were they born?
- Who was in their family when they were born?
- Where do they live now?
- Who do they live with now?
- How do they get their money –what job do they do, do they inherit money, do their parents work, do they get money from the government, are they criminals!?!?
- What is their most cherished possession?
- What is their favourite piece of music?
- What is their favourite place that they've been to?
- What's their favourite food?
- What is their earliest memory?
- Who is their favourite person?
- Who is their hero?
- Who has been their hero from their life?
- What is their name?

Writing Task 2

Ask the participants to write their own sentence or short story using some of the information on their character from the previous task. Ask participants to read it to the rest of the group if they feel comfortable to. If not, ask the participants to share some of the facts they wrote down about their character.

Making creative writing visual

Making Task 1

Take a word or sentence from the last workshop and write/draw it out in 3 different styles focusing on the typography.

Making Task 2

Pick one of those styles to show to the rest of the group who will then describe associations they can make based on how the word was written/drawn.

Making Task 3

Using this word or sentence again or picking a new word or sentence write/ draw a concrete poem. Do this either by tearing a piece of paper and writing to fit the irregular pattern of the paper or write a concrete poem to fit around an object. If you can't write directly onto the object then cut a piece of paper to fit it, and write a concrete poem to fit the object, in shape and meaning, then glue it on.

Story making in creative writing and art

Making Task 1

Create a drawing of your character from the first workshop.

Making Task 2

Pass your drawing to the person on your left (if doing the session virtually will have to work on a shared white board) who will add some further drawing onto your previous drawing. This could be drawing the environment they are in, or other people and objects. Keep on passing your drawing around the group so every person has a chance to add something to every other person's drawing.

Making Task 3

Write one sentence about the drawing. Pass the drawing to your left, and each person will add a new sentence which follows on from the previous sentences. Keep on passing around the group until your initial writing/drawing comes back to you.

Developing the personal project 1

Writing Task 1

Look over the writing and drawing from the last workshop and write some bullet points on the aspects of it that interest you the most.

Writing Task 2

Inspired by the images and text from the last workshop and your bullet points, write a few sentences or short story about your character that you can use for your comic book image/ illustrated text.

Developing the personal project 2

Making Task 1

Draw an image or series of images about your character and their environment based on the text that the participants wrote in the last workshop.

Making Task 2

Combine your image and text to make your final work (comic book image/ illustrated text), with a focus on how it will be presented to a reader or viewer.

Sharing the personal project

In the last session participants will share their work and provide positive feedback on each other's work.

Task: Take it in turns to spend 5 minutes giving positive feedback on each person's work including some ideas on what they could do next.

Impact

According to the teacher working with Special Needs participants who used the method, her pupils really enjoyed the sessions. The technique was adapted a little for them to access it but they engaged very creatively with the stimuli. They responded with very original, creative and moving letters. They particularly enjoyed watching the actors perform their work - they felt proud of what they had created.

Another trainer reported that the method was well received by the students; the fact that they were informed beforehand, by an actor, that their pieces would be read aloud by an actor and filmed, made a world of difference. It gave a real purpose for writing. The end product allowed the participants to see whether their pieces communicated what they had wanted or not. Having their pieces performed by an actor was super exciting for them. They were blown over when they saw the final film.

A genius idea to engage people in writing; and also to capture a glimpse of COVID-19 and its impact/effect.

More information

<https://www.bl.uk/childrens-books/activities/make-your-own-comic-strip-stories>

Appendix