

Hoqray

Compendium of Practices across Europe & Self-review Framework

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2024



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ABOUT HOORAY PROJECT:

Youth for Youth's Mental Health through Physical Activity - HOORAY

Even before the pandemic, the mental health of young people, particularly teenagers, has been declining. The HOORAY (Youth for Youth's Mental Health through Physical Activity) project aims to address this challenge by exploring the impact and positive influence physical activity and sport can have on improving the overall well-being and mental health of young people.

Based on the EU Physical Activity Guidelines, the project team will collect good practices, and develop educational resources and an online knowledge hub for physical education teachers, youth workers, coaches, parents and other personnel working with teens that want to put more attention on mental health and health enhancing physical activity, and prioritize participation and well-being of youth over performance, pressure and results.

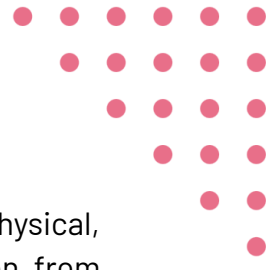
Those resources and activities will target both, youngsters that are already physically active or enrolled in sport activities, and those who have been inactive and/or dropping out of sport. Young people will play a key role as we will take a closer look at physical activity through the lens of teenagers and explore how they perceive sport and its impact on their well-being.

The HOORAY project started 1st of January 2023 and will continue for 30 months until 30th of June 2025. The kick-off meeting is scheduled for 16th and 17th of February 2023 in Munich, Germany.

Hooray



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Introduction

Adolescence is a crucial period in an individual's life when significant physical, psychological and social changes occur. These changes mark the transition from childhood to adulthood and expose the individual to various positive and negative influences (World Health Organisation, WHO, 2020). Issues such as inequality, poverty, conflict, humanitarian emergencies and upbringing in dysfunctional families and environments may increase the likelihood of early adverse experiences, predisposing adolescents to mental health problems (WHO, 2020). The more risk factors adolescents are exposed to, the greater is the potential impact on their mental health (WHO, 2020). Nowadays, it is acknowledged that poor mental health is a leading cause of disability among adolescents and, according to a recent estimation, 1 out of 7 adolescents suffers from mental disorders (WHO, 2021). In the face of this emergency, WHO has outlined several guidelines providing opportunities to promote well-being and prevent poor mental health among adolescents (WHO, 2020).

Among them, a growing body of evidence suggests that physical activity can contribute to preventing and mitigating the psychological distress of adolescents (Biddle et al., 2019; Bjørnara et al., 2021; Boelens et al., 2022; Firth et al., 2020; McCrary et al., 2021; Pettitt et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2022). Physical activity is defined as “bodily movement produced by contraction of skeletal muscles and substantially increasing energy expenditure” (Bouchard et al., 1990; Corbin et al., 2000; WHO, 2022); it is an umbrella term that includes different subcategories such as exercise, sports, leisure activities, dance and others (Corbin et al., 2000).

Scientific evidence regarding physical activity and mental health in adolescents: what works?

As a starting point for the HOORAY project, the scientific literature regarding the association between physical activity and mental health in adolescents was analysed in detail.

Three rapid reviews were conducted analysing the studies that assessed the impact of physical activity on: 1) depressive symptoms (24 studies), 2) anxiety management (12 studies), and 3) suicide ideation and behaviour in adolescents (7 studies). Rapid reviews are a form of knowledge synthesis in which the process of conducting a traditional systematic review is simplified and streamlined to summarise the main evidence on a specific research question in a resource-efficient manner (Tricco et al., 2015). The study selection followed standard systematic reviewing protocols, with analysis adapted for the rapid reviewing approach.





The methodology and the results of the rapid reviews are detailed in the HOORAY document "What works? Evidence-based guidance regarding physical activity and mental health in adolescents"

(<https://engsoyouth.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/What-works.pdf>).

The rapid reviews reveal the potential of physical activity as a non-pharmacological intervention for adolescent depression. Furthermore, physical activity and sports-based interventions may be effective methods to improve anxiety management and reduce the risk of suicidal ideation and behaviour in adolescents.

Rapid reviews also highlight possible mechanisms behind these positive effects. The elements that seem to contribute most to promoting adolescents' mental health through physical activity are: 1) encouraging a variety of physical activities with different levels of intensity to meet the preferences and abilities of adolescents, while supporting the specific needs of the most vulnerable; 2) creating a supportive and inclusive environment within sports clubs to foster positive peer interactions, leveraging social bonds as a protective aspect against stress and anxiety.

In addition, another bibliographic search was conducted to collect the main umbrella reviews on the role of physical activity in promoting adolescents' mental health, consulting international scientific databases (Pubmed, PsycInfo, PsycArticles and Cochrane Library). An umbrella review summarises the results of multiple existing reviews and represents one of the highest levels of evidence. Umbrella reviews allow easy comparison between reviews and can be useful for comparing results and developing guidelines.

The search strategy consisted of using keywords related to the concepts of physical activity/sport, adolescence, and mental health, selecting 13 umbrella reviews. Analysing the content of the 13 umbrella reviews, it emerges that exercise (e.g., aerobics, resistance, weight) is the most commonly discussed type of physical activity, followed by sports, dance and yoga. Depression is the most investigated outcome, followed by anxiety and self-esteem. Other mental health outcomes that emerge, to a lesser extent, are suicidal ideation and social skills. The umbrella reviews report results consistent with the findings of the three rapid reviews, highlighting the association between physical activity and positive mental health outcomes.

The umbrella reviews report that a young person with depression should be encouraged to follow a supervised physical exercise programme (Campisi et al., 2021), coherently to the guidelines issued by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) of the United Kingdom. As an example, aerobic and resistance exercises, with moderate-vigorous intensity, are reported as an auxiliary treatment to improve depressive symptoms in adolescents (Ashdown-Franks et al., 2020; Bailey et al., 2018; Hu et al., 2020; Wegner et al., 2020). Moreover, the participation of adolescents in



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individual and team-based sports is included as a possible preventive factor for depression (Boelens et al., 2022).

The umbrella reviews reveal a promising effect of sports, particularly team sports, and yoga in reducing symptoms of anxiety (Biddle et al., 2019; Bjørnarå et al., 2021; Dale et al., 2019; James-Palmer et al., 2020; Pettitt et al., 2022). Specifically, a recent systematic review recommends participating in yoga sessions of 30 minutes at least 2–3 times per week for a total of 6–12 weeks to achieve significant improvements in anxiety measures (James-Palmer et al., 2020).

Exercise and sports can also have a positive impact on self-esteem (Ashdown-Franks et al., 2020; Das et al., 2016), however, the causal link between the variables remains unclear (Biddle et al., 2019). This could be due to the complexity of the concept of self-esteem, which can be viewed as a multidimensional construct characterised by several subdomains (Biddle et al., 2019). In their review, Biddle and colleagues suggest that the most relevant subdomain to consider as an outcome of physical activity interventions could be “physical self-worth”, which includes perceptions about body image, as well as physical capabilities and skills (Biddle et al., 2019).

Youth voices

In addition to collecting scientific evidence, one of the goals of the HOORAY project is exploring adolescent perceptions, thoughts and voices on physical activity as a tool to promote their mental health. For this purpose, “Youth voices” study (<https://engsoyouth.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Youth-voices.pdf>) collected semi-structured interviews of adolescents from different European countries and analysed them using a deductive-inductive methodology based on the PERMA framework. According to the PERMA framework, mental health cannot be defined simply by the absence of negative psychological states. The five domains of the PERMA model (Positive Emotions, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment) (Seligman, 2011) contributed to summarise the content of the interviews, highlighting the possible benefits that adolescents can obtain through physical activity.

According to the contents collected, physical activity, while improving physical health, allows experiencing positive emotions as well as establishing supportive relationships with peers and adults in a stimulating environment that emphasises inclusion and a sense of belonging. Moreover, the adolescents reported being fully absorbed and engaged during physical activity sessions and finding relief from their stressful everyday lives. They also described physical activity as something meaningful that contributes to an increased sense of personal accomplishment and the development of new skills.



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Compendium of WORKING PRACTICES

The collection of scientific evidence and interviews confirms the important role that physical activity can have in promoting the mental health of adolescents. However, it should be emphasised that the benefits depend on “how”, “how much” and “where” the activity is offered to adolescents. For this reason, it is crucial to identify and share the practices that work (also referred to as “good practices”) on how to conduct physical activity-based programmes focused on the specific needs of adolescents.

These practices are organisational or procedural solutions collection of examples, procedures, and past experiences that are suitably formalised into rules or plans that can be followed and repeated.

In this regard, the HOORAY project involves the development of a Compendium of Practices, collected across Europe, regarding the use of physical activity as a tool to promote adolescents' mental health.

It is important to note that the European Commission designed the Best Practice Portal to help find reliable information on implemented practices recognised as best or promising for improving public health in Europe. In the context of this initiative, a call for best practices in mental health was launched: the call supports the collection of actions based on a comprehensive approach to mental health, which includes physical activity. In this regard, it would be stimulating to contribute to this initiative by sharing the practices collected in the Compendium HOORAY on the portal.



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Horses & Butterflies

The Horses & Butterflies project was designed to test the potential of equestrian vaulting exercise in promoting the psychological and physical well-being of young girls suffering from anorexia. The scientific rationale underpinning the project suggests that the activity of equestrian vaulting and the strong emotional involvement that the horse evokes can facilitate the therapeutic work of re-appropriating one's body image, which in this pathology is perceived in a distorted and dysfunctional light.



ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED IN THE PROJECT

1. Center for Behavioral Sciences and Mental Health, Istituto Superiore di Sanità, Rome, Italy
2. Centre for Eating Disorder USL Umbria 1, Umbertide, Italy
3. European Culture and Sport organisation (ECOS)
4. Umbria Regional Committee Italian Equestrian Sports Federation (FISE), Perugia, Italy
5. Equestrian Center San Biagio, Perugia, Italy

PARTICIPANTS AND BENEFICIARIES

The following inclusion criteria were established for the enrolment of the participants:

- female adolescents (15-20 years old) with a diagnosis of anorexia in outpatient treatment;
- Body Mass Index < 16;
- absence of previous equestrian experience; horse allergies or phobia.

Eight girls, in outpatient treatment for anorexia at the Centre for Eating Disorder USL Umbria1, met the inclusion criteria and were enrolled in the project. The eight participants were randomly assigned to two groups: 4 to the equestrian vaulting group and 4 to the control group (no equestrian activity).

One participant from the equestrian vaulting group dropped out, and the final sample consisted of 7 participants (equestrian vaulting group n=3; control group n=4).



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PROJECT GOALS

The main goal of the project was to test the suitability of a physical activity intervention based on equestrian vaulting designed for adolescents with anorexia.

The equestrian vaulting intervention was designed to:

- achieve a healthier perception of body image and improve anxiety management;
- establish positive relationships between all project members (the beneficiaries, the horses and the team);
- increase body mass index.

TYPE OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

The sporting activity was carried out for 3 months (December 2019-March 2020) and included 10 sessions of equestrian vaulting activities.

Equestrian vaulting is a discipline that combines artistic gymnastics and horse riding: vaulters perform gymnastic exercises to the rhythm of music, coordinating their body movements with the horse, which is led in a circle by an experienced equestrian trainer (lounger).

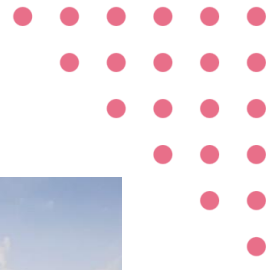
This discipline promotes the ability to get in touch with the horse, enhancing both physical (coordination, balance, agility and rhythm) and psychological (concentration, emotional management, creativity and expressiveness) skills. Moreover, vaulting can be performed in small groups (2 to 6 members) and this facilitates the establishment of relationships between team members (vaulters, loungers and horses).



Each session began with the grooming activity of the horse selected for the intervention session. This activity was important as a first approach to the horse. It was aimed at learning: 1) basic information on the horse welfare, 2) correct communication (ocular, tactile, and vocal contact) and handling of the horse and, 3) techniques and tools for grooming and harnessing. This initial activity is also essential to establish a relationship of trust between the participants and the horse.



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Afterwards, participants performed warm-up exercises (breathing exercises, body orientation and extension exercises, foot perception exercises) aimed at improving body awareness. The warm-up also included learning the basic vaulting exercises on a vaulting barrel. This enables the participants to enhance agility, coordination and balance skills before performing the exercises on horseback.



Then the participants performed horseback training in which they learned vaulting exercises, purposely chosen to increase bodily expressiveness and creativity. This activity is designed to create team spirit, fostering bonds between the participants, the horse and the trainers.



Once the vaulting activity was over, the participants groomed the horse and took it back to the stables. The activity ended with an informal briefing between the participants and the equestrian centre team.

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY ORGANISATION

Duration of the physical activity program – 3 months (December 2019–March 2020) for a total of 10 sessions

Frequency of the sessions – weekly

Duration of each session – 60-90 min.

Location of the sessions – Equestrian Center San Biagio, Perugia, Italy

The activities were organised in 4 phases (see Table 1).



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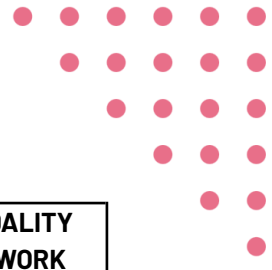
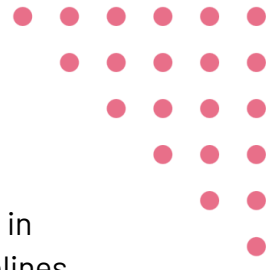


Table 1. Intervention methodology and working phases

ACTIVITY	SETTING AND WORKING TOOLS	EXERCISE	DURATION	MODALITY OF WORK
1st phase: session 1				
Horse approach and grooming	Box and round Pen; Grooming tools; Vaulting harnesses	Grooming, horse handling, and observation	60-90 min	Group work
2nd phase: session 2-3				
Horse grooming	Stable; Grooming tools; Vaulting harnesses	Grooming	30 min	Group work
Body awareness exercises	Stable	Individual breathing exercises, orientation and extension exercises, foot perception exercises, exercises on a vaulting barrel	20 min	Group work
Horse contact	Stable	Ocular, tactile, and vocal contact with the horse and handling	10 min	Individual work
3rd phase: session 4-10				
Horse grooming	Stable; Grooming tools; Vaulting harnesses	Grooming	10 min	Group work
Body awareness exercises	Stable	Individual breathing exercises, orientation and extension exercises, foot perception exercises, exercises on a vaulting barrel	15 min	Individual work
Vaulting	Indoor arena	Motor exercises on horseback with vaulting harness; specific vaulting exercises	30-40 min	Group work
4th phase: each session				
Conclusive activity	Stable	Final grooming, cooling down and sharing feedback	10 min	Group work



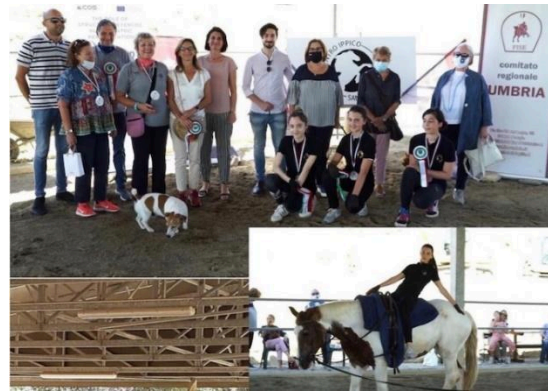


TEAM

The project was conducted by a multidisciplinary team of qualified professionals in mental health and equine-assisted interventions, as required by the Italian Guidelines for Animal-Assisted Interventions

(<https://www.iss.it/documents/20126/0/Linee+Guida+IAA.pdf/c42244ea-12f6-ed00-2975-05f7755f3d23?t=1582118322698>).

The project managers were a psychiatrist-psychoanalyst, specialised in Equine-Assisted Therapy and qualified as a first-level vaulting technician of the Italian Equestrian Sports Federation (FISE), and a professor of the Degree Course in Physical Education at the University of Perugia, specialised in Equine-Assisted Education and qualified as a third-level vaulting technician of the FISE. The project managers were in charge of planning and implementing the methodological part of the intervention.



The intervention team was composed of professionals specialised in equine-assisted interventions and equestrian vaulting: the team took care of the participants and the horses during the equestrian vaulting sessions, monitoring their wellbeing, setting up activities to achieve the predetermined objectives and fostering a good relationship between participants and horses.

The psychiatrists of the Centre for Eating Disorder USL Umbria 1 contributed to the recruitment of the participants.

Finally, the research aspects of the project (data collection and analysis; scientific dissemination of results) were carried out by a team of researchers from the Centre for Behavioural Sciences and Mental Health (*Istituto Superiore di Sanità*, Rome, Italy). This team has recognised expertise in the field as they developed the Italian Guidelines on Animal-Assisted Interventions.

MONITORING & EVALUATION

To evaluate the results, the following questionnaires were administered before (T0) and at the end of the project (T1):

- Eating Disorder Inventory-3 (EDI-3) to evaluate the eating disorder-related symptoms;
- Symptom Checklist-90-R (SCL-90-R) to assess psychopathological dimensions;
- State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI) to measure state and trait anxiety;



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- Observation reports to monitor participants' attitude, emotionality, behaviour during the session and relationship with horses and team members.

In addition, body mass index values were measured before (T0) and at the end of the project (T1).

PROJECT RESULTS

The preliminary results indicate an increase in fat mass and a reduction in lean mass weight, an improvement in anxiety and eating disorder symptoms (drive for thinness, body dissatisfaction, affective problems, and perfectionism), as well as an increase in the sociability of the participants in the equestrian vaulting group.



These results suggest that equestrian vaulting can be used effectively in the case of eating disorders as a complement to a comprehensive treatment of the person. Recovery of body awareness is the main aspect in which the equestrian vaulting intervention can play an important role, exploiting the physical and emotional synergy between horse and vaulter.

EVENTS ORGANISED IN THE CONTEXT OF THE PROJECT

27 June 2020 - Final event of the project and vaulting exhibition at the Equestrian Center San Biagio, Perugia, Italy.

7 December 2020 - Online webinar on the H&B project for the Degree Course in Physical Education, University of Perugia, Italy.

10-13 April 2021 - Project presentation at the 29th European Congress of Psychiatry (EPA).

29 September 2023 - Poster presentation at "Notte Europea dei ricercatori e delle ricercatrici 2023", Rome, Italy.

FUNDING

Project funded by the European Culture and Sport Organisation (ECOS) and Umbria Regional Committee of Italian Equestrian Sports Federation (FISE).



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LINK AND WEBSITE

<https://www.ecos-europe.com/volteggio-equestre-san-biagio-della-valle-horses-butterflies-sphere/>

<http://www.fiseumbria.it/modules/news/article.php?storyid=1669>

<https://www.fise.it/sport/volteggio/news-volteggio/archivio-news-volteggio/15273-%E2%80%99Chorses-butterflies%E2%80%9D-in-umbria-il-volteggio-come-terapia.html>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=2_Tde7KbvMU

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DW3r4sNxNds>



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Horses & Friends

The scientific community has repeatedly raised the issue of mental health disorders among young people, increased by the disruptive experiences resulting from the pandemic and restrictive lockdown measures. School and family seem to be unable to maintain their role as primary socialisation agencies for young people, who, even within peer groups, feel lonely, isolated, and unable to manage their distress, manifesting symptoms



of a psychiatric nature. According to the severity of these conditions, in many cases, a period of residence in the community is recommended to find a way out.

The Horses & Friends project was conceived to test the potential of equestrian sport as a complementary tool to promote the psycho-physical well-being of adolescents being treated for psychiatric illnesses in therapeutic communities.

ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED IN THE PROJECT

1. Center for Behavioral Sciences and Mental Health, Istituto Superiore di Sanità, Rome, Italy
2. Equestrian Rehabilitation Centre (C.R.E.) "Girolamo De Marco" Onlus, Rome, Italy
3. Therapeutic Community "Villa Madre Chiara Ricci", Rome, Italy
4. European Sport and Culture organisation (ECOS), Rome, Italy

PARTICIPANTS AND BENEFICIARIES

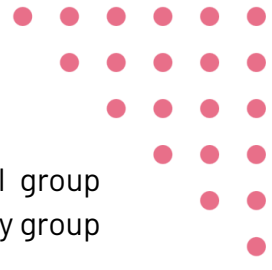
The following inclusion criteria were established for the enrolment:

- adolescents (14-18 years old) residing in the therapeutic community;
- absence of previous equestrian experience; horse allergies or phobia.

Eighteen adolescents (10 males and 8 females), under treatment for psychiatric disease at the therapeutic community "Villa Madre Chiara Ricci" (Rome), met the inclusion criteria and were enrolled in the study. The eighteen participants were assigned to two different groups: 8 (4 males and 4 females) to the equestrian activity group and 10 (6 males and 4 females) to the control group (no equestrian activity).



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One participant from the equestrian activity group and 5 from the control group dropped out and the final sample consisted of 12 participants (equestrian activity group n=7; control group n=5).

PROJECT GOALS

The main goal of the project was to test the suitability of a physical activity intervention based on equestrian activities designed for adolescents living in therapeutic communities.

The equestrian-based intervention was designed to:

- achieve improvement of psychopathological dimensions, reduction of anxiety and depressive symptoms;
- establish positive relationships among all members of the project (the beneficiaries, the horses and the team), improve traits of alexithymia;
- improve posture, balance and motor coordination.

TYPE OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

The equestrian-based intervention was carried out for 5 months (February-June 2023), with weekly sessions and involved the combination of different equestrian activities organised as follows.

Each session began with the grooming phase of the horses selected for the intervention session. This activity was important as a first approach to the horse. It was aimed at learning: 1) basic information on the horse's welfare, 2) correct communication (ocular, tactile, and vocal contact) and handling of the horse and 3) techniques and tools for grooming and harnessing.

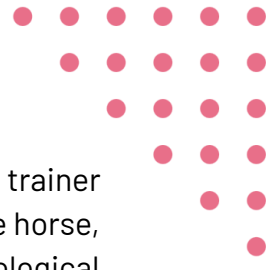
Subsequently, the participants were divided into two subgroups that performed the sports activities of riding and vaulting in parallel. Then, the two groups switched so as all the participants had done both sporting activities (riding and vaulting) at the end of each session.

The riding activities included learning how to individually ride the horse at walk and trot within the riding arena, and how to perform simple riding figures (e.g., circles, volte, half-volte, serpentine). This activity promotes the enhancement of self-esteem and sense of agency, the management of anxiety and strengthens the relationship among the participants, the horse, the coaches and the psychologists of the Equestrian Rehabilitation Centre.

Equestrian vaulting activities included: 1) muscle training exercises with a focus on mobility, flexibility, balance, rhythm and strength and 2) basic equestrian vaulting exercises. Equestrian vaulting is a discipline combining artistic gymnastics and horse riding: vaulters perform gym exercises to the rhythm of music, coordinating body



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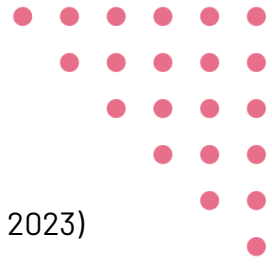
movements with the horse, driven in circle by an experienced equestrian trainer (lounger). The activity was aimed at promoting the ability to get in touch with the horse, enhancing both physical (coordination, balance, agility and rhythm) and psychological (concentration, memory, attention, courage, creativity and expressiveness) skills, as well as facilitating relationship among team members (vaulters, lounger, and horse). Once the riding and vaulting activities were over, the participants groomed the horses and took them back to the stables.

The activity ended with an informal briefing and a convivial moment together with the coaches and the psychologists of the Equestrian Rehabilitation Centre.

The session lasted a total of 70 minutes and the sequence of activities proposed are summarised in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Equestrian activities during the intervention session





PHYSICAL ACTIVITY ORGANISATION

Duration of the physical activity program – 5 months (February 2023–June 2023)

Frequency of the sessions – weekly

Duration of each session – 70 min.

Location of the sessions – Equestrian Rehabilitation Centre (C.R.E.) “Girolamo De Marco” Onlus, Rome, Italy

TEAM

The multidisciplinary team consisted of qualified professionals in mental health and equine-assisted interventions, as required by the Italian Guidelines for Animal-Assisted Interventions

(<https://www.iss.it/documents/20126/0/Linee+Guida+IAA.pdf/c42244ea-12f6-ed00-2975-05f7755f3d23?t=1582118322698>).

The project manager was a psychiatrist-psychoanalyst, specialised in Equine-Assisted Therapy and a first-level vaulting technician of the Italian Equestrian Sports Federation (FISE). The project manager was in charge of planning and implementing the methodological part of the intervention.

The intervention team included: psychologists and psychotherapists taking care after the participants during the equestrian activity session, monitoring their well-being and setting the session to achieve the objectives; a first-level riding instructor from the FISE and certified horse handlers responsible for managing the horses during the session, monitoring their well-being and fostering relationship between participant and horse.

The child neuropsychiatrists of the therapeutic Community “Villa Madre Chiara Ricci” contributed to the recruitment of the participants.

Finally, a team of researchers from the Centre for Behavioural Sciences and Mental Health at the *Istituto Superiore di Sanità*, Rome, Italy, carried out data collection and analysis; scientific dissemination of results. This team developed the Italian Guidelines on Animal-Assisted Interventions.

MONITORING & EVALUATION

To evaluate the results, the following questionnaires were administered before (T0) and at the end of the project (T1):

- Toronto Alexithymia Scale (TAS-20) to assess alexithymia;
- Hamilton Depression Rating Scale (HAM-D) to assess depression;
- Symptom Checklist-90-R (SCL-90-R) to assess psychopathological dimensions;
- State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI) to measure state and trait anxiety;



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- Observation reports to monitor participants' attitude, emotionality, behaviour during the session and relationship with horses and team members.

PROJECT RESULTS

Although analyses of the quantitative data did not reveal statistically significant results, trends of clinical improvement emerged for the group that performed the equestrian activities. In particular, most of the participants showed a promising trend towards a reduction in depression and sleep disorders.

While statistical analyses did not seem to suggest that the intervention affected levels of alexithymia and anxiety, it is important to note that the observation reports showed that the participants progressively established a deep emotional bond with the horse and improved their attitude toward the intervention team and the equestrian activity in general.

Since the beginning of the activity, improvements have been recorded in participants' involvement, behaviour and emotional management during the equestrian activity sessions. The equestrian activity promoted the enhancement of self-esteem and a sense of agency and strengthened the relationships among young participants. In addition, improvements were recorded in posture, balance and motor coordination.

Since the preliminary results, equestrian activity appeared beneficial in adolescents living in therapeutic communities especially on a socio-emotional level. The equestrian context can be a safe place, complementary to the community, where adolescents can challenge themselves both physically and emotionally.



EVENTS ORGANISED IN THE CONTEXT OF THE PROJECT

10 June 2023 - "Cavallo al Sole 2023" - Final event of the project with riding and vaulting exhibition at the Equestrian Rehabilitation Centre (C.R.E.) "Girolamo De Marco" Onlus, Rome, Italy.

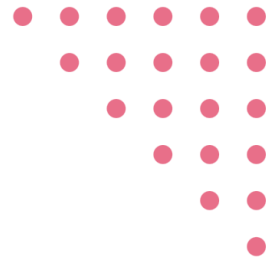
13 October 2023 - "Adolescents' Mental Health: Intervention Possibilities and Perspectives" conference for the dissemination of the project and its results.

FUNDING

Project funded by the European Culture and Sport Organisation (ECOS).



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LINK AND WEBSITE

<https://www.ecos-europe.com/it/al-via-il-progetto-cavallifriends/>

<https://www.cavallomagazine.it/people/cavallo-al-sole-2023-presente-e-futuro-della-riabilitazione-equestre>



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Surf4specialneeds

The "Surf4specialneeds" project aims at making surfing accessible to young people with special needs, by offering free courses tailored to the youth's abilities and sensitivity, thus fostering social inclusion, interaction and mutual acquaintance between volunteers and young people engaged in surfing activities.



ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED IN THE PROJECT

1. Surf4Children Onlus, Rome, Italy
2. Banzai Surf School, Santa Marinella, Italy

PARTICIPANTS AND BENEFICIARIES

Children and adolescents aged between 10 and 18 with special needs.

The activity was designed to include participants with social vulnerabilities, intellectual disabilities, genetic syndromes, cystic fibrosis, diabetes and cancer survivors.



PROJECT GOALS

Offer of free surfing courses and related activities to children and adolescents with special needs and of psycho-motricity courses tailored to the participants' abilities and sensitivities.

The surfing courses are designed to:

- improve the quality of life and psychophysical well-being of youths with special needs and their families;
- improve socio-emotional skills and foster interpersonal relationships and social inclusion;
- promote a healthy lifestyle and pro-environmental behaviour (in the context of the activity of Surf4Recycle);
- improve balance and motor coordination.



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TYPE OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Innovative psychomotricity programme based on surf-related activities. During the cold months, sports activities take place in the swimming pool. From the end of June, activities are held in the sea. The surf-based intervention has been conducted every year since 2015.

Sessions (both in the pool and the sea) are characterised by an initial meeting and sharing phase between participants, family members and staff. In this phase, activities are explained and participants perform warm-up exercises 'on land'. This initial phase is essential to improve certain psycho-motor skills functional to surfing, and to create a group atmosphere. The second phase includes activities in the pool or the sea, with dedicated surfing equipment. The participants enter the water with volunteer staff and coaches and learn how to paddle in the water on a surfboard and ride their first waves. In addition to surfing sessions, the project also includes yoga, sup and windsurfing sessions.



PHYSICAL ACTIVITY ORGANISATION

Duration of the physical activity program – 4 cold months (January-April) and 4 summer months (June-September)

Frequency of the sessions – daily sessions from Monday to Friday

Duration of each session – 90 min.

Location of the sessions – Surf4Children Onlus, Rome, Italy; Banzai Surf School, Santa Marinella, Italy

TEAM

The multidisciplinary team consists of physicians specialised in paediatrics and rare diseases, psychologists, qualified surf coaches and volunteers.

The team tailor project's activities to the needs of the participants. The physicians and psychologists enrol the participants and monitor their progress. Coaches, aided by volunteers, oversee the execution of the sports activities during the sessions.



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MONITORING & EVALUATION

To monitor progress, physicians and psychologists conduct interviews with participants and qualitative observations.

PROJECT RESULTS

The project started in 2015 and was reconfirmed for eight years, with the participation of 50 youths and their families. All participants have benefited from the activity both physically and psychologically. The project's main result is the integration of the participants into a social network based on principles of equality, inclusion and appreciation of diversity. Through the activity, the youths established meaningful bonds with each other and with the staff, experienced positive emotions, increased autonomy and rehabilitated motor skills.



EVENTS ORGANISED IN THE CONTEXT OF THE PROJECT

During the year, Surf4Children organises convivial events for club members and project participants.

FUNDING

The project was financed by 5xMille funds.

LINK AND WEBSITE

<http://www.surf4children.it/>

<http://www.surf4children.it/425-2/>



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Mindfulness – A Full Mind

“Mindfulness- A full mind” is an Erasmus+ project designed to provide mental health prevention and support for young people, in accordance with the European Commission's Compass for Action on Mental Health and Well-being action plan. The project consists of an exchange between young people from different European countries that aims to encourage social participation and raise awareness among young people about the positive effects of mindfulness and meditation for a more balanced and happy life.

ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED IN THE PROJECT

1. Budapest Association for International Sports, Hungary
2. Youthfully Yours, Slovakia
3. Active Youth, Lithuania
4. Allianssi Youth Exchanges, Finland
5. East West East, Germany

PARTICIPANTS AND BENEFICIARIES

The project participants were a total of 30 young people from the project partner countries (Hungary, Slovakia, Lithuania, Finland and Germany) 20 women and 10 men respectively, aged between 17 and 30 years.



PROJECT GOALS

The main goal of the project was to allow youth to learn new ways of how mental challenges can be faced and how their mental well-being can be promoted by physical activities and mindfulness practice.

The project was designed to:

- achieve a better understanding of the psychological and mental challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the transition to adulthood in such turbulent times (potential issues included anxiety or depression);
- learn ways of coping with stress, including stress management and stress reduction through intercultural peer learning and sharing of experiences and knowledge;
- strength peer relationships and social integration, improve communication and interpersonal skills;



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- promote the adoption of a healthier lifestyle that can contribute to the well-being of both the individual and the community;
- gain better stamina and improve their physical capabilities during the event.

TYPE OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

The project offered the opportunity to practise various activities centred on physical activity, yoga and meditation for a whole week:

- hikes to the surrounding nature (1- 2 hours, 2 times during the week);
- ball and other team games (ad hoc, volleyball, football, board, tag etc.);
- hatha Yoga sessions (45 - 90 minutes for 5 consecutive days) led by a certified instructor, the exercises were mixed but with a focus on breathing techniques;
- meditation sessions (15 - 20 minutes for 5 consecutive days) led by a certified instructor focused on mindfulness.

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY ORGANISATION

Duration of the physical activity program - 1 week

Location of the sessions - Bakonyszentlászló, Hungary

TEAM

The multidisciplinary team consisted of qualified instructors and youth workers from participating organisations.

MONITORING & EVALUATION

The project was monitored and evaluated based on the participants' reflections and the insights and contributions of the partner organisations. Evaluation was carried out using oral feedback, written feedback (comments, feelings and thoughts were collected on a whiteboard and could be anonymised) and personal feedback (1-to-1 sessions with participants).

PROJECT RESULTS

All project goals were achieved (although only qualitative indicators were present). Outcomes of the project included the acquisition of increased awareness of the risks they face as adolescents and the potential mental health issues these situations can cause. They achieved these results by sharing their own experiences working towards common



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solutions. Participants also learnt basic yoga movements and breathing and meditation exercises.

EVENTS ORGANISED IN THE CONTEXT OF THE PROJECT

Sports events, yoga, cultural exchanges, workshops, hikes, and games.

FUNDING

Project funded by the Erasmus+ Youth program of the European Union.

LINK AND WEBSITE

<https://www.wemovebudapest.com/mindfulness>

<https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/projects/search/details/2020-2-HU01-KA105-0790>

[30](#)



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Icehearts

Icehearts was founded in 1996 in Vantaa, Finland, with the aim of providing long-term professional support to vulnerable children and adolescents through a 12-year program based on team sports. Children needing special support and recognised at risk of social exclusion are selected in collaboration with professionals from preschool, school, and social services. The child's caregivers ultimately decide whether the child will participate in program activities. Once established, the team of about 25 children will be together for 12 years under the supervision of a mentor with professional qualifications. Icehearts currently operates in Helsinki, Vantaa, Espoo, Kerava, Lahti, Riihimäki, Hämeenlinna, Tampere, Ulvila, Pori, Turku, Seinäjoki and Lappeenranta.



ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED IN THE PROJECT

1. Finnish Icehearts Association, Vantaa, Finland
2. Funding Centre for Social Welfare and Health Organisations (STEA), Finland
3. Icehearts local associations
4. Local sporting clubs, schools and social service providers

PARTICIPANTS AND BENEFICIARIES

The Icehearts activity, based on team sports, is intended for children and young people aged between 6 and 18 years old who need special support. The practice is suitable for supporting the growth and development of children suffering from several kinds of difficulties (e.g., refugees, migrants, children from single-parent or low-income families, children with learning disabilities, abused children, homeless children).



However, Icehearts practice is not ideal for children with the most severe symptoms who cannot function in a group. Children's suitability for Icehearts activities is assessed already in preschool on a child-by-child basis, in cooperation with pre-school, school and social service professionals. Icehearts activities start in preschool when the educator maps the need for support for local children.



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The team is formed in the fall, when the children start school, and the activity continues until age 18. Each team is led by a mentor who supports the selected children in school, after school and at home for 12 years. The goal is for all children selected for the activity to be involved in the entire Icehearts program. So far, about 300 children (200 girls and 100 boys) have completed the program for its entire 12-year duration. Many others have participated in the program without completing the full 12 years. Families are secondary beneficiaries of the program as their children's mental and physical well-being improves. Tutors are also secondary beneficiaries, as they develop many skills and receive ongoing training during project implementation.



PROJECT GOALS

Icehearts aims at: preventing social exclusion of children and young people, enhancing social skills and promoting the well-being of vulnerable children as well as complementing public services, ultimately supporting the education and growth of Icehearts children so that they grow into plenipotent and capable members of society. The practice provides children and young people with a positive growth community and the experience of a caring adult.



Icehearts is designed to:

- improve mental health and well-being of Icehearts children (including feel meaningful, develop self-efficacy and learn to work and face challenges);
- prevent the marginalisation, promote inclusion and support the families of Icehearts children;
- learn about healthy ways of living;
- provide safe and equal opportunities for physical activity for children and youth, promoting their physical health and well-being in the short and long term.



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TYPE OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Team sports are the core of Icehearts' practice. Different sports are included depending on local opportunities (e.g., ice hockey, soccer, and floorball). Team players are selected gradually between the ages of 6 and 12. The sport played by the team is chosen together by the mentor and the team players. Until the third grade, these sports are kept as hobbies or recreational sports performed at school. At the fourth grade, when the team sport is selected in collaboration between the mentor and the child, practice is carried out after school and within tournaments of local amateur leagues. Also summer and winter camps are organised. During these events, children practise working together and doing daily chores. Local leagues and friendly matches are also played.



PHYSICAL ACTIVITY ORGANISATION

Duration of the physical activity program – 12 years

Frequency of the sessions – Usually 3 times per week

Duration of each session – Approximately 2 hours

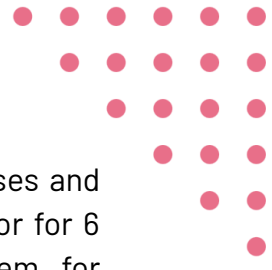
Location of the sessions – Schools, playing fields out of the school, sport clubs

TEAM

The Icehearts team includes members from inside and outside the organisation, such as mentors, researchers, volunteers from the children's families, teachers from local schools, childcare providers, and social workers. The mentor provides children with social-emotional support, presence, attention, and a trusting relationship. An Icehearts mentor is also an interlocutor for the family and can help parents/guardians with educational issues affecting the child. In addition, mentors can help with job searches and filling out the necessary forms for subsidies. There is strong communication with families, counsellors and social services, as well as collaboration with local sports federations, clubs, and NGOs. In the Icehearts organisation, the work of the mentors is supported by support services.



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The organisation promotes all members' participation in various training courses and completion of professional degrees. Initially, mentors collaborate with a senior for 6 months to learn from his or her experience. New training is offered to them, for example, on how to better deal with neuropsychiatric problems or manage actual or potential aggression etc. In 2023, to strengthen the skills of mentors, Icehearts introduced a digital learning environment with different units related to the growth and development of children and youth. Some mentors also have a degree in social service. The organisation's expertise includes ongoing critical reflection of the operating model based on information from scientific research. This approach has been developed systematically and in collaboration with relevant partners such as the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare that has underway two 13-year follow-up studies of Icehearts activities. The researchers of these projects are key experts in operational development and monitoring effectiveness and cost-effectiveness.



MONITORING & EVALUATION

Icehearts monitor and evaluate the results and effects of its work, thus adopting its own web application (Jääsydän) for the collection of information from mentors, the progress of Icehearts children and feedback from families and school. In addition, due to its open approach to research, two longitudinal studies (the 2015 one already produced several scientific articles) were carried out by researchers from the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare, three Ph.D. and activities of evaluation, development, and monitoring were conducted in collaboration, University College of Cork and the University of Cassino and Lazio Meridionale.

PROJECT RESULTS

Over the years, the effectiveness of the Icehearts project has been widely demonstrated. In particular, the Icehearts team provides children with a meaningful community and support structure for daily social inclusion, and equality and care based environment.

According to the scientific studies, Icehearts activity has produced improvement in:

- mood and emotion regulation;
- self-esteem;





- social skills (relationships within the family, with friends and adults);
- school attendance;
- behaviour at school and home (with a reduction of aggressive behaviour);
- respect for authority;
- physical activity.

Similarly, parents report improvement of family's everyday life, as well as the cooperation between home and school thanks to the mentors interaction and their primary focus on the child. A calculation of an Icehearts team's investment by researcher Petri Hilli (2017) shows that the activities are cost-effective. The net savings for a team is at least 3 million. The savings come from changes in children's need for services.



EVENTS ORGANISED IN THE CONTEXT OF THE PROJECT

In the early years, it was necessary to promote Icehearts by organising various events, such as sporting events and festivals, and by publishing various articles. Today, the Icehearts project is well known in Finland and has a good reputation for impact and sustainability.

FUNDING

The project was funded by the EU4Health program on mental health promotion.

LINK AND WEBSITE

<https://www.icehearts.fi/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Icehearts-brochure-in-English.pdf>

<https://www.facebook.com/iceheartsry/>

<https://twitter.com/iceheartsry>

<https://www.instagram.com/iceheartsry/?hl=fi>

<https://www.linkedin.com/company/suomen-icehearts-ry/>

<https://www.icehearts.fi/miten-toimimme/>

<https://www.icehearts.fi/tyomme-tuloksia/>

<https://www.julkari.fi/handle/10024/147712>



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Let's swim beyond the handicaps

"Let's swim beyond handicaps" is an Erasmus+ project designed to promote social inclusion of youths with and without physical disabilities. All participants were equally involved in an inclusive swimming training program, at the end of which an international tournament was held.



ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED IN THE PROJECT

1. Para sports association of the city of Rijeka, Croatia
2. Kinitiko Ergastiri, Greece
3. Karasu Kaymakamlığı, Turkey
4. Bulgarian Sports Development Association, Bulgaria

PARTICIPANTS AND BENEFICIARIES

Adolescents with and without disabilities, aged 12 to 16, were selected for the project and participated in swimming lessons in cooperation with parasports clubs and schools. Each partner country selected 6 young participants with disabilities and 6 without disabilities, forming integrated pairs.



PROJECT GOALS

The main goal of the project was to foster social inclusion of adolescents with and without disabilities through swimming.

The project was designed to:

- decrease psychological symptoms (e.g., anxiety and depression);
- improve attention, concentration, memory function, problem-solving and decision making skills;
- strengthen peer relationships, communication and interpersonal skills, promote empathy;
- promote the adoption of healthier lifestyle habits, including regular sleep, proper and balanced diet, and the extinction of unhealthy behaviours (smoking, alcohol consumption and other addictive tendencies).



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TYPE OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Inclusive swimming training and tournaments are carried out. The movement of the water-lifting force makes it possible to perform exercises that cannot be done outside, which has a facilitating effect. Swimming makes young people with disabilities feel more independent and increases physical strength and endurance. Each partner country worked with 6 young participants with disabilities and 6 without disabilities, forming integrated pairs. Pair training developed by the project team (swimming coaches, physical therapist and a child psychologist) was conducted during 8 sessions of one hour each. After all sessions were held, local tournaments were organised and the top three pairs from every partner country were selected to participate in a final international tournament.



PHYSICAL ACTIVITY ORGANISATION

Duration of the physical activity program – 6 months (8 training session and international tournament)

Frequency of the sessions – 2 times per week

Duration of each session – 1 hour

Location of the sessions – Training sessions in all partner countries, international tournament of 2 days in Rijeka, Croatia

TEAM

The team included swimming coaches, physical therapists and child psychologists.

MONITORING & EVALUATION

Each training session was evaluated by the leading trainer and by participants. All the deliverables of the project were evaluated with a monitoring sheet and with qualitative and quantitative reports.

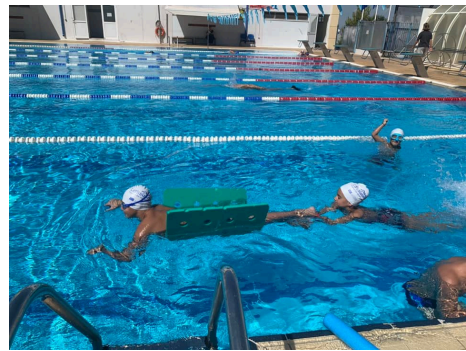


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PROJECT RESULTS

At the beginning of the project, it was observed that all the young people with disabilities were afraid of the activities and did not feel comfortable in the water; for some of them, it was their first time in the pool. After some time, the youths began to get to know each other and become familiar with water activities. By the end of the project, all the participants were enthusiastic about entering the pool and felt fully comfortable. As for the emotional improvements, the youths with disabilities established significant relationships with their peers and their communication skills increased. They also felt more free and confident having fun within the group. The young people without disabilities increased awareness about diversity and, thanks to the paired activities, were able to develop empathy, a sense of responsibility, cooperation and mutual understanding. Both were able to travel abroad, which was a great opportunity to socialise and make new friends.



EVENTS ORGANISED IN THE CONTEXT OF THE PROJECT

Inclusive swimming tournament.

FUNDING

Project funded by Erasmus+ Program of European Union.

LINK AND WEBSITE

<https://www.facebook.com/swimbeyondhandicaps/>



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Kacsakő Experience Programs

“Kacsakő Experience Programs” is designed to build an inclusive community where disadvantaged and privileged young people can come closer to each other, reducing prejudices, improving social-psychological skills, preventing radicalisation and overcoming conflicts usually rooted in miscommunication and misunderstanding. The main tools for project activities are non-formal, outdoor and experience-based learning methods. Team sports represent a great way to bring individuals together, regardless of their background.



ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED IN THE PROJECT

1. Kacsakő Association, Hungary

PARTICIPANTS AND BENEFICIARIES

The participants of the Kacsakő Experience Programs are children and adolescents aged between 10 and 16 years old coming from different social backgrounds, recruited from state care institutions, Roma settlements, (Rom settlements) and segregated schools, as well as from majority, non-Rom(a) and privileged backgrounds. About 85 young people have been involved in the project since 2019.



PROJECT GOALS

Kacsakő programs aim to create a safe and inclusive space for youth from all different social bubbles to come together and learn from and about each other. The main goal is to bring disadvantaged and privileged youth together to reduce the social distance between them and prejudices. Special focus is put on developing socio-emotional skills, especially empathy and positive-self-esteem with the aim of lowering prejudices and the risk of the negative effects of stereotype threat. To this purpose, summer camps and further recreational programmes are planned, using sports and arts as a tool to foster positive changes in group dynamics and in the development of psycho-social skills.



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Experiential pedagogy is applied throughout Kacsakó's programs: through fair play team sports activities, youth are encouraged to work together with their peers toward a common goal. In addition, by setting rules for games together, young people practise democratic decision-making, and by playing without a referee and only with the support of an adult facilitator, they are encouraged to stand up for themselves when they suffer injustice in respect of each other. An important part of the programs is that adults also participate in the activities, not only to talk about values such as fair play, but also to demonstrate them. In addition, workshops are held on a variety of topics, and different art forms are used to help youngsters in learning more about themselves and others in a creative form.



TYPE OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Fair play team sports (quidditch, ultimate frisbee, capture the flag, "Kacsakó rugby") and outdoor adventure (wall climbing, canoeing, etc.) are the core of Kacsakó's programs, and in some cases the rules are set by the youngsters themselves.



For example, Quidditch is played similarly to the game known in Harry Potter, with some modifications. The snitch is a person who has a ribbon on his or her back, and the seeker's goal is to catch it. The beaters throw a squishy ball and everyone who gets hit by it has to stop playing for a while and make a previously agreed movement, such as a cartwheel, a push, etc.

The programs involved a summer camp every year and monthly adventure-based programs. For participants over 13, a mentoring program is implemented; they also have the opportunity to participate in international youth exchanges each year.



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The summer camp is 6 days and its organisation begins in January, through a training and team building weekend during the spring and one before the camp. During summer camp, small groups of 4-6 youth from different backgrounds (sharing the same bedroom to foster opportunities for positive group dynamics) and 2 adult volunteers are formed.



A regular day in the summer camp is organised as follows: three morning sessions are delivered for groups of 10-15 youths. They attend one fair-play sport session and one creative session; the content of the creative session depends on the skills of the camp's volunteers, it could be improvisational theatre, juggling, break-dance, capoeira, arts and crafts, etc. In the 3rd session, the small groups get the project - due by the end of the week, done. Workshops are organised based on volunteers' skills, varying from recreational programs (boxing, juggling, dance, arts and crafts) to educational training with topics related to violence prevention, intercultural sensitivity, the Roma and LGBTQ+ community.



In the afternoon, fun and relaxing activities are organised, while in the evening there is always a group recreational activity (e.g., small group reflection circles) to support the development of camp identity. At the end of the week, a Fair Play Quidditch tournament is organised and in the afternoon the groups present their projects.



Monthly adventure-based programs, called Kacsakő Klub, are organised on weekends to ensure the participation of socially disadvantaged youth living in rural areas. Every Klub program is implemented on one main activity such as wall-climbing, canoeing, dancing, etc. The program begins with warm-up games aimed at facilitating the youth's first familiarity and mentally preparing them for the weekend's activities. At the end of the program a follow up meeting is organised.



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TEAM

The team includes young adult volunteers (20-40 years old) who mentor the youth during the programs. In addition, psychologists support the mental well-being of youth and volunteers.

MONITORING & EVALUATION

To monitor the progress of the projects following quali-quantitative tools were administered to the participants at the beginning and at the end of the programs:

- A questionnaire with demographic data;
- Open-questions about expectations and experiences;
- A questionnaire measuring attitudes towards different ethnic groups with Osgood-type semantic differential and an adapted version of the Bogardus scale;
- A questionnaire measuring self-esteem with a Rosenberg-type questionnaire;
- A sociometric questionnaire.

The project is currently monitored in the framework of doctoral studies research.

PROJECT RESULTS

Kacsakő Programs have been recognised as good practices in several European Networks and projects (Capoeira Connects Europe, Roma Inclusion through Sports in Europe, Radicalisation Awareness Network, Youth Anti-Radicalisation through Sports in Europe) and in 2022 the project was honoured as one of the top 3 projects in the "Inclusion and Diversity" category by the Salto Awards.



The main result of the Kacsakő Programs is a profound change in the attitudes of young participants who, by the end of the camps, had established meaningful bonds and gained a sense of belonging. The proposed activities enabled them to expand their social network, break down prejudices against those who are more disadvantaged and encourage a sense of equality



and justice against any kind of discrimination or racism. The youths collected positive memories, increased their self-esteem, created friendships, improved their



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relationship with adults, and learned how to handle conflicts and cooperate respecting others.

EVENTS ORGANISED IN THE CONTEXT OF THE PROJECT

2019-2023 - Kacsakő Experience Camp (for children aged 10-16)

2019-2023 - Volunteer program for young professionals

2021-2023 - Kacsakő Klub (for children aged 10-16)

2021-2023 - Kacsakő Next (for youngsters aged 13+)

FUNDING

The project was funded by the Solidarity Project program for three consecutive years. Since 2022 Kacsakő has become part of an international network called Generation Europe The Academy and has been able to organise international youth exchanges using Erasmus+ funds. Since all activities are offered free of charge to young people, the association also organises crowd-funding campaigns and donation collections.

LINK AND WEBSITE

<https://en.kacsakoegyesulet.hu/>

<https://www.facebook.com/kacsakoegyesulet>



#SMILE International Camp

The #SMILE International Camp is realised within the framework of the SMILE initiative – Sport, Motivation, Inclusion, Leadership, Engagement – co-funded by the Erasmus+ programme of the European Union. The initiative aims to explore the link between sports and inclusion in an innovative way, promoting international participation in sports activities of people with intellectual disabilities.



ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED IN THE PROJECT

1. Para sports association of the city of Rijeka, Croatia
2. Bulgarian Sports Development Association, Bulgaria

PARTICIPANTS AND BENEFICIARIES

Sixty athletes with intellectual disabilities (aged between 13 and 40 years) from Croatia and Bulgaria took part in the international SMILE camp.



PROJECT GOALS

The main goal of the camp was to foster social inclusion of individuals with intellectual disabilities through sports activities and a positive mental health environment.

The initiative was designed to:

- enhance overall psychological well-being and promote a sense of accomplishment and self-confidence among participants;
- improve cognitive and executive functions (attention, concentration, memory, decision-making and problem-solving) through participation in different sports;
- strengthen peer relationships, communication and interpersonal skills, promote empathy;
- promote the adoption of healthier lifestyle habits, including regular sleep, proper and balanced diet, and the extinction of unhealthy behaviours (smoking, alcohol consumption and other addictive tendencies);
- improve physical fitness and motor skills (coordination, flexibility, and overall physical well-being) through active participation in athletics, swimming, and other sports.



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TYPE OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

The SMILE International camp was organised for athletes with intellectual disabilities from Croatia and Bulgaria. The program included training sessions in athletics, swimming, basketball and various sports games over 3 days.

Beside the International camp, participants had 10 training sessions to be maximally prepared for the international event.



PHYSICAL ACTIVITY ORGANISATION

Duration of the physical activity program – 3 days

Location of the sessions – Athletic hall Kantrida, Pools Kantrida, Youth Hall Rijeka, Croatia



TEAM

The team included a multidisciplinary team qualified to involve individuals with intellectual disabilities in sporting activities and it was composed by trainers of different sports, sports psychologists, kinesiologists, pedagogues, physical education teachers, members of Croatian paralympic committee board.

MONITORING & EVALUATION

The results were monitored through periodic Erasmus project monitoring sheets; this evaluation was carried out by the project partners reporting whether the expected results were achieved on time, in quality and quantity. In addition, the young participants provided feedback on their experience during the International camp.

PROJECT RESULTS

The project has had a profound impact on mental health, as evidenced by both subjective feedback from participants and insights gathered from interviews with practitioners closely involved in the initiative. Participants reported a significant improvement in their overall well-being, i.e. increased levels of self-esteem, greater self-awareness and sense of agency. The international camp catalysed positive self-reflection, fostering a more resilient and optimistic mindset among the youth.



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Trainers and parents observed a reduction in stress levels among participants, indicating that the activities during the camp played a crucial role in alleviating youths' common stressors which, in turn, contributed to a more relaxed and positive state of mind. Through targeted activities, participants gained valuable skills to manage stress, anxiety and other mental health triggers, thereby improving their ability to cope with the complexities of daily life. Interviews with practitioners highlighted the lasting impact on the youths' mental resilience. The skills and insights gained during the project have continued to manifest positively in their lives, indicating that the benefits have extended beyond the duration of the camp. The International camp served as a platform for the creation of strong social support networks: participants not only made new connections but also strengthened existing relationships. These networks played a key role in promoting mental health by providing a sense of belonging and a support system during and after the project.



In summary, the project demonstrated a holistic approach to fostering positive mental health outcomes among young participants.

FUNDING

Project funded by Erasmus+ Program of European Union.

LINK AND WEBSITE

<https://inclusivesport.org/2022/06/08/hello-world/>

<https://inclusivesport.org/2023/04/21/international-camp-smile-croatia-2023/>



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kreuz&quer - criss cross

Kreuz&quer was created with the purpose of changing people's daily habits by promoting more sustainable and healthy mobility. *Kreuz&quer* encourages individuals to engage in physical activity and explore their neighbourhoods in an inclusive, interactive and fun way. This approach turns physical activity into a fun game, making it especially attractive to children and adolescents and involving people of all ages, including families and community stakeholders. The goal of the project is to improve community well-being by making the public environment an accessible and shared space for physical activity. Parents are encouraged to have confidence in the ability of young people to move actively within the city without the need for motorised vehicles.



PROJECT COORDINATORS

1. Mobility Department of the City of Munich, Capital of the Free State of Bavaria, Germany
2. General Administration of the Free State of Bavaria, Germany

PARTICIPANTS AND BENEFICIARIES

The project is designed for all members of the community, however, the activity is particularly suitable for young people.

PROJECT GOALS

The main goals of this project are to improve community well-being by making the public environment an accessible and shared space for physical activity, as well as to educate through exercise about sustainable and healthy mobility.

The initiative was designed to:

- reduce stress and anxiety, regularly practising physical activity;
- boost self-esteem by increasing a sense of accomplishment and confidence in one's own active mobility abilities;
- improve cognitive and executive functions (attention, concentration, memory, and problem-solving) through involvement in the game;
- promote social interaction and inclusion, providing the opportunity to find a supportive network and a sense of belonging;
- encourage a transition to a more active lifestyle and sustainable mobility;



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- improve physical health and reduce an individual's carbon footprint.

TYPE OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

The *kreuz&quer* game consists of actively moving as many kilometres as possible in the shortest time. Only active walking, bicycling, skating or other ways that require muscle work are allowed. Each player receives his or her own game card to be scanned into the *kreuz&quer* boxes located in different parts of the neighbourhood. The boxes have different colours, some can be found more easily, and others are rather hidden. Players get points by scanning their game card through these boxes at least 2 times in an hour. Players can also form teams and collect points by covering kilometres together. There is a leaderboard that shows which team has achieved the most kilometres.



PHYSICAL ACTIVITY ORGANISATION

- Duration of the physical activity program – six weeks per neighbourhood
- Frequency of the sessions – approximately four times per day (the boxes are activated for 19 hours per day; the ranking system is refreshed every four hours)
- Duration of each session – 4 hours
- Location of the sessions – different neighbourhoods are covered within Munich (September 20 until November 5, 2023: Berg am Laim; March 6 until April 17, 2024: Sendling-Westpark)

TEAM

Local partners help bring the project forward and vary by neighbourhood. City of Munich employees had the role of project development and implementation, turning physical activity into a game. The required expertise involve the use of findings from mobility science, sports, psychology, pedagogy and education, as well as geography, sustainable development and information technology.

MONITORING & EVALUATION

The project's progress is being monitored through a survey conducted by the Technical University of Munich. The survey aims to assess whether physical activity in the





neighbourhood is increased through the initiative. The study was reviewed and approved by the Ethics Committee of the Technical University of Munich.

PROJECT RESULTS

Although the results of the survey are not yet available, positive effects on physical and mental health are expected. Project leaders emphasise that "by focusing on outdoor physical activity, the project definitely has an effect on the physical and mental health of the players."

Kreuz&quer was very well received by the target group. An estimated 1,500 children and adolescents participated in the six-week sessions in Berg am Laim. Overall, participation has been between 900 and 2,000 in each neighbourhood. The City of Munich Mobility Department is very satisfied with the level of participation.

The positive feedback (online posts) reported by the young participants provides preliminary evidence on the positive mental health effects of the activity.

EVENTS ORGANISED IN THE CONTEXT OF THE PROJECT

Each game is accompanied by events offered by different collaborators from the respective local city library as well as *Lesefüchse* e.V. ("reading foxes", a not-for-profit club). Participation is always free of charge and no registration is required.

FUNDING

The project was funded by the City of Munich.

LINK AND WEBSITE

<https://www.sg.tum.de/sportdidaktik/forschung/sinn-i/evaluation-kreuz-quer/>

<https://www.sg.tum.de/sportdidaktik/aktuelles/news-single-view/article/kreuz-quer-s-tartet-in-giesing/>

<https://muenchenunterwegs.de/angebote/lauf-und-radspiel-kreuz-quer>

<https://www.kreuzundquer.de/de/startseite>



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Tele-exercise for youth

Tele-exercise for youth is part of a larger project called TELEexe4ALL that offers, through an open-source platform, supervised and interactive group exercise sessions (synchronous or asynchronous). The tele-exercise modules are designed for general and special populations (athletes with and without disabilities, elderly, cancer and diabetic patients). Among the available modules, one was developed to encourage youth participation in physical activity.



ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED IN THE PROJECT

1. Para Sports Association Of The City Of Rijeka, Croatia
2. University e-Campus, Italy
3. Associazione Progetto Giovani, Italy
4. Universidade de Trás-os-Montes e Alto Douro, Portugal
5. Latvijas Sporta federāciju padome, Latvia

PARTICIPANTS AND BENEFICIARIES

The project includes several modules targeting specific populations such as youth, elderly, athletes, people with disabilities, cancer patients and diabetics from Italy, Croatia, Portugal and Latvia. In this presentation we will focus on youth.

PROJECT GOALS

The main goal of the project is encouraging participation in sport and physical activity. In addition, the tele-exercise for youth program aims to:

- improve mental resilience (reduce anxiety, depression and foster a positive self-image, self-esteem, and a sense of accomplishment) and coping mechanisms to relieve stress through regular exercise;
- improve memory, attention and concentration, positively impacting cognitive development, academic performance and daily tasks;
- facilitate the development of executive functions, helping youth with problem-solving, decision-making, and goal-setting;
- encourage youth to establish positive relationships with peers, coaches and parents, fostering a sense of community and social support;
- encourage youth to establish and maintain healthy sleep habits, promoting optimal physical and mental health;



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- increase nutritional awareness to promote better eating habits;
- increase cardiovascular fitness, strengthen muscle tone and motor skills (coordination, balance, and agility).

TYPE OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

The youth program consists of aerobic, resistance, balance, and flexibility exercises. Moderate-intensity aerobic exercise should be done for at least 225-300 minutes per week while vigorous-intensity aerobic exercise should be done for at least 125-150 minutes per week. Resistance exercise should be done at least twice a week with activities that strengthen all muscle groups. Balance and flexibility include multi-component physical activities that emphasise functional balance and flexibility.

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY ORGANIZATION

Duration of the physical activity program –4 cycles for 8 weeks

Frequency of the sessions – approximately 3 times per week

Duration of each session – 1 hour

Location of the sessions – TELEexe4ALL online platform

TEAM

The team included trainers and sports psychologists. One part of the trainers recorded the sessions of exercises, the other part was supportive during the online training. Sports psychologists were in charge of collecting and analysing the tests collected at the beginning and end of each tele-training session.

MONITORING & EVALUATION

Through the platform, participants completed several tests at the beginning and end of the workout to monitor progress over time. The tests included a psychological questionnaire, a physical activity questionnaire, and physiological tests that assessed the impact of exercises on psychological state and physical health.

PROJECT RESULTS

For young people, exercise had a positive impact on reducing stress and anxiety, improving mood, increasing self-esteem, improving sleep, improving concentration and cognitive function, managing aggression, and acquiring life skills.

EVENTS ORGANISED IN THE CONTEXT OF THE PROJECT

As part of the TELEexe4ALL project, several international events were organised for key stakeholders.





FUNDING

Project funded by Erasmus+ Program of European Union.

LINK AND WEBSITE

<https://www.teleexe4all.com/>

<https://progettogiovani.it/teleexe4all-platform.html>

<https://www.facebook.com/TELEexe4ALL>

<https://www.instagram.com/teleexe4all>

<https://www.linkedin.com/company/teleexe4all>



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Mieli ja liike – Mind and Movement

The *Mieli ja liike* (Mind and Movement) project helps youths with multiple challenges through a physical activity program. The project promotes the well-being of young people between the ages of 16 and 29 through individual and group activities that embrace a holistic and individual-oriented approach to functional capacity. The project is implemented in local associations in Helsinki, Oulu, Tampere and Turku, with the aim of providing young people with positive experiences of physical exercise and social interactions, in addition to increasing their mental well-being.

ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED IN THE PROJECT

1. YMCA, Helsinki, Finland
2. Local Departments in Turku, Tampere and Oulu, Finland

PARTICIPANTS AND BENEFICIARIES

The project is designed for marginalised or at-risk of marginalisation youth (16–29 years old) who have difficulties staying in the school or working world.

PROJECT GOALS

The main goal of the project was to promote the well-being of vulnerable youths and the activities were designed to:

- improve mental health (reduce anxiety, stress, depression and fear of social situations);
- support the educational and working reintegration of young people;
- increase the amount of daily movement and exercise.

TYPE OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

The physical activity program is established in agreement with the youth by identifying an individualised plan that can vary for each participant. The project offers a choice of different types of sports, private physical activities, small groups, and through digital channels. Physical activities can have different levels of intensity adapting to the capabilities and needs of individual participants.



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PHYSICAL ACTIVITY ORGANISATION

Duration of the physical activity program – arranged with the participant (their contents and durations are individually tailored on the participants will and interest)

Frequency of the sessions – arranged with the participant

Duration of each session – arranged with the participant

Location of the sessions – arranged with the participant

TEAM

The team consists of a coordinator, a project planner and professionals pertaining to social and youth services, such as youth workers, social work graduates and psychiatric nurses. Each local association has teams of 2-4 professionals working part-time on the project. In total, there are about 12 team members.

YMCA has formed "sports detectives" who work with participants by doing physical activity together, but also by supporting them with daily activity. The detectives engage with participants on many topics, such as the rhythm of daily life, eating habits, and sleep quality.

MONITORING & EVALUATION

Participants' progress is mapped with initial, mid-term and final assessments that monitor levels of movement, participation in social situations and overall change in daily life. In addition, a participation metre was included to measure feelings of belonging, meaning of what is being done, and possibilities for action.

PROJECT RESULTS

The project is running for the first year, so there are no long-term results yet, but for those who already completed their final assessments, an increase in the amount of exercise and leaving home has been observed. Participants reported improvements in mood and mental well-being, essential for reintegration into society: they were able to return to study, encouraged to participate in other activities and able to be employed in military service.

FUNDING

Project funded by STEA.

LINK AND WEBSITE

<https://ymca.fi/mieli-ja-liike-hanke/>



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Self-review Framework

In the HOORAY Compendium, aligned with the principles above-outlined and motivated from shared best practices, we have created a comprehensive self-review framework. This framework can serve as a valuable tool for the evaluation of planned activities, helping in the identification of fundamental elements which are essential for ensuring the mental well-being of the target group. The self-review framework consists of a set of thoughtfully crafted questions intended to be systematically addressed prior to the implementation of any planned activity.

Listed below are the specified questions designed to assist you in assessing the extent to which the activities you do are in line with the basic elements of good practice on physical activity and youth mental health. The goal of the self-review process is to make sure that you foster a proactive approach to promoting the mental health benefits of the undertaken activities.

- Does your physical activity plan follow a structured programme tailored to the needs of adolescents? [yes/no]
- Is the physical activity programme carried out by a multidisciplinary team qualified to care for adolescents' physical health? [yes/no]
- Is the physical activity programme carried out by a multidisciplinary team qualified to care for adolescents' mental health? [yes/no]
- Is regular monitoring of the outcomes of the physical activity programme carried out, assessing both positive and negative effects? [yes/no]
- Have the young athletes established friendships and are they supportive of each other? [yes/no]
- Do you consider that, for the young athletes in your team, the physical activity programme is a source of (please check the boxes you consider appropriate):
 - 1) Fun
 - 2) Joy
 - 3) Excitement
 - 4) Pride
 - 5) Feeling of strength and resourcefulness



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- 6) Calmness
- 7) Contentment
- 8) Stress relief
- 9) Something meaningful one can do for oneself
- 10) Personal accomplishment

- As a coach, you (please check the boxes you consider appropriate):
 - 1) Foster the creation of a supportive and pressure-free environment
 - 2) Promote social ties and the inclusion of all team members
 - 3) Spend extra time and effort to dialogue with young athletes
 - 4) Commit to achieve the goals of the young athletes
 - 5) Teach the values of healthy competition

- Do you consider that parents respect the autonomy of young athletes and are involved in supporting young athletes? [yes/no]

- Any other notes you would like to leave to yourself:

Notes. Fill out the Self-review Framework regularly to monitor the progression of your activities.



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Learn more about the HOORAY project: www.engsoyouth.eu/hooray

Photos: personal archives of the organisations presented.

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PROJECT:

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Physical Activity - HOORAY**

PARTNERS:



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