



MANUAL

"Training and empowering youth workers and educators to raise awareness in civil society on disability inclusion"

TITLE:

Manual "Training and Empowering Youth Workers and Educators to Raise Civil Society Awareness on Disability Inclusion"

PROJECT:

Capacity building of youth workers for the inclusion of young people with disabilities through quality youth sports activities, outdoor and leisure programmes

Project partners are:

- Spin / Okret (BA)
- AMUSE (RS)
- BtB (XK)
- Don Giovanni Zanandrea Onlus Foundation (IT)

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ABOUT THE PROJECT

Project title: "Capacity building in youth work for the inclusion of young people with disabilities through quality sports, outdoor and recreational activity programmes"

Project Summary:

This project was created to respond to the sporting, social and recreational needs of young people with disabilities.

Several studies show that young people with disabilities are among the most marginalized and poor within the world's youth population and are more likely to face severe social, economic, and civic disparities than their peers without disabilities, even in developed countries.

When it comes to sport, for people with disabilities or chronic conditions, regular participation in physical activity is not always accessible, and participation rates are up to three times lower than those of people without disabilities. These people, for example, may find it difficult to find a suitable sports or physical activity program in their immediate vicinity, mainly due to the lack of specific staff training.

On the social side, partner organisations noted a lack of programmes tailored to the needs and interests of young people with disabilities. This scarcity limits their opportunities for participation, as they often do not find activities that align with their preferences and abilities. Even when programmes are available, they often do not adequately address the diverse needs of young people with disabilities, including people with different types and degrees of disability.

These identified needs will be addressed through capacity-building initiatives, with the ultimate goal of creating an inclusive and empowering environment for young people with disabilities, through sports, outdoor and leisure activities.

Project objective:

The general objective of the project is to develop the capacities of organisations and professionals working in the field of youth work for the inclusion of young people with disabilities through quality sports, outdoor and recreational activity programmes.

Our role as youth workers and youth organisations must be to promote blended and inclusive youth work, so that activities with young people with disabilities aim to empower and fully include them in social, economic and decision-making life.

Specific objectives of the project:

The specific objectives of the project are:

1. To strengthen the capacities of youth work organisations and youth workers (in all our countries, especially in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo) on how to raise awareness among young people and youth workers about the inclusion of young people with disabilities (YWD) through quality sports, outdoor and recreational activities within youth work programmes.
2. To strengthen the competences of youth work organisations in adapting spaces and methods in a qualitative way for sporting, outdoor and recreational activities aimed at mixed groups of young people, both with and without disabilities.
3. To strengthen the skills of youth work coordinators for active participation, through quality management of spaces intended for sports, outdoor and recreational activities, with mixed groups of young people, both with and without disabilities.

The project activities are:

Within WP1 - Project Management:

- T1.1 – Preparatory activities and procedures for project execution and planning
- T1.2 – Online Kick-Off Meeting
- T1.3 – Online mid-term evaluation meeting
- T1.4 – Online Final Evaluation Meeting

Within WP2 - Raising awareness of mainstream youth and youth workers for the inclusion of young people with disabilities:

- T2.1 – Development of a handbook for youth workers for the organisation of workshops aimed at changing civil society perceptions of persons with disabilities (PWD)
- T2.2 – Development and testing of an online course to organize advocacy activities to change civil society's perception of PWDs
- T2.3 – Creation and publication of 10 TikTok videos to promote inclusion, made by people with and without disabilities
- T2.4 – Local training visits

Within WP3 - Toolkit and online course

- T3.1 – Toolkit with recommendations for youth workers/coordinators
- T3.2 – Online course for coordinators and leaders of local youth organisations
- T3.3 – Collection of good practices and interviews

Within WP4 - Curriculum Development and Implementation of Local Training Courses

- T4.1 – Curriculum for the capacity building of youth organizations for the empowerment of PWDs in the management of inclusive sports spaces
- T4.2 – Local training courses to test the curriculum

Within WP5 - Project visibility and dissemination

- T5.1 – Development of the project dissemination plan and daily implementation
- T5.2 – Project website
- T5.3 – 6 online campaigns
- T5.4 – Local Final Conferences

Project partners:

Fondazione Don Giovanni Zanandrea (IT) was established in 1918 and is deeply rooted in the history of the town of Cento. Over more than a century, it has evolved from its original role as an orphanage into a dynamic centre of social innovation, committed to inclusion, autonomy and the dignity of people in vulnerable situations. Today, the Foundation supports people with disabilities, fragile young adults and families facing hardship through high-quality educational, rehabilitative and social services. Its work goes beyond traditional assistance: the goal is to build personalised life paths that strengthen skills, foster independence and promote active participation in the community. At the core of the Foundation's approach is the centrality of the person. Every individual is valued for their abilities, aspirations and potential, and is supported in expressing themselves and growing in a safe, welcoming environment. People are encouraged to develop practical life skills, build meaningful relationships and rediscover their role as active contributors to society. The Foundation's activities focus on three main areas. **Independent living**, through accessible housing solutions supported by trained professionals and assistive technologies; **work inclusion**, by offering training opportunities, structured routines and collaborations with local businesses; and **socialisation**, through cultural, artistic, sporting and recreational activities that foster authentic relationships and a sense of belonging.

SPIN / Okret (BA) is a non-profit youth organisation based in Mostar, Bosnia and Herzegovina, officially registered in 2018 after several years of work as an informal youth initiative. The organisation works to promote inclusive youth work, healthy lifestyles and equal opportunities for young people to participate in learning, sport and community life. SPIN primarily works with young people facing fewer opportunities, including those outside the formal education system, young people from remote areas, and youth with limited access to educational and recreational activities. Through non-formal education and sport-based methodologies, the organisation creates accessible learning environments that support personal

development, social inclusion and active participation. The organisation has extensive experience within the Erasmus+ Programme, particularly in capacity-building projects in youth work and vocational education and training. Its activities focus on inclusion, mental health, violence prevention, employability and entrepreneurship, with a strong emphasis on developing practical, inclusive methodologies for diverse target groups. Within this project, SPIN contributes its expertise in inclusive youth work, training development and community-based activities, supporting the creation and testing of inclusive approaches that promote the participation and empowerment of young people with disabilities through sport, outdoor and leisure activities.

AMUSE (RS) is a non-profit youth organisation based in Serbia that works to promote healthy lifestyles, social inclusion and youth empowerment. The organisation focuses on strengthening the skills, well-being and active participation of young people, with particular attention to those facing fewer opportunities and marginalisation. AMUSE implements a range of activities including non-formal education programmes, research on accessibility and inclusion, awareness-raising initiatives, and international cooperation. Its project work addresses key topics such as mental health, prevention of youth radicalisation, inclusive leisure and outdoor activities, and empowerment of youth workers to support diverse young people. Through its involvement in Erasmus+ and other partnerships, AMUSE brings experience in designing and delivering inclusive training, fostering social inclusion practices, and developing methodologies that enhance participation and well-being among young people with disabilities and other under-represented groups.

Building the Balkans (XK) is a non-profit youth organisation founded by a group of young leaders in Mitrovica, Kosovo, with the aim of promoting regional cooperation, youth empowerment and intercultural dialogue across the Western Balkans. The organisation develops initiatives that bring young people together to learn, collaborate and build shared knowledge, unity and mutual respect across ethnic and national boundaries. Building the Balkans implements non-formal education activities, youth exchanges, workshops and capacity-building sessions that strengthen digital and professional skills, inclusion and active citizenship among young people. Its work focuses on empowering youth from diverse backgrounds to engage in meaningful learning, innovation and community action. Through participation in Erasmus+ and other international partnerships, the organisation contributes experience in cross-border cooperation, inclusive youth work and the design of youth-led activities that foster collaboration, resilience and regional understanding.

BACKGROUND OF THE MANUAL

The Manual *"Empowering youth workers and educators to raise the awareness of civil society on disability inclusion"* has been developed in response to the growing need for inclusive practices in youth work and education. The overarching theme is the social inclusion of young people with disabilities (YWDs), approached through awareness-raising, capacity building, and active community engagement.

Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of the manual is to equip youth workers and educators with the knowledge, competences, and tools necessary to foster disability inclusion in their communities. Its main objectives are:

- To raise awareness on disability as a dimension of human diversity.
- To promote inclusive mindsets that shift the narrative from "people in need" to "people who contribute."
- To provide practical methods and examples for implementing inclusive activities with and for YWDs.
- To support youth workers in planning, executing, and evaluating inclusive initiatives that promote civil society engagement.

Target Users and Multipliers

The primary users of this manual are youth workers, educators, trainers, and facilitators working at the grassroots level, often within local associations, schools, or informal educational settings. Many of them may have little to no previous experience in working with persons with disabilities.

The manual is also designed for multipliers – professionals and educators who will further disseminate its contents by training others, implementing projects, and raising awareness at a broader community level.

Professional Development Contribution

By engaging with the manual, users will strengthen their professional profile through:

- Enhanced knowledge on inclusive pedagogical approaches.
- Improved facilitation and planning skills for inclusive activities.
- Increased awareness of the emotional, social, and community impact of inclusion work.
- A broadened perspective on diversity, equity, and active citizenship.

The manual supports the development of key youth work competences, such as empathy, critical thinking, communication, and the ability to engage diverse groups.

Structure of the Manual

The manual is divided into three main parts:

1. Theoretical Section

This section introduces fundamental concepts and frameworks, including:

- Disability awareness and narrative change: from "needing help" to "making contributions."
- Diversity and inclusion as social enrichment.
- Pedagogical and educational theories (e.g. Canevaro, Errani) supporting inclusive education.
- Inclusion as a mean to enhance emotional intelligence.
- Practical planning of inclusive initiatives, understanding impact and sustainability.

2. Practical Section

A collection of detailed case studies and good practices that demonstrate successful disability inclusion initiatives, such as:

- *Baskin* (inclusive sport)
- *Cosquillas Theatre Methodology*
- *La Banda Rulli Frulli* (inclusive music group)
- Educational labs where YWDs act as experts in schools
- Community volunteering and local event participation
- Advocacy and awareness initiatives like *Le Passeggiate di Agata*

Each example includes a description, key elements, photos, and references to provide replicable models.

3. Resources and Bibliography

A curated list of references, articles, and tools to support further learning and development.

*“Measuring ourselves against diversity involves each of us **in the foundation of our being**, in prejudices, in deep fears, in the barriers we have built to protect ourselves. Looking at the other without welcoming their richness and light, lays bare the disability of the environment, the sickness of society, the cultural, political, economic obstacles to solidarity and the ecology of coexistence.”*

[Andrea Canevaro]

PART 1. THEORETICAL PART

1. Changing the outlook of social workers and civil society on persons with disabilities (PWDs): from 'people in need' to 'people with resources and talents' or simply 'people'. Some basic theoretical elements.

Talking about disability is never neutral. The words we use, the images we evoke, the gazes we adopt are the result of deeply rooted cultural and social representations. Often, without realizing it, we perpetuate stereotypes that reduce people with disabilities to a single dimension of their identity: that of "lack", "fragility", "inability". This is even more evident when it comes to young people with disabilities, who on the one hand bring with them the energy, aspirations and needs typical of their age, but on the other hand often find themselves living in contexts that do not recognize or value these characteristics.

First of all, people

An important first step in changing perspective is to start with **language**. The expressions we use, such as young people with disabilities or people with disabilities, are not simply labels but convey visions of the world. Talking about "people with disabilities" means first **recognising the person**, and not their condition. It is a fundamental step, which helps us to recognise dignity, complexity and humanity. Even better, it would be to start simply saying people, remembering that disability is one of the many characteristics that can be part of a person's identity, but it does not define it entirely.

Young people, with or without disabilities, have interests, passions, desires, dreams, abilities, and vulnerabilities. They need to train, to have experiences, to explore the world, to be in a group, and to confront each other. They need spaces, times and opportunities to build their identity, try, make mistakes, and choose. All this is an integral part of the growth process and must be recognised and supported, also (and especially) in the case of young people with disabilities.

And it is here that a great challenge emerges for social workers: to respond adequately to the recreational, sporting, educational and cultural needs of young people with disabilities. A challenge that is far from simple, because the societies in which we live are still deeply *disabling*. It is not people who have a problem; it is the context (physical, social, cultural) that often does not allow them to participate fully in collective life.

There is not just one disability and each one is as different as people are!

To address this challenge, we must first recognise that **there is not just one disability**. Disabilities are many, different from each other, and often occur together, with different levels of intensity and manifestation. General categories (motor, sensory, cognitive disability) can help us orient ourselves, but they are not enough to describe reality. Every person is unique, and every experience of disability is different. **The real central point is that the same condition can be more or less limiting depending on the context in which one lives.**

Think, for example, of a person who moves around in a wheelchair: if the environment is accessible, if they can move freely, if they have adequate means of transport, their autonomy is very high. If, on the other hand, they are in an environment full of architectural barriers, they become dependent on others. The same goes for those with a sensory or cognitive disability: it is the communication, cultural, and organisational barriers that create the disability. **This is why today we are talking about a social model of disability, which focuses not on the individual "deficit" (if we want to call it that to be clear) but on the way in which society responds (or does not respond) to the needs of all people.**

Universal rights as a starting point

What has been said so far inevitably leads us to talk about rights. We cannot think of inclusion as a concession or a kindness: it is a right. People with disabilities, like everyone else, have the right to participate fully in social, cultural, educational and working life. They have the right to be heard, the right to choose, to express themselves. The *UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, adopted in 2006*, offers us a clear and shared framework at the international level: it promotes respect for dignity, individual autonomy and full participation.

Recognising these rights means overcoming a welfare logic, which sees the person with disabilities as an 'object of care' or passive recipient of services, and instead adopting an **inclusive and participatory logic**. Designing educational, cultural and sporting activities that are accessible and meaningful for everyone, or at least for as many people as possible, is not an "extra" action; it is not a luxury: it is an integral part of the role of social workers.

In conclusion, going beyond stereotypes means first looking at people with disabilities as active subjects, bearers of desires, needs and skills. It means recognising that inclusion is not just a matter of access, but of participation. And it means taking responsibility, as professionals and as citizens, to contribute to building fairer, more open, ultimately more human contexts.

2. The concepts of diversity and inclusion as fundamentals in every area: reformulating the narratives around young people with disabilities thanks to cinema and the world of communication

In accompanying young people with disabilities in sports, cultural and artistic activities, it is therefore necessary to look at the **enhancement of individual diversities** with attention not only to disability but also preferences, talents, and different experiences, thus recognising **differences as a value and ontological element constitutive of the human** being (De Anna, Gaspari and Mura, 2015). The direction we suggest is to take an anthropological-cultural perspective (Remotti, 2011) that allows us to recognise human diversity as a positive element. From this point of view, it would be appropriate to develop a reflection linked to the importance of considering identity as a plural and evolving entity.

The central issue, despite the changes taking place, always and only concerns a single dimension: the possibility of living together in respect and recognition of differences within a common background. As pointed out by some studies, children who have experience of contact in groups where there are others with disabilities, express a positive opinion and social representation of the latter.

From here, we clarify the concept of Inclusion, which, according to the point of view of Special Pedagogy, needs to be connected with those of diversity, difference and equity. Inclusion is plurality and respect for differences. It is a path that aims to find strategies and actions to reduce disparities and promote equal opportunities.

Help, an inspiration to build facilitation paths to carry out sports and recreational activities for those who have not worked specifically in this field can come from **cinema and literature**: films and novels that tell stories about people and young people with disabilities, but only some films! In fact, even the narratives about disabled people reflect culture and society and are often the result of prejudices and stereotypes so sedimented that they do nothing but reproduce images and ideas that experts on the subject harshly criticise. For example, Jacopo Melio, journalist, activist, writer and councillor of the Tuscany Region, offers us this article about films. We include it in its almost complete version because it is very clear and shows recent titles that can be found on the platforms and/or on YouTube.

*'After yet another post on social media that spoke with some enthusiasm of "Lawyer Woo", one of the latest South Korean series to land on Netflix, I decided to give in and shoot all the episodes in just two days. Not without pain. Yes, because those who know me well also know of my scepticism and extreme criticism (not biased!) towards films and TV series that talk about disability and, in the case mentioned above, neurodivergence. It depends on two reasons: the first is **the***

excessive 'romanticisation' of disability, which not only makes it very distant from reality but often ends up 'caricaturing' it, staging real 'caricatures'; the second concerns the fact that **disabled characters are rarely played by people with disabilities** (and here, however, a very broad debate opens on the right to self-representation and on the fact that no one can/should replace a member of a minority/community if he or she is not part of it, but we will talk about this another time with the attention it deserves).

Jacopo Melio identifies three types of films and TV series among those that talk about disability:

1) those that talk about it in a totally wrong way (with pity, compassion, "inspiration porn" or excessive "romanticisation") and have a bad plot, or are technically badly made;

2) those that talk about it in the wrong way on a conceptual level but have a pleasant, funny and at times interesting plot (which still represent a good entertainment product, enjoyable so as not to make the average viewer think that what they are watching is not in line with what is claimed by the community of people with disabilities);

3) finally, those really done well, which speak correctly about disability and have a story that works, managing to involve anyone.

*In the first case, says Melio, I include films such as **Me before you**, where disability is shown in a super privileged context and therefore the only real difficulty present is the protagonist's non-acceptance of his condition; **Runto to you** and *Detective by chance*, in which disability is told in a frivolous and light way, understood as superficial, like the irony that one tries to do to "play down" but which works little (perhaps, for those who love the level of cine-panettone).*

*In the second case, the list becomes much longer since, in these films and series, they try to wink at the belly of the spectators who often do not have the tools to be critical on the subject: the famous **Forrest Gump, Wonder, Almost Friends, A Beautiful Mind and Rain Man**, the lesser-known film **The Bélier Family**, and then the **Atypical and Special series**. Although each of these titles tends to lapse into some clichés and stereotypes, excessively romanticizing the stories told, they are so well done (either because they excite, or because they know how to entertain but also reflect, not in a trivial way) that they have a huge grip on the general public and if this can serve to bring them closer and familiarize them with disability, even if it is not the "real" one, I am willing (slightly, eh!) not to demonize this type of work.*

*Finally, for the third case, we suggest: the **series Sex Education** (the disabled character is really, and I emphasise fortunately!), but also the films **My Left Foot, Your Every Breath, The Theory of Everything, The Session** and the documentary*

(excellent for getting a culture about the first activist movements of the disability **community Crip Camp**. And little else.

Except for the Sex education series, in fact, these are stories that all existed, not excessively fictionalised, which convey a realistic idea of disability, without sweetening it and without making the protagonists heroes making everything easy when, life is not at all easy if you experience certain difficulties.

Let's be clear, I'm not saying that only boring things where you cry, get depressed or scared are fine. But to make believe that the routine of a disabled person is almost all roses and flowers to the point of making him think directly about euthanasia just because he can no longer afford some luxury of the many still possessed, or that the only real problem is the search for a home assistant and that, once found, everything goes rather smoothly in his own barrier-free villa where he can live like a King (I think of *Almost Friends*), it is completely misleading and risks offending those who, in the "same" conditions, have completely different daily thoughts and could feel belittled.

This **trivialization** happens even more, in my opinion, when we talk about mental disability or neurodivergence (which is not a disability). In fact, I believe that even the much-cited series *Lawyer Woo* can be placed in the second list: the legal cases dealt with are quite original, there are many interesting ideas and there is no lack of irony, with that very "kawaii" cheerfulness in the background typical of the oriental world. The protagonist, however, is almost hateful by how much she is made a "caricature" full of amplified stereotypes about autism, such as her repeating some phrases, avoiding social interactions, fixating on precise details or having evidently strange behaviors (without giving too many spoilers, I'll just tell you that in order to get through the revolving doors she has to pretend to dance a waltz to coordinate the steps).

Here, I believe that we will have the right narrative in the cinema when the characters with disabilities in a film, in addition to being played by really disabled people, will be humanly bad and unpleasant, will show their sincere weaknesses and fragility and will clash with real and daily architectural, social and cultural barriers. Maybe managing to overcome all this, with more or less sacrifices, but still preserving the authenticity of life in a credible way

Concrete examples

We want to bring some concrete examples of young people with disabilities who, through their actions and personal exploits communicated in a correct way, have contributed to changing the view of civil society on disability.

The most striking example is Beatrice Maria Adelaide Marzia Vio Grandis, **known as Bebe Vio**: Italian fencer and sports manager, specialised in foil, Paralympic, world and European champion in individual Paralympic foil.

She has been fencing since the age of 5 and a half; at the age of 11, she was struck by meningitis that caused her an extensive infection, so much so that doctors were forced to amputate her limbs. After 104 days of hospitalisation, he left the hospital and immediately resumed school. She then underwent motor rehabilitation and physiotherapy at a specialised prosthesis centre.

About a year after the onset of the disease, she resumed her sporting activity as a fencer, even at a competitive level, thanks to a particular prosthesis designed to support the foil.

It was through **sport** that she resumed a life full of experiences and challenges. She became a Paralympic athlete and excelled, and the media attention gave her the opportunity to make herself known and say important things. She is a very nice girl, intellectually lively who jokes and makes irony about her disability.

Thanks to this, she has since appeared as a testimonial on many television programs to spread the knowledge of wheelchair fencing and Paralympic sport in general and also to talk about challenges in life in general.

On many occasions, he has competed for advertising purposes together with his inspirational figure, the multi-medalist Valentina Vezzali. He has walked for many international high fashion brands, and in 2009, the family founded Art4sport, a non-profit organisation to support social integration through the practice of sports for children with disabilities (<https://www.art4sport.org/>)

Bebe Vio has written two books and in 2023 she graduated in Communication and International Relations from John Cabot University in Rome. In January 2025 she was elected to the Federal Council of the Italian Fencing Federation as athletes' representative for the four-year period 2025-2029.

Another interesting category concerns young journalists, trainers, activists, and *content creators* followed by hundreds of thousands of people, followers. Often their work consists precisely in the deconstruction of stereotypes through authentic, ironic and even sarcastic, captivating, cultured narratives. In the bibliography, we explore some of these profiles.

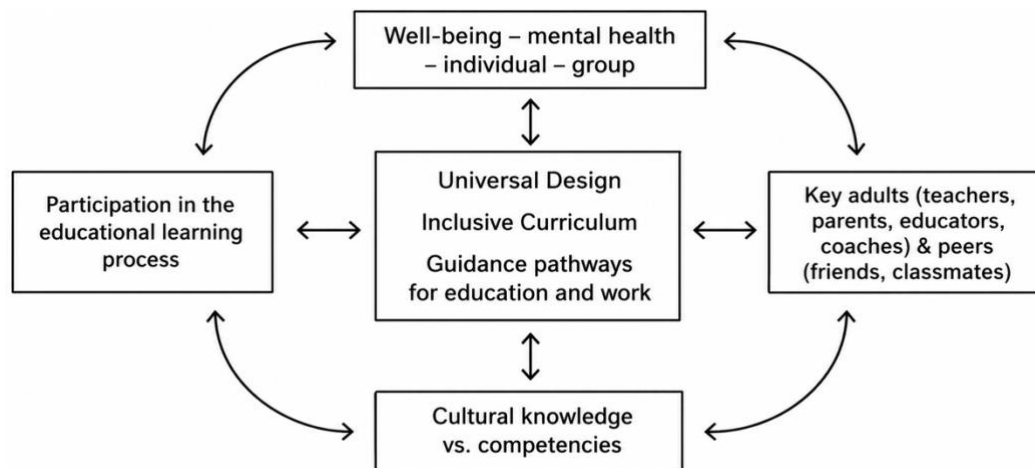
3. Pedagogical theories and approaches for diversity and inclusion education: resilience and interdependence

The realisation of the well-being of the educational success of people with disabilities is developed on a continuous process that goes from targeted interventions on individuals to reflections on social, relational and organisational contexts. To understand this concept, which is complex, it is necessary to have another clear concept, which is that of **resilience** or the ability of an individual or a system to face and overcome adversity, difficulties or traumas, positively reorganising one's life and transforming a negative experience into personal growth and positive change thanks to a multiplicity of interdependent factors. This happens in a dynamic and interdependent process between biological, psychological, social and ecological systems, which helps people to overcome adversity and promote well-being.

The internationally renowned pedagogists, Andrea Canevaro and Elena Malaguti, point out how necessary it is to have a holistic and multidimensional look and approach to disability, which takes into account people's individual resources but also relationships, contexts and intervention strategies in order to develop resilience. With this in mind, in order to support young men and women with disabilities in recreational, cultural and leisure activities, it is important to consider these five fundamental plans, in relation to each other:

1. **Well-being and mental health:** both at an individual and group level, because a state of well-being promotes learning and active participation.
2. **Participation and motivation:** including motives, interests, preferences, choices, and the level of self-determination and advocacy of students and young people
3. **Cultural knowledge and** competences: the knowledge acquired can be transformed into practical skills and useful competences.
4. **Role of reference adults:** teachers and educators, with their emotional-relational, methodological and cultural skills, and the relationships that are established with students and parents, therapists, etc.

5. **Flexibility of the curriculum and integration with guidance and job training:** to adapt to the needs of young people and promote a complete growth path.



As is evident, human systems (intra-individual, family, social) live in close correlation and are not separable. Studies in fields as diverse as genetics, psychology, political science, architecture and human ecology are showing that resilience depends as much on the culturally relevant resources available that interact with each other with common goals, as on individual emotions, thoughts, feelings and behaviours.

The study by Hölte, Theron and Ungar (2022) shows that good family and friend support improves resilience in adolescents who experience conditions of strong adversity that lead to states of depression in the medium to short term, but that, over time, school support is essential.

According to a multisystemic approach to resilience (Masten, 2014; Scheffer et al., 2018; Ungar and Theron, 2020), individual, psychological, cultural, educational, and social resources influence each other and play a fundamental role in the promotion of mental health (Masten and Cicchetti (2016). These recent studies refute the definition of resilience as the ability to adapt and agree in defining it as an interdependent process between multiple factors, and from a socio-ecological point of view

Andrea Canevaro commented in a magazine that put a word at the centre of each year. *The latest? Industry.* "For me, the **educating community** is setting industriousness in motion, it means recognizing that everyone has something in which they are capable and at the same time that no one can be enough for themselves. Everyone can be industrious in their own way, set in motion something that can be useful to others. This is the main purpose of the educating community, **not to make anyone live in a position of assistance**, to get out of the logic of those who have and those who do not have, those who have wisdom and those who are foolish, those who are well educated and those who are rude. **Not to teach someone to live, but to learn to live together.**"

4. Inclusion in practice. Some operational suggestions for youth work

First, even though some disabilities may resemble each other, it is rare to find two people with the same disability and the same emotional reaction to their condition, the same use of support equipment, or similar relationships with their environment. So, it is obvious that each person with one or more disabilities has specific abilities, needs, and preferences on how to deal with them. Therefore, it is important **to know the disability and especially the specific situation of the person you are working with (will be working)!**

The best way to do this is **to ask the person themselves** in the first place (they know their condition best!), or the person's parents, guardians, helpers or doctors. Open communication in an atmosphere of trust makes collaboration the best possible experience for everyone.

In the past, there was an "International Classification of Impairments, Disabilities and Handicaps" that focused on a person's medical condition and how to cure or treat it (the so-called medical model of disability). This classification was replaced by a more modern "*International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health*" in 2002 (www3.who.int/icf/) to reflect a new integrated **"bio-psycho-social approach" to disability that focuses not only on limitations, but rather on the level of functioning and health.**

In fact, people's activity (performance of a task or action) is not only influenced by physical conditions (diseases and disorders) or impairments (concerning body structure or functions), but also by opportunities and dispositions for participation (involvement in life situations). There are both environmental factors (physical, social and attitudinal environment in which people lead their lives) and personal factors (personality, personal situation...) that influence people's activity and participation.

This new "*bio-psycho-social model*" of disability also leads to new ways of classifying people's disabilities depending on whether one focuses on body functions and structure, the person's activity or participation, or contextual factors.

Often, for different reasons, the actual "performance" of young people with disabilities (what an individual actually does in his or her current environment and context) is less than their "capacity" (an individual's ability to perform a task or action, his or her highest likely level of functioning in a given domain at any given time). This gap can be caused by:

- *Environmental protectionism* (parents, youth workers, others): they cannot or are not allowed to carry out an activity because they "have a disability", even though they would have had the capacity to carry out activities **if adapted to their specific needs.**

- *Learned helplessness*: people with disabilities think that it is not possible to carry out an activity because they have never had this opportunity or have never seen anyone with disabilities do it (role models)
- *(Dis)ableism*: attitude (conscious or unconscious) towards people with disabilities, as people with fewer rights
- *Fear of inaccessibility*: people with disabilities are reluctant to participate because they do not have reassuring information about the accessibility of the activity, the location, transport...
- *Lack of assistive technologies*: often the technology does not exist in a "ready made" way or it could be prohibitive for the costs but many useful tools can be invented or built with the use of creativity (ramps, seats, tools,...)
- *Lack of adaptation and creativity*: youth work methods can be adapted with a little creativity: why not draw instead of speaking (language disorder), why not raise your arms in the air instead of jumping (wheelchair)... just dedicate time and attention to the planning phase of the activities. Sometimes it can be helpful to 'put yourself in the shoes of'.

Youth work can be instrumental in bridging the gap between what people with disabilities do and what they would actually be able to do. The challenge is yours!

How to do it? GENERAL TIPS FOR INTERACTING WITH PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

- When you start interacting with people with disabilities, you start from the assumption of the **maximum possible physical and intellectual abilities**, and only if necessary, gradually adapt to the disability.
- **Don't assume that all people with disabilities have limited intellectual abilities**, nor that people who use a wheelchair are very slow, nor that people with a white cane or completely blind, etc.
- When you are introduced to a person with a disability, **you do the same thing you would do with other people you meet**. If you usually shake hands, offer to shake hands. People with limited use of their hands or who wear an artificial limb usually shake hands. (Shaking hands with your left hand is an acceptable greeting.) If you usually give a kiss on the cheek, do the same, perhaps taking a blind man by the shoulders to make him feel that kiss is coming, etc...
- **Treat adults like adults**. Address people with disabilities in the same way as other people. If it's rare in your culture to use people's first names (courtesy) then they also refer to people with disabilities in the Mister or Miss format.
- **If you offer help, ask first** if the person with a disability wants help and wait until your offer is accepted (unless someone is about to fall or so). It

is best to let the person with a disability provide instructions on how to provide assistance (e.g., some parts of the wheelchair are fragile or come off easily, so it is not a good place to lift or pull the wheelchair,...)

- **Relax! Don't feel embarrassed** if you happen to use common expressions like "See you later" or "Have you heard of this?" that seem to refer to a person's disability. They often use these expressions themselves. Don't try to be too politically correct and think for days and days about what to call a person with a disability – just ask. See also the next section below.
- There are companies that can rent/sell/repair assistive equipment (wheelchairs, lifts, walking aids, hearing aids, special glasses, etc.) when you need it. Find out in advance where and how to find aids.
- Take the most demanding requirements as the minimum standard, e.g. the largest wheelchair, the slowest walker or eater, the person with the least vision...). This way, you are sure not to leave anyone behind.

These and many other suggestions on how to organise mixed activities with young people can be found in **NO BARRIERS, NO BORDERS** - a practical booklet for setting up international mixed-ability youth projects (including persons with and without a disability), available at the SALTO YOUTH website.

In organising activities aimed at mixed groups of young people, the importance of putting young people at the center of the project is emphasised, involving them in the planning and development of activities. Activities must be adapted to the abilities and interests of the participants, avoiding stereotypes related to disabilities. To promote learning and fun experiences, fostering inclusion and collaboration between young people with different abilities, it is recommended to:

- Offer variable intensity options for activities, respecting individual energy levels and needs.
- Use creative methods such as theatre, painting, music and games to encourage interaction
- Incorporate moments of fun to stimulate learning and socialisation
- Adapt communication methods, using visual tools, symbols and non-verbal languages to overcome language and disability barriers
- Create a safe and welcoming environment, with mechanisms to monitor the emotional needs of the participants (you will define this in the team)

The **practical needs** for mixed groups mainly concern the accessibility and adaptation of infrastructure and tools to ensure the participation of all. Here are the main ones:

- **Accessibility of the place:** Bedrooms, bathrooms, toilets, work rooms, restaurants and parking lots must be accessible both vertically and horizontally. There must be ramps, elevators, and obstacle-free paths.
- **Working methods:** Using tools such as audio loops, braille readers, flip charts at an accessible height, etc.
- **Transport:** Accessibility of public transport, with visual and voice directions, ramps and adapted maps.
- **Outdoor activities:** Accessibility of urban areas, adapted maps, accessible public toilets and travel in pairs or groups.
- **Leisure and relaxation:** Spaces dedicated to rest and relaxation for those who feel tired.
- **Daily life:** Adequate assistive equipment for eating, bathing, and sleeping.
- **Assistive equipment:** Availability of local companies for renting, selling, or repairing equipment such as wheelchairs, walking aids, hearing aids, special glasses, etc.

The **emotional needs** of participants in mixed groups include aspects related to personal well-being and group dynamics. Here are the main ones:

- **Self-esteem and sense of accomplishment:** Work to improve the self-esteem of participants, especially for young people with disabilities who may not feel capable of participating in international projects.
- **Comfort and inclusion in the group:** Create a welcoming environment through team-building activities and getting to know each other.

We suggest starting with less demanding activities and gradually progressing to more challenging activities to build trust and friendship.

- **Management of frustrations and dissatisfactions:** Provide moments of feedback and evaluation (individual, in small groups, in national groups, before, during, and after the project).
- **Fun and feel-good moments:** Incorporate leisure moments and enjoyable activities into the program, both during leisure time and as part of activities.
- **Free time and recovery:** Ensure free time both in groups and individually to recover from intense group interactions.
- **Connecting with your family environment:** Offering the possibility of communicating with parents, friends or loved ones by phone or email to manage any episodes of nostalgia.

These needs can be addressed already during the preparation of the project/activity and must be replicated in the international context to ensure a positive experience for all participants.

Finally... Heterogeneous activities, community involvement

With specific exceptions, it is always useful to organise activities, events, demonstrations open to all and in mixed groups and involve civil society! What is meant by civil society? Schools, sports clubs, associations, freelancers, families, parishes, shopkeepers, local authorities, individual citizens, informal groups, trade associations, everyone must be involved...

5. Inclusion as a tool to improve emotional intelligence

Inclusion, understood as the ability to welcome and value diversity, plays a fundamental role in the development of emotional intelligence. An inclusive environment, at school, at work, and in sports, associative environments, promotes the development of emotional skills such as empathy, emotional regulation and self-awareness, key elements of emotional intelligence. This applies to the young people involved but also to the social educators themselves.

Here are some key concepts related to inclusion as an element that increases emotional intelligence:

- **Exposure to diversity:** Interacting with people who are different in background, experience, and perspectives enriches one's emotional repertoire and allows one to develop a greater understanding of other people's emotions.
- **Social learning:** An inclusive environment promotes social learning, which is the ability to observe, understand, and imitate positive social behaviours, including those related to managing emotions.
- **Development of empathy:** Inclusion fosters empathy, the ability to understand and share the feelings of others. This process is crucial for building meaningful relationships and managing conflicts constructively.
- **Creating a positive climate:** Inclusion creates a climate of trust and acceptance, where people feel free to express their emotions, receive support, and learn from others.
- **Emotional literacy:** An inclusive environment can be a breeding ground for emotional literacy, which is learning emotional vocabulary and strategies for managing one's own emotions and those of others.

Some examples of how inclusion can translate into concrete actions:

- **Circle time:** Activities such as circle time, in which participants share their emotional experiences, help to create a positive group atmosphere and develop empathy.
- **Emotional literacy pathways:** Specific programs that teach how to recognize, understand and manage emotions, both individually and in groups through small group activities.
- **Group/classroom layout:** A physical environment that is conducive to interaction, such as regular group activities or desks arranged in islands, can facilitate communication and collaboration, which are crucial for emotional development.

- **Training of educators and teachers:** Training on emotional intelligence for those working in training and education is essential to create an inclusive school environment and promote the well-being of all students.
- **Inclusive activities:** School trips or activities involving people with different abilities and backgrounds can help develop emotional intelligence in informal settings.

Inclusion is not only an ethical value, but also a powerful tool for promoting emotional intelligence. Creating inclusive environments, where diversity is welcomed and valued, allows everyone to develop emotional skills that are fundamental for personal and social life.

6. Measuring the impact of inclusive initiatives

Impact assessment makes it possible to measure the effects, expected or unexpected, generated by a project and represents the final link in the design process that connects resources, actions, products, results and, indeed, **effects**. The latter manifest themselves in terms of social changes directly attributable to specific activities and allow their sustainability to emerge. The reference principles that must guide the evaluation analyses are:

1. methodological rigour: clear and contextualised indication of the methodological foundations that guide evaluation research;
2. social impact: evidence of the actual change generated on the recipients with respect to the condition of educational poverty and general outcomes on the territorial communities of reference of the project;
3. dissemination and learning: elaboration of observations on the impact generated (lessons learned and recommendations) and their dissemination among the different levels of actors involved in the project.

In consideration of the specific nature of the different projects, the social impact assessment can involve various levels, from the micro ones, linked to the changes generated on the direct recipients, to the macro ones, which affect the systems and communities of reference. It is a matter of analysing both the direct effects of the activities and the broader changes that they can generate in people and in the community.

Measuring the impact of inclusive initiatives requires an approach that combines monitoring and evaluation. Here are some key elements:

1) Co-construction of activities

Actively involve children and families in the design, implementation and evaluation of initiatives, ensuring that activities are relevant, accessible and respond to their needs and the aspirations of all those involved.

2) Monitoring

Collect data and information during the performance of activities, using quantitative and qualitative indicators, to follow progress and make any adjustments.

How? Through Impact Indicators, i.e. specific indicators defined in advance to measure changes, for example: improvement of well-being, increase in social

participation, development of skills, changes in behaviour, strengthening of family relationships.

Some examples of indicators

For children: improvement of self-esteem, increase in school participation, development of new skills, reduction of risky behaviours, strengthening relationships with peers.

For families: improved family communication, increased parental involvement, strengthened sense of community, and access to support services.

For the community: an increase in civic participation, improvement of social cohesion, greater awareness of inclusive issues, and development of a culture of inclusion.

3) Evaluation

Analyse the impact of the activities, measuring the changes that have occurred in the participants (children, families, communities) and evaluating the achievement of the objectives set through a *participatory approach*, namely: actively involve children and families in the evaluation process, through interviews, focus groups, and questionnaires, to collect their perceptions and evaluations on the impact of the initiative.

The analysis of data collected through monitoring and evaluation serves to identify strengths, weaknesses, areas for improvement and lessons learned.

4) Returning Results

Sharing assessment results with participants and the community is essential to promote transparency, accountability, and continuous learning.

Continuous evaluation is therefore crucial to understand whether inclusive initiatives are achieving their objectives and to identify areas where action is needed to improve their effectiveness. Participatory evaluation, in particular, allows beneficiaries to be actively involved in the evaluation process, ensuring that their voices are heard and that the initiatives are truly responsive to their needs.

In summary, measuring the impact of inclusive initiatives, especially co-constructed ones, requires a holistic, participatory and evidence-based approach, which takes into account both direct effects and broader changes at the individual and community level.

7. Supporting change: the sustainability of initiatives

Cultural initiatives involving young people can be both economically and environmentally sustainable, but they require a careful and integrated approach. It is essential to manage resources responsibly, promote sustainable practices and activate young people civically, transforming them into real agents of change. Below is a short list of the essential elements to keep in mind for the economic and environmental sustainability of events and projects.

Economic sustainability

Innovative business models. Cultural initiatives should explore business models that do not depend only on public funding or donations, but that generate their own income through activities such as the sale of products, cultural services or paid events.

Strategic partnerships. Collaboration with local authorities, companies and other organisations can offer financial and logistical support, as well as fostering networking and synergies.

Efficient use of resources. Optimising the use of resources such as energy, water, and materials, reducing waste, and adopting responsible consumption practices can help keep operating costs down.

Environmental sustainability

Reducing the impact. Cultural events should minimise the environmental impact, choosing ecological materials for set-ups and promotions, reducing CO2 emissions related to travel, and promoting recycling and waste reduction.

Education and awareness. Involving young people in the design and implementation of sustainable initiatives can increase their environmental awareness and turn them into promoters of responsible behaviour.

Enhancement of cultural heritage. Initiatives can enhance cultural and natural heritage, raising awareness among young people about its conservation as a sustainable resource.

In summary, the sustainability of cultural initiatives with young people requires an integrated approach that takes into account both economic and environmental aspects, actively involving young people as protagonists of change and promoting their participation in cultural and social life. If you want, I can further adapt the style (more narrative, more concise or with concrete examples).

Part 2: Practical part: tips, good practices, examples, and activities

2.1 How to design inclusive workshops step by step

Designing and facilitating workshops with mixed groups of young people, including those with disabilities, requires much more than simply choosing an activity and delivering it. Many youth workers are highly motivated to create engaging, meaningful experiences, yet often feel uncertain about how to adapt methods, spaces, or communication styles to ensure everyone can participate fully. This uncertainty is not a sign of inexperience, but rather a reflection of how complex and diverse real inclusion work can be.

Inclusion does not happen spontaneously; it is the result of thoughtful preparation, intentional planning, and a deep awareness of the different ways young people experience the world. Every group brings a variety of abilities, needs, emotions, fears, and strengths. Some young people may need more time to understand instructions, others may require adapted physical spaces, and many benefit from visual, tactile or simplified materials. Without adequate preparation, even well-designed activities risk unintentionally excluding those who cannot access or engage with them in the same way as their peers.

For this reason, designing an inclusive workshop is not merely a technical task, but a pedagogical and relational process. It asks the youth worker to anticipate barriers (such as physical, sensory, emotional, communicative) and remove them before they appear. It requires flexibility, creativity, and an understanding of safety, not only in terms of physical accessibility but also emotional well-being. When done well, inclusive workshops create opportunities for every participant to contribute in meaningful ways, to feel valued, and to engage according to their abilities, interests and comfort levels.

This guide offers a clear, step-by-step method to support youth workers, educators and facilitators in planning, adapting and implementing workshops that are accessible to all. The approach described here is not tied to a specific topic (involving sports, theatre, art, community engagement or awareness-raising), because true inclusion is transversal. Once youth workers learn how to structure sessions inclusively, they can apply the same principles to any theme or context.

Step 1: Define the purpose and learning goals

Before planning any activity, it is essential to clarify why the workshop is being organised and what kind of change it aims to generate. An inclusive workshop

becomes truly meaningful only when its purpose is clearly identified. This purpose acts as the foundation upon which all other decisions such as methods, materials, adaptations, timing, and evaluation will be built. Many youth workers begin planning with a general idea (“we want to work on inclusion” or “we want to do a creative activity”), but without a precise purpose, it becomes difficult to understand whether the workshop addresses real needs or whether young people can fully benefit from it. Defining the purpose helps transform a general intention into a concrete educational pathway.

To support this process, facilitators can reflect on the following guiding questions:

- What change or development should this workshop support?
- Which aspect of inclusion, personal growth, or group dynamics does the activity focus on?
- How does this connect to the broader goals of the project or organisation?

Once the purpose is established, it becomes necessary to identify the expected learning outcomes. Learning outcomes describe what participants should know, feel, understand, or be able to do by the end of the activity. They do not prescribe how participants must express this learning, but they serve as a compass for the facilitator, ensuring the workshop remains coherent, targeted and accessible.

Step 2: Knowing your participants

Inclusive workshop design begins long before any activity takes place. It starts with understanding who the participants are, what supports they may need, and how they experience group settings. Every young person brings a unique combination of strengths, challenges, preferences and lived experiences, and preparing for these differences is essential to ensure full participation. When youth workers take time to gather information in advance, they remove many of the barriers that would otherwise appear during the workshop itself. Preparation is not only a logistical step; it is an ethical one. It communicates respect, care and professionalism. It allows facilitators to create a space where each person feels considered from the outset, not only once difficulties arise.

This involves gathering concrete details that influence how each young person can take part safely and comfortably. Information may include:

- Specific disabilities or support requirements
- Mobility considerations, including use of aids or need for assistance
- Sensory sensitivities, such as sound, light or touch
- Relevant health or medication information needed for safety
- Preferred communication styles (AAC, visual supports, plain language)
- Allergies or dietary needs
- Emergency contacts and any critical personal information

Collecting this information early allows youth workers to anticipate adaptations instead of improvising them on the spot, which can create stress for both participants and facilitators.

Beyond practical needs, it is equally important to understand the broader context in which each young person is positioned. This includes:

- Previous experiences with inclusion or group activities
- Cultural or linguistic considerations that may shape participation
- Possible fears, hesitations or previous negative experiences
- Typical energy levels or concentration patterns
- Transport or logistical barriers that may influence punctuality or participation
- Personal expectations, hopes or concerns about the workshop itself

This information helps facilitators create activities that feel relevant, welcoming and emotionally safe, especially for young people who may have had limited opportunities to participate in inclusive settings before.

Step 3: Checking the space for accessibility

An inclusive workshop does not depend solely on good facilitation or thoughtful activities; it also relies on the environment in which it takes place. The physical space, the way it is organised, and the sensory conditions all play a crucial role in determining whether every participant can take part comfortably and safely. Accessibility must therefore be considered an integral part of the planning process, not an additional detail addressed only on the day of the activity.

Physical accessibility

This dimension refers to how easily individuals can move into, through, and within the workshop space. It includes the layout of furniture, the presence of clear pathways, the accessibility of entrances and essential facilities, and the ability to navigate the environment independently or with support. Ensuring physical accessibility reduces stress for participants and promotes autonomy.

Sensory accessibility

Many young people experience sensitivity to light, sound, smells, or visual stimuli. Assessing sensory accessibility involves evaluating the overall atmosphere of the space, checking whether the environment can be adjusted when needed, and ensuring that participants have access to calmer areas if they require them. A sensory-friendly space supports emotional regulation and fosters a sense of safety.

Cognitive and communication accessibility

To be truly inclusive, the workshop space must also support individuals who process information differently. This includes considering how instructions are displayed, whether visual supports are available, whether signage is clear, and whether communication tools such as symbols or simplified text are accessible. Preparing the space in this way enhances understanding, reduces confusion, and supports diverse learning styles.

Step 4: Structuring the workshop flow

Once the purpose of the workshop is clear and the accessibility of the space has been ensured, the next step is to design a coherent and inclusive structure for the session itself. A well-planned workshop follows a clear flow that guides participants from arrival to closure, balancing activity, reflection, interaction and rest. This structure creates predictability and safety, two essential components for inclusion, especially when working with diverse groups. An inclusive structure does not mean rigidity. Rather, it offers a stable framework within which flexibility can occur. It helps youth workers remain attentive to timing, emotional climate and the changing needs of participants. It also helps young people understand the rhythm of the workshop, anticipate what comes next, and orient themselves throughout the experience.

The following elements can guide the development of a well-balanced session:

Opening and creating a safe group climate

The opening phase lays the foundation for trust and participation. It is a moment to welcome participants warmly, clarify expectations, and establish a shared sense of purpose. This part usually includes short welcome rituals, simple introductions, and the co-creation of group agreements. Clear openings help participants feel grounded and reduce uncertainty or anxiety.

Warm-up and activation

Warm-up activities serve to “break the ice,” activate attention, and help participants transition into the workshop mindset. The warm-up should be simple, accessible and adaptable to different abilities. It prepares the group to engage more deeply with the main activity while reinforcing a sense of belonging and connection.

Main activity

This is the central component of the workshop, where the planned learning happens. The main activity should reflect the learning outcomes identified earlier and be structured in a way that allows multiple forms of participation. Clear instructions, visual or verbal cues, and opportunities for choice support different

learning styles. During this phase, facilitators may offer differentiated pathways or roles to ensure everyone can contribute meaningfully.

Key elements of main activity planning include:

- step-by-step instructions that are easy to follow
- adapted materials that everyone can use
- opportunities for collaboration and interaction
- flexibility to accommodate different pacing or comfort levels

Reflection and debriefing

Reflection allows participants to make meaning from the experience. This stage encourages individuals and groups to process what they learned, how they felt, and what insights emerged. An inclusive reflection phase offers multiple ways to express thoughts (spoken, written, visual, or symbolic) so all voices can be heard. Debriefing also helps facilitators evaluate whether the learning outcomes are being achieved and how participants are reacting emotionally and socially.

Closing and transition out of the workshop

A thoughtful closing helps consolidate learning and end the workshop with clarity and calm. This might include a final check-out, a summary of key messages, or a short ritual marking the end of the session. Clear endings provide emotional closure, reinforce group cohesion and support participants in transitioning back to their daily routines.

Step 5: Adapting activities for diverse abilities

Inclusive workshops become truly accessible when activities are adapted to match the diverse ways young people can participate, learn and express themselves. Adaptation is not about simplifying content or lowering expectations; rather, it is about ensuring that every participant can engage meaningfully, regardless of physical, sensory, cognitive or emotional differences. Thoughtful adaptation strengthens learning, promotes dignity, and supports authentic participation. Many traditional methods assume a single way of learning or interacting. In inclusive settings, youth workers shift toward multiple pathways by offering different options, adjusting roles, modifying materials, or providing alternative forms of expression. When these adaptations are planned in advance, participants do not feel singled out or treated differently; instead, the entire workshop becomes more flexible and responsive to individual needs.

Adapting instructions and communication

Instructions should be clear and accessible to participants with different processing styles. This may involve breaking down information into smaller steps, offering visual or written supports, simplifying language where appropriate, or

ensuring repetition and clarification. Accessible communication helps participants understand what is expected of them without stress or confusion.

Offering multiple ways to participate

Activities should provide choice and flexibility, allowing participants to engage in ways that suit their abilities and comfort levels. This may include offering different forms of contribution, alternative roles within group tasks, or varied levels of physical or cognitive involvement. By embedding options into the activity design, facilitators promote autonomy and reduce barriers.

Adjusting materials and tools

Materials used during the workshop must be usable for all, which may require adjusting size, texture, format, or level of abstraction. Ensuring material accessibility allows each participant to interact with the activity independently or with minimal support. This preparation fosters dignity and inclusion.

Considering energy levels and pace

Participants may engage at different speeds or with varying levels of stamina. Facilitators can plan timing, breaks, and groupings to accommodate these differences, allowing each person to work at a pace that feels safe and comfortable. When pacing is responsive, participants are more able to stay focused and engaged.

Supporting peer collaboration

Some participants may benefit from shared roles or paired work, where collaboration enhances understanding, confidence or communication. Integrating peer support into activities encourages connection and reduces isolation while still respecting autonomy and personal boundaries.

Step 6: Preparing materials and resources

Inclusive facilitation requires careful preparation of the materials and tools used during the workshop. The accessibility of content (whether visual, tactile, auditory or written) often determines whether participants can take part independently, understand instructions, and feel confident engaging with the activity. Preparing materials in advance is therefore not only a practical step, but a key element of inclusive pedagogy. In many youth activities, workshop materials are created with the assumption that all participants process information in similar ways. In reality, young people have diverse sensory, cognitive and communication needs. Some may rely on visual cues to understand instructions; others may need simplified text, tactile elements or alternative formats. When materials are thoughtfully designed, they remove barriers and offer multiple routes into the activity. To

ensure all participants can access the workshop content, youth workers can consider several dimensions when preparing materials and resources:

Providing accessible formats

Materials should be offered in formats that different participants can understand and use comfortably. This may include preparing written content in clear and readable layouts, ensuring sufficient contrast, or offering visual supports such as symbols or structured illustrations. When necessary, information can be presented in simplified or alternative formats to reduce cognitive load.

Ensuring physical usability of materials

Tools and resources should be selected or adapted so that participants with different motor abilities can handle them without frustration. This may involve choosing materials that are easy to grip, adjusting the size of objects, or providing alternatives that allow for comfortable and independent use.

Supporting multimodal learning

Since participants learn and communicate in different ways, materials should encourage engagement through varied channels including visual, auditory, tactile or experiential. Preparing a combination of resources helps ensure that each person can access information in the mode that suits them best, while also enriching the learning environment.

Preparing communication supports

Some workshops may require additional supports to help participants understand instructions, follow the activity sequence or express their thoughts. Facilitators can prepare communication tools such as visual schedules, cue cards, step-by-step diagrams, or simplified instruction sheets. These supports contribute to clarity, predictability and emotional safety.

Organising materials for easy access

Materials should be arranged in a way that participants can reach them easily, without having to ask for assistance. A well-organised setup helps maintain autonomy and reduces unnecessary delays or stress during the session. It also helps facilitators manage transitions smoothly between different parts of the workshop.

2.2 Good practice examples

SHEET 1.

BASKIN: A NEW SPORT FOR EVERYONE

Il Baskin

Baskin is a new sport inspired by basketball, but with unique and innovative characteristics, an original sport invented in Cremona (Italy) in 2003 and has been officially recognised since 2019. It is open to everyone, players with and without disabilities, of all skill levels and ages. It's inclusive, engaging, and competitive.

Baskin aims to create team spirit and promote the inclusion of people with disabilities. Children with and without physical and/or intellectual disabilities play together, creating mixed teams. It is an activity that allows some to play and others to "help" from time to time. However, everyone has the opportunity to play a decisive role in the game, each making their own contribution. It is an authentic sport where everyone can use their skills to the best of their ability to win.

In Italy, Baskin involves over 5,600 people, including players, coaches, referees, officials and managers, together with more than 5,000 students. Around 20,000 people - families, relatives, friends and supporters - actively participate in the Baskin community. The sport is also practised in Spain, France, Greece, Luxembourg, Germany, Serbia and Belgium.

Highlights

Baskin is an innovative and inclusive sport that promotes teamwork, strategy and accessibility for all. It follows a set of **10 rules** that make the game dynamic and unpredictable. The Baskin rules amend:

- **The equipment:** use more baskets: two standard baskets and two lower side baskets. The standard ball can be replaced with one of a different size and weight.
- **Space:** Includes protected zones to ensure fair shooting opportunities at side baskets.
- **Rules:** Each player has a defined role based on their motor skills and competes against an opponent of the same level. The roles are numbered from 1 to 5, each with specific rules.
- **Support:** A tutor (a teammate) can be assigned to assist a player with a disability, providing various levels of support during the game.



Official map:

<https://www.google.com/maps/d/u/0/viewer?mid=1cOcu9fOGOSYwHB0VypQQINVBZaK44gA&hl=it&femb=1&ll=43.5448616382616%2C11.232207849999973&z=5>



Sources

- Official Italian National Website: <https://www.baskin.it/>

From Fondazione Zanandrea – local good practices/ case study: **Baskin Lions Cento**

- FB page: <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=61571040057983>
- IG page: <https://www.instagram.com/baskinlionscento/>
- Training video: <https://www.facebook.com/reel/580769528089617>
- Video of a match: <https://www.facebook.com/reel/1857800248322603>

COSQUILLAS THEATRE METHODOLOGY: REWORKING THROUGH STORYTELLING

Coming out of the closet with actors, not professionals, in need of emerging by telling and telling themselves.

Cosquillas Theatre Methodology is not a theatrical or pedagogical methodology, but a tool for the communication of narrative reworking for issues of any human nature. Since December 2019, it has been an internationally recognised brand. From the didactic to the artistic sphere, the Methodology manages to generate an integrative atmosphere where the proposal for analysis of the different roles existing within the dynamics of the work group is supported, accepted and elaborated: the priority for well-being, between oneself and fellow students, who pass through a better understanding of the possibilities of managing their roles/behaviours, within the relationships in the group itself.

This result is due to the **communicative facilitation conducted by the operator** (through CTM) which allows us to understand how to build, through the empathy generated by the five steps (1. Observation; 2. Reflection, 3. Interaction, 4. Creation, 5. Sharing) that develop in a path that normally lasts months of work with a weekly appointment of 2 hours, moments of one's identity in favor of the research group, bringing out the understanding of the multiple realities.

For these characteristics, and with certain targeted collaborations, the methodology is applicable in the broader social contexts. The experience can generate a theatrical performance, where body language predominates over speech. In addition, it can be shared with an audience if requested by participants or clients.

The path of the CTM does not operate in these sectors to obtain shows that speak exclusively of the social, but to allow realities without this means to be able to talk about the world: their world. Our world, which still ignores them today, not out of malice or indifference, but because of a lack of opportunities: for this reason, the participation of adolescents and young people with disabilities or social fragility in paths that use this method leads to a growth in awareness and self-esteem and makes us learn how much the group can become a resource.

Highlights

The key concepts of CTM are *Love, Be loved, be listened to: coming out of the closet with actors, not professionals, in need of emerging by telling and telling themselves*

The Method was created and developed by Massimiliano Piva.



Sources:

Official website: <https://www.cosquillastheatremethodology.com/>

Instagram page:

<https://www.instagram.com/ctmtheatre?igsh=NW9zdDNydjllZmc0>

BANDA RULLI FRULLI: AN INCLUSIVE ORCHESTRA

The Banda Rulli Frulli is a very special musical project born in Italy in 2010. It is an inclusive orchestra that brings together musicians of all ages, abilities, and backgrounds, demonstrating that music can be a powerful tool for social integration and personal growth.

What makes this band truly unique is its way of creating music: using unconventional instruments, often made from recycled materials such as plastic containers, scrap metal and pieces of wood. This approach promotes sustainability and makes music accessible to everyone, even those without musical training or high economic resources.

The main goal of the Banda Rulli Frulli is inclusion: all members, regardless of their abilities or social conditions, find a role and can contribute to the music, strengthening the sense of belonging, self-esteem and collaboration.

The philosophy is that there are no soloists or elements that stand out from the others, but everyone has the same level and gives their best. It is an example of how music can break down barriers and change perceptions about everyone's ability to be a musician.

In addition, building recycled instruments together helps to develop teamwork and creativity, reinforcing the message that music can bring people together and overcome any social or economic obstacle.

The Banda Rulli Frulli is not only an orchestra, but also a movement that celebrates the unity, diversity and transformative power of music!

Highlights

1. The band is the band. There are no soloists, there are no elements that stand out from the others, but we are all the same and everyone makes their contribution with the utmost commitment.
2. When we play, we work, we are together, there are no barriers between musicians, despite their different abilities: this is what wins the hearts of those who meet us and dismantle any preconceived idea. – Federico Alberghini (director of the Rulli Frulli band).



Sources:

- Official website: <https://www.bandarullifrulli.com/>
- Facebook page: https://www.facebook.com/bandarullifrulli/?locale=it_IT
- Instagram page:
https://www.instagram.com/bandarullifrulli?fbclid=IwY2xjawlf3zdleHRuA2FlbQixMAABHRHqkYNY37QMmyaGZuCKrI-eSWyWUL-CaQkN6q_Ag5H8hUjZCqj54GFKmw_aem_ZZvpL9vsC2WjlesFY6iKWQ
- Zanandrea Foundation. "Artistic Practices in Youth Work" - Get to know Rulli Frulli, a very original way to do music. Youtube video created within the European project 'Superheroes' (2022-2-CY02-KA220-YOU-000101622). Available at:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vo0ejpjRGk0&t=8s>

DIFFERENTLY ARTISTS: ART IS ALWAYS A CALL TO UNDERSTANDING / OR CREATIVITY CAN HELP TO OVERCOME IGNORANCE.

Diversamente Artisti is a charity auction of paintings created and presented in collaboration with people with disabilities. This workshop was born from the shared passion for art. The idea was realized by some youth workers of the day center managed by the Zanandrea Foundation of Cento (fe), with the aim of promoting the work of the people who work there every day.

The project has the following objectives: To give visibility to the work done by youth workers and young people with disabilities (pwd), to raise funds for various specific objectives, to stimulate creativity, to make people and young people with disabilities feel included in the community to which they belong and valued for what they can offer

Painting together with a person I know and for a specific purpose: inside the day center there is a special room dedicated to painting activities and more generally to all activities that involve the use of various materials put at the service of art. In this space, people with disabilities know that they can count on the time and expertise of youth workers, who make their passions available to create works of art with them. Spending time painting and collaborating in the creation of a common work gives a sense of empowerment and active participation to the person with disabilities, something that few other activities can do, especially in people with severe cognitive deficits.

Art thus offers a way to communicate experiences when individuals lack verbal skills or when words are insufficient. Humans have evolved artistic expression as an imaginative tool to adapt to changing conditions and solve problems.

Highlights

Passion and innate talents: The "Diversamente artisti" project was born from the passion of two youth workers for art, both theoretically and practically. No specific training is required, as long as you already have a passion for drawing and painting. However, it is advisable to develop knowledge in the educational and relational fields to ensure effective interaction with people with disabilities. This helps to bring out new passions and promote a sense of satisfaction in creating something beautiful and admirable.

The auction: The most important moment of inclusion of this project is the auction, during which the paintings are sold. Every single work, every canvas, is auctioned. Each edition of "Diversamente artisti" takes place during the local fair of Cento, when the city is full of life, events and people from all over the province, usually in a very central and spectacular location. The community has responded so far with great interest and participation.

Interaction with the public: Since people with disabilities are on stage to present their paintings, they can participate in all stages of the auction and learn a fun way to buy and sell something.

How the task is planned

1. Explain the project and what goals you want to achieve to the participants
2. Deciding on the Auction Theme
3. Decide how many canvases should be auctioned and plan 'tailor-made' instructions so that the teaching methods are personalized and everyone can participate fully.
4. The technique used is very simple, ACRYLIC ON CANVAS. The canvases are already prepared with the drawing that is made by youth workers / local artists with crayons and colored pencils; therefore, youth workers direct people with disabilities in the execution of
5. DIFFERENT SERVICES AND PROJECTS: develop creative links between different projects
6. ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY: technology can be helpful both during the research to decide on the theme, and during the presentation of the canvases.



Sources:

- Booklet on "INCLUSIVE LEARNING THROUGH CREATIVE PRACTICES IN YOUTH WORK" created within the European project 'Superheroes' (2022-2-CY02-KA220-YOU-000101622). Available at: <https://www.fondazionezanandrea.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Superheroes-Booklet-EN.pdf>

GIVE VOICE WITH THE IMAGES OF THE REINFORCED CONCRETE SYSTEM

With the project: "Giving Voice with the Images of the C.A.A. System" at the "G. Carducci" High School, the Il Nodo Social Promotion Association has started a process of promotion of other forms of communication, in addition to traditional writing, to implement communication with and between subjects in conditions of intellectual-relational disability through the knowledge of other communication systems such as those in C.A.A. (Augmentative Alternative Communication).

The dissemination of this tool makes it possible to involve other people in situations of vulnerability and social hardship.

The Association, with this proposal, directly involves children with intellectual-relational disabilities by expressing their skills through the enhancement of the skills acquired by the same fragile subjects who have been using this form of communication for some time.

The protagonists of the project are the same children who use the symbolic system as a form of communication and social interaction in addition to the school literacy with which they face the Ministerial educational program.

The students of the "G. Carducci" High School were involved during all phases of the project, which first saw training sessions on social and health issues related to disabilities, the use of the C.A.A. symbolic system and how to enter into relationships with people with intellectual-relational disabilities, conducted by professionals in the sector. The program continued with practical workshops for the translation of texts into pictograms and images on an opensource platform conducted in working groups in which disabled children put their talent, skills, peculiarities and imagination into action. In the final phase of the project, with the support of the fragile children themselves, the premises, services and all the shared spaces of the Institute were labeled with symbols and pictograms.

Highlights

1. Expanding in the school environment, the Il Nodo Association strongly believes that this system is an excellent communication tool as it is easily intuitive, explicit and understandable; useful in various areas: social, health, historical, artistic and cultural. Useful for all those people who approach traditional written texts with difficulty, who have expressive problems such as a cognitive-relational deficit, a post-traumatic condition, or a foreigner or an elderly person.
2. The dissemination of this alternative form of communication is useful to counter cultural blindness and make our social life accessible and more inclusive.
3. Social isolation and difficulties communicating are often related and can manifest as symptoms of psychological disorders, particularly social anxiety disorder (social phobia). The absence of stimuli and interactions can lead to

a worsening of verbal communication, concentration and mental flexibility. All individuals with complex communication needs demonstrate a tendency to social isolation by virtue of expressive and comprehension difficulties, so the use of the symbolic system -C.A.A.- allows them to understand, interact with others, and know.

4. The use of images and pictograms to codify the environments in which pupils with disabilities live show welcome, orientation and accessibility.

Sources:

- Official website: <https://www.associazioneilnodo.it/>
- Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/associazioneilnodoaps/>
- Instagram page: https://www.instagram.com/associazione_ilnodo

THE WALKS OF THE ASSOCIATION LE PASSEGGIATE DI AGATA

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT, POLITICS AND ADVOCACY: HOW TO ACTIVATE THE COMMUNITY AROUND INCLUSION ISSUES?

"Can you imagine not being able to enter some places?" The brochure of the association Le Passeggiate di Agata Aps of Ferrara opens with this question. If you are moving around in an electric or manual wheelchair or if the ability to move is reduced, steps and thresholds often prevent entry into public or private places. If you are a girl or a boy, like Agata di Ferrara, walking or playing outdoors is not easy or even obvious.

The Association Le Passeggiate di Agata APS, founded on the stimulus of a little girl, Agata, who lives in Ferrara, now a teenager who moves around in an electric wheelchair, through its activities promotes accessibility and the right of all children (really all of them!) to play and learn and have experiences. Through participatory projects, the association creates meaningful experiences that respect and value diversity.

WHAT DOES AGATA WALKS DO

- promotes social and cultural initiatives to raise awareness relating to the contrast of architectural and cultural barriers that prevent those with motor, mental or sensory disabilities from fully participating in the life of the community and/or even from carrying out activities of daily life.
- disseminates, through its information channels, good practices and projects useful for overcoming architectural, social and cultural barriers;
- it experiments and reviews places, paths, aids and other types of supports useful for overcoming architectural barriers and other tools that facilitate the lives of people with physical and mental motor disabilities.

Highlights

Our projects

1. **Accessible gardens and playgrounds:** the association has launched initiatives to create accessible gardens starting from Ferrara. The children, together with their parents and teachers and educators, actively participate in the design of the redevelopment of the play areas. The gardens not only offer a place to play, but also become environmental education laboratories, where you learn to respect and

care for nature. An example is the Giordano Bruno Park, redeveloped thanks to the Municipality of Ferrara which, with regional resources, has been able to make a large play area usable with games chosen by children and young people with the support of educators and architects. The project was carried out with the support of the Estense Foundation and what was an abandoned, unsafe and unhealthy place has become a city green space frequented at all hours of the day and evening by children, young people and adults. Here is the link to the project: <https://lepassaggiatediagata.org/progetti-di-comunita/il-diritto-di-giocare-alla-open-and-to-participate/>

2. **Walks:** the walks are organized to offer the opportunity to explore the territory of the city from different points of view (walking or sitting in a wheelchair or blindfolded or with earplugs). These initiatives are designed to be accessible to all, with particular attention to children and adults with motor disabilities. The goal is to keep the attention high on the accessibility of the roads and show those who move without problems how a step, an area interrupted for works, can make a simple walk tiring and not at all relaxing.

3. **Creative Workshops:** the association organizes creative workshops that encourage children and young people to express themselves through art and nature. These activities are designed with the aim of bringing together adolescents with and without fragility by promoting their creativity, encouraging teamwork and cooperation among the participants. The workshops are designed ensuring that every child can actively participate.

See, for example, the summer project "Giocarte" documented through a video on the Association's Youtube page.

Photo:



- Official website: <https://www.lepassaggiatediagata.org>
- Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/lepassaggiatediagata/>
- Instagram page: <https://www.instagram.com/lepassaggiatediagata>

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European and International Websites

UNESCO (2017), *A Guide for ensuring inclusion and equity in education*, Paris, UNESCO. DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.54675/MHHZ2237>

World Health Organization – *World Report on Disability*, 2011

(free download: <https://www.who.int/teams/noncommunicable-diseases/sensory-functions-disability-and-rehabilitation/world-report-on-disability>)

Youth & Disability – Council of Europe

<https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/youth-and-disabilities>

SALTO (project)

<https://www.salto-youth.net/rc/inclusion/>

NO BARRIERS NO BORDERS – *A practical booklet for setting up international mixed-ability youth projects (including persons with and without a disability)*

Download this and other SALTO Inclusion booklets for free at: www.SALTO-YOUTH.net/Inclusion/

List of Resources for Further Study and Support

Canevaro Andrea, Dario Ianes, *Diversabilità. Storie e dialoghi nell'anno europeo delle persone disabili*, 2003, Erickson

Gheno Vera, *Chiamami così. Normalità, diversità e tutte le parole nel mezzo*, Erickson, 2022

Malaguti Elena, *Quasi Adatti? Equità, Diversità, Inclusione e Resilienza – Approccio multisistemico, socio-ecologico nella ricerca nel campo della Pedagogia Speciale e Didattica Speciale*, in *Rivista L'integrazione scolastica e sociale*, Volume 22, Number 1, February 2023; Erickson Editore

Paolini Elena, Paolini Maria Chiara, *Mezze Persone. Riconoscere e comprendere l'abilismo*, Ventura Edizioni, 2024, and *'Che brava che sei'. 8 storie di abilismo quotidiani*, Edizioni Laterza, 2024

To Learn More...

Cerebral Palsy:

<https://www.fightthestroke.org/>

<https://www.aincp.eu/kids>

Italian Association of People with Down Syndrome:

<https://www.aipd.it/site/>

International Down Syndrome Network:

<https://www.coordown.it/>

The pan-European organization promoting the rights of autistic people:

<https://www.autismeurope.org/>

National Autism Observatory (Italy):

<https://osservatorionazionaleautismo.iss.it/asdeu>

Italian Federation for the Rights of People with Disabilities:

<https://fishets.it/>

Biographies

We can learn a lot from reading true stories of real people who have made their disabilities not only their distinctive traits but also their strengths. Or we can relate to the experiences of those who have lived alongside disability through friends, children, siblings, or partners.

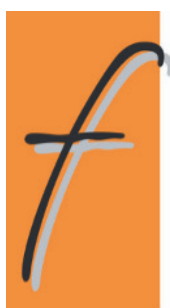
Bebe Vio, *Se sembra impossibile allora si può fare*, 2019; Bur Editore
(*The story of the famous Italian fencer — a book that can also be described as motivational.*)

Bortuzzo Manuel, *Soli nella tempesta*, Rizzoli Editore, 2019; Libreria Tlon

Imprudente Claudio, *Da geranio a educatore. Frammenti di un percorso possibile*; Erickson Editore

Mazzariol Giacomo, *Mio fratello rincorre i dinosauri*, 2016, Einaudi Stile Libero
(*Tells how Giacomo experienced discovering his brother Giovanni's Down syndrome and how, over time, he learned to overcome his initial prejudices.*)

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