



Laugh

LABS

Project Report

Impact
Sustainability
Learning



Co-funded by
the European Union



Idee in
Movimento

Acknowledgements and Thanks

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We are also very grateful to the coordinator, MAAP, for their organisation and support throughout the project.

And finally, thank you to everyone in North Macedonia, Italy and Ireland who participated in the workshops, gave us thoughtful feedback and laughed with us!

Project Details

Harnessing the power of humour to develop emotional resilience and reduce stigma in Europe



**Idee in
Movimento**

KA220-ADU Cooperation Partnerships in Adult Education

- Duration: 19 months
- Coordinated by: the Macedonian Association for Applied Psychology (North Macedonia)
- Partners: Idee in Movimento (Italy) and ArtéTeka Ltd (Ireland)

Background and Needs

The Laugh Labs project was developed to research and develop a comprehensive approach to mental health across generations and cultures. We set out to develop and test methods to use humour to reduce stigma around talking about mental health.

We created three hubs for local people to explore discussions about mental health and build emotional resilience in North Macedonia, Italy and Ireland.

Local people were welcomed to these hubs to try humour-based activities to support their wellbeing, encourage social connections and talk with other members of their communities about their mental health and strategies for resilience.

What We Delivered

We conducted research across the European Union, preparing a comprehensive literature review about how humour can be used to support mental health.

This is aimed at community workers who may wish to integrate humour-based methods into their own practices.

From this research, we developed workshop plans to test in partner countries with varying age groups. These workshops were designed to equip participants with basic skills to use in daily life to support their wellbeing and build resilience.

Project Delivery

Ireland

In Ireland, workshops used laughter yoga to warm-up and introduce the sessions. This was followed by art-based activities, using simple, quick drawings to represent their stress before adding to the drawing in a humorous way to take the power away from the feeling of stress.

The final activity was a collaborative drawing in small groups of 2-4. The group combined their individual drawings to create a shared representation of stress and resilience.

Sessions were delivered to a range of groups including social groups, community education groups and for staff teambuilding at local charities.

Older individuals told us that they had not been encouraged to explore their emotions, or talk about them. They found the sessions empowering for this reason, demonstrating how we reduced stigma by opening up important conversations about mental health.

Project Delivery Ireland



Cork Community Education Network Wellbeing Workshop



Project Delivery Ireland

Cultural Companions Social Workshop



Cork Sexual Health Centre Teambuilding Workshop



Project Delivery Ireland



Mayfield Women's Shed Wellbeing Workshop



Testimonials

Ireland

"Time to sit and be creative was a great way to reducing stress."

"The power of taking time out as a group of work colleagues to laugh together and connect, have permission to be silly and not be self conscious."

"The art activities were great for reflection."

"I felt more connected with colleagues afterwards, which is important for our team as our work can be emotionally challenging."

"We had to come out of our comfort zone to try laughter yoga, but it was so important for us to be vulnerable and feel comfortable with each other."

Project Delivery

North Macedonia

In North Macedonia, sessions began with a brief presentation about the importance of humour for mental health to introduce participants to how laughter is important for our wellbeing.

Participants then explored what makes them laugh, and the different ways they use humour to cope with stress in daily life. We also used laughter yoga exercises to demonstrate how laughter has a physically positive impact on our wellbeing.

Sessions were delivered to schools, parents groups and local community organisations.

Project Delivery North Macedonia



Ceduz Karposh



Simboliko

Project Delivery North Macedonia



AAP



Kreativa Istok

Project Delivery

North Macedonia



AAP



Gorgi Dimitrov

Testimonials

North Macedonia

"Sharing laughter with colleagues helped us connect in a different way than we usually do at work."

"The activities reminded me how important it is to take a break, enjoy the moment, and not take everything so seriously."

"The workshop gave me practical ideas that I can use with the young people and families I work with."

"I left the session with a smile, new ideas, and a renewed sense of connection with the people around me."

"These activities showed me that promoting wellbeing doesn't have to be complicated—it can start with sharing a laugh."

"Laughter can't fix problems, but it helps us cope."

Project Delivery

Italy

In Italy, humour was used to build connections between participants who were initially uncomfortable in the workshop. This was achieved using laughter yoga, smiling exercises, games and theatrical exercises.

These exercises helped lead the group into the next section, where they would discuss moments of joy, working in pairs to connect socially and discuss how they feel about loneliness.

Using humour and theatrical exercises to start sessions made it possible for the groups to open up and begin sharing their feelings and coping mechanisms for loneliness.

Sessions were delivered in schools and with community organisations.

Project Delivery

Italy



Project Delivery Italy



Testimonials

Italy

"I didn't expect a workshop about laughter to teach me so much about myself, but it did."

"Laughing together broke down barriers that months of formal meetings never could."

"It reminded me that joy is not a distraction from our work—it's part of what makes us good at it."

"I came in skeptical, but by the end I felt lighter, both in body and mind."

"These sessions gave our team a shared language of playfulness that we still use today."

Skills Developed

Participants gained the following knowledge and skills through participation in Laugh Labs:

- Laughter & smiling exercises to boost endorphins and wellbeing.
- The ability to express emotions and complex feelings in creative ways, e.g. by drawing or in expressive, theatre-based exercises.
- An understanding of mental health as a continuum, which can fluctuate over time.
- Equipped with the language to express their feelings and talk openly about mental health.
- Practices to boost resilience to stress and loneliness.
- Icebreakers and creative methodologies to engage colleagues, friends, community members in conversations about mental health.

Project Sustainability

The activities delivered in each country's Laugh Labs have equipped a range of groups and individuals with key skills to boost wellbeing, combat stress and encourage open discussions about mental health.

Older and retired adults

Working with older individuals in Ireland, we saw how they had not been encouraged to discuss mental health as children or young adults. For them, it as important to begin learning how to talk about their emotions and challenges. By equipping them with the language and confidence to express themselves, we reduced stigma around mental health. We both gave them skills to improve their own resilience and to better support people in their own communities.

Project Sustainability

In our communities

Professionals

Laugh Labs were also delivered to professionals working in non-profit and community organisations. Demonstrating humour-based techniques (e.g. laughter yoga) encouraged them to incorporate these activities, which they would not have tried otherwise, into workshops with their own service users.

Many professional participants were surprised by the effectiveness of these activities, saying that the strong boost to wellbeing and social connection would be useful in their own work. This gives Laugh Labs a lasting impact as the work will continue through other organisations.

Project Sustainability

In our communities

Schools & Teachers

Presenting an introduction to principles of mental health in educational environments, and connecting this with informal & humorous activities was important for showing youth and teachers ways to open up and have important conversations about wellbeing. Creating this supportive environment encouraged students to share things that make them laugh and boost their wellbeing, helping teachers better understand how to support their students.

This demonstration also equipped teachers with the methods and skills to continue holding these discussions, reducing stigma around mental health in schools and improving their ability to support students.

Project Sustainability

In our own organisations

ArtéTeka

At ArtéTeka, staff have already begun integrating skills learned through the development of Laugh Labs across other workshops and projects.

Through Laugh Labs, we saw the effectiveness of laughter yoga for creating social connections and a positive atmosphere. We now regularly use it to break the ice and begin a workshop outside of Laugh Labs sessions.

Following Laugh Labs, we have integrated laughter yoga exercises into a training course on the Comic Relief Erasmus+ project. This course will be delivered with youth workers, to equip them with skills to boost youth wellbeing using humour. The research and piloting of activities conducted through Laugh Labs will therefore have a lasting impact in the youth work sector across partner countries (Ireland, Italy, Slovakia, Greece and France).

Project Sustainability

In our own organisations

Idee in Movimento

At Idee in Movimento, the experience gained through Laugh Labs has directly shaped how we facilitate groups who arrive closed off, distrustful, or emotionally guarded.

We saw how laughter yoga could dismantle rigid hierarchical barriers within minutes, how comic exaggeration turned nervous smiles into genuine laughter, and how silent, sensory games helped people drop their assigned roles and connect as peers.

These insights are now shaping the training course we are developing under the GARMEnTs project (Erasmus+ KA220-YOU), aimed at NEET youth facing significant difficulties. We intend to use these same tools to lower emotional barriers, making the course a lighter and more welcoming experience rather than another source of pressure.

Project Sustainability

In our own organisations

Macedonian Institute for Applied Psychology

At MAAP, the knowledge, methods and activities developed through the Laugh Labs project have already begun to influence other educational and psychosocial initiatives.

As a result, MAAP has incorporated selected laughter and humour exercises into workshops for youth workers and other helping professionals, using them as effective icebreakers and tools for fostering engagement and psychological wellbeing.

Also, we created new training activities and educational programmes focused on mental health promotion, resilience and social-emotional learning. By integrating these evidence-informed practices into future projects, professional training courses and community-based interventions, MAAP will continue to extend the impact of Laugh Labs beyond the project's lifetime, contributing to improved wellbeing and more engaging learning environments for diverse target groups in North Macedonia and across Europe.

What We Learned

Dedicated space and time for creativity

Participants reported that having a specific time carved out to be creative, in a relaxed, non-judgemental way, was important for fostering wellbeing. Older adults in particular reported that they had rarely been encouraged to make time for creativity, and that being encouraged to do this was very special for them.

Humour as a method to open up discussions about mental health

Participants reported that using humour to warm-up at the start of the session, in the form of laughter yoga and humour-based games, was important for making them comfortable in the session. It prepared them to have deeper discussions with other participants about mental health and resilience.

What We Learned

Humour and play to build connection

Participants enjoyed having an opportunity to connect with their inner child, engage in games and “play” to connect with each other. Setting the scene in the sessions with this was an important way for participants to feel comfortable and open to connecting with new people in the session.

Humour-based activities are adaptable

We were flexible and adapted the humour-based games and warm-up activities to a range of groups and workshop contexts. In all instances, these activities had the same result of making the group comfortable and open to discussions about mental health. This demonstrates how these activities can adapt to suit a range of contexts.

Suggestions for Future Projects

Inclusion of **games** and **play-based activities** to create a positive environment at the start of a workshop is a fun and accessible way to break the ice.

Encouraging participants, especially older adults, to create time in their lives to be creative, is important for **wellbeing, reducing stress** and **combatting loneliness**.

Laughter is an effective way to **open up discussions** in **community spaces** about challenging topics like stress, loneliness, resilience and mental health. It can be easily included as part of many workshop formats to create a **relaxed environment** at the beginning and is very **adaptable**.

Suggestions for Future Projects

It is important to **adapt** workshops to the participants' **context**. For example, a social group for older adults suits play, game-based and group creative activities to ensure participants have time to **connect** and socialise with new people.

Meanwhile, a group of colleagues aiming to connect as a team may better suit more focus on **collaborative** activities to build on working relationships.

Including **trigger warnings** or **disclaimers** in activity plans to prepare participants who may struggle with activities and vulnerability. This is important for ensuring **inclusivity**, and that participants can be **supported** throughout activities.