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Active Café



A space for common activating youth
with intellectual disabilities and seniors



ACTIVE
CAFÉ

1. Who is this innovation for?

Active Café innovation can be implemented and realized by therapists, instructors, caregivers and parents – individuals working every day with youth with intellectual disabilities at educational facilities, support facilities, rehabilitation facilities, social welfare centers, or NGOs.

Recipients and participants are:

- **youth with mild intellectual disabilities** aged 17–20, attending vocational schools;
- **seniors** aged 60–70, still active and open to be socially active;
- **parents and caregivers** of young people with intellectual disabilities;
- elderly and lonely individuals in the need of help and support, **members of local communities.**

2. What social problem does it address?

According to the *Study of the needs of disabled individuals*¹ the life quality for individuals with intellectual disabilities has been measured as the lowest among all populations. Among individuals with disabilities it is that group that faces the biggest obstacles in case of employment, while integration and social rehabilitation belong to the least satisfied needs. Youth with mild intellectual disabilities who attend vocational schools have limited perspectives when it comes to professional opportunities and suffer from a lack of stable social circle.

Results of research on the level of happiness among seniors² don't leave much room for optimism either. Merely half of the individuals looked at in the research declared

¹ Study was performed on behalf of the National Fund for Rehabilitation of Individuals with Disabilities by *Social Studies Marzena-Kawiecka*, 2018.

² Collected in a report entitled "Quality of life for elders in Poland on the basis of social cohesiveness research 2015" (GUS, US in Łódź, 2017)



photo: Patrycja Kurek

a sense of purpose in life and was optimistic about the future. The most common form of spending free time for individuals 65 and above is watching television, listening to the radio, walks and relaxing outside. Seniors are rarely accompanied by counterparts their age and even less frequently by representatives of other age groups. Hence, both seniors and the youth with intellectual disabilities have limited opportunities for contact and social, or professional meetings. As a result they tend to retreat from social life, limiting their living space to their apartments, despite the fact that just like everybody else they have a need for being active, feeling fulfilled, accepted and belonging. They are still missing that crucial space for development, work and integration that would be welcoming to both groups simultaneously.

3. Description

Where did the idea come from?

Both seniors and youth with intellectual disabilities constitute groups most often exposed to social and professional exclusion, either because of the disabilities, or due to senior's lack of professional engagement and activity, diminished physical capabilities, as well as the cultural trends that champion young age, paired with disappearing respect for the life wisdom of our elders. And although it would appear like these two groups could not be more different, they face similar social challenges.

Authors of the innovation stress that their goal is to have these obstacles disappear. That's how the idea of the **Active Café** came to be. Against the stereotypes and old patterns, the innovators created and tested an innovation that allows observing and extracting the hidden potential in dependent individuals, while simultaneously paving the way to social inclusion for seniors and individuals with intellectual disabilities.

Essence of the innovation

The innovation created a special place – the **Active Café**, or a space that's open to:

- Youth with intellectual disabilities that, through social and vocational training learns new skills and competences,
- Seniors, who can share their knowledge and experience through the role of mentors,
- Members of the local community, who can get to know each other better through community meetings, as well as recognize the potential of others and together build a community of neighbors based on mutual trust and acceptance.

The innovation supports active exchange between generations, activates the youth with intellectual disabilities and seniors, as well as integrates them with the local community. The essence of the project is the collaboration between the seniors-mentors and the youth, with whom they share their experiences and knowledge. The goal is to encourage the elders of the community to leave their houses, offering help to those in need and integrating the community.

Initially, the assumption was that the seniors will teach them something and later they could use that knowledge to help the seniors. But the seniors benefit from it as well. Oftentimes our elders, just like our kids after school day is over, stay at home and have no friends to spend their time with, and all that education is for nothing. If parents are forced to keep their kid at home, they are – to an extent – confining themselves as well.

Ms. Dorota, a mother and a testing participant

Active Café is a safe space and an environment designed for a personal and social development where dependent individuals can fulfill themselves in new roles and responsibilities, are acknowledged, appreciated and accepted. It's a space for integration, generational exchange of knowledge, experiences and attitudes. As a center of local community it shows that the world can be sensitive and open to intellectual disabilities. It's a place that brings out curiosity and interest of others – anyone can visit it and receive help, or actively engage in its work. The innovative space, or collectively arranged room and workspace that was created during the project will serve the youth, mentors, parents and seniors, as well as the local community.

Innovators team

Innovation step by step

Active Café step by step:

- recruiting youth with intellectual disabilities and seniors (potential mentors)
- trainings and introductory meetings
 - introduction to social and professional activation for youth with intellectual disabilities
 - introduction to mentoring for seniors and specification of needs and work with the youth with intellectual disabilities
 - first aid training, work safety regulations, fire safety
 - integration meeting for youth with intellectual disabilities, parents, caregivers and seniors – mentor pairing (young person – senior)
- mentoring workshops series for seniors
- social and professional skills workshops and training series, as well as home assignments according to individual work requirements

- economic trainings (value of money, forms of payment, shopping)
- practical vocational training workshops (arranging and servicing a coffee shop – decorating, cleaning, serving)
- culinary trainings (food preparation)
- optional – activating workshops based on groups potential, internal dynamics and creativity, e.g. original ideas of senior mentors, animating activities
- support and motivation groups within the same age brackets – youth with intellectual disabilities, senior mentors, parents and caregivers of youth with intellectual disabilities
- workshops in two-way communication for youth with intellectual disabilities
- bringing coffee shop's open space to life
 - cyclical, open integration meetings for the local community with elements of social animation and presentation of innovation's community potential
- establishing contacts between seniors in need, offering help and inviting to a common space for social gatherings and inter-generational exchange.

Plan of action can be appropriately modified, according to the needs and the potential of participants, as well as resources available, or the allocated time.

3

innovators

8

young people
with intellectual
disabilities

8

parents / caregivers

6

senior mentors

6

months of testing
and designing

24

training
workshops

6

support group meetings
and individual
consultations for
parents and caregivers

4

integration meetings
with the local community
x 60 participants
at each meeting

My goal was to create a space where people like our youth will have something of their own. Someplace where they could come and feel at ease, feel fulfilled, dance, sing and work. A place where they would have their own space. That's what was important for me. The innovation allowed me to take our youth outside and present their skills and how wonderful they are to a broader community, so that they wouldn't be anonymous any longer. And seniors support them wonderfully and find fulfillment in their mission as well. I even plan to create jobs.

Joanna Rychlik, an innovator and co-creator of the innovation

I co-created the foundation with my Katarzyna in mind. I really wanted a place where my daughter, her friends with intellectual disabilities could meet, talk, develop their passions, fulfill their dreams, dance, sing and learn how to become adults. This undertaking gave us plenty of opportunities. Young people began to believe in themselves, while seniors began to feel needed again. A community emerged, an innovative community. Seniors talk to us and that's cool. They keep in touch, ask how we feel. They like it here and they like talking to us. We're good together. I liked coming here and meeting my friends.

Mati and Weronika, young testing participants

I like going there because I have company, friends and very nice ladies. I'm never bored.

Konrad, young testing participant

I came up with doing different crafts. Beata can't do it because she struggles with tying a bow. Mati gets bored fast, but Szymon is great at it. He has a great sense of beauty and works eagerly and diligently (...) I use his talents for sandwich making. He likes doing it (...) I want to encourage him to talk more (...) Recently, he read out loud from a book – that's a huge success.

Maria, senior mentor – testing participant

My son is more receptive now. It's a result of his talks with the seniors. He can now make his own sandwich at home, where before it would never happen. Now he'll even do dishes, or vacuum. It used to be hard for him, now he's eager to do it.

Beata, mother – testing participant

I wanted to make my son more independent. I know that independence is limited, but I'm still surprised, because for the past couple months he's been taking a bus on his own. I wanted a meaningful future for my son and others like him, relatively independent and active, so they could have contact with other people and be accepted, take a proper place within the society.

Klaudia, mother, an innovator – co-creator of the innovation

When we had the opening, the young ones put on professional aprons with their names, not nicknames we call them by, but the proper names. When they walked out it was amazing. Everybody's faces told me everything I needed to know. That was it. I think it gave us all a lot, to appreciate them and see them as adults. That project is like a positive trigger.

Jolanta Rychlik, an innovator, co-creator of the innovation

Resources, costs and recommendations

The success of the **Active Café** depends on people engaged in its implementation. Here's the suggested team structure:

- occupational therapists, specialized pedagogue, socio-therapist trained in working with intellectually disabled youth, a coordinator, who creates and implements workshop scenarios and monitors group's progress, as well as progress of its individual participants
- psychologist, coach and mentor, who mentors and supports the development of the seniors

Competent, creative and engaged team should create scenarios for activities for the youth with intellectual disabilities and seniors, adjusting them to the needs and requirements of a particular group and using tips from specialists, as well as caregivers, of intellectually disabled youth.

The innovation is based on individuals directly engaged in its realization. Both the recruitment of senior mentors and of the youth is extremely important. To break the initial ice between the two groups one can apply "relationship warmer" – a tool created by the social innovator Beata Podlasek. **How to do it?**

Work and engagement of the parents and caregivers of youth with intellectual disabilities are extremely important for motivating the kids, as well as helping with creating

the space, collaboration during integration meetings, as well as regular monitoring and development meetings.

When building relationship with the local community it's important to find partners in the local government, collaborate with the local leaders and NGOs. Depending on the environment and conditions volunteers and individuals who are socially active, experienced mentors, photographers and interior designers can be helpful as well.

Other important resources and associated costs:

- space that is appropriate for the needs of participants (workshop space, café equipment)
- materials for social skills training
- training materials for working with the intellectually disabled youth (regulations, work sheets, motivators)
- MasterMind workshop materials
- animation elements helping with integration meetings
- compensations for specialists, possible mandatory trainings and insurance
- potential promotional materials (recruitment, integration)

IMPORTANT!

Work with intellectually disabled youth and with seniors, as well as connecting the two groups requires patience and proper tools, but most importantly careful observations. It's important to remember that due to specific needs and limitations participants are not always ready for what has been planned. That's why plans always need to be flexible and any particular workshop requires its moderators to sense what is the atmosphere within the group.

The scenarios should be modified accordingly to the observed situation on any given day, depending on the disposition and psychological and physical state of the participants – primarily the youth and in the case of joined activities also of the seniors. Quick reaction time and changes on the spot are very helpful and could serve as a way of testing for a senior mentor. Tasks and tools for work with the intellectually disabled should be consulted and created according to tips from parents and caregivers, based on youth's competences and abilities, including limitations to their motor skills, as well as focus abilities and sensory sensitivity.

4. Who's behind it?



photo: Anna Szewczyk
(ArtPozytywni)

Jolanta Rychlik – vice-chair of the “Świat Wrażliwy” Foundation, occupational therapist, leader of the design team, heart and brains of the operation – spiritus movens of the innovation: I said it many times – my daughter Katarzyna was the inspiration. Our innovation consists of people who create it. The biggest joy and satisfaction is to see the young people happy, smiling, appreciated and proud of their accomplishment.

Kludia Tarasiewicz – expert through experience, responsible for support from parents and caregivers of youth with intellectual disabilities, member of the “Świat Wrażliwy” foundation: Thanks to the project I have become active and learned a lot. Co-creating

the project and its successful testing made me more optimistic about the future of my son and others like him. I believe now their lives can be active, accomplished and spent among other people. I feel great satisfaction and gratitude.

Agnieszka Głuszczyńska – psychologist, coach, mentor working with innovative methods, supporting development: It's a huge personal and professional satisfaction to see how bold dreams of an innovator come to fruition. Young people grow up and become independent, while seniors blossom in their creativity and happiness from helping others.



Foundation “Świat Wrażliwy” was created in 2012. Its main goal is to help youth with intellectual disabilities, seniors, as well as others in need who find themselves in difficult life circumstances.

www.swiatwrazliwy.pl

fb.com/fundacjaswiatwrazliwy2013



photo: Patrycja Kurek

5. Contact information

Fundacja „Świat Wrażliwy” – **Active Cafe**

[fb/CaffeAktywni](https://www.facebook.com/CaffeAktywni)

<https://www.innowacjеспoleczne.org.pl/caffe-aktywni>

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