STAGE OF mind

PARTICIPANTS-BASED
EVALUATION REPORT

Elaborated by HAIL

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Participants-based evaluation report

1. Executive Summary

This qualitative analysis of feedback from the participants engaged in the Erasmus+ funded Stage of Mind project indicates that the key objectives and aims of the project were met over the two-year period of delivery and the positive impact of the delivery of the drama and theatre training programme was evident for participants across the three participating countries.

Participants, people with long term and enduring mental health difficulties were invited to participate in a series of theatre training workshops and drama/theatre based creative process to develop and stage an original piece of musical theatre. Totally 62 participants engaged in the project activities.

Participants' feedback indicates that as a result of engagement in the process the participants had a positive experience of exploring their creativity and expression through theatre and were satisfied with the original pieces of theatre created, felt that the process destigmatized mental health experiences in arts spaces and the general community and closed the gap between themselves and the realm of the arts.

Most significantly for participants, engaging in the Erasmus+ StaGe of Mind (SoM) project contributed positively to an improvement in their quality of life, a reduction in internalized stigma, opportunities for social connection and integration, improvement in physical and cognitive abilities, emotional understanding and self-awareness, increased confidence and leadership skills, supported health routines and decision making and new practical skills to deliver a theatre-based group in the future.

However, there were some challenges indicated by participants. Most participants valued the process of engaging in the workshops and the creative process over the final outcome of a performance. Participants indicate these challenges could be managed by introducing an alternative process to create and screen a short film. This was somewhat piloted in this process by the Greek Partners as they integrated video of participants that could not participate in person. Many participants indicate this would be useful in a second evolution of this project.

It is important to note that this report relies primarily on self-reporting which is subjective in itself and participants may have been inclines to provide what they perceive as socially desirable responses as they have an ongoing relationship in many cases with the mental health partner organisations and staff.

2. An introduction to the StaGe of Mind project

The Erasmus+ StaGe of Mind project was designed to provide opportunities for people with severe, long term and enduring mental health difficulties and psychosocial challenges to participate in creative activities in the field of performing arts, to co-create an original piece of theatre on an equal basis with performing arts professionals and to present to the general public a musical performance in each participant country.

The project was created with the main purpose of offering access to the artistic and cultural environment of musical theatre with the goal of contributing overall to the improvement of their quality of life, but also to the elimination of the stigma of mental illness, the public awareness, social integration and the development of artistic and creative self-expression skills through their connection to the cultural and artistic scene.

Key objectives of the project were:

1. Improving the cognitive skills and basic abilities of adult beneficiaries with serious psychosocial problems through specialized, vocational training in the performing arts
2. Facilitating the access of people with psychosocial disabilities to the artistic scene, performing arts and cultural events
3. The training of the beneficiary participants in the self-management of a theatre group after the end of the project, to promote the idea of presence on the artistic stage and contribute to the creation of a resilient community with an inherent sense of belonging.
4. Advocating for the social integration of people with psychosocial problems, eliminating stigma and social exclusion, and ensuring access to collective and social life through the arts and culture.

The project was delivered over a two-year duration (May 2021 – April 2023) and was implemented in 3 countries: Spain, Greece, Ireland. Six organizations collaborated in the design, delivery and evaluation of the project including three mental health organizations and three performing arts organizations. Each participant country had one nominated mental health partner and one performing arts partner as follows:

Country	Mental Health Partner	Performing Arts Partner
Spain	Fundación INTRAS (Coordinator)	Rayuela Producciones Teatrales S.L.
Greece	Society of Social Psychiatry P. Sakellaropoulos (EKPSE)	Angels of Joy
Ireland	Housing Association for Integrated Living (HAIL)	Smashing Times Theatre Company

2.1 Implementation of the project

The project was delivered over two phases. The first phase involved approximately eight months of training in basic principles and methods of the performing arts through structured training workshops. The structure and content of the workshops was based on the content of ten training modules developed by the three performing arts organizations and covering the full range of performing arts and training areas required to conduct a musical theatre performance. In the first phase, the participants had the opportunity to practice activities related to the cultivation of skills in areas such as: memory and concentration, focus, artistic skills of speech production, communication, social skills, creativity and imagination, planning and organization, persistence and stamina, physical expression and physical condition.

The second phase was delivered over six months and was targeted at the production and preparation of an original theatre performance by the participants with the guidance and coordination of drama/theatre professionals. The StaGe of Mind training workshops commenced in early 2022 for a duration of 14 months. The first phase was the preparatory or training phase and the second was the creative phase, culminating in the production and presentation of an original piece of musical theatre. The goal was to utilize the knowledge and training the participants received during the first phase and to integrate that learning in the second one to co-produce with performing arts professionals an original piece of theatre to be performed between February and March 2023.

The ultimate goal of the workshops was to improve a range of abilities and skills of the participants, such as: motor, expressive, creative, musical theatre skills, but above all, to create a stable community through the cultivation of a sense of "belonging", so that the participants prepare for the self-management of an amateur theatre group in the future.

This participants-based report presents the feedback of the people that took part in the project activities and is part of a suite of deliverables produced over the course of this project including the items outlined in the table below.

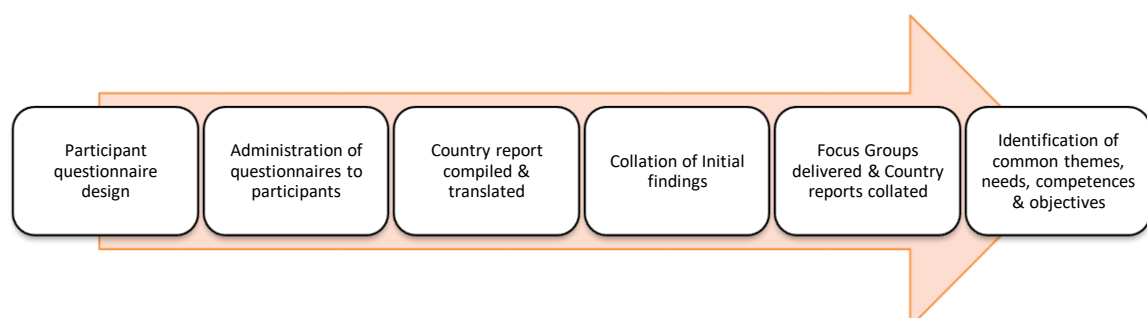| Deliverables Associated with the StaGe of Mind Project	
Training Programme	Educational material/resources tailor-made for training people with long term and enduring mental health difficulties through performing arts. The training programme consists of 10 modules covering the fundamental principles and skills necessary for the production of a play including creative techniques of script writing, acting, movement and basic principles of stage and costume design.
Blog	A Blog hosting articles produced by the six partner organizations illustrating the connection between art and mental health.

Original live musical theatre performances	Three original musical theatre performances in which the skills developed during the first phase of the programme were integrated in a creative process in the second phase.
Online Portal	Development of a personalized online portal, where the educational material is hosted so similar organizations working with this demographic may replicate the project and access the project partner organizations for further support.
Integral report	An integral report detailing the strengths and weaknesses of the programme and recommendations for implementation of similar projects in the future.

3. Project Evaluation Process

This evaluation process set out to measure the impact of the project from the participant perspective on the basis of the four key project objectives:

1. Improve cognitive skills and key competences through a tailor made, professional performing arts training - The impact of the training programme on development of transversal competences: comprehension, language/communication & cognitive function (memory, attention, perception)
2. Facilitate access to the cultural and arts scene
3. Prepare participants to self-manage a professionalized theatre group, to promote their long-term presence on artistic stage and create a durable community with an intrinsic sense of belonging
4. Advocate for social inclusion of people living with mental ill health and combat the stigma attached to them by giving visibility to the collective through the cultural and art scene

The materials for the evaluation of the project were gathered through a combination of peer designed feedback forms and focus groups with peer designed topic guides as follows:

Participant questionnaire design → Administration of questionnaires to participants → Country report compiled & translated → Collation of Initial findings → Focus Groups delivered & Country reports collated → Identification of common themes, needs, competences & objectives

Some participants were supported to complete the evaluation forms due to accessibility/ literacy needs. Feedback was gathered four times over the course of the project and translated within each partner country. This participant feedback was then collated and analysed.

The data was analysed using methods of Phenomenology to develop an understanding of the specific experience of the impact of participation in the StaGe of Mind theatre/drama programme.

4. Participants

Most of the participants were people with long term and mental health difficulties. Participants were accessing mental health services and either living independently in the community or housed in community housing structures or supported accommodation in Athens, Dublin and Valladolid. In the case of the Spanish participants, the opportunity to participate in the program was also offered to some homeless people, users of the municipal shelter in the city of Valladolid. INTRAS started running this service some years ago, after having detected the high incidence of mental health problems in this group.

The aim was to have 45 participants across 3 countries with 15 participants per country. In phase 1, there were 12 participants in Greece, 10 participants in Ireland and 14 in Spain; while in phase 2, there were 11 participants in Greece (+34 people participating by video), 18 participants in Ireland and 22 in Spain. Considering some overlap in participants in phase 1 and phase 2, the total number of unique participants engaged in the project is 62.

Unique participants	Phase I	Phase II	Performance (backstage & on stage)	Total
SPAIN	14	22	12	32
IRELAND	10	18	18	18
GREECE	12	11	7*	12
			TOTAL	62

*34 people participating by video

Participants were aged between 20 up to 70. There was a high concentration of participants in their 40s & 50s in the 3 participating countries.

There were significantly more male than female participants in each phase of the project. Engagement of males was higher than female in all 3 countries.

There were shared challenges expressed in the recruitment and engagement of participants and some participants withdrew from the process for various reasons, some noting their discomfort with a public performance. For others, their housing situation changed or challenges with their mental health recovery impacted their ability to participate. Participants were not a consistent group across the full timeframe of the project.

5. Findings & Discussion

Within this analysis we look at the impact of the training programme on development of transversal competences comprehension, language/communication and cognitive function including memory, attention, perception.

5.1 Phase 1

In the initial phase of the project, participants identified positive impact on their mood and emotional state. In addition, they identified positive impact on their behaviour and actions. Participants also identified impact on their cognitive function including Thinking & Decision Making. Participants agreed that the project had a positive impact on their Life Skills, Independence and how they live their daily lives.

In the first phase of the project, the evaluation process focused on how the training programme impacted participants in their daily lives. Participants indicated that there were more functional and able for daily tasks.

Routine

Managing those daily tasks, participants noted that participating in the programme motivated them to maintain their routine and personal care. They noted that engagement in the project activities contributed to the structure of their week and indicated that this was because they had a specific purpose or role within the project. Participants indicated that the programme provided a new and purposeful aspect of their regular weekly routine. A solid routine supported participants to avoid engaging in older self-harmful or self-neglect behaviours.

Focus & Memory

Participants reported that the training supported them to be present in the moment and leave thoughts or concerns outside the session. This supported participants to be mindful and present. Being present allowed participants time to focus attention and develop awareness around attention. Some participants noted that this helped them manage distraction.

For some participants, challenges with memory were stressful. Participants reported concerns about their ability to memorise and retain information for a number of reasons: the impact of medication on their short-term memory, ongoing experiences of anxiety contributing to divided attention or an inability to focus and remember and particularly performance anxiety. For some participants, performance anxiety impacted them within the workshops and

inhibited participation and for others they experienced anxiety around only the final performance. Performance anxiety related to the workshops reduced as the training programme progressed and participants experienced a psychological safety within workshops where they asked questions, made suggestions and illustrated initiative but performance anxiety about the final performance arose again in the second phase.

Creativity & Risk Taking

The action of being fully present in the moment allowed participants to be creative and participants were "*enjoying learning something new*" and found the workshops "*motivating to take risks and try something new*". There were some expressions of perfectionism reported around fears of getting things wrong, making mistakes and not feeling good enough to participate. This suggests a lack of confidence for some participants as they took a risk and tried something new. However, as the sessions progressed making mistakes was normalized as participants saw there was no right or wrong way to express themselves and participants became more comfortable and playful in the activities in the training programme.

Group Interaction & Social Connection

Participants reported the teamwork within their workshops and the collaboration between participants in the session provided new ways to communicate. The workshops provided a shared task and a common goal for participants to focus their interaction. As the participants worked in a collaborative and equal way they report that they learn not only from the facilitator but from one another's experience.

The interaction between participants gave some participants a space to reflect, imagine and create in new ways of being. Participants reported discovering new interests and new aspect of self in these interactions in addition to gaining new social contacts.

The participants reported that they became comfortable and familiar enough to experience the workshops as a safe place to take social risk. Participants identified that at times they were following a leader within the group and at other times they were being a leader. This process facilitated an opportunity for participants to take initiative when they were comfortable to do so and to follow the group when that felt more appropriate. For some participants they identified that they developed leadership roles in phase 1 based on the group dynamic. These were fundamental for the second phase of the project.

Through this process participants were supported to develop new social connections and friendships. Many participants increase the frequency of social connections outside the family or mental health services bubble.

As a result, some participants suggested that the process supported independence in their daily life.

Mood

Many participants reported that this had a positive impact on their mood and increased feelings of happiness were felt during the session as well as after the sessions. Some participants reported feeling some uncertainty or discomfort in the initial sessions when they were not sure what to expect. This discomfort may be indicative of participants being pushed out of their comfort zone and may be considered the foundation of the confidence developed throughout phase 2.

Some participants report ongoing stress/distress during their period of participation but the level of this stress/distress was decreased by engaging in the project. A small number of participants reported in the first phase that despite their discomfort with memory-based exercises, they noticed improvements in the cognitive goals of this process.

Physicality

Participants identified the value of the workshops in developing cconnections to the self and their own physical body.

Participants expressed that the physical movement often impacted their mood, and brought exhilaration and laughter. Participants noted an increased awareness of their physicality and physical ability through the specific exercises in the programme. Participants used exploration of physical space and movement of the body to express something that they could not verbalise.

Participants noted some challenges to participation during this period. Some of the participants shared challenges around physical movement and mobility. This was particularly noted by some of the older participants and some participants that disclosed physical disabilities. Participants felt the facilitators adapted the programme to their needs but at times some participants sat out specific exercises. There was some self-consciousness impacting self-expression in a physical way.

Participants experienced challenges around physical interaction and synchronizing movement with their peers. Participants found the observation of cues and the investment of energy in awareness to tune in to one another and predict one another's movements challenging. Participants noted great levels of satisfaction when these frustrations were overcome and in many cased expressed that this was a skill that was developed as the workshops progressed.

Some participants reported initial challenges regarding proximity and the movement of other bodies close to theirs. This was particularly significant for some participants that disclosed historical physical or sexual trauma. Facilitators were provided resources to work from a trauma informed approach and this was implemented universally. Participants recognized that there was flexibility in the delivery of the programme to accommodate their needs. As the first

phase progressed, participants noted that they felt more comfortable and safer in the workshop space to participate in physical exercised.

Confidence & Comfort with Visibility

In the initial phase of the project the most significant challenge was engagement. Many of our clients were uncertain and self-conscious about getting involved in a drama project. Fears were particularly expressed around anticipation of a possible performance and visibility in the community. Self-consciousness was one factors inhibiting participation. This involved being visible in the room with others and to the general public and in terms of final performance. Clients and tenants discussed that stigma around mental health impacted this concern around visibility. They also articulated that they were aware that they had internalised this stigma, referring to it as self-stigma. As phase 1 progressed some of these fears alleviated although sensitivity in relation to any public performance persisted.

Materials & Training Programme Design

Overall participants provided very positive feedback on the activities and exercises within the training programme. Participants recognize facilitators adapt to the needs of the group and the interaction between the facilitator, the group and the materials was significant in the success of the delivery of the materials.
Some participants felt there could be additional trust work within the group sessions and more time with an increased number of sessions to develop confidence. Participants also reported that the integration of more music and musical exercises or games would have been useful at this phase of the project. This was developed further in the second phase of the project.

Facilitators/Trainers

Across three countries participants reported that facilitators/trainers were supportive, encouraging, motivating and brought energy to the workshops that encouraged positive risk taking and creativity. Facilitators/Trainers were noted for creating safe space, warm atmosphere and trust. Facilitators/Trainers were reported by participants as well informed and communicate clearly the exercises and the purpose of the programme

Facilitators /Trainers were authentic and genuinely interested in the project and respectful of its participants, particularly around confidence and self-consciousness.

Access to Cultural and Arts Scene

Many of the participants were not previously engaged with the arts and in phase 1 had limited exposure to this area. Many considered themselves removed from the spheres of arts and culture with one remarking,

"The arts are for other people, rich people that went to college and all that, and their folks brought them to speech and drama from when they were kids."

The identified that the arts were for others and not them, not people who were experiencing homelessness, housing insecurity and mental health difficulties. They identified that this was the realm of people with more economic, social and cultural capital. They did not have experience participating in a lot of arts-based culture. More frequently they were engaged in creative writing and felt this was a more private way to express and explore sensitive themes. There were fears about expressing that vulnerability in front of others.

5.2 Phase 2

The analysis of phase 2 is focused on integrating the learning from phase 1 and the experiences from phase 2 in to an analysis of the project's primary objectives. The feedback illustrates that Phase 2 was a deeper and richer experience for the participants in terms of achieving objectives. Many similar themes are developed in phase 2 and participants report great positive impact regarding positive physical, cognitive and social developments. Some challenges persist in phase 2, particularly those around memory and these are explored below.

Engagement

Most participants reported no experience of drama or theatre and others had some limited experience of community drama. Feedback indicated that the structure of the sessions allowed people to take equal part in the process and were able to be increasingly vulnerable with their engagement as the sessions progressed. Participants identified the psychological safety created in the group supported their participation and engagement. The development of a sense of identity as a group was a significant factor in this and participants felt a responsibility to commit to their engagement out of respect of the process and their peers within the group.

Focus and Memory

Some participants identified that they continued to struggle somewhat to concentrate and focus in the sessions. For some experiencing agitation, a flexible approach allowed people to engage and disengage in the process as needed and build their capacity to maintain focus.

Most participants agreed that the programme improved their memory and concentration. Common fears were reported regarding memorising and performing despite participants reporting improvements in short term memory. Participants felt memory exercises were useful and some of the self-consciousness expressed in phase 1 around this was reduced in phase 2. As there as some shifting and inconsistency of participants, it is unclear if this is because participants who were most self-conscious disengaged for phase 2. However, as a core group was consistent it is more likely that this represents an increased level of confidence in participants.

Participants reported an incremental improvement in memory that they found challenging but highly valuable. This experience particularly intensified in later stages of phase 2.

Participants report positive developments also in relation to focus and indicate that they feel more able for daily tasks. Participants indicate that this development of memory and focus supported them to manage specific symptoms associated with their mental health or learning diagnosis. Participants report that improvements in attention and comprehension allowed them to be mindfully present and that the training supported the development of focussed attention. Participants identified value in listening and response activities in the programme and the activities involving taking ideas and decisions into actions together. This collaborative and incremental approach supported the goals of the project.

Communication

Most participants agreed that the programme improved their communication skills. This was reported more intensely in phase 2 as trust and relationships were established within the groups, the groups were formed and participants expressed a sense of safety around taking risks in communicating.

A number of participants presented with a diagnosis that impacted their participation in some way: some participants disclosed speech impairments and some participants were limited in their verbal capacity or were nonverbal. In some groups there as a language barrier impacting participation.

However, all participants felt included and part of the group and all participants felt that they contributed to the group. In relation to language/communication, an inclusive approach was implemented by trainers to ensure all participants were part of the process. There were a mixture verbal & nonverbal exercises and support around use of voice and diction. Participants report that they felt supported by the group and the trainers/facilitators and the increased social interaction and opportunities to express themselves.

Many participants reported that they felt that participation in the programme was an opportunity to express themselves in a safe way through character. They could explore and communicate aspects of self without a high risk as they did so through character. They explored tone and pitch and enjoyed playing with the volume or loudness versus quietness of voice. For some this gave them more confidence to use their voice.

Some participants particularly enjoyed the exploration of vernacular through their characters. Most participants were not previously engaged in drama programmes or theatre and for them, characters with their own language and way of speaking were an important vehicle of expression and a significant endorsement of the cultural value of their vernacular. They expressed that theatre did not have to be elite in this way but instead, validated their own language and made their plays accessible and real to others.

Physicality

The nonverbal expression part of the programme allowed participants to express themselves in a creative way. Participants report exploration of subjective perception, acknowledging that we do not all perceive our reality or social situations in the same way. Through this they developed an increased ability to read physical cues. Participants also report in the second phase an increased physical awareness, of themselves within a space, where and how their body is, how they move and controlling their movement and a comfort with physical proximity of others in contrast to the first phase. Participants report increased mobility and increased confidence in relation to their mobility. Participants also report impact of the programme on their breath & physical stamina as they feel stronger and fitter and able to manage their breath when speaking.

"At first we could not gather for an hour to do the workshop and in the end, we managed to rehearse and perform for 3 hours".

There was a notable decrease in reporting of difficulties associated with movement and synchronization of movement with other group members in phase 2.

Emotional Exploration, Awareness & Management

A significant area of impact reported by participants, particularly as they progressed in to phase 2 was emotional exploration and emotional awareness. Participants report that the workshops allowed them a space to listen, to reflect, imagine & create in new ways. They reflected on their own historical emotional responses and imagined new alternative responses and ways to engage.

Participants report that they were able to explore different feelings and emotions and develop new self-Awareness through the process. Within a safe space through the training programme, the could draw on activities around image work and character to integrate and acknowledge their own feelings. They found the programme helped them to accept their feelings, not to deny them and that acceptance supported them to reframe them in a new way. Participants noted love, rejection, grief and excitement or anticipation in particular. eye opening experience. Have incorporated this for future understanding of feelings.

Participants reported the process was very therapeutic and the integration of self and character was an important aspect, as characters were developing and participants put their own experiences in to their characters they learned about themselves, their emotional responses and alternative perceptions and responses. One participant notes that culturally within her family life, expression of feelings was not the norm and consideration of feelings was dismissed and minimized. The participant indicated that this process allowed her to *"explore and understand my feelings and help me express myself more and put my feelings out there in a supported way. I wasn't afraid to do that because I wasn't myself, I was playing a character but there was a lot of myself in my character, a lot of my mistakes and what I would*

like to have done differently. I was able to try different things out like and I learned a lot about myself. It was eye opening."

The discovering of not only a new interest but new aspects of self here was unanticipated but highly impactful for participants.

Access to Cultural & Arts Scene

In addition to impact on the individual cognitively, socially or emotionally, this programme sought to have a cultural impact on its participants.

In the implementation it was revealed participants did develop new insights in to the arts and what is involved in putting together arts and cultural events together. Many participants initially expressed that they felt somewhat alienated from the arts and had not participated in anything like this programme or attended a play.

Participants report that as a result of their participation they felt encouraged to support the arts. Many participants attended plays and arts festival or cultural events for the first time. Some did this as individuals and some did this as a group with their peers from the training programme. In many cases the participants encouraged their peers also to access the cultural & arts scene by inviting them to a play. Participants report that they developed an increased confidence to connect with culture and the arts. They expressed that they felt decreased stigma and felt less alienated from the arts after participating in the programme.

"*I would have been a bit self-conscious to go before but not now, I wouldn't be embarrassed and now I have people to actually go to a play with here. When we go to plays now, I always buy a programme, in fact I buy two because I want to support the people behind it. I never knew how much went in to this behind the scenes, all the people involved in getting a play to the stage. It was great to work with those people and see it all through them*"

Through the programme, in each country participants worked with different combinations of theatre experts. Participants had sessions with costume designers from national theatres, they worked with professional stage managers and learned about set design, props and scene changes and they worked with lighting professionals around the impact of lighting and how they could use that to tell their story. Participants report that this engagement and the feeling of being in their local theatres was motivating for them to engage and support the arts.

In some cases, the participants report that they began to develop relationships and links with other community groups using community arts and specifically drama to maintain their learning and development through drama and to support local and community theatre.

Self-manage a professionalized theatre group

Participants report that they developed confidence, leadership and an understanding of some techniques and skills to deliver a group. However, they also recognise the expertise of the professionals that they have worked with throughout the project, particularly trained drama facilitators. Participants note that they have made connections with multiple professionals working in different aspects of the arts and developed engagement with key community stakeholders.

To deliver a self-managed group, participants agree that it is possible and would be enjoyable but they identify need for further training and expertise. The participants endorse their facilitators that gave great security in the process. Participants in some cases have taken responsibility and ownership of some parts of the sessions and are confident to deliver those activities. Some participants are interested in becoming drama facilitators as a result of their participation in the programme and are interested in integrating their lived experience in to their practice.

Initially participants were very tired after the performance, physically and emotionally as the process of performance and the preparation involved was a demanding process. Early feedback indicated that they did not want to do another live stage performance but they indicated that the process of getting to that point and the implementation of the training programme brought a connectivity and new ways to communicate around a shared task and common goal. Participants identified the development of a collective identity as a group with peer support and learning from one another's' experience at the core. Participants noted that they developed team work approaches and skills, collaboration and coproduction necessary to lead a group. Participants identified that the Stage of Mind workshops provided a safe place for participants to take small risks to lead in parts of sessions or processes and develop the leadership skills that are necessary to run a peer led self-managed theatre group.

Participants acknowledged that they would like to have a long-term presence in drama and cultural events and to be part of a durable arts community. Participants reported a decreased distance between their perceived selves and that arts community and reported as a result of the performance they felt part of a larger theatre based or arts community, something previously they felt removed from. The objective to promote long-term presence on artistic stage and create a durable community with an intrinsic sense of belonging has been somewhat achieved although there is need for further support and training to progress this further.

Advocate for social inclusion and combat stigma

Participants fed back that the Stage of Mind project facilitated an opportunity for them to develop an awareness of both the external stigma impacting them in their daily life and in their engagement in the arts and also the self or internalized stigma that they realized that they had integrated in to themselves. Some participants noted that they had integrated their diagnosis or symptom and other people's perceptions of them in to their understandings of themselves. This project provided an opportunity to lift that veil and evaluate who they were beyond the stigma.

The rehearsed readings, dress rehearsals and final performances for participants were identified as a "Showcase of ability" or a way to demonstrate and illustrate their competence, skill and creativity.

The participants although nervous about performance in Phase 1, expressed a confidence to be visible and to represent community acknowledging that the programme had a label of mental health. This illustrated a shift from beginning of the first phase where they were anxious about being exposed in public, this was significantly reduced in phase 2 when the focus shifted to concerns around memory and the practicalities of the show itself. Participants indicated that they were released from stigma in some ways and shifted from a "service user" or "client" to a "leader" or "performer", capable of taking initiative.

Through the character work in the programme participants had integrated parts of themselves with their character. When showcased in performance, the participants reported that the felt empowered by the endorsement of the audience's response and the acceptance from audience. This further contributed to reframing what they previously perceived as weakness or deficit as an asset and "a story worth sharing". In the final performance, the presence of their own support networks, participants were proud to showcase their achievement and this was more important than any shame around labels.
"They tried their hand and managed to defeat their shame. They won the love of the world, tenderness, and this raised their morale, fulfilling their expectations"

Materials and Programme Design

Overall there was very positive feedback on the materials and programme design and it was described by one participant as follows, "*we didn't even realise we were learning, we were just having fun and enjoying ourselves. We had a great time with the group. I don't know how she did it but it was like learning by stealth, we didn't even know it at the time and we were acting, we were already acting*"

Participants particularly enjoyed the low focus exercise and became more comfortable with high focus, increased exposure and visibility as programme progressed. Participants were more willing to be vulnerable in response to the programme as the sessions progressed. Participants gave particularly strong and positive responses to energy circles, improvisation and image work.

Participants recognize facilitators adapt the training programme to the needs of the group. The interaction between people and materials is significant here in that when participants fed back on materials they fed back on them in terms of how the programme was delivered by the facilitators involved.

Participants acknowledge the need for facilitators to be trauma informed and use recovery-oriented language in delivery. Participants recommended the programme be extended over

time to include more time and more sessions to develop confidence. Participants also recommended the integration of more music and musical exercises and games as this was not universal.

Facilitators/Trainers

In the second phase of the project, relationships and trust facilitators deepened in phase 2, with participants noted the facilitators created safe spaces, warm atmosphere that was comfortable and a space for play and fun.

Facilitators/trainers were perceived as perceptive and in tune with the group needs, supportive of group members, encouraging of participants to engage actively and motivating. Participants noted that facilitators bring energy to the workshops. Participants describe that that energy encourages positive risk taking and creativity in the programme.

Participants report that they trusted their Facilitators/Trainers as they were well informed and communicated clearly the purpose of the programme and sessions. Participants reported that they were inspired and motivated to continue by facilitators as they were genuinely interested and authentic in the project. Participants identified that facilitators were respectful of them, particularly around confidence, self-consciousness and memorisation.

6. Conclusions & Recommendations

Throughout each country it was clear that participants enjoyed the experience of engagement in StaGe of Mind and they indicated improvements in physical, social and cognitive functioning in line with the key objectives. These improvements were noted particularly in relation to the training and creative programme but less so in relation to the final performance. For many participants, they indicate that anxiety, self-consciousness, stigma and lack of self-confidence left them feeling uncomfortable, stressed and extremely tired after the performance. They were keen to participate again in the drama/theatre workshops and not a final performance.

Future iterations of this project could be improved by allowing more time for participants to adjust to the process, built relationships and group and develop the confidence and skills to deliver the project. Additional time and an increased number of workshops would facilitate further opportunities to develop leadership within participants in the group so that participants could take increased ownership of the project and its processes.

In terms of next phase of the project, a video-based project similar to what was implemented by the Greek partners in this process could support a less stressful level of exposure, focus and visibility. Participants could work with professionals to develop relevant drama and recording/editing/sound skills to create a short film. A training programme engaging experts in the field, similar to the Stage of Mind Programme, could be developed.

A development of this project could also focus on the integration of participants to access mainstream arts and cultural events as there was limited evidence to illustrate that this occurred when participants were more focussed on their own performance.

ANNEX 1 – Evaluation questionnaire for participants

1 Month / 3 Months / 6 Months / 9 Months / After-training

Date _____

This form can be completed anonymously to protect your privacy and comfort. However, if you decide to put your name, it can be used to track your progress along the course of the training.

Name (optional) _____

Please grade the following statements (mark the box with an X)

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. I am enjoying the training so far					
2. The training information is clear					
3. My motivation levels are high					
4. I find everyone involved is friendly and I feel included					
5. I feel comfortable and supported during the training sessions					
6. I can confidently use my body language to support my communication with others					
7. I am confident in my leadership skills					

8. The trainer(s) are well informed and supportive					
9. I am able to turn my ideas and decisions into actions					
10. I can easily remember things that I have an interest in					
11. I am able to keep going even when a task is difficult					
12. I feel I can confidently perform light to medium intensity physical activities					
13. I am able to make a plan and complete it within the time frame given					
14. I find it easy to create solutions to a problem					
15. I can concentrate on the tasks and activities I am performing					
16. I am able to find new and creative ways of doing things					

Please answer the following questions

In what ways is the training affecting your daily life?

_____
_____
_____
_____

What have you found most beneficial so far?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

What have you found most challenging so far?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Do you feel confident when you are reading or speaking in public? If not, what could help you gain more confidence?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

How have the trainers helped and supported you to date?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

How can the sessions, materials or participant experience be improved?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Are you affected by anything that might impact your participation in the workshop activities that you would like your facilitator/s to be aware of? If yes, please also state what could help you

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

ANNEX 2 – Focus group guidelines

Discussion guide

Focus groups can be a valuable method for evaluating the benefits of participation in a performative arts training program for individuals with mental health issues. By following these guidelines, it is possible to ensure a respectful, inclusive, and productive environment for participants to share their experiences and insights.

- **Introduction**:

Welcome participants and express gratitude for their willingness to participate.

Remind participants of the purpose of the focus group: to evaluate the benefits of their participation in the StaGe of Mind training program.

- **Icebreaker:**

Begin with a warm-up question to help participants feel comfortable and encourage interaction, such as: "Please share one positive experience you have had during the previous sessions of the training program."

- **Experiences and perceptions:**

Ask participants to reflect on their overall experience in the program and share their thoughts on the following:

a. What motivated you to join the performative arts training program?
b. How did you perceive the program before joining, and how has it changed over time?
c. What were your initial expectations, and have they been met? Why or why not?

- **Impact on mental health and well-being:**

Explore the impact of the program on participants' mental health and well-being by asking questions such as:

a. In what ways do you feel the s training program has positively affected you?
b. Have you noticed any changes in your emotional well-being, self-esteem, or confidence as a result of participating in the program?
c. Are there any specific skills or strategies you have gained that have helped you cope with your mental health challenges?

- **Self-expression and creativity:**

Discuss the role of self-expression and creativity within the performative arts training program:

a. How has the program provided opportunities for self-expression and creativity?
b. In what ways has engaging in the arts helped you express your thoughts, emotions or personal experiences?
c. Share any memorable instances where you felt your creativity was encouraged and supported.

- **Social connections and support:**

Explore the impact of the program on participants' social connections and support networks:

a. Have you formed any new relationships or connections through the training program?
b. How have these connections influenced your sense of belonging and support?
c. Share any examples of how the program has facilitated collaboration and teamwork among participants.

- **Personal growth and empowerment:**

Discuss participants' personal growth and feelings of empowerment resulting from their involvement in the program:

a. Have you experienced any personal growth or positive changes in other areas of your life due to your participation?
b. How has the program empowered you to overcome challenges or push your boundaries?
c. Share any specific instances where you felt a sense of achievement or personal development.

- **Recommendations and feedback:**

Allow participants to provide suggestions for program improvement and share any additional feedback:

a. What aspects of the training program could be enhanced or expanded to better support participants' mental health?
b. Are there any specific resources or support services you feel should be incorporated into the program?
c. Share any other thoughts, suggestions, or feedback you have regarding the program.

- **Conclusion:**

Thank participants for their valuable insights and contributions.

Remind participants that their feedback will be used to inform program improvements and advocate for the benefits of the performative arts training program for individuals with mental health issues.

Note: Adapt and modify the discussion guide as needed to address the specific goals and objectives of your evaluation and the unique needs of your participant group.

Establishing clear rules

When conducting focus groups, it is important to establish clear rules and guidelines to ensure a productive and respectful environment. Here are some commonly recommended focus group rules:

Respectful communication: Encourage participants to listen attentively and speak respectfully to one another. Remind them to avoid interrupting or talking over others.

Confidentiality: Emphasize the importance of maintaining confidentiality within the group. Assure participants that their contributions will be anonymized and that they should not share any personal information outside of the focus group.

Active participation: Encourage active participation from all participants. Remind them to contribute their thoughts and experiences openly, while also being mindful of allowing others to share their perspectives.

One conversation at a time: Ensure that only one person speaks at a time to avoid confusion and promote clarity. Participants should wait for their turn to speak and avoid side conversations.

Non-judgmental attitude: Create a non-judgmental atmosphere where participants feel comfortable sharing their thoughts and experiences without fear of criticism. Encourage a mindset of curiosity and openness.

Stay on topic: Guide the discussion to stay focused on the predetermined objectives and topics. Encourage participants to share their thoughts related to the specific subject matter being discussed.

Time management: Ensure that the discussion progresses smoothly within the allotted time. Remind participants to keep their responses concise and to the point to allow everyone an opportunity to share.

Flexibility and adaptability: Remain open to unexpected insights or changes in the direction of the discussion. Allow for flexibility if new topics arise that are relevant to the objectives of the focus group.

Facilitator's role: Explain the role of the facilitator in maintaining order and guiding the discussion. Participants should follow the facilitator's instructions and respect their decisions regarding the flow of the conversation.

By establishing and reinforcing these focus group rules, you can create an environment conducive to open and respectful dialogue, enabling participants to freely express their perspectives and experiences.

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