



## FINAL BOOK

### PASTEL PROJECT

(PETS AND SMILES TO ENJOY LIFE)



THE EXPERIENCE OF ASP RAGUSA IN ERASMUS WORLD

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH

STOWARZYSZENIE ZWIERZĘTA LUDZIOM DI VARSAVIA





The ASP RAGUSA group



The STOWARZYSZENIE ZWIERZĘTA LUDZIOM group



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# 1. The aim of Small Scale partnership in Erasmus

The main objective of the Erasmus program is high-quality education and training for participants of all ages by giving them the opportunity to attain the qualifications and skills necessary for active participation in democratic society, intercultural understanding and transition to the labor market. It is, therefore, a very ambitious program that has now reached the 2021-2027 programming.

The objective is achieved through mobility for the purpose of learning for people of all ages.

It is, certainly, one of the most important programs promoted by the European Commission that requires some expertise in preparing applications and managing projects once approved.

It is mainly the preserve of schools and universities but can also be adapted to other types of organizations, especially adult education.

However, not all organizations have sufficient experience to be able to initiate and manage projects funded by the Erasmus program, precisely because of the peculiarity of the program itself.

This is the case of the ASP of Ragusa, the provincial health agency of Sicily, which has experience in the field of European projects in the public health sector but with other programs more appropriate to health issues.

Despite this, the ASP wanted to try its hand at drafting an Erasmus project adaptable to the needs of the institution, and after researching calls for proposals, it has, pleasantly, discovered that there is a specific call for organizations entering the Erasmus world for the first time.

These are the "Small Scale Partnerships" which are designed precisely for organizations with less experience in the Erasmus field and which are difficult to reach precisely because they are far from the Erasmus world. Such is the case with the Ragusa ASP, which has an office in-house specifically created for the training of its health personnel.

The main features of these partnerships are as follows:

- Funding limited to lump sums
- Shorter project duration
- Simpler requirements and administrative requirements
- Lower barriers to entry
- Flexible formats (national and transnational activities can be mixed to facilitate participants with fewer opportunities)

- Help bring European policies to the local level
- Reduced number of partners
- They help create networks at local, regional, national and transnational levels
- They help spread culture and language across countries.

These partnerships, therefore, represent a great opportunity for those new to Erasmus or without much experience in the program and facilitate small organizations that do not have highly qualified staff in the administrative management of European projects. The small number of partners also makes project management easier without detracting from the cultural richness that the project brings.

Certainly, the inclusion in the partnership of at least one organization with a minimum of experience in Erasmus is very important to facilitate the work of the entire partnership.

Like all Erasmus programs, this one has a strong focus on the new European bets of social inclusion, green deal, and digitization, and so it is important to include some of these concepts in the projects we are going to develop.

## **2. Introduction to the project "Pets and smiles to enjoy life – PASTEL"**

The idea of the Project stems from a well-established training experience now for about 3 years of the Ragusa ASP "With a Smile on Your Lips."

The overall goal of the course is to provide health care workers with an effective tool to be able to pursue their own well-being within the work context and, consequently, within the family and social contexts as well.

The premise is to start from the principles of "Narrative Medicine" with the aim of making it more innovative through its transformation into "Theater of Health." Theater brings the performer out of his own dimension and into that of another character who could be his rival, his colleague, his patient or his own superior.



The course was a great success, which can be seen through the satisfaction ratings that reported a satisfaction index of more than 90 percent.

We, therefore, thought that this good practice could be exchanged with other stress management practices of social and health care staff and patients.

We began a search for potential partners also using platforms provided by the European Union such as EPAL, and the Erasmus partner search platform itself.

After a careful screening of the organizations we considered most suitable and after contacting them, we received immediate feedback from a Polish animal-assisted intervention organization.

The Ragusa ASP has been running a course in AAI for years, and we thought an exchange of experience would be very fruitful, even more so given the partner's area of focus, which operates internationally by conferring certifications on AAI.

We began, thus, our online meetings every 15 days to define the project, and we found that we immediately hit it off.

They loved our experience of the "With a Smile on Your Lips" course and expressed their willingness in learning this technique.

One must consider that the context of reference is very important and is widely protected at the global, European as well as national level.

We are talking about mental health, which is just as important as physical health, if not more.

The WHO defines mental well-being as "a state of emotional and psychological well-being in which the individual is able to make use of his/her cognitive or emotional capacities, exercise his/her function within society, respond to the daily demands of everyday life, establish satisfying and mature relationships with others, participate constructively in changes of the environment, and adapt to external conditions and internal conflicts."

Mental health has, therefore, become one of the main goals of the European agenda. Moving down, then, to the Italian national level, the Directive of the Ministry for Public Administration 23/04/2004 defines organizational well-being as "the set of cultural cores, processes and organizational practices that animate the dynamics of coexistence

in work contexts by promoting, maintaining and improving the quality of life and the degree of physical, psychological and social well-being of working communities."

Particularly significant is the situation of the staff of health care organisations, especially doctors and nurses, who are at risk of burnout, as organizational problems, due to staff shortages, lead to intense workloads, increasing bureaucratic requirements, and increased expectations and demands from patients, resulting in critical relationships and communication that can sometimes even lead to episodes of aggression on the part of patients, as well as the heavy responsibilities borne by health care personnel, produce enormous stress, which in turn, therefore, comes to cause a sharp increase in risk errors.

In addition, the extreme stress condition born in this pandemic period requires special attention to the needs of health care personnel but not only, including also social and health care personnel or those working in health care facilities at different levels.

Creating the conditions for fostering a peaceful working environment is a goal to be pursued by top management but, at the same time, practitioners have the right-duty to take care of themselves to improve their working condition and encourage their colleagues to do the same, which automatically leads to taking effective and efficient care of their patients.

It is on the basis of this assumption that the Ragusa ASP and the Polish organization decided to embark on this project path based on an exchange of best practices precisely for the management of stress of staff working at health care and socially relevant facilities.

### **3. The objectives**

The goal of the project is to exchange best practices related to improving and updating the skills of educators and staff in social and health care settings in order to help both staff and patients live better, cope better with health problems and workload and stress, and try to make patients heal in a comfortable and welcoming place surrounded by smiling and relaxed staff.

This is possible through the acquisition of specific skills that enable social and health care staff to combat burnout and stress and, thus to be focused, first and foremost on their own well-being and, consequently, that of patients.

The final challenge will be to combine the two practices into a single training curriculum and disseminate them among as many health care professionals as possible, not only within the partner countries but also in Europe, through a dissemination activity that will allow a multiplier effect with the consequent possibility of improving the quality of care and life of many patients.

In this regard, two workshops were held, one in Poland and one in Sicily to implement the exchange of the two best practices: Animal Assisted Interventions and "With a Smile on Your Lips" course.

In addition to the specific objectives of the project, other more general but very much related to the principles of the Erasmus program were pursued:

The creation of a stable partnership;

- Knowledge of how the same problem is experienced in another country (stress from work);
- The improvement of the ability to compromise;
- The awakening of new cultural stimuli;
- The discovery of different lifestyles;
- The improvement of language skills.

## 4. Partners

### **Azienda Sanitaria Provinciale di Ragusa (ASP di Ragusa)**

The Provincial Health Authority of Ragusa, the promoter of the project, performs the function of protecting and promoting the health of individuals and the community, through activities of prevention, treatment of diseases and recovery of health, guaranteeing the Essential Levels of Care - (LEA) and consolidating the integration between territorial and hospital care, in order to maintain the highest possible level of quality of life for the citizens of all municipalities in the province.

The Operational Unit Training and Continuing Education of Personnel, promotes specific initiatives aimed at the training and updating of human resources as a method for the inclusion in organizational processes of newly hired staff, the development of





professional quality, the constant improvement of efficiency and productivity levels, the enhancement of professional skills and attitudes, and the strengthening of managerial culture, in order to pursue the continuous improvement of services and expected results.

### **Stowarzyszenie Zwierzęta Ludziom (SZL)**

SZL is a non-profit organization that has been conducting therapeutic and educational activities with the participation of animals in educational, medical and care facilities since 2008. The animals with guides work in places such as the Clinic for Children in Coma “Budzik”, Children's Health Centre, Alzheimer's Centre, the Mazowiecki Provincial Hospital of Drewnica (for patients with mental disorders) and others. Since 2010, SZL has been conducting training and courses in the AAI area, examining and testing human-dog teams, and since 2016 also introducing cats to work. In their work, they support themselves with the experience of practitioners (dog and cat trainers) and the support of scientific experts from universities cooperating with SZL - Warsaw University of Life Sciences and the Polish Academy of Sciences. Each year the organisation manages several educational national projects and also run international projects focused on development of eLearning materials for AAI practitioners.

## **5. Animals Assisted Interventions (AAI)**

Animal-assisted interventions, also known as pet therapy, is a form of activity that involves the use of animals, such as dogs, cats, horses and others, to help people with physical, emotional, or social challenges. To be more precise, intervention can be divided into animal-assisted activity, animal-assisted education, animal-assisted therapy, and animal-assisted coaching. The main difference is about handlers' education - the handler needs to have a therapeutic background to provide therapy.

To provide education - the handler needs to be a teacher or educator.

These interventions can take many forms, from a simple visit with a visiting animal (AAA) to a structured program designed to achieve specific goals (AAT).

The use of animals in therapy has a long history, dating back to the early 19th century. However, it was not until the 1960s and 70s that animal-assisted interventions began to be systematically studied and recognized as valid therapeutic approaches. Today, AAI is used in a variety of settings, including hospitals, nursing homes, schools, and mental health facilities.



One of the key benefits of animal-assisted interventions is the sense of connection and companionship that animals provide. For many people, animals can be a source of comfort and support during difficult times. They can also provide a sense of purpose and responsibility, which can be particularly helpful for those who may be feeling isolated or lonely.

In addition to the emotional benefits, animal-assisted interventions can also have physical benefits. For example, spending time with a therapy animal can help to lower blood pressure and reduce stress levels. Physical contact with an animal, such as petting a dog or grooming a horse, can also have a calming effect and can help to alleviate symptoms of anxiety or depression.

Animal-assisted interventions can be particularly helpful for individuals who may not respond well to traditional forms of therapy. For some people, the non-judgmental nature of animals can make them more comfortable and willing to open up and discuss their feelings and experiences. In addition, the presence of an animal can help to create a sense of safety and trust, which can facilitate the therapeutic process.

AAI can also be beneficial for individuals with physical disabilities. Dogs can support physiotherapy in a hospital or rehabilitation facility by motivating patients, reducing the subjective sensation of pain, and reducing stress during exercise.

While animal-assisted interventions can be helpful for many individuals, it is important to note that they are not a replacement for traditional forms of therapy. They should be considered as a complementary approach that can be used in conjunction with other forms of treatment. In addition, it is essential to ensure that therapy animals are well-trained and well-behaved and are treated with care and respect.

Each dog working in AAI should be an adult (over 24 months of age), in Poland they are PADA tested (it is a special mental test for AAI dogs), and pass the exam for visiting, therapy or school dog. Education, both for the dog and the handler, is critical when talking about AAI results.

Overall, animal-assisted interventions can benefit individuals with physical, emotional, or social challenges. Therapy animals can play an important role in the therapeutic process by providing a sense of connection, companionship, and support.

Animals can bring a lot of joy to our lives and support humans while recovering. The most popular and suitable form of AAI in hospitals is dog-assisted intervention, mostly

therapy or visiting.

During visiting situations, a human-dog team (visiting team) visits patients in their rooms, saying hello, and initiating talks, small games, and activities. Thanks to that, the patient feels calmer and safer in a hospital environment, and their emotional state changes. Patients report feeling happier, more secure, and less lonely.

Dogs can also support therapy, eg rehabilitation or psychological therapy, by reducing stress, building the connection between the therapist and the patient, and changing the exercising situation into a fun game - both for the patient and the dog.

## **6. With the smile on your lips – A technique to manage the stress**

It was born from an idea of RF Communications that in collaboration with the ASP of Ragusa has realized for 3 years the course within the same ASP training more than 50 health workers. The overall goal of the course is to provide health professionals with an effective tool to be able to pursue their own well-being within the work context and, consequently, also within family and social contexts. The premise is to start from the principles of "Narrative Medicine" with the aim of making it more innovative through its transformation into "Theater of Health."

Theater brings the performer out of his own dimension and into that of another character who could be his rival, his colleague, his patient, or his own superior.

It is scientifically recognized that laughing is good for your health; in fact, several studies show that laughing has effects similar to a sports session. It lowers blood pressure, reduces stress, stimulates appetite and kick-starts the immune system. Even in difficult, uncomfortable and painful relationships it is almost always possible to find unintentional moments of hilarity and smiling.

Theater teaches us that. Smiling is therefore a key factor in well-being, improves the relationship and communication between doctor and patient and relative family members, and produces relaxation effects.

### **Specific Objectives**

At the end of the training, learners will have:

- 1) Learned how to transform a life story experienced with discomfort and pain, in the work context, into narrative
- 2) Learned how to extrapolate highlights from the narrative that can be turned into moments of hilarity
- 3) Learned how to transform the narrative into writing, in the form of a script, music, an artistic form in which painful experiences are combined with the technique of laughter
- 4) Learned, under the guidance of experienced artists and scriptwriters, how to memorize parts of the script and identify with a part that can lead them to transform the pain, discomfort experienced into a therapeutic smile and well-being
- 5) Learned how to interpret the theatrical subject and realize it
- 6) Acquired the entire therapeutic process of laughter to be used later in any context and time to achieve one's mental and physical well-being
- 7) Improved one's communication and empathic skills

## **Methodology**

The course takes place over 4 days divided into 4 sessions. During the first session, nationally renowned actors introduce the concept of laughter as a therapeutic technique and are joined by psychologists who reinforce the concept. They are also joined by a musician, also nationally renowned, who will explain the importance of music as an additional and supportive element in achieving the state of well-being.

In the second session, storytelling of lived stories by the health workers is conducted. The story that will be most conducive to achieving the objective is chosen by the actors. The story is made into a script in which moments of hilarity are extrapolated and highlighted.

In the third session, a general audition takes place in which the actors choose the performers, from among the health care professionals, for each individual part. In the last session, the play is staged and videotaped at the same time and at the end of which feedback is given back by the actors themselves and the psychologists who will try to engage the performers in a reflection on their psychological state achieved after the performance and the entire training. The play may be performed in the presence of an audience.

At the end of the course, as in all courses organized by the ASP, a training evaluation is carried out as a tool to support the training process: it is used in terms of researching and identifying the changes that have occurred in participants' skills and performance as a result of the training intervention, so that the results redefine the objectives in the learning cycle.

Three levels of measurement are considered in the analysis of training effectiveness: learner satisfaction, transmission and learning of content, and organizational impact.

## **7. First Activity – “TENDERNESS TO HEAL” – Poland, July 2022**

The first activity consisted of a workshop in Warsaw, Poland.

The main objective of the workshop was to present Animal Assisted Intervention, especially with dogs, as an effective and useful tool for working with hospital patients. Research shows that AAI can be useful in many cases and can reduce recovery time for adults and children.

The first day was dedicated to learning more about the method. The workshop was held as part of the international training camp on animal-assisted intervention, organized by Stowarzyszenie Zwierzęta Ludziom.

During the camp, that take place every year, 40 teams from different European countries train together to obtain AAI international certification. The Ragusa ASP participated in some of the stages of dog training and was able to observe several AAI teams. It was a brilliant opportunity to discuss the goals of AAI and issues related to dog welfare: how to select, prepare and train the dog before letting it work in the hospital. The chance to observe teams from different countries and discuss training with dog trainers and handlers was very helpful.

The second day included a visit to the Children's Hospital, the largest and most modern facility in Poland. The hospital has almost all pediatric specialties and brings together specialized physicians from all over the country.

Instytut-Pomnik Centrum Zdrowia Dziecka is also one of the first facilities in Poland to invite dogs to support medical care. Participants were able to see the hospital from the inside and visited two different departments (pediatric and rehabilitation).

A tour around the hospital was also organized to see the environment, play areas for children and two other departments under construction. Thanks to one of the doctors, information was given about the work of the hospital. Then, two interventions with dogs in the Rehabilitation Department were observed.

The intervention was for children who need medical rehabilitation and have to stay in the hospital for several weeks. The first group consisted of young children (1 to 13 years old). The team conducting the AAI was a certified team with hospital specialization. The dog - Power - is a seven-year-old Bernese mountain dog.

The second group, dedicated to youth (ages 13-18), was conducted by a certified team with the support of an instructor. The dog was a three-year-old spaniel, Teddy. The dog played basketball with the children and performed some commands.

On the third day, a visit to a clinic for comatose children was arranged. Due to covid regulations, it was not possible to enter, but it was possible to talk to the clinic staff who gave useful information regarding interventions performed with animals.

The last day included a visit to the Mazowiecki Szpital Wojewódzki Drewnica, the most modern psychiatric hospital in Europe. The building and wards are brand new and well designed, but so is the environment: a dedicated patient garden, patio, and garden gazebo that facilitate psychiatric rehabilitation.

Interventions conducted by an experienced and certified therapy team were observed. The dog Enzo, a 7-year-old Australian shepherd, worked with elderly patients.

The main goal of the intervention was to activate the patients, make them more sociable and motivate them to do physical exercises -- walking and getting out of their chairs. After the intervention, participants met with the hospital director and one of the doctors, who speak fluent Italian, and were shown around the hospital, introduced all the departments and areas, and answered many questions.

At the end of the course activity, a satisfaction questionnaire was administered to the project participants from which an average overall satisfaction index of 90 percent was found (see section 9).



## **8. Second activity - "WITH THE SMILE ON YOUR LIPS"- Sicily, SEPTEMBER 2022**

The main objective of the workshop was to participate in the course "With a Smile on your Lips," which has been in implementation for three years at the ASP of Ragusa in collaboration with RF Communications. The aim of the course is to start from stories of situations that actually happened during working hours that may have been experienced by health care personnel and patients with discomfort, either due to work stress or objective difficulties, and that are transformed into "lighter" situations, perhaps with a pinch of irony, through the skillful and professional contribution of professional actors who modify the story in a way that makes it funnier.

The goal is to transfer to the social and health care staff some techniques to be able to overcome moments of stress and discomfort during their hospital operations. The actors write a script that is then performed, like a real play, by the health workers themselves who become the protagonists.

The Polish partner, through its practitioners present at the workshop, was directly involved in the activity. It was a very hard work of continuous translation from English into Italian and vice versa to make sure that Italian and foreign participants and actors understood each other and that the partner could acquire the techniques behind the good practice to be "exchanged." The results were amazing and the Polish friends not only learned their Italian parts very well but also turned out to be very good actresses.

But let us come in detail to the description of the mobility days.

The first day, Saturday, was devoted to welcoming the six Polish women, workers at Stowarzyszenie Zwierzęta Ludziom. They were welcomed at the Ragusa bus station by their Sicilian colleagues and accompanied to the Kikki village in Modica, a unique facility in Europe in that it was created and dedicated entirely to people with disabilities.

It is a village with bungalows, restaurant and pool, stage for events, auditorium and lots of greenery. We chose this place because it allows for full immersion activities and a green and relaxing environment that also gave us the opportunity to learn more about some topics on climate, environment and the importance of the "green deal."

They dedicated the afternoon to the sea; the southern coast is one of the most beautiful in Sicily.



From Sunday 25 to Wednesday 28 the workshop was held.

On Sunday, the project coordinator, Roberta Arnone, devoted the entire morning to teaching them how to read in Italian the stories they themselves had written in English about two situations they had actually experienced. At the same time, some Italian grammar lessons were given and some common words and phrases were transferred that they could easily use during their stay. After lunch there were social activities with a visit to the city of Modica.

On Monday, the 26th, when the actors arrived, the operators involved in the project, both Italian and Polish, read the stories to introduce them to the actors, who would later have to edit them. After lunch, the partner engaged in social activities together with the other operators involved in the project, and the actors began writing a script from the stories they heard, editing them and creating new stories.

They also defined the protagonists and the roles to be assigned to each. Also present at the workshop were other health workers supported the work and effort of the young Polish women watching their performances with great enthusiasm.

On Tuesday the 27th roles were assigned and the whole day was devoted to rehearsals, first individual and then group rehearsals. During individual rehearsals, much support was given to the Polish partner; once he was able to be autonomous in performance, the group rehearsals were moved on.

A parenthesis was placed on music.

A professional musician mentioned the importance of music in theatrical performance by giving concrete examples and then accompanied the entire performance with specially created music and stacchetti. In the late afternoon, the foreigners visited the city of Ibla, historic Ragusa, a pearl of Sicilian Baroque.

On the last day, from morning to early afternoon (after lunch) there was a final general rehearsal, and at 6 p.m. the performance was staged on the village stage in the presence of an outside audience, including guests of the village, handicapped people, almost all of whom were foreigners, who were very happy to watch the play.

The evening ended with a final performance by professional actors who wanted to give a tribute to all participants in the project and the evening. It should be noted that the actors in question are nationally renowned; to give an example, some are part of the cast of "Aggiungi un posto a tavola," a play that has toured several Italian cities.

The evening ended with a final barbecue, disco and karaoke with involvement of all present, outside audience and village guests, under the banner of total social inclusion.

At the end of the course activity, a satisfaction questionnaire was administered to the project participants from which an average overall satisfaction index of 95 percent was found (see section 9).

All participants expressed interest, appreciation, reported that they had a lot of fun, acquired a very important technique that they could repeat in their organizational reality, and, above all, an atmosphere of friendship, socialization, and participation was created, which is the basis of the overall objectives of "Erasmus."

### CROSS-CUTTING ACTIVITIES - MARCH 2022-APRIL 2023

#### "COORDINATION, ADMINISTRATIVE MANAGEMENT AND DISSEMINATION OF THE PROJECT"

The two activities previously described were supported throughout the project life cycle by careful administrative management, continuous coordination of all resources by the Ragusa ASP, and planning of dissemination activities.

The partners met regularly, online, every 15 days to plan all phases of the project. A quality plan was shared initially to limit the risks of project failure.

An ad hoc website, in Italian and English, dedicated to the project has been created, in which all useful information such as objectives, activities, photos, videos, contact information, etc. has been included so that the results of the project can be disseminated as much as possible, including through links to institutional websites and the Erasmus platform.

The link to the project website will be sent to the mailing lists of the two participating organizations and will be posted on the institutional social networks of the two entities such as facebook, linkedin ed instagram where some photos and videos have been published.

In June, during a conference on mental health organized at the ASP of Ragusa, in the presence of international experts, a conference in which mental well-being was discussed but also European planning and the importance of mental health in the European agenda, the PASTEL project was presented and the Polish partner was invited to participate, as a speaker, to present the used technique of AAI. An additional

conference was organized before the project closure where the project results were presented.

The Ragusa ASP worked very fruitfully with the Polish partner, who was very cooperative and enthusiastic about the results to such an extent that it was decided to continue the collaboration beyond the natural life cycle of the project.

The "back office" work also saw the birth of the much-desired common training curriculum, posted on the website for wide dissemination.

This paper is an additional tool for dissemination of results and will be posted on the website.

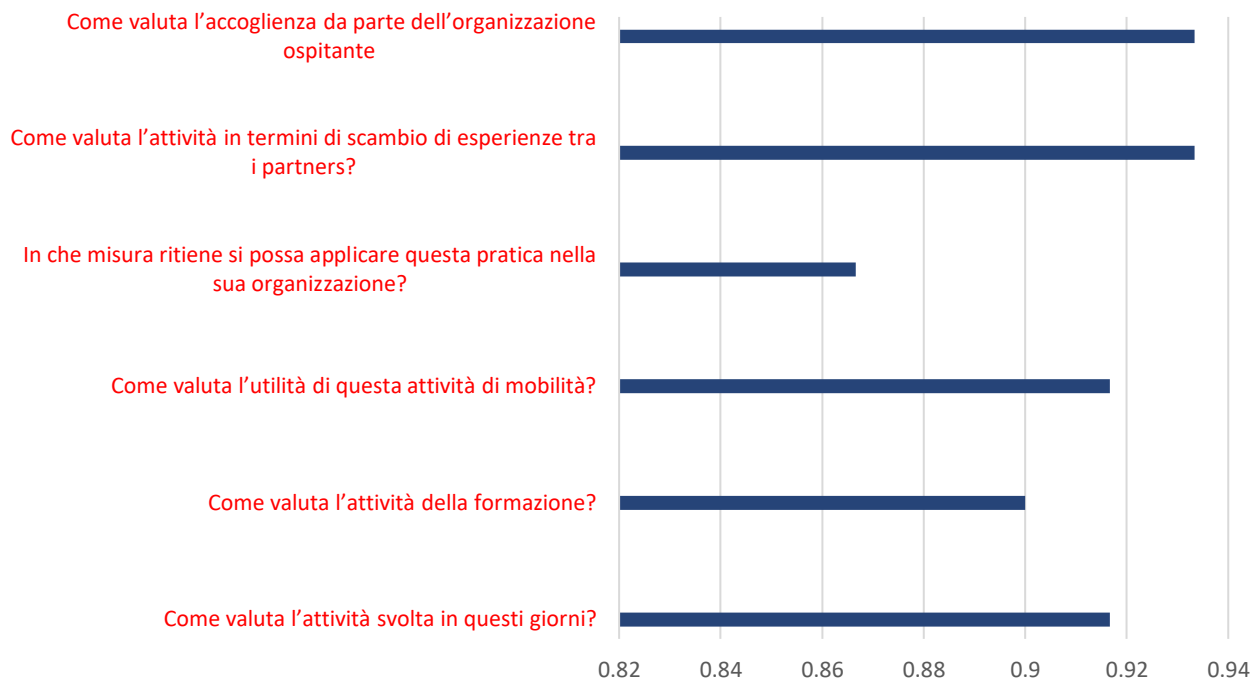
## **9. Results of the satisfaction evaluations from participants**

The results of the satisfaction questionnaires administered at the end of the activities are shown below.

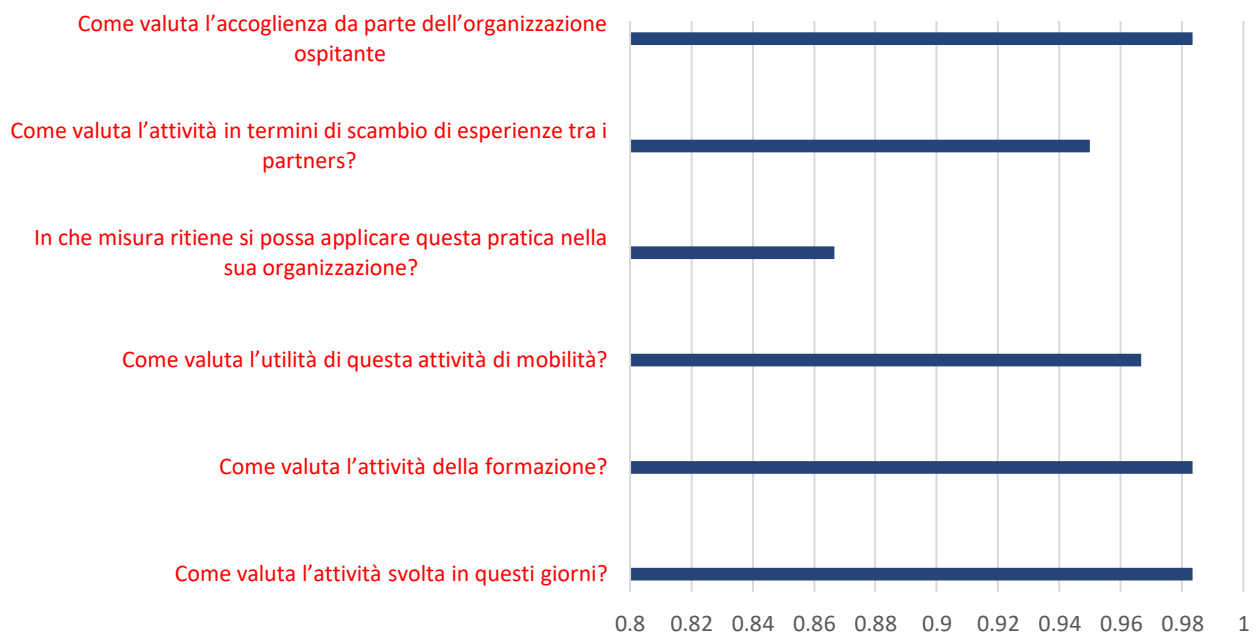
They show an average satisfaction rating of 90% for the first activity and 95% for the second one.

The paragraph n. 13 contains some comments from participants that are intended to highlight the positive and negative aspects (if any) of the activities carried out and some suggestions on how to further improve the organization of the activities. This may be useful for the purpose of better capitalization of the lived experiences to be disseminated and made available to those who want to undertake an Erasmus project experience.

## Workshop "Tenderness to heal"



## Workshop "With the smile on your lips"



## 10. Suggestion about a common curriculum

On the basis of the experience gained, the ASP of Ragusa, together with the Polish partner, has outlined a possible training curriculum that takes into account both types of course, also for the purpose of a multiplier effect that the results of the same project could generate, as well as a more widespread dissemination of the same. Certainly, we must consider that there are some critical issues due to the profound difference that exists in the two methodologies used.

Therefore, it was necessary, first of all, to make an analysis of the situation and the potential that such a training curriculum could have in social and health care settings. Therefore, to do this, a SWOT analysis was formulated, which is given below.

| OPPORTUNITIES                                                                     | THREATS                                                                |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Alternative methodologies to the classic frontal lesson are increasingly promoted | May be distracting                                                     |
| In both countries there are rules that promote well-being at work                 | Difficulty in reconciling the two interests (animals and theatre)      |
| Growing propensity of operators and management to innovate                        |                                                                        |
|                                                                                   |                                                                        |
| STRENGTHS                                                                         | WEAKNESSES                                                             |
| Both courses have been extensively tested by the two organizations                | Difficulty in organizing time given the amount of work                 |
| The staff involved in the organization of both courses is highly motivated        | Not all operators interested in Animal Assisted Interventions have one |
| Strong synergies between organizations                                            |                                                                        |

On closer inspection, the opportunities that the course could exploit are much more incisive than the threats and the strengths are not lacking. The course is innovative, practical, already tested by both organizations that have created excellent synergies and that are, therefore, able to go far beyond the present project.

We tried, therefore, to understand how to dampen the difficulties and transform weaknesses into strengths.



To do this we proceeded with a brain storming from which we arrived at some conclusions.

First of all, in order not to be dispersive, it should be concentrated in a not too long time but, to reconcile this with the difficulty in organizing the times, we thought of a "blended" form in which part of the course is followed remotely. This also reinforces one of the fundamental principles of the European Union, namely the importance of digitalisation.

We should then define a very specific target of participants: those who have a passion for theater but who would like, at the same time, to dedicate part of their time, even as volunteers, to help patients through animal-assisted intervention.

This excludes from the participants those who do not own a dog, unless they want, however, to learn the technique, just for interest or even in anticipation of owning one in the future. In any case, the course can also be divided into two independent parts so as to satisfy even those who prefer only one of the two techniques.

For detailed information on the planned course, after having drawn the conclusions set out above, please refer to the section of the website "Pastel Training Course"

## **11. The dissemination activities**

In the initial phase, the project was presented during a conference on Mental Health and Healthy and Active Aging organized by the ASP of Ragusa in June 2022. During the event, the objectives of the project and of the Erasmus program, which finances it, and the results to be achieved were presented.

It was also an opportunity to present the Polish partner who was invited by ASP. The partner explained what the organization Stowarzyszenie Zwierzęta Ludziom does and showed a video presentation. Subsequently, during the course of the entire project, photos and videos of the activities in progress were posted on various social networks such as Instagram, Facebook and LinkedIn, always underlining that the project is financed with funds from the Erasmus program.

At the same time, we started to build a website dedicated to the project, in two languages, Italian and English, in which all the best photos and videos (with the consent of the people involved or with blurry faces of children, patients etc.) that were uploaded, in addition to the description of the objectives, methodology and results of

the project. Furthermore, a joint curriculum was thought and included in the website in a specific session for multiplier purposes.

In the "Blog" section all the articles published during the twelve months of realization of the project have been inserted. The website link was linked to the homepages of the two participating organisations and to the platforms dedicated to the Erasmus programme.

In addition, on the website dedicated to the PASTEL project, useful links have been reported such as: EPALE, INDIRE and SIRS which is the Internationalization and Health Research Service of the ASP of Ragusa. At the end of the project, the link of the dedicated website was sent to all the addresses of the two mailing lists of the participating organizations.

A final conference was held at the end of February to present the results of the project. In the planning phase it was planned that the conference would take place online, also to save on the budget. In reality, having seen that the funds were sufficient anyway, it was decided to organize it in presence, also following the comments of the evaluators in the approval phase of the project in which it was noted that it would have been better to do it in presence or, at least, blended.

And so it was, since not everyone could participate in presence and, in any case, to recoup the costs, some speakers connected remotely. The final conference was also an opportunity to talk about collaborations, not only between the project partners but also with other organizations active in the world of Assisted Interventions with Animals that have been working for years in Italy.

The Polish partner was present in the courtroom while remotely connected were Masovian Provincial Hospital Drewnica's general director, Dr. Andrzej Skrzypek with an assistant, and Drs. Francesca Mugnai and Klaus Peter Biermann of the Antropozoa Association, which works throughout Italy, especially at Meyer Hospital in Florence.

After institutional greetings from the ASP management, the project coordinator presented the results by showing the dedicated website that contains all the products produced except the present publication, which was included later as it was still missing some parts.

Through the help of the website, all the activities carried out and the training curriculum created jointly by the two partners, and intended to be disseminated and

implemented in the near future, were explained. The conference provided an opportunity to compare notes with other organizations active in the IAA field and was an opportunity to start new collaborations.

All information about the project was disseminated during the course of the year, not only through the websites of the two partner organizations and the website dedicated to the project, but also through the Ragusa ASP's facebook and instagram page and on linkedin.

## 12. Conclusions

The project has given excellent results, both in terms of improvement of professional skills and from the point of view of personal and relational growth.

The activities carried out in Poland and Sicily have been fruitful for both partners, who have learned a great deal from the exchange of experiences.

It was particularly important for the ASP of Ragusa to note that in Poland there are some truly avant-garde health realities and the two hospitals visited, the pediatric one, which is a reference for the whole nation, and the psychiatric ones are an example.

Very useful the presence, among the participants, of the ASP health director, who was able to grasp ideas for improvement with regard to the hospital facilities of the province of Ragusa.

The activity of Assisted Interventions with Animals is very important in Poland and the care they reserve for animals is far superior to the Italian one. This has generated in the Sicilian participants an expansion of the sensitivity that already, however, possessed on the subject before the visits to Poland, but which has made it even more understood how important the help of the animal is in cases of emotional distress caused by the disease and this will certainly lead to further deepen the technique and apply it constantly.

For his part, the Polish partner has lived in a totally new and original way how to manage work-related stress, through a technique that has brought him into a theatrical dimension, totally different from the usual techniques, new and fun in which he also learned part of the Italian language.

What would an Erasmus project be without the cultural and social part!

From this point of view, the satisfaction of the participants was maximum. First of all, very strong friendships have been created between the two partners, and this especially during the activities in Sicily where we lived all together, in full immersion, in an inclusive Village, embellished by the presence of disabled people who welcomed our activity with great happiness, actively participating during our evenings.

And what about the wonder of Warsaw! A very special city where old and new coexist beautifully giving unforgettable cultural moments.

For the ASP of Ragusa, which approached for the first time Erasmus, this whole "world" represents an unparalleled discovery and added value. Precisely for this reason, it has decided to continue on this path, presenting other Erasmus projects or participating as partners in some of them but the most important thing, for the purposes of this project, is that the collaboration with the partner of Poland will continue, both by participating together with other projects, and by going forward with its own resources in activities that can be useful and a reason for growth and improvement for both.

In conclusion, to those who should ask if it is convenient to participate in an Erasmus, if it is beautiful, if it is not a waste of time and money, if it gives something concrete, all of us, ASP of Ragusa and Stowarzyszenie Zwierzęta Ludziom, answer ...."yes, without any doubt and without fear of trying because the results, however the project goes, it will always be positive for the life experience it gives you"

And in this regard, below, we report the impressions of the participants at the end of this 12-month journey.

## 13. Impressions and comments of participants

*"The project allowed me to learn more about Animal Assisted Intervention in a healthcare setting. It also allowed me to learn about the Polish health care system of which I appreciated the attention to disability and mental illness and the orderly management of it all. I hope to be able to introduce into my work what I have known especially in reference to the therapeutic potential that the relationship between humans and pets can have. I would have preferred to have witnessed more training of the animal so as to understand more of the different phases of the intervention and perhaps experience more of the interaction between us practitioners and the animal.*

*With respect to the Best Practice of the ASP of Ragusa, it was nice to share the lightness of teamwork and appreciate its potential in terms of well-being, belonging, and motivation to work"*

**Letizia Drogo**



*"The activities in Poland and Sicily taught me a lot, more on the Polish side, of course. Pet Therapy can really be a corollary for my project, as other aspects that I am discussing in these weeks can become one, from the point of view of, for example, food and wine, an aspect that has accompanied us often in these three years with the Project and that I believe can become an integration of the same. The Erasmus Program is undoubtedly a very effective key to being able to make it usable abroad, where minds are more open and, often, more visionary, although this group has lived up to the "visionary" with which this project "must" be accompanied. Regarding the project's room for improvement, I am also discussing this in recent weeks through "foreign" (in the sense outside Sicily) relations undertaken thanks to the interest the Project has aroused in representatives who have confided it to me, also by virtue of what could be done in the future. At the moment, however, I believe that a pause for reflection is necessary to reflect well on what we have experienced. Thanking you again for all that you have accomplished in support of the Project, I wish you well in your work"*

**Roberto Farruggio**



*"The experience has allowed us to expand the knowledge on pet therapy as a useful tool for improving the clinical pictures of users, with various problems but sensitive to interaction with animals. The experience "With a smile on your lips, moves from the assumption that one's narration of events experienced at work level is already in itself liberating tensions. If the narration is also added to the possibility of relating to an ego other than one's own, that magical world of cooperation is created. The experience realized allowed us to see how operators weighed down by routines were transformed into actors who emanated contagious smiles in a game of collective well-being, allowing everyone to discover buried energies"*

### Salvatore Guastella



*"It was an experience of personal growth and sharing best practices with important community and interpersonal moments, overcoming all barriers, including language. It was good, once again, to understand how important realities are born "from below," from the meeting of people in a reality that is scientific, yes, but also social and "community." Yes, I believe that our experience, which is small but important because it affects people's lives and their relationships, is also a way to build the much-desired Europe that, so far, has been mainly experienced from an economic point of view. It is important, now more than ever, to build together the Europe of the peoples, and projects like Pastel help to take small but crucial steps.*

*Thank you to all the colleagues with whom I shared this beautiful experience, and thank you to our far-sighted and attentive Executive Direction"*

### Venera Padua



*"Impressions are: the pleasantness of the exchange of experiences that becomes an exchange of culture and emotions: the verification of the validity of methods that seemingly non-scientific prove to be more beneficial for psychophysical health because one cannot, should not treat only the body but the person as a whole. The hope is that together the two experiences, Polish and of the Ragusa ASP, can be a flywheel for an integrated approach to care by paying attention to all the needs of the sick person"*

**Angela Tebaide**



*"Improvement of skills, friendship, values, passion, culture, cheerfulness, play, work, interest, new horizons, social inclusion, this and even more has aroused in me this project. The first Erasmus project for the ASP of Ragusa that enters, thus, into this exceptional world where you meet wonderful and very competent people, where we tell each other, compare ourselves to grow together.*

*I am honored to have coordinated the entire project, joined by a caring and helpful staff and a Polish partner who taught us so much. But I am sure that we also gave a lot to our partners, who are now friends. The project comes to an end but the partnership continues, we have great ideas to realize together to give even more meaning to what we have achieved, the collaboration will continue and our Company will be more and more committed to the realization of other projects with an international scope.*

*The ERASMUS program is truly a great resource for professional and human growth and I want to extend a warm thank you to the INDIRE Agency that gave us the opportunity to live this wonderful dream"*

**Roberta Arnone**





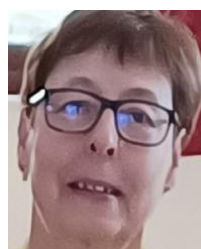
*“Let me start from the end - I would love to take part in something similar. The coolest thing for me was that we took part in the show, like everyone else and on similar terms (and we were even treated as almost stars). We were surrounded by care. The atmosphere was full of sympathy, even friendly, family-like”*

**Anna Mirkowska**



*“Warm, family atmosphere. Stage experience priceless. The most important thing in our work is the smile of the patient, and you can pursue this goal through various ways. Thank you very much for the opportunity to participate in this project”*

**Agnieszka Kwoczak**



*“Interesting project. It showed us how important mental health is for people working in facilities. It allowed me to learn Italian and improve my communication in English. The most important thing is that thanks to this project I was able to get around that stage to play an assigned role, practice acting skills. All this happened in a pleasant atmosphere full of kindness and support”*

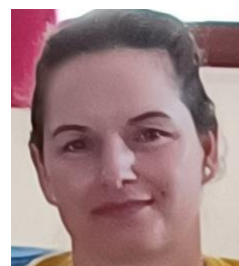
**Anna Syrowiec**



Co-funded by  
the European Union

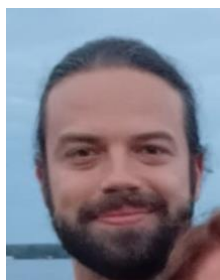
*“Participation in this type of Project gives us the opportunity to shed the burden of stress and sadness that remains after emotionally difficult activities. Turning difficult situations into tragicomedy frees us from difficult sensations and allows us to gain strength to continue. If I had the opportunity, I would gladly take advantage of it again because our strength is transformed into commitment and continuing to help those in need. I recommend to all who have not experienced it but need it”*

*Karolina Labes*



*“The project PASTEL was an exciting exchange of experience between Poland and Italy. It is constantly enriching to learn from others how they work and try to solve pressing social issues. I think that both parties learned different solutions to the same sets of problems, so maybe in the future, they could be used interchangeably”*

*Michał Plewczyński*



*“The PASTEL project about supporting hospital patients with animal-assisted interventions and drama was a unique and innovative initiative. The combination of AAI and drama therapy offers a holistic approach to patient care, providing physical and emotional benefits. Animal-assisted interventions have been shown to be effective in reducing stress, improving mood, and promoting a sense of well-being in hospital patients. Drama therapy, on the other hand, can help patients to express their emotions, cope with stress, and improve their communication skills. The fact that this project involved an exchange between Italy and Poland highlights the international collaboration and exchange of ideas and best practices in this field. It is great to see that two countries are working together to support hospital patients and improve their quality of life. Overall, this project seems like a valuable and meaningful initiative that has the potential to make a positive impact on the lives of hospital patients. I hope that the results of this project will encourage more hospitals to implement animal-assisted and drama therapy programs in the future”*

*Magdalena Nawarecka*



*\*Photos are published with participants' consent*

