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Arts on Prescription

A generic programme concept for the Baltic Sea Region

Introduction

The Arts on Prescription (AoP) Programme is part of the solution deliverables that are developed in the Interreg project *Arts on Prescription in the Baltic Sea Region* 2023-25.

The aim of the AoP Programme is to provide key provisions of setting up the Arts on Prescription Programmes by project partners.

The target group of the AoP Programme are decisionmakers, key employees and other stakeholders who are responsible for piloting and adapting the AoP Programme locally within the project term. The AoP Programme will be piloted through three piloting rounds in Denmark, Poland, Latvia, Germany and Sweden. The final version of the AoP Programme will be edited and made accessible for all those interested after the end and full evaluation of the three piloting rounds. An AoP Practitioner's Guide complementing and expanding the AoP Programme is also being developed in the project and made accessible to piloting partners.

The AoP Programme is generic and:
- reflects state-of-the-art in AoP research and practice;
- is closely aligned with AoP programmes that have already been tested and implemented in other countries such as Denmark, Sweden and the UK;
- is transferable and adaptable to local conditions in the piloting countries of the project "AoP in the Baltic Sea Region": Denmark, Poland, Latvia, Germany and Sweden.

The AoP Programme has been developed in a co-creative process by all project partners to ensure the relevance of the Programme to the region.

1. The project "Arts on Prescription in the Baltic Sea Region"

The project "Arts on Prescription in the Baltic Sea Region" aims at developing and testing an Arts on Prescription (AoP) programme, that seeks to improve the mental well-being of participants through regular participation in arts activities in group settings. This approach has proven to have positive mental health effects towards individuals with mental conditions such as stress, anxiety or depression, as well as for those at risk of developing such conditions for instance due to involuntary loneliness.

The AoP programme is adaptable to different local conditions in the piloting countries, such as public health systems and cultural institutions.

2. What is Arts on Prescription (AoP)?

AoP is a model of social prescribing (next to for example Books, Education, Exercise on Prescription) that enables health professionals or other referral channels to refer people to a range of creative and participatory activities to promote their mental health and social inclusion.

The AoP Programme aims to provide opportunities for engagement with arts and for creative activity and creating a safe and supportive space, to empower individuals to manage their emotional states and improve their quality of life. Among other things, this is done by creating a 'diagnosis-free space'

to approach the individuals for who they are, and not by focusing on the type of diagnosis they may have. The purpose is to create a non-judgmental environment where the individual feels safe to express themselves and where their unique needs and goals can be addressed.

AoP is a non-therapy programme. By offering a space for creative flow, the participants have the potential to immerse themselves in activities that require concentration and focus. Engagement in arts activities also seems to provide opportunities for imagination, aesthetic and emotional expression, stress reduction, and improved self-esteem. By engaging in group activities, the participants can moreover develop social connections and social engagement. This means that Arts on Prescription Programmes have the potential to both increase the participants' creative potential, improve mental health and social interaction and thus increase overall wellbeing

3. What kinds of "arts" can be used in the AoP context?

i) Performing arts activities such as singing, dancing and acting;
ii) visual arts, design and crafts including clay modelling, photography, sewing;
iii) digital arts activities including photography, animation and filmmaking;
iv) literary arts such as reading, creative writing, and storytelling;
v) culture such as going to museums, galleries, concerts, community events, cultural festivals, and fairs

There is scientific evidence on the positive effects of both passive and active engagement with arts. The AoP Programme encourages the use of both types of engagement and the combination of two.

4. Outcomes of AoP Programme for the target audience

The main outcome of the AoP Programme is to improve mental health and wellbeing among the target audience by

- Increasing self-esteem, self-confidence, sense of control, and empowerment;
- Reducing anxiety, depression, stress;
- Strengthening motivation, meaning in life, hope, and optimism;
- Increasing sociability and social connections, decrease loneliness, and increases wider community connectedness and bekonging.

In the long run, the project aims to contribute to make AoP a permanent offer to a large number of citizens and, hereby, creating societal impact by e.g., increasing mental well-being and reducing visits to general practitioners, referring health professionals, and primary or secondary care services.

5. Participants and target audience

The AoP Programme can be targeted to various target audiences with various backgrounds and experiences and with different needs and preferences. However, a common characteristic is that the individuals are dealing with mild to moderate mental health problems such as stress, anxiety or depression as well as those at risk of developing mental health problems, for instance, due to involuntary loneliness.

The target audience in the project can include:

- Older adults dealing with loneliness and depression or anxiety in connection with aging or loss of relationships.

- Young people dealing with school or career-related mental health problems.
- Adults struggling with balancing work and family life, and those who have had traumatic experiences.
- Exclusion criteria is participants below the age of 16, primarily due to ethical considerations and the necessity to create a concept that would be comparable within the project.

# 6. Content and structure of the AoP Programme

The AoP Programme:
- Involves groups of 8-12 participants
- Consists of 3-5 categories of activities that focus on different aspects of arts and culture, for instance performing arts, visual arts, music, and literature;
- Spans over 8-12 weeks;
- Includes 2 activities or meetings per week for at least the first 4 weeks and 1-2 activities in the remaining weeks;
- Includes activities lasting between 2-3 hours.

The AoP Programme should aim to create a safe space and a comfortable environment, allowing participants to fully engage and gain the most out of the AoP Programme.

7. Organisational framework

Local authorities who want to implement AoP must set up a sustainable organisational framework. The figure below illustrates the suggested local project organisation in the AoP Programme.
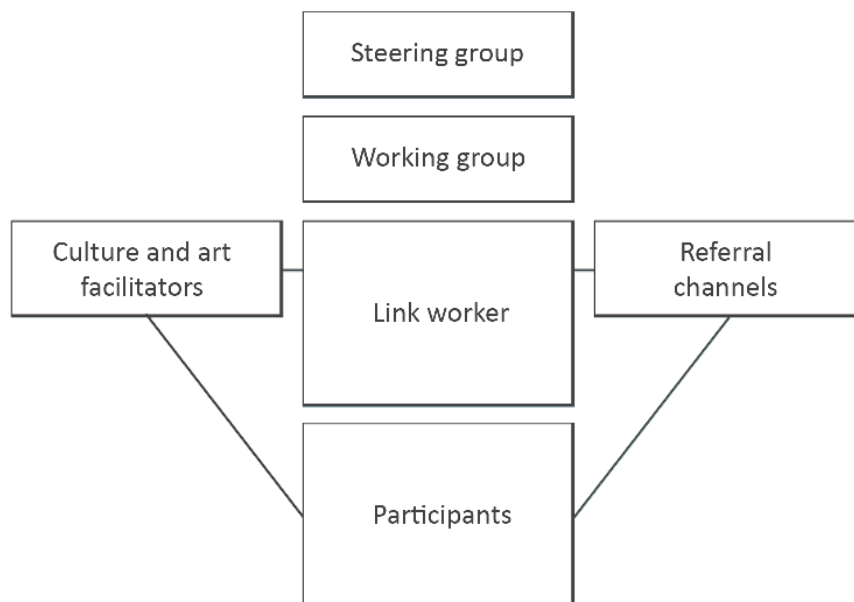
Each local region, municipality etc. *must establish* a cross-disciplinary *steering group and may consider establishing a cross-disciplinary local working group as well.*

The steering group has a strategic role in the programme. It is responsible for securing the organisational structure, fostering collaboration, and providing management support for all parties involved. This allows the local working group to focus on implementing the practical aspects of the local AoP Programme.

It is recommended that managers/leaders from the relevant municipal departments or regional departments, as well as leaders/managers from the involved cultural institutions/actors and referral channels are included.

The working group consists of employees who are responsible for implementing the programme locally. The working group's function is to specifically solve practical tasks and challenges related to the programme, and participants, as well as to ensure collaboration across sectors.
The working group should include key representatives from all the cultural institutions/arts professionals and referral channels that play an active and functional role in the implementation of the programme.

Link worker: Each municipality/local region must appoint at least one link worker. The local link worker acts as the primary point of contact for all parties involved and is responsible for the ongoing contact with the participants and for the programme management. The link worker manages the processes of recruitment, evaluation, local communication, and planning of activities in corporation with referral channels and culture and art facilitators. The link worker is also responsible for developing trusting relationships and providing personalised support to the participants and is therefore essential for ensuring that the AoP Programme runs smoothly. In some cases, it can be considered engaging a project manager to support the link worker on the managerial tasks such as the coordination of the steering group and working group.

The culture and arts facilitators are cultural professionals who are responsible for carrying out the group activities with the participants. The culture and arts facilitators can be employed at libraries, museums, art schools, music schools, etc., as well as different types of artists; performing artists, visual artists. Culture and arts facilitators can also be independent artists.
It is important that the culture and arts facilitators not only is professional in their arts but also in their treatment of the participants and in adapting their arts session to suit the participants´ possible limitations. Culture and arts facilitators are cultural- and not health professionals; the AoP activities should not include art therapy as the program does not offer therapy.

The referral channels are responsible for referring potential participants to the AoP Programme and can include general practitioners, primary healthcare professionals, job agencies and social workers. Through dialogue with both the potential participants and the local link worker, they will in the first place, assess if the individual would potentially benefit from taking part in the AoP programme.

8. Sustainability of the project

To ensure the sustainability of the AoP Programme in the Baltic Sea Region, a comprehensive approach is necessary, addressing both the integration of the program within the public system and ongoing support for participants.
The **partners** must collaborate on developing a long-term implementation plan for the programmes. The plan should take into account all the organisational and financial aspects of the implementation and ensure that there are sufficient resources available to carry out the program after pilot completion.
The **piloting partners** must also develop a plan for how the target audience in the pilot rounds can continue to be engaged with arts and / or group activities after the end of the AoP Programme (8-12 weeks) to help them strengthen social bonding and maintain the positive effects of the AoP Programme.

9. Summary

What is mandatory for all the piloting partners in AoP in the Baltic Sea Region

All piloting partners must:

- Include a target audience with mental health conditions such as mild to moderate stress, depression, anxiety as well as for those at risk of developing such conditions for instance due to involuntary loneliness.
- Choose a target audience at the age of above 16 and preferable above 18 • Set up an organisation with a: steering group, link worker, referral channels, culture and arts facilitators (consider having local politicians involved in the creation of the steering to give them ownership to the AoP programme from the beginning)
- Set up a programme with a duration between 8-12 weeks
- Set up a programme with 3-5 culture or arts activities
- Have three piloting rounds with between 8-12 new participants in each round
- Develop a plan for how the target audience in the pilot rounds will be taken care of after the end of the program (8-10 weeks) for instance by inviting them to participate in other social culture and arts activities
- Develop a long-term implementation plan for the programmes. The plan should take into account all the organisational and financial aspects of the implementation and ensure that there are sufficient resources available to carry out the program after pilot completion.

What is optional for each piloting partner in AoP in the Baltic Sea Region

- If they want to set up a working group
- If they want to appoint other key employees such as more link workers (than the mandatory one) or project managers to execute the programme
- Which specific arts and culture categories to include in the local AoP Programme
- The exact length of the program (between 8-12 weeks)
- The exact number of art and culture categories (between 3-5)
- The location(s) for the activities
- The exact target audience (for instance a specific age group (e.g young people, elderly people, people with a specific mental issue such as anxiety).

Look for more information in the Arts on Prescription Practitioner's Guide!.

Arts on Prescription in the Baltic Sea Region

The project „Arts on Prescription in the Baltic Sea Region" (2023-2025) is co-funded by the European Union (European Regional Development Fund) in the frame of the Interreg Baltic Sea Region Programme.

13 partner organisations from 7 different countries in the Baltic Sea Region develop and test a model Arts on Prescription programme in 2023-25. The primary focus of the project is to qualify local authorities and practitioners in organising, evaluating and financing sustainable AoP programmes. This is primarily done through the production of an online how-to guide for practitioners and by evaluating the costs and benefits of the programme. For more information look here:

https://interreg-baltic.eu/project/arts-on-prescription/

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