

YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES AND HEALTH PROBLEMS

TOOLKIT FOR ENVIRONMENTALLY SUSTAINABLE OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES













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About the Project "Youth Going Back to Nature - Engage, Connect, Empower"



The project "Youth Going Back to Nature - Engage, Connect, Empower"/YGBN/ is dedicated to young people with fewer opportunities and environmentally sustainable outdoor activities. The project aims to promote and contribute to reaching the EU Youth Goals set by young people in Europe.

Concrete actions will be taken to Engage, Connect, and Empower the youth community to reach those goals and return to nature. The third toolkit

"YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES AND HEALTH PROBLEMS" is already available on the project website www.outdoorportal.eu.

In July 2024, the partners in the YGBN project designed a set of environmentally sustainable outdoor activities for youth with disabilities and health problems, during a third Learning Exchange Event organized in Lithuania.

Professionals from the six partnering organizations – Paint and Quarter Horse Foundation (Bulgaria), OAZA (Croatia), Trekkify (Italy), the Lithuanian Sea Museum (Lithuania), QUEST (Belgium) and Equilibre (Estonia), generated innovative approaches to facilitate nature-based activities for youth with disabilities and health problems. The results of the event are gathered in the present toolkit.













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Documentary YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES AND HEALTH PROBLEM

INTRODUCTION



What is the purpose of this toolkit?

This toolkit is primarily intended for young people with disabilities and health problems. The toolkit was created in cooperation with 6 partner organizations that, through many years of experience, have created activities for users. The methodology for creating the toolkit is based on activities in nature. It is generally known that spending time in nature has a positive effect on every

person's physical, psychological, and spiritual aspects. When a person becomes aware of all three aspects, the tools that will be presented later can help him find himself, and his needs and deal with the challenges of everyday life.

Youth with disabilities are among **the most marginalized and poorest** of the world's youth population and are more likely to face severe social, economic, and civic disparities as compared to those without disabilities, even in developed countries. For many young people with disabilities, exclusion, isolation, and abuse as well as lack of educational and economic opportunities are daily experiences (UNICEF, 2013, https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/youth-with-disabilities.html). It is important to emphasize that people with disabilities often have health problems, mostly psychological or psychosomatic. Challenges on a physical level are also possible. People who have health problems are not necessarily disabled. We want everyone who uses this toolkit to help themselves and others with the obstacles they face.



Who is Youth with disabilities and health problems?

The CRPD (Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities) recognizes people with disabilities as those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairments, which when combined with negative attitudes or environmental barriers, prevent them from taking a full and active role in society. Often, it is the interaction between the individual and his or her environment that leads to disability, not that person's physical limitations. Such

an understanding of the social nature of disability helps to promote disability as a human rights issue.

All of the issues that affect young people, **such as access to education, employment, health care, and social services**, also affect youth with disabilities, but in a far more complex way. Attitudes and discrimination linked to disability make it much more difficult for them to go to school, find work, or participate in local activities. In many communities, both rural and urban, the environment is immensely challenging with physical and communication barriers that make it hard for them to participate in social life.



Inclusion of young people with disabilities and health problems

Whatever challenge a person has in life, he should be included in society, and receive love, support, and understanding. It is important to note that if we are talking about people who can harm the safety of others, their inclusion must be under the supervision of an expert.

The Eight Guiding Principles of the CRPD



- Respect for inherent dignity, individual autonomy including the freedom to make one's own choices, and independence of persons
- Non-discrimination
- Full and effective participation and inclusion in society
- Respect for difference and acceptance of disabled people as part of human diversity and humanity, Equality of opportunity
- Accessibility
- Equality between men and women
- Respect for the evolving capacities of disabled children and respect for them to preserve their identities.



How to involve young people with disabilities and health problems in outdoor activities

We should love what we do and constantly invest effort and work to develop skills and fields of knowledge that can help us in the office. We know from experience, love to be loved, and respect to be respected.

The involvement of young people has several steps:

- 1. What are the challenges (physical, psychological, social, etc.)
- 2. Adapting the environment to young people. For example, if we have a person with a physical disability, it is necessary to see his possibilities of staying in nature, the accessibility of roads and places where we would carry out activities
- 3. If it is about people with significant disabilities or health problems, we need to have knowledge and experience working with these people (for example, if someone has autism, it is necessary to have experience and know and work with such a person)
- 4. We need to be trained for proper reactions in crises, if they occur when working with young people
- 5. An important step is to be aware of what level we are in working with young people (assistant, mentor, friend, or expert in the field of work)



A holistic approach-the key to sustainability

"The whole is greater than the sum of its parts" expresses the essence of *holism*, a term coined by the great South African general and statesman Jan Smuts in 1926. Holism generally opposes the Western tendency toward analysis, the breaking down of wholes into parts sometimes to the point that "you can't see the forest for the trees". Holism is an important concept in the

sciences and social sciences, and especially in medicine. Holistic medicine tries to treat the "whole person" rather than focusing too narrowly on single symptoms. It emphasizes the connections between the mind and the body, avoids the overuse of drugs, and has borrowed

such practices from Eastern traditions as acupuncture and yoga, meditation, and physical activities.

We can see the holistic approach in the broader context of **the relationship between man and the environment, nature**. Our relationship with nature is inseparable, just as there is the force of gravity, so there are natural laws that make up the whole. We are an inseparable part of those laws. The first step in the holistic approach is the difference between physical and spiritual, soul and body, the question is whether the car could visit if there is no driver? it's the same with us, the soul moves the body and goes through birth, growing up, illnesses, old age and death. It's all part of a natural process and if we accept that process our life will be much easier. If we look at the forest, some changes always occur, someone is born, someone dies, someone helps another, etc. In working with young people with disabilities and health problems, it is important to have a broad view of the person and life in general. Then we can understand the person and give security and trust, which is one of the very important steps in applying the activities of this toolkit.



If you are a coach, consultant, assistant, expert, mentor, educator or want to know more, try using the activities from this toolkit and give us feedback. We are open to proposals, suggestions, changes, improvements, etc.

Connect with others and share your experiences or learn something new through our web.



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Documentary YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES AND HEALTH PROBLEM

Overview of the Content

Activity 1

Animal tombola discovering

Name of the partner organization: ASD Trekkify

Title of the activities: Animal Tombola Discovering

Summary of Activities

This activity is designed to help young people with intellectual disabilities reinforce their knowledge and identification skills of different animals they might encounter outdoors. It enhances their understanding of different animals and their diets through an engaging game activity.

Necessary material for carrying out the activity

- animal and food flashcards: use PECS cards or pictograms in Augmentative alternative communication. Prepare 8 or more pictures of different animals; cards depicting the food each animal eats; extra cards depicting foods that do not match any of the chosen animals. <u>Here</u> you can download an example! In the alternative, you can prepare a poster with the different animals.
- device to play animal sounds (e.g., smartphone, tablet, laptop)
- sound buttons or buzzers for each group to signal when they want to answer
- timer to monitor the 30-second time limit for matching food cards
- small rewards or certificates for participation and winning, to encourage enthusiasm (Optional but recommended)
- you can use pairs of round velcro tape self-adhesive for the food cards

Description of activity step



Step 1. Divide participants into 2 teams.

Step 2. Play the first animal sound. Participants press their sound button to book their turn. The first group to press the button gets two attempts to guess the animal. If they guess correctly, reveal the picture of the animal.

Step 3. All teams have 30 seconds to place the correct food card next to the corresponding animal. Points are awarded for correctly identifying the animal and matching it with its correct food.

Step 4. Repeat the process for all animal sounds and pictures.

The educator keeps track of the scores and encourages active participation.

Step 5. The team with the most points at the end of the game wins. (animal sound animal food).

Duration time



The duration of the activity can vary depending on the number of animal cards used.

For 8 animal cards: 35/40 minutes and additional discussion where educators can ask participants some questions. (What was your favorite animal in the game? Why do you like it? Which animal sound was the easiest for you to recognize? Do you have any animal at home?)

Benefits from the activity

The activity:

- improve knowledge of animals by encouraging participants to identify different animals and their sounds
- enhance sensory stimulation: visual engagement with animal and food cards enhances visual recognition and memory
- Engage participants
- Can be adapted: it's possible to adapt the activity to different ability levels by varying the number of animals and foods. Moreover, educators can introduce new animals and foods over time to keep the activity challenging. The activity can be also adapted to different topics.





Nature Scavenger Hunt

Name of the Partner organization: O.A.ZA.



Title of the Activities: Nature Scavenger Hunt

Summary of Activities

This activity can be used as a tool to help youngsters with disabilities to help them strengthen and develop their skills of awareness and understanding, and for them to learn how to use different senses.

Necessary material for carrying out the activity



- nature/park.
- table of different senses (sight smell hearing touching taste)

Description of activity step



Step 1. Divide participants into groups and every group receives a table with senses. Each group has to give a name to themself.

Step 2. All teams have 30 minutes to go into nature and try to find something related to those senses on the table. For certain terms, they can also indicate two senses.

Step 3. The team that collects all senses first is the winner. But the game doesn't stop here. Other groups should continue hunting before time passes.

Step 4. After all groups have completed NSH, there is time for reflection with some questions: "What kind of animal did you see during NSH?", "Where was that animal?", "What are the colors that surround you?" or "Name three-four-five colors that surround you", "Did you manage to find some flower or plant that you could smell?", "What kind of sound did you hear?", "Did you record the sound?", "Did you hear a bird singing?", "Did you hear a leaf movement?", "Did you touch a bark/branch or some plant?", "Did you touch some specific part of the plant?", "How was the texture to the touch and did you like it?", "Did you find some edible plants during the NSH?", "Did you taste it?"

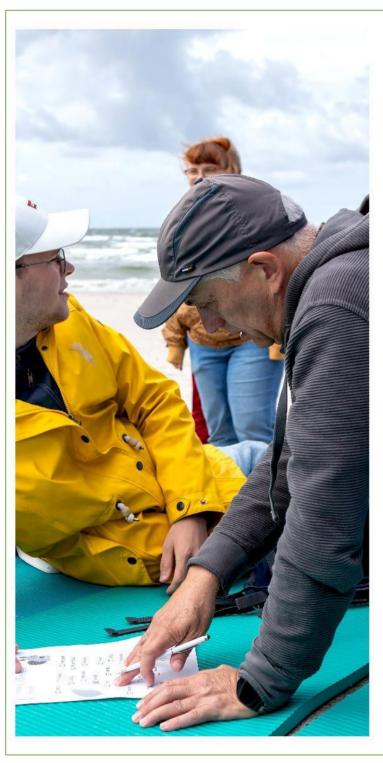
During the implementation of this activity, the existence of allergic reactions to certain plants and animals (bee/wasp sting) should be taken into account.

Duration time: 30 min to do activity + 10 min for reflection



Benefits from the activity

- it helps with language skills by naming colors, textures, and shapes.
- helps with enhancing sensory development
- helps with problem-solving skills and organization
- helps with connecting with nature by spending time collecting items and getting to know their environment which also leads to environmental awareness.
- teamwork





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Documentary YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES AND HEALTH PROBLEM

Prepare and Enjoy Horse-Assisted Activities

Name of the Partner organization: Paint and Quarter Horse Foundation Bulgaria

Title of the Activities: Prepare and Enjoy Horse-Assisted Activities

Summary of Activities

The activity aims to ensure young people with disabilities are well-prepared for their interaction with horses. A similar approach can be used in preparing young people for any outdoor activity. The preparation includes two stages. The first stage is to prepare them "on paper", the second stage is to prepare them in practice.

Necessary material for carrying out the activity



- simple questionnaire for the young person and their caretaker usually only verbal, no need for written form (Environmentally sustainable TIP: if you can't remember the information record the talk on your phone/other device or take digital notes):
 - o Do you like animals? What is your favorite animal?
 - o Are you afraid of any animal?
 - o Do you like horses?
 - Are you afraid of horses? If yes, why/what are you afraid of?
 - o What do you like to do?
- 5 Pictures/PECS cards (augmentative alternative communication) to give information about horses; Environmentally sustainable TIP: Use your phone or another device to show the visualizations
- 5 Pictures/PECS cards (augmentative alternative communication) to give information about the horse-assisted activity; Environmentally sustainable TIP: Use your phone or another device to show the visualizations
- rope 1 to 2 meters long, about 2 cm thick

Description of activity step



- Pair the participants one will be the youth worker the other the young person with disabilities, they will revert then
 - Step 1. Preparation "on paper"
- Step 2. Interview. Each youth worker will have to:
 - ask the questions to the young person
 - understand what they think about animals and horses
 - consider the information for the next steps

Step 3. Look together at the 5 Pictures/PECS cards (augmentative alternative communication) to give information about horses

Step 4. Look together at the 5 Pictures/PECS cards (augmentative alternative communication) to give information about the horse-assisted activity

Step 5. Preparation in practice

- show the young person how to tie a "Quick Release Knot" Making first 1 loop, then many loops
- tie the knot together with the young person
- give them the chance to practice by themselves if possible
- allow them to demonstrate what they have learned

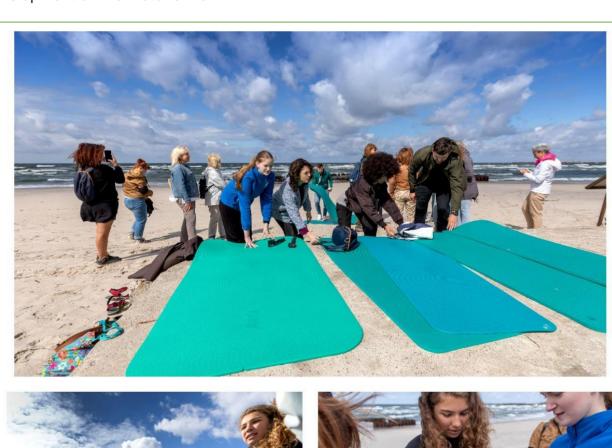
Duration time: 30 min to 1 hour



Benefits from the activity

The steps of the activity are focused on the cognitive benefits for young people with disabilities and the development of fine motor skills:

- improve communication skills listening and understanding information;
- contribute to socialization of the person and bonding with new people;
- develop visual comprehension and connect visuals with real-life objects;
- follow instructions and repeat actions that were shown;
- become confident in one's abilities to complete a new task;
- development of fine motor skills.







Exercises to soothe the nervous system

Name of the Partner organization: QUEST

Title of the Activities: Exercises to soothe the nervous system

Summary of Activities

These exercises provide tools for both facilitators and participants to regulate their autonomic nervous system by stimulating the vagus nerve, a key component of the parasympathetic nervous system that helps regulate stress, anxiety, and other involuntary physiological processes.

What is the Vagus nerve?

The vagus nerve (vaga in Latin = to wander) wanders from our brain to our large intestine, through most major organs and helps regulate the body's involuntary processes (breathing, swallowing, digestion, heartbeat, and much more). Stimulating this nerve can decrease heart rate, lower blood pressure, and boost our immunity. As such, it is considered the queen of the parasympathetic nervous system.

When to practice these exercises?

These exercises can be offered at the beginning of an activity to bring everyone into a state of ease and focus, or at the end of a high-energy activity to slow the pace down. In the case of activities in nature, these exercises can particularly help participants connect to nature and experience its soothing effect. Note that these exercises don't have to be completed in a row. Rather, they are a panel to choose from, and one exercise might be just what the group needs. Facilitators can also choose to practice these exercises on their own, as preparation for their activity. Indeed studies have shown that nervous systems are highly "communicative": by first regulating their nervous system, facilitators can positively influence the nervous systems of participants.

Necessary material for carrying out the activity



A space where you can sit comfortably with a straight back. Chairs or blocks are preferable to sitting directly on the ground since most participants will find it strenuous to maintain a straight back in a cross-legged position. A standing position with feet hip-width apart is also an option.

Description of each activity



1) The Physiological Sigh

- **get Ready:** Sit or stand comfortably with a straight spine and your eyes closed.
- **inhale deeply**: Take a deep breath through your nose, filling your lungs with air. Allow the diaphragm to expand as you breathe in.
- **inhale more**: Take a second, quicker, and shorter breath through your nose on top of the breath you already took, filling your lungs even more.
- exhale completely: Release all the air through your mouth with an ah-sound, like a sigh.
- repeat 2-3 times
- **wrap Up:** Give participants a moment to notice any changes in their mood or physical sensations. Encourage reflection and sharing if appropriate.

2) Humming

- get Ready: Ask participants to sit or stand comfortably with a straight spine and their eyes closed.
- **deep Breathing:** Guide everyone through a few rounds of deep breathing. Inhale slowly through the nose, filling the belly and the lungs, and exhale through the mouth.
- **begin Humming:** On the next exhale, ask participants to hum softly with their lips closed. Demonstrate how the humming should be gentle and continuous, creating a soothing vibration in the chest and throat.
- **repeat:** Continue alternating between breathing in and humming out, each at their rhythm, for 3-5 cycles. Encourage participants to focus on the sound and vibration.
- **optional Variation:** If the group feels comfortable, set a humming tone as the group's baseline. Then, encourage participants to deviate from this baseline whenever they feel like it: they could improvise a short melody, make strange sounds with their voice, or hum in harmony. Let this be a shared experience of listening and playfully responding to one another.
- wrap Up: After the humming session, allow a few moments of silence for participants to come back to their natural breath and observe how their bodies feel. Encourage sharing of experiences if they wish.

3) Tapping

a. The Butterfly Hug

- **get Ready:** Have participants either sit or stand comfortably. Encourage them to close their eyes if they feel comfortable.
- **introduction:** Explain that the Butterfly Hug is a technique that helps to calm the body and mind by mimicking the gentle rhythm of butterfly wings.
- **start Tapping:** Ask everyone to cross their arms over their chest, with each hand's fingertips resting just below the opposite outside edge of the collarbone. Demonstrate how to gently tap one side, then the other, in a slow and rhythmic pattern. Make sure participants continue breathing slow and deep breaths throughout the exercise.
- **continue**: Maintain the tapping and breathing pattern for about 2-5 minutes, allowing participants to relax and settle into their own rhythm.
- wrap Up: After completing the tapping, invite the group to pause and notice any changes in how they feel. Encourage them to share their experiences if they wish.

b. Face tapping

- get Ready: Ask participants to sit or stand comfortably with a straight spine and their eyes closed.
- **deep Breathing:** Guide everyone through a few rounds of deep breathing. Inhale slowly through the nose, filling the belly and the lungs, and exhale through the mouth.
- **tapping**: with one hand's fingertips, start tapping these different points for about one minute each:
 - the side of the hand, below the pinky finger
 - the inner evebrow
 - o the outer eye
 - o under the eye
 - under the nose
 - o under the lip
 - o below the collarbones





- o under the arms, on the bra line
- on the crown of the head
- Wrap Up: After completing the tapping, invite the group to pause and notice any changes in how they feel. Encourage them to share their experiences if they wish.

Duration time: 30 minutes



Benefits from the activity

- stimulates the vagus nerve, promoting relaxation
- reduces stress and anxiety
- enhances body awareness and emotional regulation
- encourages a sense of calm and well-being
- encourages a sense of connection to nature



Orienteering Competition with Velomobiles

Name of the Partner organization: Lithuania Sea Museum

Title of the Activities: Orienteering Competition with Velomobiles

Summary of Activities

Dolphin-assisted therapy center organized orienteering competitions with velomobiles, which were filmed for the international YGBN (Youth Going Back to Nature) video report. The event celebrated the global sports community while promoting a healthy lifestyle immersed in nature. Participants had the opportunity to engage in orienteering races using velomobiles and complete various team tasks outdoors, offering a chance to break away from daily routines and reconnect with nature. Depending on the cognitive level of the participants, such kinds of activities could be beneficially organized in an inclusive group. Velomobiles are very useful for proprioception activation, and can successfully be applied for children and adults with mental and physical disabilities, anxieties, depression and other status. Velomobiles have opportunities to be actively used as a means of transportation or you can be carried by velomobile as a passive participant. In this way activities including the velomobiles are very beneficial for people with different disabilities and issues, as far: activities are carried out outside in fresh air, the velomobiles can carry 4 persons, therefore you are strengthening teamwork and collaboration, empathy of involvement, sharing common experience, face physical challenges, team building while solving cognitive tasks.

Necessary material for carrying out the activity

- velomobiles
- orienteering race maps
- team task materials and tools
- communication equipment (radio, mobile phones)
- first aid kit

Description of activity step



- **Step 1. Registration and Setup:** Participants arrive, register, and receive velomobiles, maps, and orienteering race cards.
- **Step 2. Briefing:** A brief briefing is conducted on the rules of the competition, instructions for using velomobiles, and safety requirements.
- Step 3. Orienteering Races: Participants compete in orienteering races with velomobiles, using maps and completing tasks within a set timeframe.
- **Step 4. Team Tasks:** Participants engage in various team tasks that encourage collaboration and problem-solving.
- Step 5. Relaxation and Awards: After the races and tasks, a relaxation session is held where participants can share their experiences, and receive awards, and congratulations.

Duration time: The activities lasted throughout the afternoon, approximately 1-2 hours.



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Benefits from the activity

- promotes physical activity and a healthy lifestyle
- reduces stress and improves mood
- provides a break for people who spend long periods indoors to enjoy nature
- encourages teamwork and social connections
- strengthens family and friend bonds
- enhances overall well-being and emotional relaxation



The Wheel of Life Exercise for People with Disabilities

Name of the Partner organization: Equilibre

Title of the Activities: The Wheel of Life Exercise for People with Disabilities

Summary of activities

The Wheel of Life is a simple yet powerful tool designed to help individuals, including those with disabilities, assess and reflect on different aspects of their lives. By incorporating visual aids, such as pictures or objects from nature, this exercise allows participants to express their feelings about various life areas in a way that is accessible and meaningful. The primary purpose is to create an inclusive process that resonates with participants, supporting their personal growth and helping them engage with their life journey in a tangible way. Starting with this exercise is particularly beneficial as it sets the focus and provides a clear understanding of the participant's needs and capabilities, guiding the direction of further support.

Necessary material for carrying out the activity



- colored paper
- pencils

Description of activity step

Step 1. Setting Up the Wheel

To begin, take a sheet of paper and draw a large circle on it. Then, divide the circle into 4 or 8 sectors, depending on the participant's needs and abilities. Each section represents a key area of life, which may include Health, Relationships, Daily Activities, Emotional Well-being, School or Career Development, Financial Stability, Personal Growth, etc. The participant collaborates with the facilitator to identify and prioritize these areas, tailoring the wheel to reflect their unique circumstances and goals.

Additionally, the facilitator may ask the participant to choose the colour of the paper to be used for this exercise and explore the reasoning behind their choice. This selection process can provide further insight into the participant's current emotional state or preferences, adding another layer of understanding to the exercise.

The facilitator guides the participant through the process with empathy and support, ensuring the exercise is both accessible and meaningful. They help interpret the participant's choices and provide insights that align with their personal goals, fostering a deeper connection between the exercise and the participant's life journey.

Step 2. Personalizing the Wheel

Participants personalize the Wheel of Life by selecting or creating symbols, pictures, natural objects, words, or short phrases that represent their feelings about each life area. These personalized elements are then placed in the corresponding sections of the wheel, creating a visual and tangible representation of their current state in each area. For more capable

participants, this may involve drawing, writing down words or phrases, or using pre-made images to express their feelings.

Step 3. Rating the Areas

Once the key areas of life have been identified and the wheel is set up, the participant is asked to rate their current level of satisfaction in each area on a scale from 1 to 10. On this scale, 1 represents "not satisfied at all," indicating that this area of life requires significant attention and improvement, while 10 represents "very satisfied," showing that this area is well-developed and fulfilling. The ratings provide a visual representation of the participant's life balance, highlighting areas of strength and those that may need more focus and development.

Step 4. Discussion and Reflection

The facilitator and participant discuss the completed wheel, exploring how the participant feels about each life area. This conversation helps identify areas of satisfaction and those needing more attention. Together, they may set simple goals for improvement based on the insights gained.

Step 5. Ongoing Use

After some time has passed, the participant can revisit the wheel and reflect on their progress. This allows for the opportunity to measure growth and changes in each area of life. By comparing the initial ratings with the current ones, the participant can gain valuable insights into how their efforts have influenced their overall life satisfaction. This reflective process not only highlights areas of improvement but also reinforces the progress made, encouraging continued growth and development.

Duration time: approximately 1 hour.



Benefits from the activity

The Wheel of Life exercise offers several key benefits for facilitators working with people with disabilities:

- diagnostic Insight: The selection and placement of symbols or objects on the wheel reveal the participant's cognitive and emotional grasp of various life areas, helping facilitators identify key areas of focus.
- descriptive Clarity: This tool translates abstract concepts like life satisfaction into a tangible and visual format, making it easier for participants to express their feelings and for facilitators to understand them.
- understanding Needs and Wishes: Discussing the completed wheel enables facilitators to uncover the participant's personal goals, desires, and areas where they seek improvement or support.

• empowerment and Engagement: The exercise empowers participants by helping them understand their own lives, identify areas for growth, and take an active role in their well-being. It encourages a holistic approach by highlighting all key areas of life, ensuring that interventions are person-centered and meaningful.

By effectively using the Wheel of Life, facilitators can better tailor their support strategies to meet the unique needs and aspirations of each participant.



All activities developed during the Learning Exchange Event can also be seen in the YGBN documentary YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES AND HEALTH PROBLEM.

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