



CASE STUDY DESCRIPTION

ORGANIZATION:	ŠENT
COUNTRY:	Slovenia
CASE STUDY NAME/ ID/TITLE	Škofja Loka/A day centre experience

BACKGROUND INFORMATION (i.e. previous learning and challenges, situation...etc)

The staff and service users in Škofja Loka had no previous garden and only 2 users had any previous experience of gardening. The day centre itself is situated in the centre of the town and have little opportunity to exercise or do any practical work.

Since most of them are diagnosed with some form of mental illness and are medicated, motivation for work is low and most of them live a very sedentary lifestyle. This, in most users, means that they have a significantly reduced life expectancy (about 20 years) and quality of life.

Due to this, project PERMIND was implemented in Škofja Loka to address these issues. It succeeded beyond our expectations.

REASONS FOR ATTENDING THE TRAINING

An analysis of questionnaires by Škofja Loka users shows us that most of them attended the training simply because the day center mentor put gardening into the program and our trainer, Črt Kovač, made sure that the group worked with him in cultivating the soil and building the garden.

EXPECTATIONS BEFORE THE COURSE

The group did not expect much from the garden and initially was very reluctant to walk all the way to the garden and help with the project.

DID IT MEET HIS/HER EXPECTATIONS? WHY?

The course succeeded beyond their expectations.

OUTCOMES FROM THE TRAINING (OR CHANGES) IN THE PARTICIPANT'S LIFE (personal, familiar, etc.)

An analysis of the questionnaires and a talk with all the users in the group showed that they all perceived a significant increase in their quality of life. Talking with them showed that the garden represented the major physical activity in their life and an exciting new interest for 6 users. They all reported having fun in the garden and, more importantly, a sense of good teamwork. This is atypical of groups of users with mental health issues, as they are typically less motivated to work to someone else's pace. The main difference seems to be that taking care of the garden seems to be



a shared responsibility and the group feels very protective of it. They have started to organize gardening by themselves, even without their mentor and worry about the weather and how the plants are doing all the time.

This is wonderful news for ŠENT, as we are mostly interested in psycho-social rehabilitation of users, and PERMIND has definitely been a therapeutic experience. What we found was that it also worked as a preventive program, motivating the group to exercise and inform themselves about produce, vegetables, cooking and other aspects of a healthy lifestyle that they were previously not interested in.

On a more personal note, we at ŠENT have seen the user group advance and improve significantly over the past year. PERMIND has given many a reason to visit the day center, engage with their fellow users and simply enjoy life more. A garden is very different from typical activities in a day center and allows the group to cooperate and lean on one another.

To describe a typical day, the men will go and fetch water from the river, while the women organize the garden work- They will look at the soil, have a short break and discuss what they want to do. Some of the group don't want to work sometimes, but they will still come along for a chance to sit in the sunshine. The work will begin, and when everyone is tired, they'll head home. This takes place every week, at least twice.

One of the users is a young man with a history of substance abuse. He does not understand permaculture or plants and does not want to learn-he loves, however, to be useful. He helps carry the water and pull weeds and works until he's so tired he can't work anymore.

He says it helps him to be calm and he's glad that they have something to do where he does not have to be sitting down. We believe that is where the real value of PERMIND is.

PARTICIPANT'S NEW PLANS FOR FUTURE TRIGGERED BY THE TRAINING

The group has BIG plans, which are not very reasonable. They want to start selling the veggies, grow orchids and buy a horse. While these plans will not work (probably), there have been some very interesting plans made to start a collection of traditional Slovenian herbs, make tea bags and start their own cookbook. ŠENT is very excited to see how permaculture will influence our work and their lives.