

Focus Experience

#23

Educating Cities
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Title

Relating Life

Sant Boi de Llobregat promotes interaction between students and people with mental illness

Basic data

City: Sant Boi de Llobregat

Country: Spain

Number of inhabitants: 82.410

Topics: social inclusion, disabled persons, values education, intergenerational relations, living together, tolerance, personal development, self-esteem.

Principles of the Charter of Educating Cities: : 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 16, 17, 20

Summary

Sant Boi de Llobregat stands out for its awareness in the area of mental health. For years the city has been known for its two major psychiatric centres, as well as for hosting many conventions and conferences on the subject. The city also hosts the Mental Health Cluster of Catalonia which seeks to join research, training and the cure of these pathologies.

The idea of this project stems from the interest of the Benviure Public School in working on awareness of issues related to mental health. This is a "co-creative" intervention with two goals, since, on the one hand, it promotes the social integration of students at the Benviure School with adults who have been diagnosed with a mental illness, and, on the other hand, the use of creativity and play as communication tools.

In order to carry out this experience, the Benviure School submitted the proposal to the City Council of Sant Boi de Llobregat, which then placed the school in touch with the Benito Menni Mental Health Hospital in order to prepare a joint project.

At the beginning the goal of the experience was to give an opportunity to the students in primary school from 10 to 12 years old to break with social stigmas related to mental illness, but soon we also identified that there was a major opportunity for persons diagnosed with a mental illness to become active social agents for social change.

This initiative is a mutually enriching tool, a chance to interact and relate as equals, using the importance of relationships in our lives as a core value. Furthermore, it fosters healthy lifestyles, both for the students who participate in the Project as well as those diagnosed with a mental illness, who improve their self-esteem thanks to their participation in this community education project.



Breaking social stigmas

Objectives

- To become aware of the values that define any relationship in our lives.
- To introduce students to the knowledge of mental illness and make them aware that these can form part of the life experience of anyone.
- To establish relations between students and those suffering from an illness, through creativity.
- For those who are ill, to use the life experience as a resource to make people aware and impact society in the struggle against social stigmas.
- To relegate the personal role as "patient" and to participate as an active subject. To foster the participation of the mentally ill in the education of students and in society in a meaningful way.
- To foster autonomy and improve the self-esteem of the people diagnosed with a mental illness, through empowerment and taking responsibility for the role as an educator.

Methodology

The initiative is carried out in groups set up for three months, corresponding to the school calendar and planning. Depending on the school calendar, 7 to 8 quarterly sessions are carried out, that last approximately an hour and a half. Each group is generally made up of 12 students and 4 adults with a mental illness, who meet and work at the school library. The sessions are led by a specialist and they work with two support professionals: a school teacher at the school and a mental health expert.

The activities were designed using a methodology based on cooperative learning and creativity guided by body movement, looks, creative play, the need to share, and spontaneity. Different resources are used: music, card games, paper, wool, fabrics, clothing, objects brought by the participants as well as other that are used to create a participatory space.

The different years have seen different programs adjusted to the characteristics of the participants, although, in general, we have managed to maintain a minimum structure by working on different points of interest, such as, for example: Desires, Our first relationship, Our best memory, An imaginary voyage, Answering questions, Our city, Let's write a story, etc.

For example, at the session "Answering questions" the students posed questions and express their concerns on mental illness or on one's own experience to the people that suffer from them. This exchange of questions and answers strengthens the relationship between both groups and reinforces knowledge, respect and affection for all that has been shared.

At the end of each session there is time for the participants to express their impressions openly.



Moments of cooperative learning and creativity

Social and urban context

Sant Boi de Llobregat is a city in the greater metropolitan area of Barcelona that is 22 Km² and has more than 82,000 inhabitants. It is located in the county of Baix Llobregat, very close to the airport. Its strategic location has helped to consolidate its economic potential.



View of Sant Boi de Llobregat

The productive structure is made up of more than 3,500 companies, mostly in the service sector. The most prevalent industry is metallurgy.

Sant Boi has been historically linked to mental health, concern that is now a strategic axis of the city. In addition to its well-known institutions and modern equipment, the city works in the fields of research, teaching and innovation in this area.

Assessment

The Project has shown itself to be an extraordinary learning opportunity. An innovative experience that has become a reality thanks to the involvement of each individual, generating an atmosphere of opportunity and trust.

The methodology, in the framework of project-based cooperative learning based and, especially, the attention given to each of the dynamics by the coach, means that the construction of imaginary spaces, creative play, the collective generation of stories, music and movement, the materials and spontaneity, become means of generating opportunities to discover, share and learn together.

Regarding the students:

- The students have learned to form an opinion on what mental illness represents, appreciating, evaluating and respecting the individuals suffering from them, and relating to them as equals.
- For some it has been a chance to complete or modify a preconceived image they had of mental illness. For others, it has been a way to lose their fear of something unknown and become aware that mental illness forms part of the reality
- It was also an opportunity for some students, with relatives suffering from mental illnesses, to pose questions about this subject.

Regarding the mentally ill:

- The interaction with children has been a chance for these individuals to intervene as active agents since they had the "task" of contributing to breaking the stigma of mental illness.
- They have had to adapt to changes in their routines and circumstances, which has let them exercise their flexibility.
- Little by little they are taking the initiative and assuming responsibilities.

The success of this experience led another school, the Parellada School, to join the initiative.

Contact

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