

Report on Workshop: Active Steps towards Wellbeing — Movement for Connection and Belonging as a Way to Address Loneliness

Summer Academy in Nicosia, 24 - 26 September 2026

During two sessions held on 25 and 26 September, twenty-four participants explored how simple movement-based and sensory activities can create opportunities for better communication, cooperation and a stronger sense of belonging.

Through practical activities combining **movement, words, rhythm, music, play and interaction**, participants experienced how the body and the mind can work together to support communication and connection. The activities encouraged participants to step out of their usual communication patterns, interact in new ways and create a more relaxed and open atmosphere within the group. Participants pointed out that moments of joy and laughter open space for meaningful communication and emotional connection.

Particular attention was given to the emotional dimension of communication. By sharing personal experiences and reflecting on the things that matter most to them, participants discovered common ground and created opportunities for deeper understanding, empathy and connection.

Some participants expressed their intention to introduce similar activities in their own communities and highlighted the importance of creating opportunities for shared experiences.

Key points highlighted during the evaluation session:

- Play, music and movement can strengthen relationships with others, support both emotional and physical well-being and contribute to creating more inclusive communities.
- Shared experiences can contribute to:
 - reducing loneliness and social isolation;
 - supporting social and emotional well-being;
 - facilitating communication and connection;
 - strengthening empathy and mutual understanding;
 - creating a stronger sense of belonging and community.
- Simple movement-based activities can provide an accessible way of bringing people of different ages and backgrounds together.
- Direct human interaction and shared experiences can offer a meaningful counterbalance to increasingly digital forms of communication.

The workshop highlighted that **addressing loneliness does not always require complex solutions. Sometimes it starts with something as simple as moving, playing, laughing and communicating together.**

Gordana Matolek
Workshop leader

Lambert van Nistelrooij
Rapporteur of the workshop

Active Steps towards Wellbeing, Movement for Connection and Belonging

The workshop was held twice, on September 25 and 26. We focused on ways of communicating in this period of growing loneliness, with 24 participants taking part in several exercises introduced by Mrs Gordana Matolek.

Just some impressions:

We often forget that interpersonal communication is directly influenced by movement, sound and rhythm, combining words, rhythm and singing. This activates both hemispheres of the brain.

Another way to reach a deeper emotional level in communication, practised during the workshop, was to write down the five personal things that matter most to us in life, followed by an exchange within the group. This approach stimulated an open dialogue and created a stronger sense of connection among the participants. It encouraged mutual understanding and made the participants feel good.

Our central takeaway

This part of the ESU Study Days reflected on the keynote speech and the discussion that took place the day before. The keynote speech highlighted that there is still a great deal of loneliness, even though online participation and communication are growing.

How can we find a better balance and develop a tailor-made approach for different groups of older people, together with their relatives and within their neighbourhoods?

The rapporteur concluded in the plenary session that the workshop approach can bring people of all ages together, make them feel good, laugh and speak out. **Fighting loneliness is not just a theoretical issue – it starts with direct communication.**

Reaching the emotional level and fostering empathy within our member organisations, families and communities is important, across all generations.

How the outcomes of this workshop could be more intensively connected with policies and activities within the ESU should be further explored.

“It is a breakaway from the digital screens,” one of the participants added with a big smile.

Lambert van Nistelrooij
Rapporteur of the workshop

List of activities

1. Snap Game (Schnappspiel)

In this card game, the aim is to listen to the music, identify a word from the song, and grab the corresponding card. The person with the most cards is the winner.

This activity:

- **Improves concentration and attention** – participants need to listen carefully and react quickly;
- **Strengthens listening skills** – they actively listen for specific words in the song;
- **Stimulates memory** – participants connect words with sounds, rhythm and music;
- **Encourages quick thinking and reaction** – identifying and grabbing the correct card requires a fast response;
- **Combines language and movement** – participants process language while physically reacting to what they hear;
- **Activates both hemispheres of the brain** – language processing is combined with rhythm, music, movement and visual perception;
- **Supports coordination** – listening, seeing, deciding and moving happen simultaneously;
- **Encourages participation and engagement** – everyone is actively involved rather than passively listening;
- **Creates joy and laughter** – the playful element helps create a relaxed atmosphere;
- **Encourages friendly competition** – competition can add energy and motivation while keeping the activity playful;
- **Can be adapted to different ages and abilities** – the rules, speed, vocabulary and physical demands can easily be adjusted.

Music&Food – Playing&Learning (Schnapp)

Ei	Kartoffeln	Pasta
essen	Lieblingsessen	Reis
Gemüse	Marmelade	Toast
Gemüse-Curry	Orangensaft	trinken



2. What's important to me?

Each participant traces the outline of their own hand and writes on each finger something that is important to them in life. They then share their thoughts with the others, discovering similarities and differences among them.

What's
important in
my life?



3. Dart Game

Participants work in small groups, throwing balls at a target (dartboard). Depending on the field they hit, they have to say a sentence and add up their points. Sentences may not be repeated. This activity encourages participants to express their opinions and feelings while promoting mutual respect and appreciation.

Dart Game



Throw the ball and finish the sentence.

White: I know that you...

Red: I'm happy because I...

Yellow: I'm happy because you...

Green: I'm tired when I...

Black: It's fun when we...

4. Step into other people's feet

Up to six participants stand in a circle. A large sheet of paper is placed on the floor underneath their feet. Using a thick marker, they draw the outlines of their feet on the paper and write their names inside them.

The whole group then moves one step to the right, and everyone stands in the footprints of another participant. The leader asks: "If this person were a flower, what flower would they be?" The participants write their associations on the footprints they are standing in and then move to the next person's footprints. Every time they move to the right they write down a new association from a different category (a season, a musical instrument, a place, a car, a color).

After the activity, the group discusses their own self-perception and how others see them. Each participant can reflect on and appreciate their own little "personal map" created by the others on their footprints.



5. The Power of Support

Option 1: Slogans that can change the world: Participants stand in a circle. The aim is to create a four-word slogan. The first person says “We”, the second person adds a verb such as *may, can, must, want to*, the third person adds an adverb or a noun such as *more, always, never, a lot, chocolate, love*, and the fourth person adds a verb such as *laugh, play, eat, have*. Once the four participants have completed the sentence, the other participants repeat it aloud, using a gesture that conveys determination to make the statement come true.

Option 2: We all want: Participants move slowly around the room. One person says a wish or desire. The other participants stop moving, repeat the wish and gather together in a circle. Each participant can express what they wish for, and each time, the whole group supports them loudly and with determination.

The Power of Support



6. Rhythm and Singing

a) This Is the Rhythm (rhythmic movements)

Participants perform rhythmic movements while saying the rhyme together.

*This is the rhythm, schnup digedi, schnup digedi, hey!
Energy running free, Rhythm is our secret strategy!*

*Das ist der Rhythmus, schnüp digedi, schnüp digedi hey!
Energie, wie noch nie, Rhythmus ist die beste Strategie.*

b) Hans Is in the Kitchen with Stina (rhythmic movements in a circle)

Participants sit in a circle and accompany the rhyme with rhythmic movements.

Clap your hands on your own thighs, then clap on the thighs of the person sitting to your right, then again to your own, and then to your left. Then, in accordance with the lyrics, they mime playing the banjo, violin and flute.

Hans is in the kitchen with Stina, and he's playing on his old Bengio, fli, fla, flilajlo... fli fla, flo fla, flijalo fla... and he's playing on his old Bengio.

Hans ist in der Küche mit Stina und er spielt auf seinem alten Bengio, fli, fla, flilajlo...

c) Whisky Mixer and Wachs Maske

Participants stand or sit in a circle. The leader introduces two words that are passed around the circle in opposite directions.

Going clockwise, the word *"Whisky Mixer"* is passed from one participant to the next. Going counter-clockwise, the word *"Wachs Maske"* is passed around the circle. The group can practise each direction once before starting the game.

The leader starts by saying *"Whisky Mixer"* to the person on their right, who continues by passing it to the next person, and so on.

If a participant wants to change the direction, they say *"Wechsel!"* and the word starts going in the opposite direction saying *"Wachs Maske"*..

To make the game more challenging, anyone who makes a mistake has to run one lap around the group. As an additional challenge, anyone who starts laughing has to run an extra lap.

In short:

- Going to the right: **"Whisky Mixer!"**
- To change direction: **"Wechsel!"**
- Going to the left: **"Wachs Maske!"**

7. Words Meet Movements

Participants work in pairs and have a conversation. One person says what they enjoy doing, but at the same time uses a gesture to show a different activity. The other person must not be distracted by the gesture, but should instead use a gesture to show the activity that was actually mentioned and say whether or not they also enjoy doing it. Then they switch roles.

8. Heaven and Hell (Hopscotch) / Himmel und Hölle (Tempelhüpfen)

Preparation:

Outdoors: Draw a hopscotch playing field with sidewalk chalk.

Indoors: Create a playing field on the floor using paper masking tape OR place a *Heaven and Hell* hopscotch mat on the floor.

- Prepare W-words and place one next to each field, e.g. *who, what, how, when, where, where from, where to, why*.
- A pack of tissues (or another small object that does not slide).
- A game board for each player, pair or group.
- Clothes pegs (or a pen for marking each completed field on the game board).

Game variation and rules:

Decide the order of the players, pairs or groups by drawing lots or in another way.

The first player stands in front of field 1, while the other players stand beside the playing field, next to the W-words.

The first player throws the tissue onto a field (e.g. 5), then hops from 1 to 7–8, turns around at 7–8, and hops back. On field 6, the player stands on one leg and answers the question asked by one of the players standing outside the playing field. The player then picks up the tissue and hops back over the fields to the starting position, leaving the playing field.

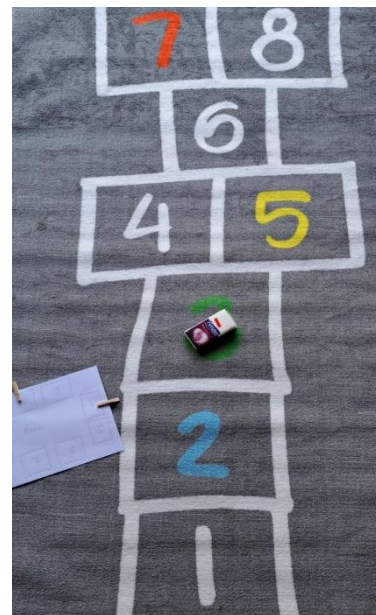
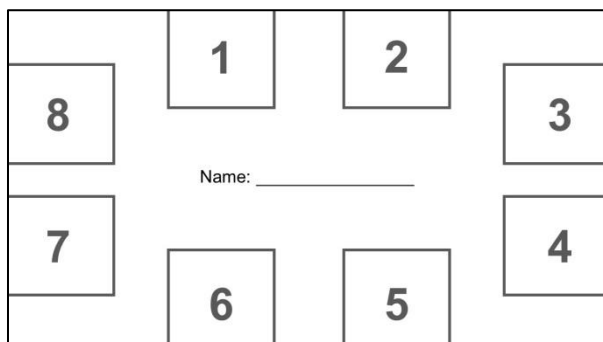
The completed field (No. 6) is then marked with a clothes peg on the player's game board.

Possible additional rules:

The lines of the fields must not be touched either with the foot or with the tissue. If this happens, the next player takes their turn.

Game board

Print the game board or draw and copy it by hand.



9. Mirror Game

Work in pairs. Sit facing each other. Person A tells their “mirror” how they feel (sad, disappointed, in love, etc.), and the mirror responds with facial expressions and gestures, showing what that emotion looks like. Then it is Person B’s turn, and the mirror responds again. Keep switching roles between the person and the mirror.

Briefly discuss whether the reactions we see in the mirror reflect our real-life reactions or not. What do our reactions look like?

10. What We have in Common

The game leader starts by saying something they like about themselves and stretches out one hand. Anyone who shares the same quality or interest takes their hand. The leader then stretches out their other hand and names another quality or interest, and someone who shares it takes that hand.

That person then stretches out their free hand and names something they like about themselves. Another participant who shares the same quality or interest joins them, and the process continues.

In this way, a chain is formed, connecting the group through the qualities, interests and things they have in common.

Examples might include: *I love chocolate, I like joking around, I love sleeping, I love animals, I can cook*, etc.

11. Two Truths and a Lie

Each participant writes three sentences about themselves related to the topic: two true statements and one lie. They do not reveal which statement is the lie.

Working in pairs and following the dialogue example, participants discuss and analyse the statements until they guess which two are true and which one is false.

12. This is What I Dream About

Participants write their names on blank templates. The templates are then randomly distributed among the participants. Each participant receives someone else's name and completes the template by writing what they think is true about that person and what they think that person dreams about.

For example:

Name:

This is what I dream about. This is what I wish for...

My everyday life looks like this...

I get up at _____ o'clock.

I would sometimes like to sleep until _____ o'clock.

I always have to hurry.

I would like to _____.

_____.

_____.

13. We have Never done This Together

Pair work. The two participants have to find two things they have either done together or have never done together.

For example:

- Wir haben noch nie zusammen ... getrunken. – We have never had a drink together.
- Wir sind beide nach ... gefahren. – We have both travelled to ...
- Wir haben schon einmal zusammen ... – We have done ... together before.

14. Me Too!

Participants sit in a circle. Each participant thinks of one personal characteristic, experience or interest that they consider distinctive and that they think sets them apart from the others.

One participant starts by sharing their statement, for example: *I was twice in Germany*. If nobody shares this experience, the next participant takes their turn.

If someone shares the same characteristic or experience, they have to jump up, shout “Me too!” (“Ich auch!”), and sit on the lap of the person who made the statement. More than one student may share the same characteristic, so several students may end up sitting on the speaker’s lap.

To free themselves, the speaker has to call out a characteristic or experience that is unique to them. Everyone then returns to their own place, and the next person in the circle takes their turn.

Alternative version: Finding similarities

Remove one chair from the circle and have one participant stand in the middle. The participant in the middle thinks of something they have in common with others, for example: *I love music*.

Everyone who shares this characteristic has to stand up and quickly find another chair. The participant in the middle also tries to find a seat. The person left without a chair becomes the new person in the middle and continues the game.

15. Human Bingo

Time: 20 minutes

Group size: 8+

Preparation: One copy of the questionnaire below and one pen per participant.

Instructions: Explain that the aim is for each participant to talk to as many different people as possible and find out something about each of them. Each name should be written only once.

Participants should find someone in the group and ask them: “Are you someone who...?”

They try to find a different person for each statement, for example:

- regularly reads newspapers;
- has a pet;
- likes football;
- plays a musical instrument;
- has travelled outside Croatia;
- etc.

Tips for the group leader

Start a discussion about what the participants have discovered by asking whether they enjoyed the game. Talk with the group about the different skills and interests they discovered, as well as cultural influences, gender differences and other observations.

Encourage participants to discover the similarities and differences within the group themselves.

16. If I Were...

Participants write five sentences individually, in pairs, in groups of three, or in smaller groups — whatever works best for you. They try to complete the sentences as quickly as possible.

- If I were the President of Spain, I would...
- If I were a school principal, I would...
- If I were an animal, I would...
- If I were a child, I would...
- If I were Luka Modrić, I would...
- If I were _____, I would...
- If I were _____, I would...
- If I were _____, I would...

17. My Souvenir / A Note to Remember (Love and Memories)

Each participant receives a sheet of paper and attaches it to their back with a clothes peg. Participants then move around the room and write a positive message, a word, a sentence or even a short poem for as many people as possible.

At the end, everyone can take their sheet home as a little souvenir and a reminder of time together.

The sense of well-being depends, among other things, on what we ourselves experience, do and feel in real life. Let this little souvenir remind you of the positive feelings, connections and memories we created together.