



CIRQUE VIBE

D2.1 GOOD PRACTICES COLLECTION: UNVEILING YOUTH EMPOWERMENT THROUGH CIRCUS ACTIVITIES

Circus 4 Youth Well-being & Inclusion



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[ANCE](#) - Greece

[Cirkus La Bulle](#) - Slovenia

[Cirqueon](#) - Czech Republic

[Defoin](#) - Spain

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TABLE OF CONTENTS



1. INTRODUCTION TO THE PROJECT	4
2. INTRODUCTION TO THE DELIVERABLE	5
3. INTERVIEW FINDINGS AND GOOD PRACTICES	7
3.1 SLOVENIA	8
3.2 CZECH REPUBLIC	9
3.3 GREECE	10
3.4 SPAIN	11
3.5 POLAND	12
4. SUCCESS STORIES	14
5. OVERALL ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSIONS	40
ANNEX 1 - METHODOLOGY.....	47
ANNEX 2 - INTERVIEW SUMMARIES.....	49
REFERENCES AND SOURCE BASE	51

Introduction to the Project

CirqueVibe is an Erasmus+ KA220 - Cooperation Partnerships in the field of Sport that explores how circus-based activities can support youth wellbeing, empowerment, social inclusion, and personal development. The project is grounded in the understanding that contemporary circus and social circus can serve as powerful non-formal educational tools, combining physical activity, creativity, cooperation, safe risk-taking, and self-expression.

The project responds to European priorities related to inclusion and diversity, participation in sport and physical activity, wellbeing, active lifestyles, and competence development. Its contribution to the sport sector lies in expanding the understanding of physical activity beyond competition and performance-based approaches. Circus-based activities offer inclusive, embodied, and creative forms of participation, enabling young people with diverse backgrounds, abilities, and experiences to engage through multiple entry points.

The project aims to enhance the wellbeing, social inclusion, and empowerment of marginalized youth by identifying, analysing, and transferring effective circus-based methodologies. Through international cooperation and knowledge exchange, CirqueVibe seeks to strengthen the capacity of youth workers, trainers, educators, and partner organisations to design and implement inclusive, empowering, and wellbeing-oriented activities for young people across different European contexts.





Introduction to the Deliverable

This WP2 e-publication, Good Practices Collection: Unveiling Youth Empowerment through Circus Activities, brings together good practices, interview findings, and success stories collected across the partner countries. Its purpose is not only to document existing initiatives but also to explore how and why circus-based methodologies contribute to youth empowerment, social inclusion, wellbeing, and personal development.

The publication serves three key functions. First, it documents a diverse range of circus-based practices implemented across Europe. Second, it analyses the factors that contribute to positive outcomes, highlighting both evidence of impact and challenges encountered during implementation. Third, it identifies transferable approaches, lessons learned, and practical recommendations that can inform the development of the WP3 “Empowering Circus” curriculum, training materials, and future youth-work methodologies.

The publication distinguishes between interview-based success stories and additional good practices. Success stories are presented where interviews provide strong evidence of personal, social, or organisational transformation resulting from participation in circus activities. Additional good practices are included where the initiative demonstrates relevance, innovation, or promising outcomes, even when detailed personal testimonies or impact evidence are more limited.

By combining documentation, analysis, and reflection, this publication contributes to a deeper understanding of the role that circus activities can play in supporting inclusive and empowering opportunities for young people across Europe.



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Good Practices Collection & Interview Findings

This section presents findings by country using a unified structure. Tables include interview-based practices and relevant desk-researched good practices. Where a practice is not interview-based, this is clearly indicated in the evidence/source column.



Country: Slovenia

Partner organisation: Slovenian partners and associated circus/community organisations

Interview / Practice	Type of respondent / source	Target group	Circus activities used	Main outcomes	Key success factors	Challenges	Selected quote
Cirkokrog - community circus and inclusion	Facilitator + participant interviews; good practice file	Children, youth, migrants, asylum seekers, young people in vulnerable situations, participants with different abilities	Juggling, balance, diabolo, acrobatics, movement games, partner exercises, community performances	Increased confidence, belonging, self-initiative, social connection, and in some cases long-term pathways into circus or pedagogy	Long-term presence in communities; no grading or punishment; flexible adaptation to group needs; participants shaping sessions	Bureaucracy, unstable funding, difficulty matching formal project requirements with street/community practice	"In circus, you don't need words to be able to shine."
Matafir - DIY cabaret and collective creation	Facilitator + participant interviews; good practice file	Young people with fewer opportunities, LGBTQ+ youth, migrants, unemployed youth, youth in alternative cultural spaces	Aerials, juggling, cabaret, performance creation, technical production, costume/visual work, collective rehearsals	Stronger body confidence, trust, belonging, creative voice, organisational skills, care for group processes and community identity	Shared authorship; feminist/queer cultural spaces; performance as public recognition; continuous reflection and evaluation	Lack of stable space, legal uncertainty, limited institutional support, risk of burnout in grassroots cultural work	"It's not about perfection, but about feeling, energy, and connection."
Ana Monro - Stand Out in Public Space	Good practice file	Young people aged approx. 16-30 with fewer opportunities to access arts education and international mobility	Street theatre, aerial acrobatics, juggling, balance, public-space performance creation	Public confidence, intercultural learning, creative participation, awareness of public space as a shared cultural environment	Erasmus+ mobility; professional mentorship; public-space performance; non-verbal creative methods	Short-term format limits long-term evidence; impact mostly inferred from participation and outputs	Desk research source; no interview quote used in the main success stories.
Fuskabo / Social Circus - A Space for Support	Good practice file	Children and youth with fewer opportunities, youth in residential care, correctional institutions, special education contexts	Juggling, balance, acrobatics, basic aerials, clowning, mentoring and reflection	Improved self-confidence, social connection, positive leisure participation, sense of achievement and public recognition	Collaboration with social workers and institutions; regular weekly sessions; adapted activities	Requires professional supervision, institutional cooperation and sustained funding	Desk research source; no interview quote used in the main success stories.

Country: Czech Republic

Partner organisation: Czech partner and associated circus/therapeutic practice contexts

Interview / Practice	Type of respondent / source	Target group	Circus activities used	Main outcomes	Key success factors	Challenges	Selected quote
Cirqueon - Circus Self-care	Trainer + participant interviews	Adults and young people with mixed needs including anxiety, depression, loneliness, self-judgement and difficult life transitions	Juggling, object manipulation, games, balance, group acrobatics, aerials, mindfulness, somatic work, talking circle	More ease in group communication, reduced self-judgement, more trust, emotional regulation, continued motivation for physical activity	Support-group framing; screening interviews; safe failure; games; mixed-needs group; reflective circle	Six-week duration was short; space was noisy; need for careful mental health boundaries	"Games just bring us together. They make us cooperate. They make us know each other."
Circus in Psychiatric Hospital - Tent/Cascabel	Trainer interview	Adult psychiatric hospital patients with varied diagnoses and unmet needs around acceptance, loneliness and self-criticism	Juggling, object manipulation, balancing, clapping/cognitive games, limited partner acrobatics	Presence in the moment, success without judgement, reflection on self-criticism, adaptive emotions such as trust and trying again	Professional dual competence of psychologist/circus teacher; accessible activities; non-clinical appearance of trainers	Small room, ward interruptions, limited course duration, no access to medical files	"The 'fails' in juggling activities were a mirror to how they treat themselves."
Circus Clinic	Good practice file	Professionals working with children and youth experiencing mental vulnerability; indirect youth impact through trained practitioners	Juggling, balance, acrobatics, aerials, clowning, storytelling, non-violent communication and expert workshops	Professional learning, safer facilitation, stronger awareness of therapeutic potential and ethical boundaries	Interdisciplinary collaboration between circus pedagogy and psychotherapy/wellbeing fields	No direct participant outcome data; sustainability and research funding limitations	Desk research source; no direct participant quote used in success stories.
Manual for Challenging Kids	Good practice file	Children and youth with special educational needs, attention difficulties, behavioural needs, sensory sensitivities	Juggling, balance, floor/aerial acrobatics, trampoline, clowning and theatre	Improved self-regulation, communication, motivation, group inclusion and emotional safety	Manualised adaptation; focus on safe/brave space; small steps and task clarity	Early-stage evidence; limited duration; no long-term evaluation	Desk research source; no interview quote used in the main success stories.

Country: Greece

Partner organisation: Greek partner and associated community/social circus spaces

Interview / Practice	Type of respondent / source	Target group	Circus activities used	Main outcomes	Key success factors	Challenges	Selected quote
Circus Lesvos	Facilitator interviews; good practice file	Refugees, migrants, children, youth, women, local communities, Roma/public-space participants	Juggling, balance, stilts, acrobatics, aerials, trampoline, open training, school visits, women-only sessions	Psychosocial relief, confidence, social connection, reduced tensions, intercultural contact, participant-to-facilitator pathway	Trusted space at PAREA; free access; non-verbal methodology; intercultural awareness; collaboration with NGOs	Unstable funding, mobility/relocation of refugees, language mediation, cultural norms around body contact and gender	"People don't need to speak the same language to understand each other."
Mikro Metaxourgeio	Facilitator + participant interviews	Adults and young people accessing a self-organised, low-cost circus and aerial practice space	Aerial rope, silks, trapeze, free training, occasional workshops, school/community performances	Reduced anxiety, increased body confidence, belonging, collective ownership, emotional release and self-expression	Non-hierarchical assembly model; free/low-cost access; collective responsibility; peer support	Collective decision-making can be slow; financial pressure; safety responsibilities with beginners	"Circus practice gives you technique, balance, coordination, and definitely self-confidence."
Social Circus Athens	Good practice file	Refugee children, unaccompanied minors, Roma youth, migrants and young people of African origin	Juggling, monocycle, acrobatics, trapeze, public performances	Empowerment, anti-racist visibility, self-expression, communication and coexistence	AfroGreek-led cultural centre; arts-as-activism; public performance as awareness raising	Limited stable funding; evidence mainly practice-based	Desk research source; no interview quote used in success stories.
Circus Camino	Good practice file	Children (from kindergarten age), adolescents and adults of typical development and with any form of disability or neurodivergence; mainstream school students and participants in KDAP / KDAP-MEA afterschool and disability centres	Functional Juggling, acrobatics, object balancing, hula hoop, cooperative circus games	Motor skills, hand-eye coordination and balance; self-confidence, self-esteem and persistence; joy and emotional engagement; social interaction; inclusion and public visibility of people with disabilities	Functional Juggling combining occupational-therapy and educational goals; adapted accessible equipment (official European Quat Props representative); professional educators/artists; mobile outreach into schools and disability centres; playful, non-competitive engagement; social circus framed as a "way of life"	No fixed venue (mobile/visiting model); reliance on performance and event income; limited and unstable public funding; low familiarity with contemporary/social circus in Crete; no formal evaluation data	Desk research source; no interview quote used in success stories.

Country: Spain

Partner organisation: Spanish partner and associated community/social circus spaces

Interview / Practice	Type of respondent / source	Target group	Circus activities used	Main outcomes	Key success factors	Challenges	Selected quote
Youth Circus Festival - FEECSE	Stakeholder + young participant interviews; good practice file	Young people aged approx. 12-26 from socio-educational circus schools, especially youth who feel isolated in local contexts	Parades, non-competitive galas, technical workshops, student-led exchanges, Circus Olympics	Belonging to wider youth circus community, motivation to continue, peer networks, personal growth, volunteering/leadership pathway	Non-competitive showcase; preparation with trainers; safety/respect agreements; national federation network	Accommodating approx. 200 people, affordability, venues, logistics, risk of losing project essence	"It is not a competition, but a showcase."
Circo Bajo el Tejado - Youth Circus Group	Trainer + young participant interviews; good practice file	Adolescents and young people needing confidence, safe space, group belonging and emotional support	Aerials, juggling, floor acrobatics, balance, acro-duo, social/contact games, performances	Overcoming fears, social skills, discipline, perseverance, self-confidence, emotional regulation	Long-term weekly structure; strong/weak discipline rotation; warm-up/reflection; peer care and non-judgement	Bureaucracy, limited external support, need to explain circus in local context, financial balancing	"The person who plays is just as important as the one who looks after them."
AZIRKARTE - inclusive circus with young people with disabilities	Good practice file	Young people with disabilities aged approx. 18-28 with limited leisure and social opportunities	Juggling, balance, acrobatics, rope jumping, percussion, workshops and performances	Improved self-esteem, motor skills, social skills, public visibility and autonomy; performances seen by large audiences	Family follow-up; weekly structure; public performance; disability inclusion through visible talent	Securing space/materials, reliance on volunteers, need not to take on more participants than can be supported	Desk research source; no interview quote used in the main success stories.

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Country: Spain

Partner organisation: Spanish partner and associated community/social circus spaces

Interview / Practice	Type of respondent / source	Target group	Circus activities used	Main outcomes	Key success factors	Challenges	Selected quote
Carampa Circus School - Adapted Circus Classes	Good practice file	Children, young people and adults with functional diversity	Balancing, juggling, aerial techniques	Greater autonomy and independence, improved relationships with others, higher self-esteem; gains in motor skills, attention and confidence; enjoyment and inclusion;	Activity adapted to each group's profile; clear playful station-based structure; recognition of skill mastery in front of peers and teamwork; trained circus educators and adapted equipment; sustained reach (~120 sessions/year, ~2,400 participants/year over five years)	High staffing ratio required (about one trainer per five participants); reliance on external funding; partner organisations lacking resources; loss of public funding after the Community of Madrid programme was privatised and discontinued; activity now survives only through the few schools that can pay privately	Desk research source; no interview quote used in the main success stories.
La Casa del Circo: Professional Performing Arts Centre specialising in Circus.	Good practice file	Young people aged 14-17; youth at social risk, victims of bullying, those with ADHD/ASD/OCD, physical or learning needs, gender-identity difficulties, and unstable family backgrounds;	Aerial acrobatics (silks, trapeze, hoop, straps) and floor work, acrobatics (mini tramp, air track) juggling, object control, contact, balancing acts, unicycle and stage performance	Self-confidence, resilience and overcoming frustration; reduced inhibition through theatre/clowning; belonging and family-like community; documented behavioural change (e.g. a bullied pupil who stopped self-harming, a participant with aggression now calm, an adult overcoming fear of heights)	Close, trust-based relationships with pupils and families; individualised adaptation to each participant rather than fixed inclusion protocols; families welcomed to observe; performance as confidence-building; certified rigging/safety and accessible venue;	Self-funded from the founder's savings, no structural public funding; only two core staff (burnout risk, partner's serious illness); small premises limiting class size; sector prejudice (circus only recently recognised under Spain's Arts Education Act); difficulty engaging local authorities	Desk research source; no interview quote used in the main success stories.

Country: Poland

Partner organisation: Polish partner and associated community/social circus spaces

Interview / Practice	Type of respondent / source	Target group	Circus activities used	Main outcomes	Key success factors	Challenges	Selected quote
Cyrkplodzja	Trainer interview	Boys in a court-mandated youth rehabilitation centre with social maladjustment, emotional deficits and disrupted education	Juggling, fireshow, unicycle, rola-bola, slackline, acrobatics, performances, volunteering and workshops for others	Concentration, patience, emotional regulation, responsibility, public recognition, stereotype change, valued social roles	Creative social rehabilitation; external performances; role reversal from “problem youth” to artist/educator; committed facilitator	Participant rotation, instability, emotional crises, logistics, equipment costs, burnout risk	“They become admired as artists and educators.”
Dr Clown Foundation	Stakeholder interview	Hospitalised children and youth, people with intellectual disabilities, seniors, hospice and adult patients	Clowning, juggling, balancing, magic, movement games, improvisation, laughter therapy	Reduced fear and tension, more participation, agency, independence and emotional lightness	Laughter plus agency; adapted activities; safe first contact; small successes recognised	Health conditions, medical procedures, limited space, diverse abilities and need to build trust	“Even a small step, a short moment of engagement or a single attempt can be meaningful.”
Festival of Contemporary Circus OFCA	Good practice file	Families, children, youth, rural/regional audiences, volunteers and local community in Olesnica	Juggling, acrobatics, clowning, highline, street theatre, workshops, mural creation	Cultural access, community participation, volunteer development and local visibility of contemporary circus	Free public programming; city transformation; volunteer base; artistic exchange	Limited individual outcome data; festival model depends on funding and logistics	Desk research source; no interview quote used in success stories.
Centrum Biblioteczno-Kulturalne FAMA – Social Circus	Good practice file	Teenagers aged 13–18, with particular reach to young people with fewer opportunities and from diverse backgrounds, in an urban community setting in Wrocław	Acrobatics, juggling, aerials, dance, acting	Improved confidence, coordination and communication; teamwork and cooperation; a sense of belonging and engagement; sustained social skills and greater openness to community and cultural participation	Free, low-threshold access; regular weekly sessions; safe, non-judgemental, inclusive environment; non-formal, experiential and peer learning led by facilitators; hosted by a public cultural institution	Limited resources (space, equipment, staff time); maintaining consistent attendance; mixed skill levels and needs within an open group; dependence on municipal and project-based funding	Desk research source; no interview quote used in success stories.

Cross-country reading guide for the interview findings



Cross-country reading guide for the interview findings

The tables above should be interpreted comparatively. Rather than reflecting distinct national models of social circus, they show the different areas of focus found in the practices identified and analysed in each partner country. The selected Slovenian practices place particular emphasis on community-based and grassroots cultural engagement; the Czech examples foreground wellbeing, psychosocial support, and ethical considerations; the Greek cases highlight intercultural work and engagement with refugee and migrant populations; the Spanish practices demonstrate strong links with youth networks and socio-educational provision; while the Polish examples emphasise rehabilitation, participation, and support within institutional or care settings.

Taken together, these findings illustrate the breadth and adaptability of social circus as a methodology. They also carry important implications for WP3. Rather than promoting a single, universal model of practice, the curriculum should provide a flexible and modular framework that can be adapted to different target groups, organisational settings, facilitator competencies, and local contexts. Such an approach would better reflect the diversity of social circus practice identified across the project while supporting transferability and practical application in a wide range of environments.

Success Stories

Success stories are adapted from interviews and selected because they demonstrate clear change, impact and human experience. Each country includes exactly two stories. Youth Circus Festival (Spain), Circus Lesvos (Greece) and Cirkokrog (Slovenia) are included because they are among the strongest evidence-based examples in the dataset.





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Country: Slovenia

From Isolation to Belonging: Cirkokrog as a Bridge into Community

Country and organisation	Slovenia - Cirkokrog
Context / initial challenge	The story begins with young people who may experience isolation, displacement, weak support networks, or limited access to cultural participation. In one participant's narrative, a rural upbringing, family disruption and life in a residential youth group created a strong need for belonging and meaningful activity.
Circus-based intervention	Cirkokrog uses community-based circus pedagogy: juggling, balance, diabolo, acrobatics, movement games, peer learning and open practice in neighbourhood, school, refugee and public-space contexts.
Personal or community transformation	The intervention created a pathway from first contact with juggling to regular practice, social connection, participation in youth exchanges and eventually identity formation through circus. The participant described circus as helping overcome social anxiety, build confidence and develop a healthier coping mechanism.
Evidence of impact	Evidence is qualitative but strong: participant testimony, facilitator observation and continuity of community practice. The clearest impact is on confidence, belonging and social initiative rather than formally measured long-term outcomes.
Selected quote	"For me, it was life-changing."
Key lesson learned	Community circus works when it is not treated as a one-off workshop but as a long-term social ecology where young people can return, practise, connect and eventually contribute.

Country: Slovenia

From isolation to belonging through juggling

This story shows how a simple first encounter with juggling can become a life-changing pathway into confidence, belonging and identity. The participant grew up in a rural area with few peers and later moved into a residential youth group after family separation. At that time, they described themselves as socially inactive, without a strong hobby or community. A juggling workshop organised by a social pedagogue became the turning point. “For most, it stopped there — but for me, something clicked.”

What began as learning three balls gradually became a daily practice. The participant trained during school breaks, Sundays and free time. Circus offered more than a skill: it became a way to relax, manage stress and reduce social anxiety. The participant explained that juggling helped them “air out my brain” and gave them a safe escape.

The deeper transformation was social. Through circus, they moved from being “more of a loner” to connecting with peers, joining a juggling subculture and eventually turning a hobby into a profession. The story demonstrates how circus can create belonging when young people are given time, support and a community where they can grow step by step.

Country: Slovenia

Collective Creation as Empowerment: Matafir and the DIY Cabaret Pathway

Country and organisation	Slovenia - Matafir
Context / initial challenge	Young people connected to alternative cultural spaces often need not only activities, but places where they can express identity, build community and participate in culture on their own terms.
Circus-based intervention	Matafir combines circus, cabaret, aerials, juggling, technical production, feminist/queer cultural practice, DIY methods and collective performance creation.
Personal or community transformation	Participants developed artistic skills, technical and organisational competences, care for group dynamics and a sense of responsibility for the collective. Transformation happened through shared authorship, reflection, performance and mutual support rather than through technique alone.
Evidence of impact	Evidence comes from facilitator and participant interviews. Strong evidence exists for belonging, self-awareness, creative confidence and group care..
Selected quote	“The most important thing I took with me is how important the community became to me.”
Key lesson learned	Youth empowerment can be strengthened when participants are not only learners but co-authors, organisers, technicians, performers and evaluators of the process.

Country: Slovenia

Finding community, body awareness and creative voice

The Matafir story is less about one circus technique and more about how a young person slowly entered a creative community and found a place within it. The participant first became involved through feminist cultural spaces and practical support work: helping with organisation, printing, carrying props and later cooking at a youth exchange. Circus entered naturally through relationships. Seeing others juggling and creating together, the participant said: "I really wanted to be part of that community."

The experience developed gradually. They moved from helping in the background to learning juggling, working with clubs, joining a cabaret, supporting technical production and performing. This mattered because the participant was not only trained as a performer; they became part of the process of making something happen. They learned organisation "by doing", understood the difference between rehearsing and performing, and became more aware of the body as something that needs care and preparation.

The strongest impact was relational. The participant described the community as genuine, connected and fun, and said the most important lesson was "how important the community became to me." This story shows empowerment through belonging, responsibility and shared creation.



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Country: Czech Republic

Circus as Self-Care: Learning to Fail Safely

Country and organisation	Czech Republic - Cirqueon
Context / initial challenge	Participants entered the course with mixed needs: loneliness, anxiety, depression, difficult life transitions, self-judgement and a wish to belong to a supportive group without entering a formal therapy setting.
Circus-based intervention	The course combined circus training with self-care methods: juggling, games, balance, group acrobatics, aerials, somatic awareness, mindfulness and talking circles.
Personal or community transformation	Participants learned to manage failure, trust others, speak more comfortably in a group and experience creativity without performance pressure. The mechanism was safe failure plus reflection: a dropped ball became a learning moment rather than proof of inadequacy.
Evidence of impact	Evidence includes trainer and participant interviews. It is strong for short-term personal change and medium for sustained impact due to small group size and six-week duration.
Selected quote	“That mistakes happen and it’s ok.”
Key lesson learned	Circus can support wellbeing when framed explicitly as a supportive process, with careful screening, emotional boundaries and reflective practice.

Country: Czech Republic

Learning that mistakes are allowed

This success story is powerful because it shows circus as a gentle entry point into self-care for people who might not join a regular circus class. Participants came with needs connected to loneliness, anxiety, depression, self-judgement and difficult life moments. The course was framed not as performance training, but as a supportive space where people could move, play, reflect and be accepted.

A participant described learning juggling, balance, aerials and partner acrobatics, but the most important learning was emotional: “That mistakes happen and it’s ok.” This is the heart of the story. In circus, mistakes are visible. Balls fall, balance is lost, bodies hesitate. But in this setting, failure was not treated as shame. It became part of learning.

The trainer also observed that some participants became more comfortable speaking in the group, more able to trust others and less distant. One participant continued being physically active after the course and felt more motivated to try new things. The success lies in how circus created a bridge between body, play, vulnerability and emotional resilience.

Country: Czech Republic

Circus in a Psychiatric Hospital: Adaptive Emotions in Practice

Country and organisation	Czech Republic - Tent/Cascabel
Context / initial challenge	Adult psychiatric patients often face loneliness, fear of doing things, self-criticism and daily stress linked to mental health and socio-economic insecurity.
Circus-based intervention	A psychologist and circus teacher introduced weekly circus sessions in a psychiatric ward using juggling, object manipulation, balancing, simple games and limited partner work adapted to a small indoor space.
Personal or community transformation	The project enabled participants to be present, experience success, and observe their reactions to failure. The trainer identified “adaptive emotions” such as trusting others, trusting oneself, failing and trying again as transferable experiences.
Evidence of impact	Evidence is based on trainer interview and practice observation. It is innovative and credible, but limited by lack of clinical outcome data and limited access to participants’ medical information.
Selected quote	“The participants had an opportunity to experience adaptive emotions - to trust other people, to trust themselves, to fail and try again.”
Key lesson learned	In mental health settings, circus should not replace therapy, but can complement care when led by qualified professionals with clear boundaries and institutional support. Unless the facilitator is the therapist.

Country: Czech Republic

A dropped ball as a mirror for self-criticism

This story takes place in a psychiatric hospital, where circus was introduced by a professional who is both a psychologist and circus teacher. Participants were adult psychiatric patients facing loneliness, fear, self-criticism and daily stress. The activities were simple and accessible: juggling, object manipulation, balancing, clapping games and limited partner work.

The most meaningful element was not technical progress, but the way participants encountered themselves through circus. The trainer observed that dropping a ball often revealed how harshly people treated themselves. A small mistake could trigger strong self-criticism. But in the circus space, the mistake could be reframed: try again, laugh, breathe, continue.

The trainer described the value of experiencing “adaptive emotions”, such as – trusting oneself, trusting others, failing and trying again. For people whose daily life may be dominated by diagnosis, stress or institutional routine, circus offered a moment of presence and success without judgement.

This story should be presented carefully: it does not claim circus replaces therapy. Its strength is showing how circus can complement care when facilitated ethically by qualified professionals.



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Country: Greece

Circus Lesvos: Communication Beyond Language

Country and organisation	Greece - Circus Lesvos
Context / initial challenge	Refugees and displaced communities on Lesvos faced trauma, uncertainty, isolation, lack of meaningful daily activity and limited opportunities for contact with local communities.
Circus-based intervention	Circus Lesvos offered open and free circus activities in collaboration with PAREA and other NGOs, including juggling, balance, acrobatics, aerials, school visits, women's sessions and public-space activities.
Personal or community transformation	The practice created moments of joy, psychosocial relief and social connection. It also built bridges across languages and communities. The strongest transformation was not full integration, but steps toward resilience, contact and shared presence.
Evidence of impact	Evidence includes facilitator interviews and good-practice data. The evidence is strong for observed psychosocial relief and intercultural contact, but weaker for long-term integration because displacement and relocation disrupted continuity.
Selected quote	"People don't need to speak the same language to understand each other."
Key lesson learned	In refugee contexts, circus is most transferable when it is language-light, trauma-sensitive, culturally respectful and rooted in trusted community spaces.

Country: Greece

Understanding each other without a shared language

Circus Lesvos is one of the strongest human stories in the collection because it takes place in a context of displacement, uncertainty and trauma. Refugees on Lesvos often faced isolation, temporary living conditions and limited opportunities for meaningful daily activity. Circus created moments where people could be present together without needing to explain their past.

One facilitator described the most important lesson clearly: “People don’t need to speak the same language to understand each other.” At Circus Lesvos, several languages were spoken at once, but movement, play and physical expression created a common ground. Through juggling, balance, acrobatics and shared games, people could communicate, laugh and try things together.

Another facilitator described a final performance where participants showed pride after months of practice. Their confidence improved, social connections became stronger and the community felt closer. The story is also honest: the project did not solve integration completely, and connection between different communities remained challenging. But it created real moments of dignity, joy and human contact in a difficult environment.

Country: Greece

Mikro Metaxourgeio: A Self-Organised Space for Confidence and Belonging

Country and organisation	Greece - Mikro Metaxourgeio
Context / initial challenge	Access to aerial practice and circus spaces can be expensive or socially closed. Mikro Metaxourgeio emerged from a collective desire to preserve an open, social and accessible training space after a previous squat closed.
Circus-based intervention	The practice is based on collective governance, free or donation-based training, aerial practice, peer support, occasional workshops and community-oriented performances.
Personal or community transformation	Participants described greater confidence, reduced anxiety, stronger respect for the body, better sleep and a feeling of community. The collective model also created ownership and responsibility among members.
Evidence of impact	Evidence comes from facilitator and participant interviews. It is strong for individual wellbeing and belonging, but formal evaluation is absent and safety relies heavily on collective responsibility.
Selected quote	“I’ve achieved things I never thought I could achieve at this age.”
Key lesson learned	Self-organised circus spaces can be powerful inclusion environments, but they require clear safety norms, shared responsibility and sustainable collective care.

Country: Greece

Learning to trust the body and be seen

The Mikro Metaxourgeio story is intimate and personal. A participant joined after hearing about the space from a friend. They chose aerial rope and began practising two or three times a week. At first, it felt like something they never imagined they could do. Gradually, through repetition and support, they began to feel safer, stronger and more confident.

The participant described circus as a practice that builds technique, balance, coordination and self-confidence. The emotional impact was especially strong: "Through circus practice, I've learned not to live with so much anxiety anymore." After training, they felt calm but also released, fulfilled and physically tired "in a good way." They also reported improvements in sleep.

The social dimension mattered just as much. The space felt open, collaborative and respectful of diversity. The participant had expected circus to be closed to beginners, but discovered that people could participate according to their own abilities. Circus helped them trust themselves, feel comfortable being seen, and open up despite being generally reserved.



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Country: Spain

Youth Circus Festival: From Isolation to a Wider Circus Community

Country and organisation	Spain - FEECSE Youth Circus Festival
Context / initial challenge	Many young people practising circus locally feel isolated: they may be the only young person in their environment doing circus and may lack peers who understand their interests.
Circus-based intervention	FEECSE created a national youth circus festival with parades, non-competitive galas, technical workshops, student-led exchanges and playful collective activities.
Personal or community transformation	Young people discovered a wider community, formed networks, developed motivation and saw circus as a possible long-term or professional path. Some moved from participant roles into volunteering and assistant roles.
Evidence of impact	Evidence is strong for belonging and motivation because both stakeholder and youth participant interviews confirm similar outcomes. Evidence for long-term career impact is promising but less systematically measured.
Selected quote	“For me, the most important thing is the fact that we’re all sharing the circus.”
Key lesson learned	Large-scale youth events can support empowerment when they are designed as non-competitive spaces of exchange, not talent contests.

Country: Spain

Discovering that you are part of something bigger

The Youth Circus Festival story is about moving from isolation to belonging. Many young people who practise circus locally feel unusual or alone: they may be “the circus person” in their school or town. FEECSE created a space where young people from different circus schools could meet, train, perform, exchange and realise that they are part of a wider community.

A young participant described feeling mostly happy during the festival because of meeting many people and making friends. The most important thing they took away was “the fact that we’re all sharing the circus.” This is a simple quote, but it captures the deeper impact: circus becomes a shared identity, not just an activity.

The participant also described personal growth. What began as leisure became something more serious, even opening the possibility of a professional path. Circus also helped them manage stress more creatively and calmly. The festival’s non-competitive structure is central: it is not about ranking, but about exchange, recognition and mutual learning. This makes it a strong model for youth empowerment across regions.

Country: Spain

Circo Bajo el Tejado: A Refuge for Confidence and Growth

Country and organisation	Spain - Circo Bajo el Tejado
Context / initial challenge	Adolescents often need safe spaces where they can test themselves, belong to a group and escape everyday pressure. Some arrive with insecurities, low confidence or difficult external circumstances.
Circus-based intervention	The youth circus group offers regular classes combining warm-up, technical work, social/contact games, progressive skill development, aerials, juggling, acrobatics, balance and public sharing.
Personal or community transformation	Participants reported opening up socially, overcoming fear, improving emotional regulation and becoming more perseverant. The trainer connected confidence to the moment when young people realise: “I can do this.”
Evidence of impact	Evidence includes trainer and young participant interviews, giving strong qualitative support for personal development outcomes.
Selected quote	“You come here and you have a refuge, you have your home, your own little corner.”
Key lesson learned	Weekly continuity and a caring pedagogical relationship are essential: empowerment grows through repeated manageable challenges, not isolated spectacular experiences.

Country: Spain

A refuge where fear becomes confidence

This story is powerful because it presents circus as a safe place during adolescence. A young participant joined after seeing a poster and deciding to try. Curiosity became commitment: “that was it, I was hooked.” Over time, circus became more than a class. It became a place to open up, make friends and become more confident.

The participant described learning social interaction, becoming more outgoing and improving physically. The emotional transformation is especially clear in relation to fear. Trapeze and other activities were intimidating, but overcoming them became meaningful. The participant said the best part was overcoming fears and managing to do something that had first seemed impossible.

Circus also helped with stress. Stretching, breathing and movement helped the participant calm down, think before acting and deal with problems in a more relaxed way. The trainer described the space as a refuge: “your home, your own little corner.” This success story shows how regular circus practice can support emotional regulation, confidence and belonging through repeated manageable challenges.



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Country: Poland

Cyrkplozja: From Stigma to Social Recognition

Country and organisation	Poland - Cyrkplozja
Context / initial challenge	The participants are boys in a youth rehabilitation centre, many with disrupted education, emotional deprivation, family instability, behavioural difficulties and experiences of conflict with the law.
Circus-based intervention	The programme combines creative social rehabilitation with circus pedagogy: juggling, fire performance, slackline, unicycle, acrobatics, theatrical performance and workshops for other children and communities.
Personal or community transformation	Participants move from being seen as “problem youth” to being performers, volunteers and educators. External performances and workshops create positive recognition and help transform social identity.
Evidence of impact	Evidence is based on detailed trainer testimony and observed practice. It is strong for role transformation and social recognition, but limited by participant rotation and lack of formal longitudinal evaluation.
Selected quote	“They become admired as artists and educators.”
Key lesson learned	For socially excluded youth, the strongest mechanism may be role transformation: young people need opportunities to be trusted in constructive, visible and valued roles.

Country: Poland

From stigma to being admired as artists and educators

Cyrkplozja is one of the strongest transformation stories because it works with boys in a youth rehabilitation centre, many of whom have experienced social stigma, emotional deprivation, disrupted education and conflict with the law. Their everyday environment is closed and their social interactions are limited. Circus creates a rare opportunity to step outside that identity.

The boys learn juggling, fire performance, unicycle, slackline, acrobatics and performance. But the success story is not only that they learn skills. The deeper change happens when they perform publicly, lead workshops for children and take part in festivals. In those moments, they are no longer seen mainly through the lens of risk or maladjustment. They become “admired as artists and educators.”

This shift in social role is central. Public performances and workshops allow participants to receive positive attention, expand social networks and function constructively in the community. The trainer also notes challenges: emotional instability, turnover and disrupted continuity. Even so, the story shows how circus can transform social image and create valued roles for young people often defined by deficit.

Country: Poland

Dr Clown Foundation: Small Successes, Big Changes

Country and organisation	Poland - Fundacja Dr Clown
Context / initial challenge	Hospitalised children, young people with disabilities, psychiatric ward patients and seniors may experience fear, loneliness, passivity or reduced agency.
Circus-based intervention	Dr Clown combines laughter therapy with circus pedagogy, using clowning, juggling, balancing, magic, movement games, improvisation and adapted activities.
Personal or community transformation	Participants who are withdrawn often begin to participate, suggest ideas and support others. Among hospitalised children, reduced fear and tension are observed; among people with disabilities, greater independence and agency are reported.
Evidence of impact	Evidence is qualitative and practice-based. It is strong for immediate emotional relief and participation, but weaker for long-term outcomes because data are not systematically measured.
Selected quote	“Even a small step, a short moment of engagement or a single attempt can be meaningful.”
Key lesson learned	In highly sensitive settings, success should be measured in small moments of agency, contact and willingness to participate, not only large visible achievements.

Country: Poland

Small moments of agency in places of fear

The Dr Clown story is different from the others because it takes place in hospitals, care institutions, psychiatric wards and disability contexts. Participants may experience fear, loneliness, pain, passivity or uncertainty. In these settings, success cannot always be measured by large achievements. Sometimes it is a smile, a first attempt, a moment of contact or a willingness to participate.

The practice combines laughter therapy with circus pedagogy: clowning, juggling, balancing, magic, movement games and improvisation. The aim is to create a safe space where participants can experience joy, cooperation and agency. Practitioners observed that people who were initially withdrawn often began to participate, suggest ideas and support others. Among hospitalised children, they observed reduced fear and tension; among people with disabilities, stronger independence and agency.

The key lesson is beautifully simple: “Even a small step, a short moment of engagement or a single attempt can be meaningful.” This success story reminds the publication that empowerment is not always dramatic. In sensitive contexts, small moments of choice, laughter and participation can be deeply important.

Overall Analysis and Conclusions

Across the cases, circus-based methodologies contribute to youth empowerment, inclusion and personal development through a repeated process rather than through isolated activities. The activity is the surface level; the developmental impact comes from how the activity is facilitated, reflected upon and socially recognised.

Core mechanism of change

Safe participation -> manageable challenge -> visible progress -> peer trust -> public recognition -> stronger identity and agency.





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Circus as a tool for confidence-building

Confidence grows because the circus makes progress visible. A participant can see and feel the difference between dropping a ball, catching it once, linking several throws, sharing it with a peer and finally performing it. This produces concrete evidence of capability. Unlike many school or sport settings, the cases show that circus often reduces the fear of failure because failure is expected, visible and playful.

This mechanism is particularly evident in Circo Bajo el Tejado, Cirqueon Self-care, Cirkokrog and Cyrkplozja. In each case, confidence is linked to repeated small achievements and the experience of being supported rather than judged.

Circus as a safe and inclusive space

Inclusion is not automatic. The same circus discipline can be empowering or excluding depending on facilitation. The strongest cases create safe/brave spaces through clear group norms, adaptation, non-competition, consent, emotional sensitivity and respect for cultural difference.

Circus Lesvos shows that intercultural inclusion requires more than bringing people together. Facilitators must understand language barriers, gender norms, cultural expectations and trauma cues. Similarly, the Czech mental health cases show that wellbeing-oriented circus requires careful boundaries and, when necessary, qualified professionals.

Development of social and communication skills

Social skills develop through shared tasks: spotting, partner acrobatics, group games, performance preparation, peer teaching and technical cooperation. Young people learn to give and receive support, wait, observe, adjust to others and communicate needs. These are youth-work outcomes, not merely circus outcomes.

FEECSE demonstrates this at network level: youth from different schools learn not only techniques but also how to belong to a larger community, exchange skills and support each other across regions.

Wellbeing and emotional regulation

Wellbeing outcomes are most credible where circus combines embodiment, play and reflection. Participants report reduced anxiety, stress relief, better self-awareness and improved emotional regulation. However, the publication should avoid overclaiming: most evidence is qualitative and short-term. The strongest formulation is that circus can support wellbeing and emotional regulation under appropriate facilitation conditions.

Role of trainers and facilitators

The facilitator is a central mechanism of impact. Across cases, successful facilitators adapt activities, create safety, model care, recognise small steps and understand the difference between teaching technique and supporting development. In sensitive contexts, such as psychiatric hospitals or refugee settings, facilitator competence and ethical boundaries become even more important.

Success factors across cases	Challenges across cases
• Long-term presence and regularity rather than one-off workshops. • Non-competitive culture with multiple ways to participate. • Safe/brave space practices: consent, respect, group agreements and non-judgement. • Progressive challenge and positive framing of failure. • Peer learning and youth leadership pathways. • Public recognition through performances, showcases or community events. • Partnerships with schools, refugee centres, hospitals, municipalities and community spaces. • Reflective practice and emotional check-ins.	• Funding instability and dependence on short-term grants, donations or volunteer labour. • Lack of appropriate spaces, especially for aerial disciplines and regular practice. • Bureaucracy that does not always match flexible community-based work. • Participant turnover, especially in refugee and institutional contexts. • Risk of facilitator burnout due to emotional labour and organisational precarity. • Weak formal evaluation systems, especially for long-term wellbeing and social inclusion outcomes. • Need to avoid presenting circus as therapy unless qualified professionals and ethical safeguards are in place.

Transferable elements for WP3 curriculum development

WP3 curriculum element	Practical implication
Safe/brave space design	Group agreements, consent, emotional safety, non-judgemental feedback and inclusive language.
Progressive challenge methodology	Breaking complex skills into small steps and using failure as a constructive learning moment.
Accessible circus toolkit	Juggling, object manipulation, balance, movement games and low-risk partner exercises that require limited equipment.
Reflection and emotional processing	Closing circles, peer feedback, self-reflection prompts and emotional check-ins.
Peer learning and youth leadership	Roles such as helper, spotter, co-facilitator, workshop leader, performer, technician and organiser.
Non-competitive performance	Showcase formats focused on recognition, storytelling and collective achievement rather than ranking.
Trauma-sensitive and intercultural facilitation	Awareness of cultural norms, gender dynamics, trauma cues, language barriers and the limits of facilitation.
Community partnership building	Working with institutions and grassroots spaces to reach youth who may not access conventional activities.

Recommendations

- *Design WP3 around mechanisms of change, not only circus disciplines.*
- *Include facilitator training on safety, inclusion, emotional boundaries and adaptation.*
- *Use success stories as training scenarios for youth workers.*
- *Develop simple evaluation tools to capture confidence, belonging, participation, wellbeing and social connection.*
- *Avoid overclaiming therapeutic impact; present circus as a supportive youth-work and wellbeing methodology unless delivered by qualified therapists.*
- *Support partners to adapt methods to local cultural contexts, available spaces and organisational capacity.*



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Annex I – Methodology

Research approach

The WP2 research used a comparative and thematic desk research approach. Partners collected good practices and interviews from their national contexts. The analysis grouped findings by country and then compared them across themes relevant to youth work and Erasmus+ Sport: empowerment, wellbeing, inclusion, trust, teamwork, personal development, innovation and transferability.

Selection criteria

- Relevance to circus-based youth work, social circus or circus pedagogy.
- Connection to inclusion, wellbeing, empowerment, personal development or community participation.
- Availability of practice information and/or interview evidence.
- Potential transferability to WP3 curriculum development.
- Representation across partner countries and target groups.

Data collection methods

The source base includes partner good-practice templates, stakeholder interviews, facilitator interviews, trainer interviews and participant interviews. Where interview evidence was not available, practices were presented as desk-researched good practices rather than success stories.



Annex I – Methodology

Interview process and ethics

Interviews were treated as qualitative evidence. The analysis focuses on themes and mechanisms rather than personal identification. Quotations were selected to illustrate findings while avoiding unnecessary personal details. Future publication steps should ensure that all consent, anonymisation and GDPR procedures are confirmed by partners before dissemination.

Limitations

- The evidence base is mainly qualitative and practice-based.
- Quantitative evaluation data, retention statistics and long-term follow-up are limited.
- Some practices have strong organisational descriptions but limited interview testimony.
- The success stories are illustrative, not statistically representative.
- Country comparison should be read in light of different local contexts, funding systems and target groups.

Annex 2 – Interview Summaries

The following short summaries preserve the main evidence from interviews while keeping the main body analytical and readable.

Interview / practice	Summary
Cirkokrog - facilitator and participant	Circus pedagogy is described as education and social work rather than technical coaching. The practice creates spaces where people can feel safe, explore, fail without fear and become active contributors. Participant testimony shows long-term effects on confidence, social anxiety, belonging and creative identity.
Matafir - facilitator and participant	Circus is embedded in DIY, feminist/queer and collective cultural practice. Participants learn performance, organisation, technical work, reflection and group care. Impact is linked to shared authorship and community, while challenges centre on space insecurity and limited institutional support.
Cirqueon Self-care - trainer and participant	The course combined circus with self-care, reflection and somatic awareness. Participants learned to manage mistakes, trust others and engage in group processes. Evidence is strong for short-term wellbeing and trust but limited by small sample and short duration.
Tent/Cascabel - psychiatric hospital trainer	Circus sessions in a psychiatric ward used accessible activities to support acceptance, reduced self-criticism and adaptive emotional experiences. Ethical boundaries and professional competence were central.
Circus Lesbos - facilitators	Circus created joyful, language-light contact in refugee and community contexts. The practice supported psychosocial relief and connection, while interviews also highlighted cultural barriers, language mediation and funding discontinuity.
Mikro Metaxourgeio - facilitator and participant	A self-organised aerial and circus practice space supported confidence, mental wellbeing, belonging and self-expression. The collective model increased ownership but created challenges around finances, safety and slow decision-making.
FEECSE Youth Circus Festival - stakeholder and youth participant	The festival reduces youth isolation by connecting young circus practitioners across schools. It uses non-competitive showcases, workshops and peer exchange to strengthen motivation, belonging and leadership pathways.
Circo Bajo el Tejado - trainer and youth participant	Regular youth circus classes function as a safe refuge where participants overcome fears, build social skills, develop perseverance and learn emotional regulation through movement, breathing and progressive challenges.
Cyrkplozja - trainer	Circus pedagogy is combined with creative social rehabilitation for boys in a youth rehabilitation centre. Public performances and workshops transform participants from stigmatised youth into valued artists and educators.
Dr Clown Foundation - stakeholder	Laughter therapy and circus pedagogy support emotional relief, agency and participation in hospitals, disability settings and care contexts. Small successes are treated as meaningful outcomes.

Annex I – Methodology

References and Source Base

Primary source base: partner good-practice templates and interviews uploaded for WP2, including interviews with facilitators, trainers, stakeholders and participants from Slovenia, Czech Republic, Greece, Spain and Poland.

Practice and interview sources used in the analysis

- Cirkokrog - community circus and inclusion, Slovenia.
- Matafir - The Caravan Makes Itself / DIY cabaret and collective creation, Slovenia.
- Ana Monro - Stand Out in Public Space, Slovenia.
- Fuskabo / Social Circus - A Space for Support, Slovenia.
- Cirqueon - Circus Self-care and Circus Clinic, Czech Republic.
- Tent/Cascabel - Circus in Psychiatric Hospital, Czech Republic.
- Manual for Challenging Kids, Czech Republic.
- Circus Lesvos, Greece.
- Mikro Metaxourgeio, Greece.
- Social Circus Athens, Greece.
- FEECSE Youth Circus Festival, Spain.
- Circo Bajo el Tejado, Spain.
- AZIRKARTE, Spain.
- Carampa Circus School, Spain.
- La Casa del Circo, Zaragoza, Spain.
- Cyrkplozja, Poland.
- Dr Clown Foundation, Poland.
- OFCA Festival of Contemporary Circus, Poland.
- Social circus - Centrum Biblioteczno-Kulturalne Fama, Poland

Additional desk research references

- FEDEC member profile: Escuela de Circo Carampa - Carampa Circus School.
- Carampa official website and public profile materials.
- Public Spanish circus mapping resources identifying La Casa del Circo in Zaragoza and Carampa in Madrid.
- Carpa Circo Aragon catalogue references to La Casa del Circo as a professional performing arts space in Zaragoza.
- The Challenging kids publication in the Czech Republic.



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