

Good Practices

Friendship Programme | www.friendproject.eu





Introduction

- Consortium of European partners in collaboration with older people and trainers created a Train-the-Trainer programme for friendships in later life
- The FRIEND programme aims to reduce the isolation and social exclusion of people over 65 through empowerment by promoting a strengthening of their social skills and coping strategies
- The programme is based on scientific research and will use blended learning methods such as theory, exercises, assignments and videos
- In this document you will find a validated and evaluated set of 23 good practices, grounded in lived experience and professional practice



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University
of Humanities
and Economics
in Lodz



Leyden Academy
on Vitality & Ageing

Detecting invisible profiles of hard-to-reach lonely seniors: Where are they, and how do we notice?

Strengthening Community Bonds through Preventive Peer Support

- Small, local peer groups identify early signs of social isolation and intervene proactively.
- Focus on strengthening everyday relationships to prevent entrenched loneliness.
- Informal, community-driven approach rather than reliance on formal services.
- Works best where people share spaces, routines, or interests.
- Low-cost, flexible model using existing community resources.
- Light facilitation supports continuity without heavy structures.
- Highly inspirational and relevant, though long-term implementation may require adaptation and structural support.



Evaluation	score
Useful practice	8
Realistic practice	3
Inspiring practice	19



Growing Stronger Communities through Shared Responsibility

- Empowers communities to recognize early signs of loneliness or vulnerability among residents.
- Builds confidence and skills to respond constructively and compassionately.
- Promotes shared responsibility, making mutual care part of everyday community life.
- Engages diverse local actors, including neighbours, associations, schools, and informal leaders.
- Most effective in small neighbourhoods with strong social familiarity.
- Relies on empathy, awareness, and basic knowledge rather than formal programmes.
- Utilizes existing community spaces, events, and networks, keeping costs low.
- Light guidance or training can enhance effectiveness.
- Flexible and adaptable across contexts, with strong sustainability potential.



Evaluation	score
Useful practice	7
Realistic practice	12
Inspiring practice	9

Theme question



Ethical alliances: Who can give us a hand?

Strengthening Integrated Community Support Systems

- Fragmentation in services for older adults often stems from unclear responsibilities, weak communication, and inconsistent follow-up.
- The practice introduces a coordinated network model with shared accountability for continuous, person-centred support.
- Clear role definitions, protocols, and communication channels reduce duplication and service gaps.
- A designated coordinator ensures collaboration and process continuity across sectors.
- The approach strengthens existing community systems, making implementation practical and scalable.



Evaluation	score
Useful practice	20
Realistic practice	13
Inspiring practice	1



Working Together to Reach Older Adults

- Social isolation among older adults is exacerbated by limited resources and fragmented communication, leaving existing services underused.
- The practice promotes alliances among organisations to jointly increase service visibility and accessibility while controlling communication costs.
- Shared communication channels enable broader outreach without duplicating efforts or expenses.
- The approach is especially effective for non-digital older adults who rely on trusted, local, and personal sources of information.
- Clear alignment around a common goal facilitates cooperation, meaningful engagement, and sustainable, low-cost implementation based on existing relationships.



Evaluation	score
Useful practice	16
Realistic practice	19
Inspiring practice	1



Communication that reaches: How to talk without scaring or labelling?

Good practice 5

Clear Messages, Visible Connections



- Strategically designed posters can effectively reach older adults who are not engaged through digital communication.
- Positive, inviting language that emphasises activity, friendship, and connection increases motivation to participate.
- Placement in familiar, frequently visited community locations enhances visibility and reduces participation barriers.
- Appealing visual design, inclusive imagery, clear wording, and indication of free access strengthen engagement. Trust is reinforced through organisational identifiers and contact details.
- Local sponsors can support printing costs and distribution.
- Once created, posters are adaptable, reusable, and cost-efficient.



Evaluation	score
Useful practice	9
Realistic practice	13
Inspiring practice	7

Seeing FRIEND in Action



- A short introductory video can effectively present atmosphere, activities, and social dynamics.
- Visual demonstration reduces uncertainty among older adults by clarifying expectations and fostering confidence in participation.
- Flexible dissemination across online platforms, social media, and community events.
- Simplicity of design (clear visuals, accessible language, and inclusive imagery) supports broad accessibility across varying levels of digital literacy.
- Although initial production requires basic technical resources, the video's reusability ensures cost-efficiency and long-term sustainability as a communication instrument.



Evaluation	score
Useful practice	19
Realistic practice	7
Inspiring practice	8

Good practice 7

Trust Begins in Person (Face-to-face meetings)



- Face-to-face meetings strengthen engagement by building trust and addressing uncertainties that may inhibit participation among older adults.
- Small, welcoming sessions enable clear explanation of the programme and responsive dialogue, fostering a sense of being heard and valued.
- Familiar community settings and an informal, respectful atmosphere enhance comfort and reduce participation barriers.
- The approach requires minimal resources, making it cost-effective and easily transferable across contexts. You primarily need:
 - a facilitator
 - a safe space
 - clear information



Evaluation	score
Useful practice	14
Realistic practice	9
Inspiring practice	7



Accessibility and accompaniment: Making it easy to come... and to come back

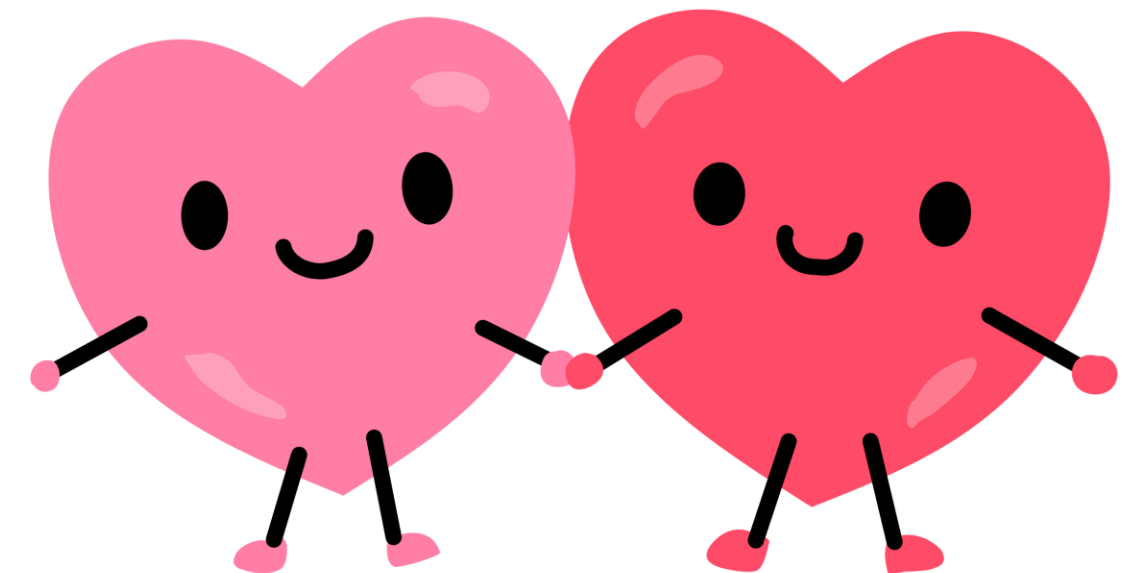
A Flexible Structure that Creates Safety



- Predictable and repeated session structures enhance psychological safety, facilitating openness and engagement in group-based programmes addressing sensitive topics.
- A structured checklist supports facilitators in balancing consistency with adaptive responsiveness to participant needs. Elements include fixed schedules, routine interaction moments, reflection phases, manageable group sizes, and use of tangible materials in informal settings.
- Facilitator competencies (such as boundary-setting, management of emotionally intense discussions, and knowledge of referral pathways) are essential for maintaining a safe environment.
- Flexible strategies (e.g., integrating physical activity, visual aids, and appropriate personal disclosure) enhance inclusivity and participation.



Evaluation	score
Useful practice	17
Realistic practice	9
Inspiring practice	5





Supporting Healthy and Inclusive Group Dynamics

- Safe and inclusive group environments require intentional facilitation to address diverse participant needs, including emotional, cognitive, or complex personal factors.
- FRIEND supports facilitators in managing group dynamics through attentive observation, anticipatory judgement, and responsive action that safeguards collective wellbeing.
- Preparatory assessment processes help identify individual needs, determine group suitability, and establish clear expectations and ground rules.
- Skilled facilitation is central to effectiveness.
- Follow-up and aftercare ensure that challenging situations are constructively resolved rather than overlooked.



Evaluation	score
Useful practice	11
Realistic practice	4
Inspiring practice	14

Practical Guidance for Managing Challenging Situations

- Challenging moments in group sessions (such as emotional disclosures or conflicts) are expected and require structured facilitator support.
- The training equips trainers with predefined principles and response strategies that promote calm, consistent, and respectful handling of difficult situations.
- Integrated into routine preparation rather than used reactively, the approach emphasises predictability as a foundation for psychological safety.
- Ground rules, boundary reinforcement, and the option to defer sensitive topics to private discussion help maintain group balance. Effective facilitation depends on competencies in limit-setting, emotional regulation, and appropriate referral to external support.
- Implementation relies primarily on training, preparation, and organisational coordination, with adaptable core principles applicable across contexts.



Evaluation	score
Useful practice	2
Realistic practice	21
Inspiring practice	4



**And if they can't come...
what then?
Technology for those
who cannot attend in person**

Staying Connected through Recorded Sessions



- Irregular attendance due to health, personal, or unforeseen circumstances should not lead to exclusion.
- By recording sessions, participants can remain connected, follow discussions, and rejoin the programme without feeling left behind, thereby preserving a sense of belonging.
- Effective implementation requires thoughtful consideration of consent, privacy, and clear communication, alongside practical measures such as reminders, technical support, and accessibility features like captions.
- The technical requirements are minimal (recording device, internet access and basic skills) ensuring a low-cost, inclusive solution that maintains clarity and respect in the use of recordings.



Evaluation	score
Useful practice	11
Realistic practice	18
Inspiring practice	2



Staying Connected in Between Sessions

- Creating a WhatsApp or Signal group to maintain social connection between scheduled sessions, reinforcing participants' sense of belonging.
- The group complements, rather than replaces, formal sessions, allowing participants to share messages, reminders, and support. It is particularly useful for those unable to attend every meeting.
- Effective use requires minimal resources (smartphone access, basic digital skills, internet connectivity, and a moderator) and clear agreements on respectful communication and privacy, ensuring a safe, inclusive, and low-cost solution.



Evaluation	score
Useful practice	11
Realistic practice	17
Inspiring practice	1

Mixed and innovative funding models

How do we pay for this?

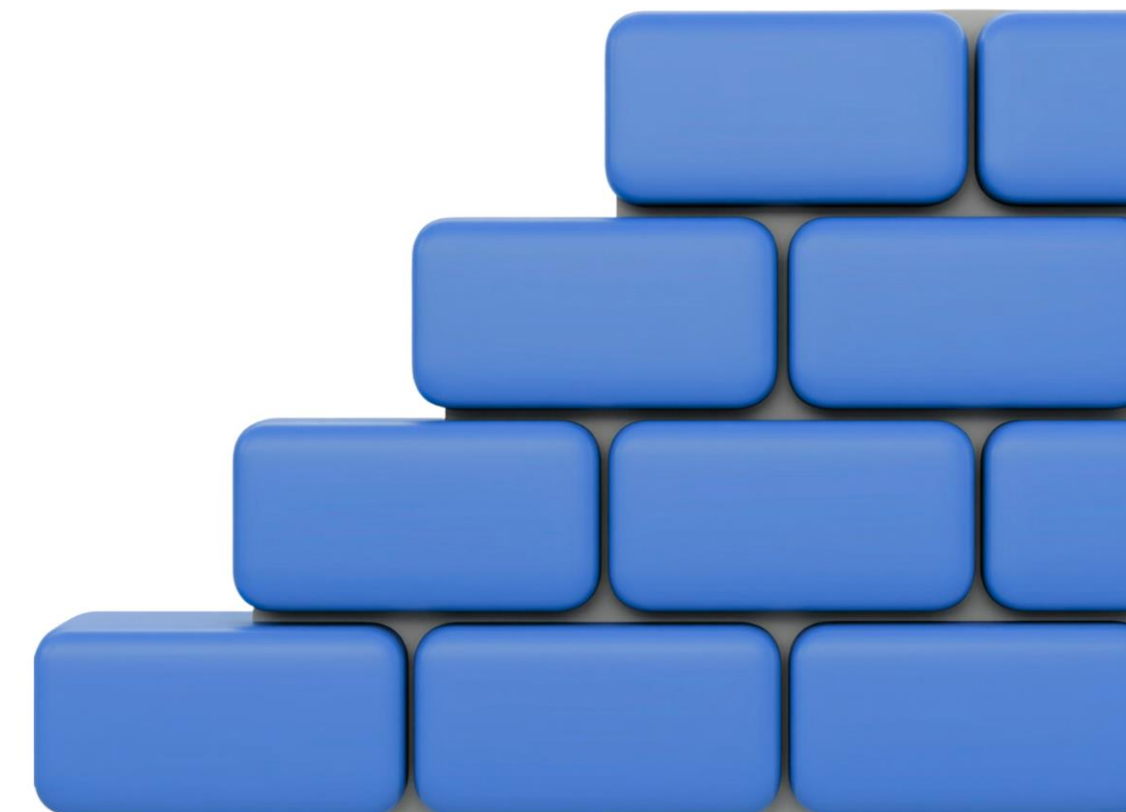


Building Stability through Public Support

- This practice emphasizes securing government funding to provide long-term stability for initiatives that might otherwise rely on short-term grants.
- Institutional support enables organisations to plan strategically, retain staff, and deliver consistent, high-quality services, embedding programmes as public responsibilities rather than temporary projects.
- Effective implementation depends on trust, clear communication, and sustained dialogue between organisations and public authorities.
- While financial investment may be modest, success requires organisational capacity, persistence, and ongoing management of administrative processes to maintain continuity amid shifting government priorities.



Evaluation	score
Useful practice	7
Realistic practice	13
Inspiring practice	3





Making Funding Part of Everyday Practice

- FRIEND can be sustainably implemented by embedding the programme into regular organisational services and job structures, ensuring continuity beyond temporary funding.
- By aligning funding with existing roles, responsibilities, and workflows, initiatives become part of routine operations rather than separate projects.
- Effective implementation relies on organisational commitment, leadership support, and integration into planning and daily practice.
- The programme primarily requires people, coordination, and institutional backing, rather than new infrastructure, making long-term continuation feasible within stable organisational frameworks.



Evaluation	score
Useful practice	6
Realistic practice	13
Inspiring practice	6

Connecting Health and Social Care Through Social Prescription



- Many people visit their doctor for (non-medical) issues like loneliness, stress, lack of social contact. A social prescription for FRIEND links healthcare with community and social services.
- By enabling healthcare professionals to refer individuals to appropriate community support, the approach fosters holistic care and preventive health, particularly for older adults and socially isolated individuals.
- Effective implementation depends on cross-sector collaboration, trust, shared responsibility, and evidence of impact to support long-term funding. FRIEND can reduce future healthcare burdens by addressing social needs early.



Evaluation	score
Useful practice	6
Realistic practice	4
Inspiring practice	21

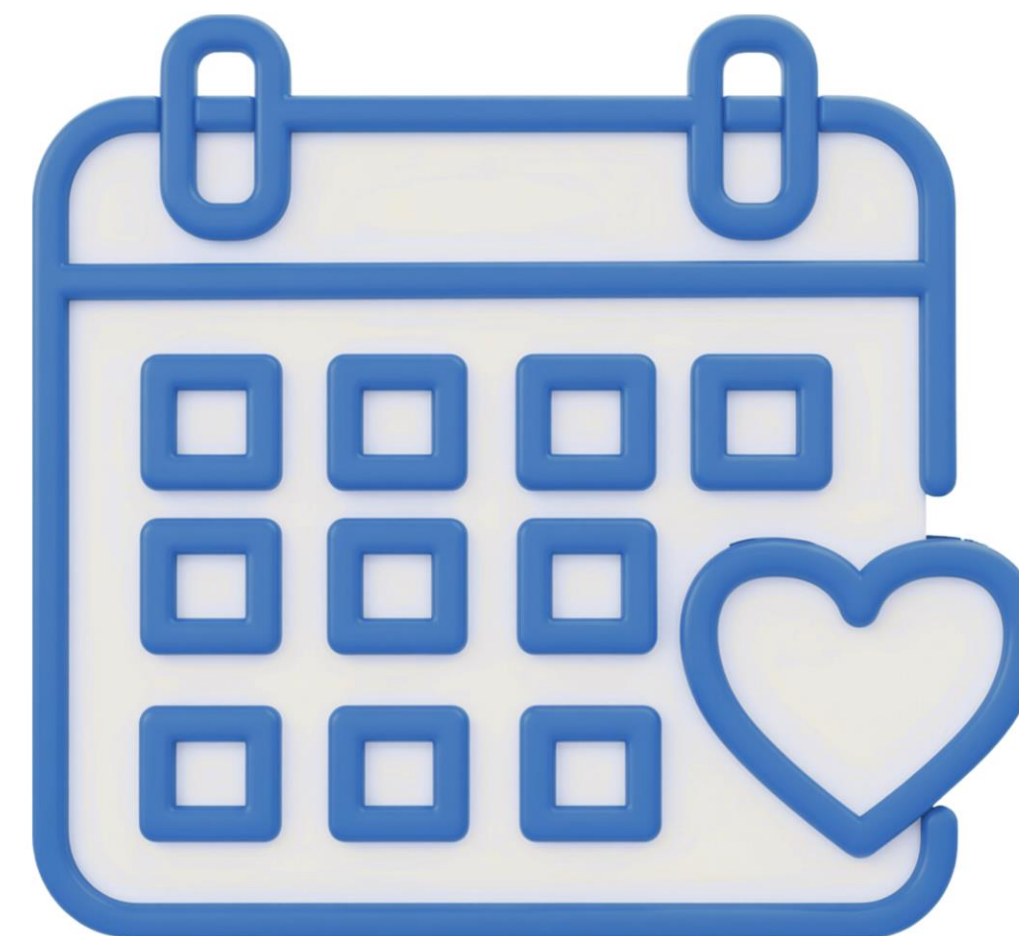


Embedding FRIEND in the hosting organization It's not just 'one more thing'

Embedding FRIEND in Everyday Practice



- Integration of the FRIEND programme into everyday organisational routines enhances participation, ownership, and long-term sustainability.
- Facilitators and social professionals introduce activities organically within existing workflows and networks, allowing the programme to expand without reliance on external promotion.
- Effective implementation involves mapping professionals and networks, tailoring communication, engaging participants, collecting feedback, and building internal capacity through training.
- Resource requirements are primarily staff time and professional involvement, making the approach replicable across different groups while fostering stability and visibility over time.



Evaluation	score
Useful practice	11
Realistic practice	12
Inspiring practice	9

Starting Strong: Planning for Sustainable Implementation

- Careful upfront planning establishes stability and integrates FRIEND into routine organisational practice.
- By clearly defining roles, responsibilities, schedules, and contingency plans, facilitators and social professionals gain direction and confidence, reducing stress and fragmentation.
- Effective implementation also includes securing funding to support continuity. The approach primarily requires staff time and involvement, with minimal additional resources, and is easily replicable across contexts.
- Strong initial preparation enhances long-term stability, effectiveness, and sustainability of the programme.



Evaluation	score
Useful practice	8
Realistic practice	15
Inspiring practice	7

Training and cascade effect (Train-the-Trainer) People who support people

Trainer Flexibility to Respond to Different Profiles

- Trainers need the freedom to adapt. It is important to grant trainers professional autonomy to adapt activities to group characteristics and dynamics, thereby enhancing engagement and relevance.
- Organisational trust and preparatory reflection enable facilitators to adjust methods thoughtfully rather than rigidly following prescribed exercises.
- Effectiveness depends largely on trainers' experience, confidence, and reflective capacity rather than additional resources or infrastructure.
- As a mindset-oriented approach, it strengthens responsiveness, inclusivity, and overall quality.



Evaluation	score
Useful practice	18
Realistic practice	7
Inspiring practice	7

Learning from Each Other: Peer Support for Trainers

- Peer support among trainers is important, enabling them to share experiences, discuss challenges, and offer practical advice.
- Regular exchanges help normalize difficulties, reduce isolation, and build confidence, particularly in small, trusting teams.
- Its effectiveness relies on the quality of interaction—openness, mutual respect, and shared purpose—rather than specific tools.
- Implementation is low-cost, requiring mainly time, willingness, and structured opportunities for reflection, though intentional planning is needed to maintain consistency amid busy schedules.



Evaluation	score
Useful practice	16
Realistic practice	15
Inspiring practice	1

Accessibility:
Keeping it simple and safe, for
those who organise

A Shared Digital Space for Trainers

- A shared digital space within the FRIEND platform for trainers to connect, share resources, and support each other beyond in-person meetings. It centralizes materials, videos, and practical suggestions, providing easy access and maintaining continuity within the wider community.
- Designed for professional collaboration, the platform offers a secure, structured environment that encourages ongoing exchange.
- Implementation requires an online platform, internet access, and coordinated management, but once established, it becomes a sustainable and expandable tool for supporting trainers' daily work.



Evaluation	score
Useful practice	19
Realistic practice	11
Inspiring practice	2

Making Support Easy to Access for Trainers



- Make information accessible and easy to find and use. It will reduce barriers for trainers.
- Clear, readily available guidance enhances confidence and engagement, encouraging questions and knowledge sharing. It is primarily online (a chatbot) to provide quick answers and direct trainers to relevant resources.
- Successful implementation requires internet access, technical support, and organisational oversight to ensure accuracy, creating a sustainable and user-friendly support system over time.



Evaluation	score
Useful practice	18
Realistic practice	6
Inspiring practice	5

Knowing if it works (without drowning in evaluation)

Regular Feedback to Improve the Course



- Brief feedback sessions at the end of each class, allows participants to share their experiences, highlight what worked well, and suggest improvements.
- By integrating feedback into the learning process, trainers can make timely adjustments and place participants at the center of quality improvement.
- Effective implementation requires a safe, supportive environment and a few minutes of structured reflection, making it simple, low-cost, and easily integrated into each session.



Evaluation	score
Useful practice	8
Realistic practice	18
Inspiring practice	6

Visual Feedback through the Post-it Board

- Use a post-it board to visually and concretely collect participant feedback, allowing reflections to be shared anonymously and displayed for the group.
- Sections like “What did I learn?” or “What could we improve?” facilitate both immediate and deeper personal reflection, fostering shared learning.
- The method is inclusive, informal, and less intimidating than verbal feedback, while being low-cost, easy to organize, and easily integrated into the programme’s routine.



Evaluation	score
Useful practice	11
Realistic practice	22
Inspiring practice	3

THANK YOU

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