



4th Newsletter – August 2026

FRIEND PROJECT- Multiplier events inspire professionals across Europe

In spring 2026, multiplier events were organised in five European countries to introduce and promote the FRIEND programme—a friendship course and train-the-trainer programme developed to help older adults strengthen and expand their social networks. Each event brought together professionals, volunteers and community organisations, demonstrating the growing interest in friendship as an essential component of healthy ageing.

In the end of May, the series of events was kick-started by a very successful event for third-age students and lecturers at Akademia Humanistyczno-Ekonomiczna in **Lodz, Poland**. Almost forty people joined the event where the programme was highlighted from different perspectives. The topic Friendship definitely resonated with the crowd and friendship bags were handed out.



In **Leiden, the Netherlands**, around 30 professionals from healthcare and social services participated in the inspiring event Vitamin V for Friendship! held at Leyden Academy on vitality and ageing. Through interactive exercises, participants explored friendship skills and experienced activities from the FRIEND programme themselves. One of the highlights was the "Ball of Yarn" exercise, which quickly revealed common ground between participants and

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sparked meaningful conversations. The event generated a lot of enthusiasm, with many attendees expressing their intention to organise FRIEND groups in their own communities.



A week later, **Crespellano (Bologna, Italy)** welcomed almost 30 caregivers, older adults, social workers and volunteers for an interactive introduction to the programme. Participants experienced practical FRIEND activities, reflected on the meaning of friendship and created their own "friendship compass". What began with a group of strangers gradually developed into an open and engaged community, with participants sharing personal stories, discovering shared interests and asking for additional materials to implement the programme locally. The event clearly demonstrated the programme's potential to inspire future facilitators.



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In **Ílhavo, Portugal**, the FRIEND programme was presented during a conference on age-friendly communities and residential care, attracting 52 participants. The presentation highlighted the project's resources, experiences from the pilot sessions and preliminary results. A particularly meaningful moment occurred when participants who had previously taken part in the FRIEND pilot shared how specific exercises, such as the assertiveness session, had positively influenced their everyday relationships, bringing the project's impact to life for the wider audience.



Meanwhile, in **Málaga, Spain**, the FRIEND project was showcased through two pilot programmes implemented in both a community setting and a residential care home. Older adults participated in activities focusing on friendship, active listening, assertiveness and mutual support. During a volunteer meeting, the experiences and results from both pilots were shared, generating great enthusiasm among volunteers who recognised how their local work contributes to a broader European learning network.



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Across all five countries, the **multiplier events confirmed the relevance of the FRIEND programme and the importance of investing in friendship in later life**. The strong engagement of professionals, volunteers and organisations, together with the willingness to replicate the programme in new communities, demonstrates that FRIEND is laying the foundation for a sustainable European approach to reducing social isolation and strengthening meaningful social connections among older adults.

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