

The DEAP Handbook: A Multi-Sensory Methodological Framework for the Empowerment of Youth with Visual Impairments through Arts and Community Practice

DEAP – Nurturing Personal Development and Empowerment of Young People with Visual Impairment through Arts Education

Project No: 101185651-DEAP-ERASMUS-YOUTH-2024-YOUTH-TOG



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Preface

This educational pathway is an integral part of the project '**DEAP: Nurturing Personal Development and Empowerment of Young People with Visual Impairment through Arts Education**' (Project No: 101185651-DEAP-ERASMUS-YOUTH-2024-YOUTH-TOG). Through this initiative, we aim to bridge the gap between arts education and social inclusion, providing educators with the specialized competencies required to mentor the next generation of visually impaired artists and leaders.

The purpose of this handbook is to provide youth workers, educators, and inclusion mediators with a structured, person-centered framework for supporting young people across the visual impairment spectrum. By shifting the focus from "what is missing" to "what is present," this guide facilitates a transition from traditional service-oriented models to participatory, youth-led models of engagement.

This document is specifically curated for youth workers, educators, and community facilitators operating in educational, rehabilitation, or community settings. It serves as a professional toolkit to help these practitioners foster "guided autonomy," ensuring that support systems enable independence rather than creating dependency.

Introduction

The DEAP Philosophy: Beyond the Visual For young people with visual impairments, traditional education and theatre practices often rely heavily on visual cues, creating environmental, attitudinal, and institutional barriers to full participation. This handbook addresses these challenges by centering the multisensory experience. It utilizes touch, sound, rhythm, and proprioception to foster three interconnected pillars of development:

1. **Psychomotor Skills:** Strengthening the connection between cognitive processes and purposeful physical movement.
2. **Self-Esteem:** Counteracting external stigma and low expectations through successful creative expression.
3. **Personal Empowerment:** Cultivating the agency and "voice" necessary for young people to influence their own lives and communities.

The handbook is organized into five specialized modules, each designed to build professional competency:

- **Module 1: Foundations of Empowerment:** Understanding the VI spectrum, identifying barriers, and supporting psychomotor development.
- **Module 2: Sculpting Potential:** Utilizing tactile creativity and ceramics to build spatial representation and "body memory".
- **Module 3: Harmony in Motion:** Implementing inclusive dance practices that focus on rhythm, coordination, and creative improvisation.
- **Module 4: Inclusive Vision:** Reimagining theatre as a sensory and embodied experience through voice work and tactile interaction.
- **Module 5: Youth-Led Community Practice:** Designing participatory initiatives where young people act as co-creators of social and cultural change.

This booklet serves as a complementary offline reference to the official DEAP Digital Platform. While this document provides the methodological foundation and practical case studies, the platform offers an interactive environment containing the complete digital curriculum, multimedia resources, and networking tools for practitioners across Europe.

Link to platform: <https://deapplatform.eu/>

How to Use This Handbook: Structure and Navigation

To ensure maximum utility for youth workers and facilitators, this handbook follows a modular and autonomous design. Each of the five modules is structured to provide a complete learning journey, transitioning from theoretical foundations to practical application.

The Internal Structure of Modules Every module in this handbook concludes with two essential practical sections:

- **Case Studies:** These provide real-world examples of successful inclusive initiatives across Europe, such as the ONCE Foundation, the CARE EU Project, or the Extant Theatre Company. These cases serve as benchmarks for professional validation and impact.
- **Non-Formal Educational Activities:** Each module includes a series of "step-by-step" activities—such as "Touch, Sort, and Create," "Moving Without Sight," or "The Volcano"—complete with learning objectives, safety measures, and debriefing questions. These are ready-to-use tools for immediate implementation in group settings.

Autonomous Learning and Repetition While this handbook can be read chronologically, Modules 2 (Ceramics), 3 (Dance), and 4 (Theatre) are designed to function as independent, standalone resources.

Because of this autonomous design, you will notice a degree of thematic repetition regarding core concepts, such as:

- The spectrum of visual impairment and WHO standards.
- Basic strategies for autonomy and independence.
- Fundamental accompaniment and guiding techniques.

This repetition is intentional. It ensures that if a facilitator wishes to focus exclusively on a specific discipline—for example, conducting a one-off ceramics workshop or a sensory theatre residency—they will find all the necessary safety protocols, communication strategies, and pedagogical frameworks within that single module. By providing these foundational "safety nets" in every artistic module, the handbook ensures that guided autonomy and participant safety are never compromised, regardless of how the resource is accessed.

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Module 1: Young people with visual impairments' psychomotor skills, self-esteem, and personal empowerment

1. Introduction

1.1 *Purpose of the Module*

This module helps youth workers and educators support young people with visual impairments in a practical, respectful, and inclusive way. It focuses on three important areas: psychomotor skills, self-esteem, and personal empowerment.

Psychomotor development is about how the body and mind work together in movement, balance, coordination, and awareness of space. Self-esteem is about how young people feel about themselves, their abilities, and their value. Personal empowerment means having confidence, choice, voice, and control over one's own life.

These three areas are closely connected. When young people feel safe in movement, included in activities, and respected in decision-making, they are more likely to build confidence and take part actively in learning and community life. This is why the module connects youth work, non-formal education, and arts education.

This module is for youth workers and educators who work with visually impaired young people in community settings, education, or rehabilitation. The young people themselves are the indirect beneficiaries of the module through better support and more inclusive learning opportunities.

1.2 *Learning Objectives*

By the end of this module, learners will be able to:

- understand why psychomotor development, self-esteem, and personal empowerment are important for young people with visual impairments
- describe different experiences of visual impairment and avoid stereotypes and assumptions
- identify environmental, attitudinal, and institutional barriers to participation and empowerment
- explain what psychomotor skills are, including body awareness, balance, coordination, and spatial orientation
- understand how visual impairment can affect movement, confidence, orientation, and the use of space
- use practical methods to support psychomotor development through movement-based, tactile, sensory, group, and partner activities
- adapt activities to different levels of visual impairment and to mixed-ability groups
- apply inclusive strategies to support self-esteem, confidence, and participation

- encourage personal empowerment by supporting choice, voice, autonomy, and decision-making
- use arts-based approaches such as ceramics, dance, and theatre to support expression, confidence, and learning
- create safe and inclusive learning environments through clear communication, accessibility, respect, and consent

2. Understanding Visual Impairment in Youth Work Practice

2.1. *Visual Impairment: Diversity Experience*

Visual impairment includes many different experiences and should never be understood as one single condition. It exists on a wide spectrum, and each young person may see, move, learn, and communicate in different ways. Some young people have low vision, which means they can see, but their sight is limited and may not be fully corrected with glasses or contact lenses. Others have partial sight, which may mean they can see light, shapes, color, or movement, but not clear details. Some young people are blind and have very little or no useful vision in everyday life. These differences matter because they shape how a young person experiences the world, takes part in activities, and interacts with other people.

It is also important to understand that visual impairment can happen at different stages of life. Some young people are born with a visual impairment and may have learned from an early age to use other senses, such as touch, hearing, movement, and body awareness, to explore and understand the world around them. Others lose sight later in life, and this can be a very different experience. They may need time and support to adjust emotionally, socially, and practically to new ways of moving, learning, and participating. Their earlier visual experiences may still influence how they think about space, objects, direction, and communication.

Because of this diversity, youth workers and educators should avoid stereotypes and assumptions. Two young people may both have a visual impairment, but they may have very different strengths, needs, confidence levels, and ways of taking part. One may feel confident moving independently, while another may feel unsure in unfamiliar spaces. One may prefer clear verbal instructions, while another may rely more on touch, repetition, sound cues, or extra time to explore. Visual impairment does not automatically mean dependence, passivity, or lack of ability. It is important not to assume what a young person can or cannot do based only on their diagnosis.

A respectful and inclusive approach means meeting each young person as an individual. This includes listening carefully, asking what kind of support works best, and creating an environment where the person feels safe, valued, and included. When educators and youth workers avoid assumptions and focus on the person's abilities, preferences, and potential, they create better conditions for participation, confidence, and empowerment.

2.1 *Barriers to participation and empowerment*

Young people with visual impairments may face different kinds of barriers that affect their confidence, independence, and ability to take part fully in activities. These barriers are not only connected to vision itself, but also to the environment, to people's attitudes, and to the way activities or services are planned. Module 1_Template.docx.

Environmental barriers

Environmental barriers are physical barriers in the space around the young person. These can make movement, orientation, and participation more difficult. For example, rooms may be hard to navigate if the

layout is unclear, if furniture is placed in unsafe ways, or if there are objects in walking areas. Poor lighting can also be a problem for young people with low vision, especially if there is glare or strong contrast. Another barrier is when activities depend only on visual information, such as written instructions on a board, visual demonstrations without explanation, or materials that cannot be explored through touch or sound. These barriers can make young people feel unsure, excluded, or less confident in joining activities.

Attitudinal barriers

Attitudinal barriers come from the beliefs and behaviors of other people. Young people with visual impairments may face low expectations, which means others assume they cannot do certain things or do not give them enough chances to try. They may also experience overprotection, where adults give too much help and do not allow them to explore or act independently. Another common barrier is being treated as less capable, for example when people speak to them in a patronizing way, ignore their opinions, or assume they always need help. These attitudes can affect self-esteem and reduce opportunities for participation, growth, and empowerment.

Institutional and systemic barriers

Institutional and systemic barriers are connected to how organizations, schools, youth centers, and programs are designed. These barriers may include inaccessible materials, such as handouts that cannot be used without sight, lack of tactile or audio resources, or activities that are not adapted for different needs. Another barrier is the lack of trained staff who understand visual impairment and know how to create inclusive and accessible learning environments. Limited inclusive planning can also prevent participation, for example when activities are designed without thinking about accessibility, safety, communication, or flexible ways of taking part. In some cases, there may also be limited time, funding, or organisational support for making proper adaptations.

Understanding these barriers is important because they can prevent young people from feeling safe, included, and confident. When educators and youth workers recognise these barriers, they are better able to reduce them and create more inclusive, respectful, and empowering environments

2.3 *The role of educators and youth workers*

Educators and youth workers play a key role in supporting the psychomotor development, self-esteem, and empowerment of young people with visual impairments through inclusive, structured, and person-centred practice.

A core responsibility is to create safe and accessible environments for movement and exploration. This includes organising spaces that are easy to navigate, ensuring consistency in spatial layout, and using clear verbal, tactile, and auditory cues. These conditions support body awareness, orientation, balance, and confidence in movement. Educators also support psychomotor learning through adapted activities. This involves designing or modifying tasks that develop coordination, spatial orientation, rhythm, and body control, using multi-sensory approaches such as touch, sound, guided movement, and repetition. Arts-based methods like dance, theatre, and ceramics can further strengthen motor skills while supporting expression and engagement.

Another key role is to encourage autonomy in movement and action. Youth workers should promote independent exploration while providing appropriate safety support, avoiding over-assistance that may limit the development of spatial confidence and motor skills. In group settings, educators facilitate inclusive participation in physical and creative activities, ensuring that young people with visual impairments can fully

engage in shared movement, collaboration, and peer interaction. This supports both psychomotor development and self-esteem.

Overall, the role of the educator is to intentionally link inclusive practice with psychomotor outcomes, enabling young people to develop physical confidence, spatial awareness, and independent participation in learning and social environments.

3. Psychomotor Skills: Foundations for Learning and Confidence

3.1 *What are Psychomotor Skills?*

Psychomotor skills refer to the connection between cognitive processes and physical movement. They involve how the brain and body work together to perform actions in a coordinated and purposeful way.

Key components of psychomotor skills include:

- **Body awareness** – understanding where one's body is in space and how different body parts move and interact.
- **Balance, coordination, and spatial orientation** – the ability to maintain stability, coordinate movements smoothly, and navigate within an environment.

These skills are essential for everyday activities such as walking, interacting with objects, and engaging with others. They also play an important role in building independence and self-confidence.

3.2 *How Visual Impairment Can Affect Psychomotor Development*

Visual impairment can significantly influence psychomotor development, as vision often supports movement, orientation, and interaction with the environment.

- **Movement, confidence, and fear**

Without visual input, individuals may feel uncertain about how to move safely. This can lead to reduced movement, hesitation, or fear of injury. Over time, limited movement can affect physical development and lower confidence in one's abilities.

- **Orientation and use of space**

Vision helps people understand distances, directions, and spatial relationships. When vision is limited or absent, it can be more challenging to orient oneself and use space effectively. This may result in difficulties navigating environments or participating in group activities.

Because of these challenges, individuals with visual impairment may need more structured support to develop strong psychomotor skills.

3.3 *The Educator's Role in Supporting Psychomotor Skills*

Educators play a crucial role in creating supportive environments where participants can safely develop psychomotor skills.

- **Safe exploration and guided autonomy**

It is important to provide opportunities for participants to explore their surroundings in a safe and structured way. Educators can guide exploration while gradually encouraging independence, helping individuals build confidence in their movements and decision-making.

- **Use of multisensory cues**

Since vision may be limited, educators should use other senses to support learning and movement:

- **Touch** – guiding movements physically or using tactile materials
- **Sound** – using voice, music, or sound cues to indicate direction or rhythm

- **Rhythm** – supporting coordination and timing through repeated patterns
- **Verbal guidance** – giving clear, descriptive instructions

Additional supportive strategies include:

- **Clear instructions** – breaking down movements into simple, understandable steps
- **Repetition** – allowing time to practice and reinforce skills
- **Encouragement** – building motivation, confidence, and a sense of achievement

By combining these approaches, educators can help participants develop stronger body awareness, improve coordination, and feel more confident in navigating their environment.

4. Practical Approaches to Supporting Psychomotor Skills

4.1 *Movement based activities*

Movement-based activities are an important way to support psychomotor development in people with visual impairment (VI), as they create opportunities to learn through the body rather than through sight. By actively moving, individuals can strengthen their understanding of space, improve coordination, and build confidence in their physical abilities.

For example, guided walking allows participants to experience movement in a safe and supported way. With guidance, they can begin to understand direction, distance, and changes in the environment. Over time, this helps reduce fear and increases confidence in moving independently. Activities such as rhythm and clapping games support coordination and timing. Rhythm provides a predictable structure, which makes movement easier to anticipate and control. This helps participants connect movement with sound, improving both motor planning and body awareness.

Using movement with sound cues helps individuals orient themselves in space. Sounds can act as reference points, guiding direction and encouraging participants to move toward or away from a source. This strengthens spatial orientation and the ability to navigate environments without relying on vision. Simple balance tasks help develop stability and control of the body. Practicing balance increases awareness of posture and body position, which is essential for safe movement. As balance improves, participants often feel more secure and willing to explore new movements.

Overall, movement-based activities help replace visual input with sensory experiences such as sound, touch, and rhythm. This not only supports physical development but also builds confidence, independence, and a sense of safety in movement.

4.2 *Tactile and Sensory Exploration*

Tactile and sensory exploration is especially important for young people with visual impairments because it offers ways to learn, explore, and express themselves beyond visual information. When sight is limited or absent, touch, hearing, movement, and body awareness often become even more important in understanding the world, interacting with materials, and feeling confident in new situations. Sensory exploration can support both learning and participation, while also making activities more inclusive and meaningful.

Working with tactile materials helps young people develop both fine motor skills and gross motor skills. It can strengthen hand control, coordination, concentration, and awareness of shape, texture, size, and position. These experiences are useful not only in creative activities, but also in everyday life, mobility,

communication, and independent action. Tactile and sensory tasks can also help young people feel calmer, more focused, and more connected to their own body and surroundings.

Activities such as clay work, ceramics, exploring textured objects, sorting objects by shape or surface, and other hand-based creative tasks can be very beneficial. For example, working with clay or ceramics allows young people to use their hands to shape, press, roll, and build. This supports sensory exploration, hand strength, patience, and creativity. It can also increase confidence, because the young person creates something real and personal that they can touch and feel proud of. In this way, tactile work is not only about skill development, but also about self-expression and empowerment.

4.3 *Group and Partner Activities*

Group and partner activities play an important role in supporting psychomotor development for people with visual impairment (VI). By engaging with others through movement, participants not only develop physical skills but also strengthen social interaction, trust, and confidence in shared spaces.

Trust-building through movement is a key element. When participants move together—such as guiding each other, mirroring movements, or completing simple tasks in pairs—they learn to rely on another person for support and orientation. This helps reduce fear of movement and creates a sense of safety. Trust grows gradually as participants experience that their partner provides consistent and respectful guidance.

Cooperation and communication are naturally developed through these activities. Without relying on visual cues, participants need to communicate clearly using voice, touch, or agreed signals. This encourages active listening and clear expression, which strengthens both verbal and non-verbal communication skills. Working together toward a shared movement goal also builds a sense of teamwork and inclusion.

Spatial awareness is enhanced when participants move in relation to others. Group activities require individuals to adjust their position, distance, and direction based on where others are. Through guided interaction, participants learn to better understand space, navigate safely, and feel more comfortable moving in environments where other people are present. Overall, group and partner activities create a supportive environment where movement becomes a shared experience. This not only improves psychomotor skills but also fosters connection, confidence, and a sense of belonging. Try the activity below trust walk in pairs.

4.3 *Adapting Activities to Different Needs*

Adapting movement-based activities is essential to ensure that all participants, regardless of their abilities or level of visual impairment, can engage meaningfully and safely. Thoughtful adaptation makes it possible for everyone to participate, learn, and develop at their own pace.

Levels of visual impairment can vary greatly, from low vision to complete blindness, which means that participants may rely on different senses and strategies. Some individuals may benefit from visual contrasts, clear lighting, or large movements that are easier to perceive visually. Others may rely more on touch, sound, and verbal guidance. By offering multiple ways to access an activity—such as combining verbal instructions with tactile guidance or sound cues—educators can ensure that each participant can understand and engage in the movement. This flexibility allows individuals to use their strengths while still being challenged to develop new skills.

Mixed-ability groups require a balance between inclusion and individual support. Participants may differ not only in visual ability but also in confidence, motor skills, and previous experience. Activities can be adapted by varying the level of difficulty, pace, or type of support. For example, some participants may need close

guidance or a partner, while others can perform the same activity more independently. Creating options within the same activity helps avoid exclusion and allows everyone to participate together.

Working in mixed-ability groups can also be a strength. Participants can learn from each other, support one another, and develop empathy and cooperation. For example, pairing participants with different strengths can encourage peer learning, where one person provides guidance while the other contributes in different ways. Overall, adapting activities is not about simplifying them, but about making them accessible and meaningful. By being responsive to individual needs and group dynamics, educators can create an inclusive environment where all participants feel safe, capable, and motivated to take part in movement.

5. Supporting Self-Esteem Through Inclusive Practice

5.1 *Understanding Self-Esteem in Young People with Visual Impairments*

Self-esteem in young people with visual impairments is often shaped by external factors such as stigma, low expectations, and experiences of exclusion. When others underestimate their abilities or limit their participation, it can lead to feelings of inadequacy and reduced confidence. These experiences may be subtle, but over time they can significantly affect how young people see themselves and their potential.

There is also a strong connection between movement and confidence. Being able to move freely, safely, and independently contributes to a sense of control and self-trust. When a young person feels uncertain in their body, for example due to lack of accessible environments or limited opportunities to practice movement, this can negatively impact both their confidence and self-esteem. Similarly, exclusion from physical or social activities can reinforce feelings of not belonging.

5.2 *Educator Strategies for Building Self-Esteem*

Educators play a key role in supporting and strengthening self-esteem. A strengths-based approach is particularly effective, where the focus is on what the young person can do rather than their limitations. Providing specific, positive feedback helps individuals recognize their abilities and progress. Offering choice and responsibility is another important strategy. When young people are given opportunities to make decisions and take ownership of tasks, it builds a sense of autonomy and trust in their own capabilities. This can be as simple as choosing an activity, leading a small group task, or deciding how to approach a creative project.

Celebrating effort and progress, rather than only outcomes, is essential. Recognizing small steps forward helps create a growth mindset and reduces fear of failure. In addition, encouraging self-expression allows young people to explore their identity and communicate their thoughts and feelings in ways that feel comfortable to them. Finally, giving enough time and listening with respect are fundamental. Young people may need more time to process, explore, and respond. Being patient and truly listening signals that their voice matters, which is crucial for building confidence and self-worth.

5.3 *Creating Opportunities for Expression and Success*

Creating inclusive opportunities for expression and success is central to building self-esteem. Creative activities such as dance, theatre, and ceramics provide alternative ways for young people to communicate and engage with others. These forms of expression go beyond verbal communication and include movement, touch, rhythm, and sensory exploration. For young people with visual impairments, this is especially important, as they may not always have access to environments where they can fully explore their abilities.

Through creative activities, they can experience success, develop new skills, and feel visible and valued within a group.

Celebrating effort and progress within these activities further reinforces confidence. When young people see that their contributions are recognized and appreciated, it strengthens their sense of competence and belonging. Over time, these positive experiences can help them discover their strengths, build resilience, and participate more actively and confidently in different areas of life.

6. Personal Empowerment and Autonomy

6.1 *What Personal Empowerment Means in Practice*

Personal empowerment for young people with visual impairment is about strengthening their ability to influence their own lives and feel confident in their choices. Central to this is self-determination – having the right and opportunity to make decisions – and agency, the feeling that “I can act and have an impact.” In environments where others may unintentionally take over or make assumptions, it becomes especially important to actively support these abilities.

Empowerment is also closely linked to participation and voice. Young people need not only to be present in activities, but to be meaningfully involved. This means having real opportunities to express opinions, share experiences, and influence outcomes. For young people with visual impairments, this often requires intentional adaptations, such as clear verbal communication, accessible materials, and inclusive group dynamics. When their voice is heard and taken seriously, it strengthens both confidence and a sense of belonging.

6.2 *Supporting Decision-Making and Leadership*

Educators and youth workers play a key role in creating conditions where young people can develop decision-making skills and leadership. One effective approach is to involve young people in planning activities. This can include deciding on themes, choosing methods, or shaping how a session is structured. Being part of the planning process increases engagement and gives a sense of responsibility. Encouraging initiative is equally important. Young people should feel safe to suggest ideas, try new approaches, and take small risks. This can be supported by asking open questions, inviting input regularly, and showing that their contributions are valued in practice—not just in theory.

Leadership can also be developed by giving young people opportunities to take the lead in manageable ways. For example, they might guide part of an activity, support peers, or take responsibility for a specific task. For young people with visual impairments, it is important that these opportunities are accessible and adapted when needed, while still promoting independence. Support should be present, but not limiting – allowing space for exploration, learning, and growth.

6.3 *From Participation to Ownership*

Moving from participation to ownership means supporting young people to feel that they are not only included, but that they actively shape their experiences. A key part of this is supporting independent movement. When young people feel confident navigating spaces and activities, it increases their autonomy and sense of control. This may involve creating accessible environments, providing orientation support, and allowing time to explore and move independently.

Respecting boundaries and preferences is equally essential. Empowerment cannot exist without respect. Young people need to feel that they can say yes or no, express what they are comfortable with, and choose how they want to participate. Some may want to take on visible leadership roles, while others may prefer quieter forms of engagement – both should be equally valued. Ownership grows when young people experience that their choices matter and that they are trusted. This includes being able to set their own goals, express their needs, and influence how activities are carried out. For young people with visual impairments, this also means ensuring that support systems enable independence rather than create dependency.

When educators and youth workers create a respectful, flexible, and inclusive environment, young people are more likely to develop confidence, responsibility, and a strong sense of autonomy. Over time, this supports not only their participation in activities, but also their ability to take an active role in their own lives and future.

7. Arts-Based Approaches as Tools for Empowerment

7.1 *Why Arts Matter*

Arts-based approaches play an important role in empowering young people with visual impairments. Through creative activities, participants can explore emotions, build social connections, and develop psychomotor skills in a holistic way. Artistic expression offers a space where there is no single “right” way to participate, which can reduce pressure and increase confidence.

Emotionally, the arts provide opportunities to express feelings that may be difficult to put into words. Socially, they create shared experiences that strengthen group cohesion and a sense of belonging. From a psychomotor perspective, engaging in creative processes supports body awareness, coordination, and sensory integration.

Tips for practice:

- Create a safe and non-judgmental environment where all forms of expression are valued
- Use clear verbal instructions and describe activities step by step
- Combine different senses (sound, touch, movement) to make activities more accessible
- Encourage collaboration rather than competition
- Allow time for reflection and sharing after activities

7.2 *Ceramics and Tactile Arts*

Ceramics and other tactile art forms are particularly meaningful for young people with visual impairments, as they build on sensory exploration through touch. Working with materials such as clay allows participants to explore shapes, textures, and forms in a direct and hands-on way.

These activities support the development of fine motor skills, hand coordination, and spatial understanding. They also offer a calming and focused environment where participants can work at their own pace. Creating tangible objects can strengthen a sense of achievement and pride.

Tips for practice:

- Use materials with different textures (clay, fabric, natural materials)
- Give hands-on demonstrations instead of only verbal explanations
- Break tasks into small, manageable steps
- Encourage exploration rather than focusing on the final result
- Provide supportive guidance without taking over the process

7.3 *Dance and Movement Practices*

Dance and movement practices support empowerment by strengthening the connection between body and mind. Through rhythm, coordination, and movement, young people can develop greater body awareness and confidence.

For young people with visual impairments, movement activities can improve spatial awareness and orientation. Rhythm and music create structure and predictability, which can increase feelings of safety and participation.

Tips for practice:

- Use music with clear rhythm and tempo
- Give verbal cues and consistent structure in movement sequences
- Work with mirroring or guided movement (e.g. hand-under-hand support when appropriate)
- Use the room actively—help participants explore space safely
- Encourage individual expression, not just imitation

7.4 *Theatre-Based Practices*

Theatre-based practices offer powerful tools for building confidence, communication skills, and self-expression. Through body expression, role-play, and storytelling, young people can explore different perspectives in a safe environment.

Role-play helps participants practice social situations and develop problem-solving skills. Theatre also strengthens voice use, presence, and interaction with others.

Tips for practice:

- Use simple and clear scenarios for role-play
- Focus on voice, tone, and storytelling—not only visual elements
- Create predictable structures for exercises (warm-up, activity, reflection)
- Encourage participation at different levels (speaking, listening, observing)
- Always respect personal boundaries—no one should be forced into a role

8. Creating Safe and Inclusive Learning Environments

8.1 *Accessibility and Communication*

Creating accessibility is essential when working with young people with visual impairments. It is not only about physical access, but also about how information is communicated and how activities are structured. Clear communication and predictable environments help participants feel safe, understand what is happening, and take part more independently.

→ **Verbal descriptions** are a key tool. The facilitator should clearly describe the space, materials, and activities. This includes explaining what is in the room, where things are located, and what will happen next.

Examples:

- “The chairs are in a circle in the middle of the room.”
- “The materials are on the table to the right.”
- “Now we will take three steps forward and then stop.”

These descriptions help participants build a mental map of the environment, reducing uncertainty and increasing confidence.

→ **Clear instructions and structure** are equally important. Activities should be explained step by step, using simple and consistent language. A clear beginning, middle, and end helps participants understand the flow of the session.

Examples:

- First, we listen.
- Then, we touch the materials.
- After that, we do the task together.
- Finally, we talk about how it felt.

This structured approach makes activities easier to follow and creates a sense of predictability.

→ A **predictable room setup** further supports orientation and independence. Keeping furniture and materials in consistent places allows participants to navigate the space more easily.

Examples:

- Tables and chairs stay in the same place
- Materials are placed in the same order each time
- Walking areas are kept free from obstacles

→ **Accessible materials** ensure that everyone can participate using different senses, not only sight. Materials should invite touch, exploration, and interaction.

Examples:

- Clay, fabric, rope, or objects with different textures
- Large and easy-to-handle objects
- Materials that can be touched, held, and sorted
- Sound signals or tactile markers to support activities

By combining clear descriptions, structured guidance, predictable environments, and multi-sensory materials, facilitators create conditions where participants can feel safe, included, and able to engage on their own terms.

8.2 *Physical Guidance and Consent*

Physical guidance can sometimes be helpful in supporting participation, orientation, or movement. However, it must always be offered in a respectful and consensual way.

Facilitators should ask for permission before offering physical support. It is important never to assume that help is needed. Instead, ask questions such as:

- “Would you like some guidance?”
- “Can I show you how by guiding your hand?”

When providing support, the facilitator should explain clearly what they are doing and how the support will work. This reduces uncertainty and helps the participant feel in control. Respecting autonomy is essential. Young people should always have the right to say no, to choose how they want to receive support, or to try independently. The goal is not to take over, but to enable independence and confidence. A useful approach is to offer different options, such as verbal guidance, demonstration, or physical support, and let the participant choose what feels most comfortable.

8.3 Emotional Safety and Group Dynamics

Emotional safety is the foundation for participation, learning, and empowerment. Without a sense of safety, it becomes difficult for young people to express themselves, take initiative, or try new things. Facilitators can build emotional safety by creating an environment based on trust, respect, and inclusion. This means valuing each participant, listening actively, and responding with sensitivity. A non-judgmental atmosphere is especially important. Participants should feel that they can participate in their own way, without fear of making mistakes or being evaluated. Encouraging effort, rather than perfection, supports confidence and motivation.

Group dynamics also play a key role. Facilitators should actively support positive interactions, encourage collaboration, and ensure that everyone is included. This may involve setting clear group agreements, modelling respectful communication, and addressing exclusion if it occurs. When young people feel safe, respected, and included, they are more likely to engage, share their perspectives, and develop both socially and personally. This creates a strong foundation for learning, empowerment, and meaningful participation.

9. Case Studies

Case Study 1: ONCE Foundation	
Full Name	ONCE Foundation Orientation and Mobility Training Programme for Children and Young People with Visual Impairments
Year initiated/ended	1980s (formalised and continuously developed since; orientation and mobility services remain ongoing)
Provider	ONCE Foundation
Target Group	Children and young people with visual impairments (including blind and low vision participants), families, educators, and rehabilitation professionals working in inclusive education and youth development contexts.
Goal of the case study (what was the intended goal? Was it achieved? If not, why?)	The main goal of the programme is to support the development of independent mobility, spatial orientation, and functional psychomotor skills in young people with visual impairments, while also strengthening self-confidence, autonomy, and social participation. The programme aims to enable participants to move safely and independently in different environments (home, school, public spaces) and to build the physical and psychological foundations for active participation in education and community life. The initiative has been widely implemented and is considered successful in its core objectives, particularly in improving independent mobility and confidence. However, outcomes can vary depending on the age of onset of visual impairment, family support, and consistency of training.

Description (in a clear step by step approach)	• Assessment of mobility, orientation, and psychomotor abilities • Individual plan with personalised mobility goals • Basic psychomotor training (balance, posture, body awareness) • Orientation skills development using sound and tactile cues • Guided mobility practice in real environments • Gradual independence training in daily routes and tasks • Psychosocial support to build confidence and autonomy • Family/educator training to support consistent practice
Impact and validation and lessons learned	Impact: • Improved independent mobility and spatial orientation • Stronger body awareness and coordination • Increased confidence, autonomy, and participation Validation: • Professional observation and functional mobility assessments • Feedback from participants and families • Real-life performance in everyday environments Lessons learned: • Early intervention improves psychomotor outcomes • Overprotection limits independence development • Consistent practice across environments is essential • Psychomotor development is closely linked to empowerment
Access details (website, contact info) and related resources developed (What training manuals, guidelines, technical fact sheets, posters, pictures, video and audio documents, and/or Web sites have been developed?)	Website: https://www.once.es/

Case Study 2: ICEVI

Full Name	ICEVI Europe resources for inclusive education and functional skills development for children and young people with visual impairments
Year initiated/ended	Ongoing network (ICEVI Europe established in 1985; resources continuously updated)
Provider	ICEVI Europe (International Council for Education of People with Visual Impairment – European region)
Target Group	• Children and young people with visual impairments • Teachers, youth workers, rehabilitation specialists • Inclusive education professionals
Goal of the case study (what was the intended goal? Was it achieved? If not, why?)	The aim of ICEVI Europe resources is to improve educational inclusion, functional independence, and developmental skills, including orientation, mobility, and psychomotor development, for learners with visual impairments. It supports professionals in adapting learning environments and methods to ensure participation, independence, and equal access to education and youth activities.
Description (in a clear step by step approach)	- Knowledge development for professionals Training and guidance materials on visual impairment and inclusive education. - Focus on functional skills training Includes orientation & mobility, daily living skills, and sensory development. - Psychomotor development support Emphasis on: • body awareness • spatial orientation • movement confidence • tactile and auditory learning strategies - Inclusive education adaptation tools Strategies for adapting classroom and non-formal learning environments. -Capacity building for educators/youth workers Workshops, conferences, and professional development materials.
Impact and validation and lessons learned	Impact: • Improved professional competence in inclusive education • Better adaptation of learning environments for visually impaired learners • Stronger focus on functional independence and psychomotor development • Increased awareness of non-visual learning approaches Validation: • Academic and practitioner uptake across Europe

	• Use in teacher training programmes and rehabilitation contexts • Conference-based dissemination and peer-reviewed contributions Lessons learned: • Functional skills (mobility, orientation, body awareness) are essential for empowerment • Inclusion requires trained staff, not only adapted materials • Psychomotor development must be explicitly embedded in education systems • Cross-sector collaboration improves outcomes (education + rehabilitation + youth work)
Access details (website, contact info) and related resources developed (What training manuals, guidelines, technical fact sheets, posters, pictures, video and audio documents, and/or Web sites have been developed?)	Website: https://www.icevi-europe.org/ • conference proceedings and research papers • inclusive education guidelines • functional vision / blindness education frameworks • training materials for educators and rehabilitation specialists • publications on orientation & mobility and independent living skills

10. Non-Formal Educational Activities

Activity 1: Sound, Step, and Balance	
Aim	Aim To help participants improve movement, listening, balance, and confidence in a safe group activity.
Learning Objectives	Learning Objectives, participants will: • follow simple movement instructions • respond to rhythm and sound • practise balance and coordination • feel more confident moving in a group
Trainee Profile	Anyone can participate as long as they are able to express themselves.
No of participants	No of participants: 6-15

Duration	30 minutes
Required materials	Required Materials • bell, drum, or clapping • chairs or markers • safe open space
Preparation	Preparation • clear the room • mark the activity area • explain the space and safety rules
Implementation	Implementation 1. Participants stand in a circle. 2. The facilitator starts with a simple clapping rhythm. 3. The group repeats the rhythm and adds one step forward or back. 4. Participants walk slowly when they hear a sound cue. 5. They stop, turn, or change direction based on the signal. 6. The activity ends with a simple balance task, such as shifting weight from one foot to the other.
Safety measures	Safety Measures • remove obstacles • keep instructions clear and slow • offer support if needed • respect each participant's pace
Debriefing	Debriefing: Ask: • What felt easy? • What felt difficult? • What helped you feel safe?

Adaptations and variations	Adaptations and Variations - do the activity seated - use fewer sound signals - work in pairs - add tactile floor markers
Activity 2: Trust Walk in Pairs	
Aim	This activity helps build trust, cooperation, communication, and spatial awareness. It also helps participants feel safe while exploring movement together
Learning Objectives	Build trust, cooperation, communication and spatial awareness.
Trainee Profile	Anyone can participate as long as they are able to express themselves.
No of participants	You work in pairs, minimum 2 persons.
Duration	30 minutes
Required materials	No Tools and physical resources needed.
Preparation	Clean the room and space to make it safe to walk around in pairs.
Implementation	One person gives clear verbal instructions while the other moves slowly through the space. They practise simple directions such as “stop,” “step forward,” “turn left,” or “turn right.” After a few minutes, they change roles.
Safety measures	Advice and guidance for conducting the activity safely and effectively.
Debriefing	Describe the debriefing process (fe: ask for opinions/feedback from the participants)
Adaptations and variations	Suggestions for modifications based on context or needs.

Module 2: Sculpting Potential: Empowerment Program on Sculpting Potential for Young People with Visual Impairments

Introduction

1.1 Purpose of the Module

Welcome to this educational module specifically developed for youth workers and educators. This training is designed to provide the methodological tools and practical strategies needed to support young people with visual impairments (VI) through the '**Sculpting Potential**' empowerment program.

By focusing on tactile creativity and sensory expression, this module explores how to dismantle barriers to participation and foster an inclusive environment where every young person can shape their own identity and unlock their hidden potential.

1.2 Learning Objectives

By the end of this module, learners will be able to:

- **Differentiate** between various types and degrees of visual impairment, acknowledging the subjective nature of visual perception.
- **Identify** the specific tools and strategies—such as assistive technologies, Braille, and mobility aids—that foster autonomy for individuals with VI.
- **Implement** inclusive communication protocols based on empathy, clarity, and respectful guidance.
- **Demonstrate** proficiency in safe accompaniment techniques, utilizing both verbal cues and physical support when required.
- **Analyze** the cognitive role of tactile perception in spatial representation and apply specialized haptic techniques within artistic and ceramic contexts.
- **Design** accessible learning environments by optimizing workspace organization and adapting creative activities to ensure safety and independence.
- **Advocate** for the empowerment and social inclusion of visually impaired youth, focusing on their unique strengths and capabilities.

2. Basic Notions for recognizing and identifying Visual Impairment

2.1 *Understanding and Empowering Individuals with Visual Impairment: Vision Rehabilitation, Orientation, Mobility, and Communication*

- This sub-module provides the foundational expertise required to foster independence and meaningful inclusion. By the end of this section, learners will be able to:
- Apply effective communication techniques tailored for both blind individuals and those with low vision, prioritizing clarity, empathy, and the "person-first" approach.
- Use precise descriptive language to provide environmental context, avoiding ambiguous terms and ensuring the individual remains informed and engaged.
- Identify and mitigate architectural and sensory barriers to create accessible workspaces and daily routines.
- Apply strategies for managing visually impaired (VI) individuals in professional settings, focusing on merit, safety, and the use of assistive office technologies.
- Employ specialized teaching methods designed for the "helping relationship," balancing support with the promotion of maximum autonomy.
- Integrate tools such as Braille, screen readers, and tactile maps into educational activities to enhance the learning experience for VI youth.
- Understand how tactile exploration replaces or supplements visual input to build complex mental representations of objects and environments.
- Apply exercises that help VI individuals construct internal "spatial maps," essential for orientation, mobility, and artistic creation (such as ceramics and sculpture)

2.2 *Blindness vs. Low Vision – Not the same thing, main points*

While "blindness" is often used as a general term, visual impairment exists on a broad spectrum. Understanding these distinctions is crucial for educators to provide the right level of support and adapt artistic activities effectively.

The Global Standard: WHO Guidelines

Most European countries (including project partners in Sweden, Czech Republic, Cyprus, and Poland) follow the **World Health Organization (WHO)** standards. These criteria are based on two primary factors:

1. **Visual Acuity:** The clarity or sharpness of vision (measured with the best possible correction, like glasses).
2. **Visual Field:** The total area an individual can see without moving their eyes (peripheral vision).

2.3 *Categories of Visual Impairment*

The following table breaks down the technical thresholds used to define the level of impairment:

Level of Impairment	Visual Acuity (with best correction)	Visual Field (Binocular residue)	Description & Impact
Mildly Impaired	$\leq 3/10$	$< 60\%$	Slight reduction in clarity; may need better lighting or slight magnification.
Medium-Severe Impaired	$\leq 2/10$	$< 50\%$	Noticeable difficulty with fine details; adaptation of materials begins here.
Severely Impaired	$\leq 1/10$	$< 30\%$	Significant vision loss; high-contrast and tactile aids become essential.
Partly Blind / Severe Low Vision	$\leq 1/20$	$< 10\%$	Reliance on non-visual senses increases; orientation and mobility training is common.
Blindness	$< 1/20$	$< 10\%$	Primary use of Braille, audio, and white canes for independence.
Total / Deep Blindness	No light or movement perception	Not evaluable	Complete reliance on tactile (haptic) and auditory perception.

Educator's Insight: Why these numbers matter

As a youth worker, you don't need to be a doctor, but knowing these categories helps you:

- **Anticipate Needs:** A student with "Moderate Low Vision" might see the silhouette of a sculpture, while a student with "Deep Blindness" will rely entirely on haptic (touch) exploration.
- **Safety First:** Understanding visual field limitations (like "tunnel vision" in Blindness) helps you organize a safer, obstacle-free studio space.
- **Standardized Support:** Using WHO criteria ensures that the support provided is consistent with European social and rehabilitation services.

Quick Check: Visual Acuity vs. Visual Field

Visual Acuity is like the *resolution* of a digital image (how sharp it is). **Visual Field** is like the *size of the screen* (how much of the "picture" is visible at once).

Note:

Someone with low vision may **not look visually impaired** and may navigate environments without a cane or guide-but still faces challenges in reading signs, recognizing faces, or moving in unfamiliar spaces.

2.4 The two big differences between blind and low vision people

Blind person:

- Total or partial loss of vision
- Has the perception of light but not of shapes
- Doesn't live in the dark

Low Vision Person:

- Has residual vision
- Many different ways of seeing

There are many variables based on the disease:

- Those who do not see in the centre
- Those who do not have peripheral vision (the ability to see even in points that you are not looking directly at)
- Those who have blurry vision but have not lost any part of the visual field
- Those who do not perceive colors or depth

To help youth workers and educators truly understand the experience of their students, it is essential to move beyond medical numbers and visualize how these impairments affect daily perception:

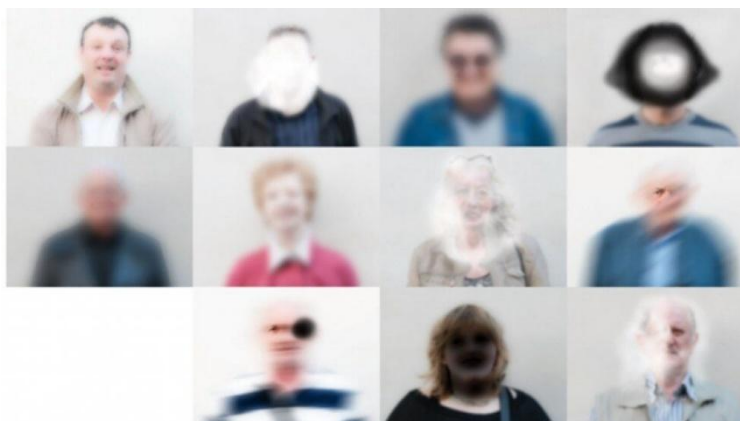


Image 1: How different visual impairments affect vision

3. Strategies for Autonomy and Independence

Autonomy is not the absence of impairment, but the mastery of tools and strategies that allow an individual to navigate life with confidence and dignity. For young people with visual impairments, regaining or maintaining independence is a dynamic process involving environmental adaptation, technology, and the development of specialized sensory skills.

As educators and youth workers, our role is to act as facilitators of autonomy. Rather than performing tasks *for* the student, we provide the framework through which they can perform tasks *themselves*.

This section explores the core pillars of independent living:

- **Activation of Vicarious Senses:** Learning to intentionally use touch, hearing, and smell to gather vital information about objects, people, and environments.
- **Sensory Feedback Interpretation:** Training the brain to decode environmental cues—such as the change in sound when entering a large room or the texture of a floor surface—to maintain orientation.
- **Orientation and Mobility Training:** Engaging in structured learning to move safely and efficiently, whether using a white cane, a guide dog, or mental mapping techniques.
- **Leveraging Assistive Technology:** Utilizing digital tools, screen readers, magnification software, and AI-powered apps to bridge the gap in information access.
- **Advanced Tactile Exploration:** Practicing the systematic touch of objects and surfaces. In the context of **Sculpting Potential**, this is vital for improving spatial perception and "visualizing" 3D forms.
- **Mastery of Daily Living Activities:** Developing practical routines for personal care, cooking, and workspace organization to ensure a self-sufficient lifestyle.
- **Building Socialization and Support Networks:** Actively participating in social events and support groups to share experiences, reduce isolation, and build a community of peers.

By integrating these strategies, the Sculpting Potential program ensures that the creative process in the studio translates into broader life skills, fostering a sense of "I can do it" that extends far beyond the clay and the kiln.

3.1 *The Educator's Role in Autonomy*

Your mission is to create a safe space where these strategies can be practiced. In the sculpting studio, this might mean:

1. **Encouraging tactile exploration** of the clay before starting a project.
2. **Organizing tools** consistently so the student can find them using sensory feedback.
3. **Facilitating social interaction** among participants to build that crucial support network.

3.2 *Tools for autonomy for VI learners*

- A precious Ally: The White Cane

A fundamental aid for moving alone safely. If used correctly, it allows you to intercept with the tip or the road:

- objects that have their base on the ground

- changes in the flooring and highlight differences in level

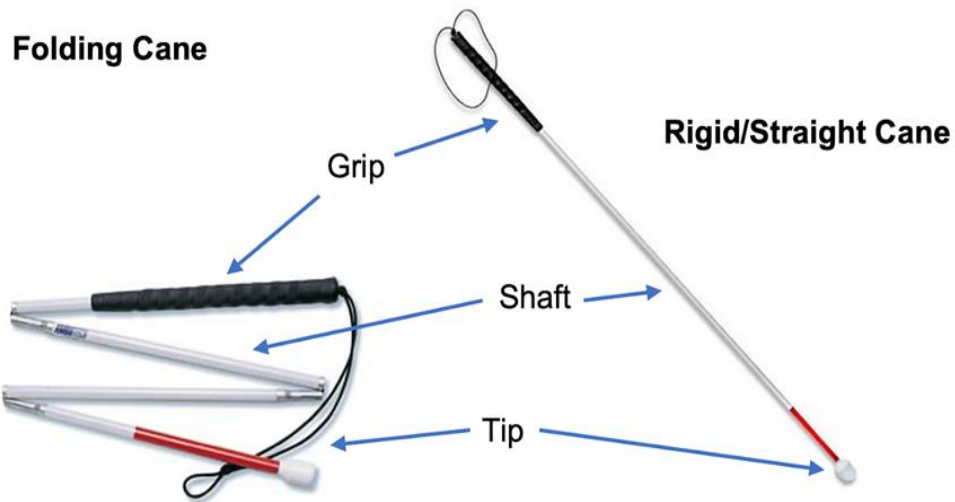


Image 2: White Cane



Image 3: People with visual impairment walking using white canes

- The Guide Dog:

A primary mobility aid for blind and low vision individuals

- Requires specialized training for both the dog and the handler
 - Most common breeds: Labrador Retriever, Golden Retriever, German Shepherd
- Represents a unique partnership built on trust and communication

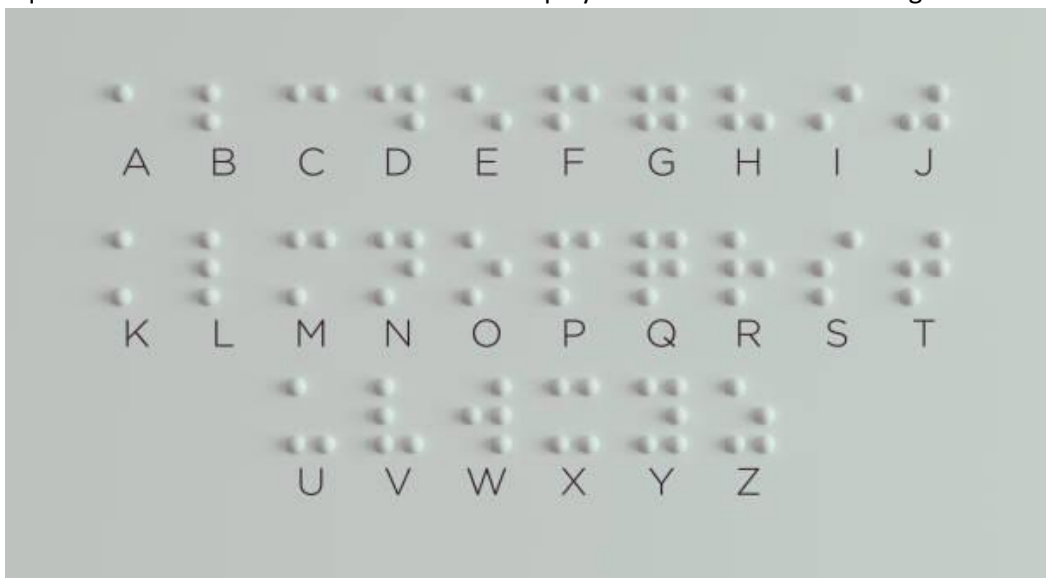
Important: Do not pet or distract a guide dog while working

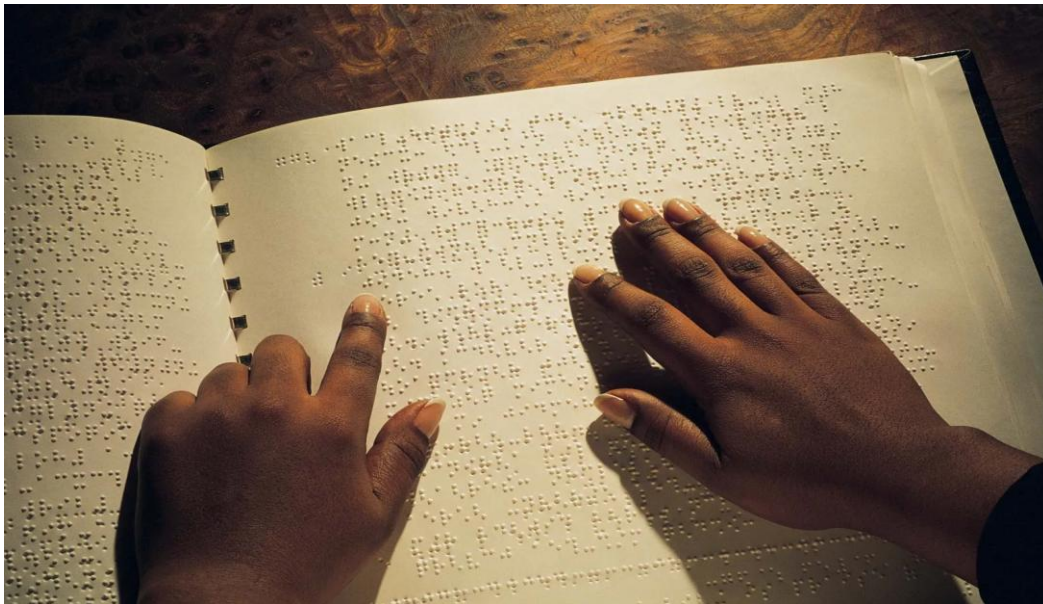


Image 4: Person with visual impairment holding a white cane along with a trained guide dog

- Braille

- Dots in relief read with the fingertips
- A reading and writing system invented in 1821 by Louis Braille
- Based on a 6-dot cell that can be combined into 63 different characters
- Used worldwide for alphabets, numbers, punctuation, music notation, and even mathematics
- Still essential today, even with modern technology, because it promotes literacy, independence, and equal access. Often combined with Braille displays and screen readers for digital access





Images 5 & 6: Braille alphabet and book with braille writing

- Assistive Technologies for Blind and Low Vision People

- **Screen readers:** Convert text on computers and smartphones into speech or Braille (e.g., JAWS, NVDA, VoiceOver, TalkBack)
- **Magnification software:** Enlarges text and images on screen for people with low vision (e.g., ZoomText)
- **Braille displays:** Refreshable devices that translate digital text into Braille in real time
- **Smartphone accessibility:** Built-in tools (voice commands, screen magnifiers, color contrast settings, object recognition apps)
- **Navigation tools:** GPS-based apps and devices designed for pedestrians with visual impairment (e.g., BlindSquare, Lazarillo)
- **Everyday technology:** Talking watches, tactile or large-print keyboards, smart home assistants (Alexa, Google Assistant, Siri)



Image 7: Assistive computers for people with visual impairment

3.3 Architectural barriers

In the context of the DEAP Project, understanding architectural barriers is essential because the physical environment can either facilitate or completely block the autonomy of a young person with visual impairment.

Architectural barriers are not just "obstacles"; they are design failures that prevent equal access. For someone with visual impairment, these barriers often relate to predictability, contrast, and tactile feedback.

"Architectural barriers are physical elements in the built environment that restrict the movement or participation of people with disabilities. For those with visual impairments (VI), these barriers often involve a lack of sensory information that would otherwise allow for safe and independent navigation".

Designing an "Inclusive Studio" (The DEAP Approach)

When we bring young people into a sculpting or arts environment, we must transform the space into an enabling environment. Here are the key strategies

Barrier Type	Inclusive Solution
Pathway Obstacles	Keep "high-traffic" zones completely clear. Never move furniture without informing the students.
Information Access	Use high-contrast tape (e.g., yellow on dark floors) to mark the edges of tables or steps.
Tool Organization	Use "Tactile Anchoring": always keep specific tools in the same place on a textured mat.
Hazard Awareness	Install "warning" textures near dangerous areas, like kilns or sharp-tool storage.

The "Cane Trail" Concept

For a youth worker, a simple way to assess architectural barriers is to walk through the space with your eyes closed, using a cane or your hands to feel the "trail." If you encounter an object at shoulder height before your feet or cane hit a baseboard, you have identified a significant architectural barrier.

Remember: A barrier-free environment reduces the "cognitive load" for the student. When they don't have to worry about bumping into a shelf, they can dedicate 100% of their energy to Sculpting Potential.

3.4 Sensorial Barriers

While architectural barriers deal with physical obstacles, sensorial barriers are more subtle. They involve the "information environment." For a person with visual impairment, a sensorial barrier occurs when the environment fails to provide the necessary non-visual cues (auditory, tactile, or high-contrast) needed to

understand and navigate a space. A sensorial barrier exists when the "language" of a building or a workspace is exclusively visual. In an inclusive arts program like DEAP, we must ensure that the environment speaks to the hands and the ears, not just the eyes.

Key Types of Sensorial Barriers

- **Low Contrast:** When objects (like a white clay tool on a white table) blend into the background. This makes it impossible for those with low vision to distinguish shapes or boundaries.
- **Inadequate Lighting:** Shadows, flickering lights, or excessive glare from windows can distort residual vision and cause "visual fatigue."
- **Acoustic Confusion:** Background noise (loud fans, music, or multiple people talking at once) creates a "sound fog." This masks the auditory clues—like the sound of a doorway or a colleague's voice—that a blind person uses for orientation.
- **The "Information Gap":** Signage, instructions, or labels that are printed in small fonts without tactile (Braille) or audio alternatives.
- **Olfactory Overload:** Strong chemical smells (like certain glazes or cleaners) can be disorienting, as smell is often used as a secondary landmark for identifying specific rooms.

Strategies for Sensorial Inclusion in the Studio

To support the Sculpting Potential program, we can replace these barriers with "sensory bridges":

Sensorial Barrier	Inclusive Solution
Visual Camouflage	Use Color Contrasting . Place dark clay on light-colored mats, or wrap tool handles in bright, neon tape.
Silent Environments	Use Audio Landmarks . A small water fountain or a clock with a subtle tick can help a student know where the "center" of the room is.
Uniform Textures	Apply Tactile Coding . Use different textures of sandpaper or grip-tape to identify different types of tools (e.g., "rough" for cutting tools, "smooth" for smoothing tools).
Glare/Shadows	Use Adjustable Task Lighting . Allow students to move a lamp to exactly where they need it to minimize shadows on their work.

4. Common Myths about Blindness and Low Vision

To effectively support young people with visual impairments (VI), we must first dismantle the stereotypes that often limit our expectations of their potential. Understanding the reality behind these myths is the first step toward true inclusion in the Sculpting Potential program.

The Myth of "Super-Senses"

- **The Myth:** People with VI are born with "highly developed" or "super" hearing and touch.
- **The Reality:** There is no biological "upgrade." Instead, people with VI train their brains to pay more attention to non-visual information. It is a learned skill, not a default gift.

The Myth of "Total Darkness"

- The Myth: Being blind means living in a world of "pitch black."
- The Reality: As we saw in the classification module, most people with VI have some level of residual vision (light, shadows, colors, or shapes). Total darkness is actually quite rare.

The Myth of Constant Dependency

- The Myth: Blind people are forced to depend on others and cannot go out or work alone.
- The Reality: With proper Orientation and Mobility (O&M) training and assistive tools (like white canes or GPS apps), individuals with VI can travel globally, live independently, and hold complex professional roles.

The Myth of the "Digital Gap"

- The Myth: People with VI cannot use smartphones, computers, or social media.
- The Reality: Through screen readers (like VoiceOver or TalkBack) and Braille displays, visually impaired individuals are often more tech-savvy than their sighted peers.

The Myth of Mandatory Braille

- The Myth: All blind people must be able to read Braille.
- The Reality: While Braille is a vital literacy tool, many people (especially those with low vision) use audiobooks, magnification, or digital text-to-speech instead.

The Myth of Physical Boundaries

- The Myth: Blind people like to touch faces to recognize people, or they don't mind being touched/guided without warning.
- The Reality: Just like anyone else, people with VI value their personal space and physical autonomy. You should always ask before touching someone or their assistive equipment.

The Myth of the "Genius" Guide Dog

- The Myth: Guide dogs "know where to go" automatically (e.g., "Take me to the pharmacy").
- The Reality: The human is the navigator; the dog is the "driver" that avoids obstacles. The person must know the route and give the dog commands.

5. Vademecum for Communicating with a Blind or Visually Impaired Person

5.1 *Professional Interaction: Communication and Etiquette*

Effective communication with individuals who have visual impairments (VI) relies on clarity, transparency, and a shift toward Person-First language. Below are the guidelines for building a successful "helping relationship" in a workshop or educational setting.

5.2 *The Approach: First Contact and Introductions*

A clear introduction sets the stage for a safe and comfortable interaction:

- Identify Yourself Immediately: Always introduce yourself when starting a conversation, especially if the person doesn't know you or your voice yet.
Example: "Hi, I'm Marco, the sculpture instructor. Nice to meet you!"
- Announce Your Departure: If you need to walk away or end a conversation, let the person know. This prevents them from the discomfort of speaking into empty space.
- Don't Overthink Language: Do not avoid common words like "see," "look," or "watch." These are part of everyday language, and blind people use them too (e.g., "I'll see you later").

5.3 Verbal Communication and Guidance

Precision is key when visual cues are unavailable.

- **Speak Directly and Normally:** Address the person, not their companion or guide dog. Speak at a normal volume; blindness does not automatically imply hearing loss.
- **Be Specific, Not Vague:** Avoid gestures like pointing or using phrases like "it's over there" or "use this."
Correct: "The clay wire is two steps to your left, near the edge of the table."
- **Name the Addressee:** In group settings, always say the person's name before asking a question to avoid confusion.
Example: "Carla, what do you think about the texture of this piece?"

5.4 Creating Empowerment through Language

How we provide feedback can significantly impact a young person's growth.

- **Strengths-Based Feedback:** Focus on what the student is achieving. Instead of "You missed this part," try "I noticed you've captured great detail on the left side; would you like to explore the right side now?"
- **Offering Choice and Responsibility:** Instead of making decisions for the student, offer options. This reinforces their autonomy.
Example: "Would you like to use the wire tool or the wooden spatula for this section?"

5.5 Respect, Discretion, and Boundaries

Respecting physical and personal boundaries is fundamental to dignity.

- **Respect the "Invisible Bubble":** Never move personal objects—such as a white cane, bag, or specialized tools—without permission. For a person with VI, these objects are extensions of their senses; moving them can cause disorientation.
- **Avoid the "Tragedy" Narrative:** Treat blindness as a characteristic, not a taboo or a tragedy. Avoid intrusive questions like "How did you lose your sight?" unless you have a close relationship and the context is appropriate.
- **Physical Contact:** Only use touch to guide if invited or if it is necessary for safety. Always ask first: "May I guide your hand to the tool?"

5.6 Quick Communication Checklist

Do	Don't
Use the person's name to get their attention.	Shout or speak to their companion instead of them.
Give "clock-face" directions (e.g., "The water is at 3 o'clock").	Use vague terms like "here" or "there."
Ask: "How can I best support you?"	Assume they need help with every task.
Inform them when you are leaving the room.	Slip away silently mid-conversation.

Notes:

- A blind person is autonomous and used to managing daily life. Offer attention that is discreet and respectful, without taking over tasks unless truly necessary.
- Build a healthy and natural relationship, based on equality and trust.
- Be concise and functional: your description should support movement or interaction, not replace personal perception.
- Be patient and respectful of their timing. Do not complete sentences for them or rush their movements.
- If help is refused, do not insist. Trust their competence.
- Visual impairment does not limit intelligence or independence. Adapt your communication, not your expectations.
- Do not be afraid of silence. If the person is exploring or touching an object, allow space for concentration. Wait for their feedback before adding details. Touch and hearing are their “eyes.”

6. Accompaniment Techniques, Principles and Best Practices

Accompaniment is a primary mobility system. It is a dual tonic/relational system providing information for both the person being guided and the guide. Techniques must be guided by:

- Reliability
- Discretion
- Confidentiality
- Empathy
- Safety
- Punctuality

These techniques are generally used with blind individuals.

6.1 *Identifying the Guide*

- The guide verbally invites the blind person to engage, keeping conversation active until contact is made.
- The blind person grasps the guide's arm using a bottle grip: thumb opposed to the fingers, above the elbow, arm at 90°. The position must be comfortable.
- Shoulders of guide and accompanying person should be parallel.
- Variations include the Hand on Shoulder method.
- The guide and accompanying person slightly overlap, occupying about the space of one and a half people.

6.2 *Starting and Stopping*

- Starting and stopping are automatic actions; verbalization is not required.
- Preferably, the guide uses the leg on the side of the hold to communicate forward motion.
- Movements not perceptible through touch are communicated verbally.

6.3 *Passing through Narrow Passages*

Short Narrow Passage (Plier Grip)

- The guide's movement communicates the passage to the blind person, who positions behind the guide.
- Once finished, the arm is brought forward to return to the original position.

Long Narrow Passage

- Blind person's hand slides from guide's elbow to wrist; other hand on the guide's shoulder.
- The guide takes shorter steps to prevent stepping on the blind person's feet.

6.4 *Passing through Doors*

Pushing a Door

- Blind person stands on the hinge side, opposite the handle.
- Guide extends arm, grabs handle, and pushes door.
- Blind person uses a free hand for protection and locates the handle to close the door behind them.

Pulling a Door

- Blind person stands on the hinge side, opposite the handle.
- Guide extends arm, grabs handle, and pulls door.
- Blind person protects face, locates handle along edge, and closes door behind.

6.5 *Stairs and Level Changes*

Going Up

- Guide signals staircase by stopping at the first step, ensuring frontal position.
- Step with leg on same side as guide arm, accentuating motion with arm.
- Check blind person's synchronization.
- At the last step, the guide takes a longer step and stops to indicate the staircase is finished.

Going Down

- Same technique as going up.
- Pay attention to emotional impact and synchronization.

6.6 *Pointing to Objects*

- Guide places hand on intended object and verbalizes.
- Blind person releases grip and slides hand along guide's arm to reach object.

6.7 *Toilet and Bathroom Behaviors*

- Guide verbalizes shape and position of toilet and fixtures.
- Blind person identifies toilet bowl with foot, flush button verbally indicated, and locates paper, soap, and towels.
- Guide waits outside to ensure independence.

7. Tactile Exploration and Mental Representation of the Image

7.1 *Introduction*

In the Sculpting Potential program, touch is not merely a substitute for sight; it is a primary language of discovery. While sight allows for a "glance" at the whole, touch requires a "journey" through parts to reconstruct the whole. This process is deeply emotional and cognitive.

7.2 *The Emotional Architecture of Tactile Art*

To support young artists, educators must understand the four emotional pillars of the tactile experience:

- **1. Trust: The Foundation of Contact** Unlike sight, which can be done from a distance, touch requires vulnerability and physical proximity. Contact with a stable material like clay provides a "sensory

anchor." For a student, the predictable resistance of the material offers a sense of security and control in an environment that may otherwise feel uncertain.

- **2. Surprise: The Joy of Emergence** In visual art, the result is often seen before it is finished. In tactile sculpting, shapes "reveal" themselves. There is a profound moment of discovery when a student's fingers identify a curve or a sharp edge they didn't realize they had created. This "haptic surprise" fuels curiosity and keeps the artist engaged in the creative flow.
- **3. Freedom: Expression without the "Visual Mirror"** Sighted artists often struggle with "visual aesthetic judgment"—the fear of how something *looks* compared to a social standard. Blind artists are free from this "mirror." This allows for a more authentic, raw expression where the value lies in the **intent** and the **feeling** of the form, rather than its visual "perfection."
- **4. Intimacy: The Dialogue with Matter** The relationship between the hands and the clay is exclusive. Without the distraction of external visual stimuli, the artist enters a state of deep intimacy with their work. This connection facilitates a "flow state" where the boundaries between the body and the artwork seem to blur.

7.3 Guidance for the Educator: Supporting the "Internal Eye"

As an educator, you are not just teaching how to mold clay; you are helping the student refine their visuospatial skills:

- **Encourage "Scanning":** Remind students to use both hands—one to act as a "fixed point" (reference) and the other to explore (mobile).
- **Narrate the Form:** Use descriptive language to help them categorize what they feel. *"I feel a sharp intersection here; how does that transition into the smooth base?"*
- **Validate the Internal Image:** Respect that the student's mental image may be different from your visual one. Their "beauty" is felt through proportion, rhythm, and texture.

7.4 The Role of Touch in Inclusive Art: Beyond the Visual

When sight is not the primary guide, the skin becomes the main interface between the inner self and the outer world. In inclusive arts education, we shift from "looking at art" to "feeling art," creating a unique tactile vocabulary that allows for a profound sensory translation.

Tactile Vocabulary and Body Memory

Through the repetitive motion of sculpting, participants develop **Body Memory** (also known as proprioceptive memory).

- **The Process:** The hands learn to "remember" the distance between points, the pressure needed to thin a wall of clay, and the specific texture of different tools.
- **The Result:** This muscle memory replaces the "visual image," allowing the student to navigate the creative process with a sense of mastery that lives in their fingers rather than their eyes.

The Three Pillars of Tactile Inclusion

- **I. Total Accessibility** Inclusive art removes the "glass wall" of traditional museums and galleries. By centering the curriculum on touch, we dismantle the barrier that defines art as something purely visual. This ensures that a young person with visual impairment is not just a "spectator" of art, but a **protagonist** and creator.
- **II. Therapeutic Empowerment** The act of manipulation is inherently grounding.
 - **Anxiety Relief:** The physical resistance of clay and the rhythmic nature of hand-building can lower cortisol levels and provide a channel for emotional release.

- **Self-Confidence:** Successfully translating an idea into a physical, 3D object provides immediate "proof of ability," significantly boosting the self-esteem of young people who may face daily challenges to their autonomy.
- **III. Sensory Translation** This is the core "magic" of the **Sculpting Potential** program. It involves taking visual concepts (like perspective, shadow, or symmetry) and translating them into tactile realities:
 - **Perspective** becomes **Depth and Volume**.
 - **Color Contrast** becomes **Textural Contrast** (rough vs. smooth).
 - **Symmetry** becomes **Bilateral Balance** (using two hands to ensure identical shapes)

7.5 Educator's Strategy: Building the "Haptic Bridge"

To facilitate this sensory translation, you can use these techniques:

- **Material Diversity:** Provide a range of "sensory stimuli"—cold metal tools, warm wooden spatulas, wet clay, and dry sponges. Each material adds a "word" to the student's tactile vocabulary.
- **The "Two-Handed" Approach:** Encourage students to always use one hand as a "fixed reference" (the anchor) while the other explores the details. This is essential for building a coherent mental map of the piece.

Final Thought: In inclusive art, the finished object is only half of the achievement. The other half is the mental transformation of the artist, who learns that their hands are capable of "seeing" and "shaping" reality in ways a sighted person might never imagine.

7.6 From the image to the Form:

Low vision: Mental images come from residual vision, light memories, or contrast perception. Participants use a hybrid visual-tactile approach, high-contrast colors, and adjusted working distances while maintaining visual-spatial references.

Acquired blindness: Past visual memories are translated into tactile information. The process involves reconversion from visual to haptic code, attention to proportions and spatial relations, and integration of visual memory with tactile perception.

Congenital blindness: Mental images are fully haptic, built from previous tactile experiences, spatial body mappings, and analogies with known objects. Perception is sequential, topological, and dynamic, evolving during exploration.

8. Case studies

Case Study 3: CARE EU Project	
Full Name	Blended mobility of learners C2
Year initiated/ended	October 2024
Provider	Partnership Care Erasmus project, This case study summarizes the CARE - C2 Sardegna training mobility, an initiative focused on inclusive artistic creation through clay manipulation for visually impaired (VI) individuals.

Target Group	VI Learners youth, youth workers, educators, VI experts, Ceramic Experts.
Goal of the case study (what was the intended goal? Was it achieved? If not, why?)	To foster social inclusion and artistic expression for visually impaired participants by developing an "International Artcraft." The program aimed to integrate non-formal learning with tactile workshops, enabling participants to move from creative ideation to the physical realization of a ceramic work (hands-on manipulation, glazing, and coloring).
Description (in a clear step by step approach)	The structured rotation between Group A and Group B ensured that all 77 participants received both theoretical/creative stimulation and practical workshop time, culminating in the delivery of certificates and a final evaluation. In specific: Phase 1: Integration & Onboarding (Sunday): Initial ice-breaking and non-formal activities at Hotel Califfo to build trust among the diverse groups. Phase 2: Ideation & Tactile Initiation (Monday): While one group engaged in "Creative Thinking" sessions, the other began "Hands-on" clay manipulation, focusing on the sensory experience of the material. Phase 3: Creation & Skill Development (Tuesday): Deepening the work. Participants utilized their senses (workshop "Use Your Senses") to translate abstract ideas into physical shapes with the support of potters and VI experts. Phase 4: Sensory Inspiration (Wednesday): A field visit to the "Sound Garden" (Pinuccio Sciola Museum) provided external sensory stimuli, linking the auditory experience of stone/sculpture to their own clay work. Phase 5: Refinement & Finishing (Thursday): Completion of the "International Artcraft" through glazing and coloring. A dedicated feedback session ("Touch and Feel Feedback") allowed for a tactile review of the progress. Phase 6: Professional Exchange & Evaluation (Friday - Saturday): Sharing best practices between international experts on improving tactile experiences, followed by a final evaluation and reflection on the learning journey.
Impact and validation and lessons learned -For successful cases: what was the impact, how it was validated) -For challenges what obstacles prevented success, what went wrong etc	Impact: The program successfully created a "bridge" between different European organizations. Participants reported increased confidence in their artistic abilities and improved interpersonal skills through the mixed-group dynamics. Validation: Validation was achieved through: • The Final Product: Completion of the glazed ceramic artcrafts. • Certification: Formal recognition of the skills acquired. • Peer-to-Peer Learning: The "Sharing of Best Practices" sessions confirmed that the methodologies used by Ierfop, Ardmore, and others were effectively transferred to the trainers.
Access details (website, contact info) and related resources developed	https://youtu.be/HMILPXfwpg0

(What training manuals, guidelines, technical fact sheets, posters, pictures, video and audio documents, and/or Web sites have been developed?)

Case Study 4: Museum Sensory Tour

Full Name	The Museum Sensory Tour allows visitors to experience the artworks through touch: it is a journey into the world of art
Year initiated/ended	Ongoing (Aligned with the 2006 UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and ICOM "Key Concepts of Museology").
Provider	CITISLAB (Laboratory for Accessible and Multisensory Solutions).
Target Group	* Persons with visual impairments (blind and partially sighted). Persons with hearing or cognitive disabilities. General public ("Design for All") seeking a multisensory cultural experience.
Goal of the case study (what was the intended goal? Was it achieved? If not, why?)	Intended Goal: To transform the museum from a place of "Do Not Touch" into a space of "Forbidden Not to Touch." The goal is to guarantee the right to culture by creating multisensory itineraries (visual-tactile-auditory) that connect the museum to its urban and landscape context. Achievement: Yes. The objective is achieved by integrating physical tactile supports with interactive technologies, allowing for a deep "aesthetic understanding" even in the absence of sight.
Description (in a clear step by step approach)	Context Analysis: Identifying the scenario—either a "Connection Itinerary" between multiple institutions in a town or a "Single Museum Itinerary." Reception & Orientation: Installation of sustainable micro-architectures (Integrated Landscape) powered by solar panels. These serve as info-points where visitors can charge devices and explore a Tactile Map of the entire itinerary.

	Museum Entry: Placement of a Tactile Totem or Tactile Table at the entrance, featuring a 3D model of the building and a floor plan to help the user build a "mental map" of the spaces. Itinerary Development: Strategic placement of specific tools based on the importance of the artworks: Tactile Tables/Panels: For detailed exploration of specific masterpieces. Tactile Plaques: For quick orientation and essential information. Technological Integration: Use of an App supported by Beacons or NFC technology to provide precise audio descriptions that guide the hands during tactile exploration. Contextual Dialogue: Designing the museum path to maintain a dialogue with the outside world (landscapes and views), ensuring the museum is not an "impenetrable container" but part of the environment
Impact and validation and lessons learned	Impact: The democratization of art. The visitor is no longer a passive subject but an autonomous explorer capable of navigating a "controlled space." It creates a bridge between physical perception and aesthetic appreciation. Validation: Validated through the use of clear graphics and texts (Easy-to-read) and the successful implementation of the "Tactile Tables" (e.g., at the Diocesan Museum of Brescia), which allow for diverse levels of information depth (via QR Codes or NFC).
Impact and validation and lessons learned -For successful cases: what was the impact, how it was validated) -For challenges what obstacles prevented success, what went wrong etc	Success Factors: Multisensoriality (touch + audio + sight) enhances learning for everyone, not just those with disabilities. Precise audio descriptions are essential to "educate the touch" and provide context to what is being felt. Challenges: The main obstacle is the traditional museum culture of "security and conservation" which often views touching as a risk. The lesson learned is that cultural accessibility is a human right, and with correct calibration (multisensory tools), conservation and inclusion can coexist.
Access details (website, contact info) and related resources developed (What training manuals, guidelines, technical fact sheets, posters, pictures, video and audio documents, and/or Web	https://citislab.it/itinerari/itinerari-museali/

sites have been developed?)

9. Non-formal Educational Activities:

Activity 3: Facial Expressions in Clay	
Aim	To allow participants to "visualize" an emotion by sculpting its physical manifestation. It transforms an abstract feeling (like joy or sadness) into a concrete tactile map of muscles, lines, and shapes. To strengthen the participant's proprioception (awareness of their own body). Mapping the distance between the eyes, the curve of the lips, or the height of the cheekbones helps in building a more accurate mental and physical self-image. To teach participants how to "read" an emotion with their fingertips. By creating and then sharing their clay faces with peers, participants practice communicating their internal state to the world without using words or sight.
Learning Objectives	● Tactile Accuracy: The objective of translating haptic perception into physical form was fully achieved. By reproducing their partner's facial expressions "in the smallest detail," students demonstrated a high level of tactile memory and the ability to convert a 3D physical sensation into a clay model.
Trainee Profile	The trainees are not only artistic facilitators but also inclusion mediators . Their profile required a specific set of skills to manage the safety, mobility, and creative autonomy.
No of participants	15 the maximum number of participants required for this activity
Duration	Time required to complete the activity is 2 hrs
Required materials	Natural Clay (Air-dry or traditional): Chosen for its malleability and the specific sensory feedback it provides (coolness, resistance, and texture). Wooden Modeling Tools: Spatulas, needles, and scrapers to allow participants to create different textures (rough vs. smooth) to represent their emotions. Tactile Surfaces/Boards: Wooden or plastic boards to provide a stable working area and a spatial "frame" for the creation. Water and Sponges: Used to manipulate the consistency of the clay, teaching participants how "softness" or "hardness" changes the sensory experience.
Preparation	The participants were divided into pairs (the same pairs that will continue to collaborate in subsequent tasks). In turns, one student acted as the "tactile observer" while the other performed various expressions. Through a careful tactile

	monitoring of their partner's face, the students were able to decipher and understand different facial expressions. The exploration was detailed and focused: they touched the cheekbones to feel the lift of a smile, the forehead to detect the furrowing of surprise, the jaw, the nose, and the area around the eyes. By physically exploring these features, they were able to identify funny faces, puffed-out cheeks, or raised eyebrows, translating physical contact into emotional understanding.
Implementation	The activity involving ceramics was designed as a direct continuation of the "Tactile Mirror". After the students had explored the faces of their partners through touch, they were asked to translate that tactile information into physical form using clay. Each participant was tasked with reproducing their partner's facial expressions in the smallest detail. Using the haptic memory of the cheekbones, forehead, and jawline they had just monitored, they sculpted the smiles, grimaces, and expressions they had "felt." This phase was crucial for bridging the gap between tactile perception and manual dexterity, turning a social connection into a tangible artistic result.
Safety measures	Before any tools were handled, a comprehensive "spatial briefing" took place. The trainers ensured that every participant had a clear mental map of the laboratory. The table was organized following the principles of order and predictability, which are essential for blind or visually impaired artisans: • Tactile Boundaries: Each participant's workspace on the table was clearly defined, allowing them to know exactly where their "safe zone" ended and the shared space began. • Consistent Layout: Materials and water containers were placed in consistent positions (e.g., "water bowl at 2 o'clock") so that participants could reach for them instinctively without the risk of knocking them over.
Debriefing	Describe the debriefing process (fe: ask for opinions/feedback from the participants) The requirement to reproduce expressions "in the smallest detail" challenges the participants to refine their fine motor skills and spatial awareness, proving that tactile memory can be incredibly precise.
Adaptations and variations	none

Activity 4 - The Tactile Soul of Nature	
Aim	The primary aim is to teach participants how to translate natural elements (the "soul" of trees, stones, water, or earth) into three-dimensional clay forms. For a visually

	impaired person, nature is experienced through wind, temperature, and texture; this activity aims to "solidify" those fleeting sensations into a permanent, tactile object. Clay is "earth" in its most malleable form. The goal is to create an empathetic connection between the artist and the raw material. By exploring the "soul" of nature, participants are encouraged to express their own inner feelings—their own soul—through the manipulation of the earth.
Learning Objectives	To explore the morphological diversity of the garden and translate it into ceramic forms through the sense of touch.
Trainee Profile	The trainees are not only artistic facilitators but also inclusion mediators . Their profile required a specific set of skills to manage the safety, mobility, and creative autonomy
No of participants	15 is the maximum number of participants required for this activity
Duration	2 hours is the time required to complete the activity.
Required materials	Organic Materials (Leaves, Twigs, Flowers): Collected during the garden exploration, these items serve as the primary "stamps" for the clay. Their diverse morphological features (veins, thorns, soft petals) provide the raw sensory data that participants translate into their artwork. Natural Clay (Air-dry or Traditional): This was chosen as the core medium due to its high malleability and the specific sensory feedback it provides. The natural coolness, the resistance felt when kneading, and the changing texture as it dries offer a continuous feedback loop for the artist's hands. Wooden Modeling Tools: Spatulas, needles, and scrapers were provided to allow participants to experiment with contrast. These tools enable the creation of rough vs. smooth surfaces, helping participants represent complex emotions or professional concepts (like their logos) through texture rather than color. Tactile Surfaces/Boards: Each participant worked on a stable wooden or plastic board. This served as a spatial "frame," helping those with visual impairments define their work boundaries and maintain a consistent orientation of their piece. Water and Sponges: These were used to manipulate the clay's consistency. This taught participants how "softness" or "hardness" changes the sensory experience and the clay's "memory," allowing for more refined detail in their impressions.
Preparation	Phase 1: The Sensory Journey (Site Exploration) - Participants are guided to touch various textures: the rough bark of a tree trunk, the silkiness of a petal, and the rigidity of a leaf. - Using aromatic plants like rosemary and lavender to navigate the space and select materials based not just on shape, but on the memories evoked by their scent. - Participants choose elements with strong material contrasts (e.g., pinecones, knotty branches, leaves with prominent veins).

Implementation	Phase 2: Dialogue with the Material (Workshop) Clay is the ideal medium because it possesses an immediate "tactile memory." • Before using the natural elements, participants knead the clay to bring it to body temperature, feeling its plasticity. • Instead of using a rolling pin, participants are encouraged to flatten the clay using the palms of their hands. This allows them to feel any air bubbles and ensure an even thickness of the earth through direct contact. Phase 3: The Impression and Recognizability In this phase, the participant "sees" the natural element through the imprint it leaves behind. • The participant explores the surface of the clay slab with their fingers and decides where to "embed" their found natural objects. • The natural element is pressed into the clay. This is a magical moment: upon removing the leaf or branch, the finger can slide into the groove left behind, perceiving a "negative copy" of the external world. Phase 4: Sensory Refinement • Rather than cutting perfect geometric shapes, participants are invited to refine the edges with damp fingers, creating a tactile continuity between the object and the person touching it.
Safety measures	• Preliminary Site Inspection: A comprehensive site survey was conducted by the Head of the Institute prior to the activity. This was done to ensure the garden was fully accessible, identifying and removing any potential obstacles to guarantee a safe path for all participants. • Verbal and Physical Support: Throughout the activities, students received constant verbal and physical support. Tutors provided descriptive guidance of the surroundings and utilized "hand-over-hand" or "hand-under-hand" techniques to assist with tactile exploration and movement when necessary
Debriefing	"I never realized how different two leaves could feel. Some were as soft as velvet, while others felt like sandpaper or cold wax. It made the walk feel like I was reading a story with my hands rather than just my eyes."
Adaptations and variations	none

Module 3: Harmony in Motion: Dance Program for Individuals with Visual Impairments

1. Introduction

1.1 *Purpose of the Module*

This module explores visual impairment within the context of dance, with the aim of promoting inclusive, accessible, and meaningful movement experiences for all participants. It is designed to provide both theoretical understanding and practical guidance for working with individuals who are blind or have low vision.

The main purpose of the module is to raise awareness of how visual impairment influences perception, movement, and learning, while also highlighting the creative potential that emerges when dance is approached through a multisensory perspective. Rather than viewing visual impairment as a limitation, the module encourages a shift in perspective—seeing it as an opportunity to develop alternative teaching methods, richer sensory engagement, and more inclusive practices.

This module also aims to support instructors, educators, and facilitators in building the confidence and skills needed to:

- Create safe and accessible dance environments
- Adapt teaching methods to diverse perceptual experiences
- Communicate clearly and effectively
- Encourage autonomy, creativity, and self-expression

Ultimately, the goal is to foster an approach to dance that is inclusive, respectful, and empowering, where every individual can participate fully and develop their own relationship with movement.

1.2 *Learning Objectives*

By the end of this module, learners will be able to:

- 1. Understand visual impairment**
Differentiate low vision and blindness; recognize key factors like visual acuity, field, and contrast.
- 2. Promote autonomy and assistive tools**
Apply sensory, mobility, and daily-life strategies; identify tools such as white cane, guide dog, braille, and digital tech.
- 3. Practice respectful communication**
Use inclusive language, descriptive guidance, and respect personal space and preferences.
- 4. Apply dance principles**
Ensure safety, adapt movements to individual needs, and support creative expression.
- 5. Foster inclusion and empowerment**
Recognize each dancer's unique perception and encourage participation and personal growth.

2. Key Concepts of Visual Impairments

2.1 Understanding and empowering individuals with Visual Impairment: Vision Rehabilitation, orientation and mobility, communication tips

Visual impairment encompasses a broad spectrum of conditions affecting a person's ability to see. It is not defined only by visual acuity, but also by other important aspects, such as:

- Visual field
- Light sensitivity
- Contrast perception

Because of this complexity, people with the same diagnosis may experience vision very differently in everyday life. Their ability to function in daily situations can vary significantly, which highlights the need for a personalized, person-centered approach. A key distinction exists between blindness and low vision, which are not synonymous:

- Blindness refers to a total or near-total loss of vision; a person may perceive light or shadows but cannot distinguish shapes
- Low vision refers to partial sight, where some residual vision remains, but can manifest in many different ways

In the European context, including the Czech Republic, Poland, Sweden, Italy, and Cyprus, definitions are generally aligned with World Health Organization (WHO) standards. Legal blindness is typically defined as:

- Visual acuity of 1/20 or worse, or
- A visual field of less than 10 degrees

Low vision is usually categorized into:

- Moderate low vision
- Severe low vision

Across Europe, visual impairment affects a significant and growing share of the population, particularly due to ageing. Tens of millions of people live with some form of visual impairment, including several million who are severely visually impaired or blind. In all participating countries, there is a shared emphasis on combining:

- Healthcare services
- Social support
- Rehabilitation and assistive services

The aim is to promote independence, inclusion, and quality of life. Overall, visual impairment is not a uniform condition but a highly individual experience, requiring flexible and tailored support.

2.2 Types of Visual Impairment

Visual impairment can take different forms depending on the underlying condition, and the way a person sees the world may vary significantly. Among the most common types are:

- Loss of central vision, often caused by maculopathy, which affects the ability to see fine details such as reading or recognizing faces

- Reduced peripheral vision (“tunnel vision”), typically linked to conditions like glaucoma or retinitis pigmentosa, limiting awareness of the surroundings
- Blurred or patchy vision (multiple scotomas), commonly associated with diabetic retinopathy, where parts of the visual field may be unclear or missing

Beyond these well-known categories, visual impairment can also involve additional difficulties that may occur independently or in combination, including:

- Reduced contrast sensitivity
- Impaired color perception
- Photosensitivity and glare

Understanding these different forms of visual impairment is an important starting point, but it is not sufficient on its own. The key is to focus on the person rather than only the condition. Each individual’s experience is unique, and even people with the same diagnosis may function very differently in everyday life. For this reason, any approach should be personalized and responsive to individual needs. In practice, this means taking the time to:

- Talk with the person about their needs, preferences, and challenges
- Observe how they use their vision in real-life situations
- Adapt teaching methods or environments to match their specific abilities

A tailored approach ensures that support is not only effective, but also respectful, inclusive, and meaningful for each individual.

3. Strategies for Autonomy and Independence

Supporting autonomy means enabling people with visual impairment to navigate daily life with confidence, dignity, and independence. This involves developing practical skills, using alternative sensory strategies, and accessing appropriate tools and support systems.

A key part of this process is learning to rely on vicarious senses—particularly touch, hearing, and smell—to explore and understand the environment. Individuals gradually learn to interpret sensory feedback, such as sounds, textures, or spatial cues, as meaningful sources of information. Through tactile exploration, they can build mental maps of objects and spaces, while repeated practice of daily activities—like organizing, cooking, or cleaning—strengthens independence and routine.

Mobility and orientation are also essential components. With proper orientation and mobility training, individuals can move safely and confidently in different environments. This is often supported by assistive technologies, as well as by social networks and peer support, which provide encouragement, shared experience, and practical advice. Key strategies that support autonomy include:

- Using alternative senses (touch, hearing, smell)
- Learning to interpret sensory information
- Practicing daily life skills
- Orientation and mobility training
- Using assistive technologies
- Engaging in social and peer support networks

One of the most important tools for independent mobility is the white cane, which serves both practical and social functions. It helps users detect obstacles, changes in terrain, and navigate safely. At the same time, it acts as a globally recognized symbol of visual impairment, signaling to others the need for awareness and respect. Its design is also meaningful:

- White cane with red lower section → indicates visual impairment
- Red-and-white striped cane → used by people who are deafblind

Another key support is the guide dog, a highly trained partner that enhances both mobility and confidence. Guide dogs help individuals move safely through complex environments, but they do not make decisions independently—they follow the handler's commands. This relationship is built on trust, communication, and long-term training. Commonly used breeds include:

- Labrador Retrievers
- Golden Retrievers
- German Shepherds

It is important to remember that guide dogs should not be distracted while working, as this can compromise the safety of their handler.

Access to information is equally important for autonomy. Braille is a tactile reading and writing system based on combinations of six raised dots, allowing people who are blind or have low vision to read and write independently. It is a universal system that can represent letters, numbers, and symbols, and can be accessed through:

- Embossed paper
- Braille typewriters or slate and stylus
- Electronic Braille displays

Braille plays a crucial role in education, communication, and everyday independence.

In addition, modern assistive technologies significantly expand possibilities for independence. These include:

- Smartphones with built-in accessibility features such as screen readers (e.g., VoiceOver, TalkBack)
- OCR applications that read printed text aloud using a camera (e.g., Seeing AI)
- Remote assistance apps that connect users with sighted volunteers (e.g., Be My Eyes)
- GPS and navigation tools with voice guidance for orientation
- Smart assistants (e.g., Alexa, Siri) that support daily tasks and access to information

Together, these strategies and tools create a comprehensive support system that empowers individuals with visual impairment to live independently, actively, and with confidence.

4. Architectural and Sensory Barriers

4.1 *When Autonomy Meets Barriers*

Assistive tools and technologies are essential for supporting independence, but they are not enough if the environment itself is not accessible. Even the most advanced solutions cannot ensure autonomy when physical and sensory barriers remain in place. Accessibility is therefore not just about removing obvious

obstacles like steps—it is about creating spaces that are truly usable for everyone, including people with different visual abilities. This requires a more comprehensive and thoughtful approach, which includes:

- Designing environments that are easy to navigate and orient in
- Ensuring consistent and well-planned lighting
- Providing tactile cues and clear acoustic signals
- Offering information in accessible formats, such as Braille, audio, large print, or digital versions

When these elements are combined, they create environments that support independence, safety, and equal access in everyday life.

4.2 Architectural Barriers

Architectural barriers are obstacles in the built environment that limit mobility, orientation, and access for people with visual impairments. These barriers can make everyday movement more difficult and, in some cases, unsafe, especially when spaces are not designed with accessibility in mind. Common examples include:

- **Stairs without tactile indicators**, making it harder to detect level changes
- **Slippery ramps or uneven surfaces**, which increase the risk of accidents
- **Narrow doorways and corridors**, restricting safe and comfortable passage
- **Pedestrian bollards or poles placed without clear guidance**, creating unexpected obstacles in walking paths

Addressing these barriers is essential for creating environments that are safe, navigable, and inclusive for all users.

4.3 Sensory Barriers

Sensory barriers are environmental challenges that limit perception, orientation, and safe navigation for people with visual impairments. Unlike physical obstacles, these barriers affect how individuals interpret and understand their surroundings, often making movement more difficult or uncertain. Common examples include:

- **Lack of tactile ground indicators**, particularly near stairs, crossings, or other hazards
- **Absence of acoustic signals** at traffic lights or pedestrian crossings
- **Poor visual contrast** on tactile paths, stairs, or doorways, making them harder to detect
- **Inadequate lighting**, whether too dim, uneven, or poorly positioned
- **Visual signage that is too small, poorly lit, or incorrectly placed**, reducing readability and clarity

Reducing these barriers is essential for ensuring that environments are clear, predictable, and accessible, allowing people with visual impairments to move with greater confidence and independence.

4.4 Small Changes = Big Impact for Everyone

Designing for accessibility goes beyond simply following rules or technical standards—it is about creating environments that everyone can use safely, independently, and with confidence. A thoughtful, inclusive approach considers how different people move through and experience a space. Often, small and practical adjustments can make a significant difference, especially for people with visual impairments. These may include:

- Improving lighting conditions
- Adding tactile or acoustic cues
- Ensuring clear contrast on stairs, doorways, and pathways
- Widening routes to support easier navigation

Importantly, these improvements do not benefit only people with disabilities. They also support a much wider range of users, including older adults, parents with strollers, or individuals carrying heavy items. By thinking inclusively, we create spaces that are clearer, safer, and more welcoming for everyone.

5. Common Stereotypes

People with visual impairments are often misunderstood due to stereotypes that oversimplify or misrepresent their experiences. Some common misconceptions include:

- **“They live in the dark.”** Many individuals with low vision or partial sight navigate the world actively and independently.
- **“They all use Braille.”** Braille is just one of many tools, and not all visually impaired people use it.
- **“They have super senses.”** Heightened senses are not automatic; skills develop through training and experience.
- **“They always need help.”** Many can perform daily tasks independently with the right tools and adaptations.
- **“They can’t enjoy art, dance, or visual experiences.”** Creative and cultural activities can be fully accessible and enriching.
- **“They’re all the same.”** Each person’s abilities, preferences, and experiences are unique.

Challenging these stereotypes helps us see individuals, not labels, and foster more inclusive attitudes and environments.

6. Respectful Communication with a Visually Impaired Person

Respectful communication with a person who is blind or has low vision is based on clarity, autonomy, and natural interaction. The most important principle is to treat the person as an equal—focusing on the individual, not the impairment.

In everyday communication, it is essential to speak directly to the person, not to a companion. Introducing yourself helps establish orientation, as your voice becomes your identity, and in group situations it is helpful to clearly indicate who you are addressing. At the same time, support should always be offered—not imposed. It is best to ask before helping, for example by politely offering assistance and respecting the person’s choice to accept or decline it.

When physical guidance is needed, the correct approach is to offer your arm rather than pulling or pushing, allowing the person to decide how they want to be guided. Communication should also be clear and descriptive—instead of vague expressions like “over there,” it is more helpful to give precise directions such as distance, position, or orientation. Another important habit is to announce when you are leaving a conversation, so the person is not left speaking to an empty space.

Respect also includes how we use language and interact more broadly. It is appropriate to use natural, everyday expressions like “see you later,” and there is no need to simplify speech or raise your voice. At the same time, it is important to respect personal space and assistive aids—never touch or move a white cane, guide dog, or other equipment without permission.

Underlying all of these practices is a simple but essential principle: always put the person first. People with visual impairments have their own skills, preferences, and independence. This means:

- Do not assume needs or abilities
- Ask before acting, rather than taking control
- Respect their pace, choices, and personal space
- Interact naturally, without pity or overcompensation

Ultimately, support should be understood as being present and available when needed, not replacing the person's actions.

7. Accompaniment Techniques for People with Visual Impairment

7.1 Principles & Best Practice

Accompaniment is a primary mobility technique that supports both the guide and the person being guided. It relies on mutual coordination and trust, and should always be carried out with reliability, discretion, empathy, safety, clarity, and punctuality.

It is important to ask which side the person prefers, as this may depend on residual vision or hearing. For the guide, the side is usually flexible, but may be influenced by environmental factors such as obstacles, doors, or narrow spaces.

7.2 Identifying the Guide

The interaction begins with clear communication. The guide should verbally invite the person to approach, allowing them to orient toward the voice. The person then uses a protective hand position to locate a neutral point (typically the guide's lower torso) and safely find the guide's arm.

7.3 Basic grip – 'Pinch/Bottle Grip'

The standard guiding technique involves the person gently holding the guide's arm just above the elbow, with the thumb on one side and fingers on the other. This grip:

- Maintains a safe position (about half a step behind the guide)
- Enables clear non-verbal communication through body movement
- Keeps natural alignment of the body and shoulders
- Allows both individuals to move efficiently in shared space

Variations of the grip (e.g., holding the hand or shoulder) may be used depending on the situation.

7.4 Starting and Stopping

Movement is usually non-verbal and intuitive. The guide initiates walking with the leg on the guiding side, setting the rhythm.

- Turning ($\pm 90^\circ$) is indicated by a natural rotation of the guide's body
- Reversing direction ($\pm 180^\circ$) is typically communicated verbally and performed as two clear turns

7.5 *Narrow Passages*

When space is limited, the guiding position must adapt:

- Short technique: the guide moves their arm behind their back, and the person follows in a single-file position
- Long technique: the person slides their hand toward the guide's wrist and places the other hand on the guide's shoulder, while the guide shortens their steps

After passing through, the normal position is resumed.

7.6 *Doors*

Door navigation requires clear positioning and coordination:

- Push doors: the person stands on the hinge side while the guide pushes; the person follows the edge of the door and locates the handle
- Pull doors: the guide pulls the door, and the person waits briefly, then follows the edge to the handle and closes it if needed

In both cases, the free hand is used for orientation and protection.

7.7 *Stairs*

Stairs can be sensitive situations, so the guide should move with confidence and fluidity.

- Going up: the guide pauses at the first step, then steps forward clearly; at the top, a longer pause signals the end
- Going down: synchronized, steady movement is essential to maintain balance and reduce stress

7.8 *Toilet Guidance*

When assisting in unfamiliar spaces, clear and concise description is key. The guide should:

- Describe the layout and positions of fixtures
- Help locate the toilet (e.g., with the foot)
- Indicate essential elements such as flush, toilet paper, soap, and towels

The person should have time to independently identify all elements before being left alone.

7.9 *General Approach*

A person with visual impairment is typically autonomous and experienced in daily life. The role of support is not to take over, but to assist when needed and in a respectful way. This means:

- Building a relationship based on equality and trust
- Keeping communication clear, concise, and functional
- Being patient and respecting the person's pace
- Not insisting if help is refused
- Adapting communication, not expectations

Silence is also part of respectful interaction. When a person is exploring through touch or listening, it is important to allow space for concentration and wait for their feedback.

8. Dance in the Context of Visual Impairment

8.1 *Introduction*

Dance can be understood as a universal language of the body and emotions, one that is fully accessible to individuals with visual impairments. It offers a powerful way to express oneself, connect with others, and

engage with culture beyond visual perception. People with visual impairments have the same right to physical self-expression, an active and healthy lifestyle, and participation in cultural activities as anyone else. Dance, in this context, becomes not only an artistic activity, but also a means of inclusion, empowerment, and personal development.

This section therefore focuses on outlining the key principles, objectives, and pedagogical approaches for teaching dance to individuals with visual impairments, with an emphasis on accessibility, creativity, and individual experience.

8.2 *Dance as a Therapeutic and Developmental Tool*

Dance for people with visual impairments is based on a multisensory experience, where music, rhythm, movement, and touch together support orientation and body awareness. It also creates a space for connection, expression, and personal growth.

- Multisensory stimulation: combining sound, movement, and touch to replace visual input
- Social interaction: encouraging communication, cooperation, and shared experiences
- Psychological benefits: building self-confidence, courage, and joy
- Expressive movement: a creative, non-competitive form of activity that supports individual exploration

Overall, dance offers an inclusive and empowering environment, where each person can engage in movement in their own way.

8.3 *Visual Impairment and its Impact on Movement*

Visual impairment has a significant impact on movement, particularly in activities such as dance, where orientation, coordination, and balance are essential. Vision normally plays a key role in understanding space and guiding movement, so its absence or reduction can influence how individuals navigate and express themselves physically. For people with visual impairments, movement may initially involve uncertainty, reduced confidence, or limited initiative, especially in unfamiliar environments. However, these challenges can be addressed through the use of compensatory strategies, which support safe and confident participation.

- Role of vision: important for spatial awareness, coordination, and balance
- Impact of vision loss: may reduce confidence and limit spontaneous movement
- Compensatory strategies: using auditory, tactile, and proprioceptive cues to support orientation and expression

With the right support and approach, movement can become confident, expressive, and fully accessible.

8.4 *Objectives of Dance Education for Visually Impaired*

Movement can be a powerful tool for empowerment, supporting both physical and personal development in a holistic way. Through regular practice, individuals can strengthen their bodies, build confidence, and express themselves more freely. Key outcomes include:

- Physical health: improving fitness, flexibility, and overall well-being
- Posture and body awareness: enhancing alignment, balance, and proprioception

- Muscle balance: strengthening underused muscles and supporting functional movement
- Spatial orientation and mobility: increasing confidence in independent navigation
- Coordination: developing rhythm, timing, and fluid movement
- Creativity and expression: enabling emotional expression and imagination
- Personal growth: fostering self-confidence, autonomy, and social interaction

Overall, movement supports a more confident, independent, and expressive way of being.

8.5 *Safety Principles in Dance for the Visually Impaired*

Creating a safe and supportive environment is essential for all dancers, especially for those with visual impairments. A well-prepared space helps participants feel confident, oriented, and able to move freely.

- Orientation to the space: guiding participants through the room before each session to understand layout and key features
- Obstacle-free environment: keeping the area clear, consistent, and free of hazards
- Clear communication: explaining any changes in the space or setup in advance
- Continuous supervision: ensuring support is available throughout the session if needed
- Tactile and auditory cues: using floor markings, handrails, or sound signals to support orientation

These measures help create an environment that is safe, predictable, and enabling for movement.

8.6 *Communication Strategies for Instructors*

Engaging dancers with visual impairments requires clear communication, consistency, and active interaction. A structured and thoughtful approach helps participants understand movement, build confidence, and stay fully involved in the learning process.

- Clear introductions: briefly outlining the content and structure of each session
- Consistent terminology: using familiar terms to support understanding and continuity
- Repetition and detailed description: reinforcing new movements through clear, repeated explanations
- Verbal cues and metaphors: using rhythm and descriptive language linked to tactile or auditory experiences
- Interactive guidance: encouraging questions, feedback, and open communication

Together, these strategies create a learning environment that is accessible, engaging, and responsive to individual needs.

8.7 *Compensating for Vision Loss*

Supporting dancers with visual impairments requires a hands-on, multisensory approach that helps them understand movement through experience rather than observation. One effective method is passive movement, where the instructor gently guides the participant's body so they can physically feel how a movement is performed. This can be complemented by tactile learning, encouraging participants to explore movement by touching the instructor or their own body to better understand positioning and spatial relationships. In addition, auditory cues play an important role in orientation and timing. Simple tools such as rhythmic sounds, instruments, or sound signals can help indicate direction, pace, or transitions. For dancers with residual vision, it is also helpful to incorporate visual support through contrast, such as clearly marked floors or brightly colored objects, which can enhance spatial awareness. By combining these

methods, instructors create an environment that is accessible, intuitive, and supportive of confident movement.

8.8 *Working with Rhythm*

Understanding rhythm plays a key role in supporting movement and coordination for all participants. Simple and consistent rhythms provide a clear structure, helping individuals maintain timing while also supporting spatial orientation. In practice, rhythm can be reinforced through natural and accessible tools, such as clapping, foot tapping, or the use of simple percussion instruments. These elements make timing more tangible and easier to follow. Music also serves an important function beyond motivation—it acts as an organizational framework for the session, guiding the flow of activities and helping participants connect movement with rhythm in a structured and engaging way.

8.9 *Orientation and Independent Movement Techniques*

Enhancing mobility for individuals with visual impairments involves developing spatial awareness, confidence, and independence in movement. This can be supported through regular practice that encourages participants to move between familiar points, helping them build a clearer understanding of space. Structured activities, such as following defined trajectories—for example along lines, circles, or clearly designated paths—provide guidance while reinforcing orientation and direction. At the same time, it is important to promote autonomy, allowing individuals to make decisions, move at their own pace, and carry out movements independently. Together, these approaches help create movement experiences that are confident, purposeful, and self-directed.

8.10 *Creative Movement and Improvisation Techniques*

Exploring freedom and expression through movement allows participants to develop creativity, body awareness, and personal expression in an open and supportive way. Improvisation plays a central role in this process, encouraging individuals to move beyond structured patterns and discover their own movement language. This can be supported through imagery-based tasks, where participants respond to ideas such as a flying bird, a growing tree, or ocean waves, helping to connect movement with imagination. Over time, dancers can build their own movement vocabulary, developing unique gestures and patterns that reflect their individual style. Working in pairs or groups further enhances this process by fostering cooperation, spatial awareness, and social interaction.

Additional sensory elements enrich the experience. Exploring different textures, surfaces, or props creates varied physical sensations, while experimenting with dynamic contrasts—such as speed, force, and direction—helps expand expressive range and motor control. Movement can also be linked to simple narratives, allowing participants to engage in storytelling through the body, combining imagination with emotion. Throughout these activities, sensory prompts such as music, touch, or verbal cues provide guidance and inspiration, supporting a creative process that is both structured and open-ended.

8.11 *Optimizing the Dance Environment*

Creating a safe and accessible dance environment is essential for participants with visual impairments, as it directly supports confidence, orientation, and freedom of movement. A well-designed space allows dancers to focus on creativity while minimizing risks.

- Tactile and acoustic cues: floor markings, textured surfaces, or subtle sound signals to support orientation
- Minimal background noise: ensuring that music and verbal instructions remain clear and easy to follow
- Supportive features: handrails or stable gripping points for added safety when needed
- Clear and obstacle-free layout: removing clutter, uneven surfaces, or hazards to allow smooth movement
- High contrast and appropriate lighting: improving visibility and spatial awareness for those with residual vision

By thoughtfully organizing the environment, instructors create a space that is safe, intuitive, and empowering, enabling participants to engage fully and move with confidence.

8.12 *Role of Assistants or Guides*

Assistants and guides play an essential role in supporting dancers with visual impairments, helping to ensure safety while preserving independence. Their role is not to take control, but to provide support that is sensitive, responsive, and respectful of individual needs. Support may include gentle physical guidance when necessary, such as offering a hand at the shoulder or elbow to help with safe navigation. In learning situations, tactile leading techniques—for example hand-over-hand guidance—can help participants understand new movements or spatial relationships more clearly. At the same time, clear verbal cues are crucial for communicating rhythm, direction, and changes in the environment.

An important foundation of this support is respect and consent. Physical contact should always be preceded by asking, and the participant's comfort, autonomy, and preferences must be continuously respected. When provided in this way, support becomes an enabling tool—helping dancers build confidence, learn effectively, and engage fully in movement, without limiting their independence.

8.13 *Suitable Dance Forms and Styles*

Different dance styles offer diverse ways for participants with visual impairments to explore movement, creativity, and social connection. Each style brings specific benefits and can be adapted to individual needs and preferences.

- Folk dances: characterized by clear rhythms and predictable patterns, supporting orientation, coordination, and social interaction
- Modern dance: focusing on body awareness, floorwork, and improvisation, allowing exploration of space and movement dynamics
- Expressive movement therapy: using dance as a tool for emotional expression and exploration of internal experiences
- Dance/Movement Therapy (DMT): a structured therapeutic approach combining movement with psychological support, promoting overall well-being and self-awareness

Choosing an appropriate style can enhance engagement, creativity, and confidence, while ensuring the experience is aligned with participants' abilities and interests.

8.14 Summary and Inspiration

Inclusive dance is centered on participation, joy, and personal growth, rather than technical perfection. It supports holistic development—physical, emotional, and social—while recognizing that visual impairment is not a limitation, but an opportunity to explore creative and alternative approaches to movement. In this context, the instructor’s role goes beyond teaching steps. It involves guiding, supporting, and inspiring, creating an environment where each participant feels safe, valued, and motivated. This approach is grounded in key principles such as empathy, clarity, safety, and joy, which form the basis of meaningful and inclusive dance experiences. Inclusive dance encourages individuals to explore movement, express themselves, and build confidence, showing that everyone can participate fully, regardless of visual ability. Key messages to keep in mind:

- Every dancer has a unique perceptual reality
- Start from what is present, not what is missing
- Differences are a source of creativity, not limitation
- Respect individuality and personal ways of moving
- Stay flexible and open, adapting plans as needed
- Inclusion means thoughtful adaptation, not compromise
- Each dancer has different goals, needs, and motivations

By embracing these principles, inclusive dance becomes a space that is creative, respectful, and empowering for all participants.

9. Case Studies

Case Study 5: Touchdown Programme	
Full Name	Touchdown Dance Programme
Year initiated/ended	2014 – ongoing
Provider	Touchdown Dance (United Kingdom)
Target Group	People who are blind or visually impaired, inclusive groups (blind and sighted participants)
Goal of the case study (what was the intended goal? Was it achieved? If not, why?)	The goal was to develop an inclusive dance methodology accessible to people with visual impairments, removing reliance on visual demonstration and promoting multisensory learning. The programme also aimed to increase participation, confidence, and creative expression. → The goal was successfully achieved, and the method is now used internationally.
Description (in a clear step by step approach)	1. Introduction to participants and verbal orientation to the space 2. Warm-up focused on body awareness and sensory activation 3. Teaching movement using verbal instructions, rhythm, and touch

	4. Use of tactile connection and partner work 5. Improvisation exercises guided by imagery and sound cues 6. Group activities to develop spatial awareness and interaction 7. Reflection and feedback session
Impact and validation and lessons learned -For successful cases: what was the impact, how it was validated) -For challenges what obstacles prevented success, what went wrong etc	• Participants showed increased confidence, independence, and engagement • Demonstrated that dance can be taught effectively without visual demonstration • Highlighted the importance of clear verbal communication and tactile feedback • Validated through workshops, participant feedback, and international dissemination
Access details (website, contact info) and related resources developed (What training manuals, guidelines, technical fact sheets, posters, pictures, video and audio documents, and/or Web sites have been developed?)	Website: https://touchdowndance.co.uk Developed resources include: • Inclusive dance methodology guidelines • Training workshops and educational materials • Videos and documentation of practice • International knowledge-sharing sessions

Case Study 6: EU Beyond Access	
Full Name	Europe Beyond Access
Year initiated/ended	2019 – 2023
Provider	European consortium of cultural organizations (e.g. Onassis Stegi, Holland Dance Festival, Skånes Dansteater, Sadler's Wells and others)
Target Group	Disabled artists (including visually impaired), dance professionals, audiences, cultural institutions
Goal of the case study (what was the intended goal? Was it achieved? If not, why?)	The project aimed to increase visibility, opportunities, and professional development for disabled artists in dance and theatre, and to remove structural barriers in the performing arts sector. It also focused on:

	• supporting international careers of disabled dancers • improving accessibility in performances and institutions • building audiences for inclusive work → The goal was successfully achieved, with large-scale European collaboration and measurable outputs.
Description (in a clear step by step approach)	Identification of barriers in the performing arts sector Selection and support of disabled artists and productions Organization of international performances and tours Development of accessible formats (audio description, touch tours) Training and knowledge-sharing among partner organizations Audience development and awareness campaigns Evaluation and dissemination of results
Impact and validation and lessons learned -For successful cases: what was the impact, how it was validated) -For challenges what obstacles prevented success, what went wrong etc	• Increased visibility of disabled dancers across Europe • Strengthened professional opportunities and mobility • Demonstrated that inclusive dance can be high-quality and internationally relevant • Validated through performances, audience engagement, and institutional partnerships
Access details (website, contact info) and related resources developed (What training manuals, guidelines, technical fact sheets, posters, pictures, video and audio documents, and/or Web sites have been developed?)	• Website: https://www.europebeyondaccess.com • Resources developed: ○ Reports and documentation on inclusive performing arts ○ Accessible performance practices (audio description, touch tours) ○ Professional development opportunities for artists ○ International networking and knowledge-sharing

10. Non-Formal Educational Activities:

Activity 5: Moving Without Sight	
Aim	The aim of this activity is to help participants experience movement without relying on vision and to develop body awareness, trust, and multisensory perception . It also

	aims to build empathy and understanding of how visually impaired individuals navigate movement and space.
Learning Objectives	Participants will: • Understand how movement can be guided by non-visual senses • Develop spatial awareness and body control • Improve trust and communication in partner work • Reflect on the role of sensory adaptation in dance
Trainee Profile	Participants with an interest in movement, dance, or inclusive practices. No prior dance experience is required. The activity is suitable for mixed-ability groups, including beginners and individuals with or without visual impairments.
No of participants	Minimum: _____ Not _____ set. Maximum: The number of participants should remain appropriate to the size and conditions of the space, ensuring safe movement and effective guidance.
Duration	60 min
Required materials	• Blindfolds (or scarves) • Speaker/music • Safe, open space
Preparation	• Ensure the space is clear of obstacles • Prepare calm and rhythmic music • Brief participants about safety and purpose of the activity • Arrange participants into pairs
Implementation	1. Introduction (10 min): Explain the concept of non-visual movement 2. Blindfold phase (15 min): One partner is blindfolded, the other observes 3. Guided movement (15 min): ○ The sighted partner guides using voice or gentle touch ○ Focus on simple movements (walking, turning, stopping) 4. Role switch (15 min): Partners switch roles 5. Free exploration (10 min): Participants move independently with blindfolds using sound and body awareness Key concepts: trust, sensory perception, orientation, communication
Safety measures	• Ensure continuous supervision • No running or sudden movements • Clear instructions before blindfolding • Encourage slow, controlled movement

Debriefing	Ask participants: • How did it feel to move without sight? • What senses did you rely on most? • What challenges did you experience? Encourage sharing emotions and reflections
Adaptations and variations	• Can be done without blindfolds (eyes closed briefly) • Add music or sound cues for orientation • Increase complexity (group movement, obstacles)

Activity 6 - Dance Through the Senses	
Aim	This activity aims to develop creative expression and movement awareness through multisensory stimulation. It encourages participants to explore how sound, touch, and imagination influence movement, especially in the absence of visual input.
Learning Objectives	Participants will: • Explore creative movement through sensory input • Develop rhythm and coordination • Enhance self-expression and imagination • Understand how multisensory cues support dance learning
Trainee Profile	Participants interested in creative movement, sensory exploration, and expressive activities. Open to all experience levels, including those with no previous dance background, and adaptable for diverse abilities, including participants with visual impairments.
No of participants	Minimum: Not set. Maximum: The number of participants should remain appropriate to the size and conditions of the space, ensuring safe movement and effective guidance.
Duration	60 minutes
Required materials	• Music (various styles and tempos) • Simple props (e.g., scarves, textured objects) • Optional: percussion instruments
Preparation	• Prepare a playlist with different rhythms and moods • Place props in the space

	• Ensure a safe and accessible environment
Implementation	1. Warm-up (10 min): Gentle movement with focus on breathing and body awareness 2. Sensory exploration (15 min): ○ Participants explore movement using props and touch ○ Focus on textures and physical sensations 3. Music-based movement (15 min): ○ Move according to rhythm, tempo, and mood ○ Use clapping or percussion to reinforce rhythm 4. Creative improvisation (15 min): ○ Introduce imagery (e.g., “move like water”, “grow like a tree”) ○ Encourage personal expression 5. Group sharing (5 min): Short presentation or group movement Key concepts: creativity, rhythm, sensory awareness, expression
Safety measures	• Keep space free of obstacles • Ensure props are safe and easy to handle • Monitor participants during movement • Encourage awareness of others in the space
Debriefing	Ask participants: • What helped you move creatively? • How did music or touch influence your movement? • What did you discover about your body?
Adaptations and variations	• Use blindfolds for deeper sensory experience • Adapt for seated participants • Focus only on one sense (e.g., sound-only session) • Can be done individually or in groups

Module 4: Inclusive Vision: Sensory Theatre for All

1. Introduction

1.1 *Purpose of the Module*

Welcome to this educational module developed for youth workers, educators, and facilitators working with young people with visual impairments (VI). This module provides a comprehensive methodological framework and practical tools for implementing inclusive sensory theatre as a powerful medium for empowerment, personal development, and social inclusion. Within the context of the DEAP project, theatre is approached not as a visually dominant art form, but as a multisensory and embodied experience. It becomes a space where participants can explore identity, emotions, and relationships through movement, voice, touch, and interaction. This shift is particularly important for young people with visual impairments, for whom traditional theatre practices—often based on visual cues—can create barriers to participation.

The module encourages educators to rethink theatre as an inclusive environment where the emphasis is placed on process rather than appearance, and where every participant has the opportunity to actively engage as a creator, performer, and storyteller. By focusing on sensory engagement and experiential learning, this module supports the development of autonomy, confidence, and creative expression.

1.2 *Learning Objectives*

By the end of this module, participant will:

- understand the challenges and opportunities of involving young people with visual impairments in theatre and performing arts
- develop practical skills to design and facilitate inclusive, accessible theatre workshops
- apply sensory-based methods such as voice work, movement exploration, and tactile interaction
- use clear and adapted communication strategies to support participation and understanding
- create safe and inclusive environments that promote expression, creativity, and engagement
- support autonomy by encouraging experimentation, initiative, and independent participation with minimal over-assistance

2. Key Concepts of Visual Impairments in Theater Context

2.1 *Understanding Visual Impairment in Performance Settings*

Visual impairment significantly influences the way individuals perceive space, movement, and social interaction. In theatre settings—where communication is often based on visual observation, imitation, and spatial awareness—this can create additional challenges for participants with VI. For this reason, it is essential to move beyond traditional, visually-oriented teaching methods and adopt a more inclusive approach. This involves replacing visual cues with clear verbal instructions, tactile guidance, and auditory signals, allowing participants to build their understanding of the performance environment through alternative sensory channels. Educators must also recognize that each participant experiences visual impairment differently.

Some may have residual vision, while others rely entirely on non-visual perception. Therefore, flexibility and individual adaptation are key elements of effective facilitation.

2.2 *Levels of Vision loss and Implications for Participation*

Visual impairment exists on a spectrum, and understanding the different levels of vision loss is essential for designing inclusive and effective theatre activities. Not all participants experience visual impairment in the same way, and their needs, abilities, and preferred methods of interaction may vary significantly. At a general level, visual impairment can be divided into low vision and blindness, with further distinctions based on the degree of visual acuity and visual field. Some individuals may perceive light, shapes, or movement, while others rely entirely on non-visual senses such as touch and hearing. These differences directly influence how participants engage with theatre exercises, spatial orientation, and group interaction.

For participants with low vision, residual sight may still play a role in their perception of the environment. They may be able to distinguish contrasts, recognize silhouettes, or follow movement under certain lighting conditions. In theatre practice, this means that elements such as lighting, contrast, distance, and positioning become crucial. High-contrast materials, clearly defined stage areas, and controlled lighting conditions can significantly enhance their participation. However, it is important not to rely solely on visual input, as it may be inconsistent or tiring for the participant. In contrast, participants who are blind—whether congenitally or through acquired vision loss—primarily rely on auditory, tactile, and proprioceptive cues. Their understanding of space is built through movement, touch, and sound rather than visual observation. In theatre activities, this requires a shift toward verbal description, physical orientation, repetition, and embodied learning. For example, instead of demonstrating a movement visually, the facilitator may guide the participant through it step by step using verbal instructions or hand-over-hand techniques.

An important distinction must also be made between congenital blindness and acquired blindness. Individuals who have lost vision later in life may draw on visual memory when imagining scenes, characters, or spatial relationships. This can support their engagement in narrative and role-playing activities. On the other hand, individuals who are blind from birth construct their understanding of the world through non-visual experiences, which often leads to a more tactile and sequential approach to perception. Both perspectives are equally valuable and should be respected in the creative process. From a pedagogical perspective, these differences highlight the importance of flexibility and personalization. Theatre activities should be designed in a way that allows multiple modes of participation. For instance, an exercise may combine movement, sound, and touch, enabling each participant to engage using their strongest sensory channels.

It is also essential to consider the cognitive and emotional implications of vision loss. Some participants may experience uncertainty or reduced confidence in unfamiliar environments, especially if spatial orientation is challenging. Creating a predictable structure, offering clear instructions, and allowing time for exploration can help reduce anxiety and build a sense of safety. Ultimately, understanding the levels of vision loss is not about categorizing limitations, but about recognizing different ways of experiencing and interacting with the world. In inclusive theatre, these differences become a source of creative richness. By adapting methods and embracing diversity in perception, educators can ensure that every participant is able to contribute meaningfully and confidently to the artistic process.

2.3 *Common barriers (physical, social, educational)*

Young people with visual impairments may encounter a range of barriers when engaging in theatre activities. These barriers are not only physical but also social and educational in nature. Physical barriers may include unclear or constantly changing spatial arrangements, obstacles on stage, or a lack of tactile reference points. Communication barriers arise when instructions are given visually or when educators rely heavily on

demonstration without verbal explanation. Social barriers, on the other hand, often stem from stereotypes or misconceptions—such as the belief that visually impaired individuals are less capable of performing or expressing themselves artistically. An inclusive theatre environment seeks to transform these barriers into opportunities. By creating structured, predictable, and well-organized spaces, and by fostering an atmosphere of trust and respect, educators can ensure that all participants feel safe and capable of engaging fully in the creative process.

2.4 *Assistive Tools and Technologies*

To effectively support the participation of young people with visual impairments in theatre activities, it is essential to combine appropriate pedagogical approaches with the use of assistive tools and technologies. These tools do not replace the creative process; rather, they act as bridges that enable participants to access, understand, and shape the theatrical environment in an autonomous and meaningful way.

One of the most fundamental and universally applicable tools in inclusive theatre is structured verbal description. Clear, precise, and intentional language allows participants to build a mental representation of space, movement, and interaction. Educators should describe not only what is happening, but also *where* and *how* it is happening, using concrete references such as direction, distance, and position (e.g., “two steps to your left,” “at arm’s length,” “in front of the group”). This form of verbal scaffolding replaces visual demonstration and becomes a primary access point to the activity. Complementing verbal communication, tactile tools and materials play a crucial role in supporting spatial understanding. Participants should be given the opportunity to explore props, costumes, and stage elements through touch before using them in performance. Textured materials, such as fabrics with distinct surfaces, foam shapes, ropes, or marked floor mats, can serve as tactile anchors, helping participants orient themselves within the space. For example, a textured mat may indicate a “stage zone,” while a rope line can define movement pathways.

In addition to tactile input, auditory tools and sound-based technologies are highly effective in structuring theatre activities. Sound cues—such as a bell, clap, musical signal, or recorded audio—can indicate transitions, entrances, or changes in movement. Rhythm-based exercises, supported by tools like metronomes, drums, or simple percussion instruments, help participants synchronize movement and develop a sense of timing and coordination. More advanced setups may include portable speakers or spatial audio cues, allowing participants to navigate toward or away from sound sources within the performance space. Digital technologies also offer significant support for accessibility. Screen readers (such as NVDA, JAWS, VoiceOver, or TalkBack) enable participants to access scripts, instructions, or workshop materials independently. Audio recording applications on smartphones can be used to capture lines, rehearse dialogue, or document ideas, allowing participants to revisit content at their own pace. In some cases, Braille displays or Braille-printed scripts may be used, particularly for participants who are fluent in Braille and prefer tactile reading.

For participants with residual vision, magnification tools and visual enhancement technologies—such as ZoomText, screen magnifiers, or high-contrast display settings—can improve access to written materials and visual elements. Simple adaptations, such as using bold fonts, high-contrast colors, and controlled lighting conditions, can also significantly enhance usability. Another important category of tools includes orientation and mobility supports. These may involve the use of a white cane during initial exploration of the space, as well as structured guidance techniques provided by facilitators or assistants. Increasingly, mobile applications such as BlindSquare or Lazarillo can support navigation in unfamiliar environments, although in theatre settings their role is usually complementary rather than central.

Equally important are body-based and proprioceptive tools, which do not rely on external technology but on structured physical experience. Exercises focusing on balance, weight shifting, spatial awareness, and coordinated movement help participants build an internal understanding of their position in space.

Techniques such as “mirroring through touch” (hand-over-hand guidance) or guided movement sequences allow participants to learn new actions safely and effectively. While assistants or guides can provide valuable support—particularly during the initial stages of familiarization—their role must always be carefully balanced. Physical assistance should be offered with consent and gradually reduced as participants gain confidence and independence. The ultimate goal is not to create reliance on support systems, but to enable participants to act, move, and express themselves autonomously.

In conclusion, assistive tools and technologies in inclusive theatre should be understood not as compensatory mechanisms, but as enabling instruments of participation and empowerment. When used thoughtfully and flexibly, they open up new pathways for creativity, communication, and self-expression, ensuring that every participant can fully engage in the theatrical process on their own terms.

3. Strategies for Autonomy and Independence

3.1 *Assistive Tools and Technologies*

Assistive tools and technologies play a fundamental role in enabling independent participation in theatre activities. However, their purpose extends beyond accessibility—they serve as instruments through which participants gain control over their environment and creative process. In inclusive theatre practice, tools such as verbal guidance, tactile markers, and auditory cues are not merely supportive elements but become integral components of the learning experience. For example, consistent use of spatial language allows participants to independently orient themselves, while tactile anchors—such as textured mats or fixed reference points—enable them to move confidently within the performance space without constant assistance.

Digital technologies further enhance independence by providing access to information and creative content. Participants can use audio recording tools to rehearse lines, reflect on their performance, or document ideas. Screen readers and accessible mobile applications allow them to engage with scripts, schedules, and instructions autonomously, reducing reliance on facilitators. Importantly, the implementation of these tools should always follow a principle of progressive autonomy. At the initial stage, tools may be used intensively to support orientation and understanding. Over time, as participants gain familiarity and confidence, reliance on external support should gradually decrease, allowing for greater independence and self-direction.

3.2 *Promoting self-advocacy and confidence*

Autonomy is closely linked to the development of self-advocacy, understood as the ability to express one’s needs, preferences, and boundaries. For young people with visual impairments, this competence is particularly important, as they often navigate environments that are not inherently adapted to their needs. Theatre provides a safe and dynamic space in which self-advocacy can be practiced and strengthened. Through role-playing, improvisation, and group interaction, participants are encouraged to voice their ideas, make decisions, and actively contribute to the creative process. This fosters a sense of agency and reinforces the understanding that their perspective is valuable.

Educators play a crucial role in this process by creating an environment that encourages participation and respects individual differences. Rather than anticipating needs or making decisions on behalf of participants, facilitators should invite them to articulate what kind of support they require. Simple practices—such as asking “What would help you in this situation?” or offering choices instead of instructions—can significantly strengthen self-confidence and independence. Feedback is another important element. A strengths-based approach, focusing on achievements and progress rather than limitations, helps build a positive self-image.

When participants recognize their own capabilities, they become more willing to take initiative, experiment, and engage with new challenges. Over time, this process leads to increased confidence not only within the theatre setting, but also in broader social and educational contexts.

3.3 *Daily living and mobility skills in creative settings*

Theatre activities can also serve as a practical context for developing daily living and mobility skills, which are essential for independent functioning. Rather than treating these skills as separate training components, inclusive theatre integrates them naturally into the creative process. Spatial orientation, for example, is continuously practiced during movement exercises, stage exploration, and group interaction. Participants learn to navigate the space using auditory cues, tactile reference points, and body awareness. These competencies directly translate into everyday situations, such as moving through unfamiliar environments or organizing personal space.

Similarly, communication skills developed in theatre—such as clear verbal expression, active listening, and turn-taking—are directly applicable to daily interactions. Participants gain confidence in initiating conversations, expressing emotions, and responding to others, which supports their social inclusion. Creative tasks also encourage the development of organizational and problem-solving skills. Preparing props, managing personal materials, or remembering sequences of actions requires planning, memory, and independence. These activities mirror real-life situations in which individuals must manage tasks and make decisions autonomously. An important aspect of this approach is the emphasis on learning through experience. Rather than instructing participants how to perform a task, educators create situations in which participants can explore, make mistakes, and find their own solutions. This experiential learning strengthens both competence and confidence.

Ultimately, integrating daily living and mobility skills into theatre practice reinforces the idea that autonomy is not a separate goal, but an integral part of personal and creative development. By engaging in meaningful activities, participants build the skills and mindset necessary to navigate both the artistic and everyday world with independence.

4. Common Stereotypes and Misconceptions

Understanding and addressing stereotypes related to visual impairment is a crucial step in creating inclusive and empowering theatre environments. Misconceptions about blindness and low vision are deeply rooted in society and often influence expectations, interactions, and opportunities available to young people with visual impairments. At a general level, visual impairment is frequently perceived through a lens of limitation, dependency, or deficiency. People with visual impairments are often viewed as less capable, more vulnerable, or in need of constant assistance. These assumptions, although often unintentional, can significantly affect how individuals are treated and how they perceive themselves.

One of the most common stereotypes is the belief that visual impairment automatically limits a person's ability to participate in creative or performative activities such as theatre. Because theatre is traditionally associated with visual expression, there is a tendency to assume that it is inaccessible to those who cannot rely on sight. In reality, theatre is a multidimensional art form that involves voice, movement, emotion, rhythm, and interaction—many of which can be fully experienced and developed without visual input. Another widespread misconception is the idea that people with visual impairments are inherently dependent on others. While support may be necessary in certain contexts, this does not equate to a lack of autonomy.

When environments are appropriately adapted and individuals are provided with the right tools and opportunities, they are fully capable of acting independently, making decisions, and leading creative processes.

Stereotypes also exist in relation to communication and social interaction. For example, there is often uncertainty about how to speak to or interact with a visually impaired person, which can lead to avoidance or overcompensation. Some individuals may speak too loudly, simplify language unnecessarily, or direct communication to an accompanying person rather than to the individual themselves. These behaviors, although well-intentioned, can undermine dignity and reinforce a sense of exclusion. Misconceptions can also affect expectations within educational and artistic settings. Educators or facilitators may unconsciously lower their expectations, offer less challenging tasks, or over-assist participants. This can limit opportunities for growth and reduce the participant's confidence in their own abilities.

The impact of these stereotypes is both external and internal. Externally, they can lead to reduced access to opportunities, limited participation, and social exclusion. Internally, repeated exposure to low expectations may affect self-esteem, motivation, and willingness to engage in new experiences. Inclusive theatre has the potential to actively challenge and transform these perceptions. By creating environments where young people with visual impairments can express themselves, collaborate with others, and demonstrate their abilities, theatre becomes a space of empowerment and visibility. Participants are not defined by their limitations, but by their creativity, voice, and presence. Educators play a key role in this process. By maintaining high expectations, promoting equal participation, and modeling respectful communication, they can help dismantle stereotypes both within the group and in the broader community. It is essential to adopt a strengths-based approach, focusing on what participants can do and how they can contribute, rather than on what they cannot see.

Ultimately, addressing stereotypes is not only about correcting misconceptions, but about shifting perspectives. It involves recognizing visual impairment as one aspect of human diversity and understanding that different ways of perceiving the world can enrich the creative process. In this sense, inclusion in theatre is not an adaptation of the art form—it is an expansion of its possibilities.

4.1 *Myth vs Reality – Understanding Visual Impairment in Theatre*

Myth	Reality
People with visual impairments cannot participate in theatre because it is a visual art form.	Theatre is a multisensory art form. It involves voice, movement, sound, rhythm, and emotion—many of which do not depend on sight.
Blind participants are dependent and require constant assistance.	With appropriate support and accessible environments, participants can act independently, make decisions, and actively lead creative processes.

Visual impairment limits creativity and expression.	Creativity is not dependent on vision. Many participants with visual impairments demonstrate strong imagination, emotional depth, and unique expressive abilities.
It is better to simplify activities for visually impaired participants.	Inclusion does not mean simplification. It means adapting methods so that all participants can engage meaningfully at the same level of complexity.
Communication with visually impaired individuals is difficult.	Clear, respectful, and direct communication works effectively. The key is precision and inclusion, not simplification or avoidance.
Theatre requires visual imitation and observation.	Theatre can be taught through verbal guidance, tactile exploration, repetition, and embodied learning.
Assistants should guide and control the participant's actions.	Assistants should support safety and orientation, but autonomy and decision-making must always remain with the participant.
All visually impaired people have the same needs.	Visual impairment is diverse. Each participant has different abilities, preferences, and ways of perceiving the world.

5. Accompanying Techniques

Safe and respectful accompaniment is a fundamental element of inclusive theatre practice involving participants with visual impairments. It enables individuals to navigate the environment confidently, participate fully in activities, and maintain a sense of autonomy and dignity. Accompanying techniques are not about controlling movement, but about providing information through the body, voice, and environment, allowing the person being guided to remain active and aware. These techniques should always be applied with sensitivity, clear communication, and explicit consent.

5.1 *Sighted-guide technique*

The sighted-guide technique is one of the most commonly used and effective methods of guiding a person with visual impairment. It is based on cooperation and subtle physical communication between the guide and the participant. In this technique, the participant gently holds the guide's arm, typically just above the elbow, while walking slightly behind and to the side. This position allows the person being guided to naturally follow the guide's movements, including changes in direction, speed, or elevation. It is important that the guide maintains a relaxed and steady pace, avoiding sudden movements. The guide should not pull or push, but rather allow the participant to interpret movement through body signals. Verbal communication can be used to complement the physical guidance, especially in unfamiliar or complex situations. The key principle

of the sighted-guide technique is that the participant remains in control of their movement, while the guide provides orientation and safety support.

5.2 *How to navigate doors*

Navigating doors can present challenges due to their structure and movement. Clear communication and proper positioning are essential to ensure safety and independence. When approaching a door, the guide should briefly explain whether the door opens inward or outward and indicate the side on which the handle is located. The participant is usually positioned on the hinge side of the door, allowing them to follow the movement of the guide and maintain orientation. As the door is opened, the participant can use their free hand to locate the door surface or handle. This enables them to understand the structure of the space and, if needed, close the door independently after passing through. The aim is not to perform the task for the participant, but to enable them to interact with the environment independently.

5.3 *Moving through narrow spaces or stairs*

In theatre environments, participants may need to navigate narrow passages, backstage areas, or stairs. These situations require slight adaptations of the guiding technique. When entering a narrow space, the guide signals the change by moving their guiding arm slightly backward. This indicates to the participant that they should step behind the guide and walk in a single line. Once the passage is cleared, the guide returns to the normal guiding position. When approaching stairs or changes in level, the guide should pause briefly to indicate the transition. The participant can then prepare and follow the guide's movement step by step. It is helpful to indicate whether the movement is upward or downward and to maintain a consistent rhythm. These techniques allow participants to move safely while maintaining awareness of their surroundings and body positioning.

5.4 *Helping seating arrangements*

Seating situations are common in theatre settings, whether during rehearsals, discussions, or performances. Supporting a participant in locating and using a seat should always promote independence. The guide can assist by placing the participant's hand on the backrest or armrest of the chair. From this point, the participant can explore the seat and position themselves comfortably. This method allows them to understand the structure and orientation of the chair without being physically placed into it. In group settings, it is also helpful to describe the arrangement of the space—for example, whether participants are seated in a circle, rows, or small groups. This supports spatial awareness and facilitates interaction.

5.5 *Communication strategies*

Effective communication is essential throughout the accompaniment process. Verbal information should be clear, concise, and relevant to the situation. Guides should avoid vague expressions such as “here” or “there” and instead use specific directional language. Informing the participant about upcoming changes—such as obstacles, turns, or transitions—helps them anticipate and respond confidently. It is equally important to communicate respectfully and directly. The participant should always be addressed as an active partner in the interaction, not as a passive recipient of assistance.

5.6 *Environmental awareness*

Creating an accessible and predictable environment is as important as the guiding techniques themselves. A well-organized space reduces the need for constant assistance and supports independent navigation. In theatre settings, this means:

- keeping pathways clear and consistent
- avoiding unexpected changes in layout
- ensuring that key elements (props, chairs, equipment) remain in fixed positions
- minimizing unnecessary noise that may interfere with auditory orientation

Educators and facilitators should also develop awareness of potential hazards, such as uneven surfaces, cables, or poorly marked transitions. By proactively managing the environment, they create conditions in which participants can move and act with confidence.

6. Theatre and Performance in the Context of Visual Impairment

6.1 *Introduction: Benefits of sensory theatre (empowerment and expression)*

Sensory theatre represents a transformative approach to performing arts, shifting the focus from visual aesthetics to multisensory experience, embodiment, and emotional engagement. For young people with visual impairments, this approach removes traditional barriers and opens up new pathways for participation, creativity, and self-expression. In sensory theatre, performance is not something to be watched, but something to be experienced through the body, sound, touch, and interaction. This creates an inclusive environment in which all participants - regardless of their level of vision—can actively contribute and feel equally engaged in the artistic process. From an empowerment perspective, sensory theatre provides a space where participants can explore their identity, express emotions, and build confidence. By focusing on what individuals can feel, create, and communicate - rather than what they cannot see—it promotes a strengths-based approach that reinforces autonomy and self-worth.

6.2 *Adopting theatre exercises for visually impaired participants*

The use of theatre in the context of visual impairment is not only an artistic endeavor but also a powerful educational and developmental tool. Its significance lies in its ability to combine creative expression with personal growth, offering participants opportunities to develop a wide range of competencies. The primary objectives of inclusive theatre practices include:

- fostering self-confidence and emotional expression
- enhancing communication and social interaction skills
- developing spatial awareness and body coordination
- encouraging collaboration and group cohesion
- supporting autonomy and independent decision-making

Through participation in theatre, young people are not only performers but also active creators of meaning, capable of shaping narratives and expressing their perspectives.

6.3 *Theatre as a Therapeutic and Development Tool*

Theatre has a strong therapeutic dimension, particularly for individuals who may experience barriers in communication or social interaction. It provides a structured yet flexible environment in which participants can safely explore emotions, relationships, and personal experiences. Engagement in theatre activities can contribute to:

- emotional regulation and stress reduction

- increased self-awareness and self-acceptance
- improved confidence in social situations
- development of resilience and adaptability

The embodied nature of theatre—through movement, voice, and interaction—supports holistic development, integrating cognitive, emotional, and physical processes. For participants with visual impairments, this can be especially valuable, as it strengthens alternative sensory channels and reinforces a sense of presence and agency.

6.4 *Adopting Theatre Exercises for Visually Impaired Participants*

Inclusive theatre requires thoughtful adaptation of traditional exercises to ensure accessibility and meaningful participation. This does not mean simplifying the activities, but rather reframing them through sensory and embodied approaches.

Improvisation: Improvisation is particularly effective in inclusive settings, as it encourages spontaneity, intuition, and creativity without relying on visual cues. Participants respond to prompts, sounds, or situations, developing their ability to express emotions and react in the moment. This approach allows individuals to explore their own expressive language and build confidence in their creative choices.

Role-Playing: Role-playing provides a structured framework for exploring social situations, emotions, and identities. Participants take on different roles and perspectives, which supports empathy, self-awareness, and communication skills. For visually impaired participants, role-playing can be enhanced through verbal description, guided interaction, and the use of sensory elements that enrich the experience.

Use of Tactile Props and Sensory Cues: Tactile props and sensory cues are essential components of inclusive theatre practice. Objects with distinct textures, shapes, or temperatures can support storytelling and interaction, allowing participants to engage physically with the narrative. Sound cues, music, and rhythm further enhance the experience, providing structure and guiding movement. These elements help create a rich sensory environment in which participants can fully immerse themselves in the performance.

6.5 *Structuring workshops*

Effective theatre workshops require careful planning and structure, particularly in inclusive settings. A well-designed session supports both accessibility and engagement.

Creating an Accessible Environment: The physical space should be organized, predictable, and free of unnecessary obstacles. Clear pathways, consistent layout, and defined zones support orientation and independent movement. Participants should be given time to explore the space and become familiar with its structure before beginning activities.

Selecting Materials Suitable for Tactile and Sensory Exploration: Materials used in workshops should be chosen with accessibility in mind. Props and tools should have clear tactile qualities and be easy to manipulate. High-contrast elements may support participants with residual vision, while textured surfaces enhance tactile engagement.

Workshop Timing, Pacing, and Group Management: Inclusive workshops require a balanced pace that allows participants to process information, explore tasks, and reflect on their experience. Instructions should be

delivered step by step, with time for repetition and clarification. Group size and dynamics should also be carefully managed to ensure that each participant receives adequate attention and support

Encouraging Creativity, Experimentation, and Confidence: A key objective of theatre workshops is to create an environment in which participants feel safe to experiment and take creative risks. There should be no single “correct” way to perform a task. Encouraging exploration, valuing individual contributions, and celebrating progress help build confidence and foster a positive learning experience.

6.6 *Communication strategies for instructors*

Effective communication is at the core of inclusive theatre practice. Instructors must adapt their communication style to ensure clarity, accessibility, and engagement. At the beginning of each session, it is important to provide a clear and structured explanation of the activities. Using consistent terminology helps participants become familiar with key concepts and reduces confusion. When introducing new movements or exercises, repetition and detailed verbal description are essential. Instructions should be precise and supported by examples that relate to tactile or auditory experiences. For instance, metaphors based on everyday sensations can enhance understanding and make abstract concepts more accessible. Interactive communication is equally important. Participants should be encouraged to ask questions, share feedback, and express their needs. This creates a collaborative learning environment and ensures that everyone feels included and supported.

6.7 *Role of Assistants or Guides*

Assistants and guides play a supportive role in inclusive theatre, particularly in ensuring safety and facilitating orientation within the space. However, their involvement must always be guided by the principle of promoting independence rather than replacing it. Physical support may be provided when necessary, using gentle and respectful guidance such as a hand on the shoulder or elbow. Tactile leading techniques, including hand-over-hand guidance, can be used to introduce new movements or support spatial understanding. Verbal cues remain a primary tool, helping participants anticipate changes, understand rhythm, and navigate the environment. At all times, assistants must seek consent before physical contact and remain attentive to the participant’s comfort and preferences. When applied appropriately, this form of support enhances learning and confidence without undermining autonomy.

6.8 *Summary and Inspiration*

Inclusive theatre, particularly in the context of working with young people with visual impairments, invites us to fundamentally rethink what performance, creativity, and participation truly mean. It challenges the assumption that theatre is primarily a visual art form and instead repositions it as a multisensory, relational, and deeply human experience. At the core of this approach lies the recognition that every participant perceives, interprets, and expresses the world in a unique way. Visual impairment does not reduce this capacity—it simply transforms the pathways through which experience is constructed. When educators shift their perspective from “what is missing” to “what is present,” they begin to see a wide spectrum of abilities, sensitivities, and creative potentials that can enrich the entire group.

Inclusive theatre is therefore not about adapting participants to fit a predefined structure, but about adapting the structure to include diverse ways of being, sensing, and expressing. This requires openness, flexibility, and a willingness to move beyond rigid methodologies. It also requires trust in the participants’ ability to explore, experiment, and take ownership of their creative process. One of the most important principles

underpinning this work is the understanding that autonomy and support must coexist. Participants should be given the tools, space, and encouragement to act independently, while knowing that guidance is available when needed. This balance fosters confidence, resilience, and a sense of agency that extends beyond the theatre setting.

Ultimately, inclusive theatre is about more than performance—it is about connection, empowerment, and shared experience. It provides a space where young people can explore who they are, express what they feel, and build meaningful relationships with others. It reinforces the idea that everyone has a voice and a place within the creative process. By embracing these principles, educators can create inclusive theatre environments that are not only accessible, but also deeply meaningful, transformative, and empowering for all participants.

9. Case studies

Case Study 7: Theatre Exit	
Full Name	<i>Theatre EXIT</i> - Inclusive Theatre as a Space for Artistic Expression, Social Participation, and Empowerment
Year initiated/ended	2016
Provider	Theatre Exit is a Polish inclusive theatre company based in Kraków, established in 2016 by Maciej Sikorski within the activities of the Catholic Association of People with Disabilities and Their Friends “Klika”. The organizational and fundraising side of Theatre Exit’s work is supported by the Fundacja Budzenie Pasji. The ensemble brings together people with different types and degrees of disabilities, including actors with visual impairments, cerebral palsy, and intellectual disabilities, as well as professional artists and musicians.
Target Group	The main target group of Theatre Exit includes persons with disabilities and non-disabled artists working together in a shared creative process, as well as wider audiences exposed to inclusive artistic practice. In the context of this module, the case is particularly relevant for young people with visual impairments, youth workers, theatre educators, facilitators, and cultural professionals interested in accessible and socially engaged theatre.
Goal of the case study (what was the intended goal? Was it achieved? If not, why?)	The main goal of Theatre Exit was to create a professional artistic space in which persons with and without disabilities could work together as equal creators, using high-quality theatrical means, live music, and strong artistic direction. The initiative sought not only to produce performances and films, but also to build an inclusive community based on mutual support, dignity, and the recognition of inner potential. This goal has largely been achieved. Since its establishment, Theatre Exit has developed a consistent artistic identity, created numerous performances and theatrical film projects, and demonstrated that inclusive theatre can be both

	artistically ambitious and socially transformative. The company has also shown that people with disabilities, including those with complex support needs, can actively participate in demanding artistic work and contribute meaningfully to the cultural field. From the perspective of the DEAP project, Theatre Exit is also an important example because of its collaboration in international theatre workshops held in Poland, where inclusive artistic practice became a space for intercultural exchange, learning, and empowerment.
Description (in a clear step by step approach)	The work of Theatre Exit is based on a carefully structured yet deeply human artistic process. First, the company creates an inclusive working environment in which actors with and without disabilities collaborate as members of one artistic team. The focus is not on separating participants according to ability, but on identifying and using each person's strengths, talents, and forms of expression. Second, the creative process is built around professionally designed theatrical productions. Theatre Exit develops performances and films that combine live acting, live music, shadow theatre, symbolic imagery, and strong emotional storytelling. These artistic means are not simplified for accessibility, but rather reimagined so that different performers can contribute authentically. Third, the company fosters deep interpersonal relationships within the group. The ensemble is not only a production team, but also a supportive community in which participants accompany one another in everyday artistic and personal life. This relational dimension is central to the theatre's inclusive philosophy. Fourth, Theatre Exit extends the impact of each artistic event beyond the performance itself. After performances and screenings, the creators regularly engage audiences in conversations, reflection, and dialogue, allowing viewers to better understand the themes of the work and the value of inclusive artistic collaboration. In some cases, workshops are also included, making the audience part of the creative and educational process. Finally, the theatre invites collaboration with professional artists from different artistic disciplines and pays close attention to the visual and symbolic coherence of its productions, posters, and communication materials. This reinforces the message that inclusive art is not a marginal practice, but a serious and valuable contribution to cultural life.
Impact and validation and lessons learned	The impact of Theatre Exit can be observed on several interconnected levels: artistic, social, educational, and personal. At the artistic level, the theatre has demonstrated that inclusive performance can maintain high aesthetic and professional quality while remaining rooted in accessibility and social meaning. The use of shadow theatre, live music, and symbolic storytelling has created a distinctive artistic language that is both accessible and emotionally powerful.

	At the social level, Theatre Exit has challenged stereotypes about disability by presenting actors with disabilities as full artistic partners rather than passive beneficiaries of support. This has helped reshape audience perceptions and foster greater openness toward inclusion in culture. At the personal level, participation in the theatre has supported performers in building confidence, communication skills, emotional expression, and a sense of belonging. For actors with disabilities, including visual impairments, the theatre has become a space of visibility, agency, and meaningful contribution. From an educational point of view, the case confirms that inclusive theatre works best when accessibility is approached not as a technical add-on, but as a core artistic and relational principle. It also shows that support and autonomy must go hand in hand: participants should receive the guidance they need, but always in ways that reinforce independence and dignity. An important lesson learned is that inclusion in theatre requires time, trust, and consistency. Strong artistic outcomes emerge when participants are treated seriously, expectations remain high, and the environment is built on mutual respect rather than pity or overprotection.
Impact and validation and lessons learned -For successful cases: what was the impact, how it was validated) -For challenges what obstacles prevented success, what went wrong etc	The success of Theatre Exit can be validated through its sustained activity since 2016, the number and diversity of its productions, the continuity of its artistic team, and the public engagement generated by performances, screenings, and post-performance discussions. The theatre has built a recognizable model of inclusive artistic practice in Poland and has expanded its impact through films, workshops, and public dialogue. Its value is also validated qualitatively through the visibility it gives to performers with disabilities, the emotional and reflective response of audiences, and its ability to maintain meaningful cooperation between artists of different backgrounds and abilities. In the DEAP context, the collaboration in international workshops in Poland additionally confirms its relevance as an inspiring practice for inclusive arts education. For challenges: what obstacles prevented success, what went wrong, etc.? One structural challenge is the lack of a permanent, stable venue throughout much of the theatre's existence. Working across different spaces may have created logistical and organizational difficulties. Inclusive theatre also requires significant emotional, organizational, and financial investment, especially when working with diverse access needs and professional artistic standards simultaneously. Another challenge concerns the broader social context: stereotypes about disability and the frequent underestimation of inclusive art can make funding, recognition, and mainstream visibility more difficult to secure. Nevertheless, Theatre Exit appears to have addressed these barriers through consistency, artistic quality, and mission-driven collaboration.
Access details (website, contact info) and related resources developed (What training manuals, guidelines, technical fact	Theatre Exit can be accessed through its official communication channels and direct contact with its team. The organization maintains an active online presence, providing information about performances, projects, and ongoing activities.

sheets, posters, pictures, video and audio documents, and/or Web sites have been developed?)

Website:
<https://teatredit.pl/>

Facebook:
<https://www.facebook.com/teatredit/>

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Theatre Exit has developed a variety of artistic and educational resources supporting its inclusive approach, including:

- live theatre performances combining shadow theatre, live acting, and music
- theatrical film productions with strong narrative and symbolic structure
- post-performance discussions with audiences
- workshop-based formats integrating artistic creation and participation
- audiovisual materials available online (recordings, poetic interpretations, documentaries)
- visual communication materials (posters, promotional content) with a strong and coherent artistic identity

These resources provide valuable inspiration for educators and practitioners working in inclusive arts and can serve as examples of how to combine artistic excellence, accessibility, and social impact within one integrated model.

Case Study 8: Extant Theatre

Full Name

Extant Theatre Company - **Leading Practice in Sensory and Accessible Theatre for Visually Impaired Participants**

Year initiated/ended

1997 – ongoing

Provider

Extant Theatre is the UK's leading professional performing arts company dedicated to creating theatre by and for visually impaired artists. Established

	in 1997, the organization focuses on developing innovative and inclusive theatre practices that challenge traditional visual dominance in performance. Extant works at the intersection of art, accessibility, and education, producing performances, training programmes, and research-based methodologies that support the participation of visually impaired individuals in the arts sector. The company collaborates with theatres, cultural institutions, and educators across the UK and internationally.
Target Group	The primary target group of Exant Theatre includes visually impaired artists, performers, and participants, ranging from young people to adults. The organization also works with educators, facilitators, and cultural professionals, supporting them in developing inclusive practices. In the context of the DEAP project, this case study is particularly relevant for: • young people with visual impairments • youth workers and theatre facilitators • educators implementing sensory theatre approaches • organizations interested in accessibility in arts and culture
Goal of the case study (what was the intended goal? Was it achieved? If not, why?)	The main goal of Exant Theatre is to create equal opportunities for visually impaired individuals in the performing arts, both as creators and audiences. The organization aims to remove barriers to participation by developing innovative methods of accessible theatre that go beyond traditional adaptations. This includes redefining theatre through sensory, audio-based, and immersive approaches, ensuring that visually impaired participants can fully engage with and contribute to artistic processes. This goal has been successfully achieved and continuously developed. Exant has become a recognized leader in accessible theatre, influencing both artistic practice and accessibility standards within the cultural sector. Through its productions, training programmes, and research initiatives, the organization has demonstrated that inclusive theatre can be both artistically innovative and socially impactful.
Description (in a clear step by step approach)	The work of Exant Theatre is structured around a comprehensive and integrated approach to inclusive performance. First, the organization develops theatre productions that are designed from the outset to be accessible. Rather than adapting finished performances, accessibility is embedded in the creative process. This includes the use of audio

	description as a creative tool, spatial sound design, and sensory storytelling techniques. Second, Extant implements structured training programmes for visually impaired participants. These programmes focus on building skills in acting, movement, voice, and spatial awareness, while also supporting confidence and professional development. Participants are encouraged to explore their own artistic language and take active roles in the creative process. Third, the organization develops and promotes innovative methodologies, such as “sensory theatre” and “aesthetic of access”, where accessibility becomes part of the artistic expression rather than an external addition. This approach challenges traditional hierarchies in theatre and opens new possibilities for inclusive performance. Fourth, Extant engages in research and knowledge-sharing activities. The company collaborates with universities, cultural institutions, and practitioners to develop and disseminate best practices in accessible theatre. It also provides training for theatre professionals, supporting the wider sector in becoming more inclusive. Finally, Extant ensures that its work reaches diverse audiences through performances, workshops, and public engagement activities. This contributes to raising awareness and changing perceptions about visual impairment in the arts.
Impact and validation and lessons learned	The impact of Extant Theatre can be observed at multiple levels: artistic innovation, social inclusion, and sector-wide transformation. At the artistic level, Extant has developed new forms of theatre that challenge the dominance of visual perception and expand the language of performance. By integrating sound, touch, and spatial awareness into the core of theatrical expression, the organization has created a distinctive and influential model of sensory theatre. At the social level, Extant has significantly increased the visibility and participation of visually impaired artists. It has demonstrated that individuals with visual impairments can not only participate in theatre, but also lead, innovate, and shape artistic practices. At the educational level, the organization has contributed to the development of inclusive methodologies that can be applied in workshops, training programmes, and youth work contexts. Its work provides valuable inspiration for projects such as DEAP, particularly in relation to empowerment, autonomy, and creative participation. A key lesson learned is that accessibility should not be treated as a technical requirement, but as a creative opportunity. When accessibility is integrated into the artistic process, it enriches the experience for all participants and audiences.

Impact and validation and lessons learned -For successful cases: what was the impact, how it was validated) -For challenges what obstacles prevented success, what went wrong etc	For successful cases: what was the impact, how it was validated? The success of Extant Theatre is validated through its long-term activity, its recognition as a leading organization in accessible theatre in the UK, and its influence on both artistic and institutional practices. The organization has developed numerous productions, training programmes, and partnerships, demonstrating the sustainability and relevance of its approach. Its methodologies have been adopted and referenced by other organizations, confirming its role as a pioneer in the field of inclusive and sensory theatre. The impact is also visible in the increased participation of visually impaired individuals in performing arts and in the growing awareness of accessibility within the sector. For challenges: what obstacles prevented success, what went wrong, etc.? One of the main challenges faced by Extant Theatre relates to the broader structural barriers within the cultural sector, including limited funding for inclusive arts and the persistence of traditional, visually-oriented approaches to theatre. Additionally, implementing innovative accessible practices requires time, resources, and continuous training, which may limit scalability. There is also an ongoing need to balance artistic experimentation with accessibility requirements. Despite these challenges, Extant has successfully navigated these barriers by maintaining a strong mission, building partnerships, and continuously developing its methodologies.
Access details (website, contact info) and related resources developed (What training manuals, guidelines, technical fact sheets, posters, pictures, video and audio documents, and/or Web sites have been developed?)	Website: https://extant.org.uk/ Extant Theatre has developed a wide range of resources supporting inclusive and sensory theatre practice, including: • professional theatre productions designed with integrated accessibility • training programmes and workshops for visually impaired participants • toolkits and methodological frameworks for inclusive theatre • research outputs and publications on accessibility in performing arts • educational materials for facilitators and cultural professionals • public engagement events and knowledge-sharing initiatives These resources provide valuable guidance for educators and practitioners seeking to implement inclusive theatre approaches and can be directly applied in projects such as DEAP.

10. Non-Formal Educational Activities

Activity 7: Sound & Movement Icebreaker – “Follow the Rhythm”	
Aim	The aim of this activity is to create a safe, engaging, and inclusive atmosphere at the beginning of a workshop, while introducing participants to non-visual communication through sound, rhythm, and movement. The activity supports group integration, builds trust, and helps participants become aware of their bodies and the presence of others in space.
Learning Objectives	Participants will: • develop basic spatial awareness through sound and movement • improve listening and reaction skills • build initial group connection and trust • explore non-verbal communication methods • gain confidence in expressing themselves physically
Trainee Profile	Anyone can participate as long as they are able to express themselves through movement and/or sound. No prior theatre experience is required.
No of participants	Minimum: 6 Maximum: 20
Duration	15-20 minutes
Required materials	simple percussion instruments (optional – drum, shaker, clap sticks) speaker with music (optional) open and safe space
Preparation	The facilitator prepares a clear, obstacle-free space and ensures that participants are familiar with its boundaries. If needed, participants can explore the space beforehand. The facilitator also prepares simple rhythmic patterns (clapping or using instruments).
Implementation	Introduction (2–3 min) The facilitator explains the activity clearly, emphasizing that participants will communicate through rhythm and movement rather than visual cues. Basic Rhythm Exercise (5 min) Participants stand in a circle. The facilitator starts by clapping a simple rhythm.

	The group repeats it together. Gradually, different participants are invited to create their own rhythm. Movement Integration (5–7 min) Participants begin to move freely in the space while maintaining awareness of the rhythm. Movement can be simple (walking, stepping, turning). Follow the Leader (5 min) One participant creates a rhythm (clapping, tapping, sound), and others follow both the rhythm and movement direction guided by sound. Closing (2 min) The group slows down and returns to stillness.
Safety measures	ensure the space is free from obstacles maintain moderate pace of movement encourage awareness of others in space avoid sudden or fast directional changes
Debriefing	Participants are invited to reflect: • How did you feel moving without relying on sight? • What helped you stay oriented? • Was it easy or difficult to follow others using sound?
Adaptations and variations	for beginners: keep movement minimal (standing or small steps) for advanced groups: add multiple sound sources for mixed-ability groups: introduce pairs or small teams

Activity 8: Emotions in Motion – “Feel It, Express It”	
Aim	The aim of this activity is to develop emotional expression, body awareness, and confidence through movement and voice. It introduces participants to theatre as a tool for expressing internal states using non-visual communication, supporting both individual creativity and group interaction.
Learning Objectives	Participants will: • explore and express emotions through body and voice • develop awareness of movement and posture

	● improve confidence in self-expression ● strengthen connection between emotion and physical expression ● engage in basic theatrical performance in an inclusive setting
Trainee Profile	Anyone can participate as long as they are able to express themselves through movement, voice, or simple gestures. No previous theatre experience is required.
No of participants	5 - 15
Duration	20-30 minutes
Required materials	open, safe space optional: background music (calm or atmospheric) optional: simple props (e.g. scarf, fabric)
Preparation	The facilitator prepares a safe, obstacle-free environment and ensures participants are familiar with the space. The facilitator also prepares a list of simple emotions (e.g. joy, fear, curiosity, anger, calmness).
Implementation	1. Introduction (3–5 min) The facilitator explains that the activity focuses on expressing emotions through movement and voice rather than visual appearance. Participants are encouraged to focus on how emotions feel in the body. 2. Warm-up (5 min) Participants begin with gentle movement exercises: ● stretching ● slow walking in space ● focusing on breathing This helps them become aware of their body and surroundings. 3. Emotion Exploration (8–10 min) The facilitator introduces one emotion at a time (e.g. “joy” or “fear”). Participants are asked to: ● express the emotion through movement (body posture, pace, gestures) ● optionally add sound or voice (e.g. tone, rhythm, breathing)

	There is no “correct” way — each participant explores their own interpretation. 4. Interaction Phase (5–7 min) Participants move in the space expressing an emotion and begin to interact with others through movement and sound. They may: • mirror each other • respond to others’ emotional expression • shift emotions when prompted by the facilitator 5. Mini Performance (optional, 5 min) In small groups, participants create a short “emotional scene” using movement and sound only. 6. Closing (2–3 min) Participants return to neutral position and relax.
Safety measures	ensure space is clear and safe avoid fast or unpredictable movements encourage awareness of others in space respect personal boundaries
Debriefing	Facilitator asks reflective questions: • Which emotion was easiest or hardest to express? • How did your body change with different emotions? • Did you feel connected to others during the activity? • What helped you understand others without seeing them?
Adaptations and variations	for beginners: work only with 1–2 emotions for advanced groups: add storytelling or dialogue for VI participants: emphasize voice, rhythm, and physical sensation for mixed groups: pair participants for guided interaction

Module 5: Youth-led Community Practices Promoting Personal Development & Empowerment of Young People with Visual Impairments

1. Introduction

1.1 *Purpose of the Module*

This module is designed to strengthen the capacity of youth workers, educators, and community facilitators to design and implement inclusive, youth-led community initiatives that actively promote the personal development and empowerment of young people with visual impairments. It builds on the growing recognition at European level—reflected for instance in the European Commission strategies on inclusion and disability—that participation, agency, and community engagement are essential drivers of social inclusion and well-being (European Commission, 2021; UN, 2006).

At its core, the module promotes a shift from traditional, service-oriented approaches towards participatory models where young people with visual impairments are not passive beneficiaries, but active co-creators of social and cultural initiatives. Youth-led practices are particularly relevant in this context, as they foster autonomy, self-confidence, leadership skills, and a sense of belonging within the community (Bandura, 1997; Council of Europe, 2003).

The module also provides a foundational understanding of visual impairments, including the diversity of conditions (from partial sight to total blindness) and the multifaceted barriers that young people encounter in their daily lives. These barriers are not only functional, but also social, cultural, and systemic—ranging from inaccessible environments to persistent stereotypes that limit opportunities for participation (Goodley, 2011; Silverstone et al., 2000).

1.2 *Learning Objectives*

By the end of this module, learners will:

- understand the ecosystem surrounding young people with visual impairments, including key structural and community-level factors affecting participation
- identify and analyse environmental, attitudinal, and systemic barriers to inclusion
- recognise and draw on effective youth-led and inclusive practices across Europe
- apply strategies that promote empowerment, personal development, and social inclusion
- use arts-based and creative approaches to support engagement, expression, and identity-building
- design inclusive activities that enhance well-being and active participation through non-formal and artistic methods

2. Understanding the Community and Context – General Overview

2.1 *Statistics and demographics of Visually impaired youth in participating countries (Italy, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Sweden, Poland)*

Understanding the demographic and socio-economic context is essential for designing effective community-based interventions. Across Europe, visual impairment affects a significant proportion of the population, although data specifically disaggregated for youth remains limited—highlighting an important gap in evidence-based policy making.

In Italy, for example, recent data indicate that over 338,000 students with disabilities were enrolled in the education system in the 2022/2023 academic year, with visual impairment representing a relevant subgroup. Approximately 2% of the population aged 15 and above experiences severe visual limitations. Similar trends can be observed in other countries, where data often combines different types of disabilities, making it difficult to isolate the specific situation of visually impaired youth.

In Poland, an estimated 1.75 million people live with visual impairments, while over 221,000 children and young people are identified as having special educational needs. In the Czech Republic, estimates vary between 23,000 and 60,000 visually impaired individuals, with new cases emerging each year due to both congenital and acquired conditions. Cyprus reports that between 1.5% and 2% of its population experiences moderate to severe visual impairment, while Sweden has around 100,000 individuals registered with vision rehabilitation services.

A common pattern across all participating countries is the disparity between urban and rural areas. Urban centres tend to concentrate specialised services, educational institutions, and community programmes, while rural areas often face limited access to support structures, increasing the risk of social exclusion. Additionally, gender disparities persist in some contexts, with young women with disabilities facing compounded barriers due to cultural and social norms.

2.2 *Existing Community Support Initiatives*

Across the participating countries, a diverse ecosystem of organisations, foundations, and specialised institutions actively contributes to supporting visually impaired children and young people through a combination of education, rehabilitation, social integration, and empowerment-oriented activities. These initiatives collectively illustrate a multi-dimensional approach to inclusion, combining education, rehabilitation, community participation, technological innovation, and creative expression (Goodley, 2011; European Commission, 2021).

In Italy, organisations such as IRIFOR play a key role in delivering structured programmes focused on training, rehabilitation, and independent living, while also promoting awareness on accessibility and inclusion. Complementing this, APRI provides targeted services including Braille literacy courses, training in assistive technologies, and advocacy actions aimed at facilitating the integration of visually impaired individuals into both the education system and public life. Together, these organisations contribute to strengthening both functional autonomy and social participation.

In Poland, a combination of civil society organisations and specialised educational institutions ensures a comprehensive support system. The Fundacja Tęcza focuses on rehabilitation, education, and social integration, while also extending its support to families, recognising their central role in the inclusion process. The Fundacja CEDUNIS contributes through functional diagnosis, the development of adapted teaching materials, and capacity-building activities for teachers, thereby reinforcing inclusive education practices. In parallel, institutions such as the Na Dziewanny School provide continuous support pathways ranging from early intervention to primary, secondary, and post-secondary education, including vocational training, thus ensuring long-term educational and professional integration.

The Czech Republic presents a particularly articulated landscape of support initiatives. The foundation Světluška offers financial grants, promotes independent living, and implements awareness-raising campaigns, while also supporting access to assistive technologies. The SONS operates at national level, including innovative projects such as satellite navigation systems designed to improve mobility and orientation. Additional actors such as Nadace Leontinka focus on early intervention, inclusive education, and family support, ensuring that assistance starts from early childhood. The TEREZA Center specifically addresses the needs of university students, providing technological support to facilitate access to higher education. Importantly, the Czech context also integrates arts and creativity as tools for empowerment, as demonstrated by the Jan Deyl Conservatory and initiatives such as the “Radost Tvořit” competition, which promote artistic expression and talent development among visually impaired youth.

In Cyprus, support structures combine formal education with community-based and creative initiatives. The St. Barnabas School for the Blind provides specialised education, including Braille literacy, assistive technology training, and a wide range of creative activities such as music, ceramics, and dance, fostering both cognitive and artistic development. Organisations like Yparxo promote inclusive sports, advocacy, and peer learning, encouraging active participation and social interaction. In addition, initiatives such as the CSI Project and C.A.R.E. Project use ceramic workshops to enhance psychomotor skills, creativity, and employability potential. The Access4All Festival represents a key awareness-raising and networking platform, bringing together diverse stakeholders and promoting inclusion through public engagement.

In Sweden, a strong tradition of advocacy and community engagement is reflected in organisations such as Unga Synskadade, which focuses on empowerment, training, and social events specifically designed for young people. The Synskadades Riksförbund plays a broader role in advocacy, legal support, rehabilitation, and recreational activities, ensuring both rights protection and quality of life. Complementing these, Aktiva Synskadade promotes social participation through physical activities, community engagement, and creative expression, reinforcing the importance of active lifestyles and peer interaction.

Overall, these initiatives demonstrate that effective support for visually impaired youth requires an integrated approach that combines education, rehabilitation, community participation, technological innovation, and creative expression. The diversity of practices across countries also provides a valuable knowledge base for identifying transferable models and scaling up youth-led community approaches at European level.

2.3 Awareness-raising Programs and their effectiveness

Awareness-raising plays a critical role in addressing social and cultural barriers. Across Europe, campaigns and public events can increase visibility, challenge stigma, and promote a more inclusive narrative around

disability when they are linked to participation, accessibility, and rights-based framing (UN, 2006; European Commission, 2021).

Initiatives such as inclusive festivals, artistic competitions, and public campaigns not only showcase the talents and capacities of visually impaired young people, but also create spaces for interaction between different segments of society. These approaches align with broader European inclusion policies, which emphasise participation, diversity, and equal opportunities.

In parallel, technology-based programmes—such as assistive technology training and navigation tools—can significantly enhance autonomy and independence, reinforcing the link between accessibility and empowerment (Silverstone et al., 2000).

2.4 Key Challenges in Social & Cultural Inclusion

Despite progress, several structural challenges continue to hinder full inclusion. One of the most significant is the persistent urban–rural divide, which limits access to education, rehabilitation services, and cultural participation for young people living in remote areas. Transportation barriers further exacerbate this issue, particularly in contexts where services are highly centralised. Social stigma and misconceptions about disability remain widespread, often leading to exclusion or reduced expectations regarding the capabilities of visually impaired individuals (Goodley, 2011; UN, 2006).

Another critical issue is the lack of comprehensive and disaggregated data, which complicates the design of targeted policies and interventions. Without reliable statistics, it becomes difficult to measure impact or identify priority areas for action. Finally, accessibility remains a cross-cutting challenge. Physical environments, public spaces, and cultural venues are not always designed according to universal design principles, limiting mobility and independent participation (European Commission, 2021; UN, 2006).

3. Access to Education and Employment

Access to education and employment represents a critical dimension in the empowerment and social inclusion of young people with visual impairments. Across Europe, significant progress has been made in promoting inclusive education systems and facilitating access to the labour market. However, structural barriers, uneven territorial development, and persistent social attitudes continue to limit equal opportunities. In line with frameworks such as the European Commission Disability Strategy and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), there is a growing emphasis on ensuring not only access, but also meaningful participation and long-term employability (European Commission, 2021; UN, 2006).

3.1 Educational opportunities and vocational training pathways

Across the participating countries, visually impaired youth can access a combination of inclusive education pathways, specialised support services, and vocational training opportunities, although the level of development and accessibility varies significantly.

In Italy, the education system has progressively adopted inclusive approaches, allowing visually impaired students to attend mainstream schools supported by specialised teachers, personalised learning plans, and assistive technologies. Braille literacy remains a cornerstone for ensuring full participation. Complementary to formal education, organisations such as IRIFOR and APRI provide vocational training programmes focused

on digital skills, mobility, and independent living, preparing young people for employment. Additionally, the ANPVI ONLUS offers orientation and mobility training, life skills development, and extracurricular activities that reinforce inclusion. The expansion of accessible online learning platforms—featuring screen reader compatibility and audio-based content—has further widened access, particularly for learners in remote areas.

In Poland, visually impaired youth benefit from both mainstream inclusive education and specialised institutions. Schools typically provide Braille materials, electronic magnifiers, and screen-reading software, supporting access to learning content. However, while teacher training programmes exist, they often remain limited in scope and depth, affecting the consistency of inclusive practices across the system.

In the Czech Republic, inclusive education is complemented by a network of specialised institutions. Students are integrated into mainstream schools with adapted materials and individualised plans, while institutions such as the Jan Deyl Conservatory offer tailored programmes that combine artistic education with vocational skills. Vocational pathways are often oriented towards sectors less impacted by visual impairment, supported by organisations like SONS, which play a key role in facilitating training and employment transitions.

In Cyprus, most visually impaired students attend mainstream schools supported by itinerant teachers or classroom assistants. Institutions such as St. Barnabas School for the Blind provide foundational competences in Braille, mobility, and digital literacy. However, vocational training opportunities remain relatively limited and are often delivered through short-term, project-based initiatives, lacking long-term continuity and structured pathways.

Sweden represents a more systematised model of inclusion, where schools provide personalised assistance, adapted materials, and advanced assistive technologies. Teachers receive guidance from the Swedish National Agency for Special Needs Education and Schools, ensuring a more consistent approach to inclusive pedagogy. In addition, specialised schools are available for students requiring tailored support, while universities offer accessible learning environments, including adapted materials and dedicated academic assistance services.

3.2 *Barriers in schools and training programs*

Despite these opportunities, a range of structural and systemic barriers continue to affect access to quality education and training.

In Italy, one of the primary challenges relates to the high financial cost of Braille textbooks, assistive devices, and mobility aids. This is compounded by limited awareness and insufficient specialised training among educators, as well as disparities in resource availability between urban and rural areas. In these contexts, the lack of accessible transport and specialised staff further restricts participation. Social stigma and negative attitudes also continue to impact inclusion.

In Poland, many schools remain only partially adapted to the needs of visually impaired students. Shortages of adapted textbooks and learning materials persist, and teachers often lack adequate training or experience in inclusive methodologies. Stereotypes and limited public awareness further hinder active participation.

In the Czech Republic, access to Braille and assistive resources is not always consistent, and teacher preparedness varies significantly. The high cost of devices and materials often places an additional burden on families, while social stigma continues to influence expectations and opportunities for visually impaired youth.

In Cyprus, systemic barriers are particularly evident in the limited availability of structured vocational training pathways. While inclusive workshops and initiatives exist, they are frequently project-based and lack continuity, reducing their long-term impact.

In Sweden, although the system is comparatively advanced, challenges remain. Delays in the provision of adapted materials can affect learning continuity, and not all teachers possess specialised expertise in visual impairment pedagogy. Additionally, social isolation and limited peer awareness can negatively impact students' well-being and sense of belonging.

3.3 Employment challenges and opportunities for career development

Transitioning from education to employment remains a critical and often complex phase for visually impaired youth. While opportunities exist across multiple sectors, structural barriers continue to limit full participation in the labour market.

In Italy, employment opportunities are increasingly emerging in sectors such as IT, digital services, telecommunications, non-profit organisations, and creative industries. Programmes implemented by ANPVI ONLUS and IRIFOR provide career guidance, internships, and vocational training. However, barriers persist, including limited workplace adaptations, employer bias, inadequate public transport, and ongoing social stigma.

In Poland, employment pathways often include sheltered workshops, customer support roles, and administrative positions. Organisations such as Fundacja Aktywizacja and the Polish Association of the Blind offer training, career counselling, and advocacy. Nonetheless, challenges related to workplace accessibility, employer misconceptions, and transport limitations remain significant.

In the Czech Republic, visually impaired individuals find opportunities in healthcare, education, IT, and creative sectors such as arts and crafts. Initiatives such as the Theseus Project promote employment in digital accessibility, while vocational workshops supported by SONS offer practical training (e.g., massage therapy). However, barriers related to workplace adaptation, employer bias, and transport persist.

In Cyprus, employment opportunities are more limited and often concentrated in customer service, administration, and craft-based self-employment. The absence of comprehensive and systematic inclusion policies further constrains access to the labour market.

In Sweden, a broader range of opportunities is available, including roles in administration, healthcare, education, IT, journalism, law, and adapted trades. Public institutions such as Försäkringskassan and Arbetsförmedlingen provide funding for assistive devices and workplace adaptations, while employers are legally required to ensure accessible working environments. Despite this, the employment rate among visually impaired individuals remains relatively low (around 50%), prompting continued advocacy efforts by organisations such as Synskadades Riksförbund.

3.4 Inclusive strategies to increase participation in education and work

Addressing these challenges requires a coordinated and multi-level approach that combines policy measures, capacity building, and community engagement.

Key strategies include strengthening teacher training in visual impairment pedagogy and assistive technologies, ensuring that educators are equipped to provide inclusive and high-quality learning

experiences. Increasing the accessibility of learning materials—particularly through digital tools and Braille resources—is also essential to guarantee equal access to education.

At the same time, stronger partnerships between vocational training providers and employers can facilitate smoother transitions into the labour market, through internships, apprenticeships, and work-based learning opportunities. Awareness-raising campaigns remain crucial to reducing social stigma and challenging employer biases, fostering a more inclusive culture.

Infrastructure improvements—such as accessible transport systems, inclusive school environments, and adapted workplaces—are equally important to support independent participation. The role of NGOs is particularly significant in this context, as they often bridge gaps between education, vocational training, and community engagement through integrated programmes.

Finally, policy measures should promote inclusive higher education systems, personalised support mechanisms, and mandatory workplace accommodations, complemented by incentives for inclusive hiring practices. These combined efforts are essential to move from formal access to genuine inclusion, ensuring that visually impaired youth can fully participate in education, employment, and community life.

4. Cultural and Recreational Inclusion

Cultural and recreational participation represents a fundamental dimension of social inclusion, particularly for young people with visual impairments. Beyond its intrinsic value, engagement in arts, sports, and community activities contributes significantly to emotional well-being, identity development, and the strengthening of social relationships. At European level, this perspective is aligned with the principles promoted by the European Commission and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which emphasise the right to participate fully in cultural life, recreation, leisure, and sport.

In this context, arts-based activities—particularly theatre, dance, music, and ceramics—emerge as especially effective tools for inclusion. Their reliance on sensory, embodied, and non-visual forms of expression makes them inherently adaptable and accessible, allowing visually impaired youth to engage actively and meaningfully. These practices not only support creativity and self-expression, but also foster confidence, communication skills, and a sense of belonging within mixed-ability groups (Fancourt & Finn, 2019; Boal, 2002; Kupperts, 2011).

4.1 *Participation in arts, sports, and community activities*

Across the participating countries, participation patterns reflect both the availability of inclusive opportunities and the broader structural context. Arts-based and sensory-oriented initiatives can provide highly accessible entry points for participation, particularly when they are based on touch, sound, movement, and embodied interaction rather than visual performance norms (Fancourt & Finn, 2019; Kupperts, 2011; Malchiodi, 2005).

In Italy, there is a strong tradition of arts-based and sensory-oriented initiatives aimed at inclusion. Activities such as sculpture and tactile arts—often using materials like clay and stone—are widely used to enhance tactile perception and creative expression. Dance and performance accessibility initiatives, including experiences inspired by approaches such as “Sentire la Danza”, demonstrate how movement can be reinterpreted through sensory awareness. Theatre and dramatherapy are also extensively used as tools for

personal development, emotional expression, and social interaction. Importantly, many of these activities are designed for mixed groups, encouraging interaction between people with and without disabilities and fostering inclusive community environments.

In Poland, participation is more frequently mediated through specialised institutions and centres for special education. Arts therapy, theatre-based activities, and group creative workshops represent the primary forms of engagement. Initiatives such as “Summer with Theater” illustrate the potential of outdoor and community-based approaches, although access to mainstream cultural venues remains limited. As a result, participation tends to occur within structured environments rather than in broader community settings.

In the Czech Republic, visually impaired youth have access to a range of artistic disciplines, including theatre, music, and visual arts. However, while inclusive initiatives exist, they are often not specifically tailored to the needs of visually impaired participants. Cultural events—such as international festivals—can provide inspiration and visibility, but do not always ensure direct or meaningful access for this target group. This highlights a gap between cultural offer and actual accessibility.

In Cyprus, participation is largely centralised within institutional frameworks, particularly around the St. Barnabas School for the Blind. Within this context, young people can engage in a variety of artistic activities, including theatre, ceramics, music, and dance. However, opportunities at community level remain limited, and inclusive experiences are often dependent on sporadic projects or festivals. While these initiatives can be impactful, their lack of continuity reduces long-term engagement and sustainability.

In Sweden, a more developed ecosystem of inclusive cultural and recreational programmes is evident. Participation is supported through a wide range of structured initiatives, including theatre workshops such as “Teater till alla”, inclusive dance therapy environments like Danshuset, and tactile art workshops promoted by organisations such as Synskadades Riksförbund and Konstfack. Music therapy is also widely accessible through public cultural education systems such as Kulturskolan. A key feature of the Swedish model is the emphasis on multisensory engagement, self-expression, and active participation in mixed-ability groups, promoting both inclusion and social cohesion.

4.2 *Existing programs promoting inclusion*

Across all countries, inclusive cultural participation is primarily driven by a combination of non-governmental organisations, educational institutions, cultural centres, and universities. These actors play a critical role in bridging gaps between formal systems and community-level engagement, often experimenting with innovative methodologies and pilot initiatives.

A number of common typologies of inclusive programmes can be identified across contexts. Arts therapy programmes—encompassing theatre, dance, music, and ceramics—represent one of the most widespread approaches, leveraging creative expression as a tool for empowerment and well-being. Tactile and sensory-based workshops further enhance accessibility by focusing on non-visual modes of interaction, enabling participants to explore materials, spaces, and artistic processes through touch and movement.

Inclusive festivals and public cultural events also play an important role in raising awareness and promoting visibility, creating opportunities for interaction between diverse audiences. In parallel, universities contribute through research and training in art therapy and inclusive practices, supporting the professionalisation of the sector. NGO-led community programmes, often implemented at local level, provide flexible and responsive solutions that adapt to the specific needs of visually impaired youth.

However, a recurring pattern across countries is the reliance on project-based or pilot initiatives, which, while innovative, often lack long-term sustainability and structural integration. This underlines the need for more systemic approaches that embed inclusive cultural participation into mainstream policies and practices, ensuring continuity, scalability, and equal access for all.

5. Arts Therapy and Creative Empowerment

Arts therapy and creative practices are increasingly recognised at European and international level as effective tools for fostering inclusion, empowerment, and well-being among young people with disabilities. In line with the principles promoted by the World Health Organization and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, participation in cultural and creative activities is not only a right, but also a key enabler of personal development, social participation, and quality of life (WHO, 2019; UN, 2006).

For young people with visual impairments, arts therapy offers particularly relevant pathways, as it shifts the focus from visual perception to multisensory experience, embodiment, and emotional expression. Across all participating countries, practices such as theatre, dance, and ceramics have emerged as accessible and impactful approaches, capable of engaging participants through touch, sound, movement, and imagination.

Arts therapy combines creative processes with therapeutic and educational objectives, creating inclusive environments where young people can explore their identity, build confidence, and develop interpersonal skills. When properly adapted to sensory needs, these approaches provide meaningful alternatives to traditional learning and participation models, which are often visually oriented.

5.1 *Overview of arts therapy approaches: theatre, dance, ceramics*

Different artistic disciplines offer distinct yet complementary pathways for empowerment. Theatre and drama-based approaches are among the most widely used methods. These practices rely on voice, movement, sound, touch, and imagination rather than visual cues, making them highly adaptable. Activities typically include storytelling, role-play, group collaboration, and emotional exploration, often implemented through dramatherapy, inclusive theatre workshops, or sensory and audio-described performances. These approaches are particularly effective in strengthening social interaction, supporting identity exploration, and enhancing communication skills (Boal, 2002; Cattanach, 2003; Goldstein & Winner, 2012).

Across countries, examples include inclusive theatre workshops in Italy and Sweden, theatre therapy initiatives in Poland, and methodologies linked to employability, such as those developed within initiatives like MEDART in Italy.

Dance and movement therapy provides another powerful channel for expression, focusing on body awareness, rhythm, and spatial perception. Through guided movement, touch-based orientation, and verbal or auditory cues, participants are encouraged to explore their bodies as tools of communication and expression. This approach facilitates emotional release, builds confidence in bodily expression, and strengthens non-verbal communication skills. It has strong potential in supporting self-esteem and emotional regulation (Röhricht, 2009; Malchiodi, 2005). Practical applications include accessible dance performances enriched with poetic audio descriptions in Italy, inclusive dance therapy workshops in Sweden, and structured movement activities within specialised schools in Cyprus.

Ceramics and tactile visual arts represent one of the most accessible and widely applicable approaches for visually impaired youth. Their hands-on nature allows participants to engage directly with materials, focusing on texture, shape, and materiality rather than visual output. These activities support the development of fine motor skills, sensory exploration, concentration, and mindfulness. Ceramics is frequently used both in therapeutic contexts and as a bridge towards vocational and employability pathways, particularly in manual and creative professions. Examples can be found in sculpture and ceramics workshops in Italy, Cyprus, and Sweden, as well as in art therapy centres and projects in Poland and the Czech Republic.

5.2 *Benefits for Personal Development: self-expression, confidence, social skills*

Evidence collected through desk research, questionnaires, and interviews consistently highlights the multidimensional impact of arts therapy on visually impaired youth (Goldstein & Winner, 2012).

One of the most significant benefits relates to self-expression and emotional well-being. Arts therapy provides non-visual channels through which participants can express emotions, process personal experiences, and explore their identity in a safe and supportive environment. This contributes to reducing feelings of isolation, anxiety, and emotional withdrawal, while encouraging creative freedom without the pressure of performance or evaluation.

In parallel, these practices play a crucial role in strengthening confidence and autonomy. By engaging in creative processes, young people develop a stronger belief in their abilities and are encouraged to take initiative, make decisions, and assume ownership of their work. Confidence is progressively built through safe experimentation, positive feedback, and peer recognition, reinforcing a sense of achievement and self-worth.

Arts therapy also significantly enhances social skills and participation. Most activities are group-based, fostering cooperation, trust, and communication. They create opportunities for interaction between visually impaired youth and their sighted peers, promoting inclusive environments where disability is acknowledged but not central. This contributes to breaking down social barriers and building more cohesive communities (Bandura, 1997; Malchiodi, 2005).

In addition to these direct benefits, arts therapy also supports the development of transferable skills relevant to employability. These include communication, teamwork, time management, and problem-solving. In some cases, programmes explicitly link creative practices with vocational pathways, cultural employment opportunities, or manual professions, reinforcing the role of creativity as both a social and economic resource.

5.3 *Identified gaps and recommendations*

Despite the strong evidence supporting its impact, arts therapy remains unevenly accessible and underutilised as a structured empowerment tool for visually impaired youth.

One of the main challenges relates to limited accessibility and adaptation. Many programmes are not consistently designed with multisensory methodologies, tactile materials, or audio description, and physical spaces often lack inclusive design features. This reduces the potential reach and effectiveness of otherwise valuable initiatives. A second critical issue is the lack of trained facilitators. There is a shortage of professionals with expertise in both arts therapy and visual impairment-specific adaptations. Youth workers, artists, and educators often lack practical training in how to design and deliver accessible creative activities.

Provision is also frequently fragmented and concentrated in urban areas, particularly in capital cities and specialised institutions. As a result, young people living in rural or remote areas remain underserved, reinforcing territorial inequalities. Funding and sustainability represent another structural barrier. Many initiatives depend on short-term projects or limited grants, making it difficult to scale successful practices or ensure their continuity over time. Finally, low awareness and persistent social perceptions continue to limit the recognition of arts therapy as a legitimate and effective tool. Families, communities, and policymakers may underestimate its benefits, while stereotypes about the creative abilities of visually impaired youth remain widespread.

In response to these challenges, several strategic recommendations can be identified. From a methodological perspective, there is a need to further develop and promote multisensory, non-visual creative approaches and to integrate arts therapy more systematically into youth work, community programmes, and non-formal education. Capacity building is equally essential. Targeted training should be provided to youth workers, artists, and cultural facilitators, including practical modules on accessible theatre, movement facilitation, and tactile art practices. Strengthening partnerships and networking between NGOs, cultural institutions, schools, and disability organisations can enhance the exchange of practices and support the development of more integrated models. Transnational cooperation can play a key role in scaling innovative approaches. Improving accessibility and outreach is also critical. This includes investing in accessible infrastructure, developing mobile and community-based programmes, and implementing awareness-raising campaigns to reach wider audiences. Finally, stronger policy and funding support is needed. This includes advocating for long-term funding mechanisms, integrating arts therapy into youth and disability strategies, and formally recognising it as a key tool for empowerment, inclusion, and social participation.

6. Youth-led Practices for Personal development

Youth-led approaches are increasingly recognised as a cornerstone of effective youth work, particularly in the field of inclusion and empowerment. In line with the frameworks promoted by the European Commission and the Council of Europe youth participation strategies, these practices shift the focus from top-down service provision to participatory, bottom-up processes where young people actively shape their own development pathways. For young people with visual impairments, youth-led practices are particularly transformative. They challenge traditional perceptions of dependency by positioning participants as capable actors, decision-makers, and contributors within their communities. This approach not only strengthens autonomy and self-confidence, but also contributes to the creation of more inclusive and responsive community initiatives (Council of Europe, 2003; Bandura, 1997).

6.1 *Principle of youth-led community initiatives*

Youth-led practices place young people with visual impairments at the centre of decision-making, recognizing them not as passive beneficiaries but as active agents of change. These approaches strengthen autonomy, leadership, and self-confidence while fostering inclusive and sustainable community initiatives.

At the core of youth-led practices lies the recognition that young people are best placed to understand their own needs, aspirations, and challenges. Rather than being passive recipients of support, they are actively involved in identifying priorities, shaping activities, and contributing to solutions within their communities. This approach is grounded in several key principles. First, participation goes beyond representation: young

people are meaningfully involved in all phases of an initiative, including planning, implementation, and evaluation. Their voices are not only heard, but have a tangible influence on decision-making processes.

Closely linked to this is the principle of ownership and responsibility. Youth-led initiatives encourage participants to take responsibility for both processes and outcomes, fostering accountability, commitment, and long-term engagement. This sense of ownership is essential for building sustainable and impactful initiatives. Accessibility and inclusion are also fundamental. All processes, tools, and environments must be adapted to ensure that visually impaired youth can participate fully. This includes providing information in accessible formats and designing activities that do not rely exclusively on visual input.

Another key principle is equality and mutual respect. In youth-led settings, the role of youth workers shifts from that of instructors to facilitators. Their function is to support, guide, and enable participation, while recognising the lived experience of young people as a form of expertise. Finally, empowerment is built through trust. Young people are given real responsibilities and leadership roles, and mistakes are framed as opportunities for learning rather than failure. This creates a safe environment for experimentation, growth, and confidence-building.

6.2 Strategies for engagement and empowerment (peer mentoring, leadership roles, project-based participation)

Effective youth-led practices require intentional strategies that support participation while respecting individual needs and capacities. Translating these principles into practice requires structured and intentional strategies that enable meaningful participation while taking into account individual needs and capacities. Peer mentoring is one of the most effective approaches in this context. By pairing visually impaired youth with peers or slightly older mentors who share similar lived experiences, programmes facilitate knowledge exchange, emotional support, and role modelling. This dynamic fosters mutual learning, strengthens solidarity, and helps participants navigate challenges with greater confidence. Another key strategy involves the active assignment of leadership roles. Young people can take on responsibilities such as group facilitators, project coordinators, workshop co-leaders, or representatives in advisory boards. These roles must be carefully adapted through clear verbal communication, structured responsibilities, and the use of accessible planning tools. When properly implemented, leadership opportunities significantly enhance confidence, decision-making skills, and a sense of agency.

Project-based participation further reinforces engagement by allowing young people to design and implement concrete initiatives. These may include cultural events, awareness campaigns, or creative community projects. Effective project-based approaches are characterised by clear goals, defined timelines, and a distribution of tasks aligned with individual strengths. Reflection and feedback sessions are essential components, enabling participants to evaluate their progress and learn from experience. Through this process, young people develop problem-solving abilities, teamwork skills, initiative, and independence. Equally important is the creation of safe and supportive environments. Participation can only be meaningful if young people feel respected, heard, and free to express their opinions without fear of judgment. In this context, youth workers play a crucial role by providing guidance without exerting control, offering practical support when needed while maintaining a facilitative approach.

6.3 Tools for fostering self-advocacy

Self-advocacy is a critical competence for the long-term empowerment of visually impaired youth. It enables individuals to articulate their needs, understand their rights, and actively participate in decisions that affect their lives in education, employment, and community contexts. A first set of tools relates to communication and self-expression. Training in verbal communication and public speaking helps young people express their needs clearly and confidently. Methods such as storytelling, personal narratives, and creative expression—through theatre, audio formats, or writing—can be particularly effective in supporting this process, as they align with non-visual modes of communication.

Equally important is access to information and rights awareness. Young people need to be equipped with accessible knowledge about disability rights, educational and employment entitlements, and the concept of reasonable accommodation. This awareness empowers them to request necessary adaptations and to engage actively in decision-making processes that affect their lives. Practical self-advocacy skills can be developed through experiential learning methods, such as role-playing real-life situations. For example, participants can simulate requesting accommodations at school or in the workplace, or practice communicating with service providers. These exercises help build confidence and prepare young people for real-world interactions. At the same time, participants learn how to set personal goals, make informed decisions, and negotiate their support needs.

Assistive technologies also play a key role as empowerment tools. The use of screen readers, voice assistants, and accessible digital platforms enables independent access to information, participation in online communities, and effective self-organisation. Digital competence, in this sense, becomes a key enabler of autonomy and inclusion.

Finally, youth-led reflection and evaluation processes are essential for consolidating learning and reinforcing agency. Encouraging young people to reflect on their experiences, evaluate activities, and propose improvements fosters critical thinking and strengthens confidence in expressing opinions. It also ensures that initiatives remain responsive to the evolving needs of participants (UN, 2006; European Commission, 2021).

7. Youth-led Practices for Personal development

Building on the principles and strategies outlined in previous sections, the effective implementation of youth-led practices requires a structured yet flexible approach that enables youth workers to facilitate participation, design inclusive activities, and actively promote empowerment. In line with guidance from the European Commission and the Council of Europe on quality youth work, the role of facilitators is not to direct, but to create enabling environments where young people—particularly those with visual impairments—can participate meaningfully, develop their potential, and take ownership of their learning and engagement processes (Council of Europe, 2003; European Commission, 2021).

7.1 Supporting participation

Supporting the participation of visually impaired youth in workshops and community activities requires a combination of practical facilitation skills, inclusive communication strategies, and careful attention to accessibility and safety. Youth workers must adopt an accompanying role, providing guidance without limiting autonomy. This involves understanding individual needs, offering appropriate support when required, and creating conditions where participants feel confident to engage actively. Rather than imposing

predefined pathways, facilitators should enable young people to explore, experiment, and contribute according to their own pace and preferences.

Communication plays a central role in this process. Effective strategies include clear and descriptive verbal communication, which compensates for the lack of visual cues, as well as the use of tactile guidance where appropriate. Orientation cues—such as explaining spatial layouts, indicating directions, and describing movements—are essential to ensure that participants can navigate activities safely and independently. Consistency, clarity, and sensitivity in communication significantly enhance participation and reduce uncertainty. Ensuring safety and accessibility in physical spaces is another key component. This includes organising environments to minimise obstacles, ensuring clear pathways, and providing accessible materials and tools. Lighting conditions, acoustics, and spatial arrangements should be considered carefully to support both orientation and comfort. A well-prepared environment not only prevents risks, but also fosters confidence and independence.

7.2 *Designing inclusive activities*

Designing inclusive activities requires a deliberate and adaptive approach that balances structure with flexibility. Activities should be tailored to the diverse needs, abilities, and preferences of participants, recognising that visual impairment exists on a spectrum and often intersects with other conditions. A central element of inclusive design is the use of arts-based and experiential methods, which allow for multisensory engagement and reduce reliance on visual input. Theatre, movement, tactile arts, and sound-based activities provide accessible entry points for participation while encouraging creativity, collaboration, and expression.

At the same time, it is important to combine structured exercises with opportunities for autonomy. Structured components—such as clear instructions, defined roles, and step-by-step processes—provide a sense of security and clarity. In parallel, open-ended elements allow participants to make choices, experiment, and take initiative, reinforcing their sense of ownership and agency. Continuous monitoring of participants' well-being is essential throughout the activity. Youth workers should remain attentive to signs of discomfort, fatigue, or disengagement, and be prepared to adapt activities accordingly. This may involve adjusting the pace, modifying tasks, or providing additional support. Flexibility and responsiveness are key to ensuring that activities remain inclusive and meaningful for all participants.

7.3 *Promoting Empowerment*

Promoting empowerment is a cross-cutting objective that should be embedded in all stages of youth work practice. It involves creating conditions where young people feel valued, capable, and motivated to take an active role in their personal and social development. Encouraging leadership and active participation is a fundamental starting point. Youth workers should actively create opportunities for participants to take on responsibilities, contribute ideas, and influence decisions. This can be achieved through small, progressive steps, gradually increasing the level of responsibility as confidence grows.

Recognising and valuing contributions is equally important. Acknowledging individual efforts, skills, and achievements reinforces self-esteem and motivates continued engagement. Recognition should be inclusive and personalised, ensuring that each participant's progress is visible and appreciated. Constructive feedback plays a crucial role in this process. Feedback should be clear, supportive, and oriented towards growth, highlighting strengths while offering guidance for improvement. It should be delivered in a way that encourages reflection rather than judgment, fostering a positive learning environment.

Finally, celebrating achievements—both individual and collective—helps consolidate learning and strengthen group cohesion. Whether through informal recognition, group reflections, or public presentations, these moments reinforce a sense of accomplishment and belonging, contributing to long-term empowerment.

8. Case studies

Case Study 9: Polo Tattile Multimediale	
Full Name	Polo Tattile Multimediale (<i>Multimedia Tactile Centre</i>), including the Museo Tattile “Borges” (<i>“Borges” Tactile Museum</i>), developed by the Stamperia Regionale Braille (<i>Regional Braille Printing House</i>) in Catania
Year initiated/ended	The Polo Tattile Multimediale (<i>Multimedia Tactile Centre</i>) was inaugurated in March 2008. In 2011, it launched the Polo Tattile Itinerante (<i>Travelling Tactile Centre</i>) with support from the Regione Siciliana (<i>Sicilian Regional Government</i>).
Provider	Stamperia Regionale Braille ETS (<i>Regional Braille Printing House – Third Sector Entity</i>) – Unione Italiana dei Ciechi (<i>Italian Union of the Blind</i>), Catania Telephone: +39 095500177
Target Group	The initiative is explicitly addressed not only to blind and partially sighted visitors, but also to sighted visitors, schools, and the wider public. This is one of its strongest features: it is not a segregated service but a shared cultural environment designed to foster accessibility, awareness, and social integration through multisensory museum practice.
Goal of the case study (what was the intended goal? Was it achieved? If not, why?)	The intended goal was to extend the work of the Stamperia Regionale Braille (<i>Regional Braille Printing House</i>) beyond production services and create a cultural and social meeting point for knowledge, awareness, information, and integration. The guided-visit pages describe the experience as one that invites reflection on visual disability and on cultural and social integration. The Museo Tattile “Borges” (<i>“Borges” Tactile Museum</i>) adds a more specific objective: enabling access to art, monuments, and beauty through touch, Braille-labelled objects, and three-dimensional models, including monuments of Sicily.
Description (in a clear step by step approach)	The Polo Tattile Multimediale (<i>Multimedia Tactile Centre</i>) of Catania was inaugurated in 2008 as the natural extension of the long-standing work of the Stamperia Regionale Braille (<i>Regional Braille Printing House</i>) in the social and cultural inclusion of blind and partially sighted persons. Its activities had already included the transliteration of texts into Braille, Large Print, and electronic formats, as well as the development of accessible design solutions and specialised museum resources. The initiative was established as a permanent cultural and accessibility hub inside a historic eighteenth-century building on Via Etnea. The first phase of the initiative consisted of creating a space that would function simultaneously as a cultural venue, an accessibility centre, and a meeting point between knowledge and diversity. From the outset, the provider framed the Polo (Centre) not simply as a museum, but as a broader ecosystem in which access to art, information, and assistive resources could be combined within a shared environment open to both visually impaired and sighted visitors.

	The second phase involved structuring the visitor experience around guided access to different thematic areas. The provider's public materials show that the Polo includes the Museo Tattile "Borges" ("Borges" Tactile Museum), the showroom Frammenti di Luce (Fragments of Light), the Giardino Sensoriale (Sensory Garden), and the Bar al Buio (Dark Bar), thus creating a progressive multisensory itinerary rather than a single isolated exhibition room. This organisation transforms the visit into a layered experience in which tactile exploration, sensory awareness, cultural mediation, and practical accessibility knowledge are interconnected. The third phase centred on the tactile mediation of art and heritage. Within the Museo Tattile "Borges" ("Borges" Tactile Museum), visitors can explore works and models produced by the Stamperia Regionale Braille (Regional Braille Printing House), including tactile representations of major monuments and heritage sites such as the Teatro Massimo Bellini (Bellini Opera House) in Catania, the Valle dei Templi (Valley of the Temples) in Agrigento, Stonehenge, the Colosseum, and other cultural landmarks. In this way, the museum transforms visually based heritage into an experience accessible through touch, spatial perception, and guided interpretation. The fourth phase expanded the educational and practical dimension of the experience through the showroom Frammenti di Luce (Fragments of Light). According to the provider, this space offers a wide range of tools to support the autonomy of blind and partially sighted persons, including books, didactic aids, devices for personal and domestic autonomy, games, and information technology equipment. The showroom is conceived not only as an exhibition area, but also as a place where teachers, parents, and visually impaired users can explore, test, and access assistive materials. This significantly broadens the scope of the initiative, moving from cultural access alone to practical support for education and everyday autonomy. The fifth phase consisted of consolidating the Polo (Centre) as an evolving cultural platform. More recent materials produced by the provider document the opening of additional spaces such as the Sala Frazzetto (Frazzetto Room), dedicated to tactile contemporary art. This shows that the museum offer has expanded over time and that the institution continues to enrich its tactile collection with new works considered particularly suitable for tactile enjoyment because of their forms, textures, and details. The sixth phase extended the initiative beyond the fixed site through public programming and outreach activities. The provider reports recurring events such as Una Domenica al Museo (A Sunday at the Museum) and, from 2011 onward, the creation of the Polo Tattile Itinerante (Travelling Tactile Centre), launched following positive visitor feedback. This demonstrates that the project evolved from a permanent centre into a broader model of dissemination and public engagement around accessible culture. Overall, the Polo Tattile Multimediale (Multimedia Tactile Centre) can be described as an integrated model of accessibility and cultural mediation, in which tactile interpretation of heritage, multisensory environments, assistive technologies, and public awareness are combined within a coherent and permanent institutional framework.
Impact and validation and lessons learned -For successful cases: what was the impact, how it was validated) -For challenges what obstacles prevented success, what went wrong etc	The initiative demonstrates impact at multiple levels: cultural access, educational support, and public awareness. At the level of cultural accessibility, the tactile museum enables blind and partially sighted users to access artistic and architectural heritage through touch, spatial exploration, and guided mediation. This represents a shift from passive accessibility measures to an active and autonomous form of cultural participation. At the educational level, the integration of <i>tiflodidactic</i> materials (<i>materials designed for the education of blind and visually impaired learners</i>) and assistive technologies within the same environment extends the impact beyond the museum visit. The availability of tools for learning, orientation, and daily autonomy supports both users and professionals such as teachers, educators, and families, creating a broader ecosystem of support and knowledge transfer.

	A third level of impact concerns awareness and social perception. By opening the experience to mixed audiences, the Polo (Centre) facilitates encounters between visually impaired and sighted visitors, contributing to a more inclusive understanding of disability and to the reduction of stereotypes. The multisensory nature of the experience allows sighted users to engage with non-visual modes of perception, reinforcing empathy and awareness. Validation of impact is supported by the long-term continuity of the initiative, active since 2008, the expansion of its activities, including the launch of the itinerant version in 2011, and the ongoing enrichment of its collections and services. The provider explicitly refers to positive feedback from visitors as a driver for further development. However, no detailed public documentation of quantitative impact indicators or formal external evaluation reports was identified. The main lesson learned is that accessibility can be transformed into a central cultural methodology when it is integrated into the design of the experience and supported by institutional continuity. The combination of tactile mediation, educational resources, and assistive technologies creates a replicable model of inclusive cultural infrastructure. A second lesson concerns the importance of coupling cultural access with practical tools for autonomy, thereby extending impact beyond the cultural domain. The main limitation lies in the limited availability of publicly accessible evaluation data, which reduces the capacity to benchmark outcomes and demonstrate impact in quantitative terms. Future development would benefit from structured data collection on visitor profiles, learning outcomes, and long-term engagement.
Access details (website, contact info) and related resources developed (What training manuals, guidelines, technical fact sheets, posters, pictures, video and audio documents, and/or Web sites have been developed?)	Access is provided through the dedicated websites of the Polo Tattile (Tactile Centre) and the Stamperia Regionale Braille (Regional Braille Printing House), with telephone booking and online visit reservation. Publicly visible resources include the website itself, guided-visit pages, image galleries, descriptions of the tactile museum, descriptions of the showroom, and the accessible-aids catalogue. The showroom page also documents the in-house development and testing of tiflodidactic materials (<i>educational tools for blind and visually impaired users</i>) and tiflotechnical materials (<i>technical and assistive tools for blind and visually impaired users</i>), such as globes, tactile maps, Braille writing tablets, maths supports, instructional games, and assistive technologies.

Case Study 10: Arts Laboratories for Inclusion	
Full Name	Performing Arts Laboratories for Inclusion (<i>Integrated Theatre, Body Expression and Choir Labs</i>), implemented within the project Non vedo differenze. Benessere e autonomia (<i>"I Do Not See Differences. Well-being and Autonomy"</i>)
Year initiated/ended	2017 - ongoing

Provider	Istituto dei Ciechi – Opere Riunite “I. Florio e F. ed A. Salamone” (<i>Institute for the Blind – “I. Florio and F. & A. Salamone” Unified Institutions</i>), Palermo Address: Via Angiò 27, 90142 Palermo, Italy Email: info@istciechipalermo.it Telephone: +39 091 540324 Website: www.istciechipalermo.it
Target Group	The laboratory is explicitly addressed to persons with visual disabilities of all ages enrolled at the institute. The institute also states that up to 30% of beneficiaries may be visually impaired persons not enrolled in the structure.
Goal of the case study (what was the intended goal? Was it achieved? If not, why?)	The initiative aimed to promote personal development, autonomy, and social inclusion of visually impaired individuals through an integrated set of performing arts laboratories combining theatre, body expression, and vocal expression. The programme was designed to strengthen communication, emotional expression, body awareness, and relational competences by activating non-visual channels such as movement, voice, rhythm, and gesture. It also aimed to compensate for limitations in imitation-based learning by providing structured environments for experiential and embodied learning. The initiative was successfully implemented as part of the institute’s educational and rehabilitative programme.
Description (in a clear step by step approach)	The initiative was developed within the project Non vedo differenze. Benessere e autonomia (“<i>I Do Not See Differences. Well-being and Autonomy</i>”) as an integrated performing arts pathway combining theatre, body expression, and choral practice. The three laboratories were designed as complementary environments addressing different dimensions of non-visual communication and personal development. The programme starts from a shared methodological assumption: in the absence of visual imitation, visually impaired individuals require structured opportunities to develop expressive, relational, and perceptual competences through alternative channels such as movement, voice, and embodied interaction. The Laboratorio espressione del corpo (<i>Body Expression Laboratory</i>) focuses on the body as the primary instrument of perception and communication. Activities are centred on guided movement, spatial exploration, and sensory awareness, allowing participants to build a conscious relationship with their body in space. Through tactile cues, rhythm, and physical exercises, participants develop coordination, posture, balance, and the ability to orient themselves and interact with others physically and expressively. The Laboratorio dell’arte del coro (<i>Choir and Vocal Expression Laboratory</i>) works on voice as a tool for identity, communication, and group cohesion. Through breathing techniques, vocal exercises, and collective singing, participants learn to modulate their voice, recognise rhythm, and synchronise with others. Choral practice creates a strong sense of belonging, as individual voices contribute to a shared sound, reinforcing listening, timing, and mutual adaptation. The Laboratorio dell’arte teatrale (<i>Theatre Arts Laboratory</i>) integrates these elements into structured dramatization. Theatre is used as a space for narrative construction, role interpretation, and emotional expression. Participants engage in storytelling, role-play, and dialogue, learning to manage communication in interaction with others. Particular emphasis is placed on gesture and social expressiveness, which are explicitly trained due to the reduced opportunity for observational learning.

	A key feature of the programme is the progressive integration of the three laboratories. Movement developed in body expression supports stage presence in theatre; vocal training enhances communication and performance; theatrical interaction reinforces both bodily and vocal expression. This creates a coherent learning pathway in which skills are transferred and reinforced across contexts. The laboratories also function as structured social environments. Participants are required to cooperate, respect timing, take turns, and adapt to group dynamics. This makes the activities not only artistic but also deeply educational, as they simulate real-life interaction patterns within a guided and supportive setting. Overall, the initiative can be described as a multisensory, embodied learning model, where theatre, movement, and voice are used as interconnected tools to develop autonomy, communication, and social participation in visually impaired users.
Impact and validation and lessons learned -For successful cases: what was the impact, how it was validated) -For challenges what obstacles prevented success, what went wrong etc	The initiative generated impact through the combined development of three interrelated competences: communication, body awareness, and social participation, each reinforced through the integration of theatre, movement, and vocal expression. At the level of communication, participants improved their ability to express themselves verbally and non-verbally. The combination of dramatization and choral work strengthened voice modulation, clarity of expression, and communicative intent. The structured use of dialogue, rhythm, and collective singing supported more confident and effective interaction in group contexts. At the level of body awareness, the body expression laboratory contributed to improved spatial orientation, coordination, and control of movement. Participants developed a more conscious use of posture, gesture, and physical presence, which are often underdeveloped in the absence of visual feedback. This had a direct effect on autonomy and confidence in both movement and interaction. At the social level, the programme created a consistent environment for practicing relational dynamics. Activities required cooperation, turn-taking, synchronisation, and mutual listening, leading to stronger group cohesion and increased participation. The collective dimension of theatre and choir, in particular, reinforced a sense of belonging and reduced social isolation. Validation of the initiative is reflected in the coherence and continuity of the integrated approach within the institutional programme. The alignment between objectives, methodologies, and activities demonstrates a structured and intentional pedagogical model. However, no publicly available quantitative indicators, formal assessment tools, or external evaluation reports were identified. The main lesson learned is that the integration of multiple performing arts disciplines produces a stronger and more holistic impact than isolated interventions, as movement, voice, and theatre reinforce each other in the development of non-visual competences. A second lesson is that embodied and multisensory approaches are essential for supporting learning and participation in visually impaired users.
Access details (website, contact info) and related resources developed (What training manuals, guidelines, technical fact sheets, posters, pictures,	Website: www.istciechipalermo.it Access is provided through the institutional channels of the Istituto dei Ciechi (<i>Institute for the Blind</i>), including direct contact and participation in activities. Publicly available resources include dedicated project webpages describing each laboratory: • Laboratorio dell'arte teatrale (<i>Theatre Arts Laboratory</i>)

video and audio documents, and/or Web sites have been developed?)	• Laboratorio espressione del corpo (<i>Body Expression Laboratory</i>) • Laboratorio dell'arte del coro (<i>Choir and Vocal Expression Laboratory</i>) These pages provide descriptions of objectives, methodologies, and activities. No publicly available training manuals, formal guidelines, or structured evaluation reports were identified.
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Case Study 11: Villaggio dei Suoni	
Full Name	Villaggio dei Suoni – Un Percorso Ludico, Didattico e Musicale (<i>Village of Sounds – A Playful, Educational and Musical Pathway</i>)
Year initiated/ended	Initiated in 1997 - ongoing
Provider	Istituto dei Ciechi – Opere Riunite “I. Florio e F. ed A. Salamone” (<i>Institute for the Blind – “I. Florio and F. & A. Salamone” Unified Institutions</i>), Palermo Address: Via Angiò 27, 90142 Palermo, Italy Email: info@istciechipalermo.it Telephone: +39 091 540324 Website: www.istciechipalermo.it Project design entrusted to Gaspere Vassallo and C&V Progetti (<i>engineering and design firm</i>)
Target Group	Blind and partially sighted individuals, particularly children and young learners involved in educational and rehabilitative pathways.
Goal of the case study (what was the intended goal? Was it achieved? If not, why?)	The initiative aimed to create a structured multisensory environment combining play, music, and tactile exploration to support cognitive development, sensory activation, autonomy, and social integration of persons with visual impairments. The project was designed to reduce physical and social barriers through a purpose-built environment that enables learning through non-visual interaction. It was implemented as a permanent educational space within the institute.
Description (in a clear step by step approach)	The Villaggio dei Suoni (<i>Village of Sounds</i>) was conceived as a purpose-built multisensory environment within the premises of the Istituto dei Ciechi (<i>Institute for the Blind</i>) in Palermo. The project originated from the institution's educational mission to support the development and integration of visually impaired individuals through sensory-based learning. The first phase consisted of identifying a suitable outdoor area within the institute. A long and narrow green space adjacent to the sports field was selected in order to create a clearly defined and continuous pathway. The spatial configuration was intentionally designed to support orientation and to guide users through a structured experiential route. The second phase focused on the pedagogical and architectural design of the environment. The project was based on the principle that learning and integration for visually impaired users can

	be strengthened by activating residual senses, particularly touch and hearing. The environment was therefore designed from the outset to be accessible, rather than adapted after construction. The third phase involved structuring the pathway as a continuous multisensory journey. The route was conceived as a progressive sequence in which movement through space corresponds to cognitive and sensory exploration. Each section of the pathway introduces new stimuli, encouraging users to interact, discover, and learn through direct experience. The fourth phase consisted of installing large-scale interactive sound structures and tactile elements. These installations were designed to be easily activated through touch and movement, producing sound as immediate feedback. Their size, materials (such as wood and metal), and strong sensory characteristics were chosen to maximise engagement and facilitate perception through non-visual channels. The fifth phase introduced orientation and accessibility features within the space. The pathway was marked by a continuous coloured curb to guide movement, and entry points were designed to be recognisable. Planned accessibility tools included tactile maps and Braille information panels, allowing users to understand the layout before engaging with the environment. The sixth phase incorporated thematic educational elements through tactile panels and symbolic sections based on natural elements such as earth, water, and sky. These sections combined textures, colours, and shapes to support associative learning and cognitive development. The final result is a fully integrated multisensory environment in which sound, touch, movement, and spatial organisation work together to support autonomous exploration, learning, and participation.
Impact and validation and lessons learned -For successful cases: what was the impact, how it was validated) -For challenges what obstacles prevented success, what went wrong etc	The initiative generated impact through its spatial and sensory design, enabling visually impaired users to interact autonomously with the environment and strengthen orientation skills, spatial awareness, and sensory perception. The combination of tactile and sound-based elements supported cognitive development and experiential learning, allowing users to understand cause-effect relationships and engage actively with the environment. The thematic organisation of the space contributed to associative learning and conceptual understanding through non-visual stimuli. The environment also supports social inclusion by allowing shared use by visually impaired and sighted users, facilitating informal interaction and reducing barriers between groups. Validation of the initiative is primarily based on its structured design and its integration within the educational framework of the institute. No publicly available quantitative data, user statistics, or formal evaluation reports were identified. The main lesson learned is that accessibility is most effective when it is embedded in the design of the environment rather than added as an adaptation. The project demonstrates the value of multisensory architecture as an educational and inclusive tool.
Access details (website, contact info) and related resources developed (What training manuals, guidelines, technical fact sheets,	Website: www.istciechipalermo.it Access is provided through the institutional channels of the Istituto dei Ciechi (<i>Institute for the Blind</i>), including direct contact and on-site visits. Publicly available resources include detailed online descriptions of the project, including its educational objectives, spatial design, materials, and sound installations.

posters, pictures, video and audio documents, and/or Web sites have been developed?)

The available documentation functions as a descriptive and technical reference of the initiative. No separate public training manuals, formal guidelines, or evaluation reports were identified.

9. Non-Formal Educational Activities:

Activity 9: "Stretch and Imagine" WARM-UP	
Aim	Activate the body and imagination. Warm up the body in a segmented way (arms, shoulders, neck, etc.) to develop greater body awareness. By stretching the body part by part, participants will become aware of areas that are not usually activated. This may reveal stiffness, awkwardness, or blockages (for example in the chest, pelvis, or other areas).
Learning Objectives	Discover individual possibilities and limitations in movement. Explore exaggerated, clearly defined characters. Step into the shoes of characters far removed from oneself (witches, chickens, etc.).
Trainee Profile	Anyone can participate as long as they are able to express themselves.
No of participants	Min: 6 – Max: 20
Duration	Long duration: 30 - 40 min
Required materials	No materials required Optional: background music
Preparation	The facilitator prepares a list of characters (e.g. witch, princess, animal, abstract figures) and optional alternative prompts (emotions, environments). The choice of characters should be fun and surprising. Start with recognisable characters and gradually move towards more unusual or imaginative ones (e.g. a shrimp or a jellyfish). Things to consider Before starting, it is important that the facilitator provides clear and vivid verbal descriptions of the characters. For example: "a witch, evil, walking through the forest looking for magical herbs, talking to herself or to unseen creatures, very old but still agile." It is also important to encourage the use of sound as part of character creation.
Implementation	How to play The group stands in a circle, with enough space between participants. The facilitator proposes stretching the body part by part, alternating with prompts for participants to interpret bold, exaggerated characters.

	Start by stretching the neck: gently moving it forward and backward, then side to side, and finally making circular movements in both directions. Then introduce the first character: for example, an evil witch. The whole group embodies the witch throughout the space (using body, voice, and movement) for a short period (around 45 seconds). Then the group returns to the circle. Next, stretch the shoulders (up and down, forward and backward), followed by a new character, such as a fairy-tale princess. Continue in this way, stretching each part of the body (from head to feet), alternating physical warm-up with imaginative work and gradually entering a fictional dimension through different characters. Additional stimulation Breathe. Each participant stretches as far as they comfortably can. Let the body produce sound naturally: sighs, groans, breaths, vocal releases. Use the voice to support the character. Try to forget about others and focus on enjoying the experience.
Adaptations and variations	• Characters can interact with each other • Stretching can become less structured and more fluid, even if still focusing on different body parts; music can be added to stimulate movement • Instead of characters, other elements can be proposed, such as spaces, atmospheres, or emotions • Adapt intensity depending on participants' mobility and confidence levels
Safety measures	Ensure the space is clear, safe, and accessible, with enough room for participants to move freely. Participants are positioned in a circle with sufficient distance between each other. Avoid sudden or uncontrolled movements. Provide clear verbal guidance at all times, especially for spatial orientation.
Debriefing	Facilitator invites reflection through questions such as: • <i>How did your body feel during the activity?</i> • <i>Was it easy or difficult to transform into different characters?</i> • <i>Which character felt more natural or more challenging?</i> • <i>Did movement or voice help you express yourself more freely?</i>

Activity 10: "The Volcano" LISTENING AND BOUNCE	
Aim	This is a basic exercise for theatre improvisers and should be repeated regularly in training. In the first stages, it is especially useful for understanding the concept of verbal bounce. At a more advanced stage of training, it becomes particularly valuable for building group energy and letting imagination flow through the listening–bounce dynamic. The Bounce (Rebound): The process through which the improviser listens, contributes, and acts is what we call the <i>bounce</i> (or rebound), a concept that sits between listening and action.

	The bounce is a response of the organism, creating an initial thought or action in reaction to a given stimulus—whether visual, verbal, or auditory. It is related to the ability to associate quickly and to respond physically, verbally, and/or emotionally to what is received or proposed by others. Through training and practice, the improviser develops both reaction speed and mental agility, gaining spontaneity and discovering the pleasure of giving themselves the freedom to follow the impulses of the body, mind, and imagination. The facilitator should encourage a free, non-judgmental bounce—an “expressing outward,” a willingness to dive in “with whatever comes,” “with whatever emerges.” Gradually, the improviser learns to find a balance between their own ideas, impulses, and proposals and those of others, placing individual spontaneity at the service of collective creativity.
Learning Objectives	To understand the basic concept of bouncing. To strengthen mental agility and associative thinking. To create an optimal group energy for improvisation.
Trainee Profile	Anyone can participate as long as they are able to express themselves verbally.
No of participants	Min: 6 – Max: 20
Duration	Medium duration: 15-20 mins
Required materials	No materials required
Preparation	The facilitator explains and demonstrates the arm movement and rhythm before starting.
Implementation	How to play Everyone stands in a circle and starts a simultaneous rhythmic movement with the right arm, swinging it upwards and then letting it fall again, as if together they were forming an erupting volcano. Once a certain level of energy and rhythm has been established, participants begin, in turn, to add words during the upward movement of the arm, as if throwing the word upwards and wanting it to explode against the ceiling. After one or two rounds to become familiar with the dynamic, participants must “bounce” from the previous player’s word, using it as a stimulus for their own new word. There are different possible ways of bouncing: • Semantic bounce: the new word belongs to the same semantic field or universe as the previous one • Image bounce: the previous word evokes an image, which is then transformed into a new word • Sound or phonetic bounce: words that rhyme, begin with the same syllable, or where the final syllable of one word becomes the beginning of the next • Personal bounce: associations linked to one’s own imagination or experiences ○ for example, one person says <i>mother</i> and the next says <i>airplane</i> because their mother is a flight attendant • Any other kind of association ○ for example, the previous word may immediately remind someone of a poem containing it, and their new word becomes the surname of the author

	Here is an example of how the exercise might sound: A: "Sun!" B: "Heat!" (semantic) C: "Fire!" (semantic/intensity) D: "Burn!" (action) E: "Pain!" (emotional bounce) F: "Cry!" (reaction) G: "Tears!" (image bounce) This is a very simple exercise, but it requires concentration. The improviser must make an effort to listen carefully to the last word spoken before their turn and bounce from it. Additional stimulation Keep the rhythm going. Every time the arm rises, there must be a word. If you cannot think of one, invent it. Do not think too much—just say it. Use the physical impulse. a) Phonetic bounce with invented words: Real words alternate with words from an invented language. From time to time, the facilitator stops the exercise and asks for a dictionary-style definition of the invented word. For example: "<i>Romotraca</i>: a sharp object used by farmers to remove weeds." b) Phonetic bounce within a specific universe: All words must belong to the same world or theme: fairy tale, urban life, a bedroom, etc.
Adaptations and variations	• Use clapping or body percussion instead of arm movement • Introduce themes (e.g. emotions, places, objects) • Allow invented words and ask participants to define them • Reduce speed for beginners or increase complexity for advanced groups • For mixed-ability groups, combine verbal words with sound-based responses
Safety measures	Ensure participants have enough space to move safely. Keep movements controlled and avoid sudden or exaggerated gestures. Facilitator should monitor the pace to avoid confusion or overlap.
Debriefing	Facilitator invites reflection through questions such as: • <i>Was it easy to stay in the rhythm?</i> • <i>Did you feel more focused on listening or on thinking of your word?</i> • <i>What type of associations came most naturally?</i> • <i>How did the group energy change during the activity?</i>

Activity 11: "Uninterrupted Story"
YES AND ADAPTATION

Aim	Saying “YES” is a fundamental rule of theatrical improvisation. It means always accepting your partner’s proposal. This rule makes it possible to work together without prior preparation and to build improvised stories. Imagine that, during an improv scene, one player suggests to another: “Come with me, let’s go into that cave.” The other player can never respond, “What cave? There’s no cave there,” because that would completely block the action and make it impossible to create or move the scene forward. When a player makes a proposal, it is a basic rule of improv to enter their game. This allows dramatic situations to take shape, evolve, and develop. When we see improvisers on stage trying to impose their ideas over others—when the performance becomes a “battle of ideas”—improvisation loses its interest. You make a proposal, I accept it, I give value to your idea and use it as a stimulus to bounce. That bounce will guide my action in a certain direction, which in turn becomes a proposal for you. You accept it, it makes you bounce, and leads you somewhere new and to a new proposal—and so on. In this way, each new proposition that appears on stage is always rooted in or inspired by what came before. Improvisation becomes richer and more engaging when each person builds on what has already been created—on what has already happened or been expressed in the scene. On the other hand, if each improviser tries to push their own ideas without valuing others’, believing theirs are better, it becomes impossible to create a shared story. What has been said or done within the ongoing fiction is always the most important thing, and the improviser must value it more than the ideas in their own head. Contributions made by others (spaces where the action takes place, character definitions and relationships, events, circumstances of the ongoing fiction, etc.) must never be ignored. They should be used as inspiring material to move forward. Improviser A proposes to B: “My son, your mother and I are worried. We know you’re hungry, but the pantry is empty.” B can bounce in many ways: he might comfort his father, decide to leave school to find a job, or show signs of illness that worsen the situation. He could also deny his partner’s idea and destroy what was beginning to emerge by replying: “What do you mean there’s nothing? The fridge is full. And besides, you’re a millionaire.” In this case, B blocks the improvisation. He removes the value of his partner’s offer—and if what happens on stage has no value, there is no theatre. With “YES,” we train our ability to adapt, to be flexible, and to enjoy the unexpected. This greatly enhances the player’s creative capacity while freeing them from the (often harmful) pressure of having to come up with many and highly original ideas.
Learning Objectives	To train the ability to accept and value another person’s suggestions. To work on flexibility and adaptability in order to enhance creativity.
Trainee Profile	Anyone can participate as long as they are able to express themselves verbally.
No of participants	Min: 4 – Max: 10
Duration	Medium duration: 20-30 mins
Required materials	No materials required
Preparation	Ensure the space is accessible and quiet enough for participants to clearly hear each other.

	Participants are organised in pairs. The facilitator explains the concept of “Yes, and...”—accepting and building on others’ contributions rather than blocking or correcting them.
Implementation	How to play In pairs. Participant A tells a story in the past tense and in the first person, while Participant B interrupts by adding new elements to the story. The storyteller must accept those suggestions, incorporate them, and continue the narration. Example: A: “Yesterday I went to the mountains with my boyfriend...” B: “You went with your seven children.” A: “...and with my seven children. During the trip, Pablito, the youngest, disappeared. We all got very nervous and started looking for him...” B: “That was when the bear appeared...” A: “It was a huge, furry bear. We climbed up a tree, and the bear started hitting the trunk...” B: “Your boyfriend started singing...” Additional stimulation Offer your suggestions with a clear and strong voice. Do not try to be especially clever or original—any interruption can be useful. It is important that the person making the suggestions does not correct the storyteller. Their interruptions should always move the story forward, not fix or contradict it. In this exercise, it is useful for participants to experience both roles: the one who offers suggestions and the one who accepts them.
Adaptations and variations	• Introduce themes (e.g. travel, fantasy, daily life) • Limit interruptions to specific signals (e.g. clapping instead of speaking) • Use sound or emotion prompts instead of verbal suggestions • Combine with movement or gesture for more embodied storytelling Reduce interruptions for beginners or increase frequency for advanced groups
Safety measures	Ensure a respectful and supportive environment. Avoid sensitive or triggering topics unless previously agreed. Facilitator monitors interaction to ensure suggestions are constructive and inclusive.
Debriefing	Facilitator invites reflection through questions such as: • Was it easy to accept all the suggestions? • Did you feel more focused on listening or on controlling the story? • What helped you adapt quickly? • How did the activity affect your creativity?

Activity 12: “I Accuse”
COMPLICITY AND TEAMWORK

Aim	Practicing improvisation means having the opportunity to share a magical moment with a group of people: the creation of theatrical scenes. It involves feeling, listening, engaging the body, emotions, and imagination, and building stories on the spot... all while being together. To improvise as a group, we need trust and complicity with others—attitudes that must be developed and trained in order to make teamwork possible. Learning improv is a collective process in which acquiring and internalizing technical tools is closely linked to values such as respect, trust, commitment, generosity, and the pursuit of collective well-being. Unity and complicity greatly facilitate group growth and help each individual become a more agile, versatile, and resilient improviser when facing the challenges that arise in any learning process. Improv is an artistic and playful activity that, beyond competition, individual showmanship, or excessive pressure, requires partners with whom to learn, grow, and explore. It calls for each person to be open, dynamic, and willing to cooperate—conditions under which good harmony naturally emerges. In improvisation, each individual's presence and contributions gain meaning when they are valued by others. The credibility and strength of a stage proposal depend on the level of acceptance it receives from the group. Everything one does on stage gains value when fellow performers acknowledge it and treat it as a strong stimulus for collective creation. When improvisers are in tune with one another, listening becomes stronger, decisions made on stage are supported and enhanced, and stories can expand and be more effectively constructed. In short, the group's qualities are better utilized. When this connection exists, a shared language and code emerge, making it easier to understand the team's strengths and weaknesses and to develop strategies for improvement. Each improviser is unique and creates in their own singular way, but the strength and richness of improvisation lie in cooperation. In a time marked by individualism and isolation, improv offers added value: connection. It is essential to cultivate and develop it!
Learning Objectives	To develop ensemble work and group contagion in improvisation. To accept each participant's proposal as a stimulus for collective play.
Trainee Profile	Anyone can participate as long as they are able to express themselves verbally and engage in group interaction.
No of participants	Min: 6 – Max: 18 (working in groups of 6)
Duration	Medium duration: 20 - 30 minutes
Required materials	No materials required
Preparation	Ensure the space is clear and accessible. Participants are divided into groups of six and positioned in a straight line, side by side, with enough space to step forward safely. The facilitator explains the sequence of lines and demonstrates the rhythm and stepping pattern.
Implementation	How to play Step 1: Six participants stand in a line, side by side. Each position is assigned a line of text, which they deliver in sequence while stepping forward: 1: "I accuse." 2: "Yes, I accuse!"

	3: "I say that I accuse." 4: "(Name of who or what is being accused)" – this can be real or imaginary, material or abstract 5: "For..." (the reason for the accusation) 6: "That's right!" Then all six participants, stepping forward together: "That's right!" After each round, participants rotate positions, so that the person in the sixth position moves to the first, and so on. Step 2: The participant in position 1 introduces an energy or intention (a state, character, emotion, or action) while delivering their line. The rest of the group continues the sequence maintaining that same intention. The collective images, energies, and atmospheres created through this exercise are often rich and highly expressive. Additional stimulation The participant in the first position can change the verb (e.g. "I pray", "I dance", "I persuade") as well as the intention. The lines are adapted as follows: 2: "Yes, I..." 3: "I say that I..." (repeating the same verb) Participants in positions 4 and 5 must adapt their content to match the new verb. The participant in position 6 can say "That's right!" or introduce a different closing phrase, accompanied by a gesture or action that the whole group then repeats.
Adaptations and variations	• Replace verbal lines with sound-based expressions for participants with different communication needs • Use clapping or body percussion instead of stepping • Reduce group size (e.g. 4 participants) for smaller settings • Introduce themes (e.g. emotions, fantasy, daily situations) Increase complexity by adding movement or interaction between participants
Safety measures	Things to keep in mind Once the first participant proposes an intention, everyone enters the same shared state, maintaining it throughout the sequence. A clear rotation system should be established so that all participants experience different positions. If the group is large, multiple groups of six can be formed and perform alternately. Don't overthink it—just say it. Keep the energy flowing. As soon as the previous person finishes, you go.
Debriefing	Facilitator invites reflection through questions such as: • <i>Did you feel connected to the group?</i> • <i>What helped maintain the shared energy?</i> • <i>Was it easier to lead or to follow?</i> • <i>How did the intention change the experience?</i>

Conclusion: Shaping a New Vision of Inclusion

The journey through this handbook has been designed to dismantle the "visual mirror"—the societal and aesthetic standards that often exclude young people with visual impairments from full participation. By centring the multisensory experience, we shift the focus from a medical definition of "what is missing" to a pedagogical celebration of "what is present". Whether through the resistance of clay, the rhythm of a dance floor, or the collaborative energy of a theatre scene, the objective remains the same: to build a "haptic bridge" that connects the individual's internal potential with the external world.

As a youth worker, educator, or facilitator, your role is that of an inclusion mediator. By applying the strategies outlined in these modules—from ensuring architectural predictability to fostering guided autonomy—you provide the scaffolding necessary for young people to transition from passive beneficiaries to active co-creators of their own narratives. Remember that empowerment is not given; it is cultivated through trust, respect for boundaries, and the courage to allow young people to take risks and lead.

The true success of the DEAP project is not measured solely by the final ceramic piece or the performed scene, but by the mental transformation of the participants. When a young person with visual impairment gains the confidence to navigate a new space, express a complex emotion through movement, or lead a community initiative, the barriers of stigma and low expectations begin to dissolve.

This booklet is just one part of a larger ecosystem of support. We invite you to continue your professional development by engaging with the DEAP Digital Platform, where you can access interactive modules, additional case studies, and a growing community of practice dedicated to inclusive arts education.

Link to platform: <https://deapplatform.eu/>

Together, we are not just teaching arts; we are sculpting the future of inclusive communities where every voice is heard and every touch has the power to shape reality

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