

Title

Viver Melhor (Living Better) – promoting use of green space and inclusion of older people

Short description

The project Viver Melhor focuses on three principles: a) encouraging individuals to go outside, be with others and create relational networks; b) create a natural surveillance system that allows a regular monitoring of the individual (how he is, what he needs, among others); c) opens a line of communication and cooperation between SCML (the organizing entity) and the participants, a comprehensive approach to the services provided and the functions of the technicians, and a perception of the institution as a place where they can draw upon when needed. At the same time, the practice of physical exercise, contact with green spaces, rehabilitation, maintenance and appropriation of spaces are promoted. The main activities implemented were the provision of joint activities in public spaces and the creation of a system (platform) that allowed signaling of older people who showed great signs of isolation or of great disturbance. In an age group in which social networks tend to be restricted and there are cases of great social isolation, a natural vigilance system will assume high importance. Although informally, it was possible to witness that there was a genuine concern for any element that missed the activities and an attempt to contact them to find if they were alright. The project has ended in 2015, however it was incorporated by several municipalities which proves its usefulness and success.

Topic

Living – Green spaces.

Characteristics (type, level)

Local/Regional Intervention.

Country/Countries of implementation

Portugal

Aims and Objectives

The program aimed to attend to the issues of isolation of older people by creating a response that did not force people to sign up or be previously identified. Had the intention to demonstrate the potential of many green public spaces to attract people to leave home and create informal networks; and also to promote the knowledge about the comprehensiveness of Santa Casa da Misericórdia (SCML) responses.

Target Group

The practice targeted older people.

Status

Completed - follow up plans.

Start and Completion dates

From 2013 until 2015.

Lifestyle and Behavior Change

The practice challenged people to engage in behaviors that run counter to social isolation, such as leaving home and being in a group, and acquiring a healthier lifestyle that involves being in contact with nature and practicing physical exercise.

Effects on:

Health and Wellbeing	The practice by encouraging people to leave home, to regularly practice physical exercise, to be with others, along with create a sense of belonging, will have an impact on physical and mental health, and also on well-being.
Vulnerable populations	By focusing on older people, the practice encompasses a population that is most vulnerable due to social isolation and lack of social support. In addition, the natural surveillance system functions as a protection mechanism for this population.
Environment	The regular use of the gardens has resulted in a greater need for their maintenance.

Initiated and/or implemented by

The practice was initiated by Santa Casa da Misericórdia (SCML) de Lisboa – one of the main charities in Portugal – in collaboration with several Lisbon parishes.

Stakeholders and sectors involved

The implementation of the practice involved several Lisbon parishes.

Financial support

Santa Casa da Misericórdia de Lisboa (SCML).

Evidence-base

The practice was triggered by the results of diagnostic program created by the institution- Programa Intergerações. In this evaluation they realized that there were people with lack of social support who did not resort to SCML because they associated it with a stigma of poverty or felt that they did not need support.

Main activities

The main activities implemented were the provision of joint activities in public green spaces and the creation of a system (platform) that allowed signaling older people who showed great signs of isolation or of great disturbance.

Evaluation

Questionnaires and interviews were collected to evaluate the practice. Participants were satisfied and it was possible to witness the increase of green spaces occupation by older people in Lisbon, and the establishment of positive social connections among users.

Main results

The project resulted in the formation of support networks among the elderly, which meet outside the scope of the project. Also it contributed to the rehabilitation and appropriation of public spaces that were considered isolated or uninteresting. VIVER MELHOR resulted in the incorporation of similar initiatives by several parishes after the project ended.

Key success factors and barriers

Having the activities in open urban gardens across the city was a big factor of success. Using public gardens does not imply linkages, nor creates complexity of use. Other key factor was the created a sense of belonging and continuity that increased the participants motivation to attend the activities. The open format of activities also contributed greatly to the success of this initiative. The only barrier identified was the weather – rainy days made it impossible to carry out the activities

INHERIT Perspective

This project has been chosen for inclusion because of its role in rehabilitate urban green areas for health-improving. The practice, by encouraging older people to leave home, to regularly practice physical exercise, to be with others, along with create a sense of belonging, will have an impact on physical and mental health, and also on well-being. By focusing on older people, the practice encompasses a population that is vulnerable to social isolation. Moreover, it has improved the regular use of the gardens resulting in greater resources placed in their maintenance.

More information

<http://www.scml.pt/>

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