

Aging better together – a project in Mirafiori Sud

Address: Via Panetti 1

Target population:

The community of Mirafiori Sud, particularly the elderly population and the socioeconomically deprived.

Mission:

To promote active, independent, social and healthy aging in a deprived suburban neighbourhood of Turin.

Funding:

Compagnia di San Paolo. The local municipality, Fondazione Mirafiori and grassroots organizations contribute in kind.

Context

Mirafiori Sud is an area of Turin that has a rapidly aging population facing little opportunities for health promotion and where health indicators show a lower quality of life compared with other areas of the city.

In 2015, the Fondazione Mirafiori, in partnership with local social services and Associazione CentroX100 (a non-profit organization) initiated a project to promote personal autonomy, independent living and improve the quality of life for the population in Mirafiori Sud. The project aims to stimulate active participation of the inhabitants by creating networks combating social isolation and enhancing health and wellbeing.

The project scope is wide-ranging: activities are developed and implemented in various settings. One is Casa nel Parco, a neighborhood center.

The project collaborates with private, public and NGOs in different sectors: healthcare, social care, sport, culture, church, social animation, volunteering, research, ICT development and application and education.

Governance & management

The project is implemented and coordinated by Associazione CentroX100.

The project has a coordinating group consisting of representatives from Fondazione Mirafiori, Compagnia di San Paolo, the Local Municipality, Local Health Authority, local public social service and Associazione CentroX100.

A social and community worker from Associazione CentroX100 monitors and develops the local and institutional network.

What this initiative is about

This is a community based intervention, targeting elderly people above 65 years of age living at home. The project does not provide health or social care services but aims to support personal autonomy, independent living and the development of neighbourhood networks.

Our strategy for people-driven care

- “Doing” approach: things are done in a group
- Self awareness of needs and resources
- Reciprocity: participants receive opportunities and then give back to the community

How are citizens engaged and empowered?

Participants take an active approach in the planning and implementation of the activities. At the beginning of the project and periodically, they initiate public world café conversations where elderly define their needs.

Already active people help with promoting the project in their social networks and manage some of the activities autonomously. From this, elderly people are connected into new and ever-changing networks.



Main activities:

- Thematic meetings and lectures where topics are decided by the participants together with the social and community worker representing the project. These meetings include health literacy topics.
- Accompanied walking groups.
- Activities for empowerment (e.g. “brain games”)
- Collective kitchen. Meals are divided into portions, consumed or donated. Participants use also an outdoor, wood-fired oven for communal use.
- Visits to local museums and monuments.
- Intergenerational activities (E.g. partnering activities between elderly and youth aged 17-21 to share memories and develop a documentary about the history and transformation of Mirafiori Sud).
- Connection to other community resources both public and private and in this way promote the emergence of new resources in the community
- Community volunteers: participants are involved as volunteers in specific initiatives for the community (to organize events, to prepare snacks for children etc.).
- Socializing activities.

Impact

- 300 elderly are enrolled in the project
- The main impact of the project is in terms of strengthening persons’ social networks. These network act as “soft monitors” for the most vulnerable participants.
- Professionals have seen improvements in terms of self-care (for the most vulnerable participants)
- From spending more time with other people, participants learn to socialize again and develop new social skills that help them live better. They re-discover their youth skills and competencies and build solidarity
- Some activities are now fully managed by the participants themselves
- The focus groups following the first 2 years of the project showed that the 300 elderly have expanded their social networks. They reported improved psychological wellbeing and health literacy and especially appreciated the lectures with experts for their pragmatic approach.

Insights (Key Learnings)

- The Casa nel Parco and all events taking place is open for everyone in the community.
- Trust and stable points of reference within the community are essential ingredients.
- The project has broken some stereotypes about elderly in deprived areas, showing that it is possible to activate people and do organize activities everyone can take part in.
- Health information provided in informal and non-institutional settings by professionals may improve people’s health literacy.
- Project management is important to identify local resources and coordinate networks.
- It is a challenge to survive fluctuating political priorities and convince new policy-makers about the project’s importance



