StorySHOP - Storytelling for Social and Health Care Workers Professional Identity Development is a Leonardo Transfer of Innovation project, aimed at developing a training programme based on digital storytelling addressing healthcare workers and students in Europe.

The main objective of the project is to enable participants to establish balanced relationships with clients, and to avoid burnout. Indeed, people who are professionally involved in the care of people who are suffering or in need, are at high risk of experiencing excessive stress, due to a possible disproportionate involvement with their clients’ situations.

Storytelling simply means the activity of telling a story, and digital storytelling means telling a story which is rendered in digital format. Stories have played a relevant role in the teaching and training environment for a long time, thanks to their ability to engage learners, foster attention and involvement and communicate strong messages and values. People experiencing disadvantaged or stressful situations often find it hard to explicitly tell their own feelings; storytelling is thus an effective means for them to express their inner world and decrease the negative feelings associated with their own environment.

In the period from February to April 2014 the partners worked on mapping the healthcare workers’ training systems in the countries
respectively. The available training resources addressing the relationship with clients and psychosocial aspects were also mapped and focus groups established in order to get hands-on experiences and stories from the health-care workers.

One of the things the mediator of the focus groups noticed was an interest from the participants in telling and sharing their stories. Examples from their daily work were often brought into the discussions. One mediator mentioned, he believed, that the health care workers for once felt, that they were taken seriously on a professional level. The fact that their results would be read by others and that it was a part of developing a larger learning programme gave the participants extra motivation in completing the task at hand. Some participants even supplied their answers with drawings, in order to explain or underline a point of view.

The results from the focus groups highlighted an interesting Janus face of the health care workers that could be synthesized as the cure-care side.

The majority of training and education opportunities available in the partner countries (Italy, Switzerland, UK, Denmark) emphasize the cure side of the healthcare workers fostering their technical competencies and minimizing their relational ones.

In contrast to this, the majority of the healthcare workers highlighted the care side of their job emphasizing the importance of enhancing their soft abilities – such as the ability to establish a therapeutic patient-centred relationship, the ability to care, active listening, observation, empathy, tolerance, patience and compassion, communication with patients, communication with stakeholders and interaction with other professionals, teamwork and flexibility.

Their role is a mediating one and from this point of view they perceive themselves as artists that have to create a beautiful painting moving from a multicolour palette, in other words health care workers are weavers of life story.

The StorySHOP partnership held its second partner meeting in Lugano Switzerland 26th and 27th July 2014.

Ms. Marta Scrignaro from Well at Work presented the results of the investigation, which has been carried out in the framework of the project, of the
state of the art of the training and education opportunities available in the partner countries for health care workers in order to identify the lacks in training and education.

The next phase of the project was the development of the Digital Story Telling material and methodology - based on the results of the research.

The key themes on which to work with the methodology had been identified by the partners:

- Interaction with other professionals
- Interaction with the patient/client
- Interaction with the relatives of the patient/client
- Interaction with other stakeholders (authorities...)
- Work/life balance
- Ethical dilemmas and moral distress
- Social perception of the care worker
- Status of the care work (Financial)
- Personal strength and weaknesses within the profession
- Interaction with people with a different cultural background

The proposed themes had been discussed by teachers and trainers in the health care sector in the participating countries and according to their feedback the list was extended and revised.

The main outcome of the project is a handbook, illustrating a digital storytelling based learning methodology addressing healthcare professionals and their trainers, and it was tested during two pilot courses organised at the University of Applied Science of Italian Switzerland (SUPSI / DEASS).

A group of students and a group of workers were guided through a digital storytelling process, guided by staff members of seed association, SUPSI / DEASS and Well At Work, focusing on their professional experience.

All participants were introduced to specific features of stories, identified turning points in their life as healthcare workers, told a story about them and rendered it in digital format.

The results were astonishing! All participants produced really deep, emotional, personal stories based on their professional experience. Moreover, all the videos were expressive, of good quality and able to deliver a strong and clear message to the audience.

The reaction was definitely positive, from all involved people: participants had the chance to share their experience and thought with a group of peers, getting feedback and insights from them. Furthermore, the activity allowed them to reach a better understanding of their own history and identity as profes-
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sionals, overcoming some difficult situations which had been left unsolved for a while. We also received precious suggestions about how to improve the methodology, handbook and additional training materials we have so far developed.

More information about the project can be found on the project website: http://storyshop-llp.eu/