

Theatre as a resource for promoting the mental health of adolescents and young adults. The SPES and Hearts projects

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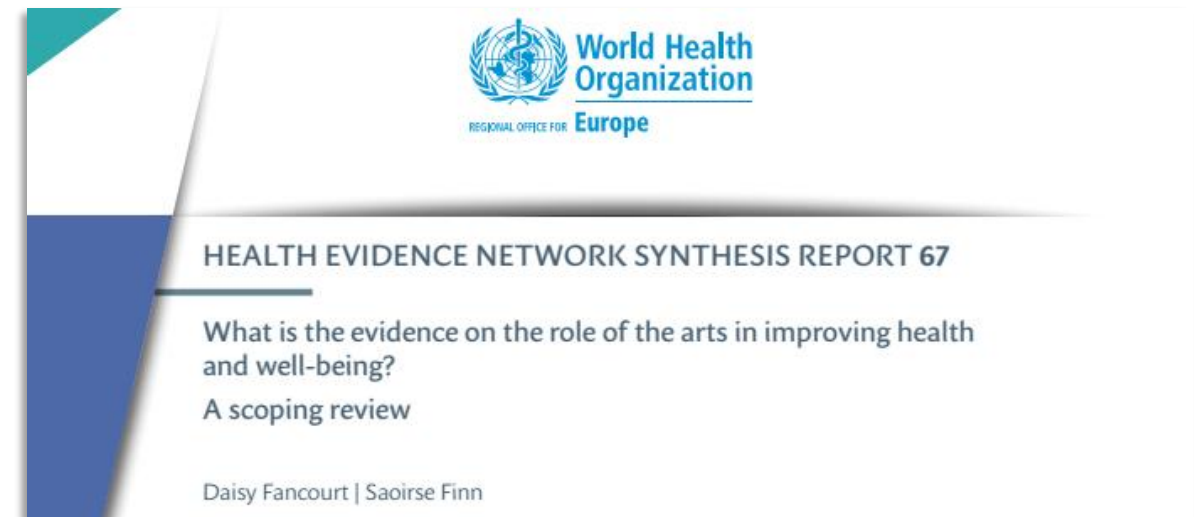
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Why theatre?

- Arts and culture **contribute to well-being** and health.
- The performing arts are used in the prevention, promotion and treatment of **mental health**.
- **Transformative effectiveness** on emotions and knowledge.

Theatre and health first came together on the island of Kos – Hippocrates suggested that patients should go see tragedies and comedies to heal.



Social and Community Theatre

Theatre: the art of the body, action, relationships and narration.

Social and Community Theatre is a theatrical method, developed by SCT Center and the University of Turin in the early 2000s, **with artistic, social and educational goals.**

It is based on the use of **creative theatrical practice as a tool for training, personal empowerment, the development of interpersonal relationships and health promotion.**

Pontremoli, Rossi Ghiglione et alii, *Performing Arts, Well-Being e Salute di Comunità*, Bulzoni, 2025.

Theatre for spectators: The performance

The performance as:

- **Myth / Narration**
(what is told)
- **Community ritual**
(collective engagement)

Participatory theatre: The theatre workshop

Development of **life skills**
because it works on:


- **Body and emotion awareness**
 - **Behaviours**
- **Communication skills**
 - **Storytelling**

Theatre and mental health promotion: what theatre can do

- Promote knowledge about **what mental health is**
- Build **new and profound narratives** that foster understanding
- **Destigmatize** the social discourse around mental health
- Encourage the **sharing of personal experiences** and counteract feelings of isolation and helplessness
- Develop **skills** to recognize signs of distress and to establish helping relationships
- Train **socio-emotional skills** that support individual mental well-being
- **Encourage** interprofessional and intergenerational **dialogue and alliance**
- Train the **ability** of a group and an environment to **promote mental health**

The SPES and Hearts projects

- Promote mental health within **educational environments**
- **School** – Adolescent distress
- **University** – Young adult distress
- Transform places of education and training into **places of health promotion**

- 
- Risk of **burnout** in university staff
 - University students are **9%-13%** more likely to develop a mental disorder



SPES Program (www.spesprogram.unito.it) is a **multidisciplinary research and intervention program** that acts at multiple levels in the **prevention chain of adolescent suicide**, with the aim of **empowering the well-being of young people and their families**.

Davico, Rossi Ghiglione et alii, *Performing Arts in Suicide Prevention Strategies: A Scoping Review*, Int J Environ Res Public Health, 2022 Nov.

Davico, Graziano et alii, *Preventing Adolescent Suicide: Feasibility and Preliminary Outcome Evaluation of a Theatre-Based Gatekeeper Training for Teachers*, Int J Environ Res Public Health, 2024 Dec.





SPES EVENT. #SPES performance



TEEN4TEEN. Photo exhibition by Ph Chiara Agostinetti

Two intervention formats for adults

585 teachers - 440 educators - 425 health professionals

SPES WORKSHOP

Active and experiential learning,
role-playing, theatrical improvisation

+

Theoretical training on suicide

4 weekly meetings

+ 3-month booster session

Approximately **20** first and second-
grade middle school teachers

SPES EVENT

Theatrical performance
(professional actors)

+

In-person **health education**
intervention

+

Group discussion

Approximately **100** teachers or citizens
or healthcare professionals

SPES4TEEN WORKSHOP

An intervention format **for adolescents**

260 boys and girls

A universal prevention theatre workshop (10 hours) aimed at adolescents, co-led by a theater professional and a social-healthcare professional. The SPES4TEEN program, developed in accordance with international guidelines (UNICEF and WHO HAT), aims to **support socio-emotional skills in adolescence.** Its goal is to foster **positive empowerment and awareness of one's own needs and potential**, while supporting the creation of significant bonds with peers and adults.

HEARTS

PROMOTING MENTAL HEALTH TOGETHER



Co-funded by
the European Union

<https://heartsproject.eu/>

ISOR Research in
Sociology of Religion
UAB Universitat Autònoma
de Barcelona



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iscte INSTITUTO
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DE LISBOA



IUHPE
UIPES
www.iuhpe.org

The HEARTS project

HEARTS: Higher Education Action Response for Trauma Support is an Erasmus+ project that aims to promote **mental well-being within the university community**.

Goals:

- Develop an innovative methodology for promoting mental well-being in Higher Education
- Spread a culture of well-being within partner universities
- Build safe, destigmatized, and inclusive university environments
- Create accessible resources for mental well-being awareness
- Raise awareness of mental well-being within the university community and enable change

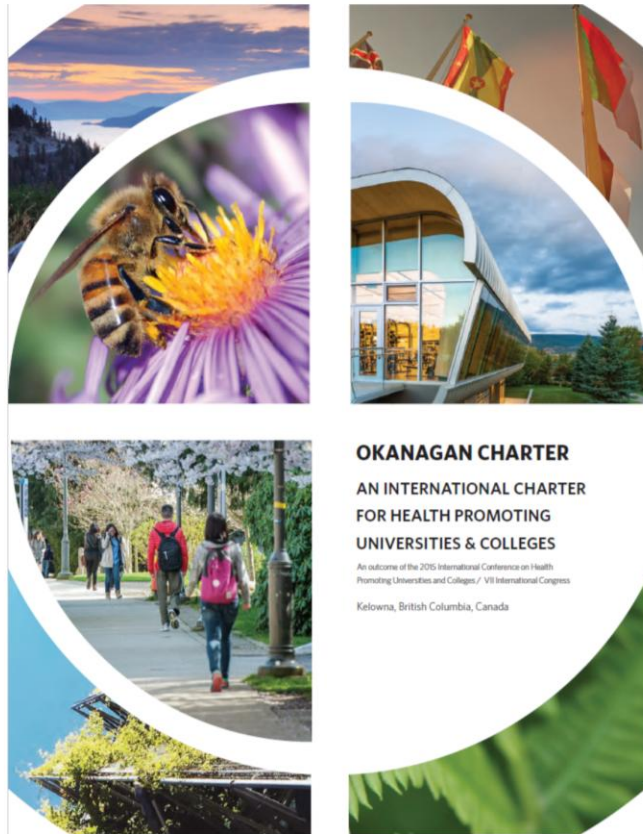


HEARTS WORKSHOP University of Turin. Workshop with teachers and students

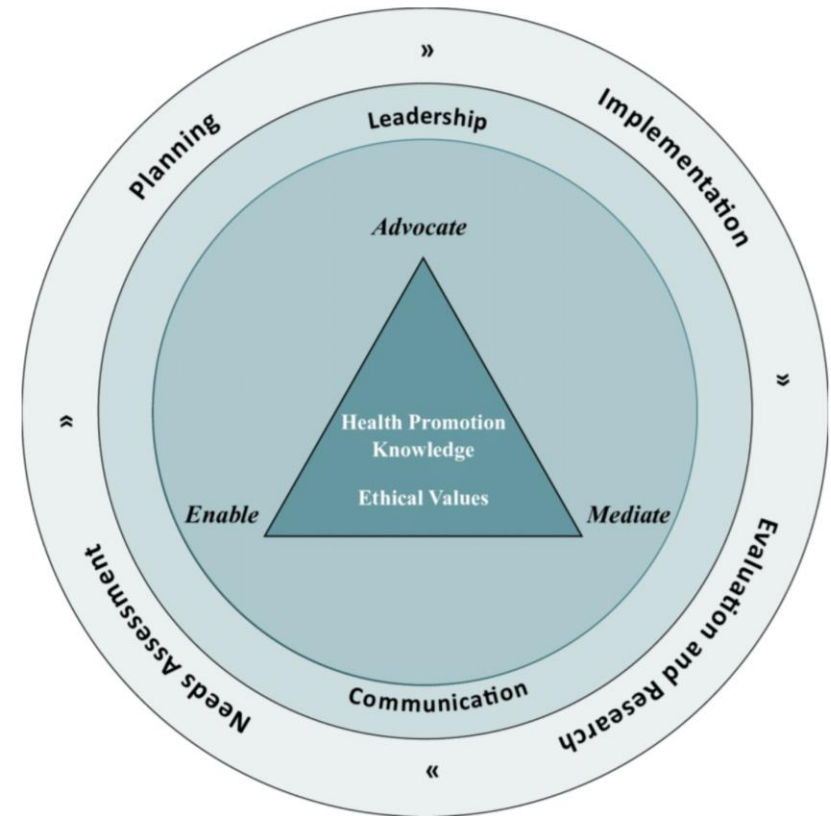


HEARTS WORKSHOP University of Turin. Workshop with teachers

Methodological framework



The Okanagan Charter: An International Charter for Health Promoting Universities and Colleges



The Core Competencies for Health Promotion framework developed by the IUHPE to train "health promoters"

Manual of activities for promoting well-being within the university community



The manual collects and presents **proposals for training activities aimed at promoting mental health** for Universities and Higher Education contexts. It is designed for **professionals who will facilitate and lead the groups.**

AMONG THE CONTENTS:

- **Five Learning Paths** created by the partners
- **Ice-breakers and closing activities**

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Thank you

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