



**Knowledge
Exchange:
Creative Ways
for Supporting
Women and
Promote Safety**

16th June 2026

10H CEST

AGENDA



- Welcome
- Introduction to the project – Meabh Savage, SETU
- Presentation of good practices on creative ways of working with women
- By Betti Balassa, BMSZKI, HU
- By Jana Bedrac, Kralj Ulice, SL
- By Bertude Joissant, Armée du Salut, FR
- Q+A
- Closing words and next steps

Creative methods in creating safe spaces for women

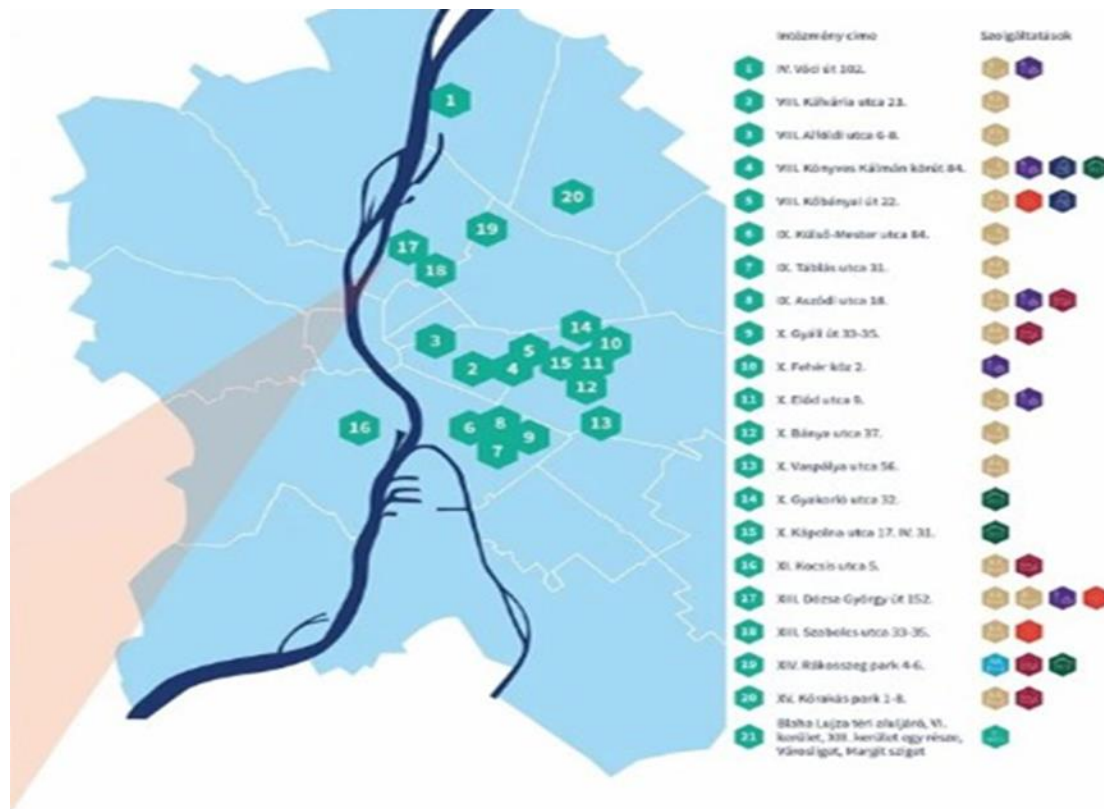
Betti Balassa: The Use of Nature Therapy connected to
Women's Voices Project



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BMSZKI Aszódi Street (South Bud

Shelter for Workers, women, men, pairs,
clients with dogs



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- Team: about 20 people; 5 during the day, 3 during the night in 24 h shifts
- Beds for 300 people
- work place for 2 mentally/physically disabled people
- Area: 9000 m² – 7 dog kennels, therapy garden, vegetable beds for personal and community use, edible forest, 2 raised beds for people with wheelchair

Društvo Kralji ulice (Kings of the street) (Maribor, Ljubljana in Celje, Slovenia)

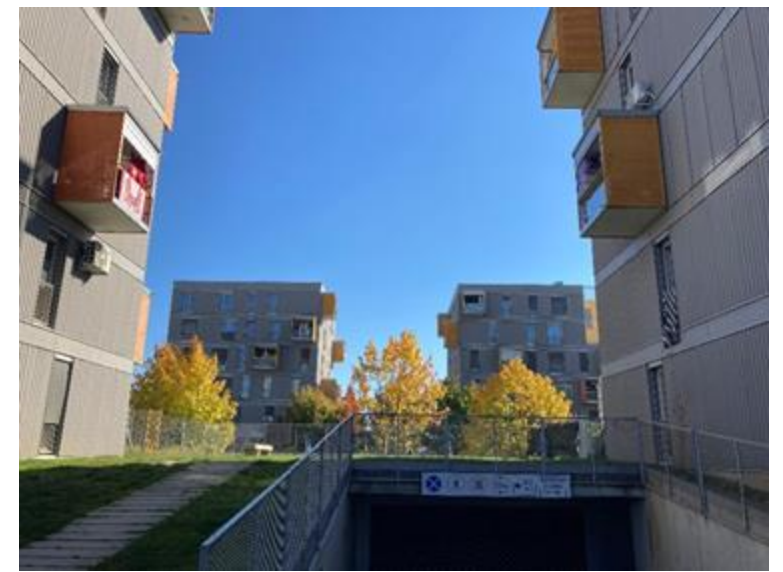
- **Organisation working in the field of homelessness and social exclusion**
- **NGO**
- **Focus on:**
 - People experiencing homelessness
 - Housing insecurity and poverty
 - Socially excluded groups
- **Work based on rights, dignity, inclusion**

Approach:

- Street outreach and field work
- Community-based social work
- Low-threshold services
- Long-term relationship building



- **Work with Women & Community Programme**
- **Women in vulnerable situations**
- **Women experiencing homelessness and housing insecurity**
- Women in Roma and non-Roma communities
- Multiple layers of social exclusion
- **Community programme (Maribor)**
- Since 2017
- Public housing estate (Roma + non-Roma residents)
- Started with anti-eviction work



Women's group

- Weekly meetings (Wednesdays, 2 hours)
- Flexible participation (social contact, support, information)
- Practical help + emotional support
- Safe and trusted space

Core idea:

→ We meet people where they are and build trust over time



Cité de Refuge-Salvation Army



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Our Organisation

- Cité de Refuge – Salvation Army
- Support for people experiencing homelessness
- Women facing violence, migration, addiction, mental health challenges
- Dignity, empowerment, participation and visibility



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Healing Walks



Budapest Zoo and Budapest Botanical Garden

“Woman”

She is a woman. She feels emotions more deeply, knows how to share, knows how to stand by decisions. She is creative, has many ideas and imagination. She is reliable. She knows how to take care of herself and her family. She is warm. She gives a calming feeling, radiates energy. She knows how to entertain others and brings joy. Caring. Responsible for herself and for the family. Works. Sad — then she needs a hug, a conversation, someone by her side. Sensitive, feels that no one understands her. Beautiful, carries warmth and strength within herself. Change of body, emotional and physical, especially during pregnancy. Disappointed when things hurt me. Strong, despite pain she gets up again. Obedient, listens to conversations and helps. Patient. Knows how to carry burden and pain.



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Sočutna ženska (Slovenia)

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“Beautiful Sight”

The picture shows the Parliament and the Danube from Margaret Bridge. This is one of my routes home from work. When I walk here, my thoughts clear and I feel calm. I don't like being confined. I need to be outside, in nature, surrounded by greenery. It has a healing effect. I don't feel terrorised, and my freedom isn't taken away. I don't feel good in my room either. When I lived with my parents, she was harsh, and had violent urges for the man she lived with to be with me... forcefully. I try to cope with this through nature, using healing mantras: “I am outdoors, I am safe. No one can hurt me anymore.”



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“A PLACE WHERE WE FEEL SAFE?”

Sometimes, when my thoughts start to suffocate me and my heart beats faster, I just want to escape. At those moments, I imagine my safe place — a meadow with wildflowers, where the wind in the trees drowns out the inner restlessness. In this corner of nature, I can finally breathe... Breathing... Sometimes we forget to breathe. In this place, my body is not tense, my head is not heavy. I simply am.

That is why I feel safe there — not because everything is perfect, but because it allows me to be as I am. Then I realize that the restlessness did not come from the outside. That everything I feel — peace, clarity, strength, and also uncertainty — comes from within. And so I allow uncertainty to be part of me. Uncertainty and anxiety are not enemies — they are parts of me that remind me I am vulnerable, and that I am human. Because now I know that everything comes from me, and is part of me.



“Garden”

When we made the garden, I felt proud to have it and that we had created it ourselves. I hope it will succeed and that something will grow. A garden brings you food and satisfaction. Walking barefoot on the soil feels good, calming, and free.



For me, the flower itself is a miracle. The colors lift my spirits, reminding me of the magical garden I once designed and brought to life. It is gone, but I know it will never truly be lost as long as my heart beats. Everything can be replaced — I will never give up.

See the miracle in the grass, in the trees, in the snow, in every tiny flower. Let your eyes open to beauty and goodness, and don't see everything blurred.



Nature — where I feel at home. Here, I recharge. All pain fades away. It eases tension, calms me, and fills me with strength and positive energy. In my current situation, it helps me a lot.



It's good to rest here and reflect.
Pure silence, peace, and calm.
Here, no one disturbs me — whether I cry, smile, feel
pain, or when everything seems hopeless.
I've never been in a situation like the one I'm in now.
I try not to show it, but inside I'm tense, after many
sleepless nights.
Here, by the lake, I can let it out and then leave it
behind — let the water wash away and carry off
everything that was.



On the way to the smoking area, the smokers' island.
The sight of the green plants is calming, we love this
little green path.



The Tree

"A boy hugging a tree. An emotion.

It is important to take care of nature.
Without it we would be nothing.

Deforestation in the Brazilian Amazon
increases every year.

Natural disasters are multiplying. I am very
afraid of what the future holds if we don't
think about the present.

Everyone must help reverse deforestation
by planting more trees and looking for more
sustainable energy sources."



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The weeds

" Flowers emerging from concrete.

We are all looking for our place; we are
not always in the right place, but nothing
is definitive.

I like seeing flowers or weeds grow
where they shouldn't or couldn't. It gives
me hope and brightens my days and my
smoke breaks.

Concrete is everywhere; I don't dislike it,
but it lacks colours. I need a colourful
view in order to move forward.

Throw seed balls as much as possible
and everywhere!

There are no weeds, they just grow
where we don't want them."



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Never enough freedom

"From the barriers of a terrace, a view over a block of housing and gardens in Schaerbeek.

You rarely see the horizon in Brussels—except when you live in the nice neighbourhoods, perched up high. I didn't grow up here. Until I was 18, I only knew the horizon and forests.

Drawn by the bustle and the social struggles of cities, I ended up in our capital. The great outdoors here is inaccessible, always blocked and restricted.

Letting nature reclaim its place in the city is possible, and it exists. Our humanity needs open, breathable spaces where all forms of life exist. Where we have the right to rest."



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Context & Community Entry

- Large public housing estate in Maribor
- All apartments owned by public housing fund
- High level of stigma and negative perception
- Previous approach: security guards and surveillance

Our approach

- Community-based work instead of control
- Building trust and relationships
- Reducing conflicts and improving quality of life



Working with Roma Women in Maribor

Community-based empowerment approach (since 2017)

- Anti-eviction and community work
- Roma and non-Roma mixed housing estate
- Focus on women's participation, safety and inclusion



How the Women's Group Started

- Started in 2017
- Initiated through work with children and families
- Mothers requested activities for themselves
- Group created based on women's needs

Key idea

→ Participation came from the community itself



Women's Group Today

- Weekly meetings (every Wednesday, 2 hours)
- 5–15 women per session
- Around 25 women involved in total
- Flexible and open participation

What it offers:

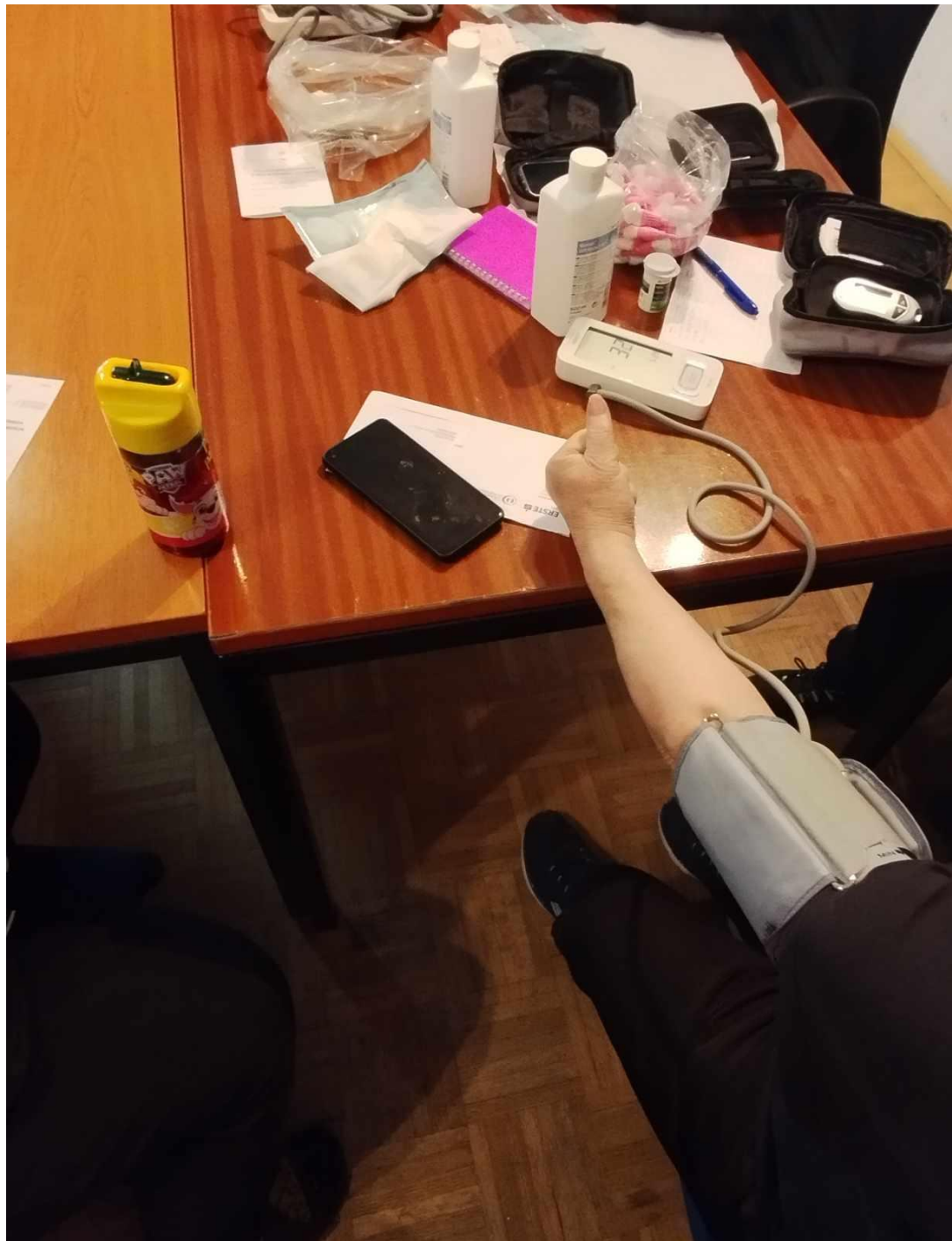
- Coffee and social connection
- Practical support (documents, applications, information)
- Emotional and social support



Creative Ways of Working with Women

- Women's support group (self-help model)
- Individual counselling and empowerment
- Cooperation with nurses and health services
- Trips (Sarajevo, Trieste, Graz, Thermal Olimje)
- Walks and hikes (Piramida, Pekrska Gorca)
- Volunteer involvement
- Cooperation with local stakeholders





Creative Activities

- Painting
- Bracelet-making
- Crochet
- Art exhibitions
- Group discussions



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The event welcomed visitors from outside the project who joined the workshops and explored the exhibition. These meaningful exchanges helped strengthen connections and build understanding. New women living in the CHRS also discovered the project and showed great interest in joining.





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Goals

- Create safe spaces Encourage self-expression Build confidence
- Strengthen social connections
-
- Give visibility to women's experiences
-



Recruitment of Women

- Through work with children and families
- Trust built over time in the community
- Women expressed their own needs
- No formal recruitment strategies
- Based on relationships and presence

Challenges in Participation

- Social exclusion and vulnerability
- Patriarchal structures in community
- Need for flexible methods

Solutions:

- Adaptation to women's needs
- Work in their living environment
- Safe and welcoming space
- Continuous presence

Recruiting Women

- Direct contact
- Trust-building
- Informal conversations
- Peer encouragement
- Welcoming atmosphere



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Participation Challenges

- Instability of situations
- Health difficulties/ Addictions
- Changing motivation
- Flexible approach
- Every participation mattered

Results for women



- finding their own way of healing
- Taking back control about their own lives
- strengthening their self-confidence and self-management
- positive feedback on their feelings, thoughts, behaviour
- encouragement in deepening their interest in culture, arts, sciences



Results for me



- Getting better in facilitating nature therapy sessions: new ideas, new inspiration
- Measureable results via POMS-test
- Getting feedback on their needs (they are valid and still alive)
- Closer contact to them and other residents
- New work relations with other social workers



Key Learning

- Women's safety is more than physical safety.
- For many Roma women, safety means:
- Being accepted without judgement
- Having a trusted place to meet
- Being listened to and respected
- Having access to information and support
- Feeling confident to speak openly

Trust is the foundation of safety.



Changes for Women

Increased Empowerment

- Greater self-confidence
- Stronger social networks
- Regular participation in activities
- More active role in the community
- Better access to health and social services

Breaking Taboos

- Open discussions about health
- Discussions on gender equality
- Increased awareness of rights and opportunities



Changes for Us as Professionals

What We Learned

- Importance of flexibility
- Importance of community-based work
- Need to adapt methods to women's needs
- Value of long-term relationship building
- Better understanding of challenges faced by Roma women

Key Message

Relationships come before interventions.



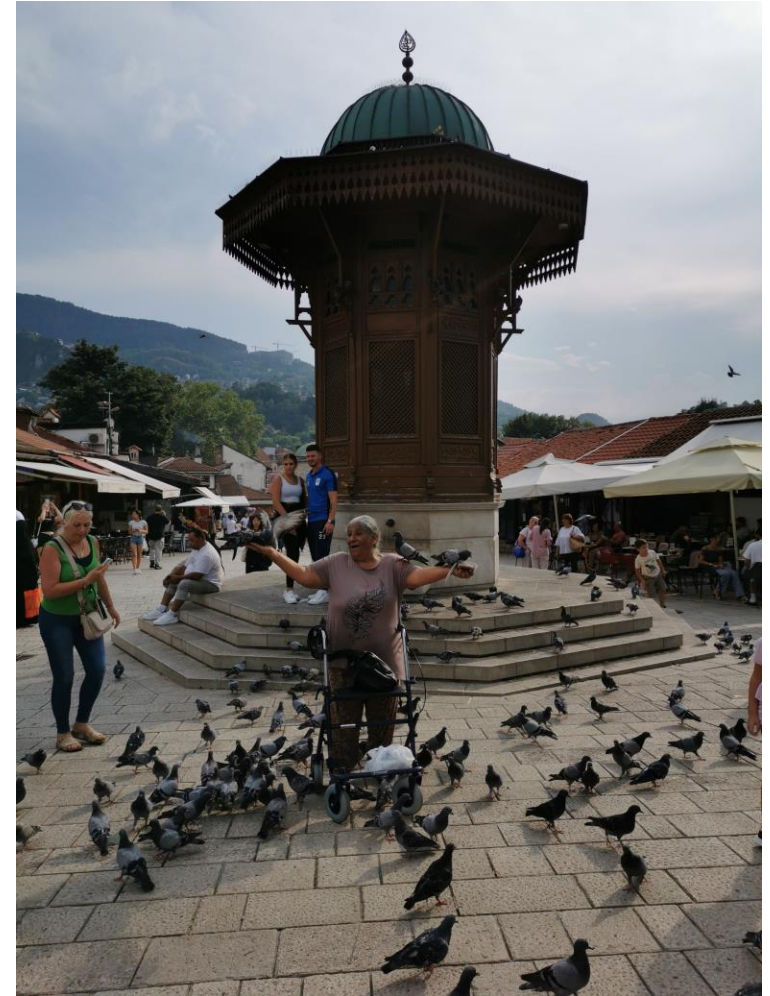
Changes for the Organisation

Organisational Impact

- Stronger cooperation with healthcare services
- Better collaboration with social services and schools
- Improved cross-sector partnerships
- Greater awareness of Roma women's needs

Community Impact

- Reduced stigma towards the Roma community
- Increased understanding among local institutions
- Greater visibility of Roma women's experiences



Conclusions and Future Directions

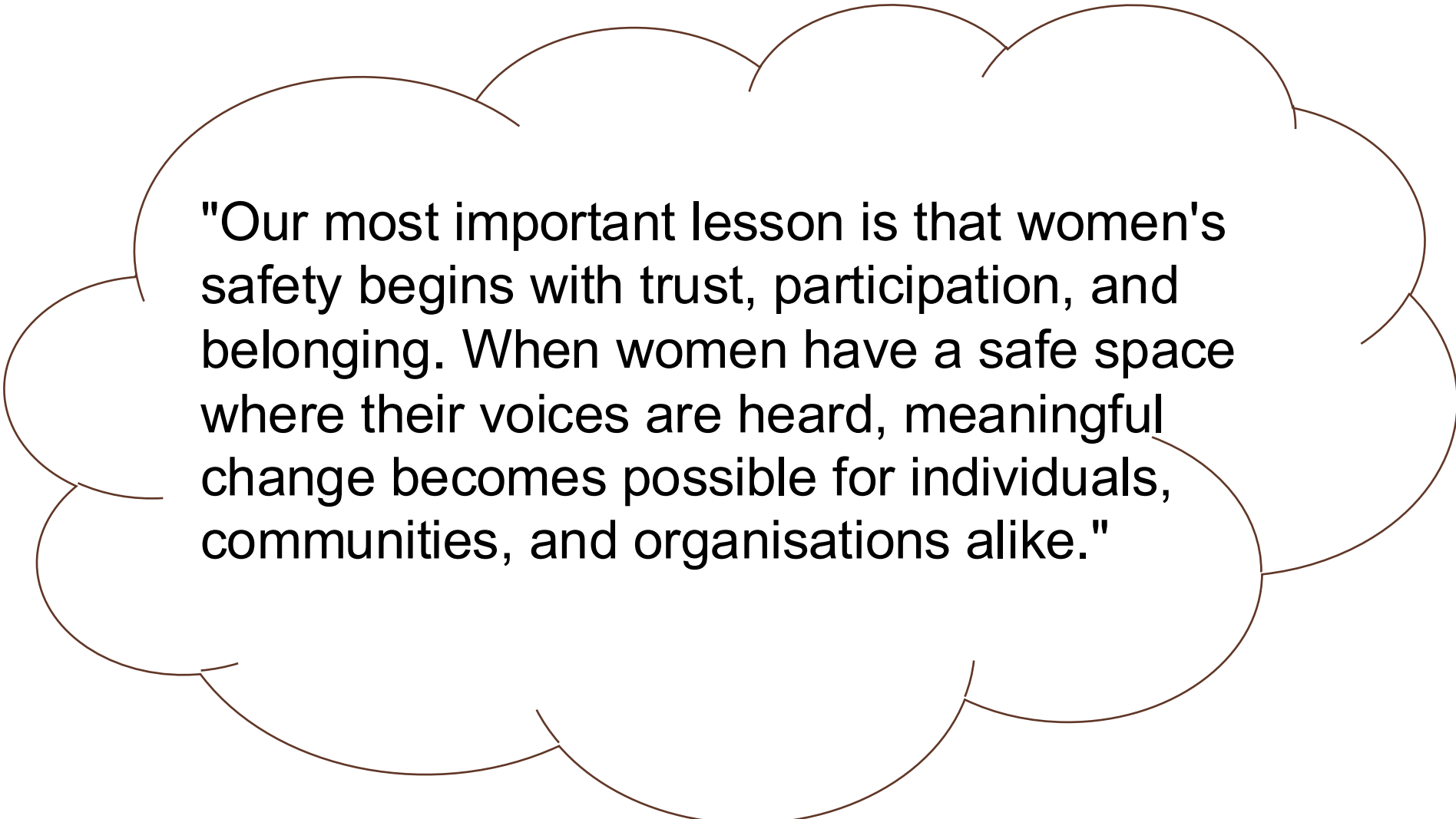
Main Results

- ✓ Safe and welcoming space for women
- ✓ Active participation in all project phases
- ✓ Improved well-being and inclusion
- ✓ Stronger community connections

Future Needs

- Sustainability of the programme
- Continued support for women's groups
- Development of a men's group
- Transfer of the model to other vulnerable communities





"Our most important lesson is that women's safety begins with trust, participation, and belonging. When women have a safe space where their voices are heard, meaningful change becomes possible for individuals, communities, and organisations alike."

Women's Safety

- Physical safety
- Emotional safety
- Being listened to
- Trauma-informed support
- Gender-sensitive approaches

Changes Resulting

- Women: confidence and participation
- Professionals: awareness and reflection
- Organisation: focus on women's safety
- Improved understanding of vulnerability





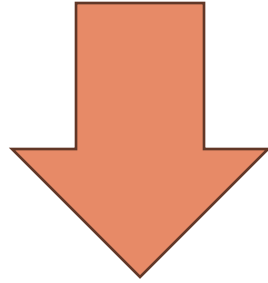
Future plans



- Therapy process with one client at the same time
- Training other colleagues for nature therapy – more professionals needed
- Burn-out syndrome – useful way for recreating our colleagues: sessions for our workers



Would We Use These Activities in the Future?



Yes - definitely.

Because:

- They are effective
- They are sustainable
- They build trust and participation
- They improve well-being and inclusion

Why This Model Works?

Key Strengths

- Flexible and low-threshold approach
- Based on women's real needs
- Long-term presence (since 2017)
- Safe and welcoming environment
- Builds trust over time

Result

→ High participation and long-term engagement

Core Activities to Continue

We would continue:

- Weekly women's group (Wednesdays, 2 hours)
- Individual support and counselling
- Health cooperation (nurses, services)
- Group activities (walks, hikes, trips)
- Volunteer involvement of women



Future Development

Two important directions:

1. Sustainability

- Long-term funding and stability
- Continued support for women's group

2. New target group

- Development of a men's group
- Inclusion of the whole community in gender equality work

Why We Would Continue?

Main Impact

- Stronger trust in the community
- Empowered women
- Better access to services
- Reduced social exclusion
- Reduced stigma

Key Message

These activities create **relationships, not just services.**



Transferability

The model can be used for:

- Other vulnerable groups
- Different communities
- Other geographical areas

Why it works:

- Based on flexibility
- Based on participation
- Based on community needs
- Easily adaptable

Future Use

- Continue workshops
- Develop exhibitions
- Increase participation
- Support wellbeing
- Train managers



Conclusion

- Homelessness is not only about housing Safety
- - Dignity Visibility Empowerment
 -
 -
 -

**Questions and
Reflections
from
Participants**



Thank you and project promotion



- Webinar on Visual Voices Methodology - end of September/October
- Homelessness in Europe Magazine on Women's Homelessness
- 2027 March - Women's Day in EU Parliament
- 2027 April - Launch of Toolkit