

# SKÅNE STADSMISSION'S CREATIVE WORKSHOP: SEEING CONVERSATION AS A CREATIVE PROCESS

The Creative Workshop was borne out of an observed need among people who came to Café David; the need to express themselves, the need to come together, the need to converse. Here, Oskar Mörnerud, Johan Perna and Matilda Jägerdén consider, among other things, the presence of conversation in the creative process and how this has influenced their broad view of the creative process and its key role in building relationships.

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*Translation Dennis Arndt*

## AN OPEN MEETING PLACE

Skåne Stadsmission is a non-profit organization that runs a meeting place called Café David for people living in social precariousness. Café David offers free breakfast and coffee, subsidized lunches, and a chance to shower and get clean clothes. Staff members are available for counselling and emotional support and work closely with the on-site counsellor and nurse. Collaboration with authorities and non-profit organisations is ongoing. Café David is the only place in the city of Malmö which is open 365 days a year for people struggling with homelessness, addiction and mental illness.

About 170 people come to Café David every day. Each participant has their own individual challenge which is why support needs to be tailored to the individuals' needs as much as possible.

*“Here I get breakfast every day and there is always someone who listens” - Stina*

Being welcome and part of a community is important for everyone and that is part of the reason why the work done at Café David revolves around creating dignified and meaningful connections between the visitors and the staff. The focus of the work is to build on peoples strenghts and one of the leading principles is “you can always have a second chance.”

## CREATIVE WORKSHOP - MEETING AND CREATING TOGETHER

Over the years, Café David has offered participants the opportunity to take part in various forms of activities and creative pursuits. The Creative Workshop developed because the staff saw a need among the participants who came to Café David to express their creativity. Many of them brought their own instruments, books, pens, brushes and paper, which were used in the Café. Initially, materials were purchased and used in the Café to paint, write and draw. As the need grew, the project needed more space and moved to a room in the basement where there was even space to make frames for finished pieces of art. After that, it wasn't long before the first exhibition.

Today, the Creative Workshop occupies an entire floor in the same building as the meeting place Café David. That house also holds the curator's office and the nurse's station. A few times a week a doctor and dentist also come to help the visitors at Café David. We see great value in having all these services under the same roof.

## THE NEED TO EXPRESS ONESELF

Conversations are at the heart of the work at Café David, that's where relationships are established and the wants and needs of our participants are identified. The entire approach is often highly pragmatic, with a strong focus on satisfying basic needs, and yet, in the midst of all this solution-based work, a conversation is always present.

*“In the conversations that arise, there is an opportunity for “the contributions of the speakers to merge into something entirely new. A new reality comes into being as we speak” which means that the conversation can lead to finding new ways forward, but also that the conversation can be seen as a creative process” (Engqvist 2013, 77).*

In fact, in the work at Café David a conversation is seen as a form of creative activity (a need to express oneself and find new ways), so one could say that the entire organization is essentially a creative project. It therefore seems quite natural that the creative workshop has now become a rather large part of the original organization.

*Based on this, we have a broad view of what creativity is. Sometimes a simple conversation can be a first creative activity that leads on to the creation of something new, sometimes it is writing a song, painting or looking for a job. In the workshop you can participate in ongoing communal projects or work on your own. The idea is to find what each individual wants to do, accommodate that idea as much as possible, and let it grow.*

The workshop has a number of rooms where you can paint, draw, print in different graphic techniques, sculpt, listen to music, use computers, sew and repair, read and write. There is also a music room where you can play music on electric guitar, electric bass, drums and piano.

In addition to participants being free to choose what they want to do, work is often done in a project format by exploring a theme. In workshops, everyone then works on the theme by trying out different techniques such as oil painting, acrylic painting, textile printing, watercolor, calligraphy, ink painting, collage, bookbinding, text, pattern sewing, different graphic techniques, and more. The result is usually presented in the form of an exhibition.

## EXHIBITIONS: TOGETHER YOU ARE NEVER ALONE

Quite recently, an exhibition was produced that was also turned into a book. The idea for the exhibition and the accompanying book emerged during the 2018 election year in Sweden. For the first time, people could submit early votes at Café David and we hosted a panel discussion with representatives of the different municipal parties. One of the most discussed topics at the Q&A session was housing policy, the reason being that a lot of the participants at Café David are homeless.

The planning of that project is a good example of how the creative process works in the Creative Workshop. The first idea was to build a movable exhibition in the form of a foldable wall filled with texts and pictures that could be displayed in different places in Malmö - a kind of wall magazine to express one's opinions on. During the discussions and conversations that followed in the workshop, the focus came to circle around what a home really is, and it was decided that that was a good theme to address on



Lars Fohrman participant in the creative workshop



The book *HOME?*

the folding wall. Then it also made sense to build the folding wall as a kind of apartment wall on which we could present the texts and pictures. The texts and images were then also turned into a book entitled "HOME?" and an exhibition was held at the Malmö City Hall and Malmö City Library.

Another project led to the formation of our music studio. Initially, the Café only had one acoustic guitar, but the participants expressed interest in playing other instruments as well, so a need for funding the cost of more instruments in order to start up a regular music activity were identified. We asked for donations of instruments and music equipment on Facebook which, together with the funds we received from other donors, led to the creation of a small music studio where it is possible to rehearse and record music. This studio is now a permanent part of the Creative Workshop. The project eventually culminated in a concert where participants performed on our new instruments.

“Here I get breakfast every day and there is always someone who listens”

Stina

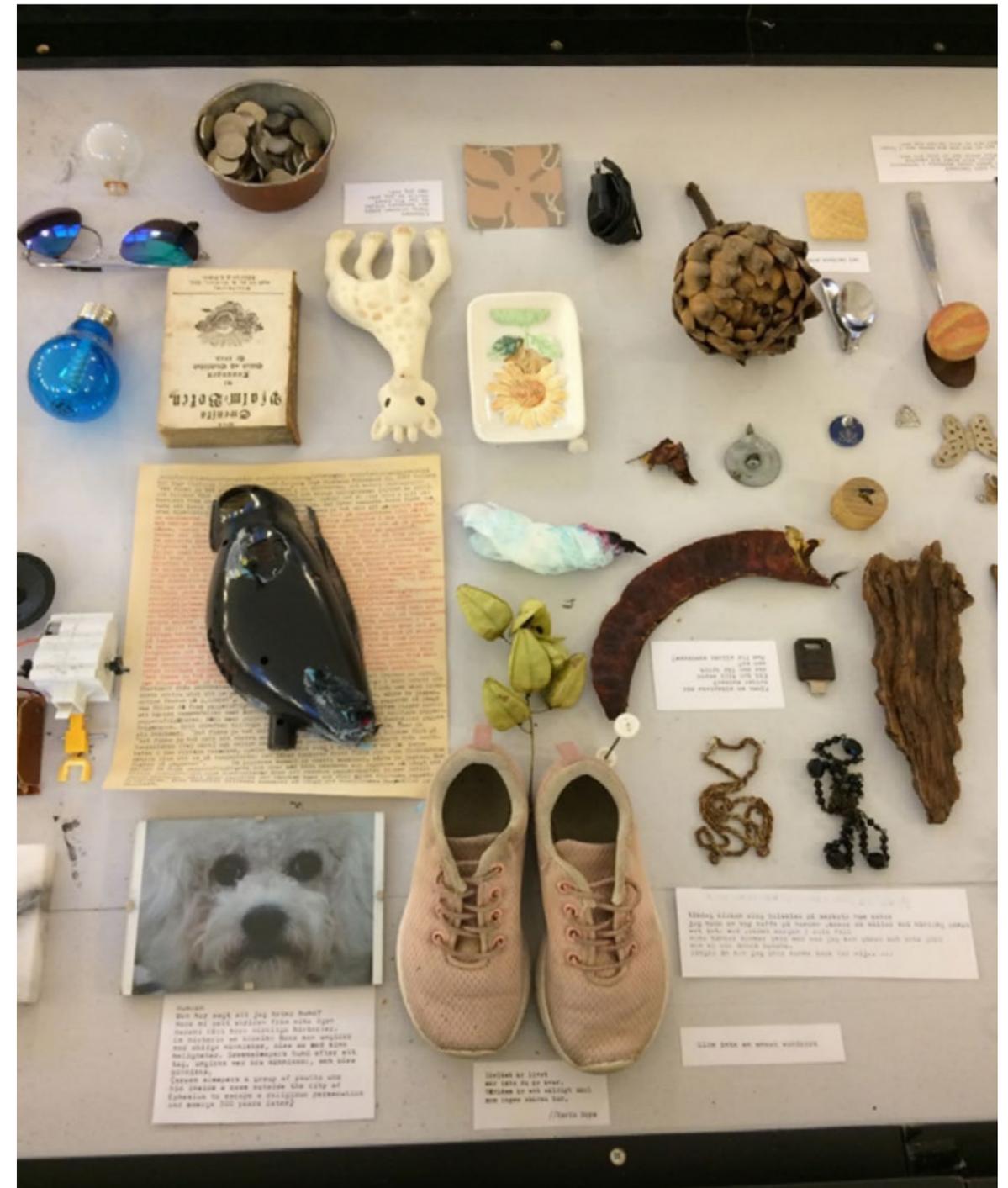


The exhibition that followed was also a combined concert and art exhibition. The exhibition, which focused on the theme of recycling, included paintings and drawings as well as a large installation entitled "The Museum of Lost and Found Things". It consisted of "lost and found objects" presented on a 7-metre-long exhibition stand. The objects in the stand were accompanied by informative texts that provided a background of the history of the objects.

Currently, work is ongoing on a documentary exhibition titled "Together you are never alone." The idea behind this project was to give participants an opportunity to talk about their experiences during the pandemic and offer an opportunity for reflection, where the participant can describe their feelings and thoughts about how they are affected by and experience the situation, using text and paintings. The project takes place mainly in the Creative Workshop, but there is also the possibility to participate through a writing station in the Café, a way to make the project as inclusive as possible. The idea is to have a free "association wall" in the first stage, where all thoughts and feelings can be mixed with each other, and then compile the material into a mobile exhibition.

## THE ART OF CONVERSATION

The creative workshop was established because there was a need among our participants to express themselves. When the workshop opened, about ten participants came each day and now, a few years later, the daily number is 30. All the organization did was to contribute material, give space, and highlight something that was already going on, the rest was done by the participants themselves. Speaking out - to be heard and seen - should be considered a human right and a basic human need, to be equated with food, warmth, and clothing, despite the difficulty to compare needs.



The Museum of Lost and Found Things



Here I can relax and be myself. I get new energy after being in the workshop” Daniel

As many of our participants are struggling with personal problems, the creative workshop often provides a much needed break from the problems, allowing participants to gather the strength to tackle them, as well as a general opportunity to create something that they can then show off and be appreciated for. By participating in the work of the creative workshop, an opportunity arises to be acknowledged and appreciated as something other than a social problem, something that many of our participants are otherwise defined as. Being creative and doing things together also creates a bridge in the meeting between people, that often leads to casual and mutual conversations between participants, but also between participants and staff. Many benefits arise from the conversations that are allowed to develop while doing something together. When we do something together that no one is really an expert in, the conversation is enhanced by being equal in the face of the uncertainty of the situation. This is especially true when it comes to art, as it is an activity without a “correct result,” and in the best case, this makes the meeting and conversation more mutual

and non-hierarchical. The conversation often becomes more relaxed when it begins with two equal persons doing something together and can be focused towards what the individuals wants to achieve. The problems are usually present enough that they come up in the conversation anyway, but because of the shift in perspective, they often arise in a different way.

If you think of the conversation as a basic creative activity – as a first opportunity to build something new together – then the creative workshop is a natural next step to help make connections and build relationships. Perhaps the question we should be asking is not “how can we solve someone’s problem?”, but “what can we build together?”

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**Skåne Stadsmission:** is an idea-based organization with activities in three locations in southern Sweden.

Skåne Stadsmission is a non-profit foundation, and its activities are financed by donations, grants, contracts and sales revenue.

Skåne Stadsmission works with people living in vulnerable situations. We offer professional support, both acute and long-term, through our work at open meeting places, residential homes, health clinics and social enterprises. Our clients include women and men living in homelessness, with addiction and mental health problems, young people who need adult support, women in need of a safe place to live, people who are unemployed and lonely older people seeking social community.