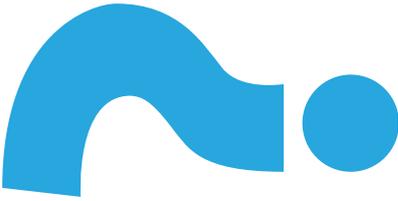




**DO  
CAN?**



**CAN?**

**VOICES**

*Personal stories of Social Change Agents on  
empowerment and combating discrimination*



Enjoy Success in life!

Things never fail...

they just go different!

My philosophy is

"I don't know,  
does not exist"

The path I  
choose is

my present

Fear

and mistrust  
are our worst

We are

enemies

IF the world!

IF YOU DON'T RISK  
ANYTHING.....

YOU RISK EVEN  
MORE!

Something  
inside so strong

Be the change

"THERE ARE VERY FEW  
MONSTERS STANDING BEHIND

you want to see in the world

THE FEARS WE FEEL"

ANDRÉ GIDE

The time of the lonely  
wolf is over

'UNCERTAINTY IS ALWAYS

THINK POSITIVE,  
BE POSITIVE.

THE PARTNER OF  
THE BRAVES ONES'

'It is easy to  
put the blame or  
the glory on anyb  
shoulders"

Be kind  
to yourself

rong... "Free the Mind  
Free the World"

"Question and challenge  
myself to make  
small moves and  
big changes"

Love  peace

Take your time

LIVE LIKE YOU  
WILL DIE TOMORROW  
LEARN like you  
will live for ever

CAN?DO!



# VOICES

*Personal stories of Social Change Agents on  
empowerment and combating discrimination*

The publication was developed under the framework of the Erasmus+ Programme “Can Do Empowerment” (2014-2017).

The programme is a partnership of the following organisations:

Community Works, Brighton, United Kingdom

Institute of Cultural Affairs (ICA) Madrid, Spain

RADAR, Rotterdam, The Netherlands

Umtapo Centre, Durban, South Africa

Verband für interkulturelle Arbeit (VIA) Bayern, Munich, Germany

ZEBRA Interkulturelles Beratungs- und Therapiezentrum Graz, Austria



The material was put together in a participatory development process with participants from Austria, Germany, the Netherlands, Spain, South Africa and the United Kingdom.

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Information about the Programme is available on the “Can Do Empowerment” Programme website. There you will also find downloads of the different language versions of this publication, as well as other contributions from participants which were too numerous to include in the book.

## **EU Disclaimer**

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CAVIN?  
D.O!  
!

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# 1 *Voices: An introduction*

Welcome to this book where you, the reader, will have the opportunity to explore and listen to the individual voices of a diverse group of participants who engaged with the “Can Do Empowerment” programme. You will receive an insight into the personal stories of individuals who face discrimination as well as those attempting to combat discrimination and exclusion. They are also, in their own discrete and different ways, Social Change Agents striving for empowerment.

During the implementation of the “Can Do Empowerment” programme we became ever more convinced that our approach, of reflection and sharing of experiences as well as highlighting personal stories and perspectives, is a very powerful means to self-empowerment. Which, at the same time, is also a way of supporting others to become more empowered themselves. In this book you will hear the voices, and personal experiences, of these people as well as their approaches to issues such as:

- what it means to be a social change agent.
- self-empowerment.
- strategies for combating discrimination.

As these were the issues that came up on many different occasions and that we found to be most relevant during the process of implementing the Erasmus+ “Can Do Empowerment” programme. All the contributions were developed by participants of the “Can Do Empowerment” programme in a number of different interactive and participatory ways. As country programme coordinators, of the “Can Do Empowerment” programme, we feel that it is very important to make these processes explicit from the beginning, as they sit at the very core of the empowerment process itself.

Fundamental to the book, with its focus on empowerment and combating discrimination, are the personal experiences of individuals which have been expressed in many different ways. It is also important to consider how empowerment, and change processes, take place at different levels. Individual empowerment is a process of personal development, a transition from a feeling of being powerless, to a position where one has the confidence and ability to take appropriate action. To change society, you not only need empowered individuals but also networks of social groups to which people belong. These may be associations responding to the various needs of different communities of place (neighbourhoods) or communities of interest. In addition, there must be a focus on the institutions that provide essential public services, where people work and learn, and to whom they turn to at various times in their life for many different reasons. Consideration needs to be given as to how, as citizens, we can influence decision making processes and hence the quality of services these institutions provide, ensuring that they respond appropriately to the diverse communities they serve. During the “Can Do Empowerment” programme we focused on these issues with the underlying question being, “how to get all the voices in the room, so that the diversity of views are heard and acted upon”. Whether this is within the setting of a community group or across an entire city to which an institution is providing services.

If you want to find out more about these issues, then please refer to our other publication “The Can Do Empowerment” Manual which was also developed as an output of the “Can Do Empowerment” programme.

Our aim here is also to stimulate and encourage you, the reader, to make your own reflections when thinking about the issues at stake. To assist you in this reflective process, we have provided some questions that we found useful, during these processes, ourselves. These questions can be found at the end of each chapter.

We invite you to take some time using these questions to reflect on what you have read. We would be delighted if you would be willing to share your own thoughts with us, as well as with a wider audience, by contributing to our blog at [www.candoempowerment.wordpress.com](http://www.candoempowerment.wordpress.com) Please send an e-mail to [candoempowerment@gmail.com](mailto:candoempowerment@gmail.com) and we will put your contribution on the blog.

We consider this to be especially important as we feel that developing an understanding of empowerment and social change has to be a continuous collective process which will always be developing.

Last but not least, we want to express our thanks to all the participants of the “Can Do Empowerment” programme and their invaluable contributions to this book.

The “Can Do Empowerment” programme team



Drawing by Hanno Langfelder

## 1.1 THE DEVELOPMENT HISTORY

In this book you will gain an insight into the thoughts and experiences of different people. The personal approaches of individuals to such issues as empowerment and discrimination are highlighted. Each person has their own life story and these stories are shaped by their past experiences, the process of their own personal development, their history as well as the “systems” into which they were born and socialised. For instance the origins of their families, the communities and institutions in which they grew up, etc. Most of the time, when we engage with people, we don’t know their life story and the experiences that have helped to shape their identity.

In the following chapters you, the reader, will be able to find out more about the history of the development process of this book. Whilst usually this process is not made explicit we felt, for us to be consistent with our overarching aim of empowerment, it is very important to provide you with an understanding of this process. We have a belief that the process itself needs to be participatory and empowering for everybody involved. It was never our intention to simply publish a great book with inspiring stories. We also wanted the process to be an enriching, learning and empowering experience for everybody involved in its production. The development of the content of this book was therefore carried out in a participatory way at different levels.

### *COLLECTIVE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CONCEPT*

During the development of the concept for this book, the involvement of different stakeholders was achieved in the following way. Helga Moser, from ZEBRA, prepared a concept paper for the book which was discussed and developed further on several occasions. In this process all the country programme coordinators were involved, as well as all the participants attending the international events, or “Learning, Teaching and Training Activities (LTTAs)”. In so doing we took into account the voices and opinions of all those people attending and participating in the “Can Do Empowerment” programme. Furthermore, since this publication was developed within the framework of an EU programme, we had to take into account what was included in the initial application as well as the suggestions of our funders, the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union and its direct agent, the German National Agency.

### *PARTICIPATORY CREATION OF THE MATERIAL*

As previously stated the creation of the material, as presented here in this book, was achieved through a participatory approach. This was done by involving the “Can Do Empowerment” programme participants by supporting them to develop their contributions during and after the international events, which were the programme’s Learning, Teaching and Training Activities (LTTAs).

Different approaches and methods were used to develop and collect all the material. During the first international meeting in Spain interviews were conducted with participants. The topic of these recorded interviews focused on their experiences of empowerment and being a social change agent, both during the meeting and also in their everyday lives. During the second meeting in Germany and the third meeting in the UK, several sessions were dedicated to creating material for the book in an interactive and participatory way. The participants were guided through creative processes, in which they were able to explore many different topics and how to express their thoughts and ideas in an artistic way. In doing so, the participants were able to develop their own contributions for the book. The outcomes of these processes were twofold: creating an empowering process during the meetings and the production of inspiring results that the participants could be (and were) proud of. At the international meeting held in Brighton and Hove we facilitated interactive sessions with the local community, as well as service providers, where we explored the complexities of how participation and engagement can influence decision making.

This, in many ways, mirrored the processes that we were grappling with in terms of implementing the “Can Do Empowerment” programme itself. How can you make sure that the diversity of voices is being heard? How can these voices influence the decisions being made? What is the evidence that such participation has had an impact on the outputs and outcomes achieved? What level of feedback is given? “You said we did.” How tokenistic are the engagement processes? There were also issues of managing expectations, being clear where decisions are made, how the participatory processes can influence the outcomes and final decisions made. These were also issues that played themselves out in the development processes of this book.

### *EMPOWERING PROCESSES*

These processes can be very empowering for the participants themselves provided that the programme’s values and principles are truly embedded in the way things are done. One participant, after being interviewed during the meeting in Spain, said that it was a special moment for him. He had felt “important”, when he was asked to share and speak about his experiences and views. It was recognised that the simple act of asking people to express their views and taking them seriously, in terms of what they think and say, was clearly one path to supporting an individual’s empowerment.

In the reflections given after each exercise participants expressed the view that the process of being creative had been very empowering for them. Many participants said that they had never thought of themselves as artists or that they were capable of creating a piece of art. Others said, they often really wanted to be creative, but didn’t normally find the time or opportunity in which they could work creatively. During all sessions facilitated at the international events, space and time was provided so that participants could explore their “hidden talents” and the potential they have within. This then allowed them to find and develop their own voice(s).

### *DOCUMENTS TO TRACE THE PROCESSES AND ITS RESULTS*

We recorded and documented the different aspects of these processes using different approaches, methods and media. To obtain further insight and for more information, please refer to the following “Can Do Empowerment” resources and materials:

- A selection of the outcomes of these creative processes, such as **written texts and photographs** of the material developed, can be found embedded within the various chapters of this **book**.
- Additional resources can be found on the “Can Do Empowerment” programme **website**. Including other contributions, prose, voices, **texts** as well as **filmed interviews** and **audio recordings** see [www.candoempowerment.eu](http://www.candoempowerment.eu)
- On the programme **blog** you can gain an insight into the experiences of participants during the international events, or Learning, Teaching and Training Activities (LTTAs). [candoempowerment.wordpress.com](http://candoempowerment.wordpress.com)
- In the “Can Do Empowerment” **Manual** our training approaches and methods used, as well as the theoretical background underpinning all our work, has been laid out in more detail.

These sources of information can help to highlight the depth of reflective practice and shared learning that was embedded within all the programme activities. It was considered essential during the development of this book that the processes we followed reflected our values and principles of empowerment. In so doing we were able to support the participants to engage in the production of this book in a more empowering way. We felt that it was not enough to simply have a professional output that could inspire people who read the book. The process of creating the contributions for the book itself had to be empowering for the participants. For further considerations, also refer to chapter 1.3 “The book’s content”.

Furthermore, we hope that this is beneficial for you, as the reader of this book. To have the opportunity to dive into and explore the results of an empowerment process that will inspire you with new insights and ideas. In the same way that we, as participants and coordinators of the “Can Do Empowerment” programme, found working together to be both fascinating and inspirational. We hope that the book will motivate you, allowing you to reflect upon your own practice and experiences, helping you to discover new ideas and solutions, as well as opening up new questions and avenues of research.

## 1.2 THE “FAMILY” BACKGROUND

Just as each individual has their own life story, each person also has their own family background. This includes the family, into which we were born, grew up in, and that helped to socialise us. In the case of this book, the idea was born within and developed out of the “Can Do Empowerment” programme itself.

The programme “family” (or partnership) brought together six organisations from across Europe and South Africa, who had in common their commitment to confronting discrimination and exclusion, and promoting equality and diversity within society:

- **VIA Bayern (Association for Intercultural work)**, based in Munich (Germany) is an umbrella organisation of various associations, groups and initiatives that are active in the areas of intercultural social work, migration and refugee work.
- **Community Works (CW)**, which is based in Brighton (UK) and covers the Brighton and Hove, Adur and Worthing area gives community groups and voluntary organisations the support they need to make as big a difference as possible to local lives and issues.
- **RADAR**, based in Rotterdam (The Netherlands), promotes equal opportunities so creating a society that is free of social exclusion.
- **Instituto de Asuntos Culturales (IACE) / Institute of Cultural Affairs (ICA)**, based in Madrid (Spain) is a not for profit organisation committed to providing training to optimise processes of participation, involvement and empowerment in all sectors of society and through organisational capacity building.
- **ZEBRA Interkulturelles Beratungs und Therapiezentrum**, based in Graz (Austria) is a non-governmental organisation that provides counselling and psycho-therapy for migrants and refugees as well as training for different target groups.
- **Umtapo Centre**, based in Durban (South Africa), is a non-profit development organisation that engages in education, training, community mobilisation, and networking in order to empower people (particularly youth) to take more control of their own lives in the struggle for sustainable development, peace, and human rights.

The main objective of the “Can Do Empowerment” programme was to empower trainers and other people engaged in anti-discrimination, social change and empowerment work, to be able to challenge discrimination and act as change agents. This was both at a personal level, within our own local context, to deal with discrimination as well as to develop and share educational and methodological tools to use within the organisations where we work. The aim was to learn from each other’s experiences so as to strengthen the collective ability to promote equality.

## *THE TRAINERS AS SOCIAL CHANGE AGENTS*

The trainers of the participating organisations work within a number of varied social settings; from schools, universities and City Councils, to place based community groups and communities of interest, supporting individuals, community groups and institutions, working with a very diverse, broad spectrum of beneficiaries.

These included individuals from both minority and majority backgrounds, young and old, professionals and the general public. In all these settings trainers can be considered as change agents, promoting a shift in practice and focus towards equality, diversity and inclusion. As change agents, we are often confronted with various forms of discrimination and prejudice ourselves. To be effective as change agents, trainers need to be empowered themselves, to be able to confront discrimination and prejudice not only in their professional, but also in their personal lives, as well as within the communities where they live and work.

### **1.3 THE CONTENT**

Having now got to know the development history and family background of this book, you will also need to gain an insight into the considerations used to determine what the content of the book is and the way in which these contributions are presented.

#### *THE CONTRIBUTORS*

The development of the content of this book lies deep within the international events we held, or the “Learning, Teaching and Training Activities (LTTAs)”. In these events participants from the partner organisations came together from many different countries including Austria, Germany, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Spain and South Africa. The participants’ backgrounds were very diverse regarding their age, gender, sexual orientation, race, disability, religion, identity and culture. Most of the participants were engaged in anti-discrimination, social change and empowerment, working as trainers as well as community activists and other development practitioners.

The participants started to develop their contributions, for the book, during the sessions and workshops facilitated during the international events. They would then continue to work on their contributions which were then finalised after these events, back at ‘home’. During the sessions the participants wrote creative texts, such as poems, built sculptures or just found the time and space to capture their reflections on a certain topic in writing. This could, for instance, be focused on a learning experience initiated through one of the programme’s activities. Some very personal texts and material was developed through these processes, expressing and highlighting intimate and sometimes challenging aspects of their lives; this could be, for instance, when speaking or writing about experiences they have had of dealing with discrimination or exclusion.

At the early stages in the development of this publication, we had the idea to include all the names and biographies of the contributors. To make them visible, to recognise their input and honour the very personal contributions they had made in this way. However, during the activities, some of the participants voiced their concern, clearly stating that they didn’t want their (full) name to appear in public. Many of the contributions were very personal and, given that these would be made public, not everybody felt comfortable with their names being attached to their text, especially given the implications of the digital age that we now live in.

Therefore it was decided that we would not include the names and personal descriptions of participants keeping ALL contributions anonymous. During a number of sessions held at our international events, we worked on issues of identity and the assumptions people can make. The decision, to keep all contributions anonymous, partly emanated and was linked to such deliberations. Questions were raised as to what lies behind the need to know the name of the author, their educational background, their current professional occupation or their age, marital status, hobbies and private interests?! We considered whether the text, or other contributions that were made, could stand on their own merit and as such still reveal the message within? We came to the conclusion that they could, we ask you to respect this decision and hope that you agree!

### *LANGUAGE AND TRANSLATION*

From the onset it was agreed that the working language for the programme, as well as all the meetings, would be in English; this created issues in itself around participation, (dis)empowerment and engagement given that English was not the first language for the majority of the participants. We gave much consideration to this and developed strategies to overcome our necessity to use the English given that it was the language we all had in common. For instance, some participants wrote their texts in English straight away whilst others chose to write in their first language and then have them translated into English. We also used many different types of media as a way of allowing people to express their views, this was from sculpture, drawings and photographs to acting and role play. The support that colleagues, especially from the participants' home countries, gave each other was also invaluable in allowing the maximum participation of everyone involved to take place.

When capturing their experiences, the participants choose their own words, expressions and images, irrespective of their first, second, or third language(s), whilst at the same time also being influenced by them. The editors of the book didn't want to change such texts as contributed and this concern was also expressed by the participants themselves. This went as far as agreeing that there was no need for an extensive (English) grammar proofreading or editing of participants text for coherence. Any changes as suggested by a third party would inevitably have meant an interference with the personal character, meaning and essence of the contributions themselves and this was deemed inappropriate. This reflects an attitude and approach to the integrity of all participants which was seen as being very important to us personally as well as being critical in the approach taken to supporting empowerment processes in general. This is essential if we are to value and appreciate the personal expressions of individuals. Not judging people or making assumptions as we suggest "improvements" for the sake of "enhancement". The authors, who made such contributions, worked hard with much commitment and effort to create the texts and material as published here. We believe that they are perfect, just the way they are?!

Another challenge we faced, regarding language, has been the issue of translation. In the partner countries not everybody, who will potentially be the audience for this book, will be able to read English. To make the content accessible to readers who are not proficient in English, we decided to have translations made. Even though we are aware, that a translation is already an interpretation as a new text is generated. However, in order to enhance the accessibility of the book, we have had to accept this shortcoming to help realise its intended potential.

## 1.4 THE NAME

Each person has a name, which is most usually chosen by your parents. Here we want to explain our reasons for choosing the name or in this case, the title of this book.

The post-colonial theorist Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak highlights in her essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?”<sup>1</sup> that for the disempowered - or the “subaltern” as Spivak calls them - it is important to have the possibility to speak for themselves and to be heard. In the “Can Do Empowerment” programme we explored different aspects and levels of (dis)empowerment and (anti)discrimination. And in particular during the international meetings we strove to create spaces, where it is possible to develop your voice, to speak for yourself and be heard. Therefore, we chose the title “Voices”.

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<sup>1</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak: *Can the Subaltern Speak? English Version e.g. in: Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*. Ed. Vincent Leitch, et al. New York: Norton, 2001. 2197-2208

## 2 *What it means to be a social change agent*

### BACKGROUND DEVELOPMENT PROCESSES OF THE CONTRIBUTIONS

A theme which guided us through the whole programme was the concept of “what it means to be a social change agent”. In the third of the international events held in Brighton and Hove we explored in more depth the question of “what is a social change agent?” The participants used many different methods to reflect upon their experiences, capturing their diverse perspectives in different ways.

In one session, participants were supported through a process to ‘discover their hero’, the people that have inspired them and the qualities these people have. Through a creative exercise, participants reflected on what being a social change agent meant to them. As an output of this activity they developed a living sculpture that expressed their different perspectives on this issue; the statue that they formed with their body was entitled “My social change agent”. These activities set the mood and spirit to think and write more creatively about being a social change agent.

In this chapter we would like to share with you some of the outcomes of these sessions. They include the different kinds of texts produced as well as photographs of the statues which inspired the writing (where this is appropriate). More examples can be found on our website [www.candoempowerment.eu](http://www.candoempowerment.eu)

The “Can Do Empowerment” Manual also contains more detail about the specific methods used in these sessions:

- Who is your hero?
- Sculpture



## 2.1 CONTRIBUTIONS

### 2.1.1 TIME TO STOP

What is a Social Change Agent? That is a good question. I had to think a lot to be able to say something about it. Now I really do not have an answer but I have a lot of questions. And I truly believe that questioning is the starting point of being a Social Change Agent. I was not aware and now I realise the importance of stopping, thinking, questioning and then doing. That is why in my sculpture I am sited and relaxed. It is the way I found to express with my body the feeling when I think about Social Change. In the world we live in it seems like everything should be doing fast. Too much action and little reflection on what we do and why we do what we do.

So, in this moment I really feel the need to stop and reflect but not in a theoretical way. I am talking about personal reflection. Who am I? Where do I come from? Where do I want to go? Do I need to change something? This is important to me because if I want to change the world I have to start with myself. And remember it is not possible to make others change unless they want to do it.

Being a Social Change Agent for me it is a challenge but also a need. I also know I must share ideas with others, not only reflect on them, in order to change something else than myself. I know I cannot do it alone, but I have to start with myself. That is for sure. The first step is finding balance in my personal life before sharing ideas to create a team of Change Agents. Realising as group of people we can change the world... at least our world. I know it is not an easy task but if we do not start sometime we will keep on living a life we do not enjoy.

Sometimes when I think of changes, I imagine very big transformations, like having a different political or economic system. And then I see that kind of change is not in my hands; so I do nothing about it. But if I think of small changes in my daily life I know I can start a chain of changes that could influence others. Therefore, my new perspective is about small but constant changes. It is not only about facts. It also can be about changing my point of view. Looking others and myself from a different perspective. Questioning what I have been told it is natural and normal. Yes, now I know life can take other direction. Social Transformation is possible if we change our point of view together. Have other values, being more human and more emphatic. Sometimes we believe we have to buy a lot of things to be happy. Then we buy things and we feel nothing further from happiness. We tend to forget that happiness is not something you buy. It is more about sharing time and interests with people that understand and care about you.

I really like the idea of movement and waves because everything that is alive it moves. There is nothing that cannot be changed. And every change, even if it is so little, it resonates. If I change something about myself others will change as well. For instance, if I change the way I talk to people, if I smile or say thank you, they will react positively and so on...

Finally, I would like to say that life is not lineal. And it is not impossible to go back, you can always take a look back before you move and write new chapters of your story. And as Ercan says: *“There are no mistakes, only experiences.”*



## 2.1.2 EM(OTIONAL)POWERMENT

*"When I was young I prayed to Allah to give me that power to change the world. When I was middle-aged I prayed to Allah to give me that power to change the people in my surrounding. Now I am old and wise and I pray to Allah just to give me enough power to change myself." - Mullah Nasruddin*

From my point of view that is the essence of being a social change agent. It is to be aware of yourself with your own assumptions and prejudices and work on - and to be aware of your surrounding and the global collective as well. You don't have to target big changes because it is a consuming goal; and you can believe Mullah Nasruddin that you will be disappointed at the end...

Just be courageous to change your own view on things and attitudes; and be honest with yourself. Keep in contact with your heart more than with your brain. Don't think. Feel! Don't speak. Be! You will have qualitative persuasive power especially by being and by doing, not by talking. Everyone, even racist politicians and activists claim to be respectful, tolerant and democratic. For example, just today on 8. September 2016 a German politician from the conservative Bavarian party CSU said: *"We don't want **our tolerant and liberal minded country** changed by migrants or refugee-storms."* Hahahhahaaaaa... could be stand-up comedy. But it is reality.

Words are used by everyone. Words without honest emotional content are just words. Meaningless. BE tolerant. BE respectful. BE human. If I AM, I do not have to explain or describe anything. People are convinced of my attitude because they feel it. Empowerment means emotional power also. Even if you convince one person from your project in an emotional way this person becomes a multiplier. Focus on quality. It will lead to deeper impact. Talk less, BE more! Do more! BE the change. Empower participants and multipliers to be the change. Involve even decision makers and potential sponsors into your projects.

### 2.1.3 LOVE AND PASSION

Om To bring a change to the society that often reminds each other more of the things that set us apart than those connecting, we discussed the concept of social change agents. It is the idea of someone whose aim is to make the world a better place. But what is now a social change agent? What does he / she do, how could I be a social change agent? What are obstacles, how can we tackle those?

I realised one very important thing when started discussing about what a social change agent is, was thinking about our own personal hero. I chose my mother who raised me and my siblings mostly alone while studying and working at the same time. I chose her because of her love and her passion and her never ending will to give us the best life possible. You might think of other qualities or competences when asking yourself what a social change agent needs but I found to me the most important one is my mother: Love and passion.

Love and passion will probably not organise the change or help solving a technical problem but it provides you with the feeling of WHY you want to change the world and it generates the energy that my mother has when taking care of her children. Love and passion are emotions that are connected to the truth in us and to the understanding and care for our surrounding. Love and passion does not mean that there may not be any other emotions like anger or the feeling of powerlessness that can drive us - as long as our actions towards others always reflect on the basis of us as human beings: Love and passion.

Setting an example for others who can feel what drives you will inspire them to feel the same and feel the importance of your cause. The passion of my mother taught me to see the world with an open heart and with honest intentions. I might not always be right about how to do something but when acting with honest intentions and love in my heart I can at least be sure I do the best I can and know my reason for it.

Having a solid base, becoming a social change agent there are of course also a few additional competences that can be quite useful while changing the world. During the Can? Do! training we exchanged a lot of inspiring approaches and learned about those in other countries and organisations.

These are the competences and methods I consider the most important to achieve a good and consistent social change:

- Question the status quo. Why do things work the way they do? Is injustice created by those patterns, are these patterns themselves unjust? Who is getting left out by whom? How could this be changed? Start being visionary, imagine the world beyond the boundaries of reality!
- Change yourself. How do you contribute to the current situations? Are there things about you or your behaviour you could start changing with? By being authentic about your intentions and through setting an example you will inspire others to change as well! And by changing yourself you already changed the world a little!
- Listen and talk to as many different people you can. You have one perspective on life but there is probably a lot of important stuff you have never seen, experienced or done. By asking other about their point of view, you improve your understanding of society and by telling them your perspective theirs will do so as well.
- Support and create possibilities of participation and cooperation. The first step is to listen and talk but participation is also about being part of the actions taken. You can not change people, people have to change themselves and become part of the 'big' change. Create ways people can talk to each other, inspire each other, take action together. Create these possibilities especially for those who usually are left out.

Those are a few characteristics my social change agent has. I'm sure there is a lot one could add but during our training and in all other activity concerning social change I've done so far, those seemed the most important to me. I think there are often moments I find it myself very difficult to continue with everything to continue with believing and engaging in social change. In those moments I try to remember my motivation that made me start questioning and being active in first place and to share my doubts and feeling with others.

## 2.1.4 INSPIRING CHANGE

For me a Social Change Agent first and foremost must be authentic or in the words of Mahatma Gandhi:

*"Be the change you want to see."*

You must have a vision and be willing to take action as a vision with no action is but dreaming and action without a vision is just like wasting time. But with vision and action you really can change the world.

There are many paradoxes in being a Social Change Agent. You need to have a passion with which to motivate others but at the same time having the courage and humility to be flexible in your approach or ideas. To be able to hold ones assumptions lightly, being willing to change yourself based on what you have heard and the lessons you have learnt. As someone once said to me:

*"If you want to know what I think then listen to what I LAST said!"*

You will need to be willing to take risks as if you don't risk anything you are actually risking even more. The risk of losing the moment, the inspiration, the idea or even the courage to do something special.

Perhaps more than anything we need to have the energy to be fully engaged. To live like you will die tomorrow whilst at the same time learning like you will live forever.

Have the confidence to believe in yourself both in terms of what you Can Do as well as what you Can Be!

### 2.1.5 LOVE, ACT, BE PRO-ACTIVE, RESPOND

Being a social change agent starts with the recognition that things need to change the recognition that things can change and to be able to envision what that better can look like. It is about being aware about how our world works and what impact that has on us as individuals, communities and as planet. Hand-in-hand with this, knowledge about power, where it lies and why.

#### ATTRIBUTES TO BE AN AGENT OF SOCIAL CHANGE?

For me, being able to be an agent of social change has to start with:

1. Recognising that change can be made and a new world is possible through my social and personal action - BUT NOT AT THE EXPENSE OF OTHERS - it must be a win-win.
2. Justice is for all and not just for those with access to power and wealth.
3. Exploring with people their current condition and inspire them to take steps to improve their condition.
4. Empowering myself. By this I mean learning to respect my own value and self-worth; believing that I can contribute to change and make a valuable contribution.
5. It is necessary for me to recognise and reclaim my power and learn how to use it to create change and to empower others to create their own change. This will involve giving up / sharing power and privilege.
6. Giving myself a voice; challenge my inner critic and fears. It is these fears that make us part of a self-regulating society.
7. Listening to others; what are other's needs, what is their vision and how can they be a part of the change.
8. Engage with other to share ideas/strategies and the benefits of change. How can change benefit everyone.
9. Increased levels of risk-taking.
10. Skills development; empathy, influence, nurture.
11. Accepting that there will be challenges and resistance and develop strategies to overcome these.
12. Know that change can happen on different levels; on an individual level, empowering someone to make personal changes to institutional change.
13. Our ideas and understanding of how our world works and what change we can make is ongoing and evolutionary.

*Love, Act, Be Pro-active, Respond*

## 2.1.6 WHAT IS A SOCIAL AGENT?

After so many years trying to change the world around me, one would say it should be a piece of cake to write down what a Social Change agent is or should be for me. Well, it is not. The moment I started to think about how to mold my thoughts about it in a good shape I agree with, my mind constantly asked me critical questions. Why, why, how?

For what I first thought, Social Change agents are we all, the people working for community centers, for the anti-discrimination agencies etc. WE, those who stand for an all-inclusive society.

But then the question popped up, is that all? Are only 'we' Social Change Agents? Because to be honest, to me... A Social Change agent is someone making a difference, someone trying to change the world, the environment but also someone who is trying to change him or herself in a way the feel good about and to contribute to society.

Because everything that anybody does has an influence somehow. I believe in the force of nature, a small ripple in the water can create a huge wave on the other side of the world.

It is the neighbour in the street who is up every day standing in front of his door wishing every bypasser a good day. He changes a day just by being there, just by enjoying the new day.

It is the teacher at school who walks that extra mile to help students pass their tests.

It is the trainer of who invests his or her time and knowledge to lift young talent up. But is also the grandfather who talks to his grandchildren, educate them with stories from the past. Advising them because he has already walked that road.

It is the parents who try to raise their children to become strong, decent and independent beings, also on their way to make a difference.

It is a passenger in the street who helps another person in need, just because.

The characteristics of a social agent lay in the will to change from within to the environment. That means to me a positive person, one who is always searching for a solution. One who can forgive, admit mistakes and is always open to learn. I think we do that a lot in our exchange programs.

Because although we are all individuals, we will not make it on our own, we need each other. So to me a social agent should be a warrior and in the same time keep the balance of it all. It is a hard task... but hey, no one said it would be easy.

### 2.1.7 HVN 3.0

The *HVN 3.0 (aided new style 3.0)* which is depicted here deepens, more than before, in the personal infrastructure of the citizen(s) and in the infrastructure of the government / civil society organizations. The *HVN 3.0* is multi-dimensional, among others: an informer, is cooperative, an intermediary, a supportive director (occasionally on call) and consistent with “the voice and the power of the citizen(s) so that it still can be better heard and represented. But also “the voice and the strength of the exchange of information within the care and cure” of the government is essential for the operational process of applying *HVN 3.0*. The *HVN 3.0* responsible for the progressive control of knowledge flow and knowledge circulation, and ensures that knowledge into action. A process of exchange of experience and self-order.

*The HVN 3.0 focus is working on what indeed! A change process of new insights and creative designs integrated into a cooperative twist. There it is to do HVN 3.0. That's tomorrow!*

#### *DIRECTED INTO THEIR OWN HANDS*

The starting point of *HVN 3.0* is aimed at strengthening the personal power of the citizen(s) and increasing self-reliance. So that it becomes clear what the citizen(s) can control from their own environment itself and what friends, neighbors and family (the social network) can do - on their own desired pace. Where necessary *HVN 3.0* can support this process coaching. It carries *HVN 3.0* ensure that the information position of the citizen(s) “grows” with the speed of the government / civil society and will guarantee the continuity and preserved.

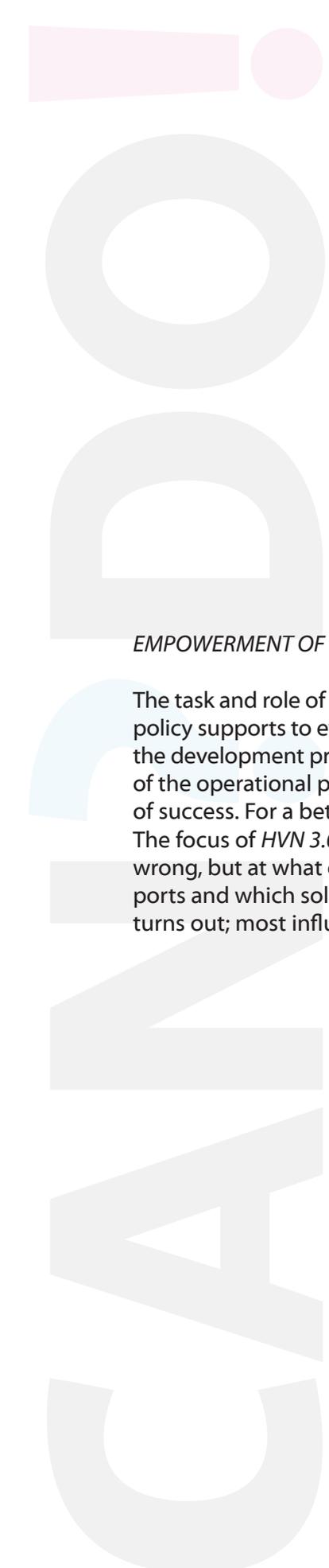
#### *CITIZENS DECIDE!*

##### *The cooperative*

The *HVN 3.0* is convinced that people are happiest when they have a grip on their own lives. Therefore, the citizens also have a say in the deployment and operation of *HVN 3.0*. With the additional effect that would cause the (care)assistance is better, citizen-friendly, more accessible, more effective and more efficient. The self-tools and meeting activities will be merged into a cooperative that ownership, self-direction and self-help is strengthened by citizens. The cooperative is a new focal point of the neighborhood / district.

A kind of pivot of a renewed care approach of the neighborhood / district. The added value of self-help of the citizen(s) is that *HVN 3.0*, the public and other professionals who are active in the cooperative. The self-help ideas / activities are converted into self-help tools that are accessible to all citizens and they are also free. Available in different platforms- and organizations. In this way, the cooperative provides the professional support of self-help required by citizens and government. The Cooperative organizes together with The *HVN 3.0* and its citizen members a continuous development of learning together, develop together, sharing and doing together.

The *HVN 3.0* has constantly dealing with new (technological) developments have on the cooperative effect, the citizen(s), co-professionals, organizations. In all developments *HVN 3.0* is always looking for opportunities to make it easier for citizens to do better. Therefore *HVN 3.0* works include digital education so that the citizen(s) generate even more control. They also stimulate the development and deployment of cooperative ambassadors. Because only together we may well shape the welfare of the future.



*For example, by giving gaining communication skills, digital skills etc. Citizens will learn how face-to-face and online feedback and capture non-verbal signals. The HVN 3.0 ensures that the cooperative herein (structural) is facilitated. And by making use of existing developments based on experience, education and training programs so that the (future) 'cooperative ambassadors' understanding of how their fellow citizens feel and behave online the impact of what he / she online does and what mix of capabilities help generate the most impact.*

#### EMPOWERMENT OF CITIZENS

The task and role of *HVN 3.0* is among others needs and wishes of the citizen(s) and bring together the policy supports to eventually create a common win-win situation for both parties. The challenge lies in the development process. Whereby the quality of knowledge of the intervention, the implementation of the operational processes, facilitation and capacity, but also the feasibility weighed on the chances of success. For a better living environment.

The focus of *HVN 3.0* has shifted from problems to solutions. She (he) not so much looking at what's wrong, but at what opportunities there are to come closer to each other for the public and policy supports and which solutions are easy to apply. For change of attitude and behavior is less feasible - as it turns out; most influence somewhat.

*For example, through the 'gate' of decisions for the district / district to create a platform for citizens to engage in dialogue with policy supports. Thus breaks HVN 3.0 circle of bureaucracy (in the eyes of citizens) "shadowy rules" and it encourages / he allows himself the direction and responsibility of citizens. But with it also stimulates the responsibility of the policy supports its citizens, to hear and to inform the (possibly) pending decisions for the good of the neighborhood / district.*

## EMPOWERMENT OF HVN 3.0

The *HVN 3.0* makes an important work envelope, the starting point to exploit and enhance their own power and self-power of citizens. The *HVN 3.0* is visibly present in the neighborhood / district (Cooperative), provides assistance close to home, knows the local police officer and doctor, and will - where necessary- in people's homes. The *HVN 3.0* works with the citizen(s) so that they can arrive at their own solutions. This therefore requires a shift from problem to solution-oriented thinking and working. It is awareness of *HVN 3.0* of influence in which it operates is a constant learning process. Own professional values and professional behavior should frequently evaluate, and be adjusted. But the *HVN 3.0* infrastructure is crucial. Is desired an open curious attitude-sustaining. With sights on what it can!

*Prevent HVN 3.0 to run behind  
the facts - otherwise you lose  
the citizen (s). Above all, it is  
necessary that HVN 3.0  
"voice" of the citizen (s) knows  
and recognizes the network.  
Because only a seal with a nice  
handshake with HVN 3.0, to  
participate in his / her  
personal growth is not a  
guarantee of a successful  
cooperative trajectory*

Therefore *HVN 3.0* is a three-stage (intake) interview with the citizen(s). The talks are an essential breeding ground for *HVN 3.0*, to:

- The What, Why and How Need idea
- Visualize form, content and performance
- Structure and (pre)conditions of the policy bearers by speaking

The *HVN 3.0* is convinced that the three-stage (intake) calls is a huge asset to the voice of the public funds. Sustainable.

## 2.2 FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Having now read the texts and seen the photos here are some questions that we hope can help to guide your reflection:

- What is the inspiration you gained from the material?
- Can you develop your own image and text around the topic of “what it means to be a social change agent”?

In order to help you explore these topics further you can refer to the relevant sections in “Can Do Empowerment” Manual.

We would like you to share the outcomes of your reflection and these creative processes with us on our blog [www.candoempowerment.wordpress.com](http://www.candoempowerment.wordpress.com) Please send an e-mail to [candoempowerment@gmail.com](mailto:candoempowerment@gmail.com) and we will put your contribution on the blog.



### 3 *Self-Empowerment*

#### BACKGROUND DEVELOPMENT PROCESSES OF THE CONTRIBUTIONS

During all three of the international (LTTAs) events we explored different levels of empowerment. More information on the theoretical concepts that underpin the different approaches we have explored to support empowerment are contained within the “Can Do Empowerment” Manual. In the process of dealing with different aspects of power and (dis)empowerment, (in)equality and exclusion, it became clear that being engaged in empowerment work and combatting discrimination can sometimes be challenging, especially at a personal level.

During the second event we explored another aspect of empowerment in terms of “what makes me feel good”. To do this we took an innovative approach in which the participants were guided through a creative process, where they could reflect on (self-) empowerment and express their thoughts and ideas in an artistic way. In the “Nature collage session” the first step was to create sculptures using different material (e.g. personal objects, material from nature, etc.). The second step was to use these sculptures as an inspiration for exploring different creative ways to express ideas. A creative writing session was used prior to this as a way of setting the tone, using poetry, stories and song writing which were related to the participants’ experiences of empowerment.

In this chapter we share with you, the reader, some of the results of these processes; the different kinds of texts produced by participants including poems, personal reflections, etc. as well as the photographs we took of our sculptures. To see more examples, please go to our website [www.candoempowerment.eu](http://www.candoempowerment.eu).

The “Can Do Empowerment” Manual also contains more details of the specific methods used in these sessions:

- The Nature collage workshop opened up a space to show “what makes me feel good” using natural and symbolic materials. A living museum was created using the sculptures as exhibits.
- The creative writing sessions included the list poem and stream writing activities.

## 3.1 CONTRIBUTIONS

### 3.1.1 MOTHER EARTH

I hear her soothing voice over the smiling mountains she flows across the slivery sea  
She connects us through the melody of the glittering sky and the wonderment of the wild  
Who is she? Who is she?  
I hear her call out "I am mother earth"  
She bears no grudges nor favours one above the other; she beckons us to listen to her call,  
Peace she says should be our guiding star  
We ignore her calls in all our struggles to rule the universe,  
We want power and more power  
And soon it will be too late  
We will have to cope with her lessons before we see the light of day  
I hear her call out free the mind to free the world  
But we too busy quarrelling to remain in power and soon it will be too late  
We will perish in our own self built prison walls  
As we feed our greed to lead  
We make great strides inventing weapons of destruction that benefit a few  
While we careless for those we have left behind or the beauty bestowed upon us by mother earth  
We so easily destroy all that she has given us  
And soon we will become extinct in our own toxic waste  
I hear her call out free the mind to free the world

### 3.1.2 IYouWeYouWeUs

I am empowered because I exist Because I exist I can do what I choose to do Because I exist other people around me exist Because other people exist I exist and am able to love Because I exist I can love and let love rule Because I exist I can create my world I can sculpture my environment so I can live my life the way I want to Because I can form my life I can be happy and when I am happy I can pass happiness trough to other people If people around me are happy we spread positivity together Positivity will rule out negativity and it will grow so people around it will grow like I will because they will If we grow together and invite each other to come swim in this pool of positivity and therefore love we can all make the world a better place Maybe it starts small and with a few but close your eyes and imagine... What if another bubble of positivity appears and the two meet? Magic! So I have to explore this is my journey so as it is yours Imagine... What a world would it be!

### 3.1.3 MY EMPOWERMENT PHILOSOPHY

What empowers me is what I seek to focus on!

It is easy to focus on what disempowers me, to be caught in the struggle 'against', 'anti-', opposing what I hate..

Hate is not empowering. Empowerment comes from love and trust - for myself, for another, for society... and from hope for the future.

I want to empower not just for myself and for my peers, but also for our children, and our children's children - so that they can build on our efforts, as we build on the efforts of those who came before us.

I have so much to be glad of and to celebrate! Yet I make my part in the world to contribute to the next generation. Life will keep on changing and never stop.

I focus on empowerment because this is where change begins. Starting with one person and one stepping stone, I begin to shape myself, my group, my community, our institutions, our society, our world.

I cannot change the world alone, but together... One person, plus one person, plus one person, we are so many, we ARE the world!

If we start a new way of being, a different way of thinking, we create the world we want to be part of. The world that I want to be part of, allows us to speak out. Always question. And to step back and ask ourselves...

*What are we being part of, by our actions?*

*What is the legacy that we are bringing to the world?*

*What is it that WE are helping to create?*

### 3.1.4 HOPE AND COMFORT

What Empowers me is Hope

Hope in the Future

Hope in People

Hope in Nature

Hope in Love

Hope in myself and my strength and Belief in the importance of Hope...

Without Hope Life has no meaning and will allow situations to overwhelm us, divide us, break us...

Hope allows Love to come in...

Hope allows Faith to grow...

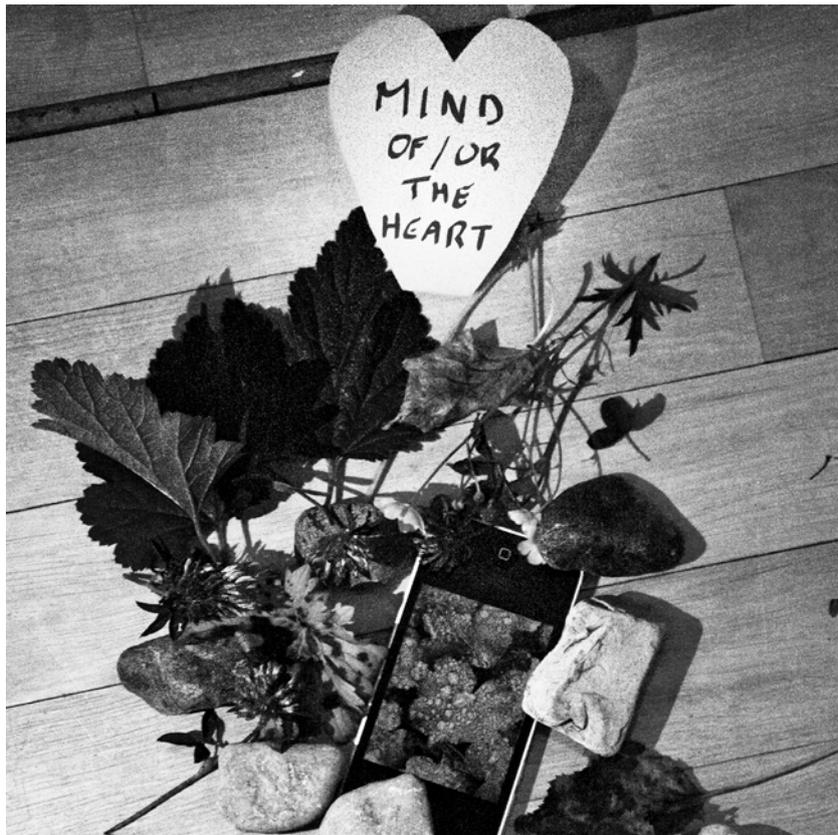
Hope allows for ideas and creative solutions to life's difficulties...

Hope is Comfort



### 3.1.5 MIND OF/OR THE HEART

Who I am empowered by are those who acknowledge me for who I am and what I can and who are examples to me and to the world as they show us what we need to do and be for each other to better this world as it needs freeing from all the conflicts and wars as they are tearing humanity down into a spiral of negativity that will destroy humanity and destroy the planet for we can only survive when we are willing to overcome our differences and conflicts that as peace, pace, friede, vrede is the only way forwards in all our lives as that is the basic need of all of us in the world in which we live together and that we have inherited from our ancestors and what we need to pass on towards the generations to come as the earth is not only ours.



3.1.6 MISTERY

I'm empowered because  
I wanted to change  
me  
And say  
**STOP**  
I need to **see**  
To go to the **sea**

Flowing and **growing**  
**Strong** and soft  
Fear that protects me **CHANGE**  
It is a *Mistery*, I know...  
*Or I feel?*  
*Now I don't know...*  
Have I ever known?

..... SOMETHING?  
.....

What can go wrong?  
If I don't try I'll never know  
Safe in my place, not taking chances  
Not wanting to move

..... I have to go  
INSIDE .....

To the deepest sea  
Oppressed

Carrying all this **weight**  
I am not aware  
I need to **see**  
To go to the **sea** see sea

If I move  
The **chain** moves

Words  
I have to take words more seriously

To use (.)

And comas (,)

Stop

And continue...

My life  
My story  
My text  
Small molecule I am

(.) .)

the Mystery is big

so big

No truth  
I will never know  
Why?  
Where?  
What?  
When?

Just flow and **GLOW**  
**ENJOY**

**Not knowing**

**Feeling, Breathing, Experiencing**

**Nature**  
**STOP NOW.**  
**GROW**  
**CHANGE**  
**STOP.**

And be small again

## 3.2 FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Having now read the creative texts and material developed by different people during the implementation of the “Can Do Empowerment” programme we now have some questions that hopefully can help to guide your reflection:

- What is the inspiration and what are the ideas that you gained from the texts and the photographs of the sculptures?
- Invite you to develop your own creative text/piece of art around the topic “what is making me feel good”

To help you explore these topics further you can refer to the various activities that have been captured in the “Can Do Empowerment” Manual.

We would like you to share the outcomes of your reflection and these creative processes with us on our blog [www.candoempowerment.wordpress.com](http://www.candoempowerment.wordpress.com) Please send an e-mail to [candoempowerment@gmail.com](mailto:candoempowerment@gmail.com) and we will put your contribution on the blog.



## 4 *Strategies for combating discrimination*

### **BACKGROUND DEVELOPMENT PROCESSES OF THE CONTRIBUTIONS**

A subject that was a common thread throughout the whole “Can Do Empowerment” programme was the issue of discrimination and developing strategies on how to combat discrimination. During the third of the international events held in Brighton and Hove we worked on the different perspectives that participants had regarding discrimination as well as sharing their strategies on how to combat discrimination.

Participants explored actual situations in which they had experienced discrimination or an act of violence, in different roles (that of perpetrator, victim, witness, helper/confronter). In groups participants shared their experiences, reflecting on what strategies they had used to deal with these incidents in the different roles they identified with.

In this chapter we would like to share with you some of the texts and personal reflections which were an outcome of these processes. More texts can also be found on our website [www.candoempowerment.eu](http://www.candoempowerment.eu)

The “Can Do Empowerment” Manual also contains more detail about the specific method used in these sessions:

- The Four Quadrant method

## 4.1 CONTRIBUTIONS

### 4.1.1 RELIGIOUS BULLYING

As a young, white and middle-class man it was a difficult for me to think about a situation in which I felt discriminated. This was also a good conclusion from the exercise because it made me aware of the privileges that these three categories give in nowadays world.

My story is located in Madrid, in my school when I was 12 years old. I had just moved to a new catholic school. My family is atheist so I was not baptised when I was a babe. So, when all my classmates were going to receive Holy Communion three of us could not receive it. Our teachers would usually talk about how necessary is to receive the Holy Communion and the good for us.

Also children would start bullying the three of us saying things like: <<why don't you receive the Communion? Don't you want the presents of your family? Are you a fool? ... >>. Finally the three of us received the Holy Communion because of the social pressure and me, personally, received the Baptism and Communion at the same time. My parents did not agree with my "decision" but as I was already a twelve-year-old child they think I was already able to decide on what my religion was to be. The thing is that, in that moment I was not aware of the discrimination because it felt nice after receiving the Communion integrate in the class again; but it was discrimination, religion discrimination.

Strategies I could have used that came out from the group reflection within the 'Can? Do! Empowerment' project:

1. Talk to my parents about the discrimination I suffered not only from my classmates but from my teachers as well.
2. Use humour in the answers against the discriminating comments.
3. Involve the other three non-Catholic classmates to raise the topic up to our principal.

#### 4.1.2 IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT

So here I am. It's the middle of the night and I am wide awake with the light off - your words and the sound of laughter playing over and over in my head, just trying to shut them out. But it's not working and they keep on breaking through, reminding me of what other people, nice people who are seemingly in touch with their feelings, who I am supposed to be connecting with here this weekend, actually think about people like us, or at least, how much they really value our dignity. People like my gorgeous daughter who I have a duty to stand up for and protect.

*I bet you're asleep though.*

That's just it though, isn't it? Even when we make a special effort to seek out 'safe' spaces, healing spaces where we can be open and calm, our experiences and identities still follow us there. As do other people's stereotypes, prejudices and assumptions.

I guess those comments just took me by surprise. I don't know why they still usually do. I don't think I'm a naïve person – anymore. My split second response was to lock them my feelings away, quickly, smile and carry on – like water off a duck's back. After all they don't know my personal history, how could they? What's worse though is that if they did, the same words would not pass their lips, not while I'm there – but that doesn't mean they aren't thinking them.

*She didn't mean any harm, she seems really nice.*

What I wanted to do was react; eloquently tell you in front of everyone there exactly how it is and make you feel like the outcast, not me. But I could hardly turn up late and within my first half an hour here challenge these friendly, chatting, happy bunch sat round the dinner table could I? They're all here for something special too. I would have had to "make a fuss", ruin it for everyone, make everyone think about negative, serious things, and reveal my insides all at the same time. How could I be responsible for all that?

*You weren't responsible for your words though were you?*

But I still feel the need to take responsibility for giving my daughter and all the other awesome people like her, like us, a voice. And I guess I failed at that tonight - or at least I feel like I have and that's eating at me here in the dark.

My strategy; get up, turn on the light. Get out my guitar. Quietly so no one can hear next door. Then start to turn my tears, memories and feelings into melodies and something that resembles poetry. That'll do it; then I'll be able to sleep for a bit. Tomorrow I'll still feel like an outsider, like I have a dark secret that everyone would prefer to not have thrust upon them. I'll be exhausted but at least I'll have my musical weapon that I can privately confront you with when that lump rises in my throat again - and I know it will. Every time someone quips that bloody joke again from last night, because it's acceptable now you said it.

*Hilarious.*

This time it's just not going to be enough. I don't know why. Maybe it's because I am older, stronger, or wiser even. Maybe it's because you don't seem like the type who would intentionally want to hurt or discriminate, to push a good person further away inside themselves. Maybe it's because I think you're just a bit ignorant.

*Maybe I've just had enough after all these years.*

That's it. I need a new strategy. I need to do the right thing, to be that person in my head that speaks out with eloquence and impression. Or at least the best thing I can manage that comes close. I need resolution. I need to feel efficacious.

*I want to turn the power tables on you.*

I am going to walk right up to you and just tell you straight. No shouting. No overt anger. No tears. Just look you in the eye and tell you exactly what you did, how it made me feel and why it's so wrong. That's it.

*This is one of the hardest things I've ever decided to do.*

Why? I have done so many things throughout my life. Hard things. Too much to go into now. Surely this just amounts to a quiet, honest chat? But I don't know how you will react. I've got to open myself up here. Intentionally make myself vulnerable, and in public, to the same person that has ruined my birthday weekend. And I have got to do it whilst putting all my feelings and triggers aside. And there's no guarantee it's going to change the way you think, or your awareness, or your future actions and I know that there's always the chance you will turn around and reject us even more. But I have to do this or I'll never forgive myself.

Either way I guess I'll leave this place having achieved three things:

1. I protected myself in the moment that my child's tragic circumstances were attacked and mocked.
2. I channelled that experience into a creative form that can reach out to others that identify with my experience.
3. I will have taken the risk to tell you my experience in the chance that this will go some small way to breaking down barriers that we face daily.

*So all in all, not as bad as I thought then.*

I guess it's all about connecting with people in the most open way you can, whilst taking steps to protect your vulnerability. Sometimes that connection might take a fierce or angry form, solo or as a group. It could come via the media or an institution, be intellectual or revolutionary. Who knows? Or at times, like today, it is through openness, vulnerability and words.

### 4.1.3 AN 'INNOCENT' JOKE - RACISM IN THE SUPERMARKET

During the last Olympic Games in Brazil 2016 one of the Dutch athletics, did very well. He was a Dutch runner with roots from out Curaçao. Every Olympic fan in the Netherlands was excited about his achievements.

One morning after one of the runs I attended a supermarket. It was kind of crowded with a long line waiting for the checkout counter. Customers were discussing the Olympics. A delivery guy walked in with a package for the store. He was a man of color. He was really cheerful, smiled and made jokes with the cashier.

Suddenly a middle-aged man in the line made a comment towards the delivery guy: 'Hey Martina, you are doing well on the Olympics. You ran a good race last night'. At first the delivery guy looked at him with a wonder, he didn't really understand what the man meant with his remark. Actually, I didn't either. The man in line noticed the confusion and continued 'Yeah, you are from Curaçao too, right? So you look like anyway!' He started laughing loudly at his own joke. Also customers in line started to laugh and compliment the delivery guy with the achievements of the topsporter in Brazil.

The postman, lifted his eyebrows and walked up towards the man in line, very calmly but with a straight face, no smile anymore. The man approached immediately called out 'He stop, what are you doing? I just made a joke'. The delivery guy stopped and laughed out loud, saying 'Well now Mr. Wilders, are you afraid? I guess you have had it commin' with that stupid remark... and oh mister, by the way, I was just joking! I am not a violent person nor a topsporter. Don't let my appearance fool you.'

The man in line and other people were very upset. Started discussing with the delivery guy about his behaviour without taking any responsibility for their own actions just before. I was observing the situation for a while and saw that besides the cashier all customers were starting to turn against the delivery guy.

I mingled into the situation because I felt it was really wrong blaming the delivery guy for being aggressive or at least not funny and I didn't like the way it was heading too. Somebody had already called the police while there was nothing going on but a discussion.

So, I asked the man in line: 'Why are you so angry with this guy? He just responded on your comment with the same sort of joke that you made towards him.' The man in line told me that he made a joke but felt that the postman reacted really aggressive and also accused him for being racist by calling him Mr. Wilders. In his eyes he himself just made a 'positive' remark because he compared the postman to a topsporter.

I explained him that maybe he himself was not a racist but his comment was a racist comment because he only made it related to the fact the delivery guy is a man of color and assumingly came from the same country as the Olympic sporter. "You addressed him as if he was someone else... and why??? Because he is black too? That is the only reason I can think of... can you tell me otherwise, if so please do?"

The man in line again explained he just made a joke and that he is not a racist and does not want to be compared to the particular politician. I asked him why he thought the delivery guy would want to be compared to the athlete? He didn't know...



### *MY STRATEGY*

My first instinct was to jump into the discussion right away from the beginning. But I realized that maybe the postman would not even appreciate an action like this. So I started to observe the situation. I was alert though.

The moment the police were called I stepped in because I felt fear that things would run out of hand. Actually, my mingling came from a distrust to law enforcement. Knowing the police were on their way I picked my words carefully. I tried to be reasonable in my conversation with the man in line. I started a dialogue with him, asking questions and trying to mirror.

### *CRITICAL NOTE*

My instinct was right. When the police arrived they immediately separated the postman with two police officers, leading him into a corner before asking what was going on. As if they assumed he was the trouble maker. The other police officer talked very calmly to the rest of the people. I noticed the difference in approach. It hurt.

#### 4.1.4 STRATEGIES HOW TO COMBAT DISCRIMINATION AT THE FOOTBALL PITCH AND BEYOND

##### **Situation**

A group of parents is shouting racist insults at players during a youth football game.

As a soccer trainer time and again I'm getting told that "verbal abuse is common practice in soccer. Some say this has always been the case and is sadly always likely to be so.

At the same time many of my fellow coaches complain about parents who make their teams unstable by loudly criticizing their own children and other team members and in this way bring them down. In addition, there are cases in which whole teams are being verbally attacked because of the (alleged) country of origin, skin color, sexual orientation, gender or appearance of individual players.

Many young, talented athletes in this way lose their passion for sports and leave the team. Reason enough to think about efficient strategies facing these forms of discrimination.

If the aggression concerns a player? What can he or she do? - What is an aim while reacting to verbal abuse and harassment? What do I want to achieve?

Working on this field I found several aims:

- To let the insult fizzle out and in this way lessen the impact of the attack?
- To win the verbal match and ridicule my opponent?
- To express my anger and quiet the person and/or make the person leave?
- To draw attention to myself and to the situation at hand?
- To express solidarity with others?
- To question the insult and facilitate good communication at the same time?
- To express a different point of view or even initiate a change of attitude?
- To record the action and to threaten or initiate legal consequences?
- Etc.

To have an aim is one thing. But what do I do related to that aim?

##### **I could ignore and stay calm**

There is nothing more annoying for a person who tries to provoke somebody than being ignored by the other person who (apparently) is unaffected by the provocation and does not react. Especially during a match, it is advisable for the players to refuse communication with the person launching the attack and wait for a suitable moment to react and to call the referee's attention to the insult.

##### **I could ask questions**

The one who asks questions is in the lead of conversation and assumes the position of a leader. Questions are also a good method to draw others to be on one's side.

##### **I could give paradoxical answers, use irony and humor**

The person who has the audience on his/her side is always stronger. Humor and irony will take the wind out of the opponent's sails. Mostly (but sadly not always), a funny answer has a deescalating effect on the situation.

##### **I could send I-messages**

By sending I-messages, I can be assertive without being directly aggressive or putting the listener on the defensive.

### **I could repeat, summarize, and examine the needs of the aggressor**

By repeating and summarizing the statements of those who loudly express their discontent they feel that their concerns are being considered and that they are taken seriously. This is yet another strategy to deescalate a situation. However, it requires a lot of time and a high level of interpretation capacity.

### **I could answer self-confidently, rise above the situation and counter with humor**

Instigators expect others to feel affected and get upset by their insults. What they do not expect is others to calmly bear the assault, then take it a step further and respond with a joke.

### **I could exaggerate the confirmation of a statement**

If a stupid statement is carried to extremes by confirming it in an exaggerated way, it may cause the person who made the statement in the first place to reflect.

### **I could perform a verbal “three-steps”**

- address the problem
- express your personal dismay
- demand changes

### **I could strengthen the victims**

If somebody falls victim to a verbal attack during or after a match, everyone tends to concentrate on the person launching the attack. Sadly enough, those affected by the insult get little to no attention. The hurtful statement will be less painful if the victim is consoled by kind and encouraging words. Such positive attention may improve the situation by changing negative energy into positive, restoring tranquility and in this way enabling the player to react appropriately and focus once again on his / her optimum performance.

### **I could report to the respective sports club and/or take legal actions**

Racist (concerning country of origin, skin color, religion), homophobic (concerning homosexuality), or sexist (concerning gender) assaults during sport events should always be reported. It is important to accurately document the incident, in order to initiate consequences later, if necessary. The different sport clubs mostly have internal regulations on how to take actions against discrimination. In such cases the local Anti-Discrimination Office.

#### 4.1.5 CHALLENGING DISCRIMINATION AGAINST TRAVELLERS IN BRIGHTON AND HOVE

I live in Brighton and Hove. Travellers regularly come to live in and around the city for a few weeks of months at a time. This is met with virulent prejudice and racism.

I have worked with traveller communities and I have a perfunctory insight into travellers' cultures and lifestyles. However, I still think that my knowledge is very limited. Much of what I know comes about these communities comes from conversations with those I have worked with and the information made available by an organisation called Friends Families and Travellers which is based in the city. Over the last few years there have been various TV programmes based on traveller cultures. These programmes haven't really added anything significant to my knowledge.

I often encounter attitudes towards travellers from people I have some relationship with. This includes my plumber, the people who attend health walks that I lead or my family members. They have expressed racism and prejudicial views about people from traveller communities.

Preparing myself to challenge when these views are expressed always raises similar questions will I be heard? do I have a right to challenge? what will be the comeback? There are also some differences depending on who I am challenging. Preparing to challenge family members can feel particularly scary- what will happen to my relationship with them? Whilst challenging my plumber or someone on a health walk feels easier there remains the question about my relationship with these people in the future.

I don't always challenge at the moment the prejudicial attitudes has been expressed. It sometimes feels best to choose the time to have a conversation where there is a greater chance of us hearing each other. Indeed, I am planning to have a conversation with my plumber about his comments about travellers in our local woodland. Depending on the outcome of this conversation the question remains. Will I choose that this man continues to be my plumber? Is it best to stay in relationship with him so the discussions about prejudice towards travellers can continue in the future? I will decide on this when we have spoken.

It always feels important to speak and let whoever know that what they have said isn't ok. At the same time, I always wonder whether my speaking up really changes hearts and minds. On balance I think it is better to challenge racism and prejudice towards travellers knowing that it may not change anything but it will have at least ensured that alternative views are expressed.

#### 4.1.6 ON THE TRAIN

Recently I was on a train when a man started shouting racial abuse at a woman because she was wearing a Hijab and who was sitting on her own. I have thought long and hard as to what I did that day and whether this was the right thing to do or not. Maybe I will never know the answer to this question but I did something which was to go and sit next to her and strike up a conversation. I wanted to show solidarity with her and hopefully make others on the train do the same. I didn't say anything to the man and often wondered whether this was right or wrong. Indeed, he got off at the train at the next station and my conversation with the women was limited. She never did say how she felt.

I have thought much since this incident and reflected on what I did and these are some of my thoughts: I am so glad that I did not just look the other way or do nothing, however was this just because I felt better myself? But at least I did something. It took courage to do something and I had to act quickly. What I did was more or less an instinct. I knew something had happened which was not right and so I could not look away. I felt as though this would have been condoning this racist abuse. I have thought since that it would have been useful to think through such situations in advance so that I could have been better prepared to take action. A guiding principle for me is to avoid violent action as this would be more likely to aggravate the situation as the perpetrator will already be fired up. Also I do not believe that it either helps or is sensible to put yourself in disproportionate danger so you will always need to weigh up the risks in such a situation as to what is appropriate.

With hindsight I should have asked someone next to me to call the police and also to have asked in a non-violent way for the person to stop harassing her, maybe others would have joined in at this point. It is important to address the person in a way that does not escalate the situation, this is difficult, however the more you can engage others the more likely you will have created a majority who are willing to support you, this is important.

If you simply ignore what is going on it is a form of acceptance whereas as soon as you intervene it is clear that the person's actions have been noticed and hence there will be consequences for them if they continue.

I believe that having the courage to take action in such situations is more likely to happen if you have talked things through with others beforehand. So be prepared to take action, keep calm and act immediately as there is often no time to consider all the options when it happens, try to keep calm and attract as much attention as you can so that others may come and help you, try and support the victim in any way you can and at all costs avoid violence and don't provoke the perpetrator in any way!

## 4.2 FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Having now read the experiences of different people we encourage you to take some time to reflect on what you have read. You may find the following questions useful:

- What important learning did you draw from the experiences of other people?
- What are your own ideas or strategies?
- Can you widen your own strategies by incorporating the strategies of others?

In order to help you explore these topics further you can refer to the relevant sections in the “Can Do Empowerment” Manual.

We would like you to share the outcomes of your reflection and these creative processes with us on our blog [www.candoempowerment.wordpress.com](http://www.candoempowerment.wordpress.com) Please send an e-mail to [candoempowerment@gmail.com](mailto:candoempowerment@gmail.com) and we will put your contribution on the blog.







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