



Booklet



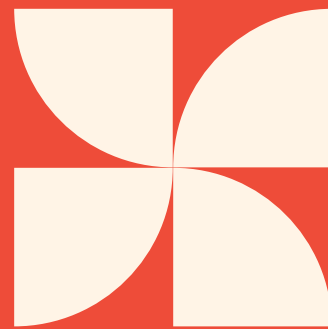
YOU(TH) CLOWN



Young People Active in Volunteering through Social Clowning is a project carried out by Teatro C'ART and Asociación Teatral On&Off, funded under the Erasmus+ programme.



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Introduction

This booklet, created from the experience of the YOU(TH) CLOWN project, aims to provide youth workers and groups of young people with inspiration and guidelines to carry out introductory activities on social clowning, targeted at groups of young people (aged 16–25) and oriented towards the organization of a volunteering event within their own community. The objective is to support youth workers in their work, engage young people in active participation through high-quality socio-educational animation based on social clowning, and foster their sense of initiative and community support.

YOU(TH) CLOWN

Young People Active in Volunteering through Social Clowning is a one-year Erasmus+ KA210 initiative aimed at promoting active citizenship, a sense of initiative, and social entrepreneurship among young people through their involvement in volunteer actions using the tools of social clowning.

The consortium is made up of the Italian partner C'ART, specialized in clowning in both artistic and social contexts, and the ON&OFF Theatre Association, with over twenty years of experience in projects involving young people and youth workers through artistic and creative methods.

The training of trainers was coordinated by André Casaca and Flavia Marco, based on the "Relational Comic Education" method, conceived and directed by André Casaca.

Goals and target

The project specifically aims to:

Promote youth engagement in volunteering and social entrepreneurship through the dissemination, understanding, and recognition of the figure of the social clown.

Train youth workers in social clowning tools to engage young people in local volunteering actions.

Create innovative forms of volunteering that respond to real local needs through international cooperation, building new bridges between European regions.

The project's main target group is young people between the ages of 16 and 25, a phase of life that marks an important and delicate transition from adolescence to adulthood. It is also a mature stage of youth, ready to engage in active participation in society. This age group includes a significant number of NEETs (Not in Education, Employment, or Training), who can benefit from volunteering by acquiring key competences useful in both personal and professional spheres.

Other target groups of the project include:

- Youth workers, key figures in youth engagement, operating in diverse contexts (social, volunteering, youth theatre), who need to strengthen their competences and innovate through international exchange.
- National and international associations and organizations working with young people to implement social actions.

Both partner organizations have strong ties to their local territories, and their motivation for implementing YOU(TH) CLOWN stems from the desire to support, through international dialogue, the creation of a bridge between young people and vulnerable communities in their respective contexts.

Social clowning is a valuable and essential tool for achieving this goal, as it is highly adaptable to working in fragile contexts such as disability, geographical isolation, marginalization, discrimination, illness, etc. Its dynamic approach fosters integration by valuing difference, creates spaces for free expression, and transforms marginality into strength, promoting change through art and grounded in human and inclusive values.

In line with the EU Youth Strategy, YOU(TH) CLOWN aims to inspire young people to recognize their value as key community support

figures and to promote their overall well-being.

The mutual exchange between young people and vulnerable communities brings great benefits to both. This initiative not only fosters social cohesion, but also addresses the well-being of young people themselves, who especially in this historical moment—marked by the aftermath of the pandemic, inflation, and environmental, digital, and societal shifts—need support and empowerment.

The tools of social clowning help young people acquire both technical skills to work in fragile contexts and personal growth tools, such as self-confidence, motivation, creative thinking, and relational abilities.

These are key transversal skills in young people's school, work, and personal lives, and are particularly valuable for those with fewer opportunities and NEETs, who are at greater risk of social exclusion and represent an average of 11.7% in Europe (Eurostat, 2022).

This action is closely connected to a broader international development of the project, with the goal of creating a permanent transnational network composed of youth workers, young people, volunteers, and social clowning trainers, fostering the exchange of good practices and mutual support.

For this reason, European funding is essential to ensure the European dimension from the very beginning and to develop a project that builds bridges between European regions while strengthening both territorial and European belonging.

Introduction to Social Clowning

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The work of the clown, when it comes to social and volunteering contexts, is a way of exchanging ideas between those offering help and those receiving it, with playfulness, naturalness, and joy at the center.

The delicacy of the clown's intervention removes prejudices, bringing people together beyond their social status. The major challenge when intervening in these realities is recognizing the dignity of individuals as the starting point in building relationships.

The clown naturally overcomes this challenge because they embody equality in an instinctive, unfiltered way, using a language that goes beyond social conventions by establishing a primarily emotional and instinctive communication. The aim of this work is to enable those encountered to acquire relational and expressive skills they previously lacked, leading them to greater awareness of their own body and their comedic potential. Working on the figure of the clown helps sustain the idea of comedy as a fundamental source of human expression beyond differences; the clown's very being expresses the abolition of all kinds of differences.

Guidelines for the Social Clowning in Voluntary Work



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3.1 The Role of Social Clowning in Volunteering Contexts

The social clown appears as a deeply human figure. Their strength lies in their ability to be authentically present, to connect through emotion, and to transform environments through play, laughter, and affection.

In vulnerable contexts, where people often experience isolation, institutional rigidity, illness, or discrimination, the social clown creates cracks through which humanity can emerge. Through humour and tenderness, they facilitate emotional expression, break down symbolic hierarchies, and return visibility and protagonism to those who often feel silenced or invisible.

Social clowns come to create encounters through shared vulnerability, to offer deep listening, and to be emotionally available. This availability, expressed through eye contact, body language, silence, and play, creates symbolic spaces of freedom and collective care.

Vulnerable environments where social clowns can intervene:

Hospitals and healthcare centres

Where fear, uncertainty, and waiting are part of everyday life.

The social clown offers emotional relief, especially with children, elderly people, or patients with chronic conditions.

Day centres and care homes

In contexts of loneliness, dependence, or cognitive decline, the clown brings playful and affectionate presence that dignifies and revitalises.

Prisons and detention centres

Spaces dominated by judgement, rules, and punishment. The clown operates beyond hierarchy, through play and shared humanity.

Communities at risk of social exclusion

Young people in vulnerable situations, migrants, LGTBQ+ groups facing discrimination... The social clown opens safe spaces for expression, identity, and symbolic healing.

3.2 Volunteering Based on Closeness, Play and Respect

The social clown does not act for people, but with them. They do not impose, fix, or attempt to change others, but rather seek to share an experience of equality through emotion and the body.

Their three pillars in volunteering are:

- **Closeness:** Not through invasion, but through openness. The clown does not bring solutions, but an honest presence that invites connection.
- **Play:** Play as a universal language, a symbolic space of freedom where, even if only for a moment, anything can be transformed.
- **Respect:** For the rhythms, stories, and silences of others. The clown is sensitive to boundaries, adapts to the context, and always places the dignity of the other person above any comedic effect.

This way of volunteering is about being present and emotionally available, with sensitivity, tenderness, and active listening.

3.3 Ethical Principles and Attitudes of the Volunteer Clown

When a clown appears in a community space or in an activity with young people, their presence can transform the atmosphere, break down barriers, and spark smiles... but it can also create discomfort if certain fundamental ethical principles are not carefully respected.

This is why, in the You(th) Clown project, we want to emphasise key attitudes we consider essential for those approaching social clowning and youth volunteering.



Listening without Judgement

True listening is perhaps one of the most important skills of the social clown. It is not just about hearing words, but about perceiving emotions, gestures, silences, and everything present beyond what is spoken.

The clown listens without judgement. They are not there to evaluate, correct, or categorise anyone. They are there to receive what others bring, just as they are. This is especially important when working with people in vulnerable situations, with diverse backgrounds, or complex life stories.

Listening without judgement means:

- Being available to others with curiosity and respect.
- Not assuming what someone needs.
- Not imposing what we think is "best" for them.
- Never ridiculing a person's genuine expression.

Authentic listening creates a safe space where each person can show themselves without fear of being judged.

Coherence Between Intention, Presence and Action

In social clowning, the volunteer's good intentions must translate into real presence and coherent actions. This coherence shows when:

- What we do is aligned with what we feel and think.
- We never force anyone to participate or to laugh.
- We never use humour as a tool of power or control.
- We relate to others as equals, even within our clown role.

To be present means to be attentive, sensitive, and available. It means making eye contact, waiting, adapting to the rhythm of the group or the individual we interact with.

The clown arrives to create an encounter, a moment of shared humanity, not to perform a show.



Respect for the Dignity of Others, Even Through Humour

Humour can be a powerful tool for connection, or a destructive barrier if used carelessly. The social clown always uses humour with absolute respect for people's dignity.



This means:

- Never laughing at people.
- Never exposing anyone to situations that might make them uncomfortable.
- Never forcing games or dynamics that might embarrass or hurt someone.
- Paying close attention to body language, gestures, and non-verbal signals.
- Knowing when to step back or change the proposal if humour is not working in a healthy or respectful way.

Respectful humour is inclusive, caring, and invites people to play without feeling judged or ridiculed. It builds trust and allows each person to show their vulnerability without fear.

3.4 Preparation of Young Volunteers

To develop a sensitivity suitable for engaging with vulnerable communities, it is possible to follow a preparation pathway. In the case of the YOU(TH) CLOWN project, our Spanish and Italian youth workers (previously trained) proposed to their respective groups of young people a socio-educational animation path to approach the tools of social clowning, leading them to co-create and implement a volunteering event in their local area.

The creation of the group of young volunteers that would engage with vulnerable realities was structured into 10 two-hour sessions, which included:



Initial Training and Continuous Support

The youth workers introduced games and exercises focused on clowning dynamics. These sessions helped participants immerse themselves in this world and, above all, understand what clowning work entails, a practice aimed at highlighting spontaneity, authenticity, and bringing out the personal and comedic traits that make each individual unique.



Dialogue and Exchange Sessions

Dialogue, communication, and the exchange of ideas were fundamental throughout the process, both to stimulate reflection on the topic and to develop awareness of the importance of artistic intervention in the field of volunteering. The continuity of the meetings helped participants become more aware and enhanced group cohesion and unity.

Emotional Work and Self-care Strategies for Young People

The experience of working with clowning can influence people's emotions in different ways: some may find it more emotionally intense than others. Therefore, it is essential that youth workers create an environment where participants feel comfortable and can interact freely.

Trust among participants, between volunteers and youth workers, is crucial to advancing the work and building a space for free expression.

An important self-care strategy is always to dedicate time to open discussion sessions, where everyone can share their feelings about the work, express any difficulties or doubts, and discuss them with the group.

Evaluation and Exchange of Experiences

Each meeting was followed by a collective reflection session, both on the lessons learned and on the volunteer work carried out in vulnerable contexts. Participants had the opportunity to discuss and share constructive feedback, with the aim of continuing the work beyond this series of sessions.

There was a shared desire to further deepen the themes of performance and clowning, improve their techniques, and better address both the challenges already encountered and those that might arise in the future.



Previous Contact with the Organization Where the Volunteering Will Take Place

Identify and get to know the target group (elderly people, children, people with disabilities, etc.) and select which exercises, activities, and games, already tested, can be proposed. If possible, build rapport with the target group by making a preliminary visit before the volunteering event.





Innovative Volunteering 4 Formats Youth Clown



4.1 What do we mean by “innovative volunteering format”?

Within the framework of the You(th) Clown project, when we talk about an innovative volunteering format, we refer to new ways of imagining, designing, and carrying out volunteering experiences that break away from traditional models and place creativity, the active participation of young people, and emotional and human connection with the community at the center.

It's not just about volunteering, but about how to do it: using dynamic, participatory, creative methodologies, adapted to the needs, languages, and realities of the different groups we work with.

Innovation, in this sense, is not only about the specific tools used (such as social clowning), but also about the attitude, the processes, and the relationships that are created.

Throughout the project, we identified some key aspects that make a volunteering action truly innovative and transformative:



Creativity as a universal language

Using humor, play, art, clowning, and other creative expressions as doorways to connection, communication, and community work.

Creativity allows us to overcome cultural, linguistic, or generational barriers, generating spaces for more direct and genuine human connection.

Real youth participation

Young people are active protagonists in the design, preparation, and implementation of volunteering actions. An innovative format promotes the ideas, talents, and sensibilities of each young person as an essential part of the process.

Positive community impact

Innovative volunteering seeks to have a real, concrete, and positive impact on the community: not just entertaining or intervening from the outside, but activating processes of care, connection, and empowerment within the local context itself.

Playful and emotional methodology

Emotions, play, and laughter are the main language of the intervention. Humor and clowning provide a kind, warm, and horizontal approach to spaces and people. This helps create experiences that are lived with joy, pleasure, and the desire to participate — not out of obligation.

Adaptability and flexibility

Each group, each community, and each context is different. That's why an innovative volunteering format must necessarily be flexible, capable of listening to the specific needs of each group and adapting proposals to their rhythms, languages, and possibilities. This requires intercultural sensitivity, an inclusive approach, and openness to the unexpected.

Participatory and community-based approach: co-creation

One of the key principles of You(th) Clown is its participatory and community-based approach. This means that volunteering actions are not designed in a one-way manner (by a leadership that provides the ideas), but are built collectively through dialogue, listening, and collaboration among three main actors:

- The young volunteer participants
- The youth workers or facilitators
- The community members or participants

We speak of co-creation because all these agents contribute their perspectives, needs, desires, and limits. This participatory approach ensures that activities are not fixed or standardized but alive, unique, and tailor-made for each situation.

Innovation, therefore, is not only about what we do, but about building it together.



4.2 Our You(th) Clown experience

Description of the Format Developed

The volunteer format implemented in You(th) Clown aimed to create a participatory and transformative process that connected young people with their community through the tools of social clowning. Far from being a one-off activity or a closed workshop, the format was structured as a long-term experience of collective creation, training, emotional engagement, and concrete action in a community setting.

The format can be defined as a creative and community-based volunteering process through social clowning. Its main objectives were:

- To develop emotional and social skills in young people through play, listening, and group work.
- To create a volunteer event that had a real impact on a vulnerable group in the community.

To bring visibility to the issues that concern young people using an accessible, thoughtful, and respectful scenic language.

Local context of implementation

The process took place in Spain in an urban neighborhood, in collaboration with a day center for elderly people. This setting was chosen due to its structural vulnerability, the tendency toward isolation among its users, and the opportunity to foster enriching intergenerational connections. The group of young people had diverse profiles in terms of education, motivation, and prior experience with volunteering or artistic expression.

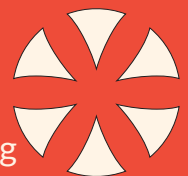
In Italy, the volunteer event took place in a day centre for people with disabilities. This context was chosen because the guests have various types of disabilities, both cognitive and physical and they have few opportunities for workshop moments. The young people who participated as operators had no experience in social work, had only a common base of experience at theatre level.

Stages of the process

Design and group building

From the very first sessions, the priority was to create a safe and trusting environment. Through group dynamics, introductory games, body awareness exercises, and listening practices, a cohesive group was gradually formed. This phase was key to establishing the foundation: a space where participants could express themselves without judgment, explore new things, and experiment through emotion and physicality.

The concept of social clowning was also introduced as a language of human connection and community engagement, based on presence and play. Although specific techniques were not yet taught, the first seeds of the clowning attitude were planted: open-mindedness, deep listening, and a willingness to connect.



Training in social clowning

The training sessions focused on specific tools of social clowning: stage presence, relational awareness, interaction with the environment, emotional connection, and humor rooted in tenderness and shared vulnerability. This phase was particularly meaningful due to the challenges it presented.

Many young participants struggled to show themselves authentically, to let go of control, or to overcome initial embarrassment. Resistance also arose regarding commitment to the group or engagement with some of the more complex exercises. It was necessary to develop educational strategies for emotional support, gradual involvement, and respect for each person's individual pace.

Nonetheless, a transformation gradually occurred: the group began to take more risks, hold each other's gaze, connect with their emotions openly, and discover clowning as a powerful means of expression without masks.

Preparation of the community event

One of the project's key objectives from the beginning was to design a volunteer event in a fragile community context, with young people as active protagonists. A day center for elderly people was selected as the intervention site, in collaboration with its staff and based on a shared needs assessment.

Over several sessions, the young people explored themes that deeply concerned them: gender-based violence, gender roles, social pressure, mental health, and chemical submission in nightlife contexts. From these

reflections, they began to build short clown scenes infused with symbolism, humor, and social critique, which they then rehearsed and refined together.

This process was not only creative but deeply personal. The young people were able to channel their worldview, questions, and frustrations into a theatrical language that neither judges nor imposes, but invites others to feel, reflect, and connect emotionally.

The event day

The event took place at the day center, attended by elderly people, staff, neighbors, and family members. The young people took to the stage with courage, showcasing all the work they had developed in previous months. A deep intergenerational dialogue was established. The elderly attendees expressed surprise and emotion upon seeing the younger generation's concerns portrayed with such care and creativity. Several remarked on how valuable it was to feel included in this symbolic conversation.

The young participants, in turn, felt their work had real impact: that their voices were being heard, that their performance evoked emotions, laughter, and thoughtful reflections from people outside their usual circles. Many shared a sense of usefulness, meaning, and belonging to something greater than themselves.



Closure and evaluation

In the final sessions, time was dedicated to personal closure and participatory evaluation of the process. Participants shared individual insights, moments of transformation, challenges overcome, and hopes for the future.

The process was experienced as a journey that opened doors: to commitment, to community, and to new forms of expression and connection.



Role of youth workers and young volunteers

Youth workers acted as facilitators and companions throughout the process. Their role was to hold space for the group, support emotional needs, pose meaningful questions, and offer technical tools when appropriate. They were essential in balancing creative freedom with collective responsibility.

The young volunteers, for their part, were the true drivers of the process: they proposed ideas, co-created scenes, managed conflicts, and took on the challenge of preparing a public performance from their own perspectives with maturity and intention. They emerged as agents of change, with their own voice and the power to make a difference.

Necessary resources

Although the format does not require major infrastructure, it does depend on several key resources:

- Basic scenic materials: clown noses, simple costumes, and recycled set elements.
- Safe and accessible spaces: a rehearsal room, community venues for the final event, and welcoming environments for creation and care.
- Sustained time: each cycle of the format requires 3 to 5 months, with weekly sessions that allow for group cohesion and deep exploration of content.
- Local partnerships: social centers, neighborhood associations, schools, or healthcare institutions. Networking is crucial to give meaning and continuity to the volunteer action.

Beyond material aspects, the most important resource is emotional and human time: listening, engagement, sensitivity, and consistent support.

Adaptability based on territory or participants

The format is highly adaptable. It can be implemented in rural or urban settings, with different youth profiles (migrant communities, youth with functional diversity, school groups or non-formal education settings), and with a wide variety of target groups (children, elderly, hospital communities, etc.).

What matters most is that the process is designed through genuine listening, not from a pre-set template. Every group, every territory, and every context has its own pace, language, and specific needs. The format works when it is built with the community.

Moreover, this approach can be sustained over time if it includes:

- Ongoing training for both young people and youth workers.
- The creation of collaborative networks between similar initiatives.
- The active participation of local entities capable of hosting and sustaining actions in the long term.



4.3 Key Elements for Replicability

One of the great strengths of this format is that, while it has a clear structure, it is not rigid: it is based on methodological and human principles that can be adapted to very diverse contexts. In order to replicate the format in other locations, there are some key elements to keep in mind:

Active participation of young people

This is not about young people attending an activity, it's about them building it from within.

Emotional and creative involvement is what gives meaning to the entire process.

The power of social clowning

Because it does not rely on verbal language and doesn't require participants to be professional artists, it allows people with no artistic background to express themselves in a deep, joyful, and authentic way.

Connection with the community

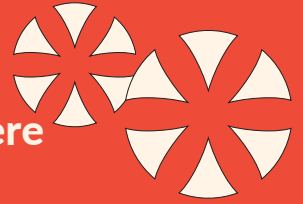
The format gains true value when oriented toward real-life intervention in a local environment. Engaging with a specific community gives the project purpose, direction, and impact.

Human-centered facilitation

Without a sensitive, respectful, and professional approach from the facilitation team, this process could not be sustained. The key lies in how it's done, not just what is done.



Minimum conditions needed to apply it elsewhere



A group of young people willing to participate consistently over time. No prior experience is necessary, but commitment is essential.

A safe and appropriate space for both rehearsals and the final event or community intervention.

Enough time for the process to unfold organically. Rushing or pressuring for results can sabotage meaningful learning.

A vulnerable community or group with whom a respectful and trusting relationship has been previously established, making it possible to intervene within a framework of mutual care.

At least one facilitator with experience in group dynamics, body expression, and/or social clowning. The role of the youth worker is crucial to accompany the pedagogical and group process.

Practical advice for those starting from scratch

Don't start at the end

It's common to want to jump straight into delivering the community event. However, the preparatory work with the young people is what ensures that the event has meaning, coherence, and genuine impact.

Prioritize group cohesion

Spend time building the group, generating trust, and listening to what the young people bring. Without that, neither artistic nor social processes can flourish.

Embrace uncertainty

Social clowning works through spontaneity, mistakes, and the unknown. Let go of control and trust what the group is building together.

Nurture relationships with the community

This is not about performing for others, but with them. Before intervening, listen, understand the context, ask for permission, and collaborate.

Celebrate small wins

Every gesture, every scene, every moment of connection has value. A large-scale event is not necessary, what matters are honest, human actions.



4.4 Observed Impact

One of the most valuable aspects of this format is that it allows you to witness the effects of the process almost in real time. Even without quantitative measurement tools, the qualitative impact was clear and profound, both on the young participants and the community members they engaged with.

Perceived Changes in the Young Participants:

- **Greater self-confidence:** Many young people shared that the process helped them trust more in their voice, their body, and their ability to communicate.
- **Increased emotional openness:** At the beginning, showing vulnerability was difficult. Over time, sharing emotions, supporting one another, and expressing without fear became normalized.
- **Improved teamwork skills:** They learned to build collectively, resolve conflicts through active listening, and make decisions together.
- **Connection with the community:** They felt their intervention had meaning—that it created something real for the people they were addressing. This impact gave them motivation and a sense of fulfillment.
- **Awakening of social commitment:** For several participants, this was their first real volunteer experience. By living it through emotion and creativity, they discovered a new way to engage with their surroundings.



Response from the Target Community

The older adults at the day center received the intervention with emotion and openness. They not only enjoyed the event but felt part of something vibrant, close, and meaningful. Several expressed surprise at how the young people addressed complex social issues with such humor and sensitivity. It was an opportunity for them to better understand today's youth and feel listened to and connected.

Moreover, the staff at the day center greatly appreciated the process and expressed strong interest in continuing the collaboration in the future.

Added Value for the Community

This type of format not only leaves a mark on direct participants, but also activates broader community dynamics:

- It breaks down generational stereotypes.
- It gives visibility to youth voices and talents.
- It encourages a creative approach to care and emotional well-being.
- It weaves networks between educational, social, and cultural organizations.



Medium- and Long-Term Sustainability

This format has strong potential for medium- and long-term sustainability, provided that the necessary conditions for continuity are created.

This means, on one hand, ensuring the commitment of educational, social, or youth organizations interested in adopting or replicating the model, and integrating it into their regular volunteer or non-formal education programs.

On the other hand, it's essential to invest in the training of new facilitators in social clowning or similar methodologies, to guarantee the quality and coherence of future implementations.

Sustainability is also strengthened when the young participants themselves have opportunities to remain involved: through new training experiences, participating in future project cycles, or taking on active roles as mentors or co-facilitators for other groups.

In this way, the format can grow organically, fostering an intergenerational network of volunteers with real impact in the community.

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YOU (TH) CLOWN

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