

## TOOLS AND METHODS

### Outreach work

France 2023



## IFS FOSTERING SOCIAL JUSTICE

### TOOL'S SUMMARY

<b>Tool/method name</b>	<b>Outreach work</b>
<b>Tool/method summary description</b>	A wide variety of methods to go out in public spaces to where residents live and are. Both including human resources and different types of vehicles.
<b>Country observed</b>	France
<b>Year observed</b>	2023
<b>Programme area</b>	Active citizenship Social inclusion

<b>Tool type</b>	This was a mix of various tools: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facilitation technique</li> <li>• Methodology</li> <li>• Physical equipment such as vehicles</li> </ul>
<b>Specific topics:</b>	Public space facilitation Community organizing Empowerment
<b>Beneficiaries of tool:</b>	Everyone in the area
<b>Can this tool be applied to other beneficiaries: yes/no</b>	Yes
<b>What type of beneficiaries: ALL, or specific ones?</b>	ALL
<b>If specific ones, which?</b>	

## Tool full description

Reaching the people who are not coming to social centers is not easy and requires new thinking. Employees and volunteers have gone out to public spaces and used different methods to invite people to come together and meet each other.

Some centres have a vehicle – caravan, bicycle, tricycle - which helps them reach people “where they are”.

This is a tool for open community activity and creating a feeling of safety and conviviality. People start to trust and like the activity, some join it regularly. They begin to talk to their new acquaintances and create by themselves new social action.

## Context

### National Context

The project “Centres Sociaux Itinérants” - "Itinerant Social Centers" began in 2021, sponsored and funded by the Ministry of Solidarity and Health.

Coordinated by the FCSF, the National French Federation of Settlements or Social Centers, the project allows the rolling out of mobile equipment : trucks, campers, caravans, bicycles, electric scooters, in 74 areas.

These projects are carried out by 81 social centers, 4 EVS (small social centers) and 6 departmental/regional federations, that are members of the FCSF.

Through this program, the FCSF enables the development of new innovative projects, particularly in rural areas and in urban policy districts. Sometimes this practice has been anchored for a long time in the practices of the structures, other times it's a new practice, in all cases their new mobile tool allows them to take up new challenges.

Objectives of the itinerancy:

- To develop social links, meetings with the teams of the social centers and between inhabitants, in the public space or in different activity area: school, library, next to a shopping center ...
- To fight against the digital divide, thanks to the deployment of digital mediators able to form residents in the various uses of digital technology.
- Promote access to rights, through assistance with administrative procedures, and make the link with a network of local, associative or institutional partners.
- To encourage the expression of the inhabitants and the emergence of projects, by the organization of animations for all the citizens who want to make concrete actions.

Beyond the itinerant project, the objectives are broader:

- To increase the range of action of social centers and innovating by giving themselves the means to set up actions to "Aller vers"  
: "go towards" or "go in front of inhabitants"
- Going out to meet the "invisible", the public who do not spontaneously push the door of the center and public services, especially people in precarious situations and/or social isolation.
- Developing new skills: a change in the volunteers and employees practices, who are used to receiving the public in the center, in precise timetables. The project modifies the postures of reception, meeting and programming. This development of new skills will be supported by a training program coordinated by the FCSF.

More information can [be found here](#)

## **Regional context**

The Federation of Social Centers in Brittany has coordinated a large project of Mobile Social Centers, and prepared an amazing programme across 3 different small towns and bigger cities to show the various means of reaching out to people where they are, and the tools used by different social centers to do this work.

The learning objectives were about understanding the importance of outreach work in rural areas and priority neighbourhoods, and the necessity of not simply waiting for people to come into centers.

One context observed was to connect people in desolated rural areas. Helping to create social fabric and structures in large areas. Learning about people's wants and needs and

helping facilitate projects that fosters their needs. Infrastructure and the mobility of inhabitants is a problem, because it's built around cars that some people don't have, that is addressed through these outreach programs.

Another example would be the work in poor or crime-influenced neighborhoods. The social center comes into the neighborhood with their tool, which first of all pushes dealers away from the area and also some neighbours are getting some coffee and can connect to other neighbours and even though other neighbors might not attend there is still a bit more connection between neighbors and a feeling of being cared about and less crimes in the area which everyone is benefiting from.

Important is also that social centres have close relationship with the townhall and CAF (government funding agency for families)

[More information in French about the Outreach approach in Brittany.](#)

### Could it be used in other contexts? If yes, which ones?

It could be used

In specific settings like young people's work

to attract new funders or present to existing funders

to support new projects led by the people reached

to promote the center

to signpost to other agencies

in gathering interest for "political" Campaigns

### What is innovative about this method or tool?

Trying to reach out to the community people which are difficult to reach out, which is something we are not always willing to admit.

The idea presented is that the caravan is a first step to go towards the community people and then give them tools and help they need.

Indirect beneficiaries are all people, also authorities, who live in the neighborhood. The centres produce important social services, which bring together local people and create peaceful and friendly atmosphere in a community.

You are not going to reach everybody, but the more active people you engage might end up reaching other more passive people.

This tool can be used to create public debates, and eventually new groups and centres.

## Detailed Methodology

This is a universally applicable method for tackling social issues such as isolation, lack of trust, lack of links between neighbours.

And this work creates a physical, real possibility for people to become aware of their abilities to act, to develop their skills, to feel their power through participation.

### The preparation

There is a variety of “tools” being used by social centers to reach everyone wherever they are, whatever their needs might be and in general work with the people, not for them and what they think local residents might need. Neighborhoods with high-priority needs are very important to the social centers. Trying to bring strangers together who don't seem to trust anyone but themselves takes a lot of time and different approaches to reach that level of trust and solidarity.

Seminars are held to educate the staff and volunteers involved in these projects, tools like the “postman’s coffee” or the caravan that makes crepes help people open up and talk honestly about their issues. Seminars like GPAS help people who work in social facilitations to train.

Social pedagogists is another educational tactic that refers to what an individual goes through in their own environment. They work as to how to approach the crowd in public spaces and wonder why this is a useful approach.

Learning new approaches as workers such as social pedagogy. An educational practice. It makes a link between individual needs and peoples' environments.

First mapping what is going on in the areas. First by asking people. To understand both about the daily life of the people and observing. Next through an inquiry approach. How to draw something from a theme people tell you, ask more questions to find out more. Not just thinking of what people need, but really finding out what they want.

Prepare to create and invoke conviviality. This means being open and welcoming. And ask questions. Welcome people with a smile first. Often they don't want to speak. Grab their attention with a question or a topic. People are shy, if you keep going back, they become curious. In general people are not asked or used to have their opinion asked on social issues.

### The activities

The vary from giving out food, opening up conversations about the local area, helping kids play sports together in a public park, showing people maps of their local areas, asking people in high rise flats their opinions about their local area.

Outreach activities are not organized to lure people to social centres but to face local people and enhance conviviality in neighborhoods. The employees and volunteers are truly interested in meeting the people and listening their worries. and thoughts. Regularity and consistence are very important for the trust of local people. If we people see that you come again and again, they will also join you again.

With simple strategies like going out with a tool like a caravan and giving out free coffee the social workers are creating an easy way for people to eventually get in contact with each other because it is easier to get into a talk like that instead of attending an official gathering for example. People can just stroll by, grab a coffee and maybe look around you and check out the people that are there with you.

For example a large yellow caravan which has a certain branding or message, and which always comes at the same time of the week to the neighborhood with coffee cups, tools for children etc.

We also saw a little tricycle that went in under the guise of “postman’s coffee”, offering free coffee at the bottom of the high rise flats when they come to get their mail at lunch time.

Another simple tool is to bring animals like a cat or dog to the public spaces where the people meet because people are less afraid of animals than humans, so it creates a comfortable atmosphere to be around a sweet dog, and this might lead to a conversation more easily too.

The core point is also not to force the people to talk. With the use of a tool like the caravan you don't give the people the feeling that they have to talk to you but if they really want to they can anyways. It's an open, inviting activity, without expectations.

It is important to regularly show up at a public space around the same time and same day of the week, it builds trust and maybe a person that did not attend the first three times because the person was too shy in the beginning the person might show up at the fourth time because the person slowly knows what is going to happen.

And it works best when creating public practices, for example repairing bikes. Setting up unusual activities for that area helps to make people curious. For example, cooking outside which is not so usual.

## **The results**

The people who benefit the most are those who participate in the activities and outreach programs, as well as the volunteers. The local inhabitants also in a more indirect way through the sense of togetherness that is created and facilitated in all activities and through the various possibilities of support the centers offer.

And in a larger sense the whole community benefits too, because it connects people to a larger whole. It offers possibilities to make them feel seen and connected, and able to act together if they want to.

Building trust and finding out their needs and wants and help facilitate, sometimes bottom up initiatives according to these needs. Meeting the people where they are at. Connecting people, listening.

Trust is built through continuously showing up and being there. Analysis is used to organize this more effectively.

Outreach work can be the first step towards empowerment. To make people realize they can organize themselves around problems. And know they are not alone with a problem. A mobile center is sometimes for information about citizens rights.

The workers and volunteers exchange their thoughts and reflections about what the whole practice meant. And to learn from this in the future. They stop having expectations but have objective knowledge, and also become able to adapt to different situations and different people.

DPA-développement - du pouvoir d'agir - it means empowerment. 'Development of the power to act'. It can be done through chats and exchanges, and something more visible like an activity.

### **Specific advice for staff/volunteers/adult educators**

The most important thing is to think through the different and specific ways of reaching out in communities in different areas. This is done through meeting the people where they are at, geographically and in what they want and need.

It requires patience and slow building of trust to create a solid foundation to build future activities and approaches.

It is key to adopt meticulous ways of reflecting and analyzing and adapting themselves to what works and being willing to change their old ways to what is necessary in the given circumstances.

Being willing to be rejected needs to be in the mindset, as well as being open to different ways of approaching things -that there isn't one single methodology that works everywhere.

Workers have to be prepared to handle difficult situations, but go out in teams with volunteers if possible.

Drinks and food are real assets to get closer to the people or attract them.

For being effective the outreach activities require regularity and consistence. It would be good if the employees stayed the same during the activity, and weekly consistency really helps.

To not be too shy to reach out. Finding people that have a passion for that kind of work and that are patient and motivated to keep on trying even if there is no success in sight at the beginning.

There is not a single methodology used, but it's fitted to the challenges and needs of the specific communities. And being innovative, trying new methods to redo things, do things differently to see the changes in outcomes.

Find a strategy that not only works short time but really is effective and resistant for a long period of time.

But of course also: a consistent money flow to ensure structural proceeding and long term stability of the initiatives to withstand unfavourable politics, governmental backlash and poor infrastructure.

### Useful quotes from the participants who observed this tool

*The social center comes into the neighborhood with their tool and first of all pushes something like dealers away from the area and also some neighbors are getting some coffee and can connect to other neighbors and even though other neighbours might not attend there is still a bit more connection between neighbours and **a feeling of being cared about and less crimes in the area which everyone is benefiting from** Natalie, Germany*

*This I believe has a positive effect on their political choices in the sense that **people who feel heard and seen are less prone to fall for more right wing politicians**. And this keeps the spirit of inclusivity and togetherness alive in a broader sense. So everybody is an indirect beneficiary of the social work that is done. Davor, The Netherlands*

*Most important for me was that social centres go out and seek new innovative activities to reach out people who usually don't participate or act. Outreach activities are not organized to lure people to social centres but to face local people and enhance conviviality in neighborhoods. **The employees and volunteers are truly interested in meeting the people and listening their worries and thoughts**. Regularity and consistence are very important for the trust of local people. Laura, Finland*

*The thing that surprised me the most is funding. Local town councils and elected officials work together with social centers and help with the funding. Also, the national government plays an important part to fund those 5-10-year projects as well. Municipality and national government need to work together to make the region-cities-small towns a great place to live. **Local people are aware of local problems and their voices need to be heard more**. This [outreach work] can also help the municipality be more active and know the high-priority neighborhoods better. Nefeli, Greece*

*I will present the ideas of management and the board which consists of local people. For me this model of management was amazing – the local people make the decisions concerning the strategy and employees facilitate and carry out the activities together with the volunteers. Our new strategy requires us to go more among the local people in most fragile neighborhoods. The outreach activities we were presented during the study visit come to me and my organization at the right time. **We need new ideas how to face people, how to***



***involve them in different activities and enhance conviviality, and in a long run, how to strengthen local democracy. Laura, Finland***

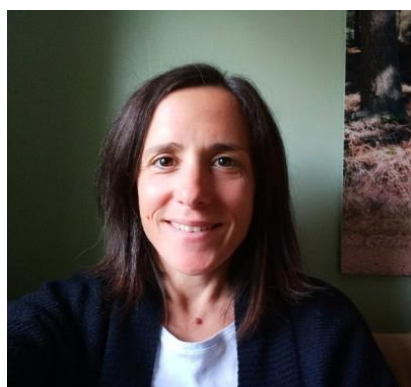
***“The aim of the project is not to give people what they need directly, but try and give people the means to obtain something they need, feel the urge to change things by themselves, even if it can raise problems.***

***Going towards people is not easy at all, it means having the courage to break their daily routine and try to convince them you are trying to help them instead of judging them”.***

***Anthony, Italy***

***Remember that is really important to empower people so they can see what they are capable of and that they start new projects by themselves. Maura, Spain***

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