



EMBRACED BY VOICE

VOICE AND MOVEMENT
IMPROVISATION AS
SUPPORT FOR
SLOVENIAN HOSPICE
SOCIETY VOLUNTEERS

CONTENTS

01

About the project

04

Session contents

26

Project outcomes

29

Facilitators

32

Conclusion



ABOUT THE PROJECT

EMBRACED BY VOICE

Embraced by Voice is an interdisciplinary project that introduces voice-movement improvisation as a complementary practice of support for volunteers of the Slovenian Hospice Society who accompany the dying and their loved ones. The project stems from the understanding that working within palliative care requires a high level of emotional presence, internal stability and ability to self-regulate, while at the same time this can take place without enough systematic support for those delivering voluntarily.

Through the creative process of voice-movement improvisation, the project opens a safe and non-hierarchical space in which participants can connect with their bodies, voices, and experiences in the moment. Improvisation is based on accepting unpredictability, listening, and responding to what is happening here and now – qualities that are also crucial in the hospice context, where life and death meet in their elusiveness and vulnerability.

The project addresses a broader social context in which death and dying can still be a taboo, and contributes to the development of a more open, compassionate and conscious attitude towards mortality. The first series of workshops represents the initial phase of a longer-term collaboration, which we hope to expand to hospice users and the wider elderly care system, including employees and volunteers in nursing homes.

THE INTERSECTION OF CULTURE AND HEALTH

Embraced by Voice is a project at the intersection of culture and health, which, through the artistic practice of voice-movement improvisation, explores the possibilities of supporting the mental health and well-being of individuals in emotionally demanding environments. The project is being carried out within the framework of the open call by Asociacija – Culture and Health 2025, within the programme framework of Culture for Mental Health, and is aimed at supporting volunteers who accompany the dying and regularly encounter intense emotional and psychological burdens within their work.

In this context, voice-movement improvisation is understood as a cultural and artistic practice that enables embodied presence, the development of emotional regulation, and the strengthening of internal resources, without therapeutic pressure or the need to resolve experiences.

Embraced by Voice creates a safe, community space where the artistic process is intertwined with mental health care, encouraging reflection, compassion, and sustainable presence in relationship with others.

The project is co-financed by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Public Administration, the Culture and Health Platform (European Union) and the Municipality of Ljubljana, in cooperation with the partner Nest, which places Embraced by Voice in the broader local and European context of the development of cultural and health practices and confirms the importance of art as an important factor in community health and social care. In this way, the project not only addresses the immediate needs of the volunteers of the Slovenian Hospice Society, but also raises the broader question of how the cultural sector can participate in the development of ethical, sustainable and accessible support models in the field of mental health in the long term.

SESSION CONTENTS

Tuning

Support

Emotions

Nurturing

Improvisation

Silence

Allowing

Re-embracing

LINKING SESSION CONTENTS WITH THE PURPOSE OF THE EMBRACED BY VOICE PROJECT

1. Session: Tuning

The opening session focused on fostering a connection with oneself by attuning to the rhythms of the body, the flow of breath, and the essence of time. Participants cultivated a profound presence that allows for a more mindful, adaptable, and gentle engagement with others – an essential aspect of supporting those at the end of life.

2. Session: Support

The meeting delved into the essence of support as a reciprocal journey. Through a dynamic voice-movement experience, participants enhanced their understanding of personal boundaries, cultivated self-support, and embraced enduring forms of presence, all while avoiding emotional fatigue.

3. Session: Emotions

Participants experienced a rich tapestry of emotions through body-voice processes. This session enhanced the capacity to embrace emotions without reactivity and to recognize the emotions of others while upholding internal boundaries.

4. Session: Nurturing

The session centered on cultivating self-care and inner support practices. Through gentle movement and vocal explorations, participants fostered a compassionate attitude towards themselves, paving the way for enduring stability in emotionally challenging work.

5. Session: Improvisation

In this session, we delved into improvisation as a vital life skill for navigating the unexpected. It fostered adaptability, confidence in our instincts, and the power to collaborate in the present moment.

6. Session: Silence

The meeting created an opportunity to embrace silence as a vibrant presence. Participants cultivated the skill to dwell in silence with ease, a vital foundation for profound and compassionate connection.

LINKING SESSION CONTENTS WITH THE PURPOSE OF THE EMBRACED BY VOICE PROJECT

7. Session: Allowing

Through the joyful dance of vocal and movement co-creation, participants delved into the realms of spontaneity, vulnerability, and authenticity. This gathering fostered a profound sense of freedom and nurtured a deeper, more genuine connection with oneself and with others.

8. Session: Re-embracing

The final session aimed to weave together the entire journey. Through the power of voice, movement, and reflection, participants welcomed their experiences and linked them to their future volunteer endeavors and daily lives.

The journey of the workshops within the Embraced by Voice project has been thoughtfully crafted as a progressive experience, guiding participants from the initial connection with their inner selves to a profound engagement with others, culminating in the integration of their newfound insights. The flow of topics is rooted in the principles of embodied learning, making it especially suitable for navigating emotionally delicate situations, such as supporting those at the end of life. Voice-movement improvisation serves as a pivotal element in this journey, functioning as a transformative practice of awareness, expression, and balance.

Voice and movement create a profound connection to the experience at hand, transcending the need for verbal explanation or control, while nurturing the growth of presence, adaptability, and compassion. It is this embodied essence that empowers participants to cultivate inner strength and the capacity to respond gracefully in the face of uncertainty.

Such a journey does not promise instant solutions; instead, it cultivates a nurturing environment for steady, enduring growth that uplifts the mental well-being of volunteers and enriches the quality of their contributions to those nearing the end of life, even long after the project concludes.

SESSION CONTENTS

TUNING

Connecting with the group, embracing the new environment, and discovering oneself within this fresh collective and innovative approaches. Some individuals were introspective, while others radiated joy and playfulness. An atmosphere of curiosity filled the space, unveiling new realms of perception.

The moments of tranquility and stillness resonated as if the group had been collaborating for ages. The silence was both vibrant and serene, creating a harmonious atmosphere. In every situation, the participants encountered their own inquiries: "How much can I permit myself to be vulnerable, how much can I embrace playfulness, joy, and uniqueness, or will I seem odd if I do?" In spite of these reflections, the facilitators' (Neža and Jaka) approach fostered a nurturing environment that welcomed acceptance of what is.

Silence is not merely a void for tuning in; it is a realm of perception. It invites us to embrace stillness and to truly listen to the resonance we cultivate in harmony with one another. This can serve as a significant contribution to engaging with vulnerable groups, particularly in the realms of hospice and palliative care.

Invitation to the group: TUNING Embrace the journey of connecting with your inner self. Tune into your rhythms, cycles, and needs. Reflect on how you harmonize with your family, your environment, and those around you. How can I recognize when I am in harmony? What sensations arise within me during these moments, and how might my experience of space and time transform as a result? There is no need to rush for answers; I can simply observe and remain aware of how the essence of harmony flows through me and my daily endeavors.



PARTICIPANT QUOTES ABOUT TUNING

"This topic holds immense significance for me, and I have been dedicating considerable time to it recently, both in my personal journey and my professional endeavors. It stems from a deep-seated need and the awakening to how distant I have felt from my body for much of my life.

Embodiment, to me, signifies the courage to surrender rather than act from a place of fear. I embrace whatever must unfold, even when it brings discomfort.

Embodiment occurs when knowledge that resonates with me on a rational level seamlessly integrates into my being, influencing my actions.

When fear of the unknown fades away, the urge to prove oneself dissipates. In that moment, a sense of natural transcendence emerges, intertwining us with the grand tapestry of existence. It is a rhythm, a heartbeat, a breath, a manifestation of love."

SUPPORT

How do I perceive support?

How can I best uplift and empower those around me?

How can I nurture my own well-being while uplifting those I work with?

What drives us to explore the realm of support?

Delving into the realms of giving and receiving support on a somatic level is vital, for it transforms an abstract concept into a vivid, physical experience. When we feel support through touch, weight, breath, or movement, we come to understand how trust, boundaries, and connection reside within our nervous system—not merely in our thoughts. These embodied explorations illuminate where we may hold back, resist, or soften; how we navigate the delicate dance of giving and receiving; and how safety and reciprocity are cultivated through genuine, physical presence. By engaging with our bodies, we foster a richer and more authentic comprehension of support—one that resonates in our relationships, communication, and the everyday interactions we share with others.

The journey of self-awareness is vital to our mission, as it enables us to identify our own patterns, limits, and strengths before extending our support to others. By delving into the ways we provide and accept support — physically, emotionally, and somatically — we enhance our understanding of our boundaries, presence, and capacity to connect deeply.

PARTICIPANT QUOTES ABOUT SUPPORT

"I discovered that a simple, mindful breath or a gentle sound can anchor me and bring a sense of tranquility."

"I began to view my voice as a source of strength, rather than something I needed to manage."

"I discovered how to harness my body and movement as a means to let go of tension rather than resisting it."

EMOTIONS

Sound is the essence that empowers us to co-create the language we use to connect with one another. Our emotions and feelings form a unique vocabulary that enables us to truly hear ourselves, attune to our needs, and respond with intention.

The greater our awareness of our own emotions and feelings, the more adept we will become at recognizing them in our clients, allowing us to respond with compassion and understanding.

It is essential to recognize that emotions are neither good nor bad; they simply exist, each carrying the unique gift of its message.

“We possess the power of courage and fear, the grace of generosity and selfishness, the beauty of vulnerability and strength. These qualities do not negate one another; instead, they weave together to create the complete tapestry of our strength and our response to life.” Rachel Naomi Remen



PARTICIPANT QUOTES ABOUT EMOTIONS

"I embrace my emotions more readily now, even when they are challenging. They no longer intimidate me as they once did."

"Now I recognize more swiftly when something is weighing me down, and I understand the importance of taking a moment for myself."

"I've discovered that not everything needs to be comprehended with the mind – at times, it's sufficient to simply feel."

NURTURING

**What sustains my days, allowing me to thrive within them?
What nurtures the essence of my being,
empowering me to bravely embrace wholeness?**

How can I embrace serenity and compassion for myself and my aspirations?

How can I guide it in a manner that enriches both myself
and my environment?

All of these questions are integral to our journey and simultaneously reflect our choices in how we will respond. The rhythm I select for my day can transform into the melody of my actions. And this, if I remain steadfast, evolves into a song that I share with myself and the world.

Life presents its own cadence, yet I always possess the chance to infuse my unique sound into the symphony of existence and dance along with it.

Gratitude creates this kind of resonance.

Embracing the small wonders we appreciate is a call to create our own rituals, infusing our lives with a rhythm that assures us of abundance.

IMPROVISATION

What does it mean to improvise?

In my journey, in my endeavors... What abilities does it demand of me?

How can I collaborate to create a shared space with others?

In the very space and moment I occupy.

If I were to act on my instincts, what transformations would that bring to my life?

To embrace the art of improvisation and heed the instincts that arise in the present moment, one must cultivate sensitivity. It is about tuning into the space both within and around us. It involves recognizing what already exists, as well as the spontaneous contributions that emerge from within us in response to the moment. Co-creation and improvisation transcend notions of right or wrong; they invite us to stay grounded and attuned to our observations. This process of observation and listening extends beyond mere sight; it encompasses all the senses that enable us to fully engage with the richness of life.

Co-creation is a journey, not a moment.

It is a chance to welcome ourselves into the moment and embrace the presence of others alongside us.

Co-creation is a vibrant, imaginative, and dynamic partnership with the present moment we inhabit.

Alone and with the world.



PARTICIPANT QUOTES ABOUT IMPROVISATION

“At the hospice, we forge deep connections that resonate with warmth and understanding.

In our workshops, we embrace the art of listening with genuine intent. We have also become attuned to the importance of respecting the boundaries of others, ensuring that our interactions are both thoughtful and considerate.”

“It’s fascinating to concentrate on your own reflection while simultaneously embracing the broader picture.”

“Once I remove my thoughts, it becomes easier to connect. In that moment, I no longer question, ‘Is this acceptable, is this right?’ When I tune into my intuition and my heart, forging a connection with another becomes effortless. In this performative world, that can be challenging. That pause is invaluable. Take your time, embrace the feeling, and only then reach out to connect.”

SILENCE

Silence is not merely what remains unspoken.
It is, above all, that which requires no words to be understood.
It is the gift of a shared presence.
There, you need not know if you are doing it right.
You need only be.
And, in being, resonate.

*And how do you meet with silence?
Do you encounter it only rarely,
or do you visit it regularly?
What gifts does it bring?
What memories does it evoke?*



PARTICIPANT QUOTES ABOUT SILENCE

›I learnt that silence is not empty,
and can feel very full.«

ALLOWING

How much courage does it take to stop filtering my impulses, words, actions, and truths and allow myself to live as I feel in that moment?

For improvisation to happen, I am invited to co-create space through observation and following inner drives and impulses. There is no right or wrong in improvisation. It is an invitation to respond in the natural rhythm of what truly resonates with you.

What do I need to allow myself more of this kind of playful and spontaneous co-creation in my life?

What does such a relaxed and light way of living bring?

What kind of gift can I be to others when I allow them to truly see me?

“When I stop thinking about whether it's right or wrong, it just happens.”



RE-EMBRACING

Re-embracing is a journey of discovering the broader perspective that an experience offers.

It is a perspective that encompasses all angles, yet it is primarily a perspective that arises from within.

What's blossoming within me?

What did this experience enable me to feel, convey, express, sing, and more?

How can I fully embrace the essence of this experience through a word, a gesture, or the power of my voice?

The answers may lack a logical explanation, yet they possess a profound symbolic one – expressed through images, shapes, colors, and sounds.

Re-embracing an experience goes beyond merely grasping its meaning and the role it plays in our lives.

It is the belief that the outcomes of the journeys we have undertaken will be woven into our very essence, allowing them to emerge and reveal themselves in their unique form at the perfect moment and in the ideal setting.

Similarly, as volunteers, we may not always be aware of the seeds of kindness we are planting in the hearts of others. It is not our place to know.

It is our responsibility to embrace the present moment and to let it unfold...

everything is well, everything is well.

PROJECT OUTCOMES

The assessment took place following the conclusion of a series of voice-movement improvisation workshops within the framework of the Embraced by Voice initiative. This project serves as a meaningful response to the increasing demand for comprehensive support for those engaged in fields with significant emotional weight, showcasing the powerful intersection of artistic expression and the vital concerns of mental health and social welfare.

The evaluation served a multifaceted and growth-oriented purpose. At its core, it sought to measure the impact of the workshops on the personal development, emotional regulation, and inner empowerment of the volunteers, focusing on their perceived transformations in the relationship with their own body, voice, emotions, and internal sources of support. Particular emphasis was placed on exploring how the artistic journey of voice-movement improvisation fosters the cultivation of embodied presence and psychosocial resilience.

The assessment of the Embraced by Voice project was crafted as a mixed-methods approach, blending quantitative and qualitative research methodologies. This approach is especially fitting for initiatives that lie at the crossroads of culture, art, and mental health, as it enables the simultaneous gathering of measurable impacts alongside profound subjective experiences of participants. The evaluation engaged 12 volunteers who participated in the workshops. This sample size aligns perfectly with the essence of the project, which thrives on small groups and deep process work.

A thorough comparative analysis, both quantitative and qualitative, of the inclusion questionnaire and the final evaluation questionnaire reveals that the Embraced by Voice project transcends mere short-term or symptomatic support. It serves as a process of internal and relational transformation. Participants embarked on this journey not in a state of extreme exhaustion, but with a keen awareness of the complexities inherent in their volunteer work and a yearning for deeper internal support. This foundational perspective enables the outcomes of the workshops to manifest not in the mere eradication of challenges, but in the empowerment of internal resources, presence, and emotional regulation.

PROJECT OUTCOMES

Quantitative data show a clear shift from relative stability to greater inner empowerment, emotional regulation and resilience, confirming that the project works preventively and developmentally. At the same time, qualitative responses reveal that this shift is not primarily expressed in increased self-confidence or a sense of control, but in a deepened ability to stay in touch with uncertainty, vulnerability and not knowing, which is central to working with the dying.

A comparison of the two questionnaires also reveals a significant shift in the language of the participants: upon inclusion, the language of expectations, questions and caution predominates, while after the process, the language of experience, bodily perception and embodied behavior prevails. This shows that the workshops do not convey knowledge only on a cognitive level, but also enable experiential integration, which is transferred to volunteer work and everyday life.

The lower perceived "readiness" to work with the dying in the final evaluation turns out to be one of the key qualitative indicators of the project's success in this comparative perspective. It is not a matter of a decrease in competence, but of the development of an ethical stance, reflexivity and respect for the complexity of human mortality, which reduces the illusion of certainty and at the same time deepens the quality of presence.



PROJECT OUTCOMES

Based on a comprehensive quantitative and qualitative comparative analysis, we can conclude that the Embraced by Voice project successfully achieves its fundamental goals and represents an effective, ethically sensitive and innovative approach at the intersection of culture and mental health. The project demonstrates that artistic practices – in this case voice-movement improvisation – can act as a powerful tool for strengthening psychosocial resilience, internal regulation and the quality of relational contact, especially in individuals working in areas of high emotional strain.

The evaluation confirms that the project's effects are not aimed at rapid or superficial changes, but at more lasting shifts in the way of being, perceiving and responding. The project contributes to the development of volunteers who are more present, more embodied and better able to remain in relationship with the dying without excessive burden or need to act. In this way, it directly supports the objectives of the Culture for Mental Health Programme and the European Culture and Health Platform, which emphasise preventive, community-based and humanistic approaches to mental well-being.

The Embraced by Voice project thus proves to be an example of good practice that has clear potential for further development, replication and transfer to other contexts – both within volunteer programs and more broadly in the fields of culture, health and social care. The evaluation results confirm its relevance, meaningfulness and sustainability, and represent a solid basis for further systematic integration of artistic processes in supporting the mental health of individuals and communities.

FACILITATORS

Neža Pele

Neža Pele is an independent cultural worker in the field of performing arts (contemporary dance), a graduate psychologist, dancer and choreographer. In her practice, she is most dedicated to researching group voice-movement improvisation and instant composition, both within a performative context and as a practice that supports human health. Neža is the author of several voice-movement performances (Lalia, Inner Voice, Ritual: Iz glasine, Valovanje, Postaja kamen glas) and a workshop facilitator (Embraced by Voice, Movement Oracle). She trained in Group Voice Arts Therapy. Since 2025, she has been collaborating with Moave association, which works at the intersection of mental health and movement. She also participated in the B-AIR project of Radio Slovenija, as one of the facilitators in the test group of voice-movement improvisation for people with Parkinson's (Maribor 2023), and in the project by Anthropos: Songs of Humanity, as part of a team of voice-movement improvisers delivering within a care home for people with dementia (London, 2024).



Špela Peterlin - Nayeli

Špela Peterlin is a graduate psychologist, a specialist in Gestalt experiential psychotherapy, and a researcher in somatics and dance improvisation. Since 2016, her interest has been exploring the intersection of mental health and movement. With this aim in mind, she founded the Moave NGO in the same year, with the vision of raising awareness among all age groups about the influence, importance and effects of physical movement on the personal development and well-being of the individual. As an organization, they operate both locally and internationally. The main vision of the association is to unite, empower and raise awareness among individuals who share the interest in movement and personal exploration.



FACILITATORS

Jaka Vid Škapin

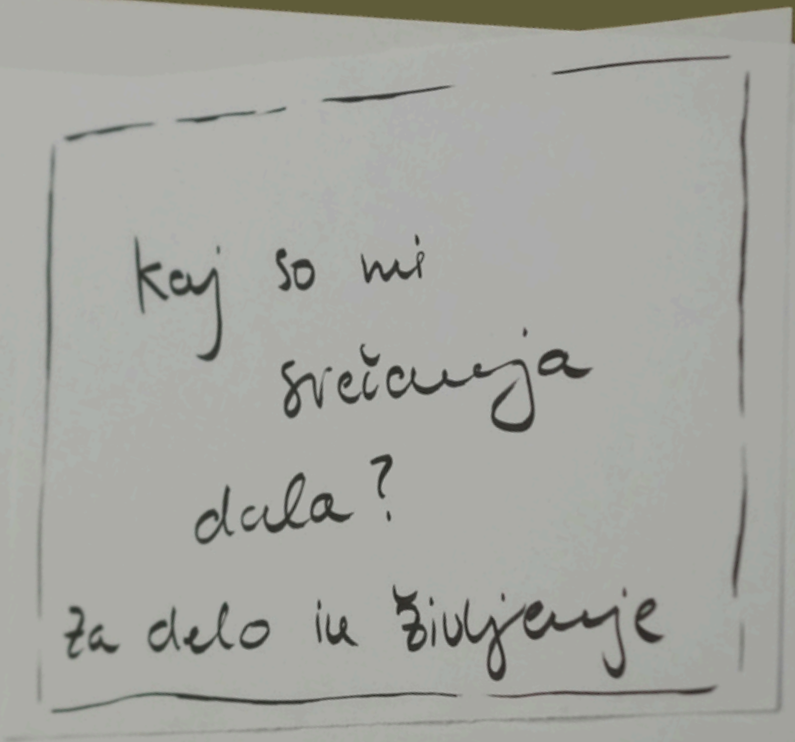
Jaka Vid Škapin is a sound artist, singer and improviser working between Slovenia and London. Since 2016, he has been joining forces with Luminelle and Danielle Jones as a music director on transformative projects that weave voice-movement improvisation into the fabric of healthcare. Their Dancing with Parkinson's initiative encompassed innovative scientific and artistic research in partnership with the National Hospital for Neurology and Neurosurgery in London. Jaka also engaged with the Dance for Life project, uniting movement therapists and musicians to enrich the lives of nursing home residents. In 2022, he launched a collaborative project focused on voice-movement improvisation in healthcare as a transcultural practice alongside Guillermo Rozenthuler, supported by Arts Council England and Breathe Arts Health Research. In 2023, he received an invitation to contribute to the B-AIR project organized by RTV Slovenija. Collaborating with the Trepetlika association, they offered a voice-movement improvisation workshop for individuals with Parkinson's in Maribor, produced a radio documentary, participated in a symposium at the Academy of Music Ljubljana, and co-authored a scientific article with psychologist and researcher Ana Kuder.





CONCLUSION

Learning transcends the mere mastery of techniques in the traditional sense; it embodies a transformation in our perception, our responses, and our very essence. This evolution underscores the deep and lasting impact of the project.



Kaj so mi
srečanja
dala?
za delo in življenje

CONCLUSION

The project Embraced by Voice fulfilled its objectives, creating a vital platform that intertwines voice-movement improvisation with emotional support, monitoring, and engagement with vulnerable groups. The activities conducted were warmly embraced by participants and the Slovenian Hospice Society, while the collaboration among the facilitation team played a crucial role in ensuring the project's high-quality and meaningful execution. Furthermore, this initiative showcased the potential of such an approach for advancing and enriching practices that empower individuals to delve into their voice, body, relationships, and presence.

The first phase of the project also sparked inquiries for future endeavors. The varied makeup of the volunteer group highlighted the importance of focusing on the induction of participants in upcoming deliveries, as well as the potential for integrating the gained experiences and practices into their daily lives and volunteer efforts. This is precisely why the audio manual serves as a crucial advancement, enabling individuals to independently delve into some of the essential exercises and principles beyond the group setting.

The journey of the project illuminated the significance of intertwining artistic practices with the realm of palliative care, revealing that voice-movement improvisation can foster a sanctuary for engaging with subjects that are frequently challenging to articulate. Thus, we perceive Embraced by Voice as a vital starting point for a more extensive inquiry that we aspire to cultivate in the future through a lasting collaboration with the Slovenian Hospice Society.

The next phase will present opportunities to collaborate with volunteers, staff, and residents, delving deeper into creative processes that bridge the voice, body, relationships, and the essence of transience. We hold the conviction that through this approach, the project can evolve into an even more enduring source of support, education, and community connection.

Authorship:

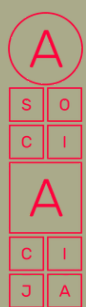
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