

AUGUST 2020 - ISSUE 4

LIVING E-MOTIONS

Emotional education through visual storyliving for people with
mental health challenges



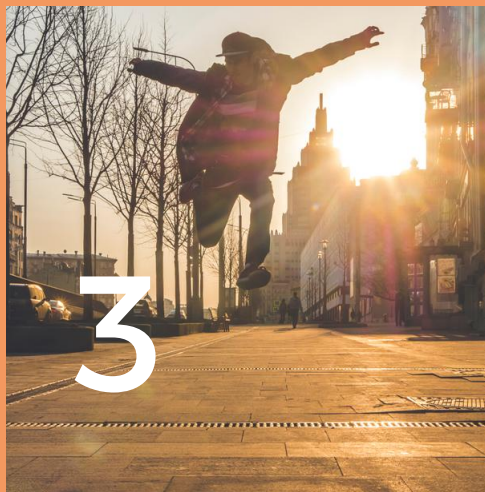
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EDITORIAL

This is one of the rarest summers we have ever lived due to COVID-19; our emotions are running very high and most of us still feel confused and anxious about the future.

Living e-Motions is helping the people we work for to express all these feelings and to learn how to handle them in their daily life.

The Living e-Motions team



THE LIVING EMOTIONS TRAINING COURSE IN SPAIN

We are ending August 2020, one of the most atypical Augusts that, unfortunately, we have had to live. The fear of COVID-19 is still in the air, with outbreaks appearing every day and the constant uncertainty of not knowing how long all this will last. But now, we are entering another world, we are entering in a small room of trust, calm and personal growth that the psychologists Susana and Natalia have managed to create in the Psychosocial Rehabilitation Center in Zamora (CRPS) managed by INTRAS Foundation. The Living e-Motions course began in Spain on February the 18th, but soon after it had to be paralyzed because of COVID-19. Finally, it was possible to resume on June the 23rd including some changes: instead of 12 participants (people with severe and prolonged mental illness), the group was reduced to 6 people and security measures had to be implemented according to the new normal. Now that only few weeks left for the pilot course to end, we would like to know the opinion of the professionals who are facilitating the Living e-Motions training course to the INTRAS Foundation clients.

1. How was the course received by the participants in the Living e-Motions course? Do you think that there are something specially motivating or rewarding for them?

Participants welcomed the course with great interest. The Psychosocial Rehabilitation Center is a resource for therapeutic intervention aimed at people with mental health problems, and it fitted very well to prepare them to understand and manage their own emotions. We work from an approach in which all the participants (people with and without diagnoses) suffer at some point in our lives difficulties



related to mental discomfort. This allows us to maintain a very collaborative and experiential atmosphere. It was very striking to the participants that people from other organizations in other countries were also working on the same project and living the same experience. It gave even more entity and strength to the program, since they saw that the course was framed in something much bigger. When the lockdown occurred, we conducted a weekly telephone follow-up with all the course participants. In such a delicate and uncertain moment, emotions such as fear and sadness surfaced that we had started working on the program and this was the moment to identify and manage these emotions, which in some way we all understood and shared.

Somehow, we were able to individually give continuity to the course contents and many of them verbalized how much they missed the face-to-face sessions. We lived hard moments but very in tune with the Living e-Motions course.

2. As professionals of the mental health field used to work with different materials and methodologies, what makes Living e-Motions different from other courses or workshops? What are the main benefits of this training?

Living e-Motions is created on the basis of the Recovery model, leaving behind the medical and biologist model, and focusing on the person and the potential that their own experience has in his/her recovery process. This concept fully fitted into the work methodology of our center, which allowed us to work with the contents of the project with few modifications. This is a great advantage for professionals, since we could use the program directly. Another interesting aspect is that all sessions have dynamics and practical exercises, which is very important to generate a practical application of the content taught. In this sense, the participants are proposed from a very flexible position, in which they can be adapted to the characteristics of the people or the facilitators, which highlights that the program is flexible to the different environments in which it is taught. The sharing of the different exercises carried out generates moments of listening, of dialogue, of expressing ... that are very powerful in the process of people's recovery. Building life stories is a technique that can improve personal self-knowledge capacity and detect the tools that can help us to overcome difficult moments. This is where we are now; our goal is to finish the course through the stories of our participants.

3. Although the course has not finished yet, can you tell us about any positive experience? What you have enjoyed the most on a personal level?

In general it is being very rewarding for everyone. Participants are attending all sessions, if they miss any of them, it is duly justified, which is an important indicator that they are interested and find it useful. The evolution of one of the participants has been very striking. At the beginning she spoke very little, it was difficult for her to maintain her attention and she had great difficulties expressing herself. As the program progressed, she has evolved in her recovery process, she has begun to find words to name her emotions, to complain about what she dislikes and has begun to empower herself and reject situations she does not want. She has gone from being the person who participated the least, to filling the sessions with content and opening her experience to others. I think this is one of the most rewarding aspects that we are going to take from this course.

4. What are your future plans regarding the Living e-Motions course at INTRAS Foundation?

As we said at the beginning, the Living e-Motions program fits perfectly with the methodology and work approach that we follow at our center. As it is a therapeutic intervention, the contents of the sessions are in tune with the objectives of working with the participants. For this reason, it is going to be a program that we are going to incorporate into our portfolio of services to be able to implement it on a recurring basis among the programs we deliver. It is very valuable for us to have this new tool for our work.

5. Would you like to make any recommendations or give any advice to other facilitators who start the course in the future in Spain or in any other European country?

In our case, we follow the program faithfully; we created power point presentations including some of the content to help the participants to keep their attention and improve the understanding. The facilitators also join in, actively participating in the exercises and dynamics through their own personal experiences, and I believe that this favors equality and a climate of trust among all.



LIVING E-MOTIONS AND COVID-19

COVID-19 and its impact has changed our way of life. Many people have faced significant challenges in their day-to-day lives and all of us have been affected by a situation full of unknowns. Quite rightly, there are concerns about how the COVID-19 situation will affect people's mental health and wellbeing over time, and how already stretched mental health services can meet new demands.

The easing of lockdown is welcome but many people are still coming to terms with bereavement, isolation and separation from loved ones and anxieties about safety and health. Others are facing the reality of prospect of unemployment, financial problems and continued challenges. Our experiences and stories are not ending with the easing of lockdown.

However, we need to be careful about predictions of a tsunami of mental health problems or a mental health pandemic. Feelings of anxiety and sadness are entirely normal reactions to difficult circumstances not symptoms of poor mental health. Some people may need specialist mental health support but many of us will just need an opportunity to make sense of our feelings and work out how we will get through this difficult time.



Scottish Recovery Network have been running a programme of conversation cafes where people with lived experience of mental health challenges and practitioners have come together to talk about what has helped them to stay well during the lockdown and how they are preparing for the future. These conversation café discussions have highlighted that many people have been able to draw on their experiences of mental health crisis and recovery to support their wellbeing during a very difficult time.

What also emerged was a desire for people to use this lived experience to help others struggling with their mental health and wellbeing but who are not connected with formal services. The opportunity to connect human to human was highly valued and provided a normalizing experience where people could learn from each other. This helped people to better understand their emotions and wellbeing and find their own way to recovery. This is something that people wanted to see more of in their communities and workplaces.

Living e-Motions is ideally placed to support people to make sense of their experiences and find their way to recovery. Bringing people together to explore and share their stories and to identify their strengths, skills and passions is a positive, empowering way to support people experiencing poor wellbeing. The peer support engendered by the use of storyliving can validate people's feelings, help them to explore them in a safe space and identify what they can do to stay well or to pick themselves up if they are struggling.

The Living e-Motions learning resource being developed has the flexibility to be adapted to a range of different audiences and needs. As well as being delivered as a training course, the materials in the learning resource could also be used to develop a programme of less formal group work or workshops by peer support groups, community groups, church groups, workplaces and youth groups. This way the benefits of storyliving could be introduced to a wider population and we can help to embed emotional education in our communities and society.

As we move through the COVID-19 situation we need ways for people to share their stories. As a society, we need to be able to hear, listen to and act on people's stories – stories not only of the challenges and difficulties they are experiencing but also their stories of what they are doing to stay well. That way storyliving can make a significant contribution to improving mental health and wellbeing across our societies.



The background of the page is a photograph of a row of grey metal mailboxes. A red flag is visible on the mailbox in the foreground. The background is slightly blurred, showing trees and a clear blue sky. An orange, torn-edge graphic overlay is positioned on the right side of the page, containing white text.

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