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XXIAdults

Adaptation of the adult educational system to the XXI Century

The Good Practices Template

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Name of the Good Practice
CAIS CAPACITA+

Summary of the Practice Brief, easy-to-understand summary: What is the practice, for whom, and for what purpose?
CAIS CAPACITA+ is a training and empowerment programme led by Associação CAIS, aimed at promoting the social and professional inclusion of people in vulnerable situations. Through practical training, personal development sessions, and close mentoring, the programme seeks to enhance participants' autonomy, skills, and employability. The initiative is designed for adults who are homeless or at risk of social exclusion, helping them regain a sense of purpose and integration in society.

Description of the Practice – min. 2000 characters
1) Context / Background What was the initial need or problem? Who was the target group? Was it part of a larger programme or project?
The **CAIS CAPACITA+** project was launched in response to a persistent and urgent social challenge in Portugal: the **exclusion of people experiencing homelessness or extreme social vulnerability** from the labour market and from educational or training systems. Many of these individuals face complex, multidimensional barriers – including lack of formal qualifications, long-term unemployment, mental health issues, and social stigma – which prevent them from accessing stable jobs and rebuilding autonomous lives. The project targets **adults in situations of social vulnerability**, especially those experiencing or at risk of homelessness in the Lisbon area. It was developed as a **complementary initiative** within the broader mission of Associação CAIS to promote **social inclusion, empowerment, and dignity** through training, participation, and civic engagement. CAIS CAPACITA+ integrates both **non-formal education** and **training for employability**, combining skill development with personalised support. It was created to bridge the gap between training and real-world opportunities, offering a structured and supportive path for reintegration. The programme responds to individual needs and capabilities, reinforcing self-confidence and social skills while opening doors to employment, volunteering, or further training.

This practice was not a one-off event but is part of a **sustained, strategic effort by Associação CAIS**, aligned with their broader inclusion and citizenship work, including other training programmes, advocacy, and partnerships with businesses and institutions.

2) Objectives

What were the goals of the practice?
What did it aim to improve or change?

The **main objectives** of the CAIS CAPACITA+ programme are:

- **To foster social inclusion** by supporting people in vulnerable situations in acquiring personal, social, and vocational skills.
- **To increase employability** through tailored training paths that combine practical workshops with soft skills development.
- **To empower participants** to regain autonomy, confidence, and a sense of purpose in their lives.
- **To bridge the gap** between excluded individuals and the labour market, education, and community networks.
- **To promote active citizenship**, dignity, and personal growth through personalised mentoring and goal-setting.
- **To break cycles of marginalisation**, by creating opportunities for long-term transformation rather than short-term aid.

The programme also aims to **build relationships of trust**, offer consistent and structured support, and help participants construct realistic life plans aligned with their interests and capabilities.

3) Implementation / Methodology

How was the practice carried out step by step?
What activities or methods were used?
How long did it take?

CAIS CAPACITA+ is implemented through a **structured and modular programme** that unfolds over several weeks, combining:

- **Group training sessions**, focused on personal development, communication, emotional management, and life planning;
- **Practical and experiential workshops**, which may include digital skills, arts, or manual crafts, depending on each edition and partnerships;
- **Mentoring and individual support**, where participants receive follow-up, motivation, and help with defining personal goals and pathways;
- **Visits and connections to institutions and potential employers**, to familiarise participants with possible job or training contexts;
- **Final presentations or integration moments**, where participants share experiences or outcomes with the wider community.

The methodology is **participant-centred**: it adapts to each individual's rhythm and capacities, acknowledging their background, vulnerabilities, and aspirations. CAIS professionals and facilitators work in proximity and trust-building mode, creating a safe and non-judgemental learning environment.

The duration of the programme is not fixed across all editions but generally runs for several weeks, allowing time for both **skill acquisition** and **personal transformation**. It is implemented in **Lisbon**, with the potential for replication in other territories.

4) Results / Outcomes

What were the concrete results?
How did the practice impact the participants?

While a comprehensive quantitative evaluation of **CAIS CAPACITA+** is not yet publicly available, several **concrete qualitative outcomes** have been reported by Associação CAIS:

- **Participants complete the programme with increased confidence**, communication skills, and self-awareness;
- Many acquire **basic competences relevant to job searching**, such as digital skills, CV writing, and interview preparation;
- Participants develop **greater emotional regulation** and clearer personal goals;
- The programme has led some individuals to **reintegrate into the labour market**, **engage in volunteering**, or **continue into other training or support pathways**;

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- **Improved social connections** and a sense of belonging are frequently observed, reducing isolation and helplessness;
- The group dynamics and mentoring help **rebuild trust**, motivation and resilience — often essential before any employment or education becomes viable.

Additionally, **institutional partnerships** (with training centres, employers, and local services) are strengthened through the programme, creating long-term impact beyond each edition.

5) Participants' Stories – optional

Short quotes, personal reflections or experiences shared by participant

Associação CAIS has shared a few participant voices during the public launch of the CAIS CAPACITA+ programme. One quote, collected during a presentation in Lisbon, illustrates the emotional impact of the experience:

"I felt that someone finally believed in me."
— Participant in CAIS CAPACITA+ (Lisbon, 2023)

This kind of testimony reflects the core values and impact of the project: restoring self-esteem, rebuilding trust, and providing a supportive space where individuals feel heard and valued.

Although no formal collection of stories has yet been published, the CAIS team has repeatedly highlighted how **participants evolve emotionally, regain motivation, and reconnect with their potential** throughout the programme.

6) Success Factors

What made the practice effective or innovative?
Were there any unique or creative elements?

Several key factors contribute to the effectiveness of the **CAIS CAPACITA+** practice:

- **Person-centred approach**: Each participant follows a tailored path, based on their own pace, life story, and specific challenges. This flexible structure increases engagement and relevance.
- **Proximity and trust**: The consistent presence of trained facilitators and mentors builds strong, trust-based relationships that are essential for participants who may have experienced institutional distrust or personal trauma.

8) Tips / Implementation Advice – optional

Checklists, lessons, or advice for those wishing to implement the practice.

For organisations wishing to replicate or adapt the **CAIS CAPACITA+** model, the following practical tips may support effective implementation:

- **Start small and scale up**: Pilot with a small group to fine-tune methods, build trust, and ensure quality before expanding.
- **Invest in facilitator training**: Staff must be skilled in both education/training and social work. Emotional intelligence and trauma-informed approaches are key.
- **Balance structure and flexibility**: Provide a clear programme structure, but remain flexible to individual needs, including allowing for moments of crisis or withdrawal.
- **Integrate emotional and practical learning**: Combine self-awareness and motivation-building with practical, job-relevant skills.
- **Create visible milestones**: Small achievements (e.g., completing a module, presenting a CV, preparing a meal) help participants build confidence.
- **Celebrate progress**: Publicly acknowledging growth and effort, even small steps, reinforces commitment and strengthens group bonds.
- **Maintain ongoing follow-up**: Provide mentoring or occasional check-ins after the end of the programme to support long-term impact.

9) Lessons Learned - optional

Biggest surprises, obstacles or key takeaways during implementation.

While a formal evaluation of **CAIS CAPACITA+** is not publicly available, experience from similar social inclusion programmes and CAIS's broader work suggests several key takeaways:

- **Trust takes time**: Participants facing long-term exclusion often carry past traumas and institutional distrust. Creating a truly safe and respectful environment is essential — and requires time and consistency.
- **Motivation is non-linear**: Progress is rarely straightforward. Participants may disengage temporarily, regress, or struggle with setbacks. The programme needs to be flexible and patient, celebrating small wins.

- **Staff burnout is a real risk**: Working closely with vulnerable adults can be emotionally demanding. Continuous support and reflective practices for facilitators are necessary to maintain energy and quality.
- **Life complexity overrides learning**: If basic needs (housing, food, health) are unmet, it is hard to engage meaningfully in training. Coordination with social services is crucial for holistic intervention.
- **No one-size-fits-all solution**: Even with a structured programme, each individual path is unique. Personalisation and autonomy are key to real impact.

10) Photos illustrating the described practice

Please attach at least 3 photos related to the described good practice

PRACTICE PROFILE – CLASSIFICATION CHECKLIST

Please tick all categories that apply to your described practice. You may choose more than one.

	TYPE OF THE PRACTICE
☒	Learning by doing
☐	Intergenerational learning
☒	Community-based learning
☐	Digital / blended learning
☒	Peer learning
☒	Mentoring / coaching
☐	Cultural / creative approaches
☒	Collaborative / partner-based
☐	Other (specify):
	TARGET GROUP
☒	Adults with low qualifications
☒	NEETs (Not in Education, Employment, or Training)
☐	Migrants / Refugees
☒	Older adults

☐	Women
☐	People with disabilities
☒	Other vulnerable groups
☒	General adult population
LEARNING ENVIRONMENT	
☐	Formal
☒	Non-formal
☒	Informal
SKILLS / COMPETENCES DEVELOPED	
☒	Literacy (reading, writing, comprehension)
☐	Numeracy (maths, logical thinking)
☒	Digital skills
☐	STEM (science, technology, engineering, mathematics)
☒	Personal, social and learning to learn
☒	Civic competences
☐	Entrepreneurship
☐	Cultural awareness and expression
☐	Language skills
☒	Job-related / vocational skills
☐	Green competences
☐	Other (specify):
POTENTIAL USERS	
☒	Teachers / Educators
☐	Administrative staff
☐	School / Centre management
☒	Policy makers / Public administration
☒	NGOs / Community organizations
☐	Other (specify):

Glossary of Categories (Explanation of Checklist Items)

Type of the Practice

- Learning by doing – learning through hands-on activities, practice-based methods such as workshops or real tasks.
- Intergenerational learning – activities involving participants from different age groups learning from each other.
- Community-based learning – learning that takes place within the local community, often through real-life engagement.

- Digital / blended learning – education using digital tools (online), or a mix of online and face-to-face methods.
- Peer learning – learning among participants of similar status or experience, supporting each other.
- Mentoring / coaching – one-to-one support from a more experienced person to help learning and personal growth.
- Cultural / creative approaches – use of arts, music, theatre, storytelling etc. as learning tools.
- Collaborative / partner-based – practices involving cooperation between organisations or groups.
- Other (specify) – any other method not listed above.

Target Group

- Adults with low qualifications – adults who have low levels of formal education or basic skills.
- NEETs – people Not in Education, Employment, or Training (often young adults).
- Migrants / Refugees – individuals who moved from another country, often facing integration challenges.
- Older adults – Adults aged 65+
- Women – practices specifically addressing women's needs.
- People with disabilities – individuals with physical, sensory, intellectual, or mental health disabilities.
- Other vulnerable groups – groups at risk of exclusion (e.g. long-term unemployed, homeless).
- General adult population – average adults not in specific categories.

Learning Environment

- Formal – learning within official education systems, certified courses (e.g. schools, universities).
- Non-formal – organised learning outside the formal system (e.g. workshops, community training).
- Informal – learning through everyday experiences, without a structured course (e.g. volunteering, family).

Skills / Competences Developed

- Literacy – reading, writing, and understanding texts (including functional texts like forms).
- Numeracy – using mathematics and logical reasoning.
- Digital skills – using digital tools e.g. CV creation, online tools, online platforms.
- STEM – science, technology, engineering, and mathematics.

- Personal, social and learning to learn – self-awareness, motivation, teamwork, lifelong learning skills.
- Civic competences – active citizenship, understanding of democracy and social responsibilities.
- Entrepreneurship – creativity, innovation, project management, risk-taking.
- Cultural awareness and expression – appreciation and creation of cultural content (e.g. arts, music).
- Language skills – ability to communicate in one or more foreign languages.
- Job-related / vocational skills – practical skills useful in specific jobs or professions.
- Green competences – knowledge and behaviours supporting sustainability and environmental care.
- Other – any other skills developed (please specify).

Potential users – groups who could benefit from applying, adapting, or being inspired by this practice in their work context.

Note: These categories follow EU frameworks such as the Key Competences for Lifelong Learning (2018), the Action Plan on Basic Skills (2025) and the Erasmus+ Programme Guide 2025 – Glossary

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