

NATIONAL CAPACITY BUILDING INITIATIVE: COMMUNITY LAB

Community Lab: Building Everyday Bridges to Community

Overview of the Reflective Practice Journey & Feedback Trends Across All Sessions (January – June 2026)

Programme Overview & Delivery

Community Lab: Building Everyday Bridges to Community was an online reflective practice and shared learning programme, delivered between January and June 2026. Designed and hosted by the **Bridge to Community Initiative**, **National Federation of Voluntary Service Providers (NFVSP)**, in partnership with the **Health Service Executive (HSE)**, it was designed to build capacity for people across the disability sector who are committed to fostering connection, friendship, and purpose in everyday community life, alongside the people they support.

Grounded in the **United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD)**, the journey shifts the concept of belonging from a service outcome to a fundamental human experience. Designed for staff at all levels across the disability sector—including frontline disability support staff, team leaders and community connectors, and service managers and practitioners—**92 organisations initially expressed interest and over 150 staff** participated.

- **A structured 6-part Learning Journey:** Each Community Lab was designed to blend theory, storytelling, reflection, and practical application across six consecutive monthly online interactive sessions.
- **Design of Each Lab session:** Specifically designed to offer curated information, tailored and facilitated questions, space for small group reflection, and opportunity to share feedback.
- **Active engagement & workplace integration:** Active engagement with the group was sought in the design of Session 5 (Navigating Challenges) and Session 6 (Stories of Change). Participants chose to use the Community Labs to support continued reflection with team members, within team meetings and pre-organised management meetings.

The 6-Session Reflective Practice Journey & Co-Produced Outcomes

Session	Reflective Journey Focus	Co-Produced Practice Strategies Created
Session 1: TheArt ofRelationship — Building Trust & Connection	Examining how authentic human relationships serve as the primary catalyst for growth, safety, and personal transformation.	Relationship Mapping; 8-Point Strategy for Supporting & Progressing Relationships; Exploration of socially valued roles and their impact.

Session	Reflective Journey Focus	Co-Produced Practice Strategies Created
Session 2: Foundations of Belonging — Rethinking What We're Here For	Distinguishing between mere physical attendance in spaces and true social belonging, while analyzing the impact of societal devaluation and ableism.	Barriers & Impacts Analysis; Practice Strategy for Joining Groups; Case Study Reflective Plan ("Meet Lucy"); Reflection Tool for Belonging.
Session 3: Discovering Interests, Gifts & Roles — Strength-Based Discovery	Moving from a deficit-based diagnostic view of individuals toward capacity thinking, uncovering hidden talents, and shifting practice from "doing activities" to "being in valued roles".	A Portrait of Possibilities (applied via the "Meet Nathan" case example); New Habits for the Reflective Practitioner.
Session 4: Connectingto Community — The Bridge Builder's Toolkit	Bridging the gap between physical community presence and active civic contribution by mapping local assets and mastering the art of introductions.	Community Asset Mapping Checklist; Mastering the Art of Introductions; Participation Continuum Matrix.
Session 5: Navigating Challenges to Community — Systems & Mindset Change	Identifying systemic, cultural, and organizational roadblocks to inclusion and co-designing practical solutions to mitigate social devaluation.	Navigating Barriers Case Scenario Guide; The 5 C's of Partnering Around the Person; A Practice Framework for Navigating Challenges (7-pillar operational tool).
Session 6: Storiesof Change — Reflection, Celebration & Sustaining Momentum	Embedding reflective insights into daily work, celebrating progress, and establishing ongoing commitments to protect individual rights and citizenship.	7 Drivers of True Citizenship; Co-Produced Practice Resource Suite; Home as a Base Reflection Tool.

Co-Produced Practice Resource Suite: Collated feedback ensured the design of **over 20 practice strategies** brought together as one practice strategy toolkit, published on the online platform **Connection Point** for ongoing sector-wide use and as a digital book on **www.fedvol.ie**.

Feedback & Community Lab 2027

Evaluations across all six sessions demonstrate consistent quality and strong evidence for scaling and continued investment in the Community Lab. Ratings for organisation, presentation, and content remained high throughout, bolstered by facilitation that actively adapted pacing and reflection spaces based on participant feedback. Participants viewed the programme as a worthwhile investment of time, readily recommended it to colleagues, and reported increased confidence applying their learning directly to practice.

Given this feedback and growing demand, we will deliver the **2027 Community Lab Programme on the 26th January 2027**. Registration details are available from eva.sentkerestiova@fedvol.ie, Pamela.Mansell@fedvol.ie, or visiting the website www.fedvol.ie.

Quotes from Direct Participants

"Thank you, so well facilitated and full of inspiring information and discussion"

"Eye opening information. Time to reflect on both ourselves and our service"

"a great way of connecting people. Hopefully you do more in the future as they're a brilliant community asset to have access to."

"really great to have the opportunity to reflect, network, and think creatively"

"it is great that the fantastic resources that have been created will be on the Connection Point portal and as PCP Lead, I will look forward to sharing and discussing with staff team after the summer."

"Was excellent thank you very much, great resources, great time out to reflect, think, talk and plan!"