

Fostering Mental Wellness in Academia: The Innovation of a University Mental Health Café - A Case Study

“At first I romanticised the idea that we would call ourselves the Coimbra’s dead poets society...”

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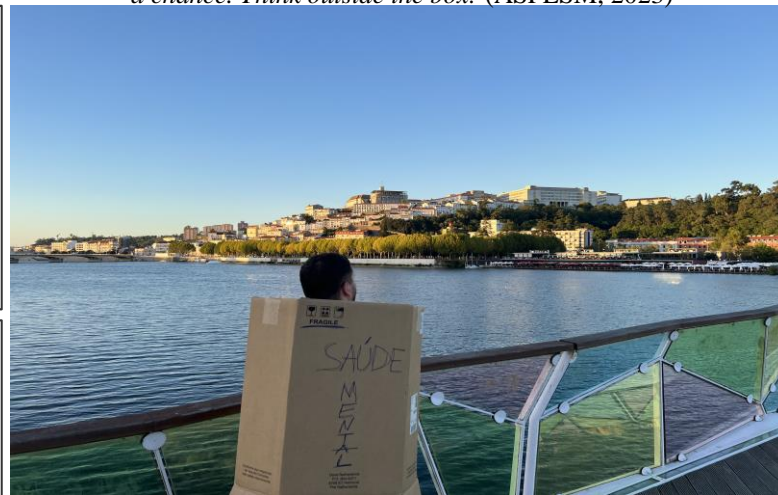
In the bustling and demanding landscape of academia, students often find their mental health overshadowed by the rigors of academic life. However, in response to the pervasive pressures of university life, a proactive student embarked on a personal innovative journey to prioritize mental well-being. By founding a "Mental Health Café" as a refuge for open dialogue, students convened to share coping strategies amidst the stresses and anxieties of their academic pursuits.

This initiative transcended traditional norms by incorporating “music therapy sessions”, where participants discovered solace in the emotive power of melodies, fostering camaraderie and providing relief from stress. Additionally, outdoor “mindfulness garden sessions” offered a serene environment for meditation amidst the natural beauty of Coimbra (Portugal), further enhancing mental resilience.

This case study illuminates the transformative impact of thinking outside the box in mental health care, reshaping the academic environment into a sanctuary where creativity and solidarity foster mental wellness. This grassroots endeavor not only empowered individuals but also sparked a ripple effect, advocating for compassionate support throughout the academic community.

"Music therapy sessions" and "mindfulness garden sessions", we can also refer to them as different types of Social Prescription.

FIGURE 1. The motto for our personal initiative: *Give mental health a chance. Think outside the box!* (ASPESM, 2023)



Through creativity, solidarity, and a shared commitment to holistic wellness, the academia and campus we've reached underwent a profound transformation, becoming nurturing environments where students could thrive both academically and emotionally.