



Arts on Prescription in Norrbotten

Long-term Sick Participants in Focus

The #ArtsOn Prescription (AoP) programme in northern Sweden is organised by Region Norrbotten in cooperation with Sunderby Folk High School. Targeting **long-term sick individuals** experiencing stress, anxiety, depression, or social isolation, the programme offers a broad range of creative art activities. Between 2023 and 2024, participants engaged in group-based sessions such as painting, working with natural materials, dance, singing, and visual arts. The emphasis was not on the final artwork, but on the process – conversations, reflections, and a sense of belonging fostered through shared experiences.

Referrals came from rehab coordinators at healthcare centres, local psychiatrists, and the coordination association in Region Norrbotten. Link workers at Region Norrbotten and Sunderby Folk High School supported participants by offering guidance, course information, and leading group reflections.



The heart of the programme lies in the **creative process**. Singing, for instance, was noted as uplifting and creating a sense of togetherness. Dance promoted freedom of movement without performance pressure, helping to ease tension and stress. Participants valued the safe, understanding environment, seeing it as vital to their recovery.

“It’s a way to make yourself visible and express something. Art challenges you. But it’s also about meeting others and doing something together. It gives you a role and a space in the world.
Ricky Sandberg, former art consultant and AoP initiator”





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A New Path for Cross-Sector Collaboration

AoP aims to help healthcare providers, authorities, and cultural institutions engage individuals with mental health challenges in creative activities that support well-being. It **bridges the gap between health and culture**, promoting existing arts programmes – like those at Sunderby Folk High School – as complementary resources for mental health.

“Some believe this is just about culture and that healthcare should focus on medical interventions. But I think it has proven to be an effective healthcare approach that can help avoid medication.
Henrik Wikström, resident physician in Boden and AoP participant

As the project enters its final phase, the focus is on long-term sustainability:

“We now see that Arts on Prescription has boosted self-confidence and helped people move on to work and education. We need to explore how this model can be embedded into our health and cultural systems in Norrbotten
Glenn Berggård, Regional Councillor of Norrbotten

For some, the journey continues beyond the programme. Inspired participants have started a new cultural group through the adult education association ABF – showing how arts-based health initiatives can lead to lasting personal and social change.



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