

Training and Formation

The international formation team is working to ensure **assistants** in L'Arche have:

- The professional skills they need
- Formation in relationship-based care
- Formation in L'Arche's values

It's the combination of all three which creates the L'Arche assistant.

Despite all the restrictions and challenges of Covid, the team has co-delivered a new style of training programme combining these three elements for 15 participants from three Countries in Africa.

"One of the benefits of being an international organization is the cross-fertilization of new ideas and best practice. We are building on an original exchange of experience between L'Arche communities in Ukraine and Kolkata, India, who have been running successful initiatives to meet the need for consistent levels of professional competence, alongside their relationship-based approach."

Jane Langlet, leader of the L'Arche International formation programme

The Aim

The aim of the course is to prepare and empower assistants and people who work with people with intellectual disabilities in L'Arche communities and beyond.

This commitment to professional competence is part of L'Arche's commitment to safeguarding across the Federation.

The East Africa training was delivered in L'Arche Zimbabwe, with care assistants coming from Uganda and Kenya. Three places were also given to local caregivers and a family member of people with disabilities.

“Before we did this training we knew we wanted to solidify the consistency of our care for people with a disability. This training has taught our team to do this. They are now much more motivated and really want to get on board.”

Time Baluwa, Community Leader,
L'Arche Zimbabwe

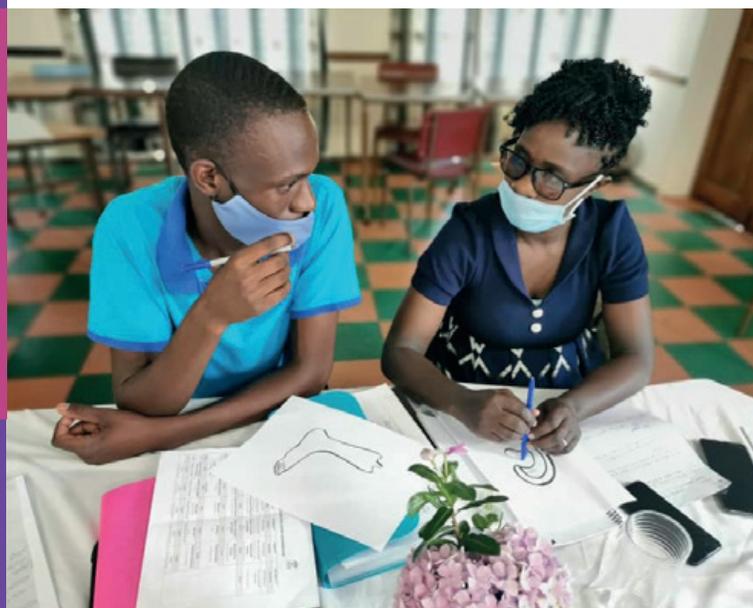
Active collaboration

The programme was developed as a three-way active collaboration, between people with disabilities, their support teams and leadership, with each one participating, teaching and receiving significant benefit from the process.

Delivered in three sessions over several months, the programme demanded a significant level of active participation, resourcing and commitment from the trainers, the participants, and the people with disabilities who receive support. It had immediate impact:

- Ensuring that the people with disabilities who receive support are heard, so they remain at the centre of their own support planning
- Changing how the participating care assistants see their role and the need for professional competence
- Upskilling the three communities involved to deliver future courses
- Enabling the L'Arche International formation team to build and trial a new approach to formation
- Embedding a consistent approach to care across the disabled person's different settings: one place on the course was given to a family member of a person with disabilities
- Building partnerships beyond L'Arche - two places were given to local caregivers

It was vital for the success of the programme that it was delivered by local people, in a local context with relevant content. The Community Leader and the Board Chair of L'Arche Zimbabwe, who is a retired university professor, tailored the course to meet local needs. They were then joined by other university professors and experienced L'Arche assistants, the whole group then spending a week with the L'Arche International team being trained to deliver the course.





Train the trainers

The innovation of offering a whole initial week to 'train the trainers', was a way of grounding the programme and maximising its long-term impact. Having stepped back from their traditional role of giving input, the International team was then able to supervise, support and monitor each person's progress. The lessons learnt from this process will help develop the programme for later use in Latin America and Asia.

'People were really motivated. The commitment to the programme had to come from the ground-up and it has made all the difference.' Jane Langlet.

'The investment in training the trainers was huge in terms of time, finance and resources, particularly when you think that the communities of Zimbabwe, Uganda and Kenya receive no public funding. But we are already seeing the dividends. And the new local trainers are available to share responsibility for the programme's further

development and inculturation, which will result in a more enduring impact.'

'This collaborative approach demands great commitment from everyone involved but promises great rewards as a result, personally, professionally, locally and internationally. It's been a significant step for us, creating a model we can repeat and build on to move training forward elsewhere: L'Arche International will be supporting communities to lead their own training, tailored to their specific context.'



"As a result of the formation, our members with disabilities have taken much more responsibility in the houses. For example, Allan, a member of Effatha, is now charged with collection of milk for use in the house, a role he takes with a lot of seriousness and he is very proud to be in charge of it."

– Maurice Muthiga, Community Leader, L'Arche Kenya

The Programme

The programme itself took place over 3 sessions, over a 10-month period with a further 3 months follow up on Zoom. As well as the 13 modules on caregiving skills and L'Arche ethos, participants had to work on two significant pieces of homework between the face-to-face meetings.

The first was to develop a life plan for and with a person with disabilities: such involvement by the disabled person in developing their own study had not happened before. The second was to work on a project to bring a benefit to their community - which had to be approved by their community leader. They then had to present the project to the whole community in order for it to be validated by both people with disabilities and assistants.

Topics included: nutrition and lifestyle, mission and outreach, empowering mothers, monthly progress reports, team building, recycling, responding to care-givers burnout, engagement of core members in community life in the evenings and weekends.

Each participant had individual local supervision. The group was supervised by the international and local trainers. Lockdown struck after the first meeting so the second meeting had to be delivered on-line. This meant that participants also learnt to get the best out of conference technology.



“The Relationship Based Care Giving Course attended by Beatrice and Leo has been immensely important for the community in Uganda. It is clear that both participants learned a great deal from the wide range of topics covered, from their case studies of core members and from the joint work they undertook in their community project. They gained knowledge and confidence and a broader understanding of the mission and identity of L'Arche as well as new friends from the communities in Zimbabwe and Kenya. From a community perspective, the course has strengthened our commitment to work more professionally; it has enabled us to start a small scale community-based rehabilitation project with local children and to look beyond our own small community to the wider needs of our neighbours.”

Brian Kelly, Community Leader, L'Arche Uganda