



TALE

curriculum

TALE CURRICULUM

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About TALE

The project is a small-scale collaboration, between Løvetannakademiet in Norway and Dkolektiv in Croatia, and funded by the [Erasmus+ programme](#) of the European union.

Project timeline: 01.10.2023–31.05.2025

The T.A.L.E project is designed to change the way we support and perceive youth in vulnerable life situations. At the core of our mission is the power of stories: stories that shatter stereotypes, nurture resilience, and build bridges across communities. We're on a quest to transform vulnerability into strength, turning young individuals into storytellers and role models who can inspire change and foster understanding. With our research and through collecting and sharing stories of youth, we aim to shift the narrative around vulnerability, offering fresh perspectives and understanding. Our project not only educates young 'storytellers' but also creates a digital platform where their voices can resonate far and wide, empowering them and the youth workers dedicated to their cause.

Project goals

1. Research and explore perspectives of vulnerability in project partner countries.
2. Raise awareness about diversity of vulnerable youth.
3. Empower vulnerable youth to speak up and share their stories.
4. Educate youth workers in their work with vulnerable youth and how to empower them through storytelling

Understanding deeply

We're digging into how communities view vulnerability and what young people really need to thrive.

Changing Perspectives

Say goodbye to stigma! We're all about celebrating the strength in our stories and the power of resilience.

Empowering Voices

Through training, we're crafting a squad of storytelling superheroes, ready to change the world, one story at a time.

Project Team

Løvetannakademiet is a Norwegian social enterprise that was started in 2016, by two care leavers. Their goal was to tackle the lack of support, that many youth with care experience face when transitioning to adulthood.

Since then, the organization has widened its target group and is on a mission to cultivate resilient youth, with confidence, courage, and faith in the future.

www.lovetannakademiet.no



DKolektiv is a Croatian organization, established in 2006 to support an open democratic society based on activism, solidarity, cohesion and mutual trust. The vision of the organization is to live in a society where people live with dignity; human rights are respected, and citizens are actively involved in decision-making.

DKolektiv strives to be innovative and is dedicated to: the development of democratic culture; active citizenship; development of volunteerism; strong and progressive civil society; inclusive society and better status of disadvantaged groups.

www.dkolektiv.hr/public/hr



TALE Research Report on Perceptions of Vulnerability

1. Introduction and Methodology:

This research aimed to analyze the current practices and needs for supporting organisations and experts working with vulnerable youth. We wanted to get an enhanced understanding of how vulnerability is perceived among the youth from these groups and understand and address the needs of vulnerable groups in partner countries, with a focus on empowering young people and shifting community perceptions.

The data collection was conducted through individual interviews, enabling participants to share their experiences in a confidential setting. We interviewed 5 representatives from organisations working with vulnerable youth groups in each partner country, and 10 young individuals, who are representatives of vulnerable groups in each country.

The data from the interviews is analyzed using thematic analysis. This involves coding the transcriptions and identifying common themes related to the empowerment of vulnerable youth and the perception of their vulnerability. We have then synthesized the findings to identify effective models for sharing personal stories of vulnerable youth. Additionally, we have selected compelling stories to be featured within the TALE curriculum and platform.

We would like to thank all the young people and youth workers who have shared their perspectives and stories with us.

Findings:

2. Perceptions of Vulnerability

This first section explores how participants understand the current issues facing young people and how they perceive the concept of vulnerable youth.

2.1. Current challenges that vulnerable young people face

When asked to discuss the challenges that vulnerable young people face, the answers from youth workers were highly varied, encompassing the diverse areas of expertise represented in the study, this included reflections of difficulties for LGBTQ+, NEET, Roma, refugees, and varied ethnic minority youth.

In addition to insights into the barriers and challenges that young people face, the responses from participants also revealed how youth workers understand and construct the concept of vulnerability themselves.

Some key themes that came up within discussions of societal context and challenges for young people:

Youth workers:

- Discrimination, including experiences of invisibility and violence
- Difficulties specific to young ethnic minorities – cultural differences, language learning, differential treatment, and racism
- Family struggles – including topics such as care responsibilities, lack of parental support, financial problems
- Mental health and self-confidence – this included discussions of trauma and difficulties with individuals taking on a victim role
- Problems with seeking employment – accessing jobs without work experience, difficulties thriving in educational settings, and knowledge of workers' rights
- Navigating structural inequalities – state processes, education, health care, difficulties with unfair bureaucratic processes
- Youth is a diverse and disadvantaged group within society
- High expectations

"I would also say vulnerability in the context of how the system made them vulnerable. These are not the people who came here any more vulnerable if we put this trauma aside, but somehow the system has made them such that they are treated... unequally, thus making them marginalised... the system made them so, society somehow distanced them from young people with a refugee past, so in that way, it somehow made them vulnerable"

- Youth worker, Croatia

"Young LGBT people are primarily exposed to a fairly high percentage of violence and discrimination... 4% of young people are open about who they are in our schools, which actually tells us how insecure they really feel and don't have the necessary support, and that's that kind of segment of the feeling of insecurity due to one's identity is very pronounced."

- Youth worker, Croatia

"I think that we should work on some additional education to understand that young people are not one homogeneous group, but when we work with young people we should keep in mind that they have different identities, that we need to create a safe space"

- Youth worker, Croatia

TALE Reflections:

- Vulnerability was seen to impact youth differently depending on their position within society. For example for LGBTQ+ young people, discussions focused most on difficulties within the family and social settings such as schools whereas refugee and ethnic minority youth were seen to face financial difficulties as well as problems with bureaucratic systems and structural discrimination.
- Within the Croatian interviews, there was a large focus on the issues within the country's education system and a perceived lack of support for particular young people or education that could create a more culturally inclusive society.
- Challenges were perceived at the macro and micro level with some professionals pointing out more structural or systemic issues while others focused on the need for attitude shifts within families or young people themselves.
- There was therefore discussion of the limitations and benefits of the types of youth work practices that organisations used. If issues existed on a community, structural, or legal level, work that was focused on supporting individual young people would always be battling with the same problems.
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To understand how young people understood their own experiences and that of other marginalised youth, young people were asked to define vulnerability.

Some key themes included:

- Intolerance: discrimination, violence, stereotypes, prejudice
- Societal sympathy: some marginalised groups were seen to garner sympathy from communities
- Bullying: this included personal experiences for several participants while at school
- Ultra-conservatism and religion were mentioned
- Lack of rights and discriminatory systems
- Isolation, disownment – some participants talked about their personal struggles in feeling like they didn't belong to a community or nation
- Hyper-focus on identity labels and not seeing young people as multifaceted

"They are not interested in my studies, but they are (only) interested in my life because I live in a Roma settlement."

- Young person, Croatia

"...sometimes you have to be in that situation to really understand the whole picture. Those who are supposed to help don't always understand or have empathy and experience, like those who have been in the situation themselves."

- Young person, Norway

"...what I experienced was really more verbal violence. Maybe not so much directly addressed to me, but collectively to my minority identity."

- Young person, Croatia

"I have been afraid sometimes, how in a way, people take it, if you are a little open, about what the situation in your life is like. It's like sometimes I've been a little afraid to talk about it because I'm a little afraid of what they really think, or that they judge or something like that."

- Young person, Norway

TALE Reflections:

In contrast to the youth workers, some of the young people struggled to talk about the wider societal contexts of perceptions of vulnerability. Most talked about their own small-scale, personal, lived experiences whether within friendship circles or school contexts. However, some young people discussed a need for critical thinking education and safer public spaces and discussed more national and local level problems.

2.2. Suggestions for improving societal perceptions:

Young people were asked about their solutions to societal perceptions of vulnerable youth. Some key suggestions:

- Story sharing and the need for varied perspectives
- Inclusive teaching within formal education
- Informal education/activities
- Changes in state policy /educational reform – some talked about the need for young people to be part of the conversation and involved in policy decision-making
- The need for everyone to develop better critical thinking skills and media literacy
- Safer public spaces
- Stop the sensationalization of issues in the news
- Advertising youth events through more official channels
- Teaching more empathy and understanding of other people's reality

"I believe that it is important not to put so much emphasis on theoretical frameworks for improving the position as on practical steps to include young people outside of their circles"

- Young person, Croatia

"The best way to meet me: People should listen more before they start telling you what you should do. That they actually see you as a person, and not just think that because you are here, this and that are the difficulties and you are like this and that. But that I can define what the problem is."

- Young person, Norway

"...increasing the activities within the city, within non-governmental organisations... because even when there are some activities that are specifically aimed at young people (they) ... do not get this information."

- Young person, Croatia

TALE Reflections:

- In the Croatian context most of the responses from young people when asked for solutions to perceptions of vulnerability centred around changing narratives in some way. Whether this was through sharing personal stories, changing the media representation of minority groups, or shifting the perspectives of others through inclusive critical thinking education. This potentially shows an agreement with the premise of the project's focus on story sharing as a tool to change narratives of vulnerability.
- In the Norwegian context, most young people talked about the need to create a space where different people can share their stories and not be judged. Empathy for one another was a keyword.

2.3. Differences and Similarities Between the Two Countries

There was a large overlap in barriers and challenges discussed within both the Croatian and Norwegian contexts for example language learning, parental involvement, and struggles in finding employment. However, there were many examples of more country-specific issues. For some participants within the Norwegian context, vulnerability was perceived as a common but vague concept and there was some discussion about the ways that attention to an issue does not always create relevant and beneficial action to address it.

"Education and awareness can go a long way. Maybe having community events, school programs, or local media stories that highlight different young people's experiences and successes could help. It's important for people to see us as individuals with potential, not just as our circumstances or challenges. Workshops or meetings where people share their stories in a supportive environment could also help everyone understand each other better. These kinds of efforts could build empathy and make our community more inclusive and supportive of people like me. Hehe, it sounds weird, but That's what I think.."

Young person, Norway

TALE Reflections:

- T.A.L.E Reflections: In the Croatian interviews, there was less discussion of the issues with the term vulnerability with more immediate concern given to the lived experiences of discrimination and disadvantage of particular youth. For several youth workers in Norway, vulnerability was synonymous with specific groups, particularly ethnic minorities. This may be because of the areas of work that certain participants were involved in but it may also be related to a racialization of the concept of vulnerability that may create assumptions based on ethnic background.

3. Current practices

To gain a better understanding of what successful empowerment youth work looks like and what resources are needed to support it, we talked to participants about their experiences with previous and current youth projects.

3.1. Examples of Current Practice:

Youth workers were asked to explain their work and the practices they felt were most beneficial. Young people were also asked to talk about activities or projects that they were involved in, where the focus was on empowerment and what they had gained from being involved.

Youth workers gave examples of their current practices including success stories

- Support through education, training, and employment
- Mentoring, self-advocacy work, and youth leadership
- Mental health support
- Cooperation with other organisations
- Creation of safe spaces and activities Integration (support in understanding rules and laws)
- Staff training

“Design Thinking. Creating frameworks for young people where they can develop their own strategies to solve their problems creates ownership and motivation.”

- Youth worker, Norway

“...we work on cooperation because no teacher can know everything and one civil society association cannot always have all the resources, and sources. But then I think that cross-sector cooperation is important in order to reach the vulnerability of young people as best as possible”

- Youth worker, Croatia

"Time Givers: One of our most important resources is our volunteer time givers. Spending time with a time giver creates a sense of safety that is necessary when trying out new things, and building "a desired life". Meeting new people can help to further develop an individual's personal identity and self-understanding allowing participants to see themselves in a new light."

- Youth worker, Norway

"... we had a meeting with three people, two of them with refugee status, and one with foreign student status... We held a meeting about the difficulties in higher education where they presented their stories and the obstacles they encountered and representatives of the Ministry of Education, universities, and different faculties were also present there... a long-term activity that we do in the direction of empowering people to advocate for themselves"

- Youth worker, Croatia

Young people were asked about the types of programs that they had been a part of and the ways that they benefited from these:

- Development of communication and interpersonal skills, including conflict management
- Cultural exchanges - meeting others from similar and different backgrounds
- Mental health/ distraction - attending events and activities that helped to distract them from difficult circumstances or offered psychological support
- Critical thinking training - help to navigate political issues and media
- Having someone who listens, understands, supports, and gives constructive feedback
- Opportunities for activism, volunteering, and ownership of projects
- Safe spaces and opportunities to connect with others
- Educational activities: art therapy, short courses, stem workshop
- Importance of mentors and peer-to-peer support
- Feeling less alone, by being a part of a community with others in the same situation

"The content of these activities was sometimes directly related to empowerment, and sometimes, although not at first, by gaining new knowledge, experience and acquaintances"

- Young person, in Croatia

"Being involved in an organisation that supports young people with care experience has been a transformative part of my journey. It's not just about finding a community of people who understand what I've been through, but also about channeling my experiences into something positive."

- Young person, Norway

"... my mentor helped me the most because she showed how much she believed in me... I believed in my ambitions. My mentor helped me a lot with the realisation of that project... she always gave me some freedom, and she never imposed her ideas. She knew I had an idea, I just had to get it out there... she highly praised that idea and then I myself started to believe that this idea was very good... it helped me a lot to increase my self-confidence"

- Young Person, Croatia

"...my mentor is the only one who for the first time involved me in something that is not strictly related to the Roma community."

- Young Person, Croatia

TALE Reflections:

- The responses from participants showed the wide variety of approaches to youth work from both the projects and activities organized by youth workers to those experienced by young people.
- Youth workers also included the importance of activities that happen more in the background such as administrative practices, training, and cooperation with other organisations as central to keeping programs running.

- Many young people highlighted the extra benefits of social activities, especially in terms of soft skills such as self-confidence and communication.
- Feedback was generally very positive from young people about particular projects that had helped them. Those who felt they had gained something from empowerment programs focused on activities where their voice was heard and where they were able to be an active participant.
- There was a common theme of increasing involvement for several young people and this was mentioned by some youth workers. Several said they had first become involved in empowerment projects after attending a more informal social offer and that this progressed into being involved in more skills development training and later volunteering/ advocacy work.

3.2. Areas of improvement

Although there was lots of positive feedback on successful projects from many participants, there were many areas where youth workers and young people felt they needed more support.

Youth workers were asked what kinds of support they needed to better assist vulnerable youth. Key themes:

- More stable financial support
- Training for staff on specific experiences of vulnerable groups
- A need for systemic and societal change
- Mental health support both for young people and youth workers
- Better cooperation between the state and nonprofit sector
- Anti-violence programs Empowerment programmes and change on an individual level as one aspect of a broader picture

"...we have a document, the National Program for Youth, 2023... (it) prescribes some goals for the next period, but it's written as if the youth are one body... and it seems that all young people have the same needs. And I think it is important ... that public policy work ... includes and recognizes vulnerable groups.. young people (who) have different identities not only in terms of sexuality but also some other things, people with disabilities, young people with developmental difficulties... There should be parallel work on changing public policies. That they are more inclusive."

- Youth worker, Croatia

"I think that often when people migrate here, a lot of emphasis is placed on what they should do, and that's why I'm trying to break that certain narrative, I think that the first things that should be done is to touch those systemic obstacles, because only then are we on to that one, I mean similar starting points and then we can only talk about the general empowerment of young people with a refugee past in the context of empowering all young people."

- Youth worker, Croatia

"We might actually benefit from some education and better information about exactly that and the specifics of working with young people. I believe that the associations that are specialised in this have that knowledge, and on the other hand, maybe those associations do not have as much knowledge about working with members of vulnerable groups, as, say, we have some kind of greater knowledge in working with people from different cultural areas, languages, and so on."

- Youth worker, Croatia

Young people were asked if there was any kind of support that they wished they had access to. Key themes:

- Education that was supportive and relevant
- More spaces where cultural exchanges could take place
- Creation of safe spaces for dialog, and regular social events for those with diverse identities
- Mental health support
- Opportunities to find community and be an active citizen
- Job opportunities for youth
- LGBT-specific support such as workshops, trans healthcare, self-love, sex, and relationships

"Somehow I was able to come to terms with the fact that for real change it is necessary to start from scratch every time, building in accordance with the needs of the group that needs that change."

- Young person, Croatia

" ...Meeting others with the same background that have made it or are successful adults. That really motivated me to keep going and become a role model myself. "

- Young person, Norway

"Maybe more communication with young people, that somehow adults share their experiences with young people and that different groups of young people come and talk to each other, simple communication in an informal form that we have some groups because currently I think that most young people do not feel safe in a community, they have some complexes and think that no one will understand, so they keep silent about some problems."

- Young person, Croatia

TALE Reflections:

- Some participants emphasized the importance of a varied approach to challenges faced by young people that doesn't purely focus on changing young people but also involves advocacy work, and broader societal change.
- Some participants emphasized the importance of a varied approach to challenges faced by young people that doesn't purely focus on changing young people but also involves advocacy work, and broader societal change.
- Financial support was a key aspect of many responses from youth worker participants.
- Several examples of short-term projects were given where funding had stopped but there had been a need to keep it going in some form.
- A need for more mental health support was a recurring theme both in the interviews with youth workers and young people.
- Interestingly the requests of some young people for certain workshops or support was the lived experience of others within the empowerment programmes they were a part of.
 - Eg. mental health support, opportunities to find community, creation of safe spaces, etc. This shows that certain youth work is offering the support that many young people feel they need but that the offer isn't always available everywhere.

3.3. Differences and Similarities Between the Two Countries

Several young people in the Norwegian context were unable to name programs in which they were involved in great detail. This may be because the programs are often more social or sports-based activities which participants may not see as relevant when asked about empowerment.

4. Models for sharing stories

To inform the next portion of the project on how to present stories of empowerment, participants were asked to give examples of ways to share stories. In addition, we also received feedback on ethical concerns for those involved in sharing stories depending on the method or context.

4.1. Story sharing methods

Key themes suggested by both young people and youth workers

- Living library/in-person events
- Social media campaigns
- Surveys and research Advocacy work
- Legal representation

“I am inspired by stories of people who have overcome significant obstacles to achieve something meaningful. Like those of people who have come from challenging backgrounds, yet managed to succeed in their education or careers, really motivate me.”

- Young person, Norway

“Maybe something that is similar to my story, so a little egotistical I like to listen to those stories, but they inspire you especially because I can imagine someone who is currently in such a situation and then I feel like, aha, this person has come out, so there is a chance for me to be able to succeed. That what I am in right now, no matter how the situation looks, is not forever and it can get better, I just must not lose hope, this is not forever.”

- Young person, Croatia

“We often do living libraries as a kind of concept where young people are happy to respond because it’s such a direct conversation with people who are interested, but don’t know how to really ask questions let’s say young people, LGBT young people often contact us and then everyone from the position of their identity and some of their own the stories are passed on”

- Youth worker, Croatia

TALE Reflections:

- From the interviews with young people, many were positive about the power of sharing stories and reflected on feeling empowered by telling their own stories to others.
- Participants were keen to hear the stories of people with a similar background to themselves, especially stories of getting through challenges.
- In the Croatian context, there was more positivity from the young participants about sharing stories in more intimate contexts, one-on-one, through mentorship, or living library events.

4.2. Ethical and Practical Concerns:

"I think it is important to create a safe space that is supportive and non-judgmental. Like a small group or online in a closed room. I also think it is important to focus on the strengths of the person. Anonymity should be an option if it makes the storyteller more comfortable."

- Young person, Norway

"What I mean is that someone is waiting for you to share your story just because of one need and activity, as we have that activity, we have to fulfill that activity, they could call that person to share their story. In my five years, when I was studying and when I was called to share my story, I did not see any advantage, except for them to fulfill their activity."

- Young person, Croatia

"And as for sharing stories, I would say that this is one of the problems of this sector in which I am, that until a long time, refugees, young refugees, but not only young people, were used as some kind of tokens that come somewhere and tell some sad story of his own to make people feel sorry for themselves and that was it. So yes, we need to move away from that approach of victimisation and work with people to make them aware of the goal of telling their stories."

- Youth worker, Croatia

TALE Reflections:

- Several participants emphasised the difficulties and dangers of sharing personal stories and the need for informed consent, creating trust and a sense of safety, media training, and support.
- Several participants spoke positively about the use of living libraries but also negative experiences they had. Some experiences related to difficulty knowing their boundaries about sharing personal stories.
- One participant was concerned about the context of sharing some stories, they worried about how stories could become sensationalised, or seen as entertainment by others, something that they felt embarrassed and uncomfortable about. Youth workers and young people were concerned that story sharing without support or a goal could often become tokenistic.
- Most of the Norwegian young people talked about their desire to share their stories in a way of helping others like themselves. They had positive experiences with sharing stories and listening to others' stories.

4.3. Differences and Similarities Between the Two Countries

In the Norwegian interviews, there was more focus on digital platforms, social media, and podcasts as the preferred way to share stories. In comparison, those interviewed from Croatia had a stronger focus on physical events, although social media platforms were mentioned by some participants. There was also more focus on ethical concerns of story sharing from Croatian participants, potentially due to more experience with story sharing and experiences of discrimination.

5. Conclusion

The T.A.L.E research provides a nuanced understanding of how vulnerability is perceived among young people and youth workers in Norway and Croatia. It highlights the diverse and intersecting challenges faced by marginalized youth; including discrimination, financial struggles, barriers to education and employment, mental health concerns, and difficulties navigating bureaucratic systems. The study also reveals that vulnerability is often shaped by societal structures rather than inherent personal traits, reinforcing the need for systemic change alongside individual empowerment.

One of the key findings is the role of storytelling as a means of transforming perceptions of vulnerability. Both youth and professionals recognize that sharing lived experiences can help challenge stereotypes, foster empathy, and shift public narratives. However, the study also emphasizes the ethical concerns associated with storytelling, particularly the risks of tokenization, re-traumatization, and exploitation. While some young people feel empowered by sharing their stories, others express concerns about being reduced to their struggles rather than being seen as multi-dimensional individuals with potential.

The research also sheds light on best practices in youth empowerment, such as mentoring, peer support, education programs, and safe spaces where young people can express themselves freely. While these initiatives have proven beneficial, the study identifies several areas for improvement. Youth workers highlight the need for more stable funding, mental health resources, and better collaboration between the public and non-profit sectors to create sustainable support systems for vulnerable youth. Additionally, young people express a desire for more opportunities to engage in cultural exchanges, community-building activities, and employment programs that offer long-term impact.

In comparing the two countries, the study finds both commonalities and differences in how vulnerability is perceived and addressed. Norwegian participants tend to view vulnerability as a vague concept and often do not personally identify with it, despite facing systemic challenges. In contrast, Croatian participants more explicitly acknowledge discrimination and structural barriers, particularly within education and employment. Additionally, while digital platforms and social media are favored for storytelling in Norway, Croatian participants show a stronger preference for in-person events such as "living libraries" and mentorship programs.

Ultimately, the research underscores that vulnerability is not a fixed state but a condition that can be mitigated through supportive relationships, inclusive policies, and opportunities for self-determination. When young people are given the space to share their experiences on their terms, in environments that prioritize dignity and agency, vulnerability can transition into empowerment. The study calls for a holistic approach that combines individual support with broader systemic reforms to ensure that all young people, regardless of their background, have access to the resources and opportunities they need to thrive.

"I think we need to talk about it and create communities to go somewhere and share our own memories, both beautiful and difficult ones that we have made. I think it is quite important that you feel safe in the community"

- Young person, Croatia

"I would say that there is a change in vulnerability that people who have their safe circle of people, this vulnerability is reduced and turns into empowerment."

- Youth worker, Croatia

"By understanding the purpose of sharing and explaining - that this can help others, remove prejudices and influence those who make decisions - and can motivate individuals to contribute their own story. Then they may be willing to tell their own story and show themselves as more than someone who is "marginalised". The focus when the stories and videos are shared should be that these young people are so much more and have so much more to contribute than "marginality". With the right support and adaptations, there is a place for everyone - and we need everyone."

- Youth worker, Norway

How Active Listening and Storytelling Empower Vulnerable Youth

To understand the vulnerability of youth, we must first clarify who falls into this category. Hardgrove (2014) says that “youth” is more of a social age and that it is a transition period between the dependency of childhood and the responsibilities of adulthood. The European Commission defines youth as individuals between the ages of 15 and 29. Many people talk about how being young is the most beautiful part of life and how it is a time when you have so much strength to reach the peak of your cognitive and physical development... But why then are we talking about the vulnerability of youth? Simply put by Hardgrove (2014) youth are vulnerable not only due to their age or the rapid developmental changes they experience, but also because they live in an unequal world where access to opportunities and resources is not equally distributed. Across the globe, young people face limitations in their choices due to factors such as economic instability, technological advancements, political unrest, conflict, and climate change.

Additionally, many grow up in environments where vulnerability stems from an unequal distribution of resources. Urban areas typically offer a wider range of goods, services, and opportunities compared to rural regions, with this disparity being particularly pronounced in developing countries. Finally, a significant aspect of youth vulnerability arises from societal treatment.

Socially excluded minorities often experience restricted access to resources and opportunities simply because of their identity or how they are perceived. The cycle of social exclusion, inequality, and poverty tends to reinforce itself, further deepening these challenges. In such circumstances, the ability to express itself and be truly heard becomes a powerful tool for empowerment. Active listening and storytelling offer a way to reclaim narratives, process experiences and connect with others in meaningful ways. When young people are given a space where their voices are valued, they gain confidence, self-awareness, and a sense of belonging.

Active listening is a communication skill that requires full engagement with the speaker, showing genuine interest and understanding, active attention, empathy and an awareness of non-verbal cues. Through active listening, we cherish a safe and supportive space that encourages meaningful and effective communication (Everyday Speech, 2024). The benefits of active listening are numerous and far-reaching. Active listening plays a crucial role in social-emotional development by promoting empathy and enhancing communication skills.

Being heard is essential for youth who often feel ignored or misunderstood because it validates their experiences, emotions, and perspectives, helping them develop a sense of self-worth. By genuinely listening to others, we create a sense of trust, making people feel valued and respected. Additionally, active listening strengthens communication skills by improving our ability to understand messages, ask clarifying questions, and respond effectively which enhances self-expression but also helps in resolving conflicts more constructively. Furthermore, active listening deepens empathy by allowing us to see situations from another person's perspective, strengthening relationships and contributing to a more inclusive and compassionate society (Everyday Speech, 2024).

On the other side, stories have long been used as a way to get people thinking about viewpoints beyond their own as well as to express our experiences to others, so it is a way that people can relate to each other (Hughes et al., 2022). In *Minds Made for Stories*, Newkirk (2014) discussed how humans are naturally drawn to storytelling, which makes it a logical medium for making connections. Sole and Wilson (2002) said that storytelling is a powerful way to represent and convey complex, multi-dimensional ideas while well-said stories can convey both information and emotion. The way we tell our stories is as important as the stories themselves (Newkirk, 2014). Storytelling as a tool has many different psychological and social benefits.

For example, in organizations, storytelling is used for sharing norms and values and developing commitment. It also can generate emotional connection in a form of its narrative transportation, as this makes the individual go back in time to when the story took place. This transportation occurs when the storyteller gets lost and absorbed in the story which benefits them greatly as they can heal and reflect on their life (Lindsey-Warren et al., 2021). When discussing the importance of storytelling for vulnerable youth, the act of coming together and sharing personal stories with peers fosters a deeper understanding of diverse perspectives. Gargiulo (2005) stated: "The quickest path between yourself and another person is a story" (p. 21). Engaging with individuals from different religious, ethnic, or national backgrounds broadens one's worldview and promotes empathy (Brailas, 2021). When students form personal connections with those who have different life experiences, they develop curiosity and a genuine interest in people, cultures, and situations they might not have otherwise encountered (Glesne & Pugach, 2018).

Beyond fostering empathy and curiosity, storytelling serves as a powerful tool for learning, healing, and empowerment, as supported by various scholars. The power of personal storytelling lies in its universality, a concept emphasized by scholars such as Smith and Watson (2010). By evoking mental images, words, and emotions, storytelling becomes an inclusive method that resonates with diverse learners.

Beyond its educational value, storytelling also holds therapeutic potential, as noted by Resilient Educator (n.d.), helping young people process and heal from traumatic experiences. Additionally, it can enhance motivation, engagement, and comprehension, making it a valuable tool for learning (Lucarevski, 2016; Atta-Alla, 2012; Wajnryb, 2003). More importantly, storytelling empowers youth to address issues that matter to them and their communities, enabling them to develop their voice and advocate for themselves and others. Critically grounded storytelling considers the role of structural power and the impact of privilege and oppression on people's lived experiences and engages young people in using their voices to raise public consciousness and drive informed social action (Aldana et al., 2016).

Nowadays, storytelling has evolved beyond face-to-face interactions. Digital storytelling expands these benefits by incorporating multimedia elements, making narratives even more engaging and accessible to youth. Digital storytelling enhances the visibility of alternative knowledge and makes it more accessible and actionable for diverse audiences. This approach, particularly when used in educational settings, allows young people not only to reflect on their own lives but also to engage with the experiences of their peers. By focusing on creating positive solutions and shared narratives, digital storytelling offers an innovative way for youth to actively participate in shaping their futures (De Vecchi et al., 2016).

This multimedia approach allows youth to communicate their stories in a more dynamic and relatable way, helping them express complex emotions and ideas that might be difficult to convey through words alone. Moreover, digital storytelling provides a platform for marginalized or vulnerable youth to share their perspectives, thus fostering a more inclusive environment where diverse voices are heard and valued. In conclusion, storytelling combined with the power of active listening, creates a transformative environment that empowers youth, particularly those who are vulnerable, to express their experiences and gain a sense of freedom of action.

As Brailas (2021) emphasizes, "By sharing stories and empowering narratives, we can establish a more democratic classroom culture; a transformative community practice that promotes the development of autonomous human beings." Active listening, when integrated into this practice, allows youth to feel heard and validated, creating a safe space for them to reflect on their lives and learn from each other's experiences. In this way, both storytelling and active listening serve as powerful tools in shaping more inclusive, empathetic, and resilient communities for vulnerable youth

TALE curriculum

In the following sections of this publication, you will find schedules for both the two-day and half-day (4-hour) TALE training sessions. Each session includes its own preparation materials, so use those that correspond to the version you are delivering.

Take time to read theoretical background about each topic to support your facilitation. Ensure the environment is safe and supportive, with regular breaks to help participants process potentially sensitive content. Pay attention to their well-being and make it clear they can opt out of any activity they find uncomfortable.

TALE training

min		
30	TALE Project	
90	Getting to know each other	
90	Introduction to Active Listening	Day 1
90	Introduction to interculturality and youth empowerment	
90	Introduction to Story Collection	Day 2
90	Personal stories as an advocacy tool (practice examples)	
90	Personal stories as an advocacy tool (intervention planning)	
30	Evaluation	

Short TALE training

min	
30	TALE Project
90	Introduction to Active Listening
90	Introduction to Story Collection
30	Evaluation

TALE Project

Duration

30 min

Materials

Projector and laptop

Objectives

Introducing participants to the TALE project and its methodology.
Motivate participants to explore and use the TALE platform.

Activities

Introduction (10 minutes)

Introduction and Welcome (5 minutes): Introduction of the training facilitators, presentation of the organization, and words of welcome.

TALE Project (5 minutes): Introduction to the Tale project, project goals and activities

TALE Platform (20 minutes)

Platform Presentation (5 minutes): Presentation of the online TALE platform, its functionality and content

Platform Exploration (10 minutes): Participants are given a QR code to access the platform by their personal phones and are given an individual task to analyze the platform, according to the following questions:

- What thematic categories of stories are there on the platform?
- How are they arranged and how do you interpret that sequence?
- How do the illustrations visually communicate the emotions and messages of the stories?
- Why are the stories placed within an illustrated community and how does this affect the perception of the content?
- Does a platform like this encourage you to share your own stories?

Group discussion (5 minutes): The facilitator leads a group discussion, going through the questions and writing down the answers.

Getting to know each other

Duration

90 min

Materials

Flip chart and markers; Post-it notes; Projector and laptop; PPT; educational cards

Objectives

Creating a safe space and establishing positive group dynamics as a foundation for working on storytelling and personal narratives.

Activities

Participant Introduction (10 min):

Participants introduce themselves with their name, experience, and motivation for participating in the training.

Creative Introduction and Setting Expectations (50 minutes):

Dixit Introductions of participants (20 minutes): Participants choose a Dixit card that resonates with them and use it as a creative way to introduce themselves. This activity fosters creativity and connection among participants while setting a positive tone for the session. Once everyone has shared, the facilitator can summarize the variety of stories and themes that emerged from the cards, highlighting common interests or unique perspectives.

Expectations and Fears (15 minutes):

The facilitator gives everyone a few post-it notes and asks them to write down their expectations for this training, as well as potential fears they have. The facilitator groups the post-it notes and goes through them with the participants. He addresses the expectations and discusses to what extent and how they can be fulfilled during the training.

Creating a safe space (15 minutes):

In this phase, the facilitator addresses the highlighted fears and potential risks, and leads the process of establishing group rules with the participants that could create a safe space in which they will be able to discuss their own identity and share personal stories. The rules could be: We protect the privacy of the speaker, We do not retell personal stories outside the group, We do not underestimate or belittle other people's experiences, etc.

Activities

Timeline of Life in Three Stories (30 minutes): The facilitator asks each participant to think about their life as a timeline and select three key stories either from childhood or recent events that define who they are. After reflecting, they should share their stories with the group, highlighting the main events and their significance.

The facilitator concludes with a group discussion about the power of personal stories and how the selected events told through personal stories communicate our identity, characteristics, and personalities in an authentic and organic way.

Introduction to interculturality and youth empowerment

Duration

90 min

Materials

Flipchart and markers; Notebooks and pens; Projector and laptop for presentations

Objectives

Understanding the concept of youth from different backgrounds or with diverse identities.

Analyzing interculturality in own community.

Reflecting on how to promote equality in the community.

Activities

Introduction to Interculturality (30 minutes): Facilitator provides an overview of the concept of interculturalism, explaining how it differs from multiculturalism. Facilitator discusses why interculturalism promotes dialogue, interaction, and mutual understanding among cultures, fostering a more cohesive society

and building social capital, and highlights examples of successful intercultural practices in both local and global contexts.

Facilitator explains how interculturalism encourages not only the coexistence of different cultures (multiculturalism) but also active engagement and collaboration between them.

Activities

In the end, the facilitator opens the topic of contemporary interculturalism, which involves not just passive recognition and respect for human rights but also collaboration among identities that form an intercultural community.

Discussion (10 minutes): Invite participants to share their thoughts on intercultural interactions they have experienced or observed in their communities. Encourage dialogue on how interculturalism can improve relationships and reduce misunderstandings in different environments.

Diversity in Our Community (60 minutes)

Possible discussion questions:

What kinds of diversity do we notice in our community?

Do we think these perspectives are represented in everyday community life?

Can you recall an example where the community embraced the diversity of its members?

What obstacles still exist?

Mapping Diversity in Our Community (20 minutes):

Participants are divided into 3-4 groups and create a "community diversity map." They receive large sheets of paper and markers and draw a "map" of their community, considering cultural, ethnic, and social groups.

It is crucial to encourage them to think beyond obvious categories (e.g., language, religion) and include less visible aspects of diversity (e.g., socioeconomic status, subcultures, etc.). Key question participants need to show through their map is where is this diversity evident in their local community?

Sharing results (20 minutes): Once completed, groups visit each other and provide feedback. One person remains as the group representative while others visit other groups and exchange impressions. Each interaction lasts 3-5 minutes, depending on the number of groups.

Reflection (20 minutes): Group discussion based on the following questions:

Representation: Were any groups left out of the map? Why?

Inclusion: Do all groups actively participate in community life, or are some excluded? What factors contribute to this?

Responsibility: What is our personal responsibility in promoting inclusion and intercultural understanding?

Action: How can we contribute to creating a more inclusive community?

Vision: What would an ideal, fully inclusive community look like, and what is the role of citizens in achieving it?

Introduction to Active Listening

Duration

90 min

Materials

PPT and laptop; pens and paper

Objectives

Understanding the role of active listening in building relationships.
Reflect on your own patterns of participation in conversations. Implementing active listening in everyday situations.

Activities

Activity: Sharing Stories in Pairs (20 min): Participants will work in pairs. One person will share their story, while the other will take on the role of an active listener—asking questions, encouraging deeper sharing of experiences, and expressing thoughts. After 5–6 minutes, they will switch roles so that both participants have the opportunity to experience both perspectives.

Possible topics (choose the most appropriate ones):

- **Unforgettable Life Experience**

Share a significant moment in your life that taught you something or changed your perspective.

- **The Greatest Challenge at Work or in Studies**

Talk about what you find most difficult in your current job or studies and how you cope with that challenge.

- **Hobbies and Passions**

Share about your hobby or passion: why it fulfills you, how you started, and how it impacts your life.

- **Goals for the Future**

Talk about your personal or professional goals: what you want to achieve in the next few years and how you plan to get there.

- **A Challenge You Recently Overcame**

Share a story about a recent challenge you faced, how you overcame it, and what you learned from the experience

- **Technology and Me**

Discuss how technology today positively or negatively impacts your life and relationships.

The goal of this activity is not only to share stories but also to develop active listening skills and deepen mutual understanding.

Activities

Reflection after the first round (10 minutes):

After the first round, the facilitator will guide participants through a reflection on their experience. The following questions can help in the reflection process:

- How did you feel during the conversation?
- How aware were you of the speaker or listener?
- Were there moments when you felt that you were not being listened to? If yes, why?
- How do you think the conversation could have improved with better listening?

Theory of Active Listening (25 minutes):

Introduction to the concept of active listening, focusing on key elements: attentive focus, verbal and non-verbal cues, and providing feedback to the speaker. In this session, participants will receive clear guidelines on how to actively listen. Some of the points to address (this is not a complete list):

- Focused attention: Not just listening to words, but also following non-verbal communication.
- Avoiding interruptions: Allow the speaker to finish their thought before asking questions or giving feedback.
- Asking open-ended questions: Instead of questions that can be answered with "yes" or "no," use questions that encourage deeper discussion.

- Paraphrasing and reflecting: Repeating what the speaker has said in your own words to show attention and ensure understanding.

Second round of active listening workshop (20 minutes):

Participants will work in pairs again, but this time with clear instructions on how to apply active listening. Participants will use new topics from the list above or other topics prepared by the facilitator.

Reflection after the second round (15 minutes):

After the second round, participants will reflect again. These questions can help analyze the changes:

- How did the communication change in the second round?
- Did you notice a difference in how you were listened to? If yes, what was the difference?
- Did you notice improvements in listening skills? How did non-verbal cues change?
- How did the structure of active listening affect the flow of the conversation?

Introduction to Story Collection

Duration

90 min

Materials

Flipchart and markers; Story collection templates or question guides; Notebooks and pens

Objectives

Learn methods of story collection while respecting privacy, anonymity, and emotional safety.

Understand how to create a safe and supportive environment for sharing stories.

Practice story collection techniques through role-playing and exercises among participants.

Activities

Activity "If I Was a Story" (20 minutes): Each participant briefly shares their favorite story (from a book, movie, or theater) and explains why it is important to them or represents them. The goal is to encourage participants to reflect on the meaning of stories and allow them to practice sharing in a supportive environment.

Presentation: Ethical Story Collection (25 minutes): The facilitator presents key principles of ethical story collection, including:

- **Consent:** Always ask for permission before collecting and sharing stories.
- **Anonymity and Privacy:** Provide options for anonymity and explain how the stories will be used.

- **Avoiding Retriggering Trauma:** Be mindful of sensitive topics and offer support if needed.
- **Active Listening:** Create a space where storytellers feel heard and valued.

Practice: Encouraging Storytelling (25 minutes)

Participants work in pairs. One takes on the role of the storyteller, and the other is the story collector. The facilitator provides a list of open-ended questions to guide the conversation, such as:

- "Can you share a memory that shaped your values or beliefs?"
- "Can you describe a moment when you felt like you didn't belong?"
- "What experience made you stronger?"

After 10 minutes, participants switch roles.

Activities

Writing Stories (15 minutes): After both participants have had the opportunity to share their experience, they write down the story they have heard and then return it to the storyteller for authorization. The storyteller has the chance to intervene in the written version and provide feedback on how satisfied they are with the written story.

Connecting Stories to the TALE Platform (5 minutes): The facilitator invites those willing to approve sharing their story on the TALE platform to indicate this by signing a paper. The facilitator then collects the signed story sheets.

Personal Stories as Advocacy Tools (Practical Examples)

Duration

90 min

Materials

Projector and laptop; Flipchart and markers; Examples of campaigns using stories

Objectives

Explore how stories can be used for advocacy, raising awareness, and campaigns.

Detect and analyze practical approaches to using stories to influence communities.

Activities

Introduction to Advocacy (25 minutes):

Advocacy is the process of influencing decisions in society – whether through policies, laws, or public opinion. In this presentation, we will go through the basic concepts, methods, and strategies of advocacy. We will define what advocacy is, how to identify a problem, formulate clear messages, and use tools like media and lobbying. We will also reflect on the key steps in creating an advocacy strategy and the challenges advocates face. The goal is to show how anyone can advocate for change and use this process to improve the community and society.

Practical Examples (25 minutes):

A presentation that gathers at least 8 examples of how personal stories have been used in advocacy processes or decision-making. The focus will be on the personal stories of vulnerable groups, i.e., identities that face vulnerability and marginalization.

Story Analysis (40 minutes): Participants, divided into groups, receive two advocacy processes (out of 8 presented) to explore via mobile devices. After becoming familiar with the story, they will analyze it according to the following criteria:

- **Clarity and Emotional Impact** – How clearly is the call to action conveyed, and how does it resonate with citizens?
- **Connection with Advocacy Goal** – Is the goal clearly communicated? Is it understandable to citizens?
- **Visibility of Systemic Barriers** – To what extent does the story highlight structural injustices or social barriers?
- **Position of the Person Whose Story is Used** – Does the story portray the person as an active participant in change, or is the focus only on victimization?
- **Adaptability for Different Audiences** – Can the story be used in different contexts (e.g., media, politics, education)?
- **Support by Evidence and Context** – Are the key claims of the campaign supported by data, research, or contextual information?
- **Call to Action** – Does the story have a clear conclusion that points to the necessary steps or solutions?

Presentation of group work (15 minutes):

The last 15 minutes of the workshop will be dedicated to presenting the group's work.

Personal Stories as Advocacy Tools (Campaign Planning)

Duration

90 min

Materials

Flip chart and markers

Objectives

Design and structure a campaign based on personal stories to advocate for change in the community.

Analyze and adapt personal stories for the target audience and choose the most effective communication channels.

Define success indicators and strategies for tracking the impact of the campaign.

Activities

Ideas for Community Impact (20 minutes): Participants brainstorm ways to use the TALE platform and collected personal stories in their own communities. Examples of possible uses include: organizing storytelling events, creating content for social media, collaborating with local organizations to amplify voices, and many other models, including previously shown examples of best practices. Facilitator writes down ideas on flip-chart sheets. To avoid repetition, participants are divided into groups based on the ideas that appeal to them most.

Campaign Development (50 minutes): Participants, in their groups, choose one idea from the brainstorming session and develop a campaign plan using TALE personal stories.

The facilitator circulates between the groups, providing support in writing the plan.

The plan should include:

- Goal: A clear definition of the change they want to achieve.
- Audience: Who are the key people they want to influence?
- Story: Which stories will they use for maximum impact?
- Channels and Format: Which media are most appropriate (video, podcast, social media, events, infographics)?
- Call to Action: What do they want the audience to do after hearing the story?

Activities

After answering all the questions, participants create the first poster (on flipchart paper) for their campaign. The poster should include the main messages and serve as a citizen-facing announcement. The detailed plan is presented verbally, explaining how the segments of the plan are reflected on the poster.

Presentation and Evaluation (20 minutes):

Groups present their campaign plans. Feedback is given by the facilitator and other participants, focusing on:

- Practicality and feasibility of the plan.
- Alignment of the stories with the campaign's goal.
- Effectiveness of the call to action.

At the end, a brief reflection is held on how participants can apply what they learned in their communities.

Evaluation

Duration

30 min

Materials

Flip chart and markers
Post it notes

Objectives

Reflect on the training experience and key takeaways.
Set an intention to apply the learned skills.

Activities

Reflection Activity (10 minutes)

Participants write on post it notes:

- Keep (What will they keep from the session?)
- Change (What would they change or improve?)
- Trash (What will they discard or no longer use?)

Final Circle (10 minutes): Participants gather in a circle and share:

- One word or phrase that describes their experience.
- One thing they are inspired to do in the future.

The facilitator thanks the participants, encourages them to stay connected, and provides information on next steps or additional resources.

Official Evaluation (10 minutes):

Participants fill out the prepared evaluation forms.

Creating an Inclusive Community

Tips for long-term work on creating an inclusive community, applying the TALE methodology.

Practical Techniques for Active, Inclusive Listening

1. **Give your full attention:** Stay focused on the speaker. Once they've finished, paraphrase or summarize to show you've understood.
2. **Use supportive non-verbal cues:** Maintain appropriate eye contact, nod, and keep open body language to show you're engaged.
3. **Ask open-ended questions:** Encourage deeper sharing by inviting the speaker to elaborate in their own words.
4. **Embrace silence:** Pauses give people space to think and feel. You don't need to fill every gap with words.

Respectfully Collecting Personal Stories

1. **Always get consent:** Ask for clear permission before collecting or sharing someone's story.
2. **Listen with intention:** Focus on the person and their experience—seek to genuinely connect.
3. **Lead with empathy:** Approach each story with care and openness to build trust and inclusivity.
4. **Be trauma-aware:** Stay mindful of sensitive topics and provide space or support when needed.

Using Storytelling to Promote Inclusion

1. **Encourage a safe and open environment,** a space where individuals feel comfortable.
2. **Determine the goal of your story:** What do I want the audience to learn, think or do after hearing the story?
3. **Consider what emotion you want to convey to the audience:** How do I want the audience to feel?
4. **Focus on impact over polish:** A story doesn't need to be perfect to be powerful. Use it to open dialogue, not to impress.

