

Nature and Youth

A booklet for youth workers to deal with youth radicalization through nature based learning

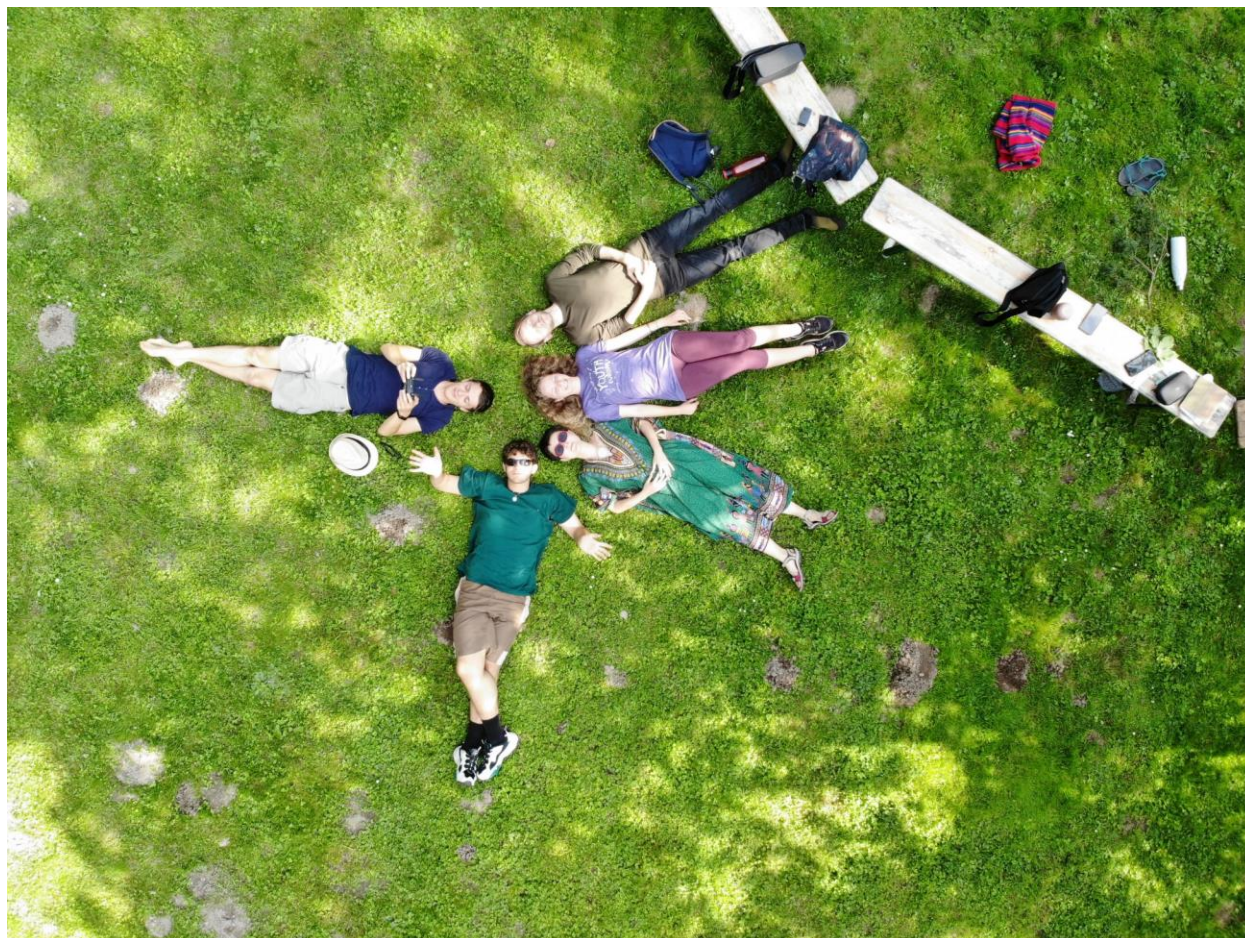


Photo taken during the training course in Czech Republic

Photo credit: Filip Kňážek

A result of the project “Trees that are rooted”

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Photo credit: Anca Anghel

About this booklet

The present booklet aims at enhancing the youth workers' work with young people, especially the ones who are vulnerable, hard to reach and at risk of radicalization. The booklet is a result of the project "Trees that are rooted" which was organized by the informal group "Common Dream".

After discussing the situation of the young people in Europe, the booklet offers a number of tools that can be done with young people.

The project "Trees that are rooted"

The project "Trees that are rooted" was aiming to foster quality improvements in youth work and enhance the capacity of youth workers and youth organisations in their support for young people, especially the ones who are hard to reach and at risk of radicalization. The project included 2 activities (training courses for youth workers).

The objectives of the project were:

- To equip youth workers with competences and methods for their professional development, in addressing the needs of the young people and in particular the ones who are hard to reach and at risk of radicalization.
- To share innovative theories, educational approaches and tools that youth workers can use in order to improve their work with young people.
- To promote diversity and sense of initiative among young people
- To increase youth worker's motivation and inspiration to work further with youth
- To create a cascading effect by developing sustainable follow-up actions targeting hard to reach young people

The project included 2 training activities, one in Czech Republic in July 2021 and one in Cyprus in October 2021, bringing together 28 youth workers (each time) from Cyprus, Czech Republic, Romania, Bulgaria, Greece, Italy, Spain, Lithuania and Germany.

You can see the video of the first training course in Czech Republic [here](#)¹

And the video of the second training in Cyprus [here](#)²

Below there are words by which participants described the project.



The project was co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union.

Short literature review

The number of young people being drawn into radicalization movements is dramatically increasing. According to EU, “radicalisation is understood as a complex phenomenon of people embracing radical ideology that could lead to the commitment of terrorist acts”. The report “Preventing the radicalisation of children by fighting the root causes” explains that youth are

¹ https://www.facebook.com/watch/?extid=CL-UNK-UNK-UNK-IO5_GK0T-GK1C&v=594149748252521

² https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cXp4Oo3gTa8&ab_channel=allaZOYMEinformalgroup

drawn into violent radicalization in their search for identity and a meaningful place in society. The main root causes of this are the profound feelings of injustice and frustration about their social exclusion and their vulnerability. These increase their willingness to adhere to extremist, sometimes violent groups, which offer an apparent social purpose to them.

The Paris declaration 2015, gathering all EU member states Education Ministers, discussed how education and training can best meet the challenges of social inclusion, radicalisation and citizenship. The declaration outlines that “the primary purpose of education is not only to develop knowledge, skills, competences and attitudes and to embed fundamental values, but also to help young people - in close cooperation with parents and families - to become active, responsible, open-minded members of society.”

Extensive research done in the field of youth work proved that youth work cultivates active, responsible and open minded members of the society. The research “Working with young people: the value of youth work in the European Union” has profoundly shown that through (sustained) engagement in youth work, young people develop certain skills and competences and strengthen their network and their social capital/social skills.

Nature based activities

Learning in nature has proven astonishing benefits on young people which include among others better health, decreased stress levels, increased motivation, real world problem solving, increased self-esteem and self-confidence and more active learning. What is even more important is that it stimulates a better overall behaviour, it reinforces teamwork, it builds awareness of the needs and contributions of others, it fosters the ability to sustain effective relationships, it helps to cope with a rapidly changing world, it strengthens the belongingness and it cultivates the responsibility to be an effective member of the community.

List of tools inspired by nature

Barefoot walk



Photo taken during the training course in Czech Republic

Photo credit: Anca Anghel

The objectives:

1. To raise awareness of the connection and belonging that nature provides.
2. To calm the mind and soothe the heart.

Duration (time): 15 minutes or more.

Space arrangements: Outdoors.

Materials required: -

Other important information: The barefoot walk should be in silence.

Description of the activity:

It is such a rich experience when we take off our shoes and socks and our skin touches the Earth. In this activity, we are inviting you for a barefoot walk in nature. Once you walk, pay attention to all sensations in your body. Not just the sensations on your sole, but also how you breathe, what you hear, what you feel, how the mind transforms. Start with a little walk and then expand your walk. Try out different types of ground tapestry if you wish (wet grass, dry leaves, soil, stones, sand, water, etc).

In the end of the barefoot walk, reflect on the following questions:

- How did you feel? How was this experience for you?
 - How was your process?
 - What have you discovered/learned?
 - What surprised you?
 - What are you taking from this activity?
-

Being alone in nature



Photo taken during the training course in Czech Republic

Photo credit: Anca Anghel

The objectives:

1. To raise self-awareness.
2. To raise self-acceptance.

Duration (time): 40 minutes or more.

Space arrangements: Outdoors in a natural space.

Materials required: Notebook and pen.

Other important information: It's important that each person is with oneself during this activity. This is a time without using the phone ☺

Flow of the workshop:

Being alone with oneself has become a very rare activity within the weekly schedule. Yet, it is such a rich experience. In this activity, we are inviting you to spend time with yourself in nature. Begin by wandering for a while in the wild, until you find a place which is really calling you. Sit there and become aware of what surrounds you. As you accept everything that is happening around you, bring your awareness to your inner landscape. What do you observe within yourself (emotions, thoughts, sensations)? Accept everything that is happening within way you accept everything that is happening outside.

If you wish, take some notes in your notebook.

Upon your return, discuss some of these questions:

How are you feeling?

What has changed within?

What have you realized?

How is the outer nature and the inner nature connected?

What are you taking with you from this experience?

Walk and talk



Photo taken during the training course in Czech Republic

Photo credit: Anca Anghel

The objectives:

1. To build bonds with other people
2. To become more self-aware

Duration (time): 30 minutes or more.

Space arrangements: Outdoors.

Materials required: -

Other important information: -

Description of the workshop:

The activity “walk a talk” could be also called a philosophical walk. It’s basically an invitation to walk in nature in pairs and talk about existential matters. It’s derived from ancient Greek philosophers who would come up with pieces of wisdom as they ventured into the wild nature. Some of the questions to talk about while walking are:

- If you were a natural being, what would you be and why?
 - Talk about a person who truly inspires you.
 - What is your super power?
 - What words would you offer to your younger self?
 - What makes you alive?
-

Praising each other



Photo taken during the training course in Czech Republic

Photo credit: Anca Anghel

The objectives:

1. To share appreciation and positive feedback to other people
2. To increase the self-esteem of every participant.

Duration (time): 10 minutes or more

Space arrangements: Indoors: in a room. Outdoors: in the nature.

Materials required: a pen and a lot of pieces of paper per person.

Other important information: It should be mentioned before starting that the activity is anonymous but if wanted, the name can be added in the upper part of the note. However, this is optional.

Flow of the workshop:

It's so great once a person stops for a while to witness and praise the beauty, the qualities, characteristics and competences another person has. Once you have a pen and a paper, choose a person that you want to praise. (it can be organized in such a way that everybody receives the same number of affirmations). Put on a paper a sentence, or a drawing through which you express what the person radiates and/or offers to you. Share this paper with the person. Observe their reaction.

Mandala in nature



Photo taken during the training course in Cyprus

Photo credit: Ivan Kobelev

The objectives:

1. To build connection within a group
2. To build connection with oneself and the nature

Duration (time): 40 minutes or more.

Space arrangements: Outdoors in a clearing in nature.

Materials required: -

Other important information: It is important not to destroy nature in this activity but to use the natural elements in a kind way. (Perhaps choose dead leaves, branches, etc).

Description of the workshop:

This activity is inspired by the ancient practice of making mandalas. This time, you are going to do the mandala by using natural objects, whatever nature provides. Being alone or in group, it's

much more wonderful if you keep silent during the whole mandala creation. In order to facilitate the process, establish in advance the mandala center. Then, go in silence and let your inner artist to co-create with the other artists around you a mandala. The mandala will be finished when everybody stops working on it.

Once you finish, stay a bit far and witness the mandala. Discuss on these questions:

- What have you observed about the mandala creation?
 - How was it for you?
 - What bonds have you strengthened? In what way? With whom?
 - What qualities does the mandala reflect?
 - To who would you like to dedicate the mandala?
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Dancing in nature



Photo taken during the training course in Czech Republic

Photo credit: Anca Anghel

The objectives:

1. To enhance inner freedom.
2. To enhance intuition.

Duration (time): 30 minutes or more

Space arrangements: Outdoors in the wild nature, far from public.

Materials required: -

Other important information: You can use music via Bluetooth speakers or simply have the natural sounds as a background music

Flow of the workshop:

Begin by warming up your body through stretches. Continue moving your body according to how you feel free. Find your corner in the wild and close your eyes if you wish. Allow your inner intuition to be the guide of your movement. If you wish, during the movement, you can embody different beings of the nature. (robin, snake, fox, snow, seed, wind, etc).

In the end, invite the participants to share their experience based on the following questions:

- How do you feel right now?
 - Any ideas about the meaning of the activity?
 - What does this activity have to say about your life?
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Further reading

Do you wish to deepen your work with concepts that will support the holistic growth of youth? Here are few recommendations from our side.

1. “Nature and the Human Soul: Cultivating Wholeness and Community in a Fragmented World” Book by Bill Plotkin
2. [SEEDS OF CHANGE - cultivating of authentic growth of youth](#) –publication for youth workers
3. [THE HEROES WITHIN: a journey towards my true self](#) – pocket book for youth
4. [On the Wings of the Ladybug - Inspiring Youth work through Ecocentric Development and Positive Psychology](#) –publication for youth workers
5. [Self-discovery pocket book](#) - pocket book for youth



Photo taken during the training course in Cyprus

Photos from the project



Photo taken during the training course in Cyprus



Photo taken during the training course in Cyprus



Photo taken during the training course in Czech Republic

Photo credit: Anca Anghel

Pieces of art from the participants of the project





