

YOUTHFUL BALANCE

nature and
mindfulness based
educational
methods



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About the project

Dear All,

(YOU)thful Balance was an international youth exchange (20–27.06.2025) in Poland, Zawoja that brought together young people from across Europe to explore mental health, emotional intelligence, and wellbeing. The project responded to the increasing challenges young people face in coping with stress, uncertainty, and social pressures.

Through non-formal education methods such as mindfulness practices, body-based learning, creative expression, outdoor activities, and intercultural dialogue, participants discovered tools for:

- strengthening self-awareness and resilience,
- developing emotional literacy and empathy,
- practicing stress reduction and relaxation techniques,
- building supportive peer relationships.

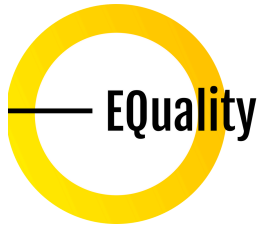
The program created a safe and inclusive learning environment where participants could both reflect on their own inner world and connect authentically with others. The activities encouraged personal growth, creativity, and community building, leaving participants with practical strategies they can integrate into daily life.

By combining experiential learning with nature-based and artistic methods, (YOU)thful Balance supported young people in finding ways to live with more balance, presence, and care for themselves and their communities.



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The background features large, abstract green shapes. In the top right, there is a watercolor illustration of three evergreen trees and a bird in flight. In the bottom left, there is a watercolor illustration of a leafy branch. The text 'Learning methods' is centered in the lower half of the image.

Learning methods



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Objectives

- Increasing self-awareness about one's psychological, emotional, physical, and social needs,
- Designing personal strategies for balance and wellbeing,
- Strengthening sense of agency and self-care after the project.



Wellbeing map

01 Materials

- A3 sheets, markers, colored paper, glue, scissors, old magazines, stickers, washi tape,
- Background music (calm & inspiring).

02 Workshop flow

11. Introduction (10–15 min)

Facilitator explains: wellbeing is more than “no problems” – it’s about fulfillment, balance, and meaning. Participants will design their own Wellbeing Map.

Guiding questions:

- What nourishes me emotionally / physically / socially?
- What drains me?
- What daily rituals support me?
- What values matter most to me?
- Who/what supports me?
- What do I do when life gets heavy?

03 Group reflection

Circle questions:

- Which emotions were easy or difficult for you?
- What did you discover about yourself today?
- How can you better take care of your emotions in everyday life?

2. Round 1 – The Movement of Emotions (20 min)

Participants walk around the board while music plays. When the music stops, each person lands on the closest square.

Tasks for each square:

- show this emotion through body movement,
- create a sound or a facial expression,
- tell a story about the last time you felt it (optional),
- draw it in the air with your hand.

3. Round 2 – Choosing emotions (20 min)

- Facilitator asks questions:
- Stand on the emotion you usually hide.
- Stand on the one you express most often.
- Stand on the one you’d like to express in a healthier way.
- After each, short sharing: “Why did I choose this?”

Objectives

- Recognizing and naming emotions,
- Exploring ways of expressing them,
- Practicing empathy and active listening,
- Strengthening emotional self-awareness in the group.



Emotions on board

01 Materials

- A4 papers arranged as a board (e.g., 5x5), each paper with one emotion (joy, anger, shame, excitement, fear, jealousy, calm, gratitude, sadness, surprise...),
- Background music (matching different moods)

02 Workshop flow

1. Introduction (10 min)

- Explain that the board is an “emotional map.” Each square represents one emotion. The aim is to:
- step on different emotions,
- express them through movement, sound, or short storytelling,
- share reflection about what this emotion means in one’s life.

2. Creative map-making (60 min)

Participants draw, collage, or design their maps (can look like a tree, circle, path, mandala, etc.).

Suggested sections:

- Daily rituals,
- Supportive relationships,
- My strengths,
- My needs & boundaries,
- How I deal with stress,
- My inspiring goal,
- What I want to change.

3. Sharing (15–20 min)

Pairs or small groups exchange one part of their map that is important for them.

4. Closing & wellbeing anchor (10 min)

Everyone chooses one symbol, word, or image as their “anchor of wellbeing” – something they will take home.

03 Group reflection

Circle questions:

- Which emotions were easy or difficult for you?
- What did you discover about yourself today?
- How can you better take care of your emotions in everyday life?

Objectives

- To explore the connection between body and emotions, and to express feelings visually in a creative, personal way.



Wellbeing

Body Mapping Exercise

01 Materials

- Large sheet of paper with a blank human silhouette (one per person)
- Colored pencils, pastels, or markers

02 Workshop flow

1. Introduction (2 min)

- Facilitator explains:
- “Our bodies often carry emotions before our minds notice them. Today, we’ll create a ‘map’ of where emotions live in us. There are no right or wrong answers – this is about awareness, not art.”
- Divide the group into few groups, each of 4–5 people.

2. Mapping (12–15 min)

- Invite participants to take colors and mark areas of the body where they feel emotions.
- Suggested emotions to trace:
 - Joy / Excitement
 - Fear / Anxiety
 - Anger / Frustration
 - Love / Affection
 - Shame / Guilt
 - Calm / Peace
- Encourage them to:
 - Use colors for intensity or temperature (e.g., red for strong, blue for calm).
 - Add symbols, shapes, or textures instead of realistic drawing.
 - Let the hand move without overthinking.

3. Sharing (5 min, optional)

In pairs or small groups, participants can show a part of their map that feels meaningful. Sharing is voluntary

03 Facilitator tip

✦ Encourage participants to repeat this exercise at home when they feel strong emotions. Over time, they’ll notice patterns (e.g., “I always feel stress in my stomach”) and can develop personal strategies to release or balance them.

Objectives

- Develop focused attention during everyday activities.
- Cultivate gratitude and appreciation for food.
- Slow down and notice sensory experiences.
- Foster positive emotions and well-being.
- Encourage noticing small blessings and support systems.
- Shift perspective from stress or negativity to appreciation.



Wellbeing

Mindful eating

01 Materials

- Small piece of food (fruit, chocolate, nut, etc.)
- Optional: quiet space

02 Workshop flow

1.Introduction (2 min):

- Explain that this exercise is about paying attention to every detail of eating — colors, textures, smells, flavors, and sensations in the mouth.
- Practice (5–10 min):
- Look at the food. Notice its shape, color, and texture.
- Smell it slowly. Observe the aromas without judgment.
- Take a small bite. Chew slowly, noticing all flavors and textures.
- Swallow mindfully, noticing sensations in the throat and stomach.

2.Reflection (2–3 min):

- How did slowing down affect the experience?
- What did you notice that you usually miss when eating quickly?
- How could mindful eating affect your daily habits or relationship with food?

Gratitude practice

01 Materials

- Notebook or paper
- Pen

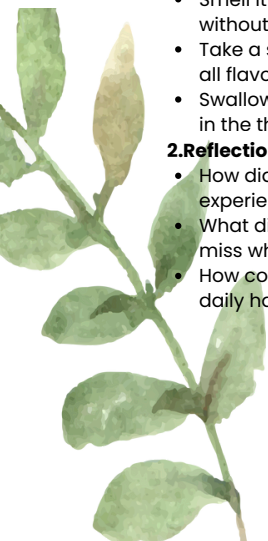
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Objectives

- To reduce stress and promote deep relaxation.
- To strengthen connection with nature as a source of balance and inspiration.
- To cultivate presence and mindfulness through sensory awareness



Wellbeing

Forest bathing

01 Materials

- A natural outdoor space (forest, park, or garden).
- Comfortable clothing for walking and sitting.
- Optional: small blankets or sitting mats.

02 Workshop flow

1.Introduction (5 min)

- Facilitator explains: "Forest Bathing, or Shinrin-yoku, comes from Japan. It means immersing yourself in the atmosphere of the forest using all your senses. It's not about hiking, speed, or reaching a destination – it's about slowing down and letting nature support your wellbeing."

2.Slow Entry (5–10 min)

- Group walks slowly and silently into the natural area.
- Facilitator encourages deep breathing: inhale through the nose, exhale gently through the mouth.
- Invite participants to notice the transition: leaving behind the "busy world" and entering a calmer rhythm.

03 Facilitator tip

This method works best in silence, with minimal talking. Less guidance = more immersion. It can be shortened to 20 minutes or extended to 2 hours depending on the setting.

3.Sensory Invitations (40–50 min)

Participants are guided through short awareness practices:

- Sight: "Look at the colors, shades, and patterns around you. Notice the small details."
- Hearing: "Close your eyes for a moment. What sounds are near? Which ones are far?"
- Touch: "Touch the bark of a tree, a leaf, or the ground beneath you. What textures do you notice?"
- Smell: "Breathe deeply. Notice the scents of the air, plants, or soil."
- Movement: "Walk as slowly as possible, feeling how your body connects with the earth."
- Participants find a spot to sit or lean against a tree. They simply rest, breathe, and absorb the environment. Optional: they may journal or sketch a thought, word, or image.

4.Solo Reflection (40–50 min)

- Participants find a spot to sit or lean against a tree. They simply rest, breathe, and absorb the environment. Optional: they may journal or sketch a thought, word, or image.

5.Closing Circle (5–10 min)

- The group gathers. Facilitator invites each person to share one word, image, or feeling they are taking with them from this experience.

Objectives

- Foster mindfulness, creativity, and focus through connection with nature.
- Encourage teamwork and collaboration within the group.
- Promote reflection on personal emotions, values, or intentions through symbolic expression.



Wellbeing

Nature mandala

01 Materials

- Natural objects: leaves, stones, flowers, twigs, seeds, pinecones, shells, etc.
- Optional: paper or fabric as a base
- Open outdoor space or a safe area to work collectively

02 Workshop flow

1.Introduction (5 min)

- Facilitator explains:
“A mandala is a circular pattern representing balance, harmony, and unity. Today we will create a Nature Mandala together using natural materials. This is a mindfulness exercise — focus on the process, your choices, and your connection to the materials and the group.”

2.Collecting Materials (5–10 min)

- Invite participants to move quietly and mindfully around the space, collecting natural objects that appeal to them.
- Encourage noticing textures, colors, and shapes, and choosing materials intuitively.

03 Facilitator tip

- The Nature Mandala serves as a visual and symbolic reminder of connection, creativity, and mindfulness.
- Encourage participants to reflect on the process or revisit the mandala mentally in moments of stress or reflection.

3.Creating the Mandala (15–20 min)

- Gather in a circle and collaboratively arrange the materials into a circular pattern.
- Optional prompts:
 - Place items representing your emotions or personal strengths.
 - Arrange items symbolizing things you are grateful for or values that guide you.
- Encourage participants to adjust, layer, or organize objects as they feel inspired.

4.Reflection & Sharing (5–10 min)

- Stand back as a group and observe the mandala.
- Invite participants to share:
 - One element they feel connected to
 - One insight or emotion the mandala evokes
 - How it represents the group or themselves

Objectives

- Encourage self-reflection and self-expression.
- Assess participants' familiarity and comfort with mindfulness practices.
- Create an open, non-judgmental space for sharing personal experiences and perspectives.



Group building

Where do you stand?

01 Materials

- Open space where participants can move freely
- Pre-prepared list of statements related to mindfulness, emotions, and wellbeing

02 Workshop flow

1.Introduction (5 min)

- Facilitator explains:

"I will read a series of statements related to mindfulness, self-awareness, and emotional experiences. Your task is to move to the position on the line that best represents your perspective – near 'Agree' if you strongly agree, near 'Disagree' if you strongly disagree, or on the line if you feel neutral or unsure. This is a silent activity, and you don't have to explain your choice unless you feel comfortable."

03 Facilitator tip

- Encourage participants to notice which statements made them feel strong, challenged, or curious.
- They can mentally "bookmark" these insights for future self-reflection or mindfulness practice.

2.Statement Rounds (10 min)

1. Read statements one by one, giving participants time to move and reflect. Example statements:
 - I feel comfortable practicing mindfulness every day.
 - I find it difficult to sit still and do nothing for even five minutes.
 - I can easily identify what I am feeling at any given moment.
 - I think meditation is too difficult for me.
 - I believe that expressing emotions openly is a sign of strength.
 - I know a specific breathing technique that helps me calm down.
 - I often feel disconnected from my body.
 - I believe that practicing gratitude can change the way I see my life.
 - I think mindfulness is just a trendy concept without real value.
 - I can easily notice when I am feeling stressed.
 - I believe that silence is uncomfortable.
 - I would like to learn more about how to manage difficult emotions.
 - I feel relaxed when I spend time in nature.
 - I believe that mindfulness can help me focus better.
 - I often find myself worrying about the past or the future.
 - I feel comfortable sitting in a group and closing my eyes for a guided meditation.
 - I am open to trying new relaxation techniques during this exchange.
 - I believe that journaling can be a powerful tool for self-reflection.
 - I find it hard to ask for support when I feel overwhelmed.
 - I feel grateful for something specific today.

3.Optional Sharing (3–5 min)

- Invite a few participants to explain their positions on selected statements, but only if they feel comfortable. This can generate discussion, reflection, or questions for further exploration.

Objectives

- Encourage self-awareness of personal strengths and contributions.
- Promote recognition of individual needs and support within the group.
- Build a sense of community and shared responsibility.



Group building

The Forest of Contributions

01 Materials

- Paper leaves or leaf cutouts (2 per participant)
- Markers or pens
- Tape or sticky tack
- Wall space or flipchart to create the "Forest"

02 Workshop flow

1. Introduction (5 min)

- Facilitator explains:

"We are going to create a Forest of Contributions. Each of you has unique gifts to bring to this group, and also needs to feel supported. This activity helps us recognize both our strengths and what we need from others to grow and feel safe."

2. Writing Leaves (5–7 min)

- Give each participant 2 paper leaves.
- On the first leaf, write one gift or strength you bring to the group.
- On the second leaf, write one thing you need from others to grow or feel safe.

3. Creating the Forest (5–7 min)

- Participants take turns or do it silently to stick their leaves on a wall, board, or designated space, forming a "forest."
- Encourage arranging leaves creatively, overlapping or clustering them to create a sense of community.

4. Reflection & Sharing (5 min)

- Invite participants to observe the forest.
- Optional: A few volunteers can share insights about their leaves or the forest as a whole:
 - What strengths do you notice in the group?
 - How do the needs and gifts complement each other?
 - How does seeing this "forest" affect your sense of belonging?

03 Facilitator tip

- The Forest of Contributions can remain on display throughout the project as a visual reminder of group strengths, support, and interdependence.
- Encourage participants to revisit it whenever they need inspiration, motivation, or reassurance.

Thank you!

Questions?

Contact us:

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