



STORIES FOR INSIGHT

**THERE IS A HIDDEN
STORY BEHIND
EVERY HUMAN**

Dear Friends,

you an e-book with stories of 10 young people from six different countries in your hands. This handbook was written by attendants of Youth Exchange, who dedicated their time during last June, 2018 to explore various topics in the frame of our project Living libraries as a tool to eliminate extremism among youth.

What may catch your attention about these stories?

All of them came to be during workshop called There is story behind every human, when our attendants tried to identify what obstacles they have overcome in their life or are still battling with and how that impacts their life. It was not an easy process. We helped ourselves with abstract pictures, background music and coaching questions. Each of our participants could decide if they want to share their stories and which topic they make their own.

Bullying, searching for home and safety, identifying with the roles in the society, questions of identity or accepting of one's sexual orientation - these are the topics which were identified during the workshop by the attendants and they have found the courage to write about them.

The result of this effort are stories, which you can read on the following pages. Many of them will touch you deeply and will push you to think, because some of these young people never had the opportunity and option to share their deep story with someone else.

Whatever country we come from - whether its Slovakia, Spain, Latvia, Slovenia or Czech republic, many of us hold similar struggles. The only difference is, however, what point of view we take and how can these obstacles actually become a strength in our lives.

We wish you a pleasant reading,

EDUMA

All stories of the participants were authorized.

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**During my childhood
I felt safe only when
I was alone**

ROBERT

I like numbers. They are with me all my life. I always liked counting when I was alone. The truth is that I was very often alone. Numbers gave me a sense of security when my schoolmates were bullying me at school. Through them I started to devote informatics and programming and they have become the part of my everyday life.

Its total opposite compare to when I was in the classroom with my classmates and teachers. I felt I did not look good as a child. I was overweight and small and I felt it is the reason to why there was no protection from teachers when I was bullied by my classmates.

Home was not a safe place

I did not feel safe in my family environment. I was the youngest, so my siblings did not really like me and my father had drinking problems. I never really talked to him because he was in work or he was drunk home.

Among my pulley I was bullied physically and mentally. I felt I deserve it, because of my looks and how I live, so I didn't really talk about it. From this time, I felt very insecure in my life. This has lead to issues I have with people. I feel extremely insecure and paranoid if I spend more than week with them.

This was the biggest problem during my high school years. I spent six years on high school instead of four. At the end of the school year I felt so insecure that I just had to move to another school or I felt I would just go crazy or run away.

I did not want to live in our city

I did not like my hometown and I could imagine to live anywhere just not in there. When I graduated from high school I was travelling around my country with my friend who was street musician and had similar issues as me. Looking to my past and present I was always searching for something. And now I am asking myself if searching is right way to find.

I am a gay and I am proud of my scars

BRAÑO

Life is a journey of finding yourself as well as losing yourself. Getting to know who you truly are is a bold task not meant for everyone. However it is all about a choice. That's the beauty of life - having a choice.

When I was four years old my father thought I was not manly enough. My grandmother had newborn puppies which I adored and cuddled with everyday. One day my father took me to the river with a prepared sack. He put the puppies into the sack and forced me to throw them into the water, because that is what men do. I still cry when I think about it. I felt like a part of me died along with the puppies that day. Sadly, after that event, I have never seen my puppies nor the part of me I lost.

I knew how my mum suffered

When I was six years old, I had a perfect new father. For the first time in my life I saw my mother happy, truly happy, not just putting a fake smile and make-up to cover the bruises. It was a different mother, not the mother that was trying not to scream too loud when my father was dragging her by the hair. I have never told my mother, but I heard her. I can recall every scream, every sound of the violence. In my mind, I was with her. Suffering as she was suffering.

I am a gay

When I was nine I would think about my future. Even though I was just nine I was very realistic and knew that my life was going to be different. „I am gay. I was gay. I will be gay.“ I kept repeating myself.

When I was ten years old I became suicidal. Back then I had no idea what was happening to me. I just knew that I no longer wanted to be here. Nobody had noticed for two years. It would never cross your mind that a ten year old child would want to end its life. I felt worthless. I hated myself so much that it scares me even today.

I accepted myself

The following years were full of ups and downs. The sad thing is, that all the negativity had become a part of me. I got used to it and did not give it much thought anymore. All this happened five or six years ago and I have made an enormous progress. I have acquired self-acceptance, love and pride of who I am.

Even though, today I'm writing this as a completely different person, trauma like this never really disappears. It exists somewhere I am in the back of my mind. I think it will always be there to remind who I was.

At the end of the day I am proud of my scars. For a very long time I have been hiding them as if they were shaming me. Today I am ready to share them with the world. Now I know that I am not alone and I never was. Stories are everywhere around us. We just need to be willing to listen.

If there is anything I want you to take from my story it is: Endure. Wait. It will get better. Perhaps it will not be tomorrow or next month, but it will. The change will come.

I endured. I hope you will too.

What it is really like to be a mother with passion for great things

LINDA

Do what I have to do. Whether it is the work I am paid for or all homework. None of them fills my heart. While sharing stories with others, I realized that the main reason why they have complexes or why they struggle with life – it is a family. The fear of raising my children who would struggle with the life because of family is freaking me out.

As far as I can remember, I can only say that I had a happy childhood despite family issues such as divorce of parents. A beautiful childhood; as happy as a kid with a vivid imagination can have.

I spent summers with my grandfather Julius, who was a strong man with a great will; and he taught me a lot about working, doing things with passion, finishing what I am currently doing. The way he lived he showed to stand up for what you believe in.

When the girl becomes a mother

Being a mother means a whole lot – receiving unconditional love, smiles, laughter, hugs and of course always a worried mind and alert for children.

At moments, when I let myself fly and burn in flames, I feel my true self. However, despite the delightful feeling I get, I feel bitter guilt inside, because of I am not spending time with my children. A terrible feeling of not being good enough and simply not enough for them.

Doing things voluntarily, out of my own will makes my life reasonable and fulfilled.

What does it mean to be a mother?

Having life divided to two fractions – desires and duties. These are contrasting, and that makes my fears and guilt even bigger.

Today I am a mother to three brilliant kids to whom I wish all the best I can ever give – love, support, understanding and care.

When I was a kid, our whole family lived in the house – parents, sister, and my grandmother Arija, with who I spent most of my free time. We sang songs, did crosswords, read stories and played games.

When I feel pressure

I am giving the best I can and most I can, but in a way it feels like it is still not enough.

For me motherhood is a complicated process in which time after time I get lost, because in the daily life I have to put aside my passions in order to do my duties as mother and wife – clean, work, cook, dress. please.... Expectations from society...

We Latvians are very superstitious and we have many ways to make a wish – wishing upon a falling star, finding and eating lilac with more than four leaves, crossing a bridge for the first time... At most of these I wish an excellent health for my kids... nothing more.

But then there are selfish moments when I wish something for myself. These times make me feel guilty for not wishing the best for kids for who I am responsible.

Responsible to ensure they grow up happy, fulfilled, and self-sufficient.

Things that satisfy me – projects, traveling, camps, work with young people, organising events and being among people who are open-minded and willing to do big things, changing the world.

About maternal love

On one hand I understand that I can only give love when I love myself and am in harmony with myself, but on the other hand....

When we look at definition of mother: Mother – a woman in relation to her child or children /Oxford Living Dictionary/

The feeling of responsibility of young lives and wanting, craving to feed my soul is tearing me apart.

About my mother

My mother is a wonderful woman. My dad is a gifted man. They both lived together for twenty-five years, including fifteen years of my life. Their example of living together has showed me that not always it works out, but as well that you have to work hard for your relationships. My mother taught me that being a mother is not all you can do with your life and that you sometimes have to be brave to pursue your dreams. From my father I have learnt that a man at home who can fix things is worth more than a man who has money but no sign of practicability.

Doing things that matter; because I feel useful, and as salary receiving the purest gift of all – seeing happiness, sparkle in the eyes, getting a feeling of well-done job. These are the things that I would stand up for, even in the middle of night.

It also means countless compromises with yourself as a woman, a person that you want to be.

If I allow the fear to swallow me, I will regret the things my whole life

ADRIAN

It is funny how some people are obsessed to follow the rules of society taking in count the chronological clock, overlooking the importance of the biological clock.

Let us say chronological clock is Khronos, the personification of „quantitative time“ and biological is Kairós, the personification of „qualitative time“.

I have been through experiences in life that have helped me to become who I am today, from helping my neighbor to carry the shopping basket to the 4th floor when I was just ten years old, to graduate from University even though I was not the best student along my childhood.

It is funny because sometimes I find it easier to help or make other people's life better than helping myself with my own stuff, but I realized that the moral is about the constant effort to help, doesn't matter who, but that effort is making me grow up and increase my self-confidence.

Each of these experiences have been so important to me because they have and will help me to create a future opportunity and I have to appreciate all of them, from the smallest to the biggest. I decided that the experiences are going to be stones, stones that I am going to use to create a door. The door that I have to jump through, blindfolded, seeking for opportunities.

I am afraid of what I do not know

I am not afraid to say that I am scared, because I do not know what it is going to be at the other side of the door even though when my door is going to be perfectly built. I do not know if I am going to find failure, success, fear, courage, insecurity or confidence. But I realized that, that is what life is about. About stepping forward without being completely sure about what is going to appear or what you are going to face, because fear it is not a tragedy, it is a fact and I have to learn how to deal with it.

I want to create my life

Most of the people may imagine that if I jump through a door, the first thing that I am going to do is fall down and smash my face with the first thing that may appear in my journey. But maybe I have to leave opinion of others and I have to think bigger, or maybe not bigger but differently or maybe not even differently but in a more creative way, because it is on my imagination: the opportunity of creating new opportunities. Using my imagination, I realized that what if I jump through the stone door and I appear in the outer space where there is 0 gravity and instead of falling down I would just move straight on, or what if I just appear sunken in the ocean and the only thing that I can do is going up.

The thing is, that the change is in my mind and I do not have to be afraid to take risks or decisions, because if I jump and I fail, I can always come back to find the stones left, add them to the stone door and jump again, because it is Kairós and not Khronos what I have to keep in my mind, but If I let the fear take over me and I decide not to jump, I am going to regret it for the rest of my life.

When I was in Portugal for one year, I had one of the biggest revelations of my life

ELINA

When I was in Portugal for a year, I experienced one of my greatest AHA moments in my life. I met many people and I made lot of friendships. I even felt in love twice, but I have realized that love means something much more for me.

Friendship is a beautiful thing, but sometimes it does not really exist. Out of twenty people who I considered my friends, I actually have three or four true friendships that lasted until now. I will tell you about two of them.

The first love

I fell in love. Like real love. I felt I needed him. It was more than comforting to be in his presence. It was nice, there was attraction, but I could never imagine anything intimate. Later I discovered he was gay. I felt strange. Good strange. I felt pleased because I knew we wouldn't hurt each other in a romantic way which usually hurts the most. But if we did manage to hurt each other somehow, we would be able to work through it.

For some time we lived in one room. We would exchange thoughts, ideas, laughs. When I would be sad, I would just go to his bed, crawl up by his side, he would hug me. He would comfort me until I fell asleep. It was something like a relationship, just without sexual intimacy. But we did become somehow intimate – the bond and honesty we shared and still share, it is magic.

The second love

Later I had another such a deep connection. One day I saw a cute guy standing outside the building I was in. I was inside with my friends. The guy turned so that I could see his face clearly. I gasped and cried out: „Give me back my eyes! He stole my eyes!“. The very moment I knew there will be a story including me and this guy.

This was happening during a youth exchange. He was a participant. I was a volunteer in the Youth Centre that was organising the YE. But this was how I knew we will have a chance to meet. I kind of started liking him instantly the moment I saw him. He was very nice looking, handsome and inviting kind of person. Hard to describe. Since he was quite handsome and his voice was very pleasant, even more like tempting, I could even imagine something intimate. Not like going all in, but more than holding hands for sure.

Anyway, it felt really wrong to have thoughts like that about him. I could not understand why, because usually I have had some thoughts and fantasies about guys I like, and it was okay to have them. Just human. Mostly every human being had them. But this time it was different.

When we met finally and got to know each other a bit, we instantly clicked. But then I was also told by some friends that he might be gay. Or bisexual. I kind of ignored that because of the strange mix of feelings that were inside me. In some little time it was clear that I was in love. I was confused if I loved him as a passionate lover or a friend. It felt somewhere in the middle, with hints of both. Anyhow, I was sure it was love. I needed him like water. And he needed me too.

About my gay friendships

We almost never spoke about relationships in the first few weeks. We spoke only about each other and the connection that we shared. Sometimes, I even felt nervous before meeting him and a bit jealous when other people were speaking with him too long in my presence. I thought it is not fair to steal his time from me.

I deserved it more. I was super confused. After a longer period of knowing him I understood that even though he is handsome man, I could never have anything with him more than holding hands. At least I got to the conclusion that it is not lover kind of love. It is something else. I didn't feel any desire related to his looks and tempting voice. They just felt very normal and needed in my life. I still felt jealous when others were taking too much of his time. One day I went up to him and said that we need to talk. I told him how I felt, how confused I have been and that i really love him. Best decision ever. He loved me too and we became a lot more stronger together. And, yes, he was gay. And, of course, I knew it somewhere inside me. My mind was just too blind to understand that I could fall for a man whom I will never share sexual intimacy. I didn't know it was possible or that I am capable of that.

I felt so good, so free and happy after speaking with him.

How I learned to love

That is how I learnt to fall in love with a human being, in love that feels like a part of me. I learnt to pass the orientation and gender. Nothing changed how I felt. Not knowing that both of these men were gay before falling for them was the most beautiful gift I could have received. It was a lesson to become more than friends – to become soul mates.

Some people consider love to be possibly shared only between family or the other halves. They consider that friendship is just friendship, not really love, but just quite strong feelings. It was intense, it still is. So intense. Soul to soul, believe it or not.

Friendship that will last

The first friend that I fell for, we still share the love, we speak often enough, we make sure we are doing good. We meet up, I go to his country few times per year.

With the other friend it was more intense there, but the distance has done some changes. We don't find too much time to speak any more and his country is further away from mine, so it makes it more difficult to travel there. But still, I know how we feel and when we will meet, the butterflies in the stomach will still be there.

I love both of them, each of them a little bit differently, but very deeply and intensely.
That is my story.

About the life in two worlds and about the crisis of identity

DOMINIKA

Have you ever felt like you don't know where you belong? Like there are two worlds and you're stuck between them trying to figure out who you are. You identify with both of them and neither of them at the same time.

Well, I have.

For past five years, it felt like I was living two lives. Actually, I would not call it a life.

That was not a life. I think that you are truly living if you are living to the fullest, if every moment is filled with emotions, positive or negative ones and you are living your way, not according to the expectations of the others. It was like as if I was an actress and I had two plays that I have been constantly switching between.

My Roma part

One role was at home. I will not talk about issues at home, that is a completely different story. What I mean is my friends and people who surrounded me in the village I was living in.

Those Roma people. They were not stupid or behind the times. They just did not understand struggles I had to tackle with in high school, because they dropped out of theirs. They did not completely understand me stressing out over finals, because they never did theirs. And they definitely didn't understand my confusion about university or even my motivation to go to the one. We had different view on life. They did not understand my open-minded opinions about the world. We could not really talk about politics, situation in Slovakia or about more complex topics. I, on the other hand, did not really understand their problems. Those adult problems.

Problems, always some problems

I did not understand how hard it is to grow up fast and give up your carefree childhood, because you need to take care of a child. I did not understand how hard it is to wake up everyday, go to the full-time job you hate, just because you need even that little money you earn there. I did not understand how hard it is to take care of the entire household on your own.

I am definitely not trying to throw shade on them and I am not saying that every Roma person I met is like that and I am not generalizing, do not get me wrong. I am talking about close circle of around five people. And they had another qualities about them. They could emotionally support me when I needed it. They were thinking with their heart and always helped me no matter what. They could give me the best pep talk when I was down. And when I felt self-conscious, they knew how to ego-boost me.

Life between non-Roma people

I played my second role at school. I was the only Roma in our high school. I was raised among non-Roma kids. Until I was nine I did not even know I was Roma, which is kind of stupid when I think about it now, I knew nothing about Roma culture until I was twelve and I have not had real Roma friends until that age either.

That is why I did not feel uncomfortable at the school. I was good friends with two of my classmates. Because of my timid personality and inhibitions, I did not really talk with the others. And if I did, it was sort of shallow and I would not call it a friendship. With those two friends I had, I did not feel like I can talk about feelings too openly. When I am thinking about it, I do not think ever mentioned something connected with Roma in their presence. Which is kind of messed up, considering how big of a part of my life it is. Although it does not define me, it is still part of me.

So I could not really talk about everything I was experiencing as a young Roma girl. I could not talk about how upset I was when I saw discrimination of the Roma people. I could not talk about all of the things I was doing with either Roma folk group I was dancing in or project (Young Roma Leaders) I was participating in. I always felt like I had to be careful not to say those Roma slang words.

My silence and me

I was quiet when my classmates or even some teachers said something, usually bad, about Roma community and I actually don't know why I did, or more precisely did not do that.

It was not because I was ashamed of my Roma me. Or maybe I was, I do not know. But what I noticed is that when I talk to the people, I always like to say which high school I was studying in or that I am planning to study law in university or I am trying to use those complicated words, just so they would not judge me because of my skin color and they would not think of those stereotypes that are there about Roma people.

However, my classmates understood and shared my school struggles and it was nice to talk to them about it and sharing our opinions on world issues. But I felt like I could not completely express myself. I could not be who I truly was, even if I did not know that. And I still do not know it.

About the crisis of identity

Maybe I have this identity crisis because of this.

Because of the fact I did not feel like I could be who I am, so I actually lost myself in the process. And maybe I am overthinking, just because I graduated and I have so much free time.

But in my opinion, not knowing who you are, from time to time, is natural. You evolve all the time. It is a long life process. Your opinions and beliefs can change, because you meet new people and visit new places or you just start to think about things you have not yet thought about. And you need to keep up with that.

Well, I have not done that. I was too focused on other things so I was pushing this to the corner. And now it decided to come out and to suddenly hit me. And I need to deal with it. Even though I do not know how, I need to discover who I truly am and what my real dreams are. And maybe I needed this identity crisis.

Maybe I needed to lose myself in order to realize that I am not happy in life and to find out who I really am and move on in life to the next stage. Maybe I will succeed. And maybe not. We will see. I will try to live in this moment and to do things because I want to, not because someone else wants me to do them.

As I became independent

PATRICIA

When I was a child, I was very shy. I was very sensitive and introverted girl. My family used to protect me a lot. I used to tell them all problems and they always found the best solution for me. They gave me advice on how to deal with my life. Today I think that was the main reason why I was afraid when I was younger to deal with my own problems by myself.

I was living like inside a family circle. I used to tell them all my problems and they gave me the solution to my problems. They have always told me the best way to carry on with my life. I consider this family protection was the major reason for why I could not solve my own problems when I was younger.

On the way to yourself

Later I have realized and I saw that I was not happy. I decided to change it. I knew what to do..

First thing was that I started visiting a therapist, because I needed to gain more self-confidence. I was visiting therapist for about a year. I felt much better, better than before. But then, I stopped visiting the therapist and again became sad.

I decided to try out and do different things, to improve my view on myself, to be more satisfied. I started to do some volunteering projects. Also, I travelled abroad. During these trips abroad my confidence started to grow, because I had to solve my problems by myself. In that moment, I became independent of my family. I didn't ask my family what to do with my life. These types of things made me happy and stronger. I am happy for it.

Home is everywhere

CLAUDIA

I have had many homes throughout my short and I guess intense life. I've lived at many places but I think it was not until moving by myself to Scotland that I actually realised about the need to create homes wherever I go.

For me, home is linked to my roots, my identity. The toys I used to play with, the smell of coffee in the morning, all that is familiar. Sometimes we become so identified with who we think we are and where we come from, that we close up to ideas that can only be found in the process of self-discovery and exploring unknown territory. In a way, we decide to live in a very restricted idea of the home.

Have a home inside of you

I think the capacity to create home is connected to questioning your thoughts, not feeling they define you completely. It's important to have roots, but we should also try to find the opportunity of finding roots wherever we go. For me, I found that I had become so merged with what my brain was thinking I could not find my own terms & conditions in how I was telling my story to myself.

Scotland seemed as place where I, after long period of fog and confusion, could see myself in the right place, in the right state of soul, in the present. Scotland is a very cloudy country. And I remember that while walking through the meadows a strong feeling and realisation came right through me.

Clouds are like thoughts

Clouds were like my thoughts; depending on the observer their shape could change. I saw a horse where you saw a dragon. Another thing is that they seem much more solid from our position. If you travelled by a plane you may recall how porous and soft they are. Thoughts are like this for me. If I transcended them, I could see how they dissolve. Just like a cloud cannot be grabbed and stagnant, thoughts should come and go without staying too much time otherwise it's never sunny up there!

Once you see thoughts as clouds, you can start sharing them depending on the moment. And just like home, clouds are everywhere. It all depends on how you transform what you see.

I accepted myself in my loneliness

Edinburgh taught me how to embrace being alone by taking care of my thoughts and body. My thoughts were clouds so I should not obsess too much about information they were telling me about. My body was my temple and I would ground myself massaging my feet, lighting up candles, cooking healthy meals, meditating and stretching.

Once I understood the nature of my perception, I peacefully turned into creating what my home would be like. The best part? It would always be with me.



Wherever I go, I
search for my home

IVANA

„Why do you always need to run away? What are you running from?“ my mom asked me yesterday standing in the kitchen as I shared my new dream with her – to apply for volunteering position in Lebanon. For a second, I froze, scared that she might be right to think I am running away, because I’ve heard this opinion from many people before.

Only few people can understand, and there are only few who can support me even without understanding because they believe in me. It is also quite hard to express that yearning to go. It is said not about the place where you are heading to, but what you wish to find along the way.

On the way home

For me what I wish to find along the way is home. I believe it is in people, places and moments. Home is where I am happy to be myself, where people give me inspiring ideas, respect my decisions and challenge me to grow and follow my dreams. These are moments of sharing, connection and meaningful conversations, learning, peaceful silence and synergy.

„It is this yearning to learn, grow and to be useful for people around me,“ I said and continued to cut apricots. In my head I was wondering why I am happy in Slovakia only for limited amount of time and then I need to go towards new challenges, discovering world and myself. I think I am searching for people who are able to create home for me and for whom I am there home. So far, I met few people like this and even though we live in different countries, but I consider them my home.

Ability to be here for the others

First time I felt like getting closer to home was when I started volunteering with youth from substitute care. I learned about non-formal education, sharing in groups and expressing my feelings. It is funny how people are used to describe how their day was or how they are only with one word good! I started to feel very happy while doing playful funny activities with youngsters like theatre, singing, trying to make a square from rope with whole group blindfolded, passing the burning match as fast as possible or sitting in the circles. Here I learned to think about my feelings, to understand myself and I have learned how to express my thoughts and share it with other people who created safe and supportive space for sharing. This was the greatest gift for me and also start of self-exploring journey.

How we influence our lives

The second most important thing was transformative home feeling, seeing how as a volunteer I am able to support young girl to face her fears and face big difficult challenges in her life. In fact, she managed to achieve it all on her own – from not having to repeat the school year to graduating and getting accepted to university. The only thing I really did was standing next to her, mentoring and encouraging her as a friend. I also have seen how significant role was to be facilitator of the program, who were able to deliver perfect non-formal trainings on mentoring to volunteers and volunteers then were able to do wonderful things with youngsters in helping them grow and discover their potential.

So, I decided it to try to become a trainer who gives tools to young active people to work with youth. I started to attend Erasmus + trainings for trainers – one-week trainings to gain experiences on facilitation and later I tried to put them into practice for 10 months European Voluntary Service in youth organization in little city in Portugal, Vila Nova de Famalicão.

Portugal gave me home

In Portugal I experienced the deepest home feeling so far. I met people from different, backgrounds, cultures with very different personalities, opinions and attitudes in contrast to mine. They were volunteers I have met in Braga for EVS meeting, my colleagues I have lived with and build our own home and friends who introduced me to their families who invited me to their homes and gave me lot of love and hugs. As I realized when I want to learn from other people, I need to look for those who are as different from me as possible and I need to look at them with open heart and if I listen to them actively there are many life changing things to learn and experience together. Sometimes we even develop exciting friendship that lasts through years and distances.

Words of fear and support

„Did you know there is war in Lebanon? It is different to travel for boys than girls. There are warnings about that country for a reason. You should reconsider.“ These are words of love and worries from my family, which make me feel discouraged and afraid to accept challenges.

„I wish I would be with you and we could talk about everything. Follow your heart, Lebanon is beautiful country. I am sending you huge hug and support. I totally understand. I hope sooner or later you will understand what makes you happy. Always feel free to have doubts and question yourself. Just try to relax and enjoy your days and every moment. With the time everything might get clear to you.“ These are the words of love from my friends. Thanks to their support I grow, and I feel at home wherever I am right now. And I am looking forward to my next home wherever that place is.

I have experienced bullying and humiliation, I am learning to trust people again

DANIEL

Did you ever feel like you can not connect to anyone? Feel like you really want to tell someone something that you are really worried about or you just have a great talk but something in your head saying „they can not relate stops you from doing that? Well, it happened to me and there are a few reasons why.

It all started when I was three years old and I've been woken up by a sound of smashing doors. I went to see what's happened and I what I saw is my Dad completely wasted, with a bottle of vodka in his hand and a blood running down his nose. Then I heard a cry from the kitchen. It was my mom, she was crying her eyes out, she looked completely hopeless and frustrated. I didn't know what's going on, I was a dumb three years old child.

I used to

Later I have already become used to this. My dad would disappear for a few days, then come back, he would gamble all the money he's earned, the same scene would happen and then we would play that nothing has ever happened.

When I later started school, my mom would help me learn. She would beat the knowledge into me. Well, she needed to take off that frustration to something, or someone. She would be so angry at me when I did something as trivial as making a small hole into my favourite jumper's sleeve, she would grab me, wave with me in the air. It felt nice, because the air caressed my cheeks, but then I felt the hard wall.

Quiet boy = Roma

In school, I was really quiet. Sitting back in the corner of the classroom, staring down to the table during the lunch break. Kids around me discussing how great their family vacations are, telling nice memories about building castles from sand at a nice beach. I never felt like joining the conversation. If somebody tried to explain to me how great a vacation with their family was, I would just nod and smile.

Later they would recognize me more as a gypsy and draw a line between them and me. I would be called names, was made fun of, they would steal my lunch or I would just find a wet towel previously soaked in the toilet in my backpack. Why? Because I am gypsy and I don not stink enough.

I realized I have no one to rely on

I remember wanting to buy a candy at a random store on the corner of the street. I was five years old at the time. As a small kid not knowing the rules of the shop line, I just skipped it and went straight for the cashier. The uncle behind me would look at me, then talk to the whole line: „Look at him, he is hungry, give him food!“ I do not understand, I had money and I asked politely.

I just could not bring myself to connect with people around me, they would not understand. My family did not ask me how are things going, everybody minded their own business. Though, all of this was happening I was always curious, adventurous and very eager to try something new or learning something new. When I heard about possibility of having clubs at school, I went to talk to my mom. „Mom, can I go to the piano club, please?“ and she answered: „No, we need to pay for it, you would not go there as I know you..“ and many other excuses.

I did not give up

I wanted to expand my world and my understanding of it.

When my dad took a loan, I convinced him to buy a computer. And this is when I met a non-profit organization after programming for a while, finding a sponsor and starting a World of Warcraft server. Non-profit made me realize many things, open up my eyes to the values that we care about, they gave meaning to my seamlessly valueless life and allowed me to meet people I could finally connect to at least in some way and open up to.

After that I felt like everything is awesome, I can finally open myself to the point when I can talk openly and freely to people and I was very excited to do so.

Before I started my current school I had a unforgettable experience with my classmates at previous school. I met people I really believe, can connect to and I know will never fail me.

I felt guilty

After coming to my new school, again very excited to meet new friends and start a new life in a different city, my mom would call me after two months crying, telling me: „Daniel, listen up. Your dad is missing again for five days already (three days was maximum, five is too much), your uncle stole 2000 euros from your great grandma's savings and managed to damage the window on her house (it was winter) and the bank will confiscate our flat in two months because your dad before has quit the job a year ago, remember? And the mortgage was not being paid since.“

This sounded like a nightmare. Imagining myself, having fun here with you guys, having a roof above my head and always something to eat, only caring about my academics, my family even if not so beloved would face the uncertainty of where to go in two months, they wouldn't have something to eat because my uncle even took the last 50 euros from my mom that were supposed to go for the shopping (it was eight of us in the flat). I felt sorry for my great grandma and angry at my uncle. My dad, I had no idea if he is alive or not. And.. I felt guilty for not being there for my family when they needed it.

I felt like shit. After crying, shouting „why does this need to happen to me?“ I went down to check-in before study hours. I tried really hard to conceal my red eyes, I was wearing a hoodie and pretended everything is ok.

That time, one person noticed and helped me. Thank you, Bella, for I will never forget the warmth of your shoulder you so selflessly offered to me in the hour of need.

And there is another person who has helped me, and that's Pete. Pete, thank you for carrying the burden with me and sorry for all the selfish requests.

If there were not

If it were not all these people, I would not be able to go to school next morning and look into eyes of any of you. Right now I am here. I feel though, I didn not connect to the guys because I was so consumed by my own fears, burdened with the weight I could not possibly carry alone.

It is my only regret, and I don not want that regret to scare me ever again. That is why I use this opportunity to again swear to myself to believe in my friends, share that burden and carry it along with them. I hope, you can do that, too, for believe me or not, it is going to change your life.

I am going to quote a Glenn Beck: „Sometimes our strengths are also our weaknesses. Sometimes to be strong you have to first be weak. You have to share your burdens; you have to lean on the other people while you face your problems and yourself.“

Living Library as a tool to eliminate extremism among youth

What is our role in the society? Do we know our identity sufficiently and how do our stories play role on our surroundings and people, with who we work and meet on every day basis? Where does our responsibility begin and to what extent do we share the responsibility for the world where we live? Who are those, who need our help? Do we know them well? Do we also belong among those, who overcome obstacles in the society?

Non-profit organization Od emócií k poznaniu – EDUMA decided to look at those questions closer together with the international participants during Youth exchange, which has taken the place on June 12 – 19, 2018 in Bratislava. EDUMA leads young people to empathy and emotional intelligence through storytelling and experimental education. It is trying to communicate desires and needs of people, who face discrimination and prejudices for their different ethnicity, religion, handicap or for different obstacles in society. Young people can meet with stories thanks to the videos on our online educational portal www.onlinezivakniznica.sk, but also through written stories, which are part of EDUMA e-books on www.eduma.sk or via direct meeting with Living Books.

Young people from Slovakia, Spain, Latvia, Slovenia and Czech republic attended Youth Exchange to dive together fully into topic of Living books as a tool to eliminate extremism among youth and they exchanged their experience. Youth has learnt who can be a Living Book, in what way they can organize Living library in their town and country and how to share their personal stories with others. They got to know the power of storytelling and its effect on people and also how they can focus the attention on important social topics and reevaluate our stances and opinions, also destroy barriers and the prejudice itself.

Youth exchange took place simultaneously during the biggest Living Library Festival called Listen.Reflect.Change in Bratislava. Our participants could meet tens of Living Books and listen to their stories. They could also try out, how it is to be a Living Book and how to deliver own story to others.

The result of the exchange is our e-book with tens of stories from our youth on different topics and also three videos in which young people talk about their path of overcoming life obstacles to acceptance of themselves in this world.

Useful links

www.eduma.sk

Find more video stories in our Online Living Library, click on www.onlizivakniznica.sk

Find more information on Erasmus+ projects on www.erasmusplus.com and www.iuventa.sk



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