

Project description – Training for trainers and coaches on disarming microaggressions

Need

In our present-day society, discrimination of marginalised groups has partially shifted from being overt to having a more subtle and everyday character. In particular, microaggressions have been receiving more attention by governments, NGOs and businesses. But microaggressions are often hard to tackle, as identifying and assessing them is more difficult than it is for more overt forms of discrimination.

As youth work organisations who are committed to ending discrimination against vulnerable groups, we wish to support young people in disarming the microaggressions they experience in everyday life. But we are struggling to do that in our activities, oftentimes being limited to e.g. defining the concepts or proposing nonviolent communication techniques to our participants to resolve microaggressions. Our struggle involves:

- not always recognizing that a microaggression is being done.
- not always being able to address the inner conflicts and emotional challenges that arise within us when dealing with microaggressions and broader acts of discrimination, including struggling to confront and integrate our own biases and shadow aspects.
- not always being empathetic to the victims of microaggressions and not always having the resilience and courage required to effectively stand against injustice and support people that face discrimination.
- not knowing how to intervene whenever we experience microaggressions, and not knowing which strategies and tactics are effective in disarming microaggressions.
- not having practised (enough) with such strategies and tactics in our own lives and experiences.
- lacking insights in how to discuss and simulate such strategies and tactics as part of our activities for youth, and not having (enough) practical experience in facilitating these discussions and simulations.

In order to be able to support young people in disarming microaggressions, we need to educate and train a pool of youth workers in our organisations to become proficient in recognizing, processing and addressing microaggressions, as well as in passing the associated competences on to the youth they work with.

Objective

To help youth workers:

- learn to better recognize and process microaggressions that they come across in their daily and professional lives and to become more aware of their own mechanisms for coping with microaggressions.
- develop their capability to disarm such microaggressions by applying microintervention strategies¹ in the practical situations they experience.
- learn to set up and implement workshops or similar activities through which they pass on these competences to youth who are targeted by microaggressions or who are / wish to be an ally to such victims. With the idea that by participating in such activities, those youth themselves learn how to (recognize and) disarm microaggressions.

¹ Based on the work of Derald Wing Sue et al

Target group

Youth workers – specifically trainers and coaches – from 6 youth work organisations in 6 different countries, who:

- want to support targets of microaggressions and their allies in disarming microaggressions
- are familiar with what microaggressions are, but don't know how to counter them and don't have the confidence or assertiveness to do so.
- possess a variety of backgrounds, perspectives on (anti-)discrimination, and competences that they bring to the project.
- are interested in learning how to facilitate and create a positive, safer learning environment conducive to the deep work required for this type of practice.
- are willing and ready to contribute to the learning process by sharing knowledge and experience.

Methodology

The main activity is a 6-day in residence training course for 24 participants that takes place in the Spring of 2025 in Ommen, the Netherlands. The approach of the training course rests on the following pillars:

- Building a strong connection and sense of community among participants through getting to know each other games, team building activities, trust building activities and exchanges on personal experiences with microaggressions.
- A holistic approach, integrating social sciences such as psychology, sociology, and anthropology to provide a comprehensive understanding of the social processes involved in microaggressions.
- The training will be group-centred, meaning that participants will be both learners and teachers, co-creating the programme to meet their individual and collective learning needs.
- Experiential learning is at the core of this training, following the ERCA model (Experience, Reflect, Conceptualize, Apply). This approach emphasizes that learning emerges from direct experience, and together, participants and facilitators co-create knowledge rather than relying solely on a one-way transmission of information.
- On the last days of the training, participants (individually) start designing an activity through which they wish to support youth in disarming microaggressions. Doing so helps bridge the void between the training and daily life that picks up after it.
- Our approach will cater to different types of learning—written, kinesthetic, imaginative, intellectual/theoretical, interpersonal, and intrapersonal—ensuring that all participants can engage meaningfully with the content and learn from various perspectives. These will include somatic and embodied components (e.g. theater exercises and somatic dancing), frequent discussions and exchanges in smaller groups, encouraging learning from and with each other in a process shaped by the facilitators; daily reflections on the development of key competences, helping to make the impact of the experiences on personal growth more clear and explicit.

Learning outcomes

Recognizing microaggressions:

- Differentiating various types of microaggressions, including through examples, and being aware how these types differ in terms of intention and impact.
- Understanding the harmful psychological and emotional impact of microaggressions.
- Developing perspicacity as a capability in relation to microaggressions.
- Deeper understanding of their emotions and reactions upon navigating through challenging situations and growing through them.

Disarming microaggressions:

- Understanding psychological safety and the effects that acts of discrimination have on the nervous system, which enables self-regulation when possible and the effective implementation of microinterventions.
- Knowing which microintervention strategies and tactics can work in which situations, and having a solid understanding of the mechanisms through which they work.
- Scripting and delivering clear and assertive responses to the microaggressions they experience.

Supporting young people:

- Helping youth articulate and process their experiences with microaggressions in safe and supportive environments.
- Coaching youth in applying microintervention strategies in their everyday lives in response to the microaggressions they face and experience.
- The facilitation skills required to provide this support through workshops and other activities: understanding which kind of facilitators they are, how to recognize and navigate power dynamics and social dynamics within groups, and how to create and maintain safety through facilitation interventions.
- In connection with that, the ability to design sessions that meet the desired outcomes they set out to achieve, ensuring that their facilitation aligns with the goals of their activity and the needs of the participants.