



# Let Me In

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## PROJECT SUMMARY



Co-funded by the  
Erasmus+ Programme  
of the European Union

# THE ORGANIZERS

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**The Autokreacja Foundation** aims at fostering the active participation in a civil society through various initiatives in the field of social economy. We contribute to the civilizational, cultural and economic development of Poland. We want to put the spotlight on problems of diverse social groups that are often marginalized, that is why we focus on cooperation with long-term unemployed, youth from underprivileged regions, unemployed women, elderly people, immigrants and refugees. Many of our projects were designed to favour multiculturalism and intercultural exchange by bringing together different lifestyles, points of view and philosophies.

*Our mission is working towards building more inclusive societies where every individual feels empowered to be a change maker*

<https://autokreacja.org>

<https://www.facebook.com/FundacjaAutokreacja>

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# INTRODUCTION

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**Let Me In** was an international project aiming at raising capacities of civil society actors concerning theory and practice of enhancing social inclusion among young people with vulnerabilities across Europe. The main rationale behind developing this project was the realization that the problem of lack of mechanisms for efficient inclusion of youngsters at risk through educational activities is cross-border and affecting the whole European and as such needs to be tackled on an international level.

The main problem we wanted to address was that Europe is getting more and more diverse on a social level and as a result of this phenomena lots of young people are excluded and deprived of access to educational opportunities that are adjusted to their needs and take into consideration their vulnerabilities. In result, those who are excluded in the early age remain excluded in the adulthood and are more prone to various risk, such as addictions, violence, unemployment.

To address this, we gathered youth workers and activists representing eight European NGOs and invited them to take part in an international training course (Warsaw, Poland, October 24 - November 2) during which they had a chance to share experiences and best practices, discuss the main challenges related to work with youngsters and risk of exclusion and develop new solutions.

This publication contains a summary of our participants' insights, ideas, and reflections that we hope will serve as an inspiration for other youth workers who would like to develop educational projects that support young people at risk of exclusion throughout Europe.

# WORKING WITH YOUTH AT RISK IN PRACTICE

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During the training course we spent our time discussing many issues connected to working with youth at risk of exclusion due to different factors, such as low level of income, limited access to career and educational opportunities, being unemployed, living in geographically disadvantaged communities, having migration/minority background and other. While sharing our experiences and good practices, discussing challenges we are facing at work and brainstorming on possible solutions, we came to a conclusion that it is really necessary for us as NGO sector representatives to start offering projects and activities that are based on digital means of expression. This is because we believe that the key to a real empowerment is to give our beneficiaries freedom to talk about what is important to them and share their perspectives with the outside world. Photography and film making can be successfully used while working with disadvantaged young people even if they do not possess any specific digital skills. Taking part in the creative process and developing tangible, shareable results help beneficiaries at risk to make their voice heard, which inspires them to bring a change both in their personal lives and in the wider communities they live in.

This summary contains examples of the exercises we as youth workers recommend for using with youngsters, supporting them in sharing their personal life stories and instigating a broader discussion about their needs and opportunities.

# YOUTH WORKERS FOR INCLUSION: MAIN FINDINGS

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**Exclusion is not something that only affects people with fewer opportunities** - young people who seem privileged also need attention and support in solving their challenges.

**Research is the key** - even the best idea will not be successful if it is not really based on actual needs of the participants.

**Acting locally** and closely interacting with your participants can bring more effects and impact than having a large scale project.

**Empowerment is about giving the voice to the unheard** - digital tools can and should be used for providing a platform for those whose stories are not presented in the mainstream media.

**Beneficiaries should be supported but not given ready solutions** - young people are the experts in their own lives who know best what is good for them but sometimes they just need someone to guide them.



# DIGITAL EMPOWERMENT

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Everyone has a story to tell and the voice of young people matters - as youth workers we should provide them with technologies and skills to make them seen and heard.





# PARTICIPATORY MEDIA

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WHY TO USE DIGITAL TOOLS WHILE WORKING WITH YOUTH?

**They are accessible.** Participants do not have to have professional equipment - a simple smartphone is enough for taking pictures and editing short videos.

**They are easy to use.** Young people do not have to have any specific skills or previous training.

**They are creative.** Taking pictures and editing films is both learning and fun.

**They produce results.** In the end of the workshop participants have tangible products that they can share with others.

**They encourage reflection.** Showing life stories visually help participants become more aware of their own emotions.

**They create bonds.** Hearing other people's stories help develop empathy and more understanding towards people with different backgrounds.



# PARTICIPATORY PHOTOGRAPHY

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**Participatory Photography** is a visual method coming from the understanding that people are experts in their own lives. It encourages self-expression through photography and enables those who are traditionally the subjects of photography to become its creators.

Participatory photography projects focus on a specific issue and aim to teach the participants ways in which photography can empower them to inform others and help them to be more involved in their communities. In result participants are enabled to documents their own lives from inside and represent themselves to the outside world.

Photography is a very easy way of expression. It allows others to experience participants' life, emotions and feelings through the photos they create. It is a direct expression of reality that is believable and reflects the life of the members of the community. It is a method that is accessible to all, regardless of their age, culture and previous knowledge. Participatory photography projects do not require any expensive equipment or software, therefore they are affordable and accessible even for people from economically disadvantaged background. The power of the method lays in the fact that it brings up the voice of people who are otherwise unheard.



# PHOTO EXERCISES

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While using photography in your work with youngsters you can choose from a variety of exercises that are combining being creative with an in-depth reflection. The main point is to give your participants tasks that will help them discover and express their emotions, values, dreams or needs in a visual way. Doing this will help them become more self-aware, which later on increase their self-confidence and inspire them to be more involved in their local communities and beyond.

Photographs produced during the workshops can be also used as a basis for a need assessment and a broader discussion about what kind of change young people would like to see around them or in what ways they would like to get engaged in social, cultural, and political life, thus becoming more included in the society. Good practice here is to gather all the photographs and make a community exhibition, inviting inhabitants but also stakeholder, such as teachers, government/municipality representatives or NGO activists, providing them with a space to not only see the art work but also to get to know the youngsters and jointly come up with ideas for community development projects.

In the following pages of this summary you can find examples of the results produced during our training course. The pictures (values/feelings photographed, portraits and self-portraits) were taken by youth workers who were learning the method.



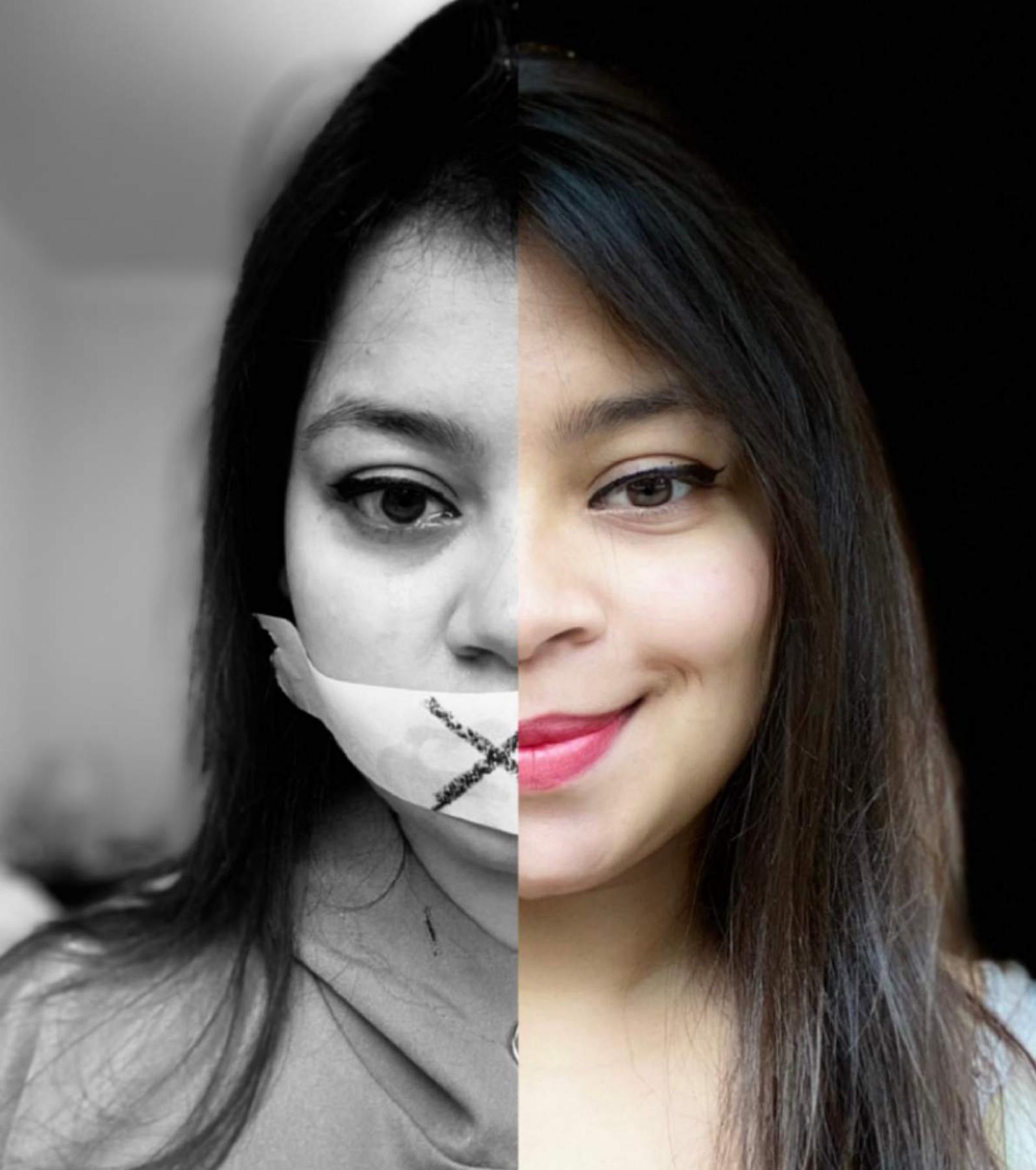
*"Being connected to people makes me feel alive. I think human connection is the only important thing that keeps us in this world. Be kind to eachother."*



*"The most important thing in your life is to maintain an equilibrium, and find your path."*



*"Every day is a day You've never seen before."*



*"There will be obstacles. There will be doubters. There will be mistakes. But with hard work there are no limits."*



*"Life consists of many things: travels, freedom to choose, hobbies, different experiences. How you see everything, it's your mindset and attitude to life not the view in broad picture"*



*"She can kill with her smile, she can wound with her eyes."*



*"Not all who wander get lost"*



*"I sleep on a pumpkin and i dream about opening other pumpkins with the sweetness, kindness and warmth of my pumpkin. (metaphor of the intelligence that open other minds)"*



*"What's the definition of authenticity? (...) I think I may have it— as I have found truth, love and respect wrapped around my fingers."*



*"You define who you are. You can choose to be the red tree. Other people are other people. Only you can be you."*



*"Home is Me!"*



*"Being connected to people makes me feel alive. I think human connection is the only important thing that keeps us in this world. Be kind to each other."*



*"There is a mysterious number that repeats all over the things in universe, from the patron of the petal's flowers and human bodies to ancient pyramids. In maths it is known as an imperfect digit because his decimals go long until the infinity, but it is also perfect, and used to find harmony in so many creations. That number is the golden ratio, represented with the Phi leter from the greek alphabet, the one i got tattooed in the middle of my chest."*



*"It's the little things that count"*



*"People assure that "time is the longest distance between two places," (T. Williams)— and still, I found a way to make it fit inside my pocket!"*



*"his car may not belong here, but it sits comfortably in the middle of forest... no other place in mind to go next"*



*"I restore myself when I'm alone."*



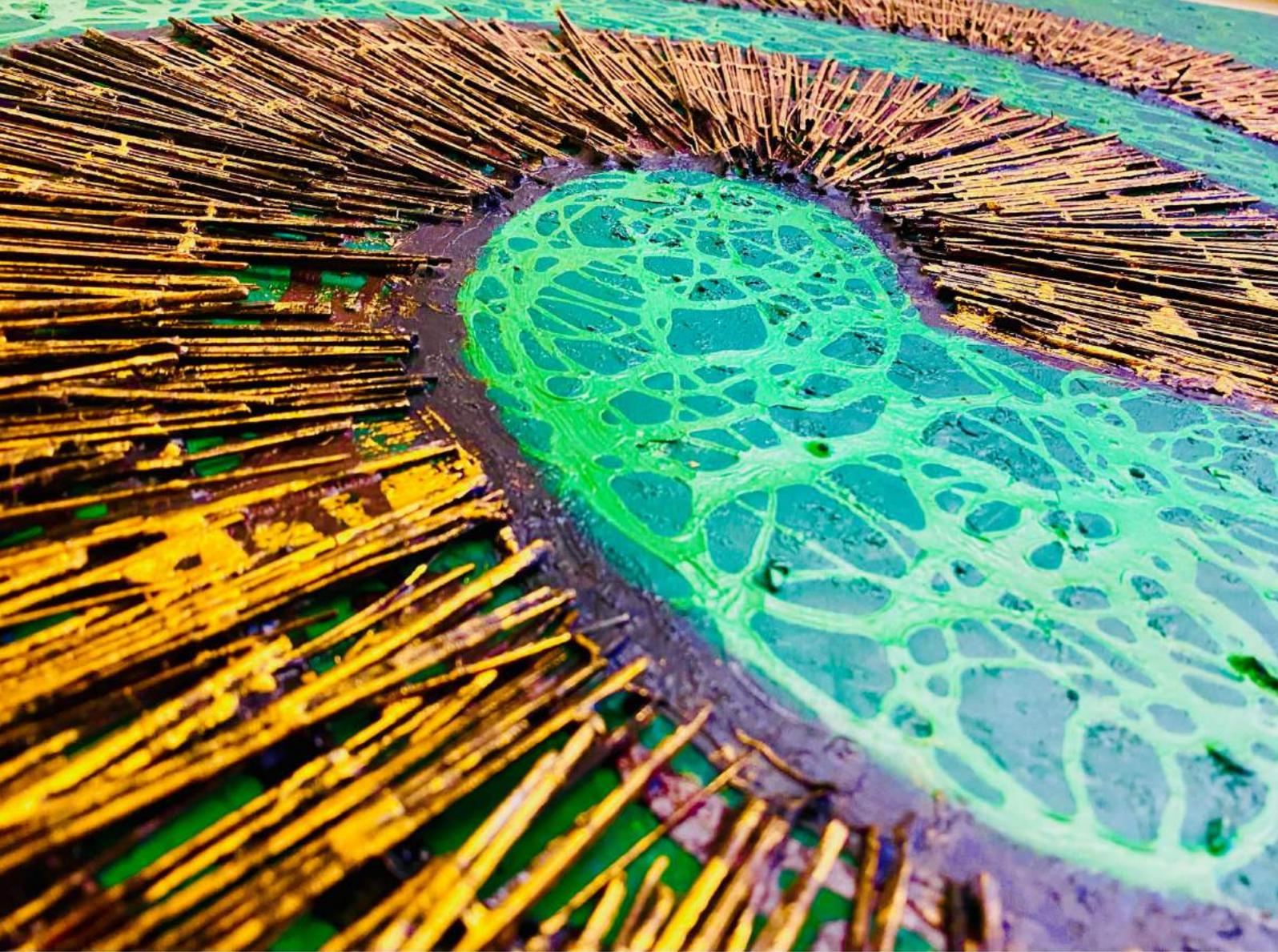
*"Real freedom lies in wildness, NOT IN CIVILIZATION."*



*"Strength is the key to a successful and happy life  
Stay strong and stay happy"*



*"When you're feelin' sad and low We will take you where you gotta go Smilin', dancin', everything is free All you need is positivity"*



*"Best way to Achieve something is to keep yourself motivated of not losing the hope, you will achieve it if don't lose it!"*



*"It's okay to be split in half. To not be extremely happy. To not be sad. It's okay to just wait for what's to come."*



*"There'll be happiness after you. But there was happiness because of you too Both of these things can be true There is happiness In our history"*



*"Water your mind to grow your soul."*



*"Nature survives united, and people as well."*



*"You can't live a positive life with a negative mind"*



*"There are several values that can define a human being, an important one being respect. Many forms are described by the word which can switch a conversation or shift interactions. A simple action such as shaking hands can reveal intentions."*



*"Simple things can be shown in a complicated manner, but you can express so many things with minimal visualization. Calmness can lead off to other ample traits."*



*"Curiosity - it keeps us dancing, exploring, experimenting"*



*"There is a calmness to a life lived in gratitude, a quiet joy."*



*"The outer world is the mirror of the inner universe!"*



*"Create your own peace and live in it."*



*"You are what you feel, you feel what you listen and experience.  
Music has the power to guide you in life and it starts from  
nature".*



*"Nature is always teaching  
everything starts from the bottom  
squirrels climb the trees  
since the floor  
and the seed  
is willing to reach  
the sky since  
it was  
under earth .*

What are you feeling right now?



-> Door after door ->



*The way we see things when we look them from a certain distance allows us to appreciate their true value. Never limit yourself to just one point of view.*

# FINAL WORDS

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Non-formal educational methods based on artistic means of expression can be successfully used in a variety of contexts. By inviting participants to be actively involved in the process of creation, those activities give them a chance to look at both their own personal challenges and the problems of the wider communities they live in in a new perspective. Projects based on digital means of expression also enable participants to reflect in a more structured way, revealing issues that remain otherwise hidden. The results of such a process can be used for shedding light on important social problems, such as discrimination, violence, and marginalization of vulnerable individuals and groups. In result, the process of empowering and giving voice to people at risk can bring a significant change in both their individual lives and the way the society perceive them.

For more information about participatory media methods as well as to see more pictures and films created during this project, please visit our website and social media profiles:

<https://autokreacja.org>

<https://www.facebook.com/FundacjaAutokreacja>

[https://www.instagram.com/autokreacja\\_ngo](https://www.instagram.com/autokreacja_ngo)

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