



**Rural Youth Europe & MIJARC Europe present**

**The Study Session Guidebook**

# 'RESPECT & RESILIENCE'

**Building Bridges for Wellbeing: Our Journey in Rural Europe**

Our group of 36 participants from 17 different countries across Europe is committed to improving wellbeing in rural areas. Through our study session on "Respect and Resilience", we aim to exchange ideas, share experiences, and develop skills among rural young people. In this guidebook, we offer resources about mental health and show why being a member of a rural youth organisation can be great for your wellbeing!





# Contents

1. Introduction
2. Resilience and Sustainability
3. Mental Wellbeing and Mental Health
4. Study Session Tips and Tricks
5. Personal Stories

# Introduction

## Who We Are

We are 36 participants from 17 different organizations across European rural areas. We came together to participate in the 'Respect and Resilience' Study Session hosted by COE Youth in collaboration with RYE and MIJARC Europe to share our knowledge.

We came together to share our experience as rural youth and gain new knowledge on mental health and working sustainably in our organizations.

## What We Do

We talk about respect and resilience in an informal way of education. Our mission is to raise awareness of mental health issues among young people, especially those coming from rural areas.

We aim to get knowledge about mental health resources from specialists and work on the topic. We promote resources to rural youth and increase awareness, while also providing a safe space for everyone to speak up.

## The Mission

To bring young people together and exchange their opinions and experiences. To work out important topics and develop skills through intercultural dialogues with people from different backgrounds.



# Understanding resilience and sustainability in our organisations

Organizational resilience helps to prevent potential crises and adapt to external and internal demands. Sustainability enhances societal, environmental, and economic systems within which it operates. In youth organizations, sustainability is important to guarantee the organization's bright future while meeting current and future member's needs and assuring continuous growth. A resilient organization can have the two critical capabilities and survive crises.

## The RMSOS Model - the five components of mental health sustainability

### R - Rights

Young people have the right to participate and have a say in the issues that affect them.

### M - Means

If young people's basic needs aren't met, it's hard for them to participate; hence, their basic needs need to be met.

### S - Space

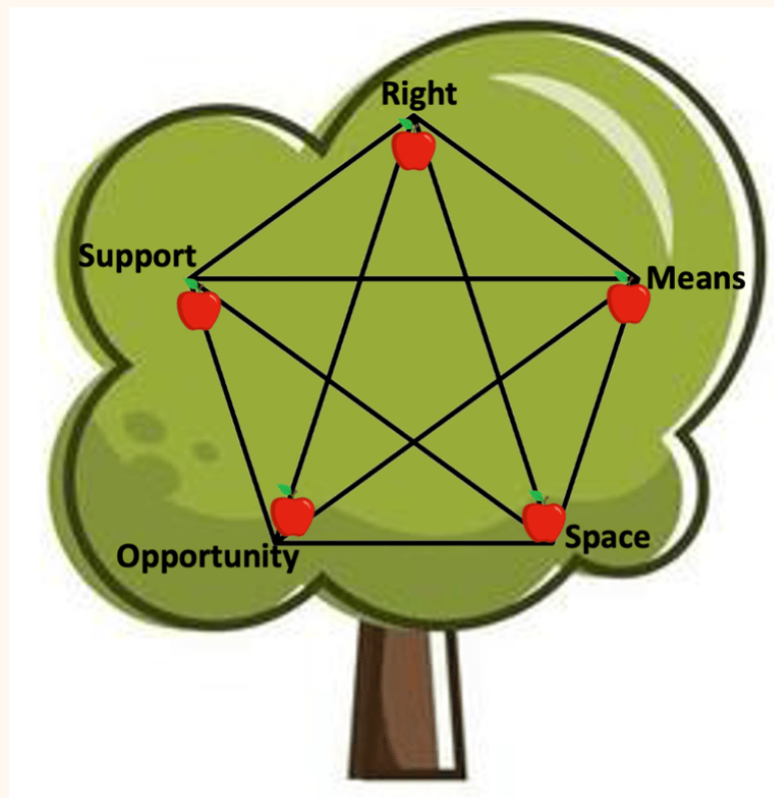
Youth organizations should have a secure and comfortable space to meet and express themselves.

### O - Opportunity

The opportunity to develop leadership skills and acquire training is essential for the youth organization's growth and development.

### S - Support

Young people have lots of talent and the potential to participate, but without the necessary support, their involvement might not be efficient as it could be.



# Challenges and Solutions to Resilience and Sustainability

## What if you can't find (new) volunteers?

- Have clear communication channels on websites and social media.
- Organize events
- Post advertisements
- Visit schools and talk to people
- Host open board meetings and bring your friend activities
- Make sure new volunteers understand the organization's values and expectations, have fun team-building and games

## What if you don't have support from the government?

If there's no government support, advocate for solutions through awareness-raising to the youth organization's issue and educating young people on how to interact positively with authorities and institutions for change.

## What if you don't have enough funding?

Raise financial awareness through advocacy in the public sphere through media and press. Obtain additional funding by acquiring information on potential grants and fundraising campaigns.

## How to activate the community?

Organize community activities, team buildings for leaders and activities, and spread awareness about youth organizations and their purposes. Utilizing social media and events promotion can increase membership.



## Not enough information about opportunities?

Not everyone has easy access to information, especially if you don't know what you're looking for. Here are some solutions:

- Social media
- Website
- Newspapers
- Word of mouth
- Community notice
- Co-operate with schools and universities
- Educational projects
- Networking (local organizations, local charity, local sports clubs)
- TV/radio interviews
- Influencers
- Information folder/leaflets (publish articles on achievements / what the activity is doing)
- Open information night/day

# Mental Wellbeing

Mental wellbeing enhances the ability to manage normal life stresses, realize abilities, and learn productively while contributing positively to the community. To maintain mental well-being, it is important to prioritize self-care by building resilience, setting boundaries, and taking regular exercise, nutrition, and digital detox. Creative outlets, group activities, and sports are also beneficial.

## Benefits of Sports on Teen Mental Health

Engagement in sports and physical activities can improve mental health by improving mood, lowering stress and anxiety levels, and reducing suicidal tendencies. Physical activity positively impacts levels of serotonin, the body's natural happy chemical while reducing cortisol levels, the stress hormone. Moreover, quality sleep is essential to mental well-being, which improves when teens are physically active.

## Meditation and its benefits

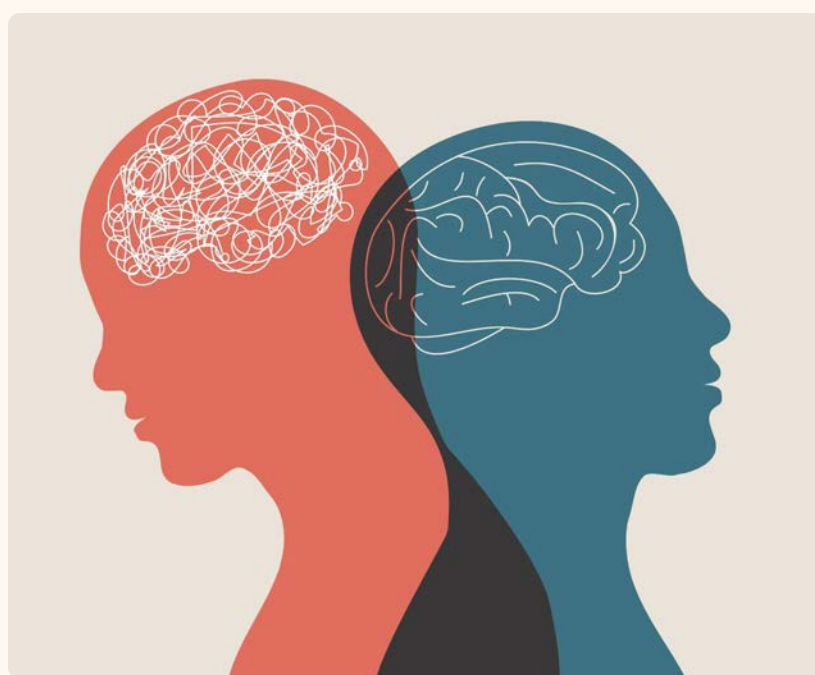
Meditation brings calm, peace, and balance that benefit both emotional well-being and overall health. When practiced regularly, meditation helps to stay centered, keep inner peace, and assist with mindfulness and awareness.

## The Benefits of Resilient Organizations

Resilient organizations with the ability to survive crises not only weather difficult situations but also turn them into opportunities for growth. A resilient organization has a positive workforce with team-building, problem-solving, and decision-making abilities.

## The Importance of Advocating for Mental Health

Advocating for mental health normalizes the conversation about mental health struggles and reduces stigma. It includes supporting initiatives that promote and educate about mental health and increasing support and understanding networks.



## Mental Health and Social Media

Research indicates that spending less time on social media is essential for improving adolescent well-being. Teens who allocate more time to physical activities and less time to social media are more mentally resilient and less prone to mood disorders than those who don't. It is essential for individuals to set digital limits and boundaries and not allow social media to affect their mental health negatively.

## Mental Health and Sleep

Sleep is essential to maintaining good mental health. It ensures proper brain function, emotional regulation, and relaxation. When there's sufficient sleep, mental health improves, and an individual is more resilient to stress, anxiety, and depression. To maintain proper sleep, it's important to incorporate healthy sleep habits and limit stimuli from electronics before sleeping.



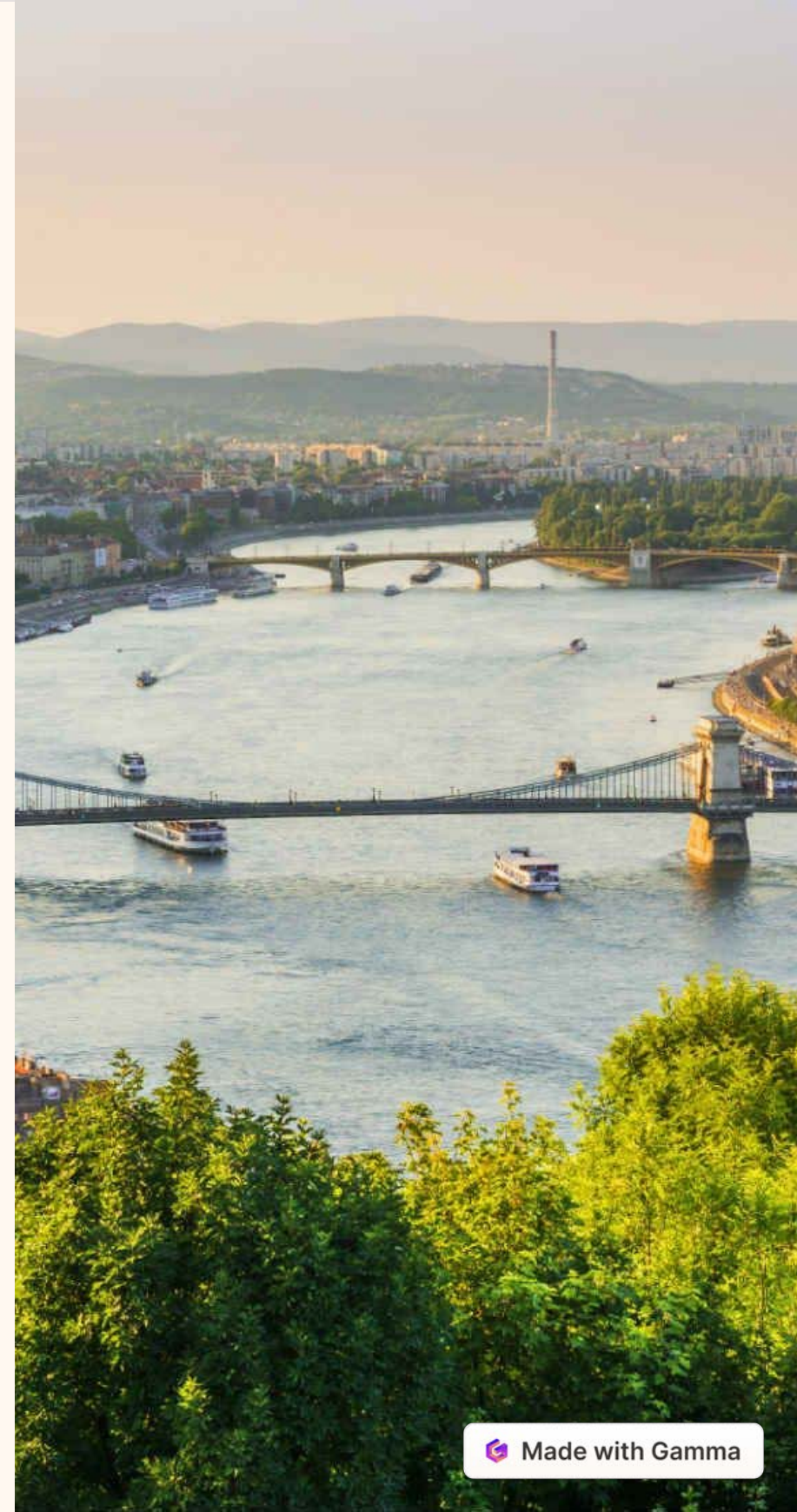
# The Stigma of Mental Health and the Mind-Body Connection

Stigma around mental health can prevent people from seeking help and receiving proper care, leading to negative impacts on mental and physical health. The mind-body connection is the link between our thoughts, attitudes, behaviors, and physical health. By addressing mental health stigma and promoting the importance of the mind-body connection, we can work towards better overall health and wellbeing.

# Recognising the Warning Signs of Mental Health Distress

It's important to be aware of the signs of mental health distress in ourselves and others. These can include feeling sad, withdrawn, or unmotivated for an extended period of time, or engaging in risky behaviors. Other warning signs may include severe mood swings, excessive use of drugs or alcohol, and intense worries or fears impacting daily activities. By recognizing these signs and seeking help when needed, we can work towards better mental health and wellbeing.

- Feeling very sad, withdrawn or unmotivated (for more than two weeks)
- Planning to or trying to harm or kill oneself
- Out-of-control or risk-taking behaviors
- Overwhelming fear with a racing heart or fast breathing
- Sudden weight gain/loss or loss of appetite
- Severe mood swings
- Excessive use of drugs or alcohol
- Drastic changes in behavior, hygiene or sleeping habits
- Extreme difficulty in concentrating or staying still
- Intense worries or fears impacting daily activities







# How to help someone who is struggling mentally

If you know someone who's struggling mentally, there are ways you can help. First, assess the risk of suicide or harm. Listen nonjudgmentally, give reassurance and information, and encourage appropriate professional help. Consider also encouraging self-help and other support strategies.

Mental health and mental wellbeing are different, but both are important. Mental health is a resource that helps us to live in the present context and face different life situations, while mental wellbeing enables us to cope with normal life stresses and contribute to the community. Encourage taking care of oneself through building resilience, setting boundaries, paying attention to exercise and nutrition, getting enough sleep, digital detoxing, being creative, doing things together, and engaging in sports.

Research shows that sports and other types of physical activity can be equally effective as medication in improving mental health and happiness levels, while boosting physical health.

# A poem made by one of the participants to remind everyone of their uniqueness:

**You.**

You are one of the most unique things in the world.

You are the person who is never going to be replaced.

You are,

You've always been,

And always will be Rare.

Rare is the word that has a key itself. The meaning that should give a glimpse of me, you, mental unity, but not a sameness.

We are one but we're not the same.

When we are together and especially, when we are alone, only then do we actually become who we truly are.

You and I are the basic of universe.

We are individuals, different from each other and we need to accept it as a gift. Rarity.

We hope that through our life line we will show, tell and explain everyone around us how important role of mental health is in the process of transforming a human being into person and existence into the actual life.

The way to solve all the problems is through self acceptance and recognition of Rarity.

Be Rare

Unique

Because you are one.

**L`Guja**



# Study Session Activities

## Tips & Tricks

**BE INCLUSIVE**

**Group rules**

1. Have respect for others and treat everyone equally, allowing space and time for people to talk
2. Reflect/evaluate at the end of activities and projects on individual and group performance
3. Create an inclusive group

Formal talks with professionals & experts

Role play on real life situations

Project update and meetings

Group talks & moving debates

Mental well being tips & self improvement

Health & wellbeing activities

**Tips for Group Leaders**

1. Ask members what they want to do, inclusion can make them more motivated
2. Clear objectives for the activity you are doing and make the expectations clear
3. Make a safe space for young people making them comfortable
4. Make sure the activities are fit for the people attending - consider the age, abilities, and interests
5. Effective communication
6. Implement simple rules to make communication easier

## What are energizers and what are their benefits...

Energizers are activities used in workshops and group situations to help participants be more alert and active; they can also be an important way of people getting to know and understand one another. It is good to have them on a weekly or monthly basis in youth organisations. They need to be enjoyable and the participants need to feel safe, so they should always be used in a way that is sensitive to factors such as culture, gender, physical ability and group dynamics. They can be particularly useful at the start of the day, when people are still getting to know one another, and after lunch, when sleepiness can set in.

**BENEFITS**

- Getting to know each other
- Building up energy
- Fun
- Motivation
- Focus
- Teamwork

## Examples of energizers

**Passing game**

You will need two things of the same size (pillows, toys, pencils, etc.). Make a circle and divide your group in two teams (there must be an even number of participants). Every other person is in the same group. You give each team one thing on the opposite side of a circle. They start passing the thing to the members of their own team. When the thing from the one team catches up on the thing from the other team the game is finished.

**Human checkers**

Divide participants in two groups on the opposite sides of the room. They are standing in a line in front of each other with a big distance. The goal is to eliminate other team members. A person is eliminated when a member of the opposite team touches his foot. They can only move straight ahead and diagonally, with one jump at a time. The order of jumping is one team at a time.

**Become a number**

All participants are moving around the room. Main task is to divide into groups as large as the number named by the leader.

**Clock date game**

You need an even number of participants. Each of them gets a piece of paper and they have to draw a big clock with numbers. They can make it as pretty as they want. Then they start mingling with each other and book a date at the same time as their pair. When they are fully booked they can sit down. The leader announces what the time is and the participants need to find their date of that specific time. When they find each other the leader gives them a topic to talk about. After a few minutes the time changes, and the participants need to find another date with another topic of the leader.

LET'S HAVE FUN!

IF YOU WANT TO SEE MORE ENERGIZERS, COPY THESE SITES:

- <https://howspace.com/blog/13-online-icebreakers-energizer-activities-and-games-to-make-your-next-workshop-more-engaging/>
- <https://www.signupgenius.com/church/youth-group-icebreakers.cfm>

# Personal Stories

We had the opportunity and the pleasure to hear some incredible people talking about their stories. Let's hear what they had to say:

## Naira's story - finding hope during difficult times

"Hi! My name is Naira. I am 25 years old. I am a member of the Executive Board and Gegharkunik (my religion) regional coordinator in FYCA (my organization). This organization changed my life really! Before attending it, my days were very plain and uninteresting. Also, the situation in my country is very difficult, and the mental health of all of us has been disturbed, because we are in a war situation. For 3 years now everybody seems to be in a stressful situation, sad and hopeless. The country near us wants a new war again, so we are really scared and feel alone now. When I started volunteering and joined FYCA team, everything changed. I started participating in various local and international programmes. New opportunities and a new environment were created for me. I felt part of the team."



\*\*\*\*

## Simone's story - living with domestic violence

We also have Simone's story, a boy who experienced family violence in his childhood; too scared to tell others as he was afraid they wouldn't believe him. Now Simone loves his life and feels like he has his own independence.

"I was too scared to go to people (for help) because they would not believe me; I was also really ashamed by my situation and I acted a lot like my problems are not real and does not exist"

Simone found help and understanding with a psychologist as he really couldn't feel connected to anyone.

"I was in the position where I couldn't make friends. I thought, no one wants to know about me and my home situation. But I realized that I can't live like that, that I need connections, I need to feel happy and to go on. Thanks to Martha my psychologist I finally had the courage to say "Hi! Would you like to grab a cup a coffee?"

Simone explains how he found his best friend in his youth organization, and how much of this experience changed his life.

"I joined my organization in 2020. Here I found amazing people, amazing opportunities, great initiatives and most importantly, people who understand me."



\*\*\*\*

## Louise's story - experiencing grief

'I've been part of my organisation - the National Federation of Young Farmers Clubs - for 15 years now. Throughout life you have ups and downs, but 6 months ago I suddenly lost my fatherly figure without any warning. The reason I was able to cope and carry on without him, was through my involvement with Young Farmers. It kept me busy and stopped me constantly thinking about the grief. The support I received from other members in my local club was exceptional, and they're there even now. It's an ongoing process to stay positive, but they encourage me to keep attending events, be busy, focus on the future and on the club itself. I'm a florist, and they also helped me stay focused in my job through supporting with Young Farmers floristry competitions. The fact that the person I lost also went to this Young Farmers Club 40 years ago has meant I have a personal tie to the club, and this motivates me to make sure it continues to thrive and be there for young people in our area.'



\*\*\*\*

## Anxiety almost ruined my life - a personal story about a mental issue and how to overcome it

"I was diagnosed with anxiety at the verge of a burnout this year. Nobody knows about this, not even my close friends. How was/is anxiety and this start of a burnout for me? My body was shaking uncontrollably most of the time, my throat dry as desert, I was unable to sleep at night, I was cranky and hard to talk to. Finally, after a couple of days of taking the medication I become very sleepy during the day, and all of a sudden I was able to get a

good nights sleep. Before that, anxiety almost ruined my life. I was acting weird, avoiding anyone with no explanation, rejecting my family, my friends. I was easily irritated and I had moments when I yelled at people to leave me alone. It was hard to have a simple conversation, it was hard to even say "Hi!". Also, for me my work is really important, I work hard and I find fulfilment in that. Imagine sometimes I had to present 2 to 5 presentation daily in front of my managers and peers... It was horrible every time. It is not a life to live like that; I am struggling to open this topic in front of my friends now, but I really want to tell them. Wish me luck. Now how do I cope with this? I am working with myself. I do therapy, I take my pills and I take breathing breaks. I try to connect to myself, with my passion in order to feel relaxed and less stressed. Does it work? Yes... And I feel proud of myself because I let myself heal and to take care of myself. I would not let myself down again, it's a promise I made for myself. I encourage you to do the same!

Bests of luck, AA.



\*\*\*\*

## Make the Moove - a story which moves hearts

'I heard about Make the Moove when I was studying at Agricultural College, and then through Mochra, a youth organisation in Ireland. They are a charity that work with people from the agricultural community struggling with their mental health, and they encourage people to reach out and talk about their feelings. Several of my friends have benefited from their support - one friend was struggling with alcoholism, and he's now in a

much better place, he's no longer drinking. They train members in our organisation to become counsellors, and teach people how to spot the signs when someone might be struggling with their mental health. It means we're all much more open about our own challenges and can support each other. I now know that if I was struggling or have a dark day, I've got someone to reach out to!



\*\*\*\*

We asked our group some quick things they do to help when they're struggling with their mental health. Here's what they said...



# Want to hear more about our Study Session? Listen to our dedicated podcast episode!

Dan from Rural Youth Europe chats to the participants and prep team, as well as Mette Ranta from the University of Helsinki to talk about her research surrounding mental health and Lukas Stede to speak about his role on the Advisory Council.

**LISTEN HERE!**

