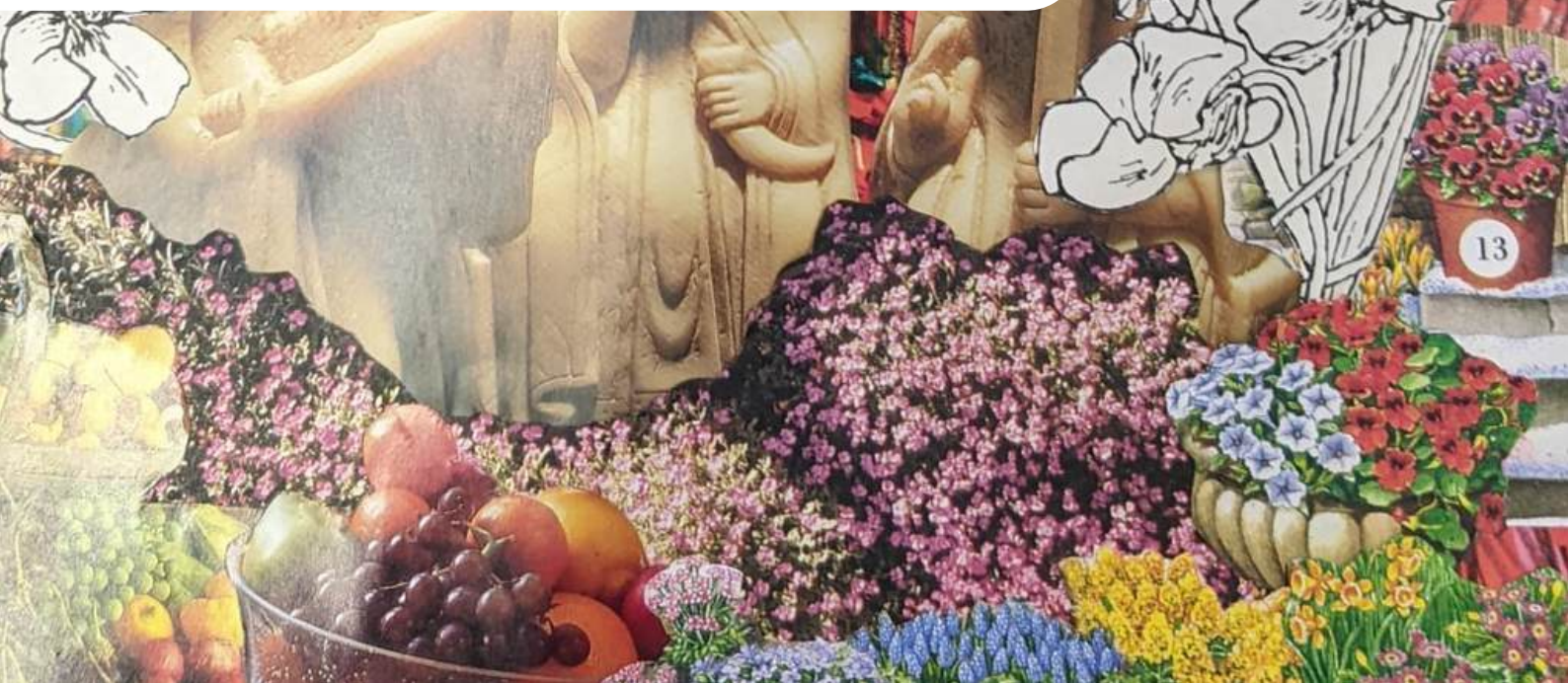




Beyond the Frame

TOOLKIT FOR YOUTH WORKERS

**Collage art as a tool for mental
wellbeing and civic action**



About this toolkit

Beyond the Frame is a two-year Erasmus+ Cooperation Partnership bringing together:

- a psychology association in North Macedonia, [Macedonian Association for Applied Psychology](#)
- a youth and civic organisation in Italy, Associazione [Idee in Movimento](#), and
- a creative social enterprise in Ireland, [Artéteka](#).

The project starts from a simple observation: young people across Europe are under significant emotional pressure, and many of the young people who are under the most pressure are the least likely to walk into a formal service or fill in a form about their feelings.

Collage offers a way in. It needs no artistic skill, no expensive equipment and, crucially, no fluency in the local language. It lets people say things sideways that they cannot yet say directly. And because it works by rearranging existing images, it invites people to look critically at the world those images come from, which is **where personal expression starts to become a civic voice.**

This toolkit gathers what the partnership has learned from research and from practice into a usable resource. **It is written for youth workers, not for therapists.** It assumes you are good with young people and new to collage, rather than the other way round.

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Design principles

Seven principles run through every activity in this toolkit. If you adapt something (and you should!) these are the things worth protecting.

- **Non-verbal first.** Every activity must work for someone with limited literacy or limited fluency in the language of the session. Images do the talking before words are asked for.
- **Low-barrier and low-cost.** No prior artistic skill, no specialist equipment, nothing that cannot be sourced from a recycling bin, a library or a charity shop.
- **Facilitate, do not direct.** Young people are the experts on their own lives; your job is to hold the space, not to interpret their images for them.
- **Personal, then social, then civic.** Self-expression is the beginning, not the destination. Every cycle moves outward from private feeling to shared experience to public voice.
- **Safety before depth.** You are a youth worker, not a therapist. Every activity that opens something up also closes it down before people leave the room.
- **Structured but flexible.** Give clear prompts and then give explicit permission to ignore them. Participants in Break the Frame asked for exactly this combination.
- **Green by design.** Salvaged and recycled materials are the default, and the materials themselves become a conversation about waste, consumption and value
- **Choice and consent throughout.** Participation is always voluntary. Young people can choose what to create, what to share and what to keep private, and they can step back from an activity at any point without having to explain why.
- **Inclusion means adaptation.** There is no single “right” way to participate. Activities should be adaptable to different abilities, sensory needs, communication styles, cultural backgrounds and levels of confidence. Offer different materials, ways of working and ways of contributing.
- **Represent with care.** When personal stories move into public or civic spaces, consent matters again. Participants decide whether their work is displayed, photographed or shared, whether their name is attached to it, and how much of the story behind it becomes public.

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Part 0 - How to use this toolkit

0.1 Who this is for

This toolkit is written for youth workers, educators, NGO staff, volunteers and facilitators working with young people aged roughly 18 to 30, with particular attention to those facing barriers: young migrants and refugees, NEETs, and young people living with stress, fear, low mood, isolation or disability.

No mental health qualification is assumed. No art training is assumed. If you have run a group session of any kind, you have the core skill this toolkit builds on. What we add is a set of creative methods, a way of sequencing them, and clear boundaries around what youth work can and cannot do.

It will also be useful to teachers, adult educators and community artists. Part 7 gives specific guidance on adapting the material for schools and adult learning.

0.2 What is inside

The toolkit follows the shape of a delivery cycle. You can read it front to back before you start, or dip into the part you need on the day.

Part	What it gives you	When you need it
1 Why collage	The evidence base, in plain language	Before you start - and when you need to convince a manager or funder
2 Foundations	Room, materials, ethics, safeguarding, inclusion	Before your first session, every time
3 Core methods	The seven techniques behind the activities	When you want to know why a session is built the way it is
4 Workshop programme	Six ready-to-run sessions	In the room
5 Collage challenges	Group work that turns reflection into civic action	After the workshop cycle
6 Evaluation	Tools to capture what changed	Throughout
7 Adapting	Different contexts, groups, sectors, digital, green	When the standard model does not fit

A typical full cycle runs:

1. six workshops, then
2. reflection and dialogue work with the group, then a
3. collage challenge producing collective artworks, then
4. a public showing.

Evaluation runs alongside all of it.

0.3 Three ways to use it

- **The full programme.** Six workshops plus group dialogue plus a collage challenge, roughly 3 to 12 weeks with a consistent group. This is the version the project delivers and evaluates, and the version with the strongest evidence behind it.
- **The single session.** One workshop, drop-in, no commitment. There is good evidence that even a single collage session produces a measurable drop in self-reported stress, so a one-off is not a waste of anyone's time. Part 4 (workshop programme) gives 45-minute variants of every session so you can adapt them.
- **The embedded module.** One or two activities dropped into provision you already run - a job club, a language class, a residential, a youth forum. Often the easiest way to start.

0.4 How the sessions are labelled

Each activity in Parts 4 and 6 carries the same set of markers so you can judge its fit at a glance.

Marker	What it tells you
Time	Realistic running time including set-up and clear-up. Collage takes longer than people expect.
Group size	The size the activity is designed for, and the point at which it needs a second facilitator.
Materials	Everything needed, with the minimum viable version noted.
Language demand	Low = works with almost no shared language. Medium = needs some spoken exchange or interpretation.
Emotional intensity	1 = playful and light. 2 = personal but contained. 3 = potentially activating; do not run this with a group you have just met.
Transfers to	Whether the activity adapts to school or adult education settings.

0.5 What this toolkit is not

Being clear about this protects you and protects the young people you work with.

- **It is not art therapy.** Several of the studies behind these methods were carried out by qualified art therapists with clinical populations. We have adapted their findings for non-clinical group work and, where an approach could not be safely adapted, we have said so rather than diluting it.
- **It is not a diagnostic tool.** A collage is not evidence of a condition. Do not read images as symptoms, and do not speculate about a young person's mental health on the basis of what they made. However, if you have cause for concern for a participant from something they made or disclosed during a session, be sure to report this in the appropriate way based on your organisation's safeguarding practices
- **It is not a substitute for professional support.** It sits alongside services and can be a bridge towards them. Section 2.5 covers referral.
- **It is not a fixed curriculum.** Local adaptation is expected. The design principles above are what should survive that adaptation.

0.6 Glossary

- **Collage.** Making an image by selecting, cutting or tearing existing materials and arranging them into something new. Paper, fabric, packaging, photographs, text - anything flat enough to fix down. It can also be done digitally.

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- **Civic action collage.** A collective artwork made by a small group to carry a shared message about an issue that matters to them. The output of a collage challenge.
 - **Containment.** The deliberate closing of an emotionally open session, so that participants leave settled rather than raw. A closing round, a grounding exercise, tea and biscuits, a clear ending.
 - **Flow.** The absorbed state produced by repetitive, hands-on, moderately demanding activity. Associated with reduced stress and improved emotional regulation.
 - **Fewer opportunities.** The Erasmus+ term for young people facing barriers to participation - economic, social, geographic, cultural, health-related, educational or disability-related. In this project at least 80% of participants come from these groups.
 - **Intersectional barriers.** Overlapping disadvantages that compound one another, for example a young migrant with limited language who is also unemployed and isolated. Support that addresses only one barrier tends to fail.
 - **Reflection circle.** A facilitated group dialogue following creative work, which moves participants from personal experience to shared social issues.

Part 1 - Why collage? The evidence base

This part summarises what research tells us about collage as a method for wellbeing, inclusion and civic participation. It is written so you can use it: to design better sessions, and to make the case to a manager, a funder or a sceptical colleague who thinks arts activity is a nice extra rather than a serious intervention.

The full research report and bibliography are separate project outputs and go into more depth. You should get in touch with the project partners to access them.

1.1 Collage as a visual language

The most consistent finding across the literature is that collage lets people communicate things they cannot yet put into words. Research with migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking women in London found that collage workshops opened up conversations about emotional and bodily experience that had been inaccessible through interview or discussion, and that this worked across language barriers rather than in spite of them. Participants who could not describe their situation in English could show it.

Later work identifies this directly as collage functioning as a visual language: a shared medium of communication that does not depend on shared vocabulary. For youth work with mixed-language groups, this is the single most important property of the method.

What this means in the room

Put the making before the talking. Ask questions after images exist, not before.

Do not treat limited language as limited insight. A participant with fifty words of the local language may produce the most articulate piece in the room.

Resist the urge to translate everything. Some of the work is done non-verbally and stays there.

1.2 Collage and emotional regulation

There is direct quantitative evidence that collage reduces anxiety. A pilot study of a single art therapy session using pictorial collage found a statistically significant reduction in self-reported anxiety after just one session. The sample was adults with traumatic brain injury rather than young people, so the finding should not be over-claimed, but it is rare collage-specific evidence of a measurable emotional effect from a very short intervention.

Complementary work on collage therapy describes the mechanism: selecting and arranging images lets people externalise difficult emotions, gain some insight into what is driving them, and identify their own coping strategies. The feeling moves out of the body and onto the table, where it can be looked at rather than only endured.

Research on textile crafting adds a second mechanism. Repetitive, hands-on making - cutting, tearing, stitching, sorting - induces a state of flow associated with reduced symptoms of anxiety and depression and improved emotional regulation. This is why some of the sessions in Part 4 deliberately include slow, physical, undemanding making rather than filling every minute with instruction.

Practical implication

You do not need young people to be good at art, and you do not need them to complete a long programme, before anything useful happens.

A single well-run session is a legitimate offer. Build in a before-and-after mood check (see Part 6) so that participants can see the shift for themselves - the visibility of the change is part of the effect.

1.3 Collage, memory and rebuilding

Art therapists working with trauma have argued that the physical process of collage mirrors the process of recovery¹. You take something apart and then decide how to put it back together. Where difficult experience has left memory fragmented - gaps, disconnected pieces, events that will not join up - collage invites the maker to place fragments in relation to one another and to decide what connects to what.

The same source highlights a set of practical therapeutic qualities that matter for youth work: collage is well-structured, so participants know what to expect; it is accessible to people with no experience; and the materials are cheap. Predictability is a safety feature, not a limitation.

Crucially, the decisions belong to the maker. Choosing what goes where, what stays and what is discarded, is small-scale practice in agency - which is precisely what is missing for many young people who feel that things happen to them rather than being chosen.

1.4 Collage as critical thinking

Collage is not only expressive. Writing on critical collage in university art galleries² argues that its experimental character makes it an ideal medium for social and critical inquiry, and a good entry point for people who have never made art before. Arranging pre-existing visual material forces you to clarify a point of view: you cannot place two images next to each other without making a claim about their relationship.

The physical act of arranging, moving, cutting and rearranging mirrors the mental process of constructing an argument³. This matters in a society saturated with images. Collage gives young people a way to slow that flow down, look at where images come from, and think critically about how they connect.

Work on collage as a research method reinforces this. In making a collage about a topic, people begin to work out what actually matters to them about it; the process of prioritising and arranging materials makes an implicit viewpoint explicit and communicable. That is directly transferable to civic engagement work.

There is also a material argument. Using what would otherwise be waste opens up discussion about consumption, climate and value - the medium carries part of the message.

1.5 Collage as civic voice

Research with young NEETs in a disadvantaged neighbourhood of Porto, working through music, film and graffiti, reframes a group usually described as 'lost' as in fact socially invisible⁴. Community arts gave these young people a means of resisting the stigma attached to them and of positioning themselves as cultural mediators and active citizens. The researchers worked as co-creators rather than as observers.

¹ Babla, A. (2020). "Putting the pieces together: collage as a mode in the treatment of trauma." Collage Research Network, May 2020.

² LAURIE DALTON Journal of Canadian Art History / Annales d'histoire de l'art Canadien Vol. 43, No. 1/2 (2022)

³ LAURIE DALTON Journal of Canadian Art History / Annales d'histoire de l'art Canadien Vol. 43, No. 1/2 (2022)

⁴ Paula Guerra & Sofia Sousa (2022), Frontiers in Sociology (open access)

Two things follow for this toolkit.

First, **the goal is not only wellbeing but visibility and agency**: helping young people move from being talked about to speaking for themselves. Second, **a public-facing output is not decoration at the end of the project**. It is the moment at which invisibility becomes recognition.

Research on collage in social work makes the bridge explicit, describing how collage helps people narrate their stories and connect personal experience to wider social and political realities - at times producing what the author calls imaginative realities⁵, images of how things could be otherwise, which function as a form of resistance to dominant narratives.

1.6 Collage as reflective practice

A study with undergraduate nursing students in the United Arab Emirates used picture collage to help them process their experiences on mental health clinical placements. Making and then discussing collages helped them express emotion, develop self-awareness, reflect on their own wellbeing and challenge cultural stigma around mental illness - in a way that was experienced as culturally responsive and safe.

Two lessons carry across. The discussion after the making is not an optional extra; it is where much of the learning happens. And collage can approach stigma indirectly, which is often the only way it can be approached at all - particularly in communities where naming mental health difficulty directly carries a cost.

This also applies to you. Part 6 includes a facilitator reflective log built on the same principle.

1.7 Collective making

Research on textile crafting with marginalised communities found that making together builds social connection and empathy, and that craft in a community setting creates a structured social space which makes interaction easier for people who find unstructured socialising difficult⁶. Participants reported feeling more connected, better regulated emotionally, and more empowered. Participation was associated with higher life satisfaction and a sense of purpose.

The structured-social-space point deserves emphasis. For an isolated or anxious young person, a room where everyone has something to do with their hands and no one is required to make eye contact is far more accessible than a room with chairs in a circle and an invitation to share.

Work on collective collage adds that group making surfaces what a community actually cares about, and pushes participants towards problem-solving and identifying solutions together. This is the direct rationale for the collage challenges in Part 5.

1.8 What the evidence does not show

- Most of the quantitative work involves small samples, pilot designs and adult or clinical populations rather than young people in community settings. The direction of effect is consistent; the size of it in our context is not established.
- Much of the literature is qualitative and reports participant experience rather than measured outcomes. That is appropriate to the questions being asked, but it is not the same as proof of effect.

⁵ Mostafa Hosseini (2025), *Qualitative Social Work*, SAGE (UK)

⁶ Michelle Burton, Montclair State University, USA; Ja-Young Hwang, Kent State University, USA; Bianka Hausknecht, Kent State University, USA *The International Journal of Social, Political, and Community Agendas in the Arts*, 2925

-
- Almost nothing follows participants up over time. We do not know how durable the effects are.
 - There is little evidence about who collage does not work for. Assume some young people will dislike it and offer them something else without treating it as a failure.

This project contributes to the gap: the before-and-after measures in Part 6 are designed so that 90 young people across three countries generate usable evidence about collage with this population.

1.9 The one-page case

If you have two minutes with a manager, this is the argument.

- It reaches people other methods miss. Works across language and literacy barriers, so migrant and refugee young people participate on equal terms.
- It works quickly. Measurable reduction in self-reported discomfort after a single session.
- It is cheap. Under fifty euro sets up a group of ten, and much of the material is free.
- It builds more than mood. Critical thinking about images, confidence in expressing a viewpoint, and practice in collective decision-making.
- It produces something public. Artworks that can be exhibited, which turns private experience into recognised contribution.
- It is replicable. Any youth worker can run it in any room, which is why it survives the end of a funded project.

Part 2 - Foundations for facilitators

Everything in this part happens before a single image is cut out. Sessions that go wrong usually go wrong here, not in the activity.

2.1 Setting up: time, space and place

Research on what actually enables collage work identifies time, space and place as practical conditions for success rather than incidental details. Treat them as requirements.

Time

- Ninety minutes to two hours is the working minimum for a full session. Below ninety minutes, participants are still browsing images when you need to move on.
- Allow thirty minutes of unhurried browsing and selecting. This looks like doing nothing. It is the part of the process where people decide what they are actually saying.
- Build in fifteen minutes at the end for sharing and closing. If you are running late, cut the making, never the closing.
- Add twenty minutes either side for set-up and clear-up. Collage generates an extraordinary amount of debris.

Space

- Table space matters more than floor area. People need to spread material out and see it all at once.
- Avoid a room with a front. No lectern, no whiteboard focus, no seating that implies an audience. Everyone at the same table if possible, including you.
- Provide a quiet corner or a second room where someone can step out without leaving. This is a safeguarding feature as much as a comfort one.
- Check acoustics. Hard rooms with echo make quiet conversation impossible and exclude anyone with hearing difficulty or limited language.
- Put the discard bin where people can reach it without crossing the room. Where the bin sits changes how freely people cut.

Place

Where the session happens carries meaning. A clinical room says patient. A school room says pupil. A community centre, library, gallery or youth space says participants. Where you have a choice, choose the setting that describes people the way you want them to see themselves. Where you do not have a choice, change the room: cover the tables, bring your own light, put work on the walls.

Set-up checklist

Accessible entrance, accessible toilet, lift or ground floor
Tables that can be joined; chairs that can be moved
Natural light if possible; extra lamps if not
Quiet corner available
Water and something to eat

Transport costs covered and communicated in advance
Session times that work around care responsibilities and shift work

2.2 Materials

The core kit

The target is a full working kit for a group of ten for under fifty euro, most of it reusable.

Item	Notes	Minimum viable version
Magazines and printed images	The single most important resource. Volume matters - aim for four or five per participant	Donated magazines, old books, free newspapers, catalogues, junk mail
Backing sheets	A3 card is ideal; A4 works	Cereal box card, cut flat
Scissors	One pair each, including left-handed	Shared, plus tearing by hand
Glue sticks	One between two, minimum	One between two
Coloured paper and card	Offcuts from print shops are usually free	Packaging, envelopes
Fabric scraps, thread, needles	For the textile extension in Session 5	Optional
Masking tape	For temporary placement before committing to glue	Essential - buy this
Marker pens	For text, outlines, artist statements	Any pens

Sourcing without a budget

- Hairdressers, dentists, doctors' surgeries and libraries discard magazines frequently. Ask once and set up a standing arrangement.
- Print shops and framers give away offcut card. Charity shops sell end-of-line fabric cheaply or donate it.
- Ask participants to bring material. This changes the character of the work - people bring images from their own world rather than only from a Western magazine rack.
- Packaging, tickets, receipts, maps, envelopes, wrapping and labels all work and are free.

The image bias audit

Do this before your first session. Spread your magazine stock on a table and look at who appears in it. In most donated European magazine stock, the people pictured are overwhelmingly white, thin, young, able-bodied and affluent. If those are the only images available, you are asking a young person to build a self-portrait out of materials that do not contain them.

- Deliberately source magazines and printed material from a wider range of communities, languages and body types.
- Include non-figurative material - texture, colour, pattern, landscape, text - so that participants who cannot find themselves are not forced into a poor approximation.

- Name the problem with the group if it comes up. The absence is itself worth discussing, and it leads naturally into the critical work in Session 6.
- Ensure you remove/censor any images you do not deem appropriate for the group at this stage to ensure maximum autonomy of participants in selected images from the materials given.

Green practice

Recycled and salvaged materials are the default, not the budget option. Keep a scrap box between sessions and let the group raid it. Reusable backing boards, clip frames and display equipment mean the exhibition materials survive the project.

2.3 The facilitator's stance

The research on collage as a participatory method is consistent about one thing: **the facilitator makes work alongside the participants**. This is not a stylistic preference. It levels the power relationship, it removes the sense of being observed, and it means that when you ask people to show something personal you have already done it yourself.

Make work, on the same terms

- Use the same materials, the same time limit and the same prompt as everyone else.
- Share your piece in the round, and share it at roughly the same depth you are hoping for - not deeper. You set the ceiling, not the floor.
- Choose your own material carefully. Something real but resolved. Not a current crisis, not a performance of vulnerability, not something that shifts the group's attention onto looking after you.
- It is fine for your collage to be bad. It is helpful, in fact.
- If participating alongside your group, ensure you have an easy way of keeping an eye on the time and your session plan.

Young people as experts

Never interpret someone's collage for them. You do not know what the image means, and a confident wrong reading from a facilitator is difficult for a young person to contradict. Ask, and accept the answer, including 'I don't know' and 'I'd rather not say'.

The stance the research describes is co-creation: young people as cultural mediators and active citizens rather than as recipients of an intervention. In practice this means they choose the themes in the reflection work, they choose the issues in the collage challenges, and they help curate the exhibition.

Handling 'I'm not creative'

You will hear this in every first session. Responses that work:

- Name the rule out loud at the start: there is no skill in this, only choices. Everyone can choose.
- Start with an activity where the outcome is obviously not meant to be beautiful - Session 1 is built for this.
- Point at the process, not the product: the interesting part is why that image and not the one next to it.
- Show your own unpolished work early.

Your own boundaries

Being a participant does not mean being a member. You are still responsible for the group, the time and the safety of the room. If you find that a session has activated something in you, that belongs in supervision or with a colleague afterwards, not in the circle.

2.4 Ethics of associative creation

Collage is made out of other people's images. That raises questions the group will notice even if you do not raise them.

Whose images are these

- Cutting up a published photograph for a workshop artwork is normally fine. Reproducing that artwork publicly - in an exhibition, in a catalogue, on the Virtual Museum - brings copyright into play.
- Prefer material that is old, generic or your own. Avoid recognisable commercial photography and celebrity images in work destined for publication, and avoid logos and brand imagery.
- Photographs of real, identifiable people carry an additional weight. Talk about it: what does it mean to cut up a face? Groups often reach a thoughtful position on this by themselves.

Personal images

Some participants will want to use their own photographs, including family photographs and images from a country they have left. Never let an original be cut. Scan or photocopy first, every time, and say so before anyone reaches for the scissors.

What happens to the work

- Decide with the group where finished work is stored between sessions, and make sure it is somewhere private.
- Participants can destroy their own work at any point. That is sometimes the most useful thing that happens in a session, and it should not be treated as a loss.
- Unfinished and discarded pieces belong to the participant, not to the project.

Layered consent

A single consent form covering everything is not adequate here. Use a layered form in which each of the following is a separate, optional, revocable yes:

- The work stays in the room and is seen only by the group.
- The work may be photographed for internal project reporting.
- The work may be shown in the local exhibition.
- The work may be published online in the Virtual Museum.
- The work may be used in promotional material and press.
- My name may be shown alongside it - or I prefer a first name only, a chosen name, or anonymous.

Revisit consent when the exhibition is real rather than hypothetical. People agree to things in week one that feel different in week ten, and they must be able to change their mind without explaining why.

2.5 Safeguarding and emotional safety

Ground rules, co-created

Build the group agreement with the group in the first session rather than presenting one. Participant feedback from Break the Frame was explicit that people engage more where the rules are theirs. Keep it visible in every session. Most groups arrive at some version of: what is said here stays here; no one has to share; no one comments on anyone's skill; you can step out.

Recognising distress

Watch for: sudden withdrawal or going very still; leaving abruptly; working with unusual force; tears; disclosure that surfaces sideways while someone is talking about their image.

- **Do** - stay calm, stay near, offer a break and a quiet space, ask what would help, keep the rest of the group occupied. Do report any safeguarding concerns or general concerns in line with your organisation's policy
- **Do not** - make it the focus of the room, probe for detail, interpret the artwork, promise confidentiality you cannot keep, or leave the person alone if you are worried.

Containment: always close the session

This is the single most important safety habit in the toolkit. A session that opens something up must close it before people go home.

- Signal the ending ten minutes before it happens.
- Run a short closing round - one word, one image, one thing you are taking away.
- Move to something ordinary: tidying up, tea, small talk. The shift back into the everyday register is part of the work.
- Say when and where the next session is. Continuity is containment.
- Stay available for ten minutes afterwards. Most disclosures happen while people are putting their coats on.

Scope of practice

This toolkit uses methods drawn from art therapy. It does not make you an art therapist, and the difference is not a formality.

Youth work with creative methods	Therapy
Works with what a person chooses to bring	Works deliberately towards difficult material
Aims at expression, connection, confidence, voice	Aims at treatment of a clinical problem
Group-based, open-ended, voluntary	Contracted, structured, clinically supervised
Refers on when something is beyond scope	Holds the clinical work

Stay on the left-hand side of that table. When something appears on the right, refer.

Referral

Have the referral sheet completed, printed and in the room before your first session - not findable, present. Below you can find a template:

[TO BE COMPLETED NATIONALLY]

Youth mental health services contact details:

School counselling routes (if school age participants are present):

Local mental health contacts

Services for unaccompanied minors (if young migrants or refugees are present):

You can add phone numbers (preferably Whatsapp), email addresses, websites, or QR connected to online forms.

A note on trauma-informed adaptation

A published clinical protocol⁷ asks participants to combine a self-selected comforting image with a mildly disturbing one, and found a significant reduction in state anxiety, with the strongest effect among those who integrated the disturbing image rather than removing or compartmentalising it. It is a well-evidenced approach and it was delivered by qualified art therapists working with trauma survivors.

We have not reproduced it. Deliberately introducing distressing imagery to a youth group is outside what a non-clinical facilitator should do. What we have kept is the useful insight: that integrating difficult material produces more relief than avoiding it. Session 4 therefore lets participants choose their own level of challenge, from purely comforting to something more mixed, and models integration as one option among several. Nobody is handed a difficult image by a facilitator.

Supporting people who bring someone with them

Break the Frame evaluation recommended accommodating family members, friends and guardians where this enables a young person with additional needs or a mental health condition to take part. Plan for it: a spare chair, materials for the supporter, a clear conversation about their role. A supporter who joins in works well. A supporter who watches and comments does not.

2.6 Inclusion in practice

Working with limited shared language

- Open with a non-verbal icebreaker every time. Break the Frame - the piloting project funded by the Erasmus+ programme that led to Beyond the Frame - showed that participants identified this specifically as what allowed people to connect across language and what drew in less confident members of the group.
- Demonstrate rather than explain. Show the step, then let people copy it.
- Use visual step cards on the tables so nobody has to ask twice.
- Pair participants who share a first language, and let them work in it.
- Where interpretation is used, brief the interpreter beforehand that they are interpreting feeling and nuance, not summarising.
- Accept pointing, gesture and single words as complete contributions in a sharing round.

Literacy

⁷ Tally Tripp, Jordan S. Potash & Deni Brancheau, 2018

Do not require reading or writing at any point where it can be avoided. Where written material is unavoidable - consent, evaluation - offer a visual version and offer to complete it together.

Intersectional barriers

Overlapping barriers compound. A young migrant with limited language who is also unemployed and isolated faces something different in kind from any one of those alone. Practically this means:

- Recruit through trusted intermediaries rather than open advertising - the centres, clubs and workers people already rely on.
- Cover costs in advance rather than reimbursing afterwards. Reimbursement excludes anyone without money this week.
- Expect irregular attendance and design for it. Sessions build on each other but each must stand alone, so that missing week three does not end participation.
- Follow up absence with a message that assumes a reason rather than a lack of interest.

Neurodivergence, stress and sensory needs

- Say what will happen at the start of every session, in order.
- Make sharing genuinely optional, every time, out loud.
- Allow headphones, and allow people to work slightly apart from the table.
- Offer an alternative to scissors - tearing, or pre-cut material.
- Avoid sudden loud starts, strong smells and overhead fluorescent light where you can.
- Offer alternative materials to accommodate a range of needs.

Gender, culture and identity

Aim for gender balance in recruitment and pay attention to who speaks in the room. Where identity is the subject - Session 2 in particular - make it explicit that participants decide what to show and what to keep. Some things are not for the group, and choosing not to show them is a legitimate and complete answer.

Part 3 - Core methods

Seven methods sit behind the activities in Parts 4 and 6. You can learn more about each method below (3.1 - 3.7) You can run the sessions without reading this part, but you will adapt them better if you know what each one is doing. Each method is set out the same way: what it is, why it works, where it appears, and one short exercise you can try on your own before using it with a group.

3.1 Identity negotiation

What it is. Working with identity as something plural, situational and in motion rather than fixed. Most young people in this project are negotiating several identities at once - a home identity and a host-country identity, a family identity and a peer identity, an identity from before a diagnosis or a move and one after it.

Why it works. Collage is good at holding contradictions. A page can carry two things that do not agree without resolving them, which spoken narrative struggles to do. Research with migrant women found collage surfacing exactly this layered, embodied material⁸.

Where it appears. Session 2 primarily; underlies Sessions 5 and 6.

Try it. Make a two-sided piece: what people see, and what they do not. Notice which side takes longer.

3.2 Narrative principles for youth work

What it is. A set of ideas borrowed from narrative therapy and adapted for non-clinical settings. The central one: the problem is the problem, the person is not the problem. Difficulty gets treated as something a person is in relation to, rather than something they are.

Why it works. Externalising - putting the difficulty outside the self where it can be looked at - reduces shame and creates room to act. Collage externalises literally: the thing is now on the table, made of paper, and can be moved.

Where it appears. Session 3 primarily; Session 5.

Language that helps. 'Where is the worry in this piece?' rather than 'is this your discomfort?'. 'What does it want?' rather than 'why do you feel that?'. 'What is on the page that is bigger than the worry?'

Try it. Give a recurring stress of your own a shape and a colour and put it on paper. Then place something else on the same page that is larger than it.

3.3 Resilience building

What it is. Practical work on noticing stressors, mapping what helps, and recognising coping that is already happening. Not positive thinking, and not resilience as a demand that young people absorb unreasonable conditions.

Why it works. Naming and mapping makes both pressure and support concrete. Most participants discover they have more support than they had counted, and that they are already coping in ways they had not noticed.

Where it appears. Sessions 3, 4 and 5.

⁸ Elena Vacchelli (2018), Qualitative Research, SAGE — EU Horizon 2020 funded project.

A caution. Where a young person's difficulty is caused by their circumstances - poverty, insecure status, discrimination - resilience language can slide into implying they should cope better with something they should not have to cope with. Keep the door open to naming the cause, which is where the civic work begins.

Try it. Map your own week: pressures on one side, what carries you on the other.

3.4 Flow and regulation

What it is. Deliberately using repetitive, absorbing, moderately demanding making - tearing, sorting, cutting, stitching - to settle a group or an individual.

Why it works. Research on textile craft associates this kind of activity with reduced anxiety and depressive symptoms and improved emotional regulation. Collage evidence points the same way, with measurable anxiety reduction after a single session.

Where it appears. Built into every session as the warm-up; central to Session 5.

How to use it deliberately. When a group is agitated, add a slow physical task and stop talking. When a group is flat, shorten the task and add a decision. Silence during making is not a failure of facilitation.

Try it. Tear a magazine page into forty pieces without using scissors. Notice what happens to your breathing.

3.5 Visual literacy and critical reading of images

What it is. Looking at where images come from, who made them, who they are for, who appears in them and who does not.

Why it works. Collage puts the maker in the position of editor. Once you have spent six weeks choosing and rejecting images, you look differently at images that were chosen for you. Writing on critical collage argues that arranging existing material mirrors the construction of an argument, which is why the medium suits critical inquiry.

Where it appears. Session 6; underpins the collage challenges in Part 5.

Try it. Take one magazine and count the people in it by age, skin tone, body size and apparent wealth. Then look at what your group is being asked to build a self-portrait from.

3.6 Facilitation techniques

The small moves that make the difference between a craft activity and a session that goes somewhere.

- **Demonstrate, do not instruct.** Show the step. Words are the backup.
- **Silence.** After a question, wait longer than is comfortable. The first answer fills a gap; the second is usually the real one.
- **Pair before group.** Almost nobody wants to speak first to twelve people. Almost everybody will speak to one.
- **Reading the collage.** The core sharing method. The maker shows the piece and says what is in it, in their own order, at their own depth. Others look and may ask, but do not interpret.
- **Rounds.** Everyone speaks once, briefly, in order, with an explicit right to pass. Distributes airtime without singling anyone out.

- **Naming what you see, not what it means.** 'There's a lot of blue at the edges' is an observation. 'You seem sad' is an interpretation. Stick to the first.
- **Closing ritual.** The same short ending every week. Predictability does real work with anxious groups.

3.7 Group dynamics

- **Forming.** The first two sessions build safety, not depth. Resist the temptation to go deep early because the group seems ready, it usually is not.
- **Dominant voices.** Use rounds and pairs structurally rather than managing individuals in the moment. A structure that limits airtime is not experienced as a rebuke.
- **Withdrawn participants.** Sit beside them and work rather than opposite them and ask. Side-by-side makes talking easier; it is one of the quiet advantages of a making activity.
- **Groups that will not talk.** Add more making and less discussion, and let the sharing be showing rather than speaking. Silence is not failure; a room of people absorbed in work is a good outcome.
- **Conflict.** Return to the group agreement rather than adjudicating. Where the disagreement is about something real and social, it may belong in the reflection work rather than needing to be closed down.
- **Different levels of engagement.** Not everyone needs to participate in the same way. Some people will make, some will talk, some will observe before joining in. Offer different routes into the activity rather than treating visible participation as the only sign of engagement.
- **Friendship groups and cliques.** Existing relationships can make a group feel safe, but they can also leave others at the edges. Change pairs and small groups gently across sessions, without forcing intimacy between participants.
- **Emotional contagion.** One person's disclosure can quickly shift the mood of the whole group. Acknowledge what has been shared without allowing the session to become centred on one story, and use a grounding or making activity to help the group settle.
- **Humour and teasing.** Humour can build connection, but it can also exclude. Make a distinction early between laughing *with* people and laughing *at* them, and return to the group agreement when humour crosses that line.
- **Changing energy.** Do not assume low energy means disengagement or high energy means success. Adjust the pace: shorten discussion when attention drops, introduce movement when useful, or allow quiet concentration when the group is absorbed.
- **Endings.** Name the last session at least two weeks ahead. Endings that arrive without warning undo some of what the group has built, particularly for participants with experience of abrupt loss.

Part 4 - Workshop programme: six sessions

Six sessions, designed to run weekly with a consistent group of around 5 to 10 young people. Together they move from play to identity to feeling to safety to repair to critical looking and hand over to the collage challenges in Part 5 with a group that is ready to work collectively on something public.

Each session follows the same shape, which participants come to rely on:

- Arrival and non-verbal warm-up (10 minutes)
- Mood check-in (2 minutes - also your evaluation data)
- Main activity (50-70 minutes)
- Sharing round (15 minutes)
- Mood check-out and closing (10 minutes)

Run them in order where you can. The emotional intensity ratings rise across the programme for a reason, and Session 4 in particular assumes a group that already trusts each other.

Session 1 - Getting comfortable

Aim: establish that this room has no skill test in it, build the group agreement, and give everyone the experience of finishing something on the first day.

Detail	Specification
Time	90 minutes
Group size	5-10, second facilitator above 10
Materials	Magazines, A3 card, scissors, glue, masking tape, marker pens, flipchart for the agreement
Language demand	Low
Emotional intensity	1 - playful
Transfers to	Schools and adult education without change

Group agreement

Ten minutes on flipchart. Ask what would need to be true for this to feel like a room they can work in. Write their words, not yours. Keep it and bring it every week. Agree on common rules:

1. We do not critique or alter each other's work.
2. We do not speak over each other.
3. We keep everything said in the space confidential.

Warm-up: the swap

Everyone tears out one image they like. Pass it to the person on the left. That image must appear in your finished piece. Participants can share why they chose a specific picture while passing it on. It takes five

minutes and it does the whole job: it establishes that images move around, that you do not fully control the material, and that this is not a test.

Main activity: memory collage

- The brief is deliberately trivial: make a page about a colour, a season, a sound, or a place you liked when you were small. Choose one.
- Thirty minutes browsing and selecting, unhurried, no pressure to start sticking.
- Masking tape first - arrange, move things around, and only glue when the composition is settled. Say this out loud; people who feel they cannot undo a decision make timid work.
- The facilitator makes one too, at the same table.

Sharing

Round: Hold up your piece and describe it in one sentence. One sentence each. Explicit right to pass. This is deliberately shallow - the point is to establish the ritual, not to extract anything.

Closing

Mood check-out. Confirm the time and place of Session 2. Tidy up together.

Facilitator notes

Expect 'I'm not creative' in the first ten minutes. Answer it before it is asked by naming the rule at the start.

Expect at least one participant to finish in eight minutes and one to be still browsing at minute forty. Both are fine; give the fast finisher a second sheet.

Do not go deep today even if a group seems to want to. Depth without a group agreement in place is a risk you carry, not a success.

Record: attendance, mood check scores, and the group agreement (photograph it).

45-minute version. Skip the group agreement if this is a genuine one-off, cut browsing to fifteen minutes, and use A4 rather than A3.

Session 2 - This is me: identity in collage

Aim: explore identity as plural and layered rather than singular, and give participants control over what they show and what they keep.

Detail	Specification
Time	2 hours
Group size	5-10
Materials	Core kit plus envelopes or folded card, and a wider-than-usual range of image sources
Language demand	Low
Emotional intensity	2 - personal but contained
Transfers to	Both, with care in school settings

Warm-up

Two-minute sort: each person picks three images that are “nothing to do with me/they do not relate to them”. Quick, non-verbal, and it warms up the act of choosing by rejecting - which is easier.

Main activity: the shown and the kept

- Take a sheet of A3 and fold or divide it: an open area, and a closed one — a pocket, a flap, a folded corner, a sealed envelope glued on.
- In the open area: what people see. How you are read by the world, correctly or not.
- In the closed area: what is not on show. This part is never shared, never opened by anyone, and does not have to be looked at again.
- Emphasise before starting: nobody will be asked to open the closed part, today or ever. If a group member wants to share, that is ok as well - but make sure they are aware this is fully optional.

Sharing

Round, on the open part only. Prompt: 'what's in the part you're showing?' Some participants will volunteer something about the closed part. Accept it, do not follow it up in the group, and be available afterwards.

Optional extension

Where the group has mixed backgrounds, ask them to include one thing from somewhere they have lived and one from where they are now. This works well with mixed migrant and local groups and often produces the first real conversation between them.

Closing

Closing round: one word for how it is to have made this. Then something ordinary - clear up, eat, talk about the week.

Facilitator notes

This is the session where the image bias audit pays off. If a participant cannot find a single person who looks like them, the exercise wounds rather than affirms. Check your stock the day before.

The closed section is the safety feature of this session. It gives people a legitimate place to put what they are not ready to share, which means they are less likely to either overshare or disengage.

Watch for a participant who makes the closed area very large. Note it; do not comment on it in the room.

Common facilitator error: asking 'why did you choose that?' in the round. Ask 'what is it?' instead.

45-minute version. Use a single A4 folded in half. Open side, closed side. Fifteen minutes making, five minutes sharing.

Session 3 - Naming it: feelings, stress and what helps

Aim: externalise a difficulty, and map the support that already exists around it.

Detail	Specification
Time	2 hours
Group size	5–10

Detail	Specification
Materials	Core kit, two sheets per person, coloured paper for non-figurative work
Language demand	Low
Emotional intensity	2-3 - do not run before Session 2
Transfers to	Adult education; in schools only with pastoral support present

Warm-up

Slow tearing. Five minutes tearing paper into small pieces with no purpose announced. Settles the room and does regulation work before anything is asked (see 3.4).

Main activity, sheet one: the stressor

- Make an image of something that presses on you. It does not need to be recognisable and it does not need to be named, now or later.
- It can be abstract: colour, texture, weight, direction. Offer this explicitly, because it is the route for participants who are not ready to be literal.
- Language that helps: 'give it a shape', 'where does it sit', 'how big is it actually'.

Main activity, sheet two: resilience - what carries the stress?

- Second sheet: what helps. People, places, routines, animals, music, work, the future.
- Ask for at least four things. The number matters — most participants find the fourth one surprising, and the surprise is the point.
- Place the two sheets side by side. Do not force a resolution between them; simply looking at them together does the work.

Sharing

Pair first, five minutes each, then a group round on sheet two only. Sharing what helps is safer than sharing what hurts, and it leaves the room in a better state.

Closing

Grounding: name three things you can see in this room. Mood check-out. Confirm next week. Stay available for ten minutes.

Facilitator notes

This is the first session where disclosure is likely. Re-read 2.5 before running it, and have the referral sheet in the room.

Never ask a participant to name what is on sheet one in front of the group.

If a participant cannot find anything for sheet two, that is significant. Sit with them, work alongside, and follow up individually afterwards.

End on sheet two. Always.

45-minute version. One sheet only, divided in two: the pressure on one side, what helps on the other. Skip the group round; pair share only.

Session 4 - Safe Spaces

Aim: build an image of safety and resource that participants can return to and draw on when things are hard.

Detail	Specification
Time	2 hours
Group size	5-10
Materials	Core kit; heavier card if pieces are to be kept and carried
Language demand	Low
Emotional intensity	2 - participant-controlled
Transfers to	Both

Warm-up

Colour sort. As a group, sort a pile of torn paper into colours. Collective, wordless, satisfying, and it produces a shared palette for the session.

Main activity: building a safe place

- Everyone makes a place that feels safe. Real or invented, indoors or outdoors — a landscape, a texture, or a room.
- Do not hand anyone an image. The participant selects everything that goes on their page.
- The whole page is theirs to fill with what steadies them. Nothing difficult or distressing goes on it.

Why it is built this way

This session draws on a clinical art therapy protocol which paired a comforting image with a mildly disturbing one, and found that participants who integrated the difficult element experienced the greatest reduction in anxiety. That protocol is delivered by qualified art therapists, in a therapeutic relationship that can hold distressing material safely. A youth work setting cannot, so this session keeps only the part that is safe to run without that container: building and dwelling in an image of safety. The difficult half is deliberately left out. Participants work with the comforting, resourcing image alone — which is itself calming and grounding — and no distressing element is introduced by anyone.

Sharing

Round: show the place, and say one thing about what makes it safe.

Closing

Grounding, mood check-out, and a clear ending.

Facilitator notes

Do not run this with a group you have met once. It assumes the trust built in Sessions 1-3.

If a participant produces something overwhelming, help them add resources to the page rather than removing what is there. Adding is safer than taking away.

Keeping the page entirely positive is doing safeguarding work here: do not invite anyone to add difficult or distressing material, and do not turn the safe place into a before-and-after exercise.

This is the session most likely to prompt someone to ask about getting support. Have referral details at hand.

45-minute version. Make a safe place. No difficult element. Photograph it. Twenty minutes making, ten sharing.

Session 5 - Piece by piece: repair and re-assembly

Aim: experience taking something apart and rebuilding it differently - agency, change over time, and the possibility that something broken becomes something else.

Detail	Specification
Time	2 hours
Group size	5-10
Materials	Core kit plus fabric scraps, thread, blunt needles, hessian or heavy card for stitching
Language demand	Low
Emotional intensity	2
Transfers to	Both; strong intergenerational potential

Warm-up

Fold paper twice and intuitively cut shapes from your paper. unfold to see design and keep the cut out shapes for the collage - this is similar to making paper snowflakes and the result can be used in the background for a final collage. Teaches participants to trust in the process + work intuitively as well as encouraging them to think about negative space/relief cuttings

Main activity: break and rebuild

- Everyone makes a quick, simple collage picture - ten minutes, low investment, deliberately not precious.
- Then cut or tear it into pieces. Announce this only at this point. Expect resistance and take it seriously: nobody is required to destroy work they have become attached to, and a spare pre-made image should be available.
- Rebuild from the pieces on a fresh sheet. Nothing may be discarded, but gaps are allowed, and pieces may be turned over, overlapped, or placed at a distance from where they were.
- Optional textile version: stitch the pieces down rather than gluing them. Slower, more absorbing, and the visible thread becomes part of the meaning.

The conversation this opens

Research on collage in trauma work describes exactly this movement⁹ - taking apart and deciding how to reassemble as mirroring the process of making sense of fragmented experience. You do not need to say this to the group. Most participants arrive at it themselves, and it lands better when they do.

Sharing

Round: what changed between the first version and the second? Prompt if needed: is anything better in the second one? What did you decide to leave a gap around?

Closing

Mood check-out.

Facilitator notes

Have three or four pre-made spare images available for anyone who cannot cut up their own. Offer them without comment.

The stitched version takes noticeably longer. Budget an extra thirty minutes or run it across two sessions.

Some participants make the second version deliberately worse. That is an honest statement and should be received as one, not corrected.

This session works particularly well with textile-experienced participants, including older family members if the group includes supporters.

45-minute version. Use a pre-made image supplied by the facilitator rather than making one. Cut, rebuild, share.

Session 6 - Reading the world: images and messages

Aim: turn six weeks of choosing images into critical attention to images that were chosen for us — and open the door to the civic work in Part 5.

Detail	Specification
Time	2 hours
Group size	5-10
Materials	Core kit plus advertising, newspapers, packaging, campaign material and political imagery
Language demand	Medium - this session needs discussion
Emotional intensity	2
Transfers to	Both; especially strong in schools

Warm-up: magazine census

⁹ Babla, A. (2020). "Putting the pieces together: collage as a mode in the treatment of trauma." Collage Research Network, May 2020.

In pairs, take one magazine and take note of who appears in it - roughly, by age, skin tone, body size, apparent wealth, visible disability. Five minutes. Report back numbers only, no analysis yet. The numbers make the argument without anyone having to make it.

Discussion

- Who is missing from these pages?
- Who are these images for?
- What would somebody conclude about our community from this pile of magazines?
- Where have you seen yourself represented badly, or not at all?

Main activity: talk back

- Take one advertisement, headline or news image and remake it so that it says something more true to the participant.
- Techniques: substitute the figures; change the caption; extend the frame to show what was cropped out; put two contradictory images together.
- This is the point at which collage stops being personal and starts being political. Name that transition explicitly with the group. Note this transition may create unease for some participants where political affiliations differ or where activism efforts reference a particular member's background too directly in the group- can make individuals feel put on the spot.
- Keep everything made today. It feeds directly into the collage challenges.

Sharing

Show the original and the remade version side by side. Round: what did you change, and why does it matter?

Bridge to Part 5

Close by asking each person for one issue they would want to say something about publicly. Write them all up. This list is the raw material for the collage challenges, and it must come from the group rather than from the partnership.

Anonymous veto: allow for participants to veto a particular topic that would make individuals lose the safe space.

Closing

Mood check-out. Explain what happens next: group work, a public artwork, an exhibition. Give people a week to think about it.

Facilitator notes

This session has a higher language demand than the others. Plan interpretation, use pairs, and let the visual comparison carry the argument where words are short.

Political disagreement may surface. Return to the group agreement, keep the focus on images rather than parties, and do not adjudicate.

Some participants find this session energising and some find it deflating. Watch for the second group and make sure the closing round gives them somewhere to put it.

Photograph the issues list. It is a project record and it is the input to Part 5.

45-minute version. The count, plus one remade advertisement. Skip the extended discussion; use the pair report-back instead.

Part 5 - Collage challenges: group work for civic action

The collage challenge is where the programme turns outward. Small groups of young people co-create collective artworks about issues they have identified themselves, and those artworks go on to a public exhibition and the Virtual Museum.

Target: at least eight civic action collages per country, made in groups, by participants who have completed the workshop cycle.

5.1 Why collective, and what changes

Individual work builds expression. Collective work builds something different: the experience of negotiating a shared position, discovering that a private difficulty is common, and producing something that speaks for more than one person.

Research on collective collage found it an effective and empowering way to surface what matters to a community, and to push a group towards problem-solving together rather than in isolation. Research with young NEETs found that arts practice let participants resist the stigma attached to them and position themselves as cultural mediators - people who explain their community to the wider world, rather than being explained by it.

Expect this stage to be harder than the individual sessions. Agreement is difficult, and the difficulty is where the civic learning is.

5.2 The challenge format

Element	Specification
Group size	3–5. Below three there is no real negotiation; above five somebody disappears.
Time	Three sessions of two hours, or one full day plus a finishing session. Do not attempt it in one sitting.
Output	One collective artwork plus a short artist statement written by the group
Format	Large-format panel, textile banner, sequence or triptych, zine, or digital - the group chooses
Facilitation	One facilitator per two groups. Groups need less input than individuals but the input is harder.

5.3 The process, step by step

Step 1 - Choosing the issue

- Start from the issues list generated at the end of Session 6. It must come from the group.
- Cluster the list on a wall and let people stand next to the issue they care about. Groups form around the clusters rather than being assigned.
- Test each issue with two questions: is it something you have some experience of, and is it something you would be willing to say publicly?

- Where an issue is too broad - 'racism', 'mental health' - narrow it to something local and specific. A specific image argues better than a general one.

Step 2 - Negotiating the message

- This is the hardest step and the one most likely to stall. Give it a full session on its own.
- Each person makes a small individual piece about the issue, twenty minutes, working alone.
- Lay all the pieces out together and look for what repeats - colours, symbols, kinds of image, tone.
- As a group, complete one sentence: 'We want people to understand that ____.' Write it on the wall. Fifteen words maximum.
- Where the group cannot agree, do not force consensus. A piece can hold two positions - divide the surface, or use the disagreement as the subject.
- Only once the sentence exists does the group start making the large piece.

Step 3 - Making it

- Agree roles at the start: who sources material, who composes, who assembles. Roles reduce the chance of one person taking over.
- Work on a surface everyone can reach from all sides. A table in the middle of a room, not against a wall.
- Masking tape until the whole group agrees, then fix. This is more important in group work than individual work, because a glued decision made by one person is a decision taken from the others.
- Prioritise recycled and salvaged material, and let the choice of material carry meaning where it can.

Step 4 - The artist statement

Every piece is accompanied by a short statement written by the young people, not by staff. Sixty to a hundred words, in the language the group prefers, translated for exhibition.

- Three prompts are enough: what is this about, what do you want to change, who made it.
- Offer to scribe for anyone who prefers to speak it. Do not tidy their language into institutional register; the voice is the point.

Step 5 - Deciding how public to be

- Revisit consent now that the exhibition is concrete rather than hypothetical (see 2.4).
- Each group decides how it is credited: full names, first names, chosen names, group name, or anonymous. Individuals within a group may choose differently.
- Discuss reactions honestly. Public work about a contested issue may attract responses. Talk about what the group would want to happen if it did, and what support is available.

5.4 Format options

- **Large-format panel.** The default. A0 or A1 backing board, visible across a room, straightforward to hang and transport.
- **Textile banner.** Slower, more absorbing, and it carries a protest-banner association that some groups want deliberately. Rolls up for transport, which suits touring.
- **Sequence or triptych.** Three or more linked panels. Good for before-and-after, cause-and-effect, or three perspectives on one issue.

- **Zine.** Photocopied, cheap, multiple copies, given away rather than exhibited. Reaches people who never enter a gallery.
- **Digital.** Scanned elements composed on screen. Reproducible at any scale and easily shared, but read Part 7.4 before choosing it.
- Be open to accommodating any other formats that the group are interested in trying.

5.5 The advocacy dimension

Be honest with the group about what an artwork can do. It will not change a policy by itself. What it can do is make an issue visible, make an argument in a form that is hard to dismiss, and put young people in the room with people who make decisions.

- Invite specific people to the exhibition rather than issuing a general invitation: councillors, service managers, school leaders, community organisations, local press.
- Give the group the choice of speaking at the opening. Prepare anyone who wants to, and make it genuinely optional.
- Consider a follow-up: a meeting, a letter, a short film of the process, a request for a response.
- Connect the work to what already exists locally - an ongoing campaign, a youth council, a consultation. A single artwork lands harder inside an existing conversation.

5.6 Materials as message

Making civic work out of what was thrown away is an argument in itself. Where the issue is environmental, the material can carry most of the meaning. Where it is not, the material still says something about value, waste, and about the resources available to the people who made it.

Practically: prioritise recycled paper and salvaged fabric, keep display boards and clip frames for reuse across the three exhibitions, and print only what is needed on recycled or certified stock.

5.7 Facilitator notes for group work

- **Unequal contribution.** Assign roles early rather than intervening later. If it happens anyway, name it as a process question to the whole group, never to the individual.
- **Groups that stall.** Almost always stuck at Step 2. Go back to the sentence on the wall. If there is no sentence, that is the problem.
- **The dominant maker.** Give them a role that uses the energy - sourcing material, assembling - and structure composition decisions as a group vote.
- **Work you are uncomfortable with.** It will happen. Distinguish between work that is politically uncomfortable for your organisation and work that is genuinely unsafe, defamatory or discriminatory. The first is not a reason to intervene; if you censor it you lose the group. The second is, and should be discussed with the group rather than removed quietly.
- **Documentation.** Photograph the process, not only the product. Process images are what make the exhibition and the Virtual Museum legible to visitors.

Part 6 - Evaluation, reflection and learning

Evaluation here has two jobs. It tells the partnership and the funder whether the project worked, and it shows young people their own change which is itself part of the effect. Design it so it does both, and so it never feels like paperwork imposed on a creative session.

6.1 The mood check - one minute, every session

A visual scale completed at the start and end of every session. It is the smallest possible evaluation instrument and it does the most work.

- Use faces or a coloured line rather than numbers. Point rather than write.
- It takes sixty seconds and generates a data point per participant per session.
- Show participants their own line across the six weeks at the end. Research on collage and anxiety found measurable change after a single session; making that change visible to the person who experienced it is part of what builds confidence in the method.
- Do not discuss individual scores in the room. It is a check, not an assessment.

6.2 Pre and post survey

- Short. Eight to ten questions maximum. Anything longer will not be completed honestly by a group that has just spent two hours making things.
- Administer the pre-survey in Session 1 after the warm-up, not at the door. People answer differently once they have settled.
- Offer a visual-response version for participants with limited literacy or language, and offer to complete it together.
- Post-survey at the end of the collage challenge rather than the end of Session 6, so it captures the civic dimension.
- Keep the same wording across all three countries so the data can be compared.

6.3 Evaluation that is not a form

Some participants will never complete a survey, and they are often the ones whose experience matters most. Use these alongside.

- **The one-word round.** Recorded by the facilitator at the close of every session. Cheap, and surprisingly good longitudinal data.
- **The exit collage.** A final small piece answering 'what am I taking from this?'. Photographed and coded thematically.
- **Placement voting.** Statements on the wall; participants place a sticker. Works with no shared language.
- **Observation.** Who spoke, who arrived early, who came back. Attendance patterns say more about value than a satisfaction score does.
- **Participant quotes.** With consent. A sentence in a young person's own words carries further with stakeholders than a percentage.

6.4 Case studies

Three to five per country, tracking individual journeys through the programme. Anonymise unless the participant actively wants to be named, and let them read and approve the final version before it is used anywhere.

A good case study includes: where the person was at the start, what they made, what changed, what they said about it, and what happened next. Avoid before-and-after narratives that flatten a person into an outcome.

6.5 The facilitator reflective log

Five minutes after every session. This is not administration; the research on collage as reflective practice applies to practitioners as much as participants.

- What did I plan, and what actually happened?
- What worked better than expected? What did not work?
- Who did I lose, and why do I think that was?
- What did I do that I would not do again?
- What needs to change in the toolkit?

These logs feed the lessons-learned documents required at each project stage and are the main input to the revised edition of this toolkit.

6.6 Youth worker self-assessment

Youth workers trained through the project complete a short self-assessment before the online mentoring sessions and again after delivering the workshop cycle. It covers: knowledge of psychology-informed creative methods; confidence facilitating collage; confidence facilitating group dialogue; ability to link personal narrative to civic engagement; and confidence in safeguarding boundaries.

The same instrument evidences the project's target that at least 75% of trained youth workers report improved skills.

6.7 Feeding it back

- Share findings with participants first, before funders. They generated the data.
- Report dissemination and delivery quarterly through the shared project form so the record builds continuously rather than being reconstructed at the end.
- Log every adaptation you make to an activity. The adaptations are the most valuable output of the pilot phase and they belong in the next edition.
- Where an activity did not work, write that down. A toolkit that reports only successes is less useful and less credible.

Part 7 - Adapting the toolkit

Everything here is designed to be changed. This part covers the adaptations we have already tested or anticipate, and the principles to hold onto while you make your own.

7.1 By context

- **Youth club or centre.** The default assumption. Watch for drop-in culture undermining group continuity; consider a closed group for the six weeks.
- **Migrant reception or accommodation centre.** Language demand must stay low throughout. Expect irregular attendance as people are moved. Make every session standalone. Be careful with identity work where legal status is precarious - a collage is not a document, but participants may not experience it that way.
- **Library or gallery.** Excellent for the exhibition phase and often free. Negotiate mess tolerance in advance and check whether the space is one your participants already feel entitled to enter.
- **Community centre.** Usually the best balance of accessibility, informality and space.
- **Detached and outreach.** Use the 45-minute variants and a portable kit in a single box. Session 1 works cold; do not attempt Sessions 3 or 4 without continuity.
- **Online.** Possible but different. See 7.4.

7.2 By group

- **Newly arrived migrants and refugees.** Non-verbal throughout; pair by shared first language; source images from a wider range of communities. Avoid pressing on journeys or reasons for leaving - let participants bring what they choose to bring.
- **NEETs.** Lead with making rather than with talking about feelings, which can read as another assessment. The critical and civic sessions often land hardest here. Frame participation in terms of skills and recognition as well as wellbeing.
- **Young people with stress or low mood.** Predictability, permission to pass, permission to leave, and no surprises. Sessions 4 and 5 are the strongest. Watch that the group does not become the only support and quietly hold the referral routes.
- **Mixed local and migrant groups.** The main prize of this method and worth the extra planning. Session 2's extension is designed for it. Balance numbers deliberately - a token minority in a group is not inclusion.
- **Young people with disabilities.** Pre-cut material, larger formats, adapted tools, tearing instead of cutting, working vertically instead of flat. Ask rather than assume what is needed.
- **Low-literacy groups.** Remove every written requirement you can and provide visual alternatives to the rest.

7.3 By sector

Adult education

All three partners work in adult learning as well as youth work, and this material transfers with little modification. Collage and group dialogue can be used with adults to build resilience, manage stress and support social inclusion. Adjustments: allow longer for participants who are more resistant to being asked to

make art; use the reflective practice framing, which adults tend to accept more readily than a wellbeing framing; and expect richer material in Session 5, which suits participants with more life to reassemble.

School education

The partnership has established links with schools including Nikola Karev High School in Skopje, and dissemination is designed to bring the toolkit into school settings. Adjustments for schools:

- Sessions 1, 2, 5 and 6 transfer directly. Session 6 in particular fits media literacy and citizenship curricula.
- Session 3 requires pastoral staff to be aware and available; Session 4 should only be run with school counselling support in place.
- Compress to fit a lesson: use the 45-minute variants across a half-term.
- Assessment culture is the main obstacle. Say explicitly and repeatedly that this is not marked.

Younger participants

The programme is designed for 18-30s. For under-18s: keep the identity and critical work, treat Sessions 3 and 4 with much greater caution or omit them, apply your organisation's child safeguarding policy in full, and obtain parental consent for any public exhibition of work.

7.4 Digital collage

Digital collage is a complement to physical making, not a replacement for it. Research on technology in therapeutic collage found real advantages - greater engagement, easier editing, improved accessibility and the possibility of remote participation - alongside real limitations: reduced tactile experience, and concerns about confidentiality and over-reliance on the tool. The conclusion in that literature is the one we adopt: digital should complement rather than replace traditional materials, and its usefulness depends on thoughtful integration.

When digital helps

- A participant cannot attend in person - illness, distance, caring, mobility.
- Fine motor difficulty makes scissors and glue frustrating.
- The group wants to reproduce or share work at scale.
- The participant is already fluent digitally and physically self-conscious. The screen can be a way in.

When it does not

- The flow and regulation effects in 3.4 depend on the hands. A mouse does not do this.
- Undo removes the commitment that makes a physical decision meaningful.
- Personal images on a shared or institutional device create confidentiality risks that paper does not.
- Screens fragment a group. People stop looking at each other.

Practicalities

- Free browser-based tools are sufficient; avoid anything requiring an account tied to a personal email where you can.
- Never upload participants' personal photographs to a third-party service. Work locally.

- Agree where files are stored and who can see them, and delete at the end of the project.
- Where participants develop digital skills, use the DigComp framework to help them reflect on and evidence their competences in content creation, and support them to record these on a Europass CV. This turns a creative session into something a participant can show an employer.

7.5 Green practice

- Recycled and salvaged material is the default: donated magazines, packaging, offcuts, fabric scraps.
- Keep a scrap box between sessions; almost nothing needs to be thrown away.
- Reusable exhibition infrastructure - display boards, clip frames, signage - carries across all three national exhibitions.
- Print only when necessary, on recycled or certified stock. The Virtual Museum carries most of the dissemination load.
- Make the material a topic. Where images come from, what they cost, and what happens to them is a legitimate session in itself and connects wellbeing to sustainable living.

7.6 Running it with less

If you have fewer resources than the full model assumes:

- **Less time.** Sessions 1, 3 and 6 are the minimum viable programme. They cover entry, emotional work and the critical turn.
- **Less money.** The whole programme runs on donated magazines, cereal box card, borrowed scissors and one pack of glue sticks.
- **Fewer staff.** Cap the group at eight and use pairs rather than whole-group rounds.
- **No exhibition venue.** A corridor, a shop window, a library noticeboard, a school hall. Public showing matters more than the prestige of the venue.
- **No group continuity.** Run standalone 45-minute versions and treat each as complete in itself. The single-session evidence supports this.

A final word

This toolkit is a beginning, not a fixed method. Everything in it has been drawn from research and tested in practice, but the youth workers who use it will always know their own young people better than any document can. Treat the design principles at the front as the thing to protect, and treat everything else — the sessions, the timings, the prompts, the materials — as a starting point to be adapted, argued with and improved.

What matters is not that a session is run exactly as written, but that it stays non-verbal enough to include everyone, safe enough to open something up and close it again, and generous enough to hand young people the authority to speak for themselves. Collage is only ever the means. The end is a young person who arrives feeling unheard and leaves having made something true, shown it to someone, and discovered that their voice belongs in the room.

If this toolkit helps that happen even once, in one borrowed room with a box of old magazines, it has done its work. Keep what serves your young people, change what does not, and pass on what you learn — the next edition of this toolkit will be written by the people who use this one.

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The methods in this toolkit are grounded in the following research, gathered by the partnership during the development phase. Where a study was carried out with clinical or adult populations rather than young people in community settings, this is noted in the relevant part of the toolkit. Full URLs are given so the sources can be traced; several are open access.

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