

RFSL UNGDOM, NEWCOMERS YOUTH

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PEER TO PEER GUIDEBOOK

Step by step manual by Newcomers Youth on how to plan, organize and facilitate support group sessions for LGBTQIA migrants and asylum-seeking youth.



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Pilot topics for Peer-to-Peer Support Group: Newcomers Youth

Newcomers Youth has realized fifteen sessions in total during 2020 and 2022. The session's themes were decided in consultation with all participants and they came as suggestions on what is important for LGBTQI migrant youth in Sweden. The sessions have been realized in the following order:

- Session 1: Identity, Home & Security
- Session 2: Homo/bi/trans-phobia
- Session 3: Xenophobia & Racism
- Session 4: Community and Chosen Family
- Session 5: Faith & Religion
- Session 6: Relationships & Dating
- Session 7: Sex & Consent
- Session 8: To be an Adult
- Session 9: Minority Stress and Microaggressions
- Session 10: Coping with Trauma and Depression
- Session 11: Gender Expression
- Session 12: Body Image
- Session 13: Coming Out
- Session 14: Toxic Positivity
- Session 15: Selfcare and Stress

This is the order that is going to be used in the presentation of the Peer-to-Peer support group throughout this book.

IMPORTANT: Note that the fifteen session themes that Newcomer Youth members chose as the central one, might not be the ones the most relevant for your group. Regardless if a target group is the same (in this case, the queer migrant youth), the group's needs, thus topics, always depend on context, time, and what each participant finds important for their wellbeing. Always try to prioritize the current needs of a group you are working with instead of closely following the session outlines presented in the following pages.

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INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

A Peer-to-Peer support group is an activity that has a form of support sessions for LGBTQI migrants and asylum-seeking youth in Sweden. The realization of the Peer-to-Peer support group started in 2020 within a framework of a Swedish LGBTQIA organization, RFSL Ungdom. It is facilitated through RFSL Ungdom's project Newcomers Youth.

Newcomers Youth has a mission of supporting LGBTQI youth with asylum experience in Sweden (15–30 years of age). Support is provided through various activities in Stockholm, Gothenburg, Luleå, and Malmö. The activities range from legal counseling that is crucial for all newly arrived in Sweden, meeting place activities that are important for our members' everyday wellbeing, to activist workshops and performance workshops that gather those interested in activist and creative expression. The most recent activity developed in collaboration with our members is the Peer-to-Peer Support Group, on which we will focus in this guidebook.

The idea behind Peer-to-Peer sessions started during our meeting place activities that were often used as the platforms for members to talk about their mental health and everyday challenges. It seemed that every meeting place included those reflection moments where the members would comfort each other, provide each other with different tips and tricks on how to deal with difficult life situations, and empower one another. Although our organization (RFSL Ungdom) had mental health support services provided by our curators (one-on-one sessions), it seemed that these group moments where members discuss their struggles in a separatist setting is something that is highly appreciated. Consequently, the Newcomers Youth team decided, together with our members, to pinpoint those areas related to mental health that we want to explore with the hope of strengthening our identities and dealing with stress.

The peer-to-peer methodology helps us to establish equal grounds for every participant. The young queer persons with migrant experience are the central figures in it. Each participant is an expert on their own life who is entitled to share and interpret their personal experiences.

Each Peer-to-Peer support group has one assigned group leader who should also belong to the target group in terms of their migrant and queer identity and have experience working with youth. In terms of concrete skills that one group leader should possess, being a good listener is one of the basic pillars. This person should also be able to draw conclusions and connections between different stories and offer both acknowledgment and appreciation to each member's involvement. Preferably this person should have knowledge about dealing with panic attacks that a group member might have during the emotional conversations.

The overwhelming topics often make members start crying or express their emotions in unconventional ways. Respecting your group means offering every member the possibility to take a break or take more time in explaining why they react in the way they do. At the same time, keeping both individual and group needs in balance is not easy, but what the group leader often has to act upon.

To make the Peer-to-Peer Support Group more giving and comfortable to both members and group leaders, the Newcomers Youth has implemented four working principles that should be repeated at the beginning of every session: confidentiality, I-statement, self-care, and group care.

WORKING PRINCIPLES

CONFIDENT SPACE Everything that we talk about stays in the space we share at that moment. The participants will not share the information learned in this space with people who were not part of the group. In that way, we respect everyone's privacy and integrity. In that way, we build trust.

I-STATEMENT Using the sentences that start with "I" is always good (instead of talking about what "we" want or what "you" should do). In that way, we are talking only about our personal experiences where we are the experts. We avoid advising others since we can never fully know their perspectives.

I-statements help us to achieve an equal structure where no one (including the group leader) advises others what they should do with their lives and how to deal with particular situations- the focus is on our personal experiences and our active decisions of accepting and considering a certain set of actions to improve our situations. In that way, each of us is a decisive actor who listens to others and chooses on their own, if one's dealing with a particular situation could be something that they can apply in improving their mental health and dealing with stress.

SELF-CARE The group leader reminds the members that it is okay to leave space or take a break if it becomes too emotional or overwhelming. They will not be judged or asked by the group leader why they did that. If something does not feel right (a member is offended or does not feel good), we let them know that they are allowed to say to the group respectfully what hurt them so that frustration and future conflict are avoided. Self-care refers to dealing with emotional tensions that each of us can feel throughout the sessions,, and it is different for every person.

GROUP-CARE Although all of us share a queer identity, we must acknowledge that we are all different in other aspects, be it ethnicity, race, religion, ability. Even within this queer identity, we probably belong to different subcategories in relation to our sexual orientation and gender identity. Consequently, any expression of homo, bi, or transphobia cannot be tolerated. The same goes for discrimination on any other grounds. We treat each other with respect, and we are careful about what we say to ensure it does not sound insulting to anyone.

Lastly, group care simply means that we care for each other and that everyone's feelings matter- discrimination and disrespect on any ground are not allowed.

FRAMEWORK

Depending on how big the Peer-to-Peer support group is, there is always a possibility to divide it into subgroups so that everyone has a chance to participate equally. According to the Newcomers Youth's experience, an optimal number for one subgroup is up to 8 participants (including one group leader).

In terms of the session's duration, 150 minutes is optimal for conducting one session (including a 15-minutes break in the middle).

The group leaders are expected to be at the meeting place before the session start time, in case they would like to add some more sub-themes and plan with one another. Although there is a session plan for each topic (to be presented below), the dynamics within the group can strongly affect the direction of a specific discussion. That is perfectly fine and actually desirable since it means that the participants are taking more active roles and simply find certain aspects of the discussion more relevant for them as a group.

INTRODUCTION

The group leader welcomes the group members and explains what is the purpose of Peer-to-Peer sessions (provision of support through sharing experiences on how to deal with stress, safeguarding and mental wellbeing). The group leader explains their purpose in the group (presenting the topic, explaining the concepts, keeping track of time).

PRESENTATION ROUND

The group leader asks the participants to share their names and pronouns with the rest of the group. This could be done in combination with a certain energizer or icebreaker chosen by the group leader. For example, it could be a certain body movement that every participant does after saying their name and pronoun.

REMINDER ABOUT THE WORKING PRINCIPLES

The group leader reminds the group about four pillars that help us keep our setting safe and inclusive: confident space, I-statement, self-care, and group care.

EXPLORING THE GIVEN TOPIC

Fifteen session topics are given in the following parts of this guidebook.

END OF SESSION (DEBRIEFING)

Every Peer-to-Peer session should finish with debriefing question(s). In that way, we make sure that the members feel emotionally stable and ready to leave the meeting place with good feelings as much as possible. Some examples of debriefing questions where the participants can reflect on their learning experience and emotional state are:

- What happened during the activity? How do you feel?
- What were the challenging moments for you in this activity? Why?
- What have you realized about yourself? Others? Society?
- How can we use what we discussed in this activity in our everyday life?
- How can we keep supporting each other?
- How to move forward and use what we have learned?

SESSION REPORT

After every session, the group leader has a task to fill out the session report (attached at the end of this guidebook) that is helpful to evaluate how the particular session went. The group leader can always return to their session reports and reflect on both challenges and activities that have worked well within the group. The session reports remind us about the dynamics of the particular group and help us act better in challenging situations that we had encountered throughout our group work.

SESSION 1

IDENTITY, HOME AND SECURITY

Introduction, presentation round, and reminder about the working principles is a standardized beginning of Peer-to-Peer Support Group regardless of a given topic.

Ask the group members to say what they think about first when you say the word "identity." (note that everyone has to answer). The group leader explains that identity can be sexual (for ex. being gay) or gender identity (for ex. transgender). Of course, there are other identities, but these are now in our focus.

Ask the members how they identify in terms of their sexual/gender identity if they are willing to share.

Explain the difference between gender identity, sexual identity, and gender expression. For example, suppose a person is gay in terms of sexual orientation. In that case, he can identify as a man in terms of gender identity and have a more feminine expression in terms of gender expression. However, it is not always "visible" how someone identifies, and no one is obliged to share that with others except in case they feel a need to do that. It is very important never to assume someone's identity, especially gender identity, which is why we have a pronoun round at the beginning of every meeting.

Remind the members that we are much more than our sexual/gender identity: we have our religious identity, race, profession, among other things.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- When and how have you become aware of your identity in terms of sexual orientation and gender?
- Do you feel the same about your sexual/gender identity today in relation to how you felt when you first figured it out?

It is recommended that you take a break before continuing the session.

How we think about home today and how we felt about our home before is certainly not the same. Also, the question is, if home means the same thing for all of us? For some of us, home means a house and family in which we are born.

Some of us still feel that place “as” our home and feel secure around our biological family (mom, dad, and siblings).

Some of us (many queer persons) lost that feeling of security once their family members found out about their sexual/gender identity.

Some of us have built a new home where they feel secure (your apartment in Sweden, living with your friends/partner).

What is essential here is to point out that all of us have different experiences. Even if we share the same identity, our experiences regarding home and security can be different.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- Describe a home in which you grew up. Did you feel happy and secure there?
- If you stopped to feel secure in your “first” home, when and how did that happen?
- What type of home would you like to have for yourself in the future? What must it have to make you feel secure?

CLOSING EXERCISE:

Describe one thing you will take home with you from this session.

The end of a session (Debriefing) is a standardized ending of the Peer-to-Peer Support Group regardless of a given topic. After the session, the group leader should fill in the session report document (attached at the end of this guidebook).

SESSION 2

HOMO/BI/TRANS-PHOBIA

Introduction, presentation round, and reminder about the working principles is a standardized beginning of Peer-to-Peer Support Group regardless of a given topic.

Note to a group leader: The topic of homo/bi/trans-phobia can be very triggering to our members since it reminds them of why they fled from their home country. Consequently, when the members explain some parts of their stories, it is crucial that you, as a group leader, follow both individual and group reactions. If you see that a member is getting upset by explaining the details graphically of, let's say, a homophobic, violent attack, remind them to focus on their feelings instead of explaining the actual situation (for example, to explain how they felt in that moment, how they feel today about it, and what helped them to overcome these traumatic experiences and be with us today). Of course, this does not mean that the members should not explain some details related to homo/bi/trans-phobia, but just make sure that it does not become overwhelming to that member or the group.

Explain what homo/bi/trans-phobia is (negative attitudes, feelings, and actions towards the LGBTIQ community). The reasons for this can be many depending on the context: the government which imposes the anti-LGBTIQ regulations and laws on people in which persons simply adapt to the general, anti-queer sentiment; the religious authorities and religious interpretation according to which queer people's lives do not matter; overall patriarchy where both gender roles and sexuality are strictly defined in a heterosexual/cisgender way and any exception from it is not tolerated.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- Explain if there are homophobic/transphobic laws in your home country?
- What do you think affects people the most in your home country to have negative attitudes towards LGBTQ people?
- What feelings arise when you experience someone/something that is homo/bi/trans-phobic towards you?

It is recommended that you take a break before continuing the session.

When we think about homo/bi/trans-phobia, we should perceive it as a disease that affects both society and individuals. Consequently, it is normal that you are not immune and have/had a life period where these negative feelings affected you personally. For example, seeing that everyone around you is homophobic and in order to hide your sexuality, you articulated yourself as someone who dislikes the gay community. These are the defense

mechanisms and survival techniques that are toxic and dangerous. Still, we cannot deny that this had a survival role in some part of your life. What is important is to be aware of your actions and act to prevent these negative feelings from coming again. Thinking about these feelings might feel shameful and might cause guilt in ourselves. Still, we cannot defeat it until we are open and admit that once we had this type of thinking. Recognizing homo/bi/trans-phobia, including the one in ourselves, is the only way to fight it.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- Did you ever find yourself judging other queer people for being, for example, too much “out” or “too much gay”?
- Have you ever judged yourself because of your sexuality/gender identity? In what ways?
- Fitting in: How have you tried to adapt or hide your sexuality/gender identity from others? Was that more related to a feeling of safety, or were you trying to change who you are?
- How do you deal with homo/bi/transphobia today?

CLOSING EXERCISE:

Affirmation Mantra, ask the members to close their eyes and start thinking about their lives. Ask them to listen to your words while they think and have their eyes closed. Your words go as follow: Transphobia and homophobia are not my fault. I deserve to live in a world without transphobia and homophobia. I deserve to love, be loved and be happy.

The end of a session (Debriefing) is a standardized ending of the Peer-to-Peer Support Group regardless of a given topic. After the session, the group leader should fill in the session report document (attached at the end of this guidebook).

SESSION 3

XENOPHOBIA AND RACISM

Introduction, presentation round, and reminder about the working principles is a standardized beginning of Peer-to-Peer Support Group regardless of a given topic.

Start the session by asking the members what they think is racism. Encourage the members' definitions because all thoughts are relevant. Conclude this part by telling them that overall racism includes prejudices and discrimination by an individual, community, or institution against a person or people based on their membership of a particular racial or ethnic group, typically the one that is not the majority. Ask the members what the reason for people could be for being racist, and conclude with that it can include a variety of reasons, such as upbringing (learned values by one's family or community where a person grew up), the government's policy of one country that historically discriminate one particular race / ethnic group, media representation, etc.

Explain that racism can have both visible and invisible forms. An example of visible racism might be that, let us say, a Swedish government makes a law where Roma people do not have a right to university education, regardless that they are Swedish citizens. An example of invisible racism can be a situation where, let us say, you as a person of color, are avoided and not invited to any of the hangouts or parties organized by your white Swedish peers. The invisible racism often includes something called micro aggression, which can be both verbal or shown through someone's behavior, as well as both intentional and unintentional. By its definition, micro aggression always communicates hostile, derogatory, or negative attitudes towards minority groups or individuals.

Focus on xenophobia and ask the members what they think that is. Share the information that xenophobia is simply, dislike or discrimination against people from another country. The reasons for that are similar to the reasons why someone is racist.

Also, xenophobia and racism can be (and are often) expressed via hate speech. Through hate speech, a speaker intentionally aims to humiliate and show hatred toward a specific individual or group based on their race, skin color, ethnicity, or migrant background, to name a few. However, it is important to note that hate speech can be directed to, let us say, queer people, and then it is based on one's sexual orientation or gender identity. Hate speech can have many forms, for example, a verbal insult that someone uses when they talk to you, or a written status on Facebook where someone writes that the migrants in Sweden are responsible for the crimes happening in Sweden.

Note that both xenophobia and racism are structures beyond our control as those discriminated against. The real work of fighting this lies in the hands

of those who belong to the majority group, the government, and the media. What we, as the victims of xenophobia and racism, can control is how we respond to these instances both directly to the persons who are racist/xenophobic and to ourselves: processing it in a healthy way and knowing that something is wrong with those persons/institutions, not with us.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- Would you say that your home country is racist/xenophobic, and in what way?
- What are your experiences of racism and xenophobia in Sweden?
- Are your experiences more related to visible or invisible racism?
- Are your experiences in Sweden different from the experiences in your home country, and in what way?

It is recommended that you take a break before continuing the session.

We discussed how most of the systems in this world are racist/xenophobic in their essence. There is always the most privilege for the racial/ethnic/national majority in one country (for example, the white Swedish people in Sweden). At the same time, how these privileged persons react to us and how popular culture sees everything that is not white as something less desired, affects us on both subconscious and conscious levels. It is very easy to simply absorb these racist messages and develop a mindset where we are trying to be “more white” or “more Swedish” in the context of Sweden. This often results in self-hatred both towards us as individuals and towards people belonging to our racial/national group. An example of that is trying to prove that you are “different” than other men of color, or that you are more educated and cultural than other people from your home country that lives in Sweden.

Sometimes, this internal racism/xenophobia does not have to be pointed to other persons from our community, but only to ourselves. For example, not posing a question in a group because we feel less worthy due to our lack of Swedish language skills, or simply not liking what we see in the mirror because we are not blonde or white. Consequently, it is crucial to learn how to undo these internal racist/xenophobic patterns. This session is an opportunity to learn how our peers deal with it and pick up those strategies that could be helpful in our individual cases.

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- What feelings arise in you as the effects of xenophobia and racism?
- Do you feel that you sometimes love yourself less or like less people belonging to your racial/ethnic/national group? Give us some examples.
- When these negative feelings towards yourself /others come up, how do you deal with them?
- If these feelings do not come up, what would you suggest to others to feel good about who they are?

The end of a session (Debriefing) is a standardized ending of the Peer-to-Peer Support Group regardless of a given topic. After the session, the group leader should fill in the session report document (attached at the end of this guidebook).

SESSION 4

COMMUNITY AND CHOSEN FAMILY

Introduction, presentation round, and reminder about the working principles is a standardized beginning of Peer-to-Peer Support Group regardless of a given topic.

Biological/legal family and being a queer youth in your home country

Ask the group members if they have a role model, who is that, and why? If there is no one right now, they can say if there is some role model they had while growing up.

While growing up, most of us considered our biological/legal family as the only group of people that is actually “the family”. In the best-case scenario, our parents and siblings should be a base that helps us grow into happy and healthy individuals. In some cultures, this feeling of family belonging is developed within the young persons in relation to their religious community or ethnic group that their biological/legal family identifies with.

Many LGBTQI children/youth realize that our biological family is unwilling to give us their support once we “come out.” For many of us, this feeling of possibility that they will reject us rises even before we come out verbally to them: we hear how they talk about queer persons in general, or we see how they negatively react when we act in a way that does not belong within heterosexual/cisgender pattern.

It is important to point out to group members that there is nothing shameful about not coming out to people around you. Many queer people decide this in order to protect themselves, ensure their safety, avoid violence, or simply because they believe that they will protect their families in this way. Lastly, it is important to note that some of us are and were privileged enough that we have not had the problems of the mentioned types: our queer community is truly diverse, and regardless of that we share many identities and experiences, some of them are simply different.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- Tell us a bit about your biological/legal family- how your childhood and growing up at your home looked like?
- When and how did you become open to your biological/legal family about your queer identity? If you did not come out to them, what are the reasons for it?

- If your experiences with your biological/legal family were negative, what tools and ways did you use to “heal” from it (spending time with your queer friends, talking with someone who understands you)?
- Has your relationship with your family changed now once you are in Sweden, and in what ways?

It is recommended that you take a break before continuing the session.

The LGBTQI persons can often find support within the community to which they are not bonded biologically or legally. These persons can be people living in the same town, queer people that we meet online, or queer people we encounter once we go from that place where we did not feel supported and welcomed.

For many of us, the members of this Peer-to-Peer Support Group give a feeling of family and community belonging. We can call them our chosen family in which we feel welcomed and accepted. This is a group where we feel seen, heard, and respected. In the end, that is what the purpose of every family should be.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- If you go back in time, when was the first point when you felt supported by someone as a queer person? Tell us a bit more about it and what sort of feelings that arose in you? Was that person your family member, friend, another queer person?
- Since you arrived in Sweden, have you gotten any kind of support from another queer person or queer community overall?
- Who are the first people you think about when “chosen family” is mentioned?
- What sort of family do you wish to create for yourself in the future? What will this family look like?
- Have you ever found yourself in a situation where you support another queer person in need? Describe that situation and how that makes you feel.

The end of a session (Debriefing) is a standardized ending of the Peer-to-Peer Support Group regardless of a given topic. After the session, the group leader should fill in the session report document (attached at the end of this guidebook).

SESSION 5

FAITH AND RELIGION

Introduction, presentation round, and reminder about the working principles is a standardized beginning of Peer-to-Peer Support Group regardless of a given topic.

Ask the members what their names mean in their native language or Arabic/Latin? You will notice that many of these names can be found in writings belonging to Christian and Islamic traditions, to name a few.

While introducing this session's theme, it is especially important to explain and say the difference between three aspects: religion, faith, and spirituality. In the first part we will talk about religion, while the second part is mainly reserved for faith and spirituality.

Religion represents a system of organizations that has specific morals, views, and rules that the members of it follow. Consequently, religion is something that is global and practiced in the more or less same way regardless of where a particular group of people is. For example, if we talk about Sunni Muslims (the largest group within Islam) who are following their religious postulates, they will have the same sort of desired and designated behavior for those who live in both Iraq and Germany. Regardless of what part of the world they live in, they will have a sense of community belonging that we touched upon during the last session. Similar to the queer community, there should be solidarity among the members of one religion and treating everyone within it as a family regardless that not all are related by blood.

For many queer people, relationship to religion changes over time. Many of us grew up in a religious family/community. Once we became aware of our queer identity, some of us wondered if something might be wrong with us. In many instances, we thought that our religion was not open to queer people. In this situation, a feeling of shame can be very strong. Some of us were even trying to "change" who we are.

It is important to understand that we, as queer people, are not a problem in our religious community due to our identity. The problem is how people interpret religion and how they act towards someone who is not the same as the majority. Although it is a process, we have to confront shame and remember that we must accept ourselves as we were born and for who we are.

Many queer people decide not to be part of particular religion anymore due to not feeling safe anymore within that community. Some of us choose to still be part of a specific religion. Still, we disagree with how other religious members interpret it in relation to queer people. The queer community is very diverse; we have different experiences and personal beliefs regardless

of that we all share a queer identity. In that way, remind the members to talk with each other with respect once they start to discuss this and let them know that our accounts on religion are our personal beliefs that should not be communicated in a hateful/discriminatory way to those who might think differently.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- While growing up, were you a part of some religion? What sorts of feelings did you have about it at that particular time?
- Has your relationship with religion changed throughout time due to your queer identity?
- Have people belonging to your religious group changed their attitude towards you once they find out about your queer identity? If you did not come out to them yet, what do you think their reactions would be?
- How do you see yourself today: are you a part of a particular religion? What is your reasoning behind it?

It is recommended that you take a break before continuing the session.

Faith is a part of all religions. It represents the trust that a person has in their god(s) and believes that following their religious rules will bring something good as a final product: the good things happening to them or simply having a good afterlife once they pass away. Consequently, persons who belong to a specific religious community have faith in it, which means that they are assured with their whole heart and mind that they are doing something right.

Faith can be something else as well- a concept that goes outside of religion. For example, having faith in yourself and not letting society bring you down with its negative views on your queerness. In that way, we can think about faith as something very personal and often connected to one's spirituality- a concept related to peace, finding your own purpose, and searching for meaning in life. The degrees of spirituality can be very different for different persons. It can be simply trying to preserve good mental health by being calm and positive in your life. It can also be more supernatural, such as you creating your own way of believing in a certain god(s) and nature, the way that is not always influenced by how a certain religious community thinks how religion should be practiced.

For those of us who went through this process of shaming ourselves for who we are, we often felt isolated and alone. Some of us used this opportunity to pray for the better days to come or simply had some rituals that were just our own and made us feel better.

In that way, these spiritual rituals with yourself are especially important tools to reconnect with yourself, love yourself, get courage, or simply survive.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- Have you ever performed some rituals or practices that might be spiritual in their nature? For example, “talking” with your god(s) or praying? Have these been helpful for you, and in what ways?
- Which practices are a part of your life today and how do they help you achieve peace within yourself? Note that spiritual practices can include many things, such as believing that doing good things will bring good things to yourself.
- If you consider yourself non-religious or you do not belong to the religion that you were a part of before, are there still some aspects from it that you like and respect?

The end of a session (Debriefing) is a standardized ending of the Peer-to-Peer Support Group regardless of a given topic. After the session, the group leader should fill in the session report document (attached at the end of this guidebook).

SESSION 6

SEX AND CONSENT

Introduction, presentation round, and reminder about the working principles is a standardized beginning of Peer-to-Peer Support Group regardless of a given topic.

For any sexual activity to happen, two or more sides have to say yes. Saying yes willingly and freely means to give consent. Sexual activity does not just mean sex, but it includes making out, cuddling, or touching someone's body in a sexual way. If consent does not happen, we are talking about sexual assault that is not allowed and considered a crime.

EXERCISE Ask the members which of these sentences/expressions mean yes and which mean no:

"Yes please!" *(The answer is yes.)*

"Ummm.." *(The answer is no because this sounds like there is hesitation. consent always needs an enthusiastic yes.)*

"Uh-huh" *(The answer is that we cannot know what this "uh-huh" means, so we should never take it for yes.)*

"Totally!" *(That is an enthusiastic yes.)*

"Sure!" *(That is an enthusiastic yes.)*

"Sure?" *(That is no because it sounds like there is hesitation. Even if a word sure means yes, we have to listen to how it is said. consent always needs an enthusiastic yes.)*

"Not right now." *(The answer is no.)*

"No please." *(The answer is no.)*

"Mmmm." *(That is no because consent always needs an enthusiastic yes.)*

"Maybe later." *(It is no because that is not an enthusiastic yes. "Maybe" often means no that a person is not comfortable to say assertively.)*

"I am not sure." *(The answer is no because this is not an enthusiastic yes. If someone is unsure, we do not pressure them to say yes. Always respect and honor their answer.)*

"I guess so?" *(That is no because it sounds like there is hesitation.)*

"I would like to stop." (The answer is no. Never forget that people have the right to change their minds at any point and that always has to be respected. If at any point you feel that your sexual partner's body language changes, do a check-in. They may want to stop and that is okay.)

Remind the group that each of us has a right to decide if we consent to something, when we do it, where we do it, and how we do it. We decide by saying willingly, freely, and enthusiastically "yes". Another way of thinking about it is that only yes means yes. If someone forces us into sexual activity without our consent, that is sexual assault. Sexual assault includes any unwanted sexual contact or sexual attention, including coercion and harassment. Remember that it is never your fault if you have been sexually assaulted.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- Is there another example of non-consensual sexual behavior that you can think about? These examples can come from your own experience or simply something you believe should not happen.
- Have you ever witnessed any sort of non-consensual behavior towards someone else? How do you feel about it, and what do you think are the right ways to support this person?
- Have you ever found yourself in a non-consensual situation or in a situation that can be considered sexual assault? If you feel comfortable, share it with the group.

It is recommended that you take a break before continuing the session.

Being an asylum seeker or undocumented person in Sweden has many challenges. First and foremost, we do not have the same rights and privileges as the rest of society in Sweden. This places our group in a vulnerable position in terms of accessing healthcare, employment or accommodation, for instance. 6

Being in this vulnerable position often makes us feel that we cannot decide for ourselves due to power structure in relation to persons who might have more power than we do. Those persons include not just the migration officers, doctors, and employers, but also those who may wish to help us with accommodation and food (our partner, friends).

Generally speaking, giving consent to something is giving your permission for something to happen. This is very important in relation to sex that we discussed where both sides should consent (agree) to get into sexual relation. If one side does not agree and another side pushes it against that person's will, we are talking about something illegal and criminalized in Swedish law.

Regardless of if you are an undocumented person or an asylum seeker, do not forget that no one has a right to force you to have sex with them. In case that happens, it is very important to immediately contact the Swedish police by calling 112 or visiting the nearest police station. If you do not feel comfortable contacting the police due to any reason, please contact anyone within the Newcomers Youth who can assist you in your matter. If, for any reason, you do not feel comfortable speaking with someone at Newcomers Youth / RFSL Ungdom, contact any of the organizations or institutions that help the victims of sexual abuse (feel free to adjust emergency phone numbers and contacts in relation to the country's context where you and your group reside).

Note to the group leader: Make sure to create a reference guide of organizations/institutions in your city/region that can help victims of sexual abuse. Feel free to share this list with your group at this point. Note that those organizations do not have to be specifically specialized in reporting sexual abuse, but they can be different organizations that work with reporting discrimination and hate crimes. It is because both discrimination and hate crimes are often intertwined with sexual abuse in relation to LGBTQI undocumented persons and asylum seekers.

Use the following bullet points to practically explain what is illegal and not allowed in Sweden. As a group leader, you can make a similar list for a specific country where Peer-to-Peer Session Group is facilitated.

- It is illegal that someone forces you to do sexual activities (anal sex, oral sex, masturbating, etc.).
- It is illegal to show your genitals to someone against that person's will (in person or online).
- It is illegal to force someone to send naked pictures via apps or the Internet.
- It is illegal to threaten or blackmail someone to do something sexual so that person gets provided with help such as a place to sleep, food, etc.
- It is illegal to touch someone's genitals, breasts, and other body parts without them approving it.

The end of a session (Debriefing) is a standardized ending of the Peer-to-Peer Support Group regardless of a given topic. After the session, the group leader should fill in the session report document (attached at the end of this guidebook).

SESSION 7

RELATIONSHIPS AND DATING

Introduction, presentation round, and reminder about the working principles is a standardized beginning of Peer-to-Peer Support Group regardless of a given topic.

Ask the group members to describe their perfect date in terms of location and content. Note that it does not have to be something they already experienced, but something that each person considers ideal.

Being a queer person brings different dynamics to both dating life and relationships if we compare it to the dating life of cisgender heterosexual persons.

Ask the members what is different or challenging in their opinion when it comes to dating in relation to straight couples?

Once a group leader has their turn, do not forget to mention that safety is an important factor depending on where we are dating. Queer persons have different levels of rights and violations of those in relation to the context and country where they are. The queer Newcomers in Sweden also have financial challenges, simple as not being able to afford to pay for entrance in the LGBTQI+ clubs. The legal challenge can be that asylum seekers and undocumented persons in Sweden cannot enter LGBTQI+ clubs due to not having a Swedish ID. An often challenge is simply being a foreigner within the queer community of one country that might hold prejudices against persons who have a different ethnicity, race, and social status, among the others.

It is recommended that you take a break before continuing the session.

Ask the members what is their experience with relationships and dating in their home countries?

After everyone shares, ask them to compare it with their dating life in Sweden (or the country where Peer-to-Peer Support Group is facilitated).

This question is important because many queer Newcomers were forced to follow social norms and expectations in their home countries that are related to heterosexuality. The group should know that there is nothing shameful about it: it was one of many survival mechanisms that we had in order to protect our safety and integrity in a dangerous setting.

Lastly, ask the group members what are their ways to get in contact with other queer people who they might date (dating apps, visiting queer places, keeping it spontaneous)? What works the best and what would they recommend to their fellow queer peers?

The end of a session (Debriefing) is a standardized ending of the Peer-to-Peer Support Group regardless of a given topic. After the session, the group leader should fill in the session report document (attached at the end of this guidebook).

SESSION 8

TO BE AN ADULT

Introduction, presentation round, and reminder about the working principles is a standardized beginning of Peer-to-Peer Support Group regardless of a given topic.

Introduce the session by asking the members one simple question: “When a person becomes an adult?”. Do not insinuate and lead them in any direction in terms of their replies. This will create a floor for open-ended conversation where the members will explore different dimensions that we, as the group leaders, cannot think about from our personal perspectives and levels of privilege.

Once the conversation round is over, empower your group by stating that all of them had become adults from a point when they decided to take their lives into their hands, come to a country where they are now, and do something for their future. This decision in itself is very mature and adult-like in itself. Adulthood also includes our engagement with all daily responsibilities, such as going to school, working, paying the bills, finding accommodation.

On the other hand, many of us have been pushed to adulthood very early in life. We could not choose “to stay the children ” who are free of worry and problems that life has brought. This is very relevant for the queer community overall, but especially for queer refugees that have had to take the adult roles, regardless of if they feel ready or not.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- Was there a point in your life where you had to become an adult regardless of, according to your age, you were not that mature?

Note to a group leader: This question can be emotionally charged. It is important to remind the group that at this moment they are in a safe place surrounded by their community. That fact cannot remove the challenging experiences from their past. Still, it can help them reflect on their past experiences and learn how others deal with them. As a group, we aim to pave the way to healing and further growth. We have learned very much from the negative experiences that we have had and now, from a safer position, we can reflect on it more constructively.

- Is being an adult a state of mind or age? What are the situations now in Sweden (or your residence country) when you feel the most as an adult?
- “Managing time”, “handling emergencies”, and “having healthy habits” are often described as valuable life skills in one’s adult life. If you have to choose one that you possess, which one of these three would that be?

As discussed, the topic of adulthood can sometimes be related to the unpleasant life moments and experiences where we had to toughen up and take our lives into our own hands. During the second part of this session, we focus on how we can bring back that childhood spirit we once had that was free of worry and enjoyed all the little moments that life brought. Our reflections on positive practices will hopefully inspire the group to live in the present while remembering what made them happy and satisfied. Ask each member the following question: which parts of the “young you” would you like to bring back in your presence?

Encourage the group to keep/start to practice the activities that used to make them happy. Remind them that having a fight-or-flight response is natural and it was more than necessary in certain aspects of our lives. Today, at least sometimes, we are safer than we used to be and we should be grateful for that opportunity. In the end, ask them to give advice to a group about one activity that makes a person relaxed and in a positive mood. Remind them that simply knowing how to have fun is very important for mental health, but unfortunately it is often forgotten in adult lives. We will not let that happen.

The end of a session (Debriefing) is a standardized ending of the Peer-to-Peer Support Group regardless of a given topic. After the session, the group leader should fill in the session report document (attached at the end of this guidebook).

SESSION 9

MINORITY STRESS AND MICROAGGRESSIONS

Introduction, presentation round, and reminder about the working principles is a standardized beginning of Peer-to-Peer Support Group regardless of a given topic.

Stress is a concept that most of us are familiar with. It is something that we are experiencing or have experienced at least one time in our lives. In general, stress can be caused by challenges related to one's work, studies, personal life, or relationships with others.

When we talk about minority stress, we refer to something that persons belonging to different minority groups experience. It is a result of the structural inequalities that we are living in. For example, if a gay young person experiences stress due to many assignments that their teacher has given to them, it is probably not minority stress. But if that same young gay person experiences stress because their friends do not want them in their study group because they are gay, it is most probably minority stress.

Often minority stress is not caused by just one factor (one identity of ours that goes against the societal norm), but by accumulated factors related to queerphobia, racism, and xenophobia, to name a few. This is a crucial point for our group, who are not out of the societal norm in terms of our gender identity and sexual orientation, but also in terms of our ethnicity, race, religion, or migrant background. Consequently, our possibilities and access to resources are limited and that causes stress in us. It results from historical developments and power structures that we are not responsible for.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- Have you experienced people treating you differently because of your queer identity or some other identity that is not a part of the societal norm?
- If you are comfortable, explain one particular situation you thought about while listening to the group leader presenting a minority stress topic.

Minority stress results from many experiences that have followed us throughout our life. Those experiences can be offensive comments related to our sexuality or gender identity. The offensive comments can be verbal and expressed directly to us. These comments can be written in relation to us on social media. These offensive comments can be those that we hear about queer people overall. These situations make us feel uncomfortable

and might cause minority stress. They produce anxiety in us, as well as fear that they will happen again. The unpleasant situations do not have to be even direct or indirect comments, but a degrading way in which someone looks at us or their body language.

In relation to anxiety and stress, many queer persons experience feelings of shame and guilt for the negative situations that happen. Consequently, they often avoid going to public spaces and feel as if they cannot live their lives as they would like to. In those moments, it is important to remember that there is nothing that we should feel guilty about. This is a structural problem where the persons who do not belong to the norm are excluded and discriminated against. In relation to the queer community, this norm is a heteronormative and cisgender societal norm.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- After listening about possible causes of minority stress (comments, non-verbal actions, non-inclusion), can you think about some situations that you experienced?
- What sort of feelings this situation caused in you?

It is recommended that you take a break before continuing the session.

Micro aggressions refer to people's verbal and non-verbal actions that minority groups perceive as downgrading and stressful. A person performing micro aggression towards someone does not always have to have a bad intention (being intentionally racist/homophobic), but simply someone affected by prejudices and society that normalizes a specific type of behavior.

One example can be a comment, "You look amazing, not like other transgender girls" that someone says to a transgender woman. Although that person might think it is empowering to say that to the girl, it is actually micro aggression because it is downgrading the whole trans community as something that is not "amazing" and something that is worse than what that person is, probably heterosexual and cisgender. Another example of micro aggression with a racist/xenophobic element in it is asking someone, "Where are you really from?". This is a common experience for all of us living in Sweden. It is often related to one's skin color and migrant background. This can also be experienced by, for example, a black person born and raised in Sweden.

It is important to say that how the majority population might think about minority stress and micro aggressions is absolutely not relevant. It has to do with the minority group's perception. Only that minority group is entitled to say what they feel as micro aggression.

There is no universal solution for dealing with minority stress and micro aggressions. Instead, everyone deals with it in their own ways. Ask the group what are their ways of dealing with minority stress and micro aggressions. What would they advise to someone who feels overwhelmed by it on a daily basis?

One way for dealing with a situation that is causing minority stress/includes micro aggressions is to point out to that specific person what we are not okay with. This can be verbal where we directly say to the person that something is important for our integrity and that their particular action does not make us feel comfortable. Regardless of our feelings, we must try to react calmly, point out the facts, and not act violently towards the person that caused stress in us. Of course, this strategy might not work in all situations. It is important to do a risk assessment for ourselves and evaluate if that person is able to understand what we have to say. Could that cause some sort of more violent reaction from their side? It is always important to find a balance between protecting ourselves and pointing out injustice.

If a situation involving minority stress and micro aggressions happens, it is important to talk with people who support you, such as this group. For some of us it works to transform our negative feelings into something creative, such as writing or painting.

Ask the group members how they cope with minority stress and micro aggressions. This discussion can be not just inspiring, but life-saving for many of us.

The end of a session (Debriefing) is a standardized ending of the Peer-to-Peer Support Group regardless of a given topic. After the session, the group leader should fill in the session report document (attached at the end of this guidebook).

SESSION 10

COPING WITH TRAUMA AND DEPRESSION

Introduction, presentation round, and reminder about the working principles is a standardized beginning of Peer-to-Peer Support Group regardless of a given topic.

During the previous session, we discussed minority stress. Minority stress as such is often related to one's trauma. Note that trauma as a subject is much more complex than it is covered here. The information that a group leader presents are partial, but important because they are strictly related to the needs of our group.

In the broadest sense, psychological trauma is a psychological injury that is generally caused by a series of events that were distressing to the person who experienced it. Trauma is not just related to the traumatic event(s) that happened in the past, but it easily becomes a part of our present. It affects how we feel, think, and behave. Trauma also makes us confuse our presence and past. It is a part of our memory and it can be triggered by some event that seems unrelated to it at first sight. Trauma keeps haunting us and could cause sleep difficulties, anger, and concentration difficulties. Trauma causes a constant feeling of "survival mode" even when danger is not around us and we are physically safe.

In relation to our group composed of queer asylum-seeking/undocumented youth, trauma can be caused by severe incidences that we experienced in our home countries. These incidences often include violence, sexual assault, and abuse that one experienced due to sexual orientation or gender identity. This was our reality in homophobic and transphobic settings where we were located. Even if we are safer now and far away from those events, it can happen that we still have flashbacks of particular events from the past. Sometimes we experience feelings of anxiety and get reminded of some unpleasant situations without any concrete reason. That happens because these situations were traumatic for us.

Most queer asylum seekers carry trauma with them. It often gets revived once we go to the Migration Agency and have an introductory interview about the asylum case. We live those events once again while explaining why we asked for protection in a specific country. Once we were done talking, we were probably moved to one of the accommodation facilities where other asylum seekers are. At least in Sweden, those asylum seekers are not necessarily queer people. They are often cisgender and heterosexual persons sometimes coming from our home countries. This had been traumatic in itself for many of us, regardless of whether these persons were a real threat or not.

Uncertainty about one's asylum case is also traumatic. It can cause depression in a person. The reasons for that are more than obvious: we were in a dangerous setting from which we fled, but still, there is a possibility that we will be sent back there. According to the current asylum regulations in Sweden, getting a positive decision for one's asylum case does not mean that one is safe forever- it is a temporary residence permit that brings additional uncertainty about one's future. All of these situations are stressful and could cause trauma revival and depression.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- Are there some aspects that you recognize in yourself while listening to a group leader's presentation in relation to trauma and depression?
- How much are negative events from the past part of your present?
- The general symptoms of depression are constantly being sad, hopeless, even having suicidal thoughts. Have you experienced any life period with similar symptoms?

Note to a group leader: Reminding the group members that they do not have to go into details while expressing themselves in words. The information heard within the group is strictly used to assess which aspects are the most important for the present members. Once we know that, we are much more able to provide them with relevant information related to the recovery process and support mechanisms.

It is recommended that you take a break before continuing the session.

In the first part of the session, we focused on what trauma and depression mean and how they can be related to us as a group. Later on, we had a discussion based on our personal experiences in relation to it. A group leader should thank all who were brave enough to participate in this discussion. Thank them for empowering other participants to talk openly about these experiences in a safe setting, such as the Peer-to-Peer Support Group. Also, thank those who have not been ready to discuss this topic, but are still here and empowering everyone with their presence.

When we think about our trauma and the best ways to deal with it, three aspects are important to be considered. These aspects are individual, group, and professional level.

INDIVIDUAL LEVEL - The fact that we recognized some of the trauma/depression symptoms in ourselves is a key for starting working on our well-being and better mental health in the future. Since you are the one who experienced a particular event(s) that is traumatic and can lead to depression, you are the one who is an expert in terms of knowing all details

related to it. You know the best how these events looked like, you know the best how you felt in that moment, and you know the best to what that triggered in you later on. Lastly, you know what works best for you to feel better—listen to yourself, your body, and what your mind is trying to communicate with you. Once a person is physically safe, it is essential to have the routines in your daily life (for example, eating at proper times, working out, reading). Having predictability and purpose is very important in the healing process.

Lastly, understanding your symptoms helps you with handling your reactions better. Meditation, breathing exercises, and trying to have a positive outlook on life are helpful for many people, perhaps for you also.

GROUP LEVEL - Once we are in a safe country, many challenges can still remain during or after the asylum process. However, this is a unique possibility for us to be the ones who decide whom we call our family. Our chosen family here in Sweden are the persons who support and accept us for who we are. These persons are essential for our recovery process. Some examples of this group-level support are this Peer-to-Peer Support Group, a queer organization where we are the members, our queer friends, our non-queer friends who try their best to understand us and be there for us.

Within this Peer-to-Peer session, we remember certain events that were not so pleasant and that affected our lives negatively. Not repressing these memories in order to process them and recover is one of the keys to healing. Here we talk about certain trauma-focused events to the degree you are comfortable with. We all together try to create a supportive social network to avoid further traumatization and offer a space where both group care and self-care are in focus.

PROFESSIONAL LEVEL - Recovering with the support of this group and your chosen family is important, but sometimes professional help is needed. Consequently, it is crucial for a group leader to inform the group what sort of professional services are available to them.

The asylum seekers in Sweden have a right to medical appointments that are considered as “care that cannot wait”. These appointments could be in the form of health counseling, a meeting with a psychologist/psychiatrist, or something third that the health care center finds urgent.

The website 1177 Vårdguiden provides you with information in different languages concerning healthcare services. You can make your appointment also by calling/going to the nearest health care center here in Sweden.

RFSL has its support service for queer people who experienced violence, threat, and violation. You can contact them by writing to stod@rfs.se

Ask the group leader for assistance if contacting them alone feels overwhelming.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- What was the most helpful for you personally in dealing with trauma and depression?
- Do you feel that this group is helpful for you in dealing with symptoms of trauma and depression? In what ways?
- What is your experience with professional healthcare wellbeing services in Sweden?

The end of a session (Debriefing) is a standardized ending of the Peer-to-Peer Support Group regardless of a given topic. After the session, the group leader should fill in the session report document (attached at the end of this guidebook).

SESSION 11

GENDER EXPRESSION

Introduction, presentation round, and reminder about the working principles is a standardized beginning of Peer-to-Peer Support Group regardless of a given topic.

When we talk about gender, we have to differentiate between one's gender identity and gender expression.

Gender identity is a personal identification as female, male, or something else (internal self).

Gender expression is one's presentation that can be masculine, feminine, or something else (external self).

None of them is related to one's sexual orientation (heterosexuality, homosexuality, bisexuality, etc.). However, there are certain expectations and stereotypes that exist in the world we are living in. For example, a heterosexual female person is often expected to be feminine in terms of her gender expression. These stereotypes exist in both queer and heterosexual/cisgender communities.

For some people, gender identity and gender expression are closely related to one another. For example, one who identifies as female (gender identity) prefers to present herself as feminine (gender expression).

In the above discussion about gender identity and gender expression, we mentioned "something else". That "something else" includes persons who can be non-binary in terms of their gender identity and gender expression. Non-binary is an umbrella term for identities/expressions that are not male or female. It is a term widely used by persons who do not follow the norms of expressing themselves with binaries such as masculinity-femininity, or male-female.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- If you are comfortable, share with the group where you stand on a spectrum of gender identity, gender expression, and sexual orientation?
- Do you feel accepted by queer people who surround you in relation to your gender identity or gender expression?

Gender expression can vary and be dependent on a particular moment of life that we are in. Also, there can be daily variations from masculinity to femininity, as well as being somewhere in between. For instance, we express our gender differently during our childhood, adolescence, and how we do it today.

Daily variations of one's gender expression can be through one's behavior, clothing, hairstyle, voice, and body characteristics. For example, someone who identifies as male can have a morning where he will feel like taking an Instagram selfie with a full-grown beard. That same person on the same day can shave his beard, decide to put on a lovely lipstick, and go party with his friends. Consequently, this person's day is very much gender non-conforming, and he was varying between what the normative world perceives as masculine or feminine. In that way, one's gender expression almost always has a performative element. That is why it is often said that one is "doing" gender.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- Has your gender expression changed throughout time? Explain how and in which periods.
- To what extent are you "visual" with your gender expression? How and do you express it through your clothing, hairstyle, way of speaking, or something else?

It is recommended that you take a break before continuing the session.

To make this Peer-to-Peer session even more relevant for our group's participants (queer asylum-seeking youth), the second part of this session focuses on how we had expressed our gender in our home countries, and how we express it today in Sweden.

A person can apply for asylum in a specific country based on violations that a person experienced due to their sexual orientation and gender identity, but also gender expression. Our gender expression could be a reason how people in our home countries perceived and assumed our gender identity and sexual orientation. Unfortunately, many of us had negative experiences for a certain way we were expressing ourselves.

Many of us have found ourselves in situations where we adapted our gender expression depending on what is safe for different contexts. For example, a transgender young girl could be super comfortable expressing herself hyper feminine in a safe setting, while she was expressing herself in more subtle ways back to her home country. There is nothing wrong with it. That does not mean that this person was not accepting herself, but simply this person was using her own judgment and considered risk factors that existed in a transphobic environment she was in. This means that our gender expression is often context-dependent. We have absolute freedom to choose how, when, and to what extent we will be open with it.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- What can you tell a group about your gender expression in your home country vs. today in Sweden?
- During the asylum interview for refugee protection, many of us talked about our gender expression. Was it difficult to express that in words?

Are there any concepts related to queer terminology (especially those related to gender identity and gender expression) that you do not understand and would like a group leader to explain further?

The group leader should try to reply to the questions if they have the correct information. If you do not have the right answer, inform the group that you will come back with that information for the next session.

The end of a session (Debriefing) is a standardized ending of the Peer-to-Peer Support Group regardless of a given topic. After the session, the group leader should fill in the session report document (attached at the end of this guidebook).

SESSION 12

BODY IMAGE

Introduction, presentation round, and reminder about the working principles is a standardized beginning of Peer-to-Peer Support Group regardless of a given topic.

A focus of Peer-to-Peer Support Group is wellbeing and promoting better mental health among queer migrant youth. While covering the topic of body image, our goal is to leave all participants with positive feelings about themselves and their community, as well as to encourage them to create healthy life habits.

Body image can be defined as both thoughts and feelings related to your physical body.

Body image can be positive, negative, or a combination of both (switching from positive to negative feelings about your body in different life points and contexts).

The first question we would like to ask ourselves is how much is our body image influenced by what we actually want vs. what society expects from us? That society can be both general society, as well as a queer community specifically.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- Would you define yourself as a person who has a positive or negative body image of yourself, or is that a combination of both?
- Would you say that you are the one who decides what are your feelings/ thoughts about your body, or do you think that is influenced by something else?

The feelings about one's body come from the earliest period- one's childhood. Depending on the context, we are more or less exposed to media that show us what it means to be a good-looking person (generally man or woman). When it comes to non-binary representation in media, it is fewer. In some of our home countries, the non-binary bodies were not visible at all. From our childhood, we internalized what sort of people's bodies are appreciated and considered beautiful by the people surrounding us.

During our adolescence, many of us did not belong to a norm of beauty present in our community. Some of us were bullied for being too tall, some of us were bullied for being too short. Some of us were bullied because our body shape was not feminine or masculine enough.

An important point here is that our current body image is affected by our experiences and memories. If we were encouraged for who we are and what bodies we have, we have most probably created a positive body image. If that was not the case, there is a high possibility of developing a negative body image about oneself. The effects of negative body image can be low self-esteem, isolation from others, unhealthy eating patterns and even depression.

A group leader should give a chance to participants to spontaneously share and relate to everything they have heard so far. Perhaps they have recognized themselves in some of these patterns, or maybe not? Do not ask too many questions: let the participants talk, conclude, and reflect.

When we talked about beauty ideals coming from the general society, we referred to those ideals that are heterosexual and cisgender in their essence. However, there are particular dynamics for gay men/women/non-binary persons, bisexual men/women/non-binary persons, transgender men/women/non-binary persons, intersex men/women/non-binary persons.

For example, many gay men struggle to meet a “6-pack body ideal”. Many trans women struggle to meet a “curvy-but-slim body ideal”. Many non-binary persons are worried over if their bodies are non-binary “enough”. Many gay persons of color wonder where is their place in the queer community that often follows an ideal of the white body as the ideal one.

EXERCISE

Provide the participants with a piece of paper and pen. Ask them to write anonymously one thing/part they like in relation to a) their bodies and b) their personalities. Once they are done, the group leader can collect the papers, read them aloud without further commenting or pointing out to whom the papers belong.

It is recommended that you take a break before continuing the session.

Being aware of negative thoughts and feelings we might have about our bodies is always the first step in solving this problem. It is the first step towards a positive self-image. This session will hopefully help us to have body positivity as our goal, not a body type that society considers ideal.

Body positivity means that we both accept and appreciate our bodies. We want us to respect our bodies in the same way that they respect us. Your body was with you through so many challenges. It serves you to go through different happy and sad moments. It kept itself healthy and made you come where you are today. Your body was carrying a burden of negative experiences in your home country and through the complicated asylum process. It did not give up on you, and that is why we are here today. Being

kind to our bodies means being kind to ourselves- both we and our bodies have deserved that.

Body positivity does not mean that you should think of your body as an ultimate perfection. It is about accepting sides that you like, and it is about accepting its limitations that make you into the unique and wonderful person you are. We are all human beings, not objects which serve just an esthetic purpose. You are a collection of both physical and non-physical. You carry beautiful things in you. They are reflected in your character and everything about you that other people value.

Body positivity also means that your body is your friend. Accepting is keeping it in good form and embracing self-care in your daily life.

EXERCISE

The group leader should give the papers and pens to all participants. Ask them to write their names on the top. Collect all papers. Give the papers one by one to the group and ask the participants to write one compliment to the person whose name is at the top. That compliment should not be body-oriented, but positive feedback on one's personality.

The compliment can be related to a particular situation, such as "(Name), you are amazing because you were there to listen when I was struggling with X". It can be more general, such as "(Name), you are kind-hearted, and it is amazing to have you in this group".

Once the participants are done with writing, a group leader can read aloud the compliments given to a particular participant. Ask that participant how it feels to receive those compliments.

This exercise is a perfect way to end this session since it will leave the participants with a positive spirit and perhaps make us aware of how other people appreciate us.

The end of a session (Debriefing) is a standardized ending of the Peer-to-Peer Support Group regardless of a given topic. After the session, the group leader should fill in the session report document (attached at the end of this guidebook).

IMPORTANT TO HIGHLIGHT

There will be a slight difference in writing style.

Taking into account the importance of the topics discussed and the outcomes of these sessions, we decided to include them in the manual as well. The sessions are produced by the Newcomers Youth Coordinators and Leaders from Göteborg and Stockholm.

Session 13: Coming out - written by Nera Mešinović

Session 14: Toxic Positivity - written by Nera Mešinović

Session 15: Self care and stress - written by Adrian Glamocak

SESSION 13

COMING OUT

Introduction, presentation round, and reminder about the working principles is a standardized beginning of Peer-to-Peer Support Group regardless of a given topic.

Coming out of the closet, often shortened to just coming out, is a metaphor that is used to describe the process of becoming aware, acknowledging and accepting one's gender identity, or sexual orientation, specifically tied to the LGBTQI community. The term stems from the early 20th century and implied coming out as we know it today, but exclusively to the queer community. It is discussed and debated as a privacy issue and often entails a lot of deeply psychological processes. Coming out is also a gradual process and often referred to as a journey. It is a matter of personal identity and a voluntary disclosure. Simply put, it is admitting to oneself or telling someone that you are gay, bisexual, lesbian, trans or something else from the spectrum.

It entails the decision-making process where one goes through exploring and accepting their own sexual orientation or gender identity and potentially sharing it with others. It is often considered a risk-taking event, especially for asylum seekers who used to live in countries where it is forbidden or stigmatised to identify oneself as gay, bisexual, lesbian, trans, asexual or as any other queer identity. LGBTQI people who used to live in these countries tend to experience severe social stigma, discrimination, shaming, violence and correction treatments.

Even though the situation for LGBTQI people is better in the Western countries, the LGBTQI community still has a higher rate of teenage suicides, a bigger rate of homelessness, unemployment etc., exactly because of stigma, stereotypes, heteronormative expectations, and because of threats of violence. And all these reasons are exactly why we still talk about coming out as a liberation process, and consider it as emancipation from oppression.

There can be a lot of emotions coming up when we start this discussion. There might be people in the group who will not want to share at all or will want to talk a lot. So, the suggestion is to work with open-ended questions in order to evaluate where the group is coming from in order to provide the necessary support.

In the first part we are going to focus on venting the negative parts of their experiences of coming out, reassuring them and reflecting on their experiences in a way that confirms that experience. If you see that they have a hard time opening up in front of a bigger group, split them into groups of 3-4 with the same questions. They might have an easier time sharing if the group is smaller. And later return to the group and ask them to reflect on what they talked about.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- What kind of feelings and thoughts do you get when we talk about coming out? (freedom, excitement, fear, pressure, anger, empowerment-just to give a few)
- Do you remember the first time you came out? To yourself or others? Share your experience with the group.
- Did you experience any feelings such as fear, shame, guilt, confusion? If yes, do you want to share some of those experiences, feelings and thoughts with the group?

Coming out is not simple, as they have probably demonstrated through their discussion. Feelings like fear, insecurity, anxiety, shame, pressure, guilt and confusion are feelings that come up often, especially in the first times when LGBTQI people are coming out, especially when they did not get any positive reinforcement or had positive examples of coming out around them, in the family and in the society. These feelings are also very normal and there is nothing wrong with feeling all of these related to coming out. We are all products of societies that we were raised in and which conditioned us on what is right and what is wrong. And being LGBTQI is right and beautiful. Even though it can bring with itself a turmoil of confusing emotions that every individual has to go through.

In the next part we are going to expand the topic of coming out a little further, by asking questions that are putting the topic in perspective and in a few different contexts. Those contexts are:

- The reality of perpetual coming out to those around LGBTQI people and the necessity to learn that one does not always have to come out;
- The reality that close people to us also have to come out which makes the instant acceptance when coming out a bit more complex;
- The reality that LGBTQI people are also influenced by the heteronormative society and narrative which brings up another challenge of facing auto homophobia and auto transphobia.

Auto homophobia and auto transphobia are internalized homophobia and transphobia, the projection of negative social attitudes towards oneself. When extreme, it leads to rejection of ones own sexual orientation or gender identity. It creates a conflict within the person, between the desire to be oneself and the desire to fit in the heteronormative society. It is considered to be a common experience in the process of coming out, and overcoming it is essential for strengthening the feeling of personal integrity.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- How many times do we have to come out as LGBTQI people?
- Is it only LGBTQI people who have to come out?
- Is coming out always a good decision?
- Have you ever experienced auto homophobia or auto transphobia and what do you think that causes this?

It is recommended that you take a break before continuing the session.

In the first part of the session, we have focused on the negative emotions that can arise in the coming out process. The members have shared experiences about their coming out and the feeling in the group might be lower.

In the second part of the session we are going to focus on the positive aspects of coming out. Simply put, we will try to examine what it is that brings up positive emotions during the process and after the process of coming out. Coming out process is, as earlier mentioned, a liberating experience and emancipatory step against oppression and it carries a lot of positive aspects with it. LGBTQI people experience feelings of relief, freedom, empowerment, connection, increased self-confidence, greater honesty in relationships, and a sense of greater personal integrity.

Here, we are going to ask them questions about the positive parts of their experiences of coming out. We do this before we make any conclusions or recommend any strategies. Most of them have already developed some good strategies and sharing about it will lighten the mood and remind them of all the strength they have and of positive experiences of being an LGBTQI person.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- How did you decide that you want to come out, what were the thoughts and feelings that you experienced that inspired you to come out?
- When you came out, did you have any people who supported you? Did you have any positive experiences of coming out to others? How did those experiences make you feel? What did the context look like? Share with the group if that feels good.
- Were there some strategies you used that helped you to prepare for coming out? Were there some tools you used to encourage and support yourself after coming out?

LGBTQI people have, just like everyone else in the world, a need to be loved and accepted for just who they are. These needs will most often initiate the process of coming out. The positive outcomes that LGBTQI people want is the sense of relief, feeling good about themselves, being more honest in their relationships, having a bigger sense of personal integrity, feeling connected to others and fully accepted in the society.

Since this is not always the case, it is useful to remind the group that coming out should not be abrupt or urgent. That one should not come out while experiencing strong emotions such as being upset and angry. Instead of this, it is good to develop a support network for oneself, look for a mentor, talk to an accepting friend, talk to LGBTQI people who have already gone through coming out, watch movies, read up on coming out and search for content that provides positive reassurance.

Remind the group to be patient with themselves and to take it one step at a time, not to rush anywhere because, for example, some of their friends or other people came out sooner or were better accepted. Lastly, remind them to be prepared for different types of reactions. In this situation, it is also important to go back to the significance of having a core support system, in friends, teachers, mentors, family members that will be able to offer support in case the reactions they get are not the most accepting.

The end of a session (Debriefing) is a standardized ending of the Peer-to-Peer Support Group regardless of a given topic. After the session, the group leader should fill in the session report document (attached at the end of this guidebook).

SESSION 14

TOXIC POSITIVITY

Introduction, presentation round, and reminder about the working principles is a standardized beginning of Peer-to-Peer Support Group regardless of a given topic.

Focus of Peer-to-Peer sessions is on emotional and mental wellbeing of queer migrant youth in Sweden. This session has a goal to empower the participants to express and experience both negative and positive emotions which are both part of our authentic human experience. It also has the goal to make it easier for the group to connect with each other, with the community and the world around them, and to provide healthy life habits that will be useful for them in the future.

The topic of today's session is Toxic positivity. The session will begin with a discussion, unlike other sessions. Prepare a few toxic positivity statements (see table below) and write them on a whiteboard, flipchart, or print them out on papers that you will later share with every member of the group. A lot of members have probably heard of the concept and will recognize the statements easily.

The focus of this part of the session is to give space to the group to share their knowledge, thoughts and feelings surrounding toxic positivity. The questions given are open ended questions so the discussion stays broader. Allow the group to explore without interrupting, explaining or interfering. In case the group is not familiar with the term or does not have any answers to the following questions, proceed with the explanation of the term of toxic positivity as stated below the questions, and then come back to the statements and discussion questions. Another way to go is to give examples of the youth leaders' own reactions to these statements. This can encourage the group to start sharing or offer them an example of possible responses.

Examples of Toxic positivity statements: (These are a model that the youth leaders can work with, but the youth leaders can also find statements that would be more relevant for their local groups.)

Don't worry, be happy.	I see that you are really stressed, is there anything I can do?
Don't think about it, stay positive	Describe what you are feeling, I am listening
Delete negativity!	Suffering is a part of life, you are not alone. It is pretty normal to have some negativity in this situation.

If I can do it, so can you!	Everyone's stories, abilities and limitations are different and that is okay.
If I can do it, so can you!	Sometimes life sucks. How can I help you during this hard time?
It could be worse.	That is really tuff. I'm sorry you are going through this.
Failure is not an option.	Every failure is a lesson and a learning opportunity. It is okay to feel bad about it for a bit, though.
Think happy thoughts.	I am here for you, both good and bad. I know that there is a lot that could go wrong. Is there something that could go right?
You'll get over it.	This is hard. But you have done hard things before and I believe in you.

Important: It is very important for the toxic positivity statements in the first column to be written out somewhere, whiteboard, flipchart or paper, because in the second part of the session (Exercise 2), we will come back to these statements and work with the group on finding better solutions for expressing in a less toxic manner (examples in the second column).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- How would you describe your attitude towards the world? (positive, negative, or something else)
- What kind of feelings and thoughts do you get when you hear these statements(read the statements out loud)? (excitement, fear, pressure, anger, positivity)
- Have you ever seen or heard these statements? Where have you seen or heard them most often?
- Do you know what toxic positivity is? Share your knowledge and give examples if that feels okay.
- Do you ever use these statements and in which situations and contexts?
- Do you repost/use these quotes without thinking? Do you use/post these quotes when you feel good or bad? Share your experiences with the group.

Toxic positivity is a term used to describe the process of avoiding negative emotions and responding to distress with false reassurance instead of with compassion. Toxic positivity in its pattern denies the complexity of human experiences which can be both negative and positive. Toxic positivity is a mechanism that stems out of being uncomfortable with negative emotions. It is often well intended, but it does cause disconnection from both our own feelings and the ability to sit with the uncomfortable feelings of others.

Negative emotions often arise when life doesn't go as we would like it to, or as we have planned. For example, if a person's loved (friend, family member, partner) one passes away, or if we lose a job or housing, if we don't get into the school we want to. In the case of LGBTQI asylum seekers, they might arise if one doesn't get the residency permit, or if the coming out doesn't go well. These are all very stressful situations and confronted with them, if we just say, "It could have been worse" or "Just keep looking forward" without looking under the surface and seeing that there are feelings of disappointment, anger, sadness, guilt, shame, that need the attention and that need to be heard and acknowledged, these feelings may just simmer and cause bigger mental or physical problems further in life.

In the context of connecting to others, responding with these statements and not listening and acknowledging the feeling that someone is conveying can cause a disconnection with that person, because human beings connect by sharing both their negative and positive experiences and emotions. If one uses too many toxic positivity statements, the other person might not feel free to express their true feelings and the relationship will eventually end because of this disconnection. Toxic positivity statements do come from the desire to help, from wanting to make ourselves or others feel better, but are using clichés because of the lack of knowledge on what to say or what to do.

It is recommended that you take a break before continuing the session.

In the second part of the session we will focus more on explaining the difference between true positivity and toxic positivity and finding tools that will work best to offer to members to be able to recognize and confront toxic positivity.

Not all positivity is bad. True positivity comes from accepting both positive and negative emotions and allowing both of the processes to unravel. It is leaning into our authentic feelings and accepting all of our emotions.

EXERCISE 1:

This is a mindfulness exercise. Give everyone papers and pens and instruct them to write down, without thinking about it, what they notice they are feeling and what is going on in their body. Instruct them to not judge them-

selves for any negativity that might come up, to just let themselves write everything down. Remind them that they will not have to share anything that they write with anyone else. And the longer they write, the easier it will get.

This exercise has a goal for everyone in the group to become aware of the depth of their emotional experiences. This will help with them recognizing that in every moment, they have a lot of different thoughts and feelings that are coming up and will help them in the later exercise where they will have to give positive examples of responses that would be used instead of toxic positivity statements.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

(Here, do not insist on the members sharing the content that they wrote about, but focus more on the bare process of writing, was it easy or hard, did stuff come up that they were surprised with etc)

- Have you ever done an exercise like this before?
- How was the experience of writing?
- Was it easy to just write down what came up, or was it challenging?
- Did you learn anything new about yourself?

After the discussion, thank them for being willing to share and reflect personally confirming any member's feelings as valid.

EXERCISE 2:

Brainstorm different ways one can express understanding and compassion instead of using toxic positivity statements

Go back to the flipchart and repeat that the context is one of the stressful situations in life that have been named earlier. The working question is: What response would you give to a friend that didn't get the residency, who lost their job, who broke up with their partner etc? Instead of using one of the toxic positivity examples.

Let them brainstorm, and come up with solutions. If they have any issues, you can bring up the examples stated in the table from above and explain them shortly. Most of the examples focus on truly listening to the other person, acknowledging the feelings that they are expressing and trying to understand the situation that they are coming from. It is a position of not prioritizing either positive or negative emotions, and letting your friend experience their feelings.

It is also good to remind them that in communication, when confronted with unwanted advice, one can just express what they need: “I need empathy right now and not advice”. It is good to express the intention for the conversation, because it also helps the other person to relax and respond in a more authentic way. It enhances the connection between two people, or with oneself.

The end of a session (Debriefing) is a standardized ending of the Peer-to-Peer Support Group regardless of a given topic. After the session, the group leader should fill in the session report document (attached at the end of this guidebook).

SESSION 15

SELF CARE AND STRESS

Introduction, presentation round, and reminder about the working principles is a standardized beginning of Peer-to-Peer Support Group regardless of a given topic.

Focus of Peer-to-Peer sessions is on emotional and mental wellbeing of queer migrant youth in Sweden. This session has a goal to empower the participants to express and experience both negative and positive emotions which are both part of our authentic human experience. It also has the goal to make it easier for the group to connect with each other, with the community and the world around them, and to provide healthy life habits that will be useful for them in the future.

The topic of today's session is Self care and stress. In life we experience a lot of different things that are out of our control. We are born within a family that we didn't choose, into a society that has its own norms and laws and circumstances we sometimes can not do anything about. The thought of this might make everything feel hard to cope with and we use a lot of our energy worrying about life. This worry can cause a stress reaction to our bodies and even though stress in some situations is good (because it is a fight or flight response our body has to export more adrenaline to our muscles and heart) long term stress is harmful for us. If we don't find ways to switch the fight or flight system, it can have profound effects on our mind and bodies. One way to calm both mind and body is to actually take time for yourself and take care of yourself. The only thing we can control in this life is our response to things that happened around us. We can only control how we react and feel about different situations, but we can not control the world around us. This is why I invite you to join me today to talk about these topics and explore different ways to manage your stress and start putting your energy in the right place.

The first thing we are going to do is establish the meaning of self care and how it can look like, what we mean by it. Self care means different things for different people. We will also want to establish the definition of stress.

Feel free to do this in the way that feels most comfortable for you and the group. It can be done on a white board where you sit in a half circle and write down concepts together. You can also hand out pen and paper to everyone to write down for themselves first and then bring it up to the larger group.

One suggestion is that if you are more than 10 people, please start with your own reflections on a piece of paper, if less than 10 you can directly talk about what comes up.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- What does self care mean to you? How do you take care of yourself?
- What is stress for you? When do you feel stressed?

After the first exercise, invite everyone to join you in a circle and open up for discussion. Before doing so, remember to check in with everyone and see how they are doing and remind them of the safe space that has been created.

- Share an experience with the rest of the group about your favorite thing to do for yourself and why you like it so much
- How does it feel when you take time to do something just for you and not for someone else?
- Do you have strategies to calm yourself down when you get really stressed out? If yes, share with the rest of the group.
- How can we support each other, if a friend is feeling down or worried or vice versa, how can we be an emotional support without taking on too much from the other?
- How do you feel about setting boundaries for yourself and others? Does it feel good or bad, why?

It is recommended that you take a break before continuing the session.

FUTURE SELF JOURNAL

Future self journal is a practice aimed to help you out of your subconscious autopilot or in other words the daily conditioned habits that are keeping you stuck repeating your past. To journal to your future self is a way to start keeping small promises to yourself about areas in your life where you want to see change. This is a great practice if you are struggling with changing habits in your life that are not serving you any purpose or making you feel bad.

Example 1: I want to drink more water daily

Promise 1: I'm going to drink one glass of water every morning before anything else in the morning

Example 2: I want to get in better shape/move my body more

Promise 2: I'm going to go out for a 10 min walk every day

The promise you make for yourself is not supposed to be too big because then it can seem overwhelming to handle. Start with something small and then with time you can start making bigger commitments. You can also choose to write to your future self on how you would like your life to look like.

This exercise is supposed to be for each person themselves. If you want, when they are finished writing ask if someone wants to share what they wrote or how they see themselves in the future. You can also just move on to the next part since this exercise's purpose is to get the one writing to start to reflect upon their own change.

MEDITATION

The practice of meditation has shown to have profound effects on your mind, body and spirit. Today's western medicine and society have just now started to realize the effects of meditation. Meditation is good for various reasons like the way we with our breath can calm our nervous system and return to a calm state. Meditation also holds space for us to watch our thoughts and see how they come and go. Practicing meditation will help you stay connected to your body's ever-changing emotional state.

Meditation exercise

(This part should be read by the leader out loud to the rest of the group)

To begin, find yourself a quiet place (if possible) and comfortable position. Settle into the present moment, begin to turn your attention to yourself and your inner experience. If you feel comfortable, gently close your eyes or find a spot at which to gently gaze. Take a deep breath, bringing all the air all the way down to your lungs, feel your belly inflate, spend an extra moment or two letting out a nice slow long breath, and repeat, feel your lungs expanding with air, exhale nice and slow. When you feel ready, turn your attention to your physical body and all of the present sensations. Starting at the top of your head, scan your body and notice if you feel any tension, tightness, warmth, tingling or lightness anywhere. Spend a moment or two on your head, neck and shoulders, then move downwards, noticing any or all sensations present in your arms and hands. Move a bit lower, noticing your chest area and stomach. Travel down your upper and lower legs and end with your feet and toes. Spend as much time reconnecting with any area you feel called to and when you feel ready, return your attention to your breath, gradually expanding it to the environment around you and returning to the sights, smells and sounds present in this moment.

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SESSION REPORT

AN EFFECTIVE WAY TO EVALUATE A PARTICULAR SESSION.

Date & Time:

Group leader:

Name of the session:

Number of group members:

1. Briefly explain how the session went.
2. What are the topics that came up repeatedly?
3. What was the most important moment of the session for you?
4. What was the most challenging?
5. Other things you would like to add:

OUR TOOLKIT



**A collection of material
produced by Newcomers Youth**

GUIDEBOOK - YOUTH LGBTQ+ ASYLUM,

A guide for newcomers youth meeting places.

GUIDEBOOK - INNOVATION INTELLECTUAL OUTPUT: 01

Developing youth work practices on refugee inclusion

GUIDEBOOK - INNOVATION INTELLECTUAL OUTPUT: 02

Innovative youth work and intersectional practices for YMRA

REPORT - I WANT TO BE FREE:

Legal review of LGBTQI youth asylum cases and nine stories from NCY

REPORT - ATTENTION DETENTION:

Interview study about young LGBTQI people in detention centers.

MAGAZINE - UNHEARD STORIES,

A glimpse into the lives of Newcomers Youth members

ACTIVIST HANDBOOK

The journey to becoming an NCY activist, useful tips in starting up

CAMPAIGN - IF I HAD THE POWER

Campaign films addressing racism, homophobia, transphobia and other intersecting and discriminatory struggles within the Swedish Asylum System

MUSIC VIDEO & AUDIO - IF I HAD THE POWER

Anthem, Song & Music Video (Following the campaign Series)

SHORT FILM - REMEMBER US

Three young asylum-seeking LGBTQ people meet at the Swedish Migration Agency, where a decision is made on whether they can stay in Sweden.

EDUCATIONAL FILM - YOUNG AND LGBTQI IN THE ASYLUM PROCESS

Experiences from NCY members

EDUCATIONAL FILM - WHY DIDN'T YOU TELL ME?

If asylum grounds are submitted late

The individual sessions from this Peer to Peer Guidebook can be downloaded, viewed or ordered from our website www.newcomeryouth.se

Ask us a question or provide feedback
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RFSL UNGDOM in the Swedish youth federation for LGBTQIA people's rights. As a member, you contribute to a world filled with love and respect where all LGBTQIA youths are, live and express themselves as they want to. We make change together!

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