

# **Mental Matters**

**Supporting young people  
with mental health issues**



## **Strategy Paper**

# **"Funding opportunities for supporting young people with mental health issues in non-formal settings"**



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# DISCLAIMER

“**Mental Matters**” is a European project carried out by the following organizations:

- Gemeinsam Leben & Lernen in Europa – Germany
- Pista Mágica – Portugal
- Sosiaalipedagogiikan säätiö – Finland

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# INTRODUCTION



## What is Mental Matters ?

Mental Matters is a European Erasmus+ project that focuses on supporting young people with mental health challenges. It combines volunteering, peer education, and non-formal learning to create inclusive opportunities where young people can gain stability, confidence, and social participation. At the same time, the project strengthens the skills of youth workers and develops practical tools for organisations to improve their services.

## Who are the partners ?

The project brings together three organisations from different countries: Gemeinsam leben und lernen in Europa e.V. from Germany, Sosiaalipedagogiikan säätiö from Finland, and Pista Mágica – Associação from Portugal. Each partner contributes unique expertise, from inclusive volunteering and peer education to Culture houses and impact measurement, making the cooperation a rich exchange of approaches.

## What are the objectives ?

- Implement and adapt good practices for supporting young people with mental health issues.
- Improve the skills, methods, and tools of youth workers.
- Promote active participation and civic engagement through volunteering.
- Develop funding and marketing strategies to ensure long-term sustainability.
- Strengthen the mental health and well-being of young people in non-formal settings.

3



# **PART 1:**

# **Research within own organisations**



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Based on interviews with partner organisations working in youth mental health, several strategies have proven effective when developing and funding services for young people.



## SUCCESSFUL STRATEGIES

NGOs that are most successful in securing funding usually have a **clear mission and a well-defined target group**. Funders want to understand exactly which problem is addressed, for whom, and how. Services that are based on **real needs**, such as peer support, social inclusion, or responses to digital stress and addiction, are particularly convincing.

Another key factor is the ability to **demonstrate impact**. This includes collecting data, feedback from participants, and using evaluation tools to show positive changes in young people's wellbeing. Organisations that invest in evaluation and learning build stronger credibility and long-term trust with funders.

**Diversified funding models** increase stability. Successful organisations combine public grants, EU funding (e.g. Erasmus+), local or regional support, foundations, and—in some cases—fee-based services such as training, evaluation, or consultancy for municipalities and institutions. Project funding is often used to pilot new approaches, which can later become part of long-term core services.

Strong **partnerships and networks** also play an important role. Cooperation with municipalities, schools, health services, other NGOs, and international partners increases visibility, strengthens applications, and opens new opportunities for sustainability.

## LESS SUCCESSFUL APPROACHES



Challenges arise when organisations rely on **only one funding source** or focus exclusively on short-term project funding without a long-term strategy. Smaller NGOs often struggle when competing with large, well-established organisations that have more resources and visibility.

A lack of time, staff, or expertise for fundraising, networking, and reporting can also limit success. In addition, services that do not clearly communicate their outcomes or social value are harder to fund, especially in a competitive environment.

Political changes and shifting funding priorities are another risk, particularly for organisations that depend heavily on public subsidies.

## THE VALUE OF BEING WELL NETWORKED

Good networking is not an “extra” but a **core success factor**. Well-connected NGOs benefit from shared knowledge, joint projects, and mutual support. Networks help organisations learn from others, improve service quality, and respond more effectively to emerging mental health needs.

Being part of local, national, and European networks also increases **trust and legitimacy** in the eyes of funders and decision-makers. For NGOs working with young people’s mental health, collaboration often leads to stronger, more accessible, and more sustainable services than working alone.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS FOR NGOs

- Start with small, well-designed pilots and scale up based on evidence
- Invest in impact measurement and quality assurance
- Diversify funding sources to reduce dependency and risk
- Build long-term, trust-based relationships with funders and partners
- Use your unique expertise (e.g. peer support, lived experience, innovative methods) as a strength



# **PART 2: Approaching Donors for Youth Mental Health Services**



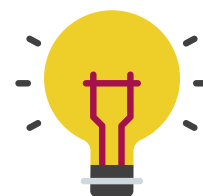
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Our Target audience: NGOs providing services for young people with mental health challenges.



## OUR SUGGESTED APPROACH

### 1. DEFINE YOUR MISSION AND UNIQUE VALUE

**Why it matters:** Funders want to understand who you are, what problem you solve, and how you are different.

**Actions:**

- Clearly define your target group and the mental health challenges you address (e.g., social isolation, digital addiction, anxiety).
- Highlight unique approaches, such as peer support, expert by experience, or innovative socio-pedagogical methods.
- Emphasize free or low-barrier access for participants to show societal impact.

### 2. SHOW EVIDENCE OF IMPACT

**Why it matters:** Donors need proof that their money creates real change.

**Actions:**

- Collect quantitative data (number of participants, service uptake, measurable outcomes).
- Use qualitative data (participant stories, case studies, testimonials).
- Develop or use evaluation tools (social return on investment, agile impact measurement, participant feedback).
- Present clear, concise evidence in proposals and reports.



### **3. DIVERSIFY FUNDING SOURCES**

**Why it matters:** Reliance on a single funder is risky; multiple streams increase sustainability.

**Actions:**

- Combine public grants, EU funding (e.g., Erasmus+), foundations, local government support, and service-based revenue.
- Use project funding to pilot innovative approaches; integrate successful pilots into core activities.
- Explore smaller, local donations or partnerships with companies, if relevant.

### **4. BUILD STRONG RELATIONSHIPS WITH DONORS**

**Why it matters:** Long-term partnerships increase trust, repeat funding, and credibility.

**Actions:**

- Treat funders as partners, not just financiers.
- Provide regular updates, site visits, and opportunities to meet participants.
- Be transparent about challenges and successes.
- Understand donor priorities and adapt proposals accordingly.
- Frame long-term strategic planning to demonstrate continuity and sustainability.

## **5. LEVERAGE NETWORKS AND PARTNERSHIPS**



**Why it matters:** Networking strengthens credibility, opens doors to co-funding, and improves visibility.

### **Actions:**

- Join local, national, and international networks focused on youth mental health.
- Collaborate with schools, municipalities, NGOs, and universities.
- Share knowledge and experience with partners to improve joint applications.
- Use networks to identify new funding opportunities.

## **6. COMMUNICATE CLEARLY AND STRATEGICALLY**

**Why it matters:** Donors decide quickly based on clarity, relevance, and trust.

### **Actions:**

- Use a standard proposal structure:
  - Introduction – your mission and organisation
  - Problem – the challenge you address
  - Solution – your services and approach
  - Target audience
  - Impact / Results – evidence of effectiveness
  - Budget – financial needs and secured resources
  - Evaluation – how success will be measured
  - Partnership – roles and collaboration
  - Attachments – supporting documents
- Combine storytelling and data to make your case compelling.
- Highlight innovative methods and alignment with donor priorities.
- Explain long-term benefits of funding your services.



## **7. MANAGE RISKS AND SUSTAINABILITY**

**Why it matters:** Funders look for stability and the ability to adapt to changes.

**Actions:**

- Balance short-term project funding with stable grants for core operations.
- Plan for political or funding shifts by maintaining contingency strategies.
- Diversify staff skills to include fundraising, project management, and evaluation.
- Communicate openly about dependencies while showing resilience and adaptability.

## **8. PRACTICAL TIPS FROM SUCCESSFUL NGOS**

- Start small with pilots, scale up with evidence.
- Work hard, focus on high-quality implementation, and maintain credibility.
- Use your organisation's unique expertise as a differentiator.
- Document everything; evaluation is key to trust and repeat funding.
- Network strategically—sometimes “challenging” others in your field can strengthen your reputation.

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