

# Youth Work/Ers Matter - Tbilisi, Georgia

14/06/2024 - Actions in EGL



We've interviewed **Slava Mezhdoyan**, president of Umbrella, a youth organization from Tbilisi, Georgia. Slava shared with us how **Umbrella** contributes to the quality development of youth work in Georgia and what are concrete initiatives and programs that help local communities. We also discussed their goals, inspiring good practice called Youth Work/Ers Matter, and the impact they bring to the municipal youth work.

## What are the main activities of Umbrella? What issues and challenges in the local youth work is your organization solving?

Umbrella is a Georgian youth value-based organization that aims to educate, motivate, and activate young people aged 13-30 in Georgia and beyond to empower and develop the communities that they come from. The organization's mission is to support young people's progress by creating educational initiatives to develop young people's competence in civil society, the environment, human rights, and democracy in Georgian society. Our main activities consist of activities done on the local, national, and international levels.

On the local level, we support three youth centers in different regions of Georgia and implement grassroots initiatives, aiming to develop local youngsters as active citizens. On the national level, we gather youth workers from different youth centers and support their professional development. On the international level, we are active in organizing different mobility activities for youth workers and young people, successfully collaborating with the Erasmus+ program, and others as well. We are also



active in supporting Georgian volunteers to volunteer abroad under ESC and on the other hand, we host the European volunteers in Georgia. Even though we are very active in local youth work, we face many challenges. I would like to mention that Georgian independent youth organizations need support for capacity building. We still lack governmental support in these areas, and international funding opportunities are limited especially for the country like Georgia. Besides the financial support, we face the issue of keeping young adults (18-30) in youth work, either as youth workers or beneficiaries, as the profession of the youth worker is not fully recognized by the government or by society. Youth work is a newly emerging field in Georgia and we are one of the pioneers striving to promote grassroots youth work despite the scarce resources and many challenges. Many youth organizations that provide opportunities are working in a style of touristic agencies just providing the international mainly Erasmus+ youth exchanges and training courses, without local youth work those activities are simply tourist visits.



### **What are the goals and milestones for your process of raising the competencies of youth workers in the NFE methods?**

We plan to keep developing the competencies of youth workers in running NFE (non-formal-education) activities with local young people. We strongly believe the development of youngsters starts with empowering the youth workers, which will have a multiplying effect on young people. For this to happen, we prioritized several goals, which will be our focus for the following years. A big one

is gamification, and we already started gamifying youth work within this project “Youth Work/Ers Matter”. We want to develop this direction further and create a special platform for the youth workers, which can be used to track the progress of youngsters involved in local youth work activities. We are working on creating a tool to recognize the developed competencies of young people not only on the international level but also at the local level, which will be the additional motivation fostering their involvement.

### **How is the project “Youth work/Ers matter” developing youth participation?**

Our main aim is to increase the level of youth participation at the local level. That’s why we put a big effort into developing local youth work. By implementing the project “Youth Work/Ers Matter”, we develop competencies of youth workers. These youth workers work with Georgian youngsters in different municipalities, and they run the Grassroots Youth Work program and develop the key competencies of the youngsters. The topics and programs of those initiatives were carefully selected and tracked the most important parts of youth participation, human rights, environmentalism, healthy lifestyle and similar. These topics are important for youth and are needed to foster youth participation. At the end of our project, the young people – our final beneficiaries, were more likely to participate in decision-making processes. They raised their awareness about different topics and were competent to engage in meaningful dialogues.





### **In your opinion, what are the results/impact of the project so far?**

The project had its immediate and medium impact at the local level and far going and expected long term.

- Short and medium-term

*Participants:* Participants developed competencies and changed their behavior; during the training course, participants improved their competencies on the topic of NFE and youth work and existing e-tools, thus improving their ability to run NFE activities with young people within the grassroots activities. Now, more young people/youth workers are aware of methods and tools for NFE activities and are ready to promote them at the local level to address youth-related issues. They better understand their role as a youth worker in solving youth-related issues.

*Communities:* Right after the residential event, participants started implementing actions in their communities and bringing positive changes and impact in this direction. They are in a significant capacity in their local communities as agents of change. The grassroots program

impacted the communities (youth) in the following way in the short term in terms of awareness (changed behavior) about the environment, human rights, youth participation, health, and other issues; in addition, they changed the behavior and became better in the aspects mentioned above than before.

Organizations: The project brought together representatives of various youth centers and organizations, and as a follow-up, these sectors started to cooperate, create links, and promote the youth work with NFE elements, something that was not the case before. This was the awareness-raising step, the leap forward in promoting grassroots youth work with NFE at the local level by involving more than 200 beneficiaries in total. Organizations also have the guidebook as a resource to promote NFE and youth work in their daily life with many valuable tools for their youth workers.

- Long term: The guidebook as a tool for future engagement is sustained on the website of the organisation (Umbrella) and will be used by the youth workers or any other actors to address various youth issues by involving young people in grassroots activities with NFE methods at the local level. Empowered youth workers will go deeper into the topic and become professionals not only in youth work but also as trainers or facilitators in youth projects. Young people – we had more than 200 beneficiaries, in this case, the majority of them changed their behavior and became ambassadors of change and thus contributed to the improvement of the situation with different youth issues. Communities – as the grassroots activities were directly related to the youth issues (participation, environment, health, HR, bullying) we expect that those issues will be drastically decreased in the communities (villages and towns) where the follow-up activities took place.





### **What are key activities coming up for your organization this year?**

This year we are working on establishing new youth centers and already started the kick-off program for the youth workers interested in starting their grassroots initiatives. We are planning to establish at least 2 youth centers at the end of this year and next years will be dedicated to supporting their development. We are also organizing the training course for center-based youth workers in June, from where we are expecting important outcomes to establish this goal. We will also start another edition of Grassroots Youth Work programs in our youth centers in September, which will give us the opportunity to involve more youngsters in this field. Besides the activities we are planning on the local level, we are also going to host a few international events this year and empower Georgian youngsters by giving them the opportunity to be involved in different European projects and exchange the best practices

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