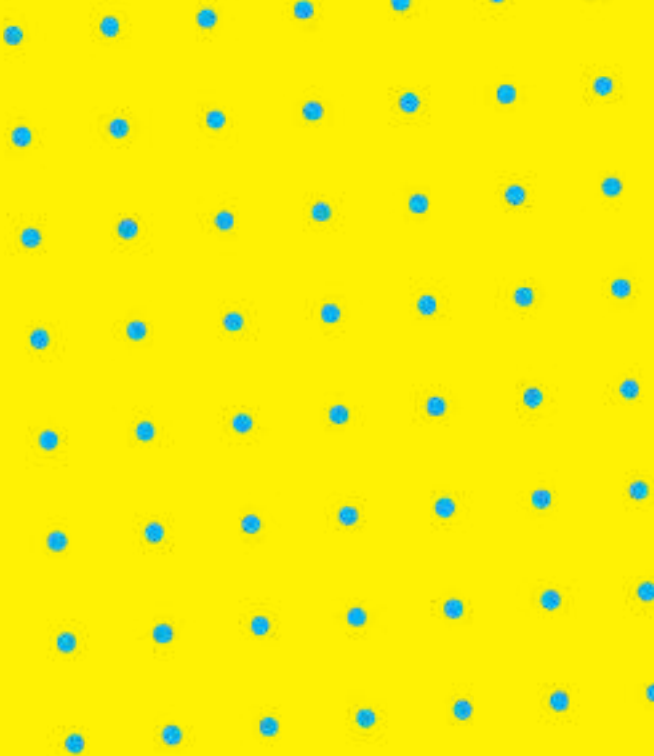






Building Caring Music Ecosystems: A toolkit for Youth Music Leaders, Teams, and Organisations



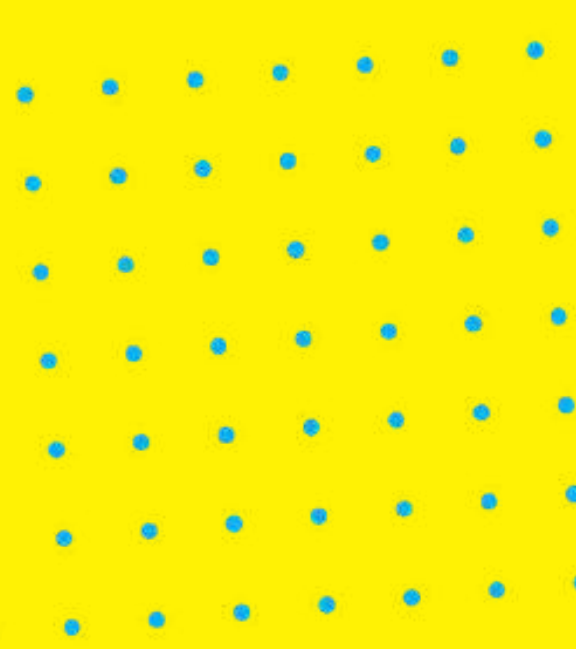
Developed by: **PIL EQ participants** (see annexes)

Written by: **Martha Lomeli**

Edited by: **Ingrid Dyrnes Svendsen, Ricardo van Mildert, Vladimir Dumitrescu, Giulia Annibaletti**

Graphic design by: **PlayState**

Visuals by: **Stefania Del Ponte, Gintare Petenaite**





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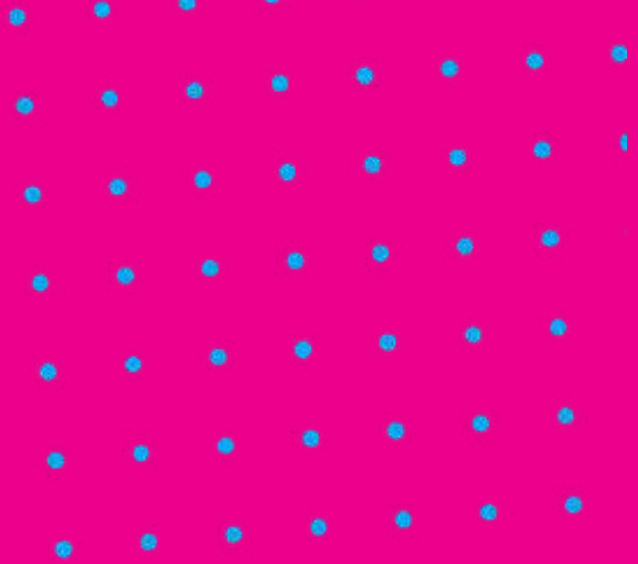
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Introduction



Music is a powerful vehicle for fostering creativity, social connection, and wellbeing. Yet, research highlights a troubling prevalence of mental health challenges among **people working in music sectors, including higher rates of anxiety, depression, substance use, and suicide, compared to other industries.** This has been explained by **harmful practices in music environments**, such as **high competition, irregular working conditions, and odd working hours, which have been normalised for decades**, to the extent that they are not only accepted but even expected. Notably, evidence shows that **young people, and especially those who are racialised, disabled, LGBTQIA+ or from other marginalised identities, are particularly vulnerable to experiencing inequality, discrimination, harassment and exploitation in music environments.**

This toolkit is grounded in the understanding that **young people's experiences in music environments are shaped by intersecting social identities such as gender, race, class, sexuality, religion, and ability**, and that harm within these spaces is often produced through unequal power dynamics. **It is designed to support leaders, organisers, facilitators, and young people within** the JMI network and beyond to **better understand, identify, and challenge these harms by adopting a care-centred approach in everyday practice**. Bringing together knowledge, practical actions, and resources, the toolkit offers a framework for recognising how power operates at different levels and for fostering safer, more equitable, and inclusive environments for all young people. By making these structures visible, **it encourages collective responsibility and action to challenge inequality and build fairer, more just music ecosystems**. The content has been developed collaboratively with young people aged 18 to 30 from across Europe who are actively involved in music projects or work in music environments, through their participation in **Play it Loud!** events and activities — JMI's initiative to promote intersectional access and participation in youth music organisations and their projects.

Module overview:





✓ **Module 1: Understanding the Need for a Culture of Care in Youth Music Organisations and Projects**

This module explores how wider social, political, and economic forces shape music environments and youth work. It examines how neoliberal logics, precarity, and competition influence working conditions in the sector and can contribute to inequality, exploitation, and harm. The module introduces the concept of a culture of care as an alternative approach, highlighting the importance of collective wellbeing, ethical organisational practices, and sustainable ways of working. It also outlines the key structural characteristics of the music sector that can place young people at risk, encouraging readers to reflect on how these dynamics may appear in their own contexts.



Module 2: Understanding Intersectionality



This module introduces intersectionality as a key framework for understanding how different aspects of identity, such as gender, race, class, sexuality, and ability, interact to shape young people's experiences of access, participation, and risk in music environments. It explains how systemic structures create unequal starting points for young people, and makes those from marginalised identities more at risk of experiencing harm in music environments. Through reflection exercises and examples, the module encourages readers to consider how privilege and marginalisation operate in their own organisations and projects and to identify which groups may be more vulnerable to harm, exclusion, or limited opportunities.





Module 3: Actions to Nurture a Culture of Care in Youth Music Organisations and Projects



This module focuses on practical actions to embed care, equity, and inclusion into everyday practice. It outlines how to create equitable access and fair recognition for young people, while fostering healthy, anti-burnout working cultures. It also highlights leadership approaches grounded in accountability, empathy, and empowerment, as well as transparent and inclusive management practices.





Module 4: Actions for Making Youth Music Environments Safer Spaces

This module focuses on building safer, more equitable music environments by recognising how systemic inequalities such as sexism, racism, ableism, and transphobia shape risk and access to protection. The module outlines practical actions for youth music organisations to prevent harm, address discrimination, and respond effectively to concerns. It emphasises clear policies, shared agreements, and accountability at every level of practice. Ultimately, it supports organisations to create environments where all young people feel safe, valued, and able to thrive.





✓ Module 5: Resourcing and Financial Sustainability grounded in Care



This module explores how youth music organisations can build financial sustainability through a care-centred approach to resourcing. It addresses the pressures of shrinking funding and the risks of adopting extractive or inequitable practices in response to scarcity. The module reframes resourcing as a shared, community-based responsibility grounded in ethics, solidarity, and transparency. It presents practical strategies for diversifying income, mutual aid, and forming values-aligned partnerships. Overall, it seeks to support organisations to create resilient infrastructures that prioritise people, equity, and long-term wellbeing.

✓ Afterword

The afterword speaks directly to those in management and leadership roles in youth music organisations. Drawing on insights from the Play it Loud! process and recent sector research, it highlights the gap between good intentions and the persistent structural blind spots that continue to shape exclusion and harm. It invites those from other generations to reflect on inherited assumptions and adapt their leadership to the realities and values we observe among young people to build equitable, just, and sustainable music ecosystems.



➤ How to use this toolkit ➤

You can use this toolkit in different ways, depending on your role and context. It can support group discussions with young people, facilitators, or teams as a starting point for reflection and dialogue. It can also be used as a self-check tool when designing, reviewing, or evaluating projects and organisational practices. The content may help you name and better understand tensions or challenges you already feel or observe but find difficult to articulate or communicate to others. Finally, it can strengthen your ability to advocate for inclusion, diversity, equity, and access (IDEA) and care-centred approaches in your everyday work and decision-making.



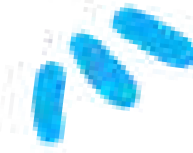
MODULE 1:

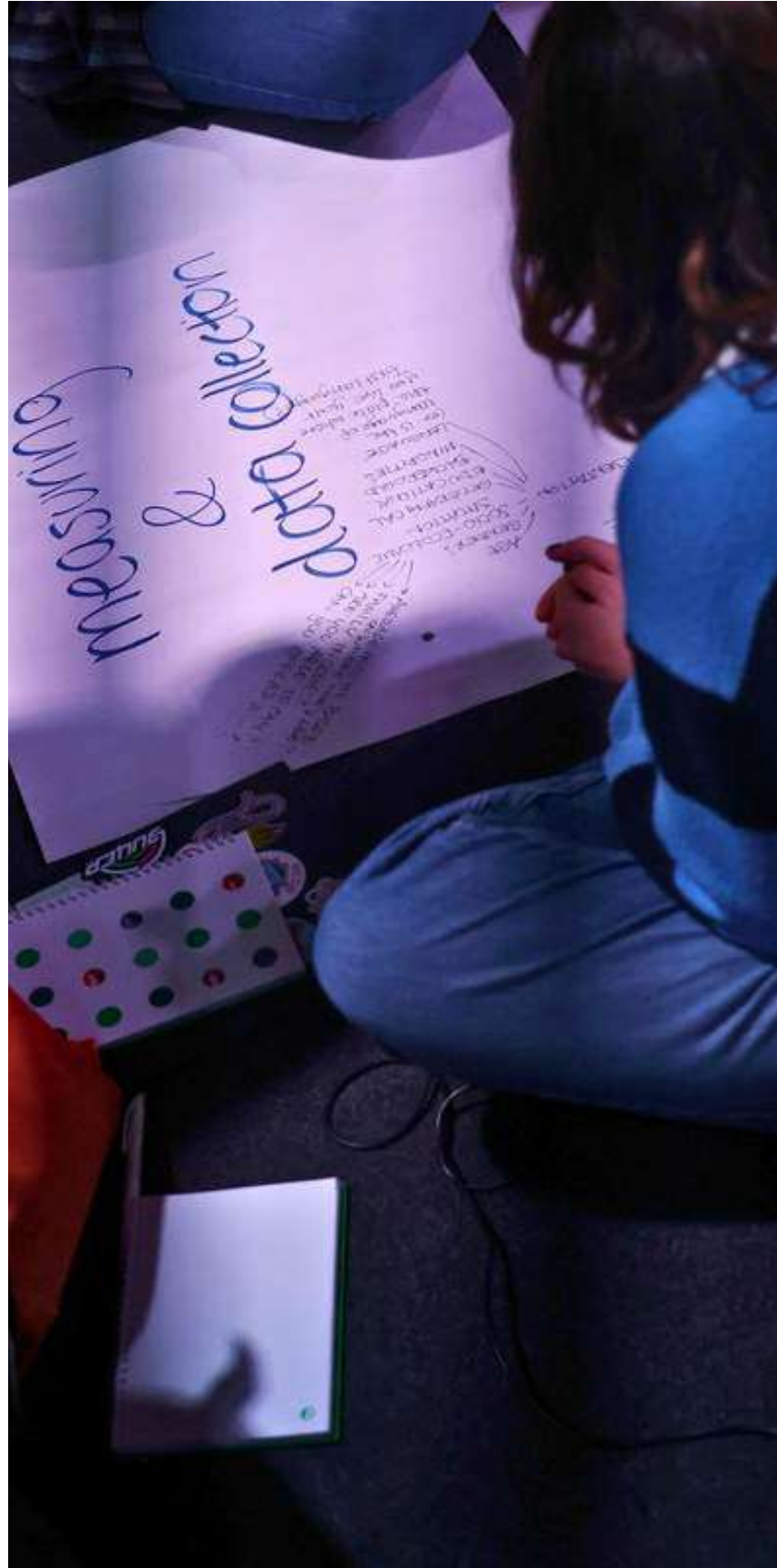
Understanding the Need for a Culture of Care in Youth Music Organisations and Projects

Youth music organisations and projects do not exist in isolation: they are **shaped by the wider societal, cultural, political, and economic forces of the contexts in which they operate.** Across Europe and in many other parts of the world, **music environments are increasingly influenced by the logics of neoliberalism and late-stage capitalism, where market competition, individual responsibility, and economic gain are prioritised.** At the same time, **the rise of right and far-right political agendas** in multiple countries has further accelerated trends of **privatisation and reduced public investment in social and cultural provision.**



Together, these forces have contributed to a set of widespread characteristics within music sectors that **place people at greater risk of inequality, discrimination, harassment, and exploitation.**





✓ Precarious and informal working conditions:

Short-term contracts, freelance arrangements, and informal agreements that leave people without adequate labour protections or job security

✓ Power imbalances and gatekeeping:

Decision-making power is often concentrated in a small number of individuals, creating environments where abuses of power can occur and go unchallenged

✓ Normalisation of unpaid or underpaid labour:

Expectations to “work for exposure” or accept poor conditions to gain experience

✓ Lack of safeguarding training and clear reporting structures:

Many organisations and music spaces have limited knowledge of safeguarding, consent, and inclusive practices, and may not have transparent policies or procedures in place. This can make it difficult to prevent harm, respond appropriately to disclosures, or ensure that individuals can report concerns and access support safely

✓ **Culture of silence and fear of repercussions:**

Concerns about reputation, career progression, or retaliation can prevent people from reporting harm, allowing harmful behaviours to continue

✓ **Blurring of professional and social boundaries:**

Events often takes place in informal or nightlife settings, where alcohol or drugs may be present, increasing vulnerability to harassment or coercion

✓ **Competition:**

High levels of competition and scarcity of opportunities can discourage solidarity, silence concerns, and make people less likely to challenge harmful behaviour

✓ **Informal recruitment and networking practices:**

Opportunities are often distributed through personal networks rather than transparen



These conditions can deepen existing inequalities and create environments where exclusion, exploitation, and harm are more likely to occur. **Without intentional reflection and action, these dominant and harmful dynamics can easily be reproduced within youth music organisations and their projects.** For this reason, it is essential to move beyond these prevailing logics and consciously **cultivate a culture of care:** one that actively resists harm, centres collective wellbeing, and builds equitable, supportive environments where people can participate, create, and thrive safely. **The following table outlines the differences between a neoliberal logic and a care-centred approach.**



Dominant logic built neoliberalism and late-stage capitalism

- Values productivity, growth, and visibility
 - Success is measured by outputs, numbers, and “impact”
- Individuals are responsible for managing risk and failure
- Do what you love” justifies overwork and unpaid labour
- Competition and hierarchies are natural and necessary
 - Precarity is normalised and individualised
 - Care is private, informal, or invisible
 - Burnout is a personal weakness
- Flexibility benefits institutions more than workers
 - People must be “resilient” and adaptable
- Short-term projects and quick results are prioritised
 - Mistakes are hidden or punished

A care-centred approach

- Values wellbeing, sustainability, and dignity
- Success is measured by relationships, processes, long-term change and honouring values
- Individuals are responsible for managing risk and failure
- Do what you love” justifies overwork and unpaid labour
- Competition and hierarchies are natural and necessary
- Precarity is normalised and individualised
- Care is private, informal, or invisible
- Burnout is a personal weakness
- Flexibility benefits institutions more than workers
- People must be “resilient” and adaptable
- Short-term projects and quick results are prioritised
- Mistakes are hidden or punished

Concluding Remarks



Cultivating a culture of care means making deliberate choices in leadership, management, safeguarding, funding, and everyday practice that prioritise dignity, equity, and collective wellbeing, enabling youth music organisations and projects to foster skill development and employability from a foundation of trust, care, and shared responsibility rather than competition, exploitation, or purely economic gain/potential.



Questions for reflection ??

To support deeper engagement with the information presented in this module, we invite you to reflect on your own environments, practices, and responsibilities:

1 In your organisation or project, how is 'success' defined, and who is considered 'successful'? Reflect on whether achieving success comes at the cost of people's values, rest, or social relationships, and whether such sacrifices are treated as necessary or celebrated as a mark of achievement

2 In your organisation or project, how is 'success' defined, and who is considered 'successful'? Reflect on whether achieving success comes at the cost of people's values, rest, or social relationships, and whether such sacrifices are treated as necessary or celebrated as a mark of achievement

3 In what ways might your current ways of working unintentionally reproduce neoliberal logics (e.g., competition, urgency, individual responsibility)? Are people expected to work beyond their agreed hours or take on extra tasks without support or recognition?

4 How are responsibility and accountability currently shared within your organisation or project? Are systems in place to support collective care, transparent decision-making, and safe reporting of concerns?

5 How does a scarcity mindset influence the decisions and behaviours in your organisation or project? Reflect on whether limited resources, competition for funding, or fear of "not having enough" affects how people are treated, how opportunities are distributed, or how risks and responsibilities are shared

Key takeaways:



Youth music organisations are shaped by wider political, economic, and cultural systems, including neoliberal pressures and reduced public investment in culture and youth work



These conditions often produce precarious work, power imbalances, gatekeeping, and a normalisation of unpaid or underpaid labour across music sectors



A lack of safeguarding knowledge, clear reporting processes, and transparent recruitment practices can increase the risk of harm, discrimination, and exclusion



Informal environments, competition, and fear of repercussions can silence concerns and allow harmful behaviours to continue unchallenged



Without intentional action, these dynamics can be reproduced within youth music projects and organisations



A care-centred approach is essential to resist these harmful structures, prioritise wellbeing and equity, and create safer, more supportive environments where all young people can participate and thrive



Further reading :

Goble, J. S. (2021). *Neoliberalism and Music Education: An Introduction. Action, Criticism & Theory for Music Education*, 20(3), 1-18.
<https://doi.org/10.22176/act20.3.1>

León, J. F. (2014). *Introduction: Music, Music Making and Neoliberalism. Culture, Theory and Critique*, 55(2), 129-137.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/14735784.2014.913847>



MODULE 2:

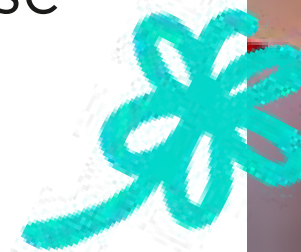
Understanding Intersectionality

Within Play it Loud! activities, we frequently engage our partner organisations and wider networks in conversations about the importance of promoting inclusion, diversity, equity, and accessibility (IDEA) in the youth music ecosystem. Notably, a common argument we encounter against implementing such strategies is that opportunities to develop skills or to pursue a career in music are increasingly difficult for everyone, and therefore, all young people should simply be supported equally, regardless of identity or background.

As discussed in Module 1, it is a fact that music sectors can be challenging environments for development and growth.

However, to fully understand the need for IDEA strategies and care-centred approaches in our work, it is crucial to recognise that **systemic structures**, the broader, established ways in which societies are organised, place some individuals at greater risk of inequality, exploitation, exclusion, and harm.

These structures mean that not all young people experience the same starting point or face the same barriers, and proactive strategies are necessary to ensure equity and safety for those most vulnerable.



To understand this, an **intersectional lens** is particularly useful. Intersectionality refers to the idea that different aspects of a person's identity interact to shape their experiences, opportunities, and the barriers they may face. Historically, **societies have been organised hierarchically** based on social categories or identities. As a result, some **identities are afforded greater access, recognition, and protection** (often referred to as 'privilege'), **while others face barriers and disadvantage** (often referred to as 'marginalisation' or 'oppression'). In other words, societies are built on power imbalances that perpetuate and reproduce inequality. Notably, these structures are so deeply ingrained in our society and collective thinking that they require our conscious effort to recognise and disrupt them. Although the specific identities affected by these dynamics vary across sociocultural contexts and historical periods, factors such as **gender, sexuality, race, religion, ability, and socio-economic background and level of education** still influence people's experiences of access and exclusion in most societies around the world.

A note on intersectionality: In our experience, conversations about privilege and oppression can sometimes trigger defensiveness or incredulity, particularly in individuals who identify with groups that are socially advantaged. This reaction often stems from feelings of guilt and shame or a fear that their personal achievements or struggles are being invalidated or dismissed. Thus, we want to make very clear that recognising privilege does not negate individual hardship or recognition of talent or success. Rather, it helps us understand how structural advantages and disadvantages shape opportunities and risks in different ways for people.

Exercise: Understanding intersectional barriers

- ✓ 1. Think about your environment and the experiences of different individuals within it. Below, you will find boxes, each representing a specific identity. For each box, consider the potential barriers, challenges, or harms that people with that identity might face in music environments. We have added some of you, based on findings of the Play it Loud! Crescendo survey 2025.

Young people in their early careers

- The need for exposure to develop their careers make them more likely to accept low pay or work for free

Disabled young people

- Barriers to access venues and stages
- Their needs are often deemed “too expensive” to accommodate

Level of education

- Better and more opportunities for those with formal music studies
- More opportunities for those who speak other languages

Young woman

- More at risk of experiencing sexual harassment
- Focus tends to be on their looks rather than their talents

LGBTQAI+youth

- Prejudice and negative attitudes
- Lack of data on their representation in the music industries

Racialised youth

- Continuous experience of racist microaggressions
- Oversexualisation of black bodies
- Prejudice and stereotypes

Are there any other identities that are relevant to consider in your context? Write them down here (e.g. a specific marginalised ethnic group or a minority group in your society).

Three large, empty rectangular boxes with rounded corners and double-line borders, each containing a large quotation mark at the top left and bottom right, intended for writing relevant identities.

✓ **2.** Now think of the ways in which these identities combine to shape experiences of access or exclusion and answer the following questions:

- Are young women equally vulnerable to young men in music environments? Why?
- Would a black young woman living in an European country face the same risks to harm as a young white woman living in a European country? Why?
- If two equally talented young men applied for the same youth worker role in your organisation, but one has formal qualifications while the other has relevant lived experience, who would you hire? Why?

While challenges in music sectors affect all young people, some identities are more vulnerable to harm, exclusion, and exploitation due to structural inequalities. Recognising these differences is essential: applying an intersectional lens helps organisations understand who is most at risk and why. By implementing strategies that prioritise equity, inclusion, and care, youth music organisations can better protect those who face greater barriers, promote their development, and ensure meaningful access for everyone.



Key takeaways:



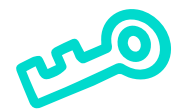
Not all young people experience the same starting point or face the same barriers; proactive strategies are necessary to ensure equity and inclusion.



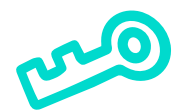
Intersectionality helps us understand how identities such as gender, race, class, ability, sexuality, and more combine to shape access, participation, and risk.



Privilege and marginalisation are structurally embedded, requiring conscious effort to identify and disrupt.



A care-centred approach informed by intersectionality ensures that support, resources, and protections are targeted to those most vulnerable, rather than assuming a “one-size-fits-all” model



Reflection and dialogue about identity, experience, and power are vital steps for leaders and organisations seeking to foster safer, fairer, and more equitable youth music spaces.



Further reading :

The Play it Loud Handbook

Presents knowledge on how s to make youth & music organisations and initiatives more diverse and inclusive.

<https://www.playitloud.live/copy-of-toolbox-try2>

Positionality & Intersectionality Resources Kit: Exploring power, privilege, and access for reflexivity and self-reflection

This toolkit is designed to provide resources that help others reflect on their own positionality, intersectionality, and experiences of power, privilege, politics, and access through different exercises.

https://auckland.figshare.com/articles/educational_resource/Positionality_Intersectionality_Resources_Kit_Exploring_power_privilege_and_access_for_reflexivity_and_self-reflection/30845528?file=62001733



MODULE 3:

Actions to Nurture a Culture of Care in Youth Music Organisations and Projects

Youth music organisations and projects offer vital spaces for young people to express themselves, collaborate with peers, and develop their skills. However, as our organisations and projects do not exist in isolation, the wider social, political, and economic context influences the way our organisations operate and our approach to working with youth. To challenge and avoid reproducing harmful practices we commonly see in music environments and at the broader societal level, we need to intentionally cultivate a culture of care that challenges neoliberal ideology and social dynamics stemming from deeply rooted systems of oppression, such as prejudice and discrimination.



An approach grounded in care shifts us towards creating a culture where **relationships, well-being, and collective growth are prioritised above anything else.** The following practices translate these values into concrete actions for organisations, projects, and leaders who work directly with young people or have young people in their workforce.



✓ 1.Supporting Access, Participation, and Fair Recognition

Creating equitable participation means recognising the conditions that shape whether young people can engage in our projects and activities.

Youth organisations and projects should:

- **Cover essential costs** such as food, travel, and accommodation, so that participation is not limited by income
- Develop **reward and recognition systems** that value the participation and contribution of young people (e.g., instrument-swap schemes, free rehearsal space, venue discounts, or learning opportunities)
- Provide **certificates of participation or completion of training**, recognising young people's skills, experience, and engagement
- Offer **recommendation letters or references** to support young people's educational or career pathways





✓ 1. Supporting Access, Participation, and Fair Recognition

Creating equitable participation means recognising the conditions that shape whether young people can engage in our projects and activities.

Youth organisations and projects should:

- Create **clear pathways into leadership**, including opportunities for participants to become facilitators, peer mentors, or part of organising teams
- **Implement youth work practices such as** flexibility, co-creation, and inclusive engagement in everyday work and activities. Monotony and rigidity do not foster creativity or participation!
- Offer **workshops, webinars, and skills-building opportunities** that support both artistic and professional development
- Provide **mentoring programmes** that support long-term growth, confidence, and belonging

✓ 2. Fostering Healthy, Inclusive, and Anti-Burnout Cultures

A culture of care actively resists burnout by respecting rest, boundaries, and sustainable ways of working.

Organisations and teams should:

- Organise **social activities within working hours**, rather than expecting staff or participants to give up their free time
- Respect people's time and capacity, including the right to **say no** without negative consequences
- Set **realistic timelines and expectations** to avoid an “everything is urgent” culture
- Ensure **clear roles and responsibilities**, avoiding the expectation that “everyone does everything.”
- Create **spaces for informal connection and team-building** to strengthen relationships and trust
- Build **active feedback loops** where concerns can be raised safely and addressed meaningfully
- Ensure **transparency** in decision-making, budgets, and remuneration structures.
- **Honour contracts and agreements**, including working hours, responsibilities, and payment conditions
- Where possible, develop **longer-term or stable employment models** rather than relying exclusively on precarious freelance labour





✓ 3. Leadership for Care, Equity, and Accountability

Leaders and managers play a critical role in shaping whether a culture of being modelled and implemented within an organisation and its activities.

Caring leaders should:

- Adopt an **encouraging, empowering leadership style** that creates space for others to flourish rather than controlling outcomes
- Be **accountable and transparent** about decisions, responsibilities, and limitations
- **Advocate for their teams**, including fair pay, safe working conditions, and equitable contracts
- Commit to **regular check-ins with staff**, making time to listen and respond to needs
- Create **two-way feedback processes**, where staff can also give feedback to leadership
- Maintain an **open-door approach**, where staff feel safe to seek advice or raise concerns
- **Know their team members as individuals**: their goals, strengths, and development needs
- Be aware of **personal circumstances and access needs**, and adapt expectations accordingly
- Lead with a **proactive, solution-oriented mindset**, while acknowledging structural constraints
- **Lead by example**, modelling healthy boundaries, time management, respectful communication, and ethical conduct

✓ 4. Ethical Management and Organisational Practices

Care-centred organisations require management structures that are fair, transparent, and inclusive.

Organisations should:

- Ensure **clear communication of expectations**, responsibilities, and organisational processes
- Avoid **micromanagement**, while knowing when supportive intervention is needed
- Promote **equity in hiring**, actively recruiting diverse profiles and avoiding nepotism or gatekeeping
- Ensure **knowledge sharing**, so information and opportunities are not restricted to a few individuals
- Provide **training on inclusion, diversity, equity, and accessibility** for all staff and leadership
- Be transparent about **budgets, salaries, and decision-making structures** to build trust and accountability
- Ensure everyone understands **how the organisation operates**, including its governance, finances, and roles
- Encourage staff to **share their expertise and knowledge** to build collective capacity
- Ensure leaders have **relevant experience in the field and an understanding of IDEA values and practices**, as well as of youth-centred and care-based approaches



✓ 5. Building Pathways for Growth and Collective Flourishing

Care frameworks recognise that people thrive in environments where they can grow, contribute, and be valued

This includes:

- Supporting **professional development** through **training, mentoring, and peer learning**
- Recognising and nurturing **individual strengths and aspirations**
- Creating **clear pathways for progression** within projects and organisations
- Ensuring that young staff members and participants can **develop leadership and decision-making skills**
- Building **collective ownership** of projects, rather than concentrating power in a few roles





Ultimately, operating from the principles of care invites us to reimagine what success looks like in youth music work: not just the quality of artistic outcomes, but the **quality of relationships, the fairness of opportunities, and the conditions we create for people and communities to thrive together.**

Concluding remarks

Nurturing a culture of care in youth music organisations and projects is not a one-off intervention or a checklist to complete, it is an **ongoing, collective commitment.** It requires organisations, leaders, and teams to continually reflect on their practices, challenge harmful norms, and make intentional choices that prioritise **wellbeing, equity, and shared responsibility** over productivity, competition, or short-term gain.

By embedding the practices outlined in this section, youth music environments can move towards models that **value people as much as creative output,** where young people are not only participants but **active contributors, decision-makers, and future leaders.** This approach strengthens not only individual well-being but also the **long-term sustainability, relevance, and integrity** of the sector.



Key takeaways:



Safeguarding young people in the music industry requires awareness of both individual and systemic risks.



Power imbalances, financial pressure, and informal working environments can increase vulnerability to harm.



Clear boundaries, safe working practices, and accountability structures are essential for protection.



Everyone involved, including managers, labels, educators, and peers, shares responsibility for safeguarding.



Early identification of risks and confident reporting processes help prevent harm and support wellbeing.



Further reading :

Hersey, T. (2022). Rest is resistance: Free yourself from grind culture and reclaim your life. Hachette UK.

The care collective (2020). The Care Manifesto: the politics of interdependence. Verso.

Further reasources:

Youth Music Hub with resources to promote safety and rights in the music industries

A hub of many useful resources, including on building safer and fairer cultures in organisations

<https://www.youthmusic.org.uk/resources/community/resource-hub/resources-promote-safety-and-rights-music-industries>

Youth Music Hub to amplify youth voice

A hub full of resources to support youth voice and participation. We specially recommend the handbook!

<https://www.youthmusic.org.uk/resources/pillar-6-youth-voice-hub>



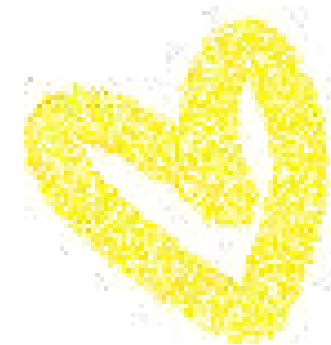
MODULE 4:

Actions for Making Youth Music Environments Safer Spaces

People thrive in environments where they feel safe, valued, and respected. However, societal systems such as **sexism, racism, ageism, ableism, transphobia, and other forms of oppression** continue to shape who is **protected** and who is **made vulnerable**. In music environments, these inequalities often expose young women and non-binary youth (especially those who are also racialised, disabled, LGBTQI+, or any other marginalised identities) to discrimination, harassment, and abuse, with serious consequences for their wellbeing, confidence, and professional development. **Shame, fear of retaliation, and lack of action** from authorities often **prevent people from reporting harm**, perpetuating and normalising abusive behaviour.

For this reason, creating safer spaces is both a safeguarding responsibility and a matter of social justice for youth music organisations. A care approach requires us not only to prevent harm but also to actively build environments where **dignity, equity, and accountability** are core priorities.

In this section, you will find actions to integrate safeguarding and care, making your activities and organisations safer spaces for young people.



✓ 1. Integrating Safeguarding and Care

At the very least, all youth music organisations and projects must:

- Comply with **national safeguarding and child protection** frameworks
- Ensure staff understand **legal duties of care and reporting obligations**
- Align internal policies with **anti-discrimination and equality legislation** at the local and national level
- **Go beyond compliance** by embedding care, inclusion, and accountability into everyday practice



✓ 2. Establish Clear Agreements and Expectations

- Co-create **group agreements** with participants at the start of your activities
- Develop a **Code of Conduct** outlining expected behaviours from organisational staff, partners, contractors, participants, and anyone involved in your organisation and its activities
- Ensure agreements include **respect, consent, inclusion, and accountability**

✓ 3. Put Strong Safeguarding and Protection Policies in Place

- Maintain **up-to-date safeguarding policies aligned** with national frameworks
- Appoint and train a **designated safeguarding/safety officer** to lead in any situations or complaints of this nature
- Ensure all staff are trained in **responding to disclosures and concerns**





✓ 4. Address Harassment and Discrimination Explicitly

- Develop and implement a clear **anti-harassment and anti-discrimination policy**

- Make clear that **sexism, racism, ableism, transphobia, homophobia, and other forms of discrimination** are not tolerated

- **Communicate policies** clearly to staff, participants, partners, contractors, and anyone else involved in your organisation and its activities. Make sure you communicate them from the beginning of any partnership, process, activity, or event to avoid any unpleasant surprises!

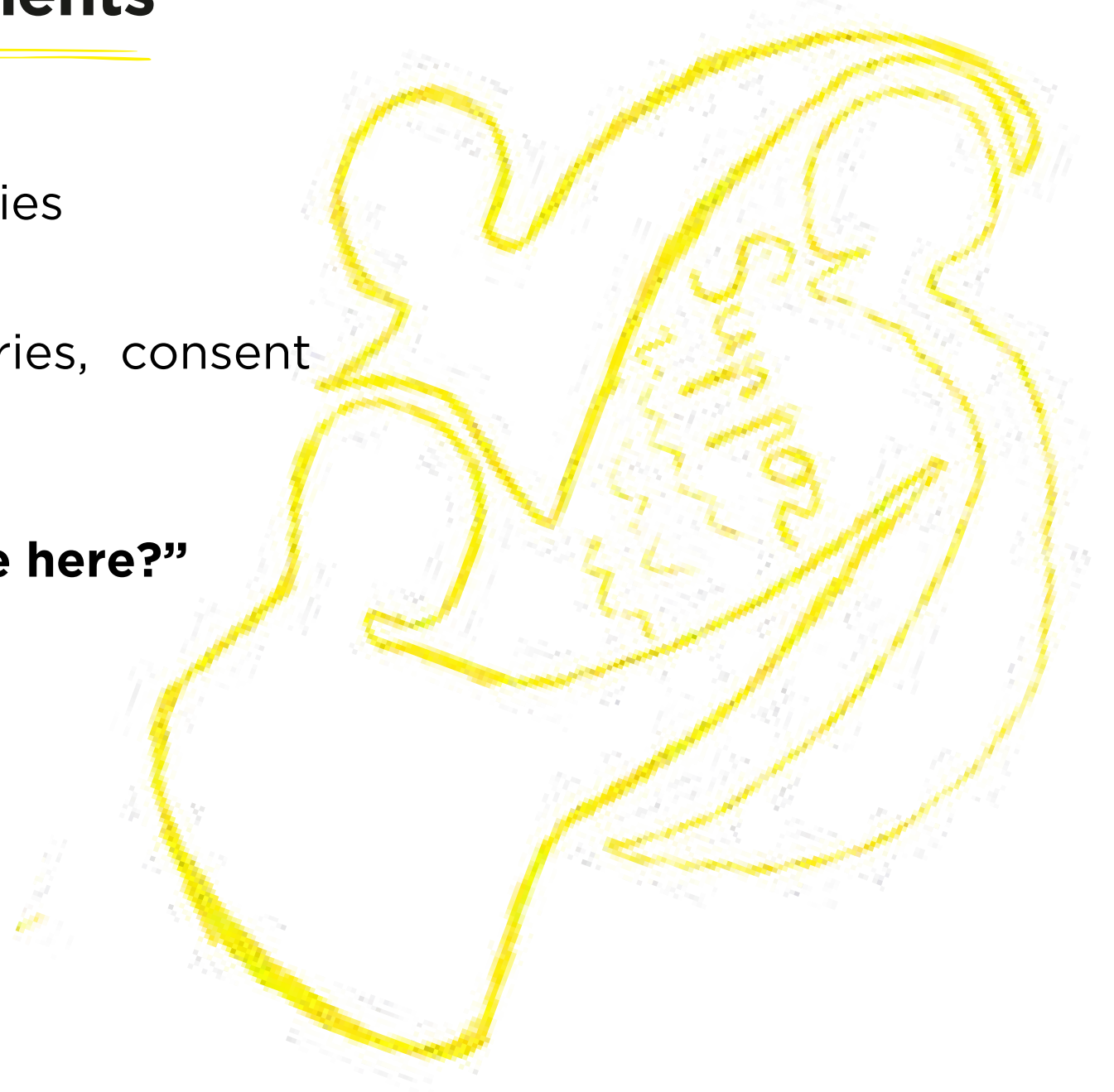
✓ 5. Create Clear Reporting and Response Protocols

- Establish a **clear, accessible protocol for reporting concerns**
- Provide **multiple reporting options**, including anonymous routes
- Communicate clearly:
 - Who receives reports
 - What happens next
 - What support is available
- Ensure **responses are timely and transparent**



✓ 6. Create Supportive and Inclusive Environments

- Provide **wellbeing and quiet spaces** at events and activities
- Encourage **open conversations** about safety, boundaries, consent and other relevant topics
- Ask participants directly: **“What do you need to feel safe here?”**
- Normalise **rest, boundaries, and asking for support**



✓ 7. Build a Culture of Accountability and Trust

- Be **transparent about policies, processes, and decision-making** around cases of misconduct and breaches of policies
- **Follow through** on commitments and act on reports of harm
- **Regularly evaluate safety, accessibility, and inclusion.**
 - Remember that once created, the documents need to be revised periodically
- **Update participants and any other relevant stakeholders** on any changes that have been made to your policies and processes

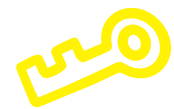


Concluding Remarks

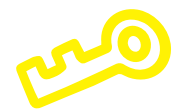
Making youth music environments **safer spaces** requires more than good intentions or policies that only exist on paper. It is an **ongoing, collective commitment to care, justice, and accountability in practice**. By integrating **safeguarding with everyday relational approaches**, organisations can actively **challenge the structural inequalities** that shape young people's experiences and ensure that everyone, especially those most marginalised, can participate without fear of harm. **Safer spaces are not static achievements but living processes that must be regularly reviewed, adapted, and strengthened through listening, transparency, and shared responsibility**. When safety, dignity, and trust are embedded into the core of youth music work, organisations not only protect young people but also create the conditions for genuine **creativity, confidence, and collective flourishing** to emerge.



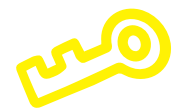
Key takeaways:



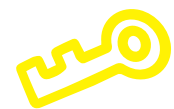
Safer spaces require both safeguarding measures and a commitment to equity, dignity, and inclusion.



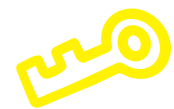
Systemic inequalities increase vulnerability, so safeguarding must actively address discrimination and power imbalances.



Clear codes of conduct, safeguarding policies, and anti-discrimination frameworks are essential foundations to create safer spaces.



Accessible reporting processes and transparent responses build trust and encourage people to speak up.



Creating a culture of care means embedding wellbeing, consent, accountability, and inclusion into everyday practice.



Further resources:

Developing a Sexual Harassment Policy: Musician's Union

Step by step guidance on how to develop a sexual harassment policy.

<https://musiciansunion.org.uk/legal-money/workplace-rights-and-legislation/equality-rights/sexual-harassment-at-work/developing-a-sexual-harassment-policy>

Youth Music Report Just the Way It Is? Report 2026

This reports highlights how unsafe environments, discrimination, and exploitation still influence the experiences of young people across the music industries, disproportionately affecting creatives from marginalised backgrounds

<https://www.youthmusic.org.uk/community/resource-hub/just-way-it-report>

Youth Music Hub with resources to promote safety and rights in the music industries

A hub of many useful resources, including on building safer and fairer cultures in organisations

<https://www.youthmusic.org.uk/resources/community/resource-hub/resources-promote-safety-and-rights-music-industries>

MODULE 5:



Resourcing and Financial Sustainability grounded in Care

Across Europe and beyond, public investment in culture and youth work is under increasing pressure. Many youth music organisations and projects are currently operating in contexts of **shrinking funding, rising costs, and growing demand**, which can create a sense of scarcity, uncertainty and financial instability.

In these conditions, organisations could feel pressured to adopt neoliberal responses to scarcity, for example, prioritising competition over collaboration and opting for practices such as overreliance on volunteers, seeking unpaid support, and shifting towards freelance contracts. While these approaches may offer short-term solutions, they can **undermine care, equity, and sustainability**, and reproduce the same harmful dynamics in the wider music environment we seek to change.

A care approach invites us to think about resourcing not only as income generation, but as **collective responsibility, shared value, and mutual support**. It encourages organisations to diversify their income in ways that are ethical, transparent, and aligned with their values, while building relationships and structures that sustain the community, not just their projects.



In this section, you will find strategies and approaches to resourcing and finances grounded in care that youth music organisations can adopt to build more **resilient, equitable, and caring infrastructures** that are adaptable to their needs and sociocultural and political contexts.



✓ 1. Get the Wider Community Involved

Crowdfunding and community fundraising can be powerful tools for mobilising your network and communicating the social value of your work.

- Run targeted crowdfunding campaigns for **specific projects, equipment, and raise funds exclusively to promote intersectional participation and access**
- Offer **non-financial ways to contribute** (e.g. sharing knowledge, volunteering, advocacy)
- Implement **“Pay it forward” models** (e.g., “pay for the next participant”). These allow those with more resources to support access for those who face financial barriers
- Use storytelling to show the **impact on young people’s lives and wellbeing, and the benefits for the wider community**

✓ 2. Sliding Scale and Accessible Contribution Models

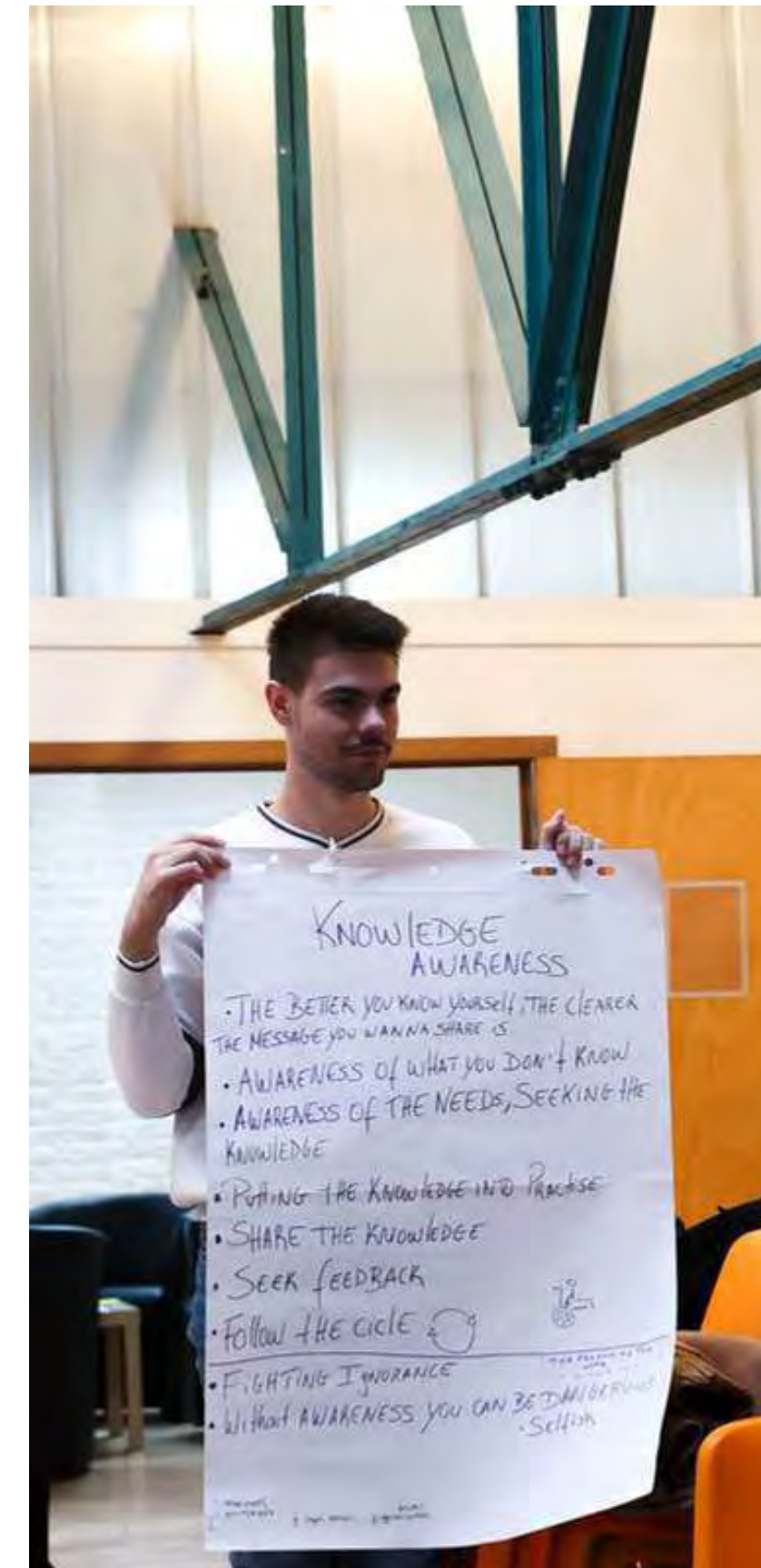
A **sliding scale** is a flexible pricing system in which participants contribute according to their financial capacity rather than paying a fixed fee. This model recognises that **people have different levels of access to resources** and aims to remove financial barriers while still generating income, which helps organisations remain accessible while **redistributing resources more equitably**.

Common approaches include:

- **Tiered pricing bands** (e.g. low, standard, solidarity rate)
- Suggested contribution ranges with **guidance on how to choose fairly**
- Encouraging those with more resources to **subsidise access for others**

When using sliding scales:

- Be **transparent about costs** and what contributions support
- Avoid requiring participants to **prove financial hardship**. Take a **'no questions asked' approach**
- Frame contributions as part of a **collective care system**, not charity





✓ 3. Membership and Solidarity Schemes

Create systems that build **long-term relationships, belonging, and a sense of shared ownership**, while generating income:

- Develop a **membership programme** with sliding-scale contributions and different benefits
- Offer a **“Friends of the Organisation” scheme** for supporters, alumni, and partners
- Provide meaningful engagement opportunities (e.g. events, previews, networking)

✓ 4. Ethical Partnerships and Collaborations

Move from transactional sponsorship to **values-aligned partnerships, where the goal** is to create **reciprocal relationships**, not extractive ones:

- Partner with **venues, studios, festivals, and local businesses** that share your values
- Develop **mutual support agreements** (e.g. rehearsal space for visibility, workshops for access to audiences, etc.)
- Collaborate with **schools, youth centres, and community organisations**





5. Grants and Public Funding

Continue to engage with **cultural, youth, and social justice funding programmes** at local, national, and international levels.

Examples include:

- National arts councils and youth funds
- Municipal cultural budgets
- European and international youth and cultural programmes
- Foundations supporting **IDEA values and youth empowerment**

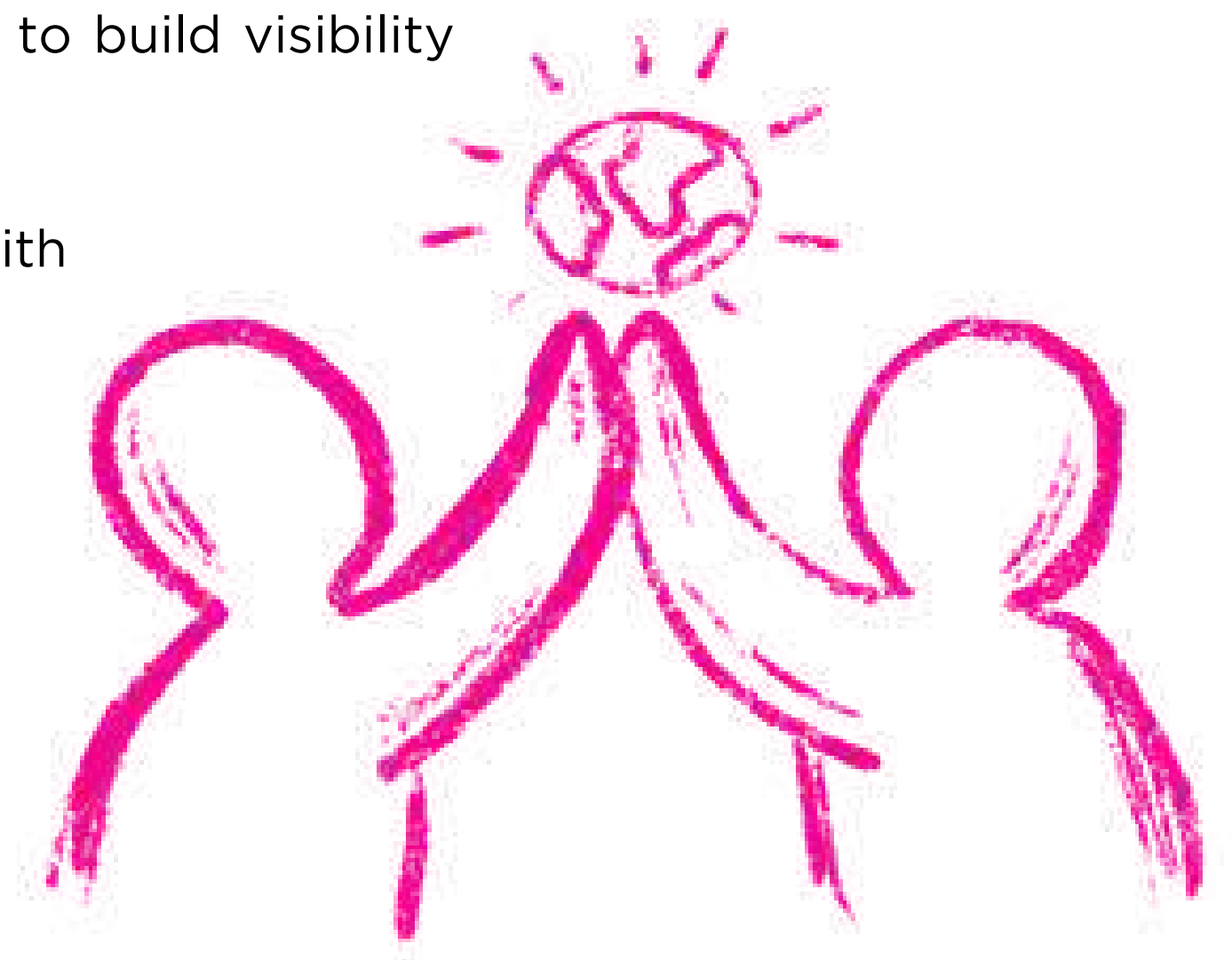
When applying:

- Frame your work in terms of **social impact, inclusion, and wellbeing**
- Demonstrate **participatory approaches and community benefit**
- Highlight how your project **addresses inequality and barriers to access**

✓ 6. Digital Visibility and Mutual Support

Use online platforms to strengthen your reach and networks in a way that supports a **collaborative rather than competitive** music ecosystem:

- Engage in **mutual promotion (“follow for follow”)** to build visibility for small organisations, artists or initiatives
- Share **resources, opportunities, and knowledge** with peer organisations
- Use digital platforms to **amplify collective campaigns and advocacy**





7. Resource-Sharing and Cost Reduction

Resourcing is not only about generating income, but also **sharing and redistributing resources**, reducing costs, and strengthening **inter-organisational solidarity through mutual aid**:

- Share **equipment, instruments, and spaces** across organisations
- Develop **instrument libraries or swap systems**
- Pool administrative resources or staff roles where possible

✓ 8. Invest in People, Not Just Projects and Outputs

Financial strategies should support **fair and sustainable working conditions**, where young people are not exhausted or burnt out by the work.

- Budget for **fair pay, rest time, and wellbeing support**
- Avoid relying on **unpaid or underpaid labour**
- Create pathways for **long-term roles and stability where possible**



Concluding remarks

Resourcing youth music work through a lens of care requires us to move beyond survival-driven funding models and towards **systems rooted in equity, community solidarity, and long-term sustainability**. By diversifying income ethically, sharing resources, and valuing people's labour and wellbeing, organisations can resist extractive practices and instead build infrastructures that nurture both communities and creativity. **Financial sustainability grounded in care is not only about maintaining programmes, but about redistributing opportunity, strengthening relationships, and ensuring that young people and those who support them can participate with dignity, security, and a sense of collective ownership.** When resourcing is approached as a shared responsibility and an expression of care, it becomes a powerful tool for transforming the wider music ecosystem into one that is more just, accessible, and resilient.

Key takeaways:



Resourcing is relational, not just financial: A care-centred approach treats funding, partnerships, and contributions as part of a wider ecosystem of mutual support, shared value, and collective responsibility.



Scarcity should not justify harm: Short-term responses such as unpaid labour, overwork, and extractive partnerships can reproduce inequality and undermine wellbeing, equity, and sustainability.



Diversify income ethically and accessibly: Combine grants, community fundraising, sliding scales, memberships, and partnerships in ways that are transparent, inclusive, and aligned with your values.



Centre equity and access in financial models: Use tools like sliding-scale contributions, “pay it forward” schemes, and community fundraising to redistribute resources and remove barriers to participation, especially for marginalised identities.



Build solidarity over competition: Collaboration, resource-sharing, and mutual promotion strengthen the wider music ecosystem and reduce isolation and precarity



Invest in people, not just outputs: Fair pay, rest, wellbeing, and long-term opportunities are essential for sustainable and caring youth music work



Financial sustainability is a social justice issue: Care-based resourcing helps redistribute opportunity, strengthen communities, and create safer, more equitable conditions for young people to participate and thrive



Further reading :

Spade, D. (2020). Solidarity not charity: Mutual aid for mobilisation and survival. Verso

Further reasources:

Youth Music Finance and Fundraising Hub

Presents guidance, videos, templates and other resources on finance and fundraising practices and strategies.

<https://www.youthmusic.org.uk/resources/finance-and-fundraising-hub>



AFTERWORD

Afterword: a Call for Liberation through Care



This toolkit emerges from a growing and urgent body of evidence. From Keychange's call to embrace a politics of care in the music sector, to the findings of the Play it Loud! Crescendo Survey (2025), and Youth Music's Just the way it is? (2026) report, the message is clear: too many young people, particularly those from marginalised backgrounds, are navigating music environments shaped by precarity, exclusion, and harm. These are not isolated issues, but systemic patterns that demand a systemic response.

Since the launch of Play it Loud! in 2020, we have engaged in countless conversations with leaders and organisers in the youth music sector, as well as with young people involved in music projects and initiatives. These exchanges show that, while youth music organisations hold a genuine commitment to supporting young people's participation and development, persistent blind spots continue to limit truly inclusive practice. Outdated ideas of meritocracy, competition, and hierarchy still shape recruitment, opportunity, and recognition. Conversations about privilege and oppression still provoke defensiveness, sometimes leading to the dismissal or trivialisation of injustices. The need for the implementation of inclusion and diversity strategies is sometimes deemed irrelevant, even when presented with data showing that sexism, racism, ableism and many other forms of exclusion and marginalisation are also problems within the youth music sector. At the same time, during our activities, young people consistently share experiences of mental health challenges, burnout, and first- or second-hand accounts of abuse and harassment in music spaces, alongside a feeling that their needs, values, and voices are not fully reflected in the structures shaping their pathways into music ecosystems.



For those of us in management and leadership roles who come from generations shaped by social norms around work, hierarchy, and mental health that differ from those we see today, this is a wake-up call. An urgent invitation to examine the assumptions we inherited, recognise how they may unintentionally reproduce inequality, and adapt our leadership and decision-making to the realities and aspirations of younger generations. Today's young people are more attuned to wellbeing, fairness, and collective care. They are less willing to accept exclusion, overwork, or silence around harm as the price for success. Importantly, this does not mean they are 'easily offended'. It means they have the language, awareness, and courage to name harm and injustices that in previous generations were seen as 'normal' or expected.

Thus, leadership in this moment requires more than good intentions. It requires courage to question long-standing practices, to redistribute power, and to centre the voices of those most affected by inequality. It means embedding IDEA and care not as add-ons or tick boxes in grant applications, but as core organisational values that shape our everyday work and activities. It also means creating meaningful pathways for youth participation and leadership, ensuring that young people are not only beneficiaries of programmes but active co-creators of the environments in which they learn, create, and thrive.



The future of the youth music sector depends on our ability to evolve and resist the neoliberal mindset. By adopting a care-centred approach, we can move beyond harmful norms and build ecosystems that are equitable, sustainable, and rooted in dignity and belonging. The question is not whether change is needed; the evidence is already here. The question is whether we are willing to embrace it and become co-developers of new possibilities and realities.



**With love and accountability,
Martha Lomeli-Rodriguez
for *Play it Loud!***



ANNEXES

A1 - PIL EQ Summit

List of participants:

- Ana Ivankovic (RS)
- Andreea Ramona Iancu (RO)
- Capucine de Montadry (FR)
- Concepcion Nueling (NL)
- Franciska Papp (HU)
- Giulia Annibaletti (BE/IT)
- Iva Damjanovski (MK)
- Janina Hakopuro (BE/SE)
- Lamija Sarić (BiH)
- Lucija Maroević (HR)
- Maria Kaposi (HU)
- Martha Lomeli (UK/MX)
- Natalie Aray (BE/SE)
- Nikola Nejcev (RS)
- Prabhat Das (DK)
- Robin Havbring (SE)
- Sofie Søndervik Sæther (NO)
- Tena Bosek (HR)
- Tiffany Holland (UK)
- Valdemar Kušan (HR)
- Vedran Savić (BiH)
- Verica Ajtovska (MK)
- Vlad Dumitrescu (RO)
- Zografia Lepoura (BE/GR)



A2 - PIL EQ Meetup

List of participants:

- Alice Carbonnaux (FR)
- Anna Voloshyna (UA/DE)
- Boglárka Lili Bodnár (HU)
- Doris Tkalčević (HR)
- Elmir Rašidović (BiH)
- Emma Ortega Richarte (ES)
- Eray Temiz Gümüş (SE)
- Franciska Papp (HU)
- Giulia Annibaletti (BE/IT)
- Iris Hoxha (BE/IT)
- Ivana Bodganovic (CY)
- Leona Kondratenko (MK)
- Maria Krutsenko (UA/DE)
- Martha Lomeli (UK/MX)
- Melissa Maria Hagen (NO)
- Mia Matilda Tammekun (EE)
- Natalie Aray (BE/SE)
- Nikola Nejcev (RS)
- Pop Darius Sorin (RO)
- Ricardo van Mildert (NL)
- Tiffany Holland (UK)
- Tommaso Purri (IT)
- Valdemar Kušan (HR)
- Vilje Wold (NO)



A3 - PIL EQ Evaluation Seminar

List of participants:

- Elmir Rašidović (BiH)
- Eray Temiz Gümüs (SE)
- Franciska Papp (HU)
- Giulia Annibaletti (BE/IT)
- Giulia Simonetti (BE/IT)
- Ingrid Svendsen Dyrnes (NO)
- Iris Hoxha (BE/IT)
- Iva Damjanovski (MK)

- Janina Hakopuro (BE/SE)
- Joana Costa (BE/PT)
- Jordana Ramos (PT)
- Lesia Lesiv (UA/SE)
- Maria Kaposi (HU)
- Marloes de Nul (NL)
- Martha Lomeli (UK/MX)
- Melissa Maria Hagen (NO)

- Natalie Aray (BE/SE)
- Nevena Prvulj (RS)
- Nikola Nejcev (RS)
- Tiffany Holland (UK)
- Tommaso Purri (IT)
- Valdemar Kušan (HR)
- Zakaria Hantout (BE)



