

# NARRATIVES OF EMPATHY

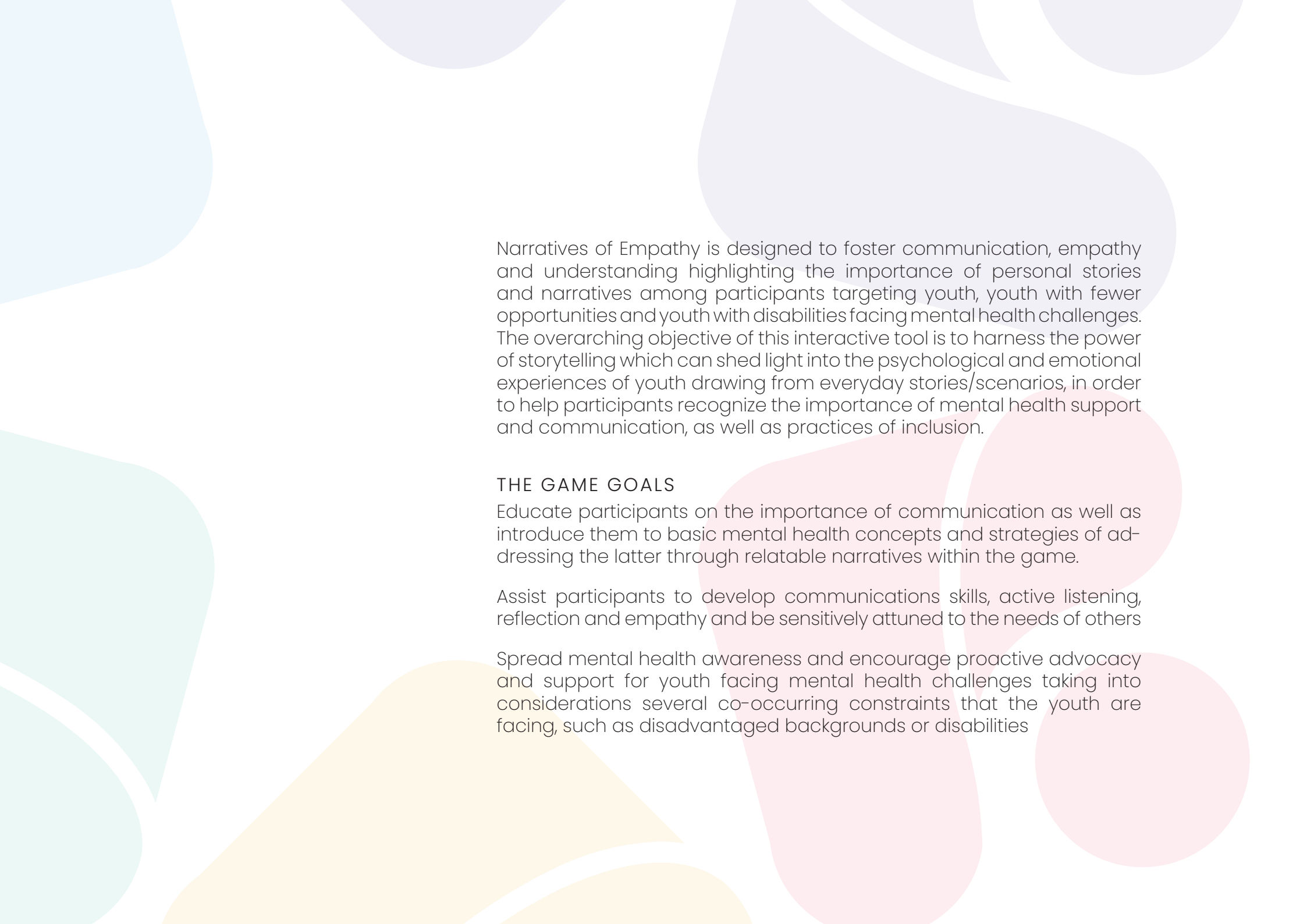


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Narratives of Empathy is designed to foster communication, empathy and understanding highlighting the importance of personal stories and narratives among participants targeting youth, youth with fewer opportunities and youth with disabilities facing mental health challenges. The overarching objective of this interactive tool is to harness the power of storytelling which can shed light into the psychological and emotional experiences of youth drawing from everyday stories/scenarios, in order to help participants recognize the importance of mental health support and communication, as well as practices of inclusion.

#### **THE GAME GOALS**

Educate participants on the importance of communication as well as introduce them to basic mental health concepts and strategies of addressing the latter through relatable narratives within the game.

Assist participants to develop communications skills, active listening, reflection and empathy and be sensitively attuned to the needs of others

Spread mental health awareness and encourage proactive advocacy and support for youth facing mental health challenges taking into considerations several co-occurring constraints that the youth are facing, such as disadvantaged backgrounds or disabilities

**TIME**  
60' - 90'  
DEPENDENT ON SETTING

### **MATERIALS NEEDED**

Story prompts either printed or online format

Guidelines for facilitators on each story and general debriefing questions/discussion prompts

Post-it notes, markers/ pens and board/ spacious wall to collect them

Notebooks and pens for note taking of participants (optional)

### **TARGET GROUP AND GROUP SIZE**

Youth workers, social workers, educators working with youth, support workers working with youth facing mental health challenges, youth from disadvantaged backgrounds and youth with disabilities, youth counselors.

The group size can be adapted from 3-person groups up to 30-person groups, ideally the groups contain up to 6 persons, to ensure that all participants can express their opinions and feelings adequately. This game can also be adapted to one-to-one sessions of youth workers with youth.

## HOW TO ORGANIZE THE ACTIVITY

### Setup of materials

Ensure that materials are prepared and available at the venue, confirm that materials are available in accessible formats if need be (Large print, Braille format etc.)

### Room setup

Arrange the room in such a way as to facilitate an intimate discussion atmosphere, arrange seating in circles or semi-circles

### Introduction

Welcome participants, introduce facilitators and conduct ice-breaker activities for participants to get to know each other and ease interactions

Explain the objectives of the game and the structure of the game, explain the importance of empathy, open communication, the power of narratives, active listening and understanding towards mental health awareness of youth

### Story Reading

Select one of the stories from the annexes that you believe best fits the composition of the participant groups

Read the story aloud with emotive expression and if possible, involve participants in the reading

## HOW TO ORGANIZE THE ACTIVITY

### Group Discussion

Bigger groups can all listen to the same story and then be divided into smaller groups in order to discuss the stories and later all groups could come together to discuss the insights of their groups or alternatively smaller groups can all receive different stories and keep working in rotation, changing the composition of the groups every time all groups are done working on their stories, so that all participants interact with each other and work through all five stories.

Each group discusses the stories through the discussion guides which help explore the stories in depth. A facilitator or group leader ensures that all participants have the chance to speak, and that the discussion remains both focused and respectful.

In the case of a divided bigger group working on the same story, representatives of each group can keep notes to present their discussions, findings and insights to the large group

## HOW TO ORGANIZE THE ACTIVITY

### Plenary Sharing

After all groups have finished their discussion, they will gather again together in the larger group

The participants will be provided with post-it notes and markers, where they will write down their key insights, personal reflections and/or a word or phrase that captures their thoughts and emotive responses to the stories

The participants can further be instructed to cluster their notes into common themes or ideas, organically formed

Once all the notes are posted on the wall or board, the facilitator can lead a walk-through where participants can collectively discuss and comment on the content and the emerging themes

### Documentation

Photos can be taken afterwards of the wall to act as record of the activity

## HOW TO ORGANIZE THE ACTIVITY

### Conclusion and closing remarks

The facilitator can briefly summarize the key findings of this activity, thank participants for their openness and reinforce the importance of empathy and proactive support

If applicable, the facilitator can provide further resources on mental health, such as websites with information, local organizations as well as support lines on mental health at the national/local level.

Optionally feedback forms can be distributed to participants with closed and open-ended questions regarding the activity and their engagement, and knowledge as well as motivation

Adaptation of the game in terms of accessibility for inclusive participation  
Sign language interpreters are provided to ensure accessibility.

The venue is selected based on accessibility standards to accommodate participants with mobility challenges.

Make sure that participants are aware that they can withdraw playing the game whenever they wish to

## DEBRIEFING QUESTIONS

What is one significant insight you gained from today's stories about the experiences of youth facing mental health challenges? Does this change your perspective on mental health and if yes how so?

Can you identify a moment during the workshop when you felt a strong emotional connection to a story or a character? What triggered that connection, and what does it tell you about your own responses to similar situations?

How can the themes discussed today be applied in your daily interactions with youth? Can you think of specific communication strategies that would be effective?

What challenges do you anticipate facing when trying to implement the empathy, communication and understanding strategies and mechanisms discussed today? How might you overcome these challenges?

If you could say something to one of the characters from the stories we discussed, what would it be? How do you think they would respond?

Reflecting on today's workshop, what are some steps you can take to enhance your support for youth with mental health challenges within your community or organization?

## OPEN-ENDED DISCUSSION GUIDE

IMAGINE YOURSELF AS ELLA,  
ARRIVING IN A NEW ENVIRONMENT  
THAT FEELS OVERWHELMING  
AND UNSUPPORTIVE.

HOW WOULD YOU FEEL?

WHAT WOULD YOUR THOUGHTS BE?

WHAT STEPS WOULD YOU TAKE AS ELLA  
TO COMMUNICATE YOUR NEEDS  
TO YOUR TEACHERS AND CLASSMATES?

WHAT STRATEGIES COULD BE EFFECTIVE  
TOWARDS FORMING NEW FRIENDSHIPS  
AND A SUPPORT NETWORK?

HOW MIGHT HER CLASSMATES  
AND SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION HELP MAKE  
HER DAY-TO-DAY EXPERIENCE AT SCHOOL  
MORE INCLUSIVE AND LESS STRESSFUL?

IMAGINE YOU ARE A CLASSMATE OF ELLA:  
HOW MIGHT YOU AND OTHER STUDENTS  
HELP MAKE ELLA'S DAY-TO-DAY EXPERIENCE  
MORE INCLUSIVE AND LESS STRESSFUL?

WHAT SIMPLE ACTIONS COULD YOU TAKE?

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO ELLA?

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE  
TO THE SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION,  
TO THE TEACHERS AND TO  
THE CLASSMATES OF ELLA?

## ELLA

### STORY 1

Ella is a high school student who is visually impaired and has recently transferred to a new school that's more mainstream and less equipped for her needs. Ella finds it difficult to navigate the school's physical layout, which is not familiar to her, including locating classrooms, the cafeteria, restrooms, and navigating crowded hallways between classes, which often stresses her out and disorients her. Posters around school with school news and activities are not available in a format accessible to Ella and so she feels that she misses out on social activities. Visual teaching aids such as diagrams, charts, or videos used in the class are not adapted for her visual impairment, causing her often to miss out on key information and even cause her to struggle keeping up with her coursework. In her interaction with her peers Ella feels that her classmates do not fully understand her situation, and hesitate to approach her, which makes social interactions awkward. She often feels excluded from group conversations or activities. The lack of awareness by her classmates lead to either over-accommodating behaviours which make her feel that she is dependent and highlighting the sense of "otherness", or classmates completely ignoring her and avoiding her. Ella starts feeling increasingly isolated, feels unmotivated and discouraged to go to school every day and is not sure on how to make her needs known among her teachers and classmates.

## OPEN-ENDED DISCUSSION GUIDE

IMAGINE YOURSELF AS NICHOLAS, A TALENTED ART STUDENT NOW STRUGGLING WITH SEVERE ANXIETY THAT AFFECTS YOUR PASSION AND PRODUCTIVITY.

HOW WOULD YOU FEEL?

WHAT THOUGHTS MIGHT GO THROUGH YOUR MIND AS YOU FACE THESE CHALLENGES?

WHAT PERSONAL COPING MECHANISMS WOULD YOU EXPLORE TO MANAGE STRESS AND ANXIETY RELATED TO YOUR ARTISTIC CREATIONS AND ACADEMIC EXPECTATIONS?

WHO WOULD YOU TURN TO FOR HELP?

HOW WOULD YOU COMMUNICATE YOUR NEEDS TO YOUR ART MENTOR AND TEACHERS?  
WHAT WOULD YOU WANT THEM TO UNDERSTAND?

AS LUCY, NICHOLAS' FRIEND

WHAT SUPPORT COULD YOU OFFER?

HOW COULD YOU HELP HIM FEEL MORE UNDERSTOOD AND LESS ISOLATED?

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU OFFER HIM REGARDING HIS MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES?

## NICHOLAS

### STORY 2

In the art school there is a project about Holocaust. It should be ensured that those that participate in the development of the project will show the maximum respect and will not misuse the information received. They will depict the true experiences and stories of the Holocaust survivors. THL will also ensure that it has adequate measures to protect the raw data used in the creation of these virtual personas, and the company will ensure compliance with all data privacy laws and regulations. By following this dual approach, each step of the process, from the collection of the testimonies to the digital archiving of them, can be done in the most ethical and sensitive manner possible to the people involved.

## OPEN-ENDED DISCUSSION GUIDE

IMAGINE YOU ARE JASMINE,  
FEELING OVERWHELMED BY THE SENSORY  
INPUTS AND SOCIAL DEMANDS OF COLLEGE.

WHAT ARE THE KEY CHALLENGES YOU ARE FACING?

HOW WOULD THESE CHALLENGES MAKE YOU FEEL?

HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR FEELINGS AND  
NEEDS TO SOMEONE WHO MIGHT NOT UNDERSTAND  
WHAT IT'S LIKE TO EXPERIENCE SENSORY OVERLOAD?

WHAT ACCOMMODATIONS OR CHANGES WOULD MAKE  
ACADEMIC AND SOCIAL SETTINGS MORE ACCESSIBLE  
FOR YOU? WHAT KIND OF SUPPORT WOULD HELP?

AS PROFESSOR SMITH

HOW WOULD YOU APPROACH  
THE SITUATION AFTER FINDING JASMINE?

WHAT STEPS COULD YOU TAKE TO SUPPORT  
HER RIGHT THERE AND THEN?

WHAT LONG-TERM STRATEGIES COULD  
YOU ADVOCATE FOR TO ASSIST JASMINE  
AND OTHER NEURODIVERGENT STUDENTS?

WHAT INITIATIVES OR PROGRAMS COULD BE  
INTRODUCED TO RAISE AWARENESS  
AND FOSTER UNDERSTANDING AMONG STUDENTS AND  
STAFF ABOUT AUTISM AND SENSORY SENSITIVITIES?

## JASMINE

STORY 3

Jasmine is a first-year university student with ASD (Autism Spectrum Disorder), who finds the unstructured and socially demanding university environment challenging. She struggles with sensory overload and social interactions, which affect her ability to participate fully in class and campus life. Her transition from the structured environment of the high school to the university environment has proven more difficult than anticipated and Jasmine finds herself often overwhelmed by the crowds in the lecture theatres, the noise in the cafeterias and the social expectations to engage in social events and group projects, which make her very anxious and cause her to often and more frequently retreat to quieter, less crowded places. One day, after a particularly chaotic lecture, Jasmine cannot cope anymore and leaves the room distressed. After the lecture her lecturer, professor Smith finds her in an empty class, where Jasmine often goes to study undisturbed and approaches her, as she is concerned with Jasmine's wellbeing.

## OPEN-ENDED DISCUSSION GUIDE

IMAGINE YOU ARE SAMIR,  
EXPERIENCING SUBTLE EXCLUSION AND  
FEELING ISOLATED DURING SCHOOL HOURS.

HOW WOULD YOU FEEL?

WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES THAT YOU IDENTIFY?

HOW MIGHT YOU TRY TO OVERCOME  
THESE CHALLENGES DESPITE YOUR FEARS?

AS A CLASSMATE OF SAMIR

HOW WOULD YOU APPROACH SAMIR?

HOW WOULD YOU MAKE SURE  
THAT SAMIR IS INCLUDED  
AND MAKE HIM FEEL LESS ISOLATED?

WHAT ROLE COULD THE TEACHERS  
AND SCHOOL COUNSELLORS OR SCHOOL  
ADMINISTRATION PLAY IN SUPPORTING SAMIR?

HOW CAN THE SCHOOL CREATE AND FOSTER  
AN ENVIRONMENT THAT CELEBRATES CULTURAL  
DIVERSITY AND SUPPORTS STUDENTS  
FROM DIFFERENT BACKGROUNDS?

WHAT ARE SOME INITIATIVES WHICH COULD BE  
IMPLEMENTED IN ORDER TO EDUCATE STUDENTS  
ABOUT CULTURAL SENSITIVITY AND OPENNESS?

## SAMIR

### STORY 4

Samir is a 15-year-old high school student who recently migrated from another country, starting halfway in the school year. Samir can speak and read in the language of the host country, but he is not a native speaker and there are language barriers which make it hard for him to confidently participate in his classes or in conversation with his classmates. This often leads to misunderstandings as well as to him being overlooked in selection of sports teams or class projects. During breaks Samir usually sits alone and while he wants to approach his classmates, he feels unsure about how to do that. Whenever he struggles to find the right words or his foreign accent causes misunderstandings from his peers and teachers, he retreats which only increases his sense of isolation and loneliness as time goes on. .