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**TRAINEESHIP REPORT – RELATÓRIO DE ESTÁGIO**

**2C Ação Humanitária, Cooperação e Desenvolvimento**

**Universidade Fernando Pessoa  
Porto, 2024**



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*Assinatura da/o discente / Signature of the student*

Trabalho apresentado à Universidade Fernando Pessoa como parte dos requisitos para obtenção do grau de Mestre em Ação Humanitária, Cooperação e Desenvolvimento, sob a orientação do João Casqueira.

**Universidade Fernando Pessoa  
Porto, 2024**

**Institution and location of the traineeship:**

Travelling Folk High School - DRH Lindersvold

Denmark

## RESUMO

Este relatório analisa a jornada enriquecedora de um estágio que tem como objetivo promover uma compreensão mais profunda de vários temas interligados. Centrada na educação, nas condições de saúde mental, na dinâmica da comunidade e nos direitos humanos, a experiência de estágio em Lindersvold serve de ponto focal para a investigação de caminhos para a mudança positiva, a colaboração e um ambiente inclusivo. Através de um inquérito qualitativo, incorporando observações e análise reflexiva, este relatório elucida as interações multifacetadas entre estes elementos fundamentais. Revela como os esforços educativos podem servir de catalisadores para enfrentar os desafios da saúde mental em comunidades como a de Lindersvold, realçando o papel fundamental da colaboração para efetuar mudanças significativas. Além disso, o relatório aprofunda a intrincada paisagem da doença mental, lançando luz sobre as dificuldades encontradas pelos estudantes que enfrentam estes desafios. Além disso, o relatório fornece uma visão geral abrangente das actividades realizadas durante o estágio, juntamente com uma análise detalhada da estrutura e do funcionamento da organização. O relatório engloba também um estudo académico realizado durante o estágio, que se debruça sobre a inclusão da doença mental e a forma como podemos transformar a educação, com especial ênfase na Geração Z. Saliencia a sua importância vital e reconhece a DRH Lindersvold como um catalisador essencial para atingir estes objetivos. Ao desvendar estes temas, este relatório tem como objetivo fornecer informações sobre a natureza da experiência de estágio e os seus potenciais contributos para a promoção de comunidades inclusivas e resilientes, que constituem objetivos e competências cada vez mais essenciais na Ação Humanitária e Cooperação para o Desenvolvimento.

**Palavras-chave:** educação; inclusão; doença mental; comunidade; Lindersvold.

## **ABSTRACT**

This report delves into the enriching journey of an internship aimed at fostering a deeper comprehension of various interconnected themes. Centered on volunteering, education, mental health conditions, community dynamics, and human rights, the internship experience in Lindersvold serves as a focal point for investigating pathways toward positive change, collaboration, and an inclusive environment. Through a qualitative inquiry, incorporating observations, and reflective analysis, this report elucidates the multifaceted interactions between these pivotal elements. It reveals how educational endeavors can serve as catalysts for addressing mental health challenges within communities like Lindersvold, emphasizing the pivotal role of collaboration in effecting meaningful change. Furthermore, the report delves into the intricate landscape of mental illness, shedding light on the struggles young people encounter navigating these challenges. Moreover, the report provides a comprehensive overview of the activities undertaken during the internship, along with a detailed analysis of the organizational structure and functioning. The report also encompasses an academic study completed during the internship, delving into the inclusion of mental illness and how we can transform education, with a particular emphasis on Generation Z. It emphasizes their vital importance and recognizes DRH Lindersvold as an essential catalyst in meeting these objectives. By unpacking these themes, this report aims to provide insights into the nature of the internship experience and its potential contributions to fostering inclusive and resilient communities, which are increasingly essential objectives and skills in Humanitarian Action and Development Cooperation.

**Keywords:** education; inclusion; mental illness; community; Lindersvold.

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## **Abbreviations**

DMM - Determination of Modern Methods

GEN Z - Generation Z

NGO - Non-Governmental Organizations

UN - United Nations

WHO - World Health Organization

## Introduction

The notion of being involved with a non-governmental organization (NGO) has consistently appealed to me, fueling my desire to actively participate in initiatives that bring positive and meaningful change. I am genuinely drawn to the prospect of utilizing my skills and dedication to contribute towards the greater good, making a tangible impact on the lives of individuals and communities in need. Working in an NGO aligns with my commitment to social responsibility, and I am eager to immerse myself in the challenges and rewards associated with creating positive change on a broader scale. This decision to pursue a traineeship in Humanitarian Action, Cooperation, and Development with an NGO is driven by the motivation to leverage the opportunities provided by the Erasmus+ traineeship program. This choice stems from a strong desire to immerse oneself in the field of humanitarian work and contribute to meaningful projects aimed at fostering development and cooperation.

Nowadays, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) stand as indispensable architects of positive change and societal well-being. As the world faces an array of complex challenges, from environmental crises to socio-economic disparities, the limitations of governments and markets in addressing these issues alone become increasingly evident. In this context, NGOs emerge as vital catalysts, bringing innovative solutions, resilience, and are the forefront of battling humanitarian crises daily. Their role extends beyond conventional problem-solving; NGOs serve as dynamic agents of empowerment, bridging gaps, fostering collaboration, and championing causes that might otherwise be overlooked. Through their commitment to inclusivity and justice, NGOs play a pivotal role in averting conflicts and advancing the cause of a harmonious global community (Faisal, 2023). NGOs are also indispensable agents in the pursuit of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) outlined by the United Nations. With their diverse expertise, grassroots connections, and unwavering commitment to social progress, NGOs are pivotal players in driving forward the global agenda for sustainable development (Besançon *et al.*, 2022). The immense efforts of NGOs often go unnoticed, despite the significant impact they make. These organizations are consistently underrated and receive far less recognition than they deserve

for their tireless work and dedication to humanitarian causes, therefore it is crucial to recognize their immense importance.

Embarking on a traineeship marks a pivotal juncture in the academic journey, offering a hands-on experience that bridges the theoretical knowledge gained in the classroom with practical applications in a professional setting. It is a transformative experience that not only molds individuals into adept professionals but also equips them with the practical acumen necessary to navigate the complexities of their chosen field. This report encapsulates the comprehensive exploration of the traineeship, detailing the organization of the placement, the spectrum of activities undertaken, and the academic study that was an integral part of this immersive learning experience.

The primary goals of this report are to underscore the significance of the internship and conduct a comprehensive analysis of the entire experience. It aims to bring attention to the importance of the internship in a detailed manner, shedding light on the valuable insights gained and lessons learned throughout the duration of the program. Through this analysis, the report seeks to provide a thorough understanding of how the internship contributes to professional development and aligns with broader career goals.

The decision to pursue this internship at DRH Lindersvold in Denmark was motivated by the recognition that it would offer a diverse array of activities. The prospect of engaging in a variety of tasks and projects presented an exciting opportunity to not only broaden my skill set but also to gain exposure to different facets of the professional landscape.

Moreover, my enthusiasm for this internship was deeply rooted in the awareness that the associated institution held the potential for an eye-opening experience. From the moment I learned about the school, I sensed that it was not merely a workplace but rather a dynamic environment that would challenge my perspectives and expand my horizons. The expectation of encountering innovative ideas, methodologies, and cultural nuances made this internship a compelling choice, promising not just routine tasks, but a transformative journey of exploration and learning.

Upon being introduced to the school and its programs by the headmaster, Tina Whittington, a sense of hope and inspiration took root within me. The comprehensive presentation of the institution left me with a profound belief that positive change was not only possible but achievable through collective efforts. I felt empowered, realizing that I could play a part in making a tangible impact. This experience stirred within me a genuine desire to contribute to transformative initiatives.

In a world filled with challenges, it is natural to wonder how we, as individuals, can make a substantial impact. This internship not only provides an answer but also serves as a blueprint for anyone aspiring to be a catalyst for change. It goes beyond theory, inviting us to step into the realm of practical solutions and collective endeavors. The school's commitment to unity has become a guiding principle, reinforcing the idea that tackling real-world issues necessitates a collaborative and concerted effort.

“Alone the world changes you. Together we can change the world” (DRH Lindersvold n.d.). This statement resonates deeply with the school. This guiding principle encapsulates the belief that individual growth and transformation occur through firsthand experiences and challenges. Yet, the true power lies in collective action. DRH Lindersvold, in all its aspects, stands as a testament to the profound impact of collaborative efforts. Here, students not only undergo personal development but are also nurtured in an environment that values unity, teamwork, and shared aspirations. The school embodies the idea that, together, the students can go beyond individual limitations and actively contribute to positive changes in the broader world. It is for students to recognize their potential for influence and impact, emphasizing the importance of solidarity in shaping a better future.

This internship is designed to encompass a diverse array of crucial topics, weaving together the realms of education, volunteering, human rights, and providing support to students affected by mental health conditions. By delving into these multifaceted areas, participants are not only exposed to a comprehensive understanding of societal dynamics but are also equipped with a perspective on the interconnected issues affecting our communities. This immersive experience goes beyond the conventional boundaries of a singular focus.

Engaging with this amalgamation of subjects not only broadens one's knowledge base but also cultivates a sense of empathy and resilience in the face of complex social issues.

During my internship, the primary focus was on assisting young individuals grappling with mental illnesses and other backgrounds. Engaging in various activities with them was an integral part of the internship, aiming to help but also to foster a positive and inclusive environment. Consequently, both the report and the activities undertaken revolved around this focal point, focusing on gaining a deeper understanding of the experiences these individuals undergo. This detailed examination not only sheds light on the difficulties these young individuals face but also marks the importance of addressing their unique circumstances with empathy and consideration.

Another fundamental theme of this report centers around education, specifically exploring various pedagogical approaches to teaching. Lindersvold stands out as a unique institution in multiple aspects. It is crucial to underscore the profound significance of education throughout this analysis, recognizing the school's distinctive characteristics that contribute to a new and impactful learning environment.

Comprising four chapters, this report unfolds diverse facets of the undertaken work, starting with an introductory overview of the developed approach to the topic. The first chapter delves into the organizational structure and contextual background of the internship, providing insights into the rationale behind selecting the specific area of focus. The second chapter offers a comprehensive understanding of the carried-out activities and their significance. In the third chapter, concepts associated with the executed activities are scrutinized, providing a deeper analysis. The fourth chapter is dedicated to an academic study related to the internship, centering on the inclusion of mental illness and transforming education, with a specific emphasis on Generation Z. Concluding the report are final considerations and reflections, encapsulating insights and conclusions drawn from the undertaken work.

# 1. Context of the traineeship

## 1.1 How it all started

DRH Lindersvold, originated from the translation of "Travelling Folk High School" into Danish as "Den Rejsende Højskole " is a nonprofit organization situated in the Danish countryside. Founded in 1995, the institution was formerly a farm that underwent numerous renovations and changes in ownership over time (DRH Lindersvold, n.d.).

It all began with a pioneering collective of seven Danish individuals who embarked on a journey around the world during the late 1960s and early 1970s. Their exploration commenced aboard a sizable 40-seat bus, embarking on a journey to discover different countries and their people. The group's initial trajectory led them southwest through Europe, crossing the Bosphorus into Turkey before veering eastward through Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India. Nepal marked a significant stop on their journey, after which the group dispersed in various directions, spanning Australia and the Pacific Islands, where they resided for several months ( Lindersvold, n.d.).

Figure 1. How it all started



Source: The history of the traveling folk High School – RVA, 2017

The primary objective of this expedition was to immerse themselves in distinct realities and lifestyles within the countries they visited. Through these travels, they encountered new countries and engaged with people from diverse cultures, thereby assimilating and learning from their unique ways of life. Amidst shared laughter and experiences, their mode of bus travel across the globe became a profound means through which they garnered invaluable knowledge and understanding. Most of the countries and people they encountered during their journey were struggling with poverty and facing limited opportunities for a better life. Travelling by bus allowed the group members to meet individuals living in conditions starkly different from their own upbringing. Exploring the world and engaging with its diverse inhabitants sparked significant transformations within the group. During that time and even today, there was a notable lack of understanding and awareness regarding impoverished communities and countries ( Lindersvold, n.d.).

Upon their return to Denmark after a year of travel filled with numerous life-altering experiences, the group gathered to ponder their next steps and they found themselves contemplating how to share their newfound knowledge and envisioned ways to extend this enriching travel/life experience to a broader audience. Extensive discussions took place, leading to a solution that aimed to expand upon these unique travel experiences on a larger scale, involving a more extensive community of participants. The concept revolved around establishing a school that would offer courses involving travel to developing countries. The aim was to encourage individuals to glean knowledge from underprivileged countries, engaging with their inhabitants and experiencing their living conditions, thereby undergoing personal transformation in the process. The school started its first team in June 1970 with 42 participants. Following extensive travels and interactions with numerous individuals in need, a novel concept began taking root within the school: The Solidarity Workers, also known as Development Instructors. Consequently, students not only gain knowledge but also contribute by engaging in initiatives such as battling poverty, participating in climate activism, and disseminating information to underserved communities ( Lindersvold, n.d.) In this inspiring way, the school came into existence.

## 1.2 Another Kind of School

This concept is designed to steer your attention away from standard educational institutions. In the realm of education, there is a prevailing notion that all schools share a similar structure, fostering shared experiences among students. The familiar appearance and behavior of these institutions often lead to the use of derogatory terms when discussing our past educational encounters. Yet, there exists another type of school that challenges these preconceptions and has proven to be distinct and effective.

Lindersvold transcends the conventional definition of a school, evolving into a collaborative network of institutions dedicated to the comprehensive care and empowerment of young individuals. This collective effort extends far beyond the boundaries of traditional education, encompassing various facets of personal development. Lindersvold is a union of entities that not only impart academic knowledge but also prioritize the growth of the youth. It fosters an environment that nurtures mental and emotional well-being, fosters skill acquisition, and encourages active participation in the community. In essence, Lindersvold is a multifaceted entity where young people are not just educated but are also provided with the tools and support needed to navigate the complexities of life and emerge as confident, well-rounded individuals.

Within Lindersvold, there exist five distinct institutions:

- **Volunteer training centers** are dedicated to empowering individuals to effect change within communities and to collaborate effectively with others in the current reality. The school possesses a well-defined vision and a concrete plan to impart both practical and theoretical knowledge, skills, and practices to students. Rooted in the foundational theme of the human condition, these programs engage energetically and profoundly with the contemporary world, aiming to equip students comprehensively. The Determination of Modern Methods (DMM) is the used pedagogical tool that provides students with essential opportunities for learning by making each student independently responsible for their training. The DMM is a

digitally based system and focuses on three learning categories: Studies, Courses, and Experiences ( Lindersvold, n.d.).

- A **care home** providing support and shelter for young adults aged 18 and above who cannot reside in their homes.
- Another **care home** serves as an institution for youth between the ages of 12 and 18.
- A **day school** designed for young people unable to access public schooling and it provides comprehensive theoretical and practical instruction across a wide spectrum of subjects for children and young individuals aged 6 to 18. Simultaneously, it engages in specialized and social pedagogical efforts to enhance the overall learning and developmental experience ( Heldagsskolen, Lindersvold, n.d.),
- **STU College** is a specialized individual training program tailored for 18 and over-year-old youths who are affected by mental health conditions and other challenges, emphasizing practical skill-building essential for their future ( DRH Lindersvold, n.d.).

Figure 2. Another kind of school



Source: Heldagsskolen Lindersvold, n.d.

What distinguishes this school as a unique institution is its approach to pedagogy. The school operates not under a singular pedagogical approach but rather embraces diverse programs and a philosophy of tailoring education to suit the unique needs of each

individual student. The methodology revolves around the principles of relationship-oriented pedagogy, focusing on what proves effective for each student (Heldagsskolen, Lindersvold, n.d.).

Another pivotal feature that defines the school is its vibrant international setting. Situated amidst a diverse community, students not only gain knowledge within the classrooms but also have the chance to absorb various cultures, languages, beliefs, and culinary delights. This global atmosphere fosters an inclusive learning environment, equipping students with a broadened worldview and a deeper appreciation for the richness of human diversity (STU College Lindersvold, n.d.).

Lindersvold places a strong emphasis on diversity in nature, biodiversity, and environmental awareness. These core values drive the mission to familiarize students with the natural world and cultivate a sense of belonging within it, empowering them to actively care for and appreciate their surroundings. As part of their approach, nature is seamlessly integrated into the teaching, with hands-on sessions being a common occurrence. Students can cultivate their understanding by growing vegetables, tending to school animals, and occasionally relocating the classroom to the serene setting of the woods. This immersive approach fosters a profound connection between students and the environment, instilling a sense of responsibility for the well-being of the natural world (Heldagsskolen, Lindersvold, n.d.).

In the school, the headmaster assumes leadership, while the Common Meeting serves as the governing body, collectively overseeing the school's operations. This inclusive assembly comprises students, teachers, and the headmaster, making decisions for the benefit of all, including organizing cooking, cleaning, and other projects. The Common Meeting serves as a valuable platform for actively participating in decisions related to community care, the management of programs and the school, and the resolution of various issues. It also provides an opportunity to stay informed about any updates, initiatives, and decisions that need attention or action. Managing the school is a collaborative effort, a continuous and collective action involving everyone. Every contribution, no matter how small, is valued, and each responsibility undertaken contributes to the overall functioning of the school. The

administration of the school is unequivocally a collaborative endeavor ( Lindersvold, n.d.). In the collaborative spirit of the community, the operation of the school is a collective responsibility, underlining the need for cooperation and organization among its members. To ensure the smooth functioning of the school, specific structures are in place, and everyone assumes distinct responsibilities to simplify daily life. The primary responsibility revolves around the kitchen, where tasks are divided, and a rotation is managed. A meticulous approach to cleanliness is the second responsibility, with organized efforts to keep the school and shared spaces well-maintained. Hosting responsibilities involve preparing rooms for new arrivals. Further responsibilities encompass maintenance and practical actions, where the team focuses on repairing and preserving school facilities. The transport team ensures the continuous upkeep of the school vehicle. The garden farming responsibility is particularly crucial, involving efforts to enhance garden functionality, secure funding, and contribute to the production of healthy food, an area the school prioritizes. Lastly, the cultural life team organizes diverse events, including games, movie nights, and cultural gatherings, adding vibrancy to the school's communal life.

Being an integral part of a community is one of the fundamental elements defining this school, highlighting the profound importance of collaborative efforts and shared experiences. The emphasis on doing things together goes beyond the traditional boundaries of education, creating an environment where students not only learn from textbooks but also from each other. This communal spirit not only fosters teamwork but also deepens interpersonal connections, making the school a supportive family. It is this commitment to collaboration and shared experiences that truly distinguishes the institution, fortifying its identity as a unique educational entity where unity and collective growth are the most essential factors ( Lindersvold, n.d.).

All these reasons justify the school's designation as a different kind of school. By placing emphasis on community engagement, fostering a rich educational environment, and empowering young people, it not only distinguishes itself but also advocates for a broader transformation in educational paradigms worldwide. The school's commitment to these values highlights the urgent need for more educational institutions that prioritize

community, education, unity and empowerment.

### **1.3 The school mission and vision**

“Our school seeks to empower people to understand an ever-growing complex world while we join forces to create positive change in the world through action” (DRH Lindersvold, n.d.).

At Lindersvold, they champion the profound impact of education, activism, and community engagement in fostering positive global change. The organization is committed to mobilizing empowerment through education and sustainable development, aiming to create a more equitable and prosperous world. Lindersvold stands as an international educational center where they invite individuals from all backgrounds, driven by a passion to enact meaningful change and contribute to a more just and sustainable future. Through an array of programs and initiatives, they offer immersive learning experiences that enable participants to cultivate skills, expand their knowledge base, and nurture critical thinking. These endeavors simultaneously empower them to make tangible and impactful contributions to communities worldwide. The primary aim of this institution is to inspire and empower ordinary individuals to take tangible steps in their lives and address the prevalent poverty around the world. Collaboration with communities in need forms the cornerstone, and the school undertakes projects in the southern regions of Africa. The pressing issues of hunger and homelessness affect far too many individuals, prompting the school's dedication to equipping people with the skills necessary to communicate, strategize, and take meaningful action. This educational institution offers a blend of theoretical knowledge and practical training, delving into contemporary global realities and actionable solutions (DRH Lindersvold, n.d.).

The school's essence is intricately linked to humanity's deepest and noblest qualities. Rooted in a fundamental principal of caring, the school extends its concern beyond its students to encompass all of humanity. This commitment goes beyond mere sentiment; the school actively translates care into action. In a world marked by conflicts and suffering, the school discerns both the hardships and the hopeful endeavors of humanity striving for a

better collective future. The institution addresses a multitude of global issues, recognizing the looming threat of rendering the planet uninhabitable and acknowledging the imperative to engage with the current political and cultural reality. In navigating the complexities of society, the school, its teachers, and students collectively draw solace and courage. They believe that by confronting these challenges together, they empower the student body to find and share in that same resilience. Another critical concern for the school is the fate of humankind. This pertains to demographic challenges, issues of hunger, conflicts over water, and the destruction fueled by ideologies. Remarkably, the school stands out as one of the few where programs constitute the political framework surrounding the curriculum. Here, cultural considerations and perspectives envelop the educational framework, recognizing the significance of various matters ( Lindersvold, n.d.).

**Courage, unity, and commitment** are essential when endeavoring to articulate a perspective that is not only embraced theoretically but also lived out in practice by a dynamic institution like another kind of school. The school's perspective is centered on improving teaching, fostering deeper learning, and cultivating a commitment to the common good. As an evolving public institution, the school aspires to align with the aspirations of future generations. Fulfilling this commitment to the future requires the courage to envision and anticipate the needs of humanity ( Lindersvold, n.d.).

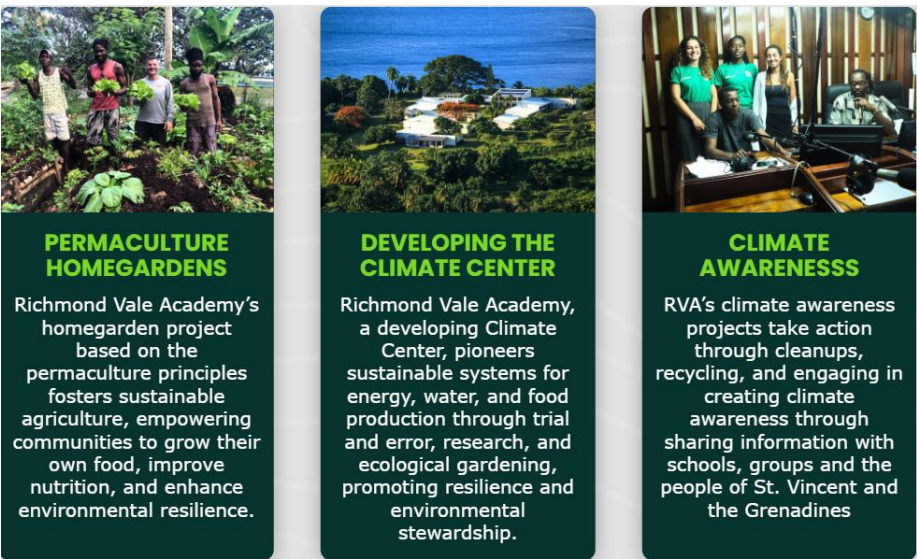
#### **1.4 Nature Now and Volunteer for Change**

The school currently has two volunteering programs: “Nature Now” and “Volunteer for Change”. The program, Nature Now collaborates closely with the Richmond Vale Academy in St. Vincent, located in the Caribbean. Focused on addressing pressing environmental concerns, this action-oriented program aims to educate individuals on climate-related issues and our role in combatting them, recognizing the threat they pose to our future. Nature Now's structure begins with a rigorous three-month training period at Lindersvold. This phase involves thorough preparation, extensive study, and research on various aspects including the environment, climate change, global movements, the history, and the current state of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, along with a specific focus on

Caribbean history and St. Vincent and the Grenadines' climate change history. Combining theoretical knowledge with hands-on experience, courses and programs offer a comprehensive grasp of the causes and consequences of global warming and climate change. Encouraging collective action to safeguard the planet, their approach fosters discussions, teamwork, critical thinking, and practical learning throughout the learning process (DRH Lindersvold, n.d.).

The subsequent three-month phase concentrates on enhancing the Richmond Vale Academy's status as a Climate Centre while actively engaging in climate-related projects within the communities of St. Vincent and the Grenadines. Volunteers, equipped with pertinent knowledge, collaborate with students, educators, and project leaders to implement transformative climate projects. Additionally, they participate in community projects and connect with the local community. Upon completion of the program, volunteers return to Denmark for one month to assess and raise awareness about the impacts of global warming and climate change. This phase involves touring Denmark, conducting presentations and workshops to highlight individual contributions and advocate for climate action (DRH Lindersvold, n.d.).

Figure 3. Nature Now and Volunteer for Change



Source: DRH Lindersvold, n.d.

Volunteer for Change represents another volunteering opportunity, also spanning three

months of intensive preparation and training in Denmark. Here, volunteers delve into comprehensive subjects like global affairs, world history, the root causes of poverty, and social movements. The training equips them with vital skills such as project management, teamwork, and practical capabilities that are essential for engaging in development projects. Through a varied approach involving lectures, group discussions, independent study, research, and hands-on activities, volunteers cultivate the necessary knowledge, attitude, and expertise to serve as effective international volunteers. The subsequent phase encompasses a six-month project in countries like Zambia, Mozambique, Malawi, or India. Projects in these regions primarily revolve around education, community development, health, and agricultural initiatives. Collaborating with project professionals, volunteers focus on addressing the underlying factors of poverty and actively contribute to constructing resilient communities. The scope of activities varies based on project goals—ranging from conducting surveys, organizing caregiver workshops, supporting income-generating endeavors, implementing climate-resilient strategies, creating educational materials, and more. For instance, specific community projects involve working with a school to empower students for their future skills in Children's Town, Zambia; enhancing early childhood education in rural preschools through Pre-schools of the Future in Malawi; aiding farmers in becoming more resilient by organizing, sharing knowledge, and providing materials through Farmers Club in Mozambique; and training the next generation of educators in Teacher Training College, India. Upon program completion, volunteers return to Denmark for a month-long period focused on evaluating and raising awareness (DRH Lindersvold, n.d.).

Figure 4. Nature Now and Volunteer for Change



Figure 5. Nature Now and Volunteer for Change



Source: DRH Lindersvold, n.d.

### 1.5 Humana People to People

The school has fundamental partnerships with Humana People to People in Zambia, Malawi, Mozambique and India. The Federation Humana People to People, commonly known as the Federation for Associations connected to the International Humana People to

People Movement, came into formal existence in 1996. It serves as a supporting entity for member associations distributed across Africa, Asia, Europe, North America, and South America. These associations are an integral part of Humana People to People, a global organization comprising 29 independent member associations, each deeply rooted in its respective country. The origins of this movement trace back to the 1970s, emerging from a progressive educational initiative that actively opposed apartheid and colonialism. Founded by individuals impassioned by the pervasive inequality prevalent worldwide, Humana People to People aimed to enact change. The organization's inception was propelled by a collective desire to address global disparities. The core function of the member associations, backed by the Federation, involves executing essential on-the-ground programs. These programs are centered around five key areas of development: *community development, sustainable agriculture and environmental initiatives, healthcare, education, and the collection and resale of second-hand clothing* (Humana People to People, n.d.).

In 2022, Humana People to People impacted 16.3 million individuals through the execution of 1410 projects spanning across Africa, Asia, Central and South America. Their efforts extend to safeguarding the environment, fostering community development, and providing support by facilitating connections through transformative programs. These initiatives empower individuals, unleashing their potential for positive change and proactive engagement (Humana People to People, Progress Report, 2022). Humana People to People is actively involved in collaborating with communities to develop solutions. This is what they state: “Our experience speaks clearly: Hope, resilience and strength grow out of acting together. From more than 40 years of building and practicing solidarity across continents and peoples, we are not in doubt that this is where the true forces reside and this is where the future is built” (Humana People to People, Progress Report, 2022).

## **2. Activities performed and relevance**

### **2.1 STU College Lindersvold**

I completed my internship at STU College Lindersvold between the 25<sup>th</sup> of September and the 22<sup>nd</sup> of December, one of the institutions situated within the school. STU College Lindersvold stands out as a solution-oriented program, prioritizing personalized guidance

for each STU student. With an unwavering commitment to individuality, the college offers a limitless space accommodating diverse needs and aspirations. The educational approach at STU College Lindersvold is distinctly tailored to each student, organizing courses based on their unique preferences and skills. With STU, students have the freedom to develop at their own pace and dedicated and engaged teachers actively work to ensure students thrive in the school community. A broad spectrum of activities, led by skilled professionals, awaits students, covering activities such as gardening, farming, culinary arts, theatre, music, fitness, and other sports. Students are actively involved in tasks like kitchen assistance, maintaining communal areas, and participating in creative workshops. The newly renovated workshops provide an immersive environment for hands-on projects, complemented by on-site amenities like horses, sheep, paddleboards, a boat, and a fire pit. Additionally, the college facilitates domestic and international trips for those eager to explore beyond the campus. These activities collectively contribute to equipping them with essential skills for independent living, providing a practical and experiential pathway through life. Recognizing the importance of structure for these students, the school has established a specific framework that effectively meets their needs. This structured approach serves as a foundation for their development, ensuring a supportive environment that fosters growth. This will be explained in more detail in the next chapter.

A crucial facet of STU College Lindersvold's mission is to clarify students' future aspirations and opportunities. This involves engaging in internships, either on-site within the familiar campus or in collaboration with local partners. Emphasis is placed not only on academic growth but also on community development, honing social skills, and fostering a sense of co-determination and responsibility. STU College Lindersvold embodies a holistic educational experience, where individuality is celebrated, and students are empowered to shape their own learning journey within a supportive and dynamic community (STU College Lindersvold, n.d.).

The students are young individuals aged 18 to 25 who are affected by mental health conditions such as ADHD, Borderline, Autism, or other learning challenges, backgrounds marked by abusive or alcoholic/drug-using parents, carry personal setbacks and disrupted educational paths. Recognizing the need for an alternative approach and pedagogical

teaching, STU functions as a specialized division or union dedicated to catering to the unique needs of teenagers who require an alternative approach that centers around the individual and their unique circumstances, fostering an environment of trust, humor, and acknowledgment (STU College Lindersvold, n.d.).

## **2.2 My arrival at the school**

Upon my arrival at the school, I was warmly greeted by my supervisor, who took the initiative to provide a comprehensive introduction to both the school itself and the diverse student community. This initial welcome set the tone for my immersive experience and helped me swiftly acclimate to the unique environment.

My supervisor not only extended a friendly welcome but also took the time to familiarize me with the school's ethos, mission, and educational approach. Additionally, I received an insightful overview of the students, gaining valuable insights into their backgrounds, needs, and the overall dynamics of the learning community.

This introduction played a pivotal role in establishing a sense of belonging and understanding within the educational setting. It facilitated a smooth integration into the school's culture, fostering a collaborative atmosphere where I could effectively contribute to the students' development and the overall success of the educational initiatives. The warm reception and thorough orientation provided by my supervisor laid a solid foundation for a meaningful and purposeful engagement during my time at the school.

The following day, my supervisor organized a breakfast session within the classroom. This thoughtful gesture provided me with the perfect opportunity to present a detailed introduction about myself, allowing me to connect with each member of the STU. During this breakfast presentation, I shared insights into my background, professional experiences, and personal interests. The breakfast presentation served as a meaningful icebreaker, breaking down barriers and establishing a foundation for positive interactions. It allowed the students to get to know me but also facilitated a mutual exchange where I could learn more about them. This intentional and inclusive approach not only contributed to my integration into the school community but also reinforced the importance of personal

connections in fostering a supportive and collaborative educational environment.

Figure 6. My arrival at the school



Source: own source

Figure 7. My arrival at the school



### 2.3 Activities carried out

Throughout my internship, I engaged in diverse activities that spanned a wide range of experiences. The primary objective of the internship revolved around collaborating with students under the guidance and support of my supervisor. The activities undertaken were not only varied but also tailored to foster a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter. From facilitating interactive workshops to supporting and organizing hands-on projects, my role encompassed a dynamic array of tasks aimed at creating an immersive and impactful learning environment. This multifaceted approach allowed me to actively contribute to the students' educational journey while gaining valuable insights into effective teaching methodologies. Additionally, I collaborated closely with my supervisor to design and implement innovative initiatives that went beyond traditional classroom methods. This collaborative effort not only enhanced the students' learning experiences but also provided me with a rich and nuanced understanding of educational practices. The internship served

as a platform for both practical and interpersonal skills, offering a professional development experience that extended beyond the confines of routine tasks.

My initial responsibilities in the school revolved around community tasks, encompassing various roles within the community. This involved participating in cleaning activities, contributing to the kitchen rotation for dishwashing and cooking, taking care of the school and organizing the cultural life, and playing a role in the common meetings. As previously mentioned, these responsibilities are crucial for the smooth functioning of the school and fostering a sense of collective responsibility among everyone. I also actively participated in the Planet Protection Council, a collaborative initiative involving everyone in the school aimed at promoting sustainable and eco-friendly practices. The council meetings started with updates on accomplished tasks and discussions focused on minimizing environmental impact. One significant effort was addressing food waste by adopting practices such as consuming leftovers each night instead of discarding them, repurposing bread waste to create new ones, and collectively transforming excess apples into jam and juice to prevent wastage. Additionally, a new sorting system was implemented to enhance waste management and discussed the importance of improving biodiversity. The council also emphasized the need to educate individuals on reducing food waste and fostering an approach to environmental conservation within the school community.

During my involvement in the STU, I supported diverse activities with the students, including gym sessions, card games like Uno, various sports, leisurely walks, academic support in Math and other subjects, collaborative cooking sessions to prepare typical meals, and even teaching Italian to one of the students. Every Friday, STU had the responsibility of preparing lunch. Initially, we experimented with various dishes like focaccia, but eventually, we established a tradition known as Pizza Friday. As a result, I ended up making pizzas every Friday for lunch for a sizable group of people. While it posed a challenge, it also provided a valuable opportunity to enhance and develop my skills.

The students participated in this culinary mission, contributing to tasks such as setting up tables and other preparations. These activities aimed not only to keep the students engaged and occupied but also to ignite their interests and provide valuable learning experiences. The combination of structured routines and diverse activities plays a pivotal role in

nurturing the students and helping them navigate the journey toward independence.

Figure 8. Activities carried out



Figure 9. Activities carried out



Source: own source

The students' typical day commenced at approximately 8:30 or 9:00 and concluded around 14:00, delineating a well-defined schedule. My day, in turn, mirrored this structure, comprising two distinct halves. During the initial portion, I actively engaged with the students, participating in their daily routines and activities. This experience allowed me to establish connections, provide support, and contribute to the conducive learning atmosphere. In the latter half of the day, I transitioned to various other activities, broadening the scope of my responsibilities. These additional tasks encompassed diverse facets, including planning future workshops, refining educational materials, and collaborating with fellow educators. By strategically dividing my day, it ensured a comprehensive utilization of time but also enabled me to balance direct involvement with students and the broader responsibilities essential for my learning experience.

Throughout the academic year, numerous shared events serve as focal points for collaboration and participation among students and teachers. These events provide valuable opportunities for fostering a sense of community and camaraderie within the school

environment. Whether it is organizing cultural festivals, charity fundraisers, academic competitions, or sports tournaments, both students and teachers play integral roles in planning, coordinating, and executing these activities. By working together, they not only enrich the school experience but also cultivate teamwork, leadership, and social skills among all participants. Additionally, these events often showcase the diverse talents and interests within the school community, reinforcing the sense of belonging and pride among students and faculty members alike. These events play a crucial role in uniting individuals, making them essential for the cohesion of the school community.

One of the first events organized by the STU was the Halloween party which took place on the 27<sup>th</sup> of October, where, with guidance from my supervisor, I oversaw a part of the evening's program. This involved setting up an enthralling escape room in the basement and organizing intricate riddles and puzzles to challenge the students as they participated in the game. I oversaw the entirety of the program, handling most aspects of its organization. We aimed to cultivate a pleasant atmosphere, ensuring the students could fully immerse themselves in the festivities and have a delightful experience.

On the 14<sup>th</sup> of November, the Autumn Concert, stood out as a pivotal event, drawing together schools from across Denmark. At this gathering, students' poems were compiled into a visually stunning printed book, complemented by illustrations from a poster competition centered around the theme "Man and Nature." The evening was filled with poetic recitals, musical performances, and engaging acts on stage, fostering a sense of collective joy and celebration. I took on the responsibility of creating an introductory video showcasing various school activities, which were to be presented during the concert. Additionally, I participated in the musical performance alongside fellow volunteers and teachers. Furthermore, I contributed to the creation of a poem that was featured alongside others in the published book. The central theme of my poem conveyed the notion that while hope may seem elusive, it remains within reach despite the harm inflicted upon nature by human actions. It emphasizes the idea that although we are responsible for the degradation of the environment, we also hold the key to its restoration. The poem served as a call to action, highlighting our dual role as both contributors to environmental decline and

potential agents of positive change.

I also collaborated with a volunteer to create a poster focused on the chosen theme and the essence of our poster was to emphasize the interconnectedness between humans and nature. It conveyed the idea that while nature demonstrates remarkable adaptability, continually evolving in response to various changes, our dependence on it remains crucial. We indicated that no matter the circumstances, nature persists in assuming new forms, highlighting the essential relationship between humans and nature. We are not separate from nature; we are nature itself.

Figure 10. Activities carried out



Source: STU College Lindersvold, n.d.

Another significant event at the school was the Christmas market in December, where I oversaw creative workshops aimed at crafting Christmas decorations, alongside the supervisor and students. I produced homemade aromatic candles, created a budget, and managed the final production and produced many more decorations. Additionally, I contributed to decorating the dining hall for the occasion and assisted in attending to guests at the market. I also played a role in coordinating the Christmas trip alongside the supervisor and students. My responsibilities included overseeing the well-being of some students throughout the day in Lübeck, Germany, ensuring they had a pleasant experience and fostering a positive atmosphere. In the final weeks of December, various activities and games were arranged for the students before the holidays. Among these was the Bingo Evening, where I assisted my supervisor in tasks such as preparing materials, organizing

the cards and prizes, decorating the hall for the event, and welcoming and hosting the guests. The culminating event was the annual Christmas Party, where I played a role in coordinating the evening dinner for students, parents, and all staff members. It was a wonderful opportunity for everyone to come together and celebrate before the Christmas holidays, fostering a sense of unity and togetherness.

Figure 11. Activities carried out



Source: own source

A significant factor to highlight during my internship is my active involvement in the two ongoing volunteering programs at Lindersvold: "Volunteer for Change" and "Nature Now." Every week I eagerly participated in various courses, activities, and practical actions organized by both teams, driven by a genuine interest in their programs. The chance to engage in these activities was indeed a rewarding experience for me. While the two volunteering programs differ in their nature, they are interconnected. This connection provided me with the valuable opportunity to gain a more comprehensive understanding of their respective programs and actively engage with them. I actively participated in documentary sessions covering a range of crucial topics. There was a shared enthusiasm

among us to absorb knowledge and stay informed. Among the courses I attended with the Volunteer for Change team, I participated in diverse sessions covering subjects such as The Debt Trap, Africa and Asia's Liberation Movements, Malaria in Africa, Malnutrition, and many others. With the Nature Now team, our focus shifted towards sustainability, climate change, permaculture, and various related topics. I actively participated in several of their courses and engaged in practical actions to deepen my understanding and contribute to these crucial areas. These courses were a perfect fit for my master's program and the specific subjects I was delving into. The insights gained from these sessions not only complemented my theoretical studies but also offered practical perspectives that enhanced my overall understanding. For this reason, the activities offered were not only diverse but also remarkably comprehensive. This provided me with the opportunity to gain extensive knowledge on numerous important topics that were previously unfamiliar to me. I aspire to continue participating in similar initiatives in the future, eager to contribute and learn further. Overall, the opportunity to be part of these initiatives has enriched my experience and deepened my commitment to contributing to positive change.

One of my initial engagements with the Nature Now team was attending the 5-day Erasmus+ training called "Green Up." This comprehensive program aimed to educate participants on various aspects of green initiatives, sustainability, and social inclusion. Topics covered included global warming and climate change, with discussions on their causes and effects. The training also featured visits to a rooftop garden, insights into the textile industry, exploration of biodynamic farming, the intricacies of beekeeping, using the kitchen as an educational space, and participation in activities by "Theatre of the Oppressed." One of the initial activities of the Green Up program involved visiting Boserup School, which is affiliated with DRH Lindersvold as its sister school. Boserup School offers diverse programs catering to children and young individuals in need of alternative and enriching educational experiences, including residential programs where necessary. At Boserup, the focus is on each individual student, addressing their needs and strengths across all aspects of life. This commitment extends to education, where the curriculum is tailored to meet each student's unique requirements, as well as socially, where fostering friendships and a sense of community is paramount. Boserup School shares

similarities with Lindersvold School, such as a strong emphasis on nature and therapeutic use of animals, these principles are important particularly for students with special needs. During our visit to Boserup garden and greenhouse, we received valuable insights into the significance of cultivating one's own food and various gardening techniques. Additionally, we delved into the importance of beekeeping and its role in ecosystems. Furthermore, we learned about the school's emphasis on providing students with a robust foundation in practical education. With park areas, forests, an apple orchard, and a vegetable garden at their disposal, the school integrates hands-on experience into its curriculum. Students are taught essential skills such as planting, fertilizing, pruning, tree felling, and firewood production, among others. This approach equips students with the necessary knowledge and skills to thrive in various aspects of gardening and land management (Skolerne i Boserup, n.d.).

Another significant activity was our visit to the UFF Humana secondhand clothes collection center, where we gained valuable insights into environmental pollution within the fashion industry. The center collects used clothing for reuse and exports it across Europe, a necessary step to maintain the value of these garments. Additionally, they repurpose textiles that cannot be reused by transforming them into sustainable bags for various shops. After collecting the clothes, one of the processes involves sorting them based on whether they are dry or wet. Wet but recyclable clothes are separated from those that are dry, while wet items that cannot be recycled are incinerated. An ongoing experiment with the city of Copenhagen involves exploring the possibility of reusing wet clothes by drying them. This initiative aims to salvage clothes that would otherwise be discarded solely due to their wet condition. We engaged in practical action by sorting out clothes during our visit. This hands-on experience inspired me to return to Humana another time to offer my assistance in sorting out clothes once again. The experience was incredibly enriching. Not only did I gain a deeper understanding of textile recycling practices, but I also developed a greater appreciation for the importance of sustainable fashion and environmental conservation efforts. It was eye-opening to witness firsthand the intricate processes involved in collecting, sorting, and repurposing clothing to minimize waste and promote reuse. Additionally, being actively involved in sorting clothes further solidified my

commitment to supporting initiatives aimed at reducing the environmental impact of the fashion industry.

Figure 12. Activities carried out



Figure 13. Activities carried out



Source: own source

The third activity involved exploring Copenhagen's green initiatives, which offered valuable insights into sustainable practices within the city. We visited a rooftop garden maintained by the community, where we observed the cultivation of various vegetables and learned about the collaborative efforts involved in its upkeep. Finally, we explored Copenhill, another noteworthy green initiative, which provided further inspiration for eco-friendly living practices. Copenhill is a groundbreaking facility in Copenhagen that embodies the city's dedication to sustainability and creativity. It is not just an ordinary waste-to-energy plant; it is also a place for people to enjoy outdoor activities like skiing, hiking, and climbing. This unique combination serves as a symbol of Copenhagen's ambition to become the world's first carbon-neutral city by 2025. In terms of function, Copenhill burns trash to produce electricity and heat for thousands of homes in Copenhagen. Plus, the facility is designed to be exceptionally clean, minimizing its environmental impact. Copenhagen's waste-to-energy system is one of the most advanced

in Europe, handling all the city's waste and significantly reducing CO2 emissions (Edo, 2021).

Figure 14. Activities carried out



Figure 15. Activities carried out



Source: own source

The subsequent activity involved participating in a workshop at our school's biodynamic garden, where I contributed by assisting in various tasks such as composting and removing harmful plants. It was a rewarding opportunity to actively contribute to the maintenance and cultivation of our school's green space, promoting biodiversity and ecological harmony. Following that, we delved into learning about the nine planetary boundaries, exploring the critical points that define the safe operating space for humanity within Earth's ecological systems. Later in the evening, we embarked on a dumpster diving excursion, gaining firsthand insight into the issues surrounding food waste and consumption patterns. Engaging in dumpster diving for the first time was a truly eye-opening experience for me. Witnessing the staggering amount of perfectly decent food discarded daily was both shocking and enlightening. However, it was also heartening to see how much of this food remained usable. I am grateful for this experience, as it underscored the importance of reducing food waste and utilizing resources more responsibly. The day after, we utilized the food to prepare the dinner, highlighting the value of repurposing and saving items that would have otherwise gone to waste.

I also participated in a building weekend at Boserup School, where our entire school community came together for a collective effort. Alongside others, I played a role in constructing a winter shelter for animals and assisting with the renovation of the school's interior. This hands-on experience provided valuable opportunities to learn carpentry skills and allowed me to learn by doing, reinforcing the value of hard work and perseverance. As we tackled various tasks, I also developed a deeper appreciation for teamwork and cooperation. It was a fulfilling and demanding experience.

After completing my internship, I was extended an invitation to return in January for the preparatory camp leading up to one of the school's most significant events: the New Year's Concert. This prestigious event features performances by renowned artists and musicians from around the globe, captivating an audience of approximately 300 people. Working closely with the leadership team and fellow volunteers, I assisted in organizing all aspects necessary for the concert's success. The New Year's concert is a celebration of classical music, showcasing exquisite performances by a symphony orchestra, accompanied by ballet dancers from the local school and choir singers. Throughout the entire month of January, the focus is dedicated to music, exploring various genres, and sharing favorite pieces with one another. The week leading up to the New Year's concert was filled with intensity and a multitude of tasks to accomplish. Despite the demanding schedule, witnessing the collective dedication and passion of everyone involved was truly inspiring. It underscored the importance of collaboration and highlighted the transformative power of music in bringing people together.

#### **2.4 The overall experience and its challenges**

The overall experience was incredibly positive, enriching, and eye-opening. Engaging in a variety of activities throughout the program allowed me to acquire numerous practical skills that aren't typically taught in traditional settings but are nonetheless essential. From participating in building projects to crafting decorations and delving into environmental initiatives, I gained valuable hands-on experience that I wouldn't have acquired elsewhere. This diverse range of activities not only expanded my skill set but also broadened my

perspective, deepening my understanding of the world around me. It was a truly transformative experience that left me feeling empowered and inspired to continue learning and growing.

Throughout my internship, I dedicated considerable time to tasks requiring creativity, an area not typically my strong suit, so it was quite challenging. This experience proved invaluable in showing me that creativity is not bound by inherent strengths or weaknesses. Rather, it's a skill refined through persistent effort and practice. It reinforced the notion that creativity is a universal trait within us all, waiting to be nurtured and developed. With each endeavor, I discovered the power of perseverance and the transformative impact of simply engaging in the process, reaffirming that creativity knows no bounds when we commit to its pursuit.

In addition, I gained valuable insights from immersing myself in a new environment alongside young people affected by mental illness, a group I had never previously encountered in my work. This experience provided me with a deeper understanding of mental health issues and allowed me to develop empathy and compassion for those facing such challenges. It was a learning opportunity that went beyond practical skills. Certainly, navigating the dynamics of a new group, particularly one facing mental health challenges, presented its share of obstacles. As a newcomer, I found myself grappling with uncertainty and apprehension about how to connect with them initially. Adjusting and finding my place within the group was a gradual process, marked by moments of uncertainty and the need for patience. Each day brought its own set of challenges and unpredictability, requiring a considerable amount of flexibility and adaptability. Planning activities was particularly challenging, as the mental availability of the students could vary greatly from day to day. I must praise my supervisor for her exceptional ability to navigate these complexities and provide effective support to the students. Her dedication and skill in managing the group's needs were truly admirable.

What I've truly come to appreciate is the significance of prioritizing a positive and inclusive environment for young individuals struggling with mental health conditions. It's not just

about offering support; it's about fostering a sense of belonging and empowerment. Every member of the community, regardless of their mental health journey, is valued and respected. The school strives to create a space where everyone feels heard, understood, and supported. Through various activities and initiatives, they encourage collaboration, creativity, and self-expression. The goal is to promote growth and resilience among the students, actively work to dismantle stigma surrounding mental illness and promote acceptance and understanding. I came to realize the crucial significance it holds, building a community where young people feel empowered to embrace their journey towards mental wellness, knowing they are surrounded by unwavering support and compassion.

The school environment fosters a collective desire for positive change and active participation in making it happen. Engaging in discussions on pressing issues leaves us feeling not just inspired, but hopeful for the future. Every day brings new learning opportunities, with our minds constantly stimulated in the best possible way. It's more than just a school; it's a community that feels like family. Sharing thoughts and emotions openly creates a sense of belonging and encourages meaningful dialogue. Moreover, the teachers bring invaluable insights from their extensive experience in humanitarian work, adding layers of inspiration to our learning journey. Their stories ignite a sense of purpose and fuel our aspirations to contribute meaningfully to the world. In this environment, critical thinking thrives, and personal growth is nurtured, it is a setting that motivates us to contemplate deeply and inspires us to expand the horizons of our knowledge and understanding.

### **3. Analysis of concepts and practices**

#### **3.1 A specialized approach tailored to students' needs**

The school employs a variety of pedagogical methods to engage and instruct students. In this analysis, we delve deeper into these methodologies to understand their significance and impact on student learning outcomes. In institutions like STU, students face challenges in following a mainstream education and require additional support, so a specialized approach

tailored to their unique needs becomes essential. By tailoring education to the specific needs of students at STU, teachers can unlock their potential and pave the way for success in academics, social-emotional development, and life beyond the classroom. Specialized approaches not only address the immediate challenges students face but also empower them to become confident and independent learners. At the institution, they prioritize the individual and the unique learning needs of the students, recognizing that establishing meaningful connections and relevance is essential for effective learning and fostering a sense of belonging within groups and communities. They believe in the importance of personalized education, where the curriculum and instructional approaches are adapted to accommodate the specific learning conditions of each student. By embracing this approach, they strive to create an inclusive and supportive learning environment where every student feels valued, understood, and empowered to succeed (STU College Lindersvold, n.d.).

### **3.2 “Learning by doing”**

STU employs experiential methods through their plans and programs, designed to ignite students' interest and curiosity in exploring various aspects of our society, both locally and globally. For this reason, they work in small “lines”, adopting a personalized approach where the students are met with understanding and assessed based on their subject level, interests, and available resources. This method deviates from traditional classroom teaching, allowing individuals to be catered to rather than needing to adapt to a broader curriculum (STU College Lindersvold, n.d.). The different activities are:

- **Metal workshop:** Within their carpentry and metal workshops, students can construct their projects while also assisting our staff in maintaining Lindersvold's machinery and buildings. This hands-on experience ensures practical skill development. Additionally, they can contribute to various tasks such as crafting tables and benches, building raised beds for the garden, and restoring antique furniture. Students can learn and engage in hands-on practice with both hand tools and machinery, acquire knowledge about workshop safety protocols, develop skills in organizing and executing production processes, learn to evaluate the quality of manufactured goods and cultivate customer service skills and maintain positive

client relationships (STU College Lindersvold, n.d.).

- **Road and Park:** The outdoor team utilizes a variety of machinery from the equipment park to upkeep Lindersvold's park areas and surrounding roads. Tasks include maintaining the paved courtyard, tidying the parking lot and gravel roads, ensuring stairs and footpaths are free of ice in winter, pruning lime trees, and mowing grasslands to promote biodiversity. Additionally, the team operates from the school's spacious workshop, equipped for maintaining and repairing the machinery under their responsibility (STU College Lindersvold, n.d.).
  
- **Health and Strength:** The school emphasizes the importance of healthy eating, exercise, and strength training. STU tailors a program to suit the student's needs and align with their current health, lifestyle, and well-being goals. It offers both group and individual training sessions, allowing the students to choose the approach that suits them best, and it provides education on healthy eating and nutrition. The school offers various sports and fitness facilities, including a small gymnasium, outdoor volleyball court, table tennis room, and scenic paths for cycling and running. Students can access to the Fit & Sund gym in Faxe, which provides ample opportunities for strength and cardio training and participate in different sports competitions throughout August and September. Diet and Lifestyle courses are available to learn about healthy meal preparation and lifestyle choices. These courses often involve practical activities, such as cooking healthy meals together or learning about body functions through measurements like blood pressure, heart rate, and fitness levels. Personalized diet and training plans are available for those interested, with ongoing support and follow-up (STU College Lindersvold, n.d.).
  
- **Cooking and Service:** The students delve into the art of baking delightful cakes, crafting traditional Danish dishes from scratch, and exploring exotic flavors from distant lands. The focus extends beyond culinary creations to the art of presentation, from elegantly set tables adorned with folded napkins and flowers to showcasing dishes to diners with flair. The students can master fundamental cooking techniques

including handling vegetables, sauce and gravy making, baking, dessert preparation, preserving fruits and vegetables, buffet arrangement, food storage, promoting healthy eating habits and maintaining kitchen hygiene. The school also embraces the "farm to fork" concept, venturing into the garden and chicken coop to incorporate freshly harvested ingredients into our recipes. Sustainability is integral to Lindersvold's values, so students also learn about cultivating their own vegetables and pickling homegrown fruits. Many of the vegetables used are grown right on-site (STU College Lindersvold, n.d.).

- **Horses and other animals:** In this line students delve into the world of equine and livestock care. The animals include chickens, Shetland ponies, a couple of riding horses, and sheep. During the previous spring, students from the workshop line assisted in constructing a cozy shelter for our horses and building enclosures. Their priority is to ensure that all necessary equipment is readily available, ensuring the well-being of our four-legged companions. The teachers have observed that many of the students, across all courses, develop a deep fondness for our animals. They provide a sense of tranquility and connection, bridging relationships between teachers and students, as well as among peers. The school has also integrated equine therapy into the STU curriculum as it enhances the self-esteem of the students and has proven benefits against stress, anxiety, and depression (STU College Lindersvold, n.d.).
  
- **Music, Theatre and Creativity:** The creative line is tailor-made for individuals seeking to enhance their expressive skills through art. Every spring, the STU participates in a theatre festival. The students dive into costume design, set creation, and extend invitations to family and friends to be part of the audience. Drama and theatre education serve as vital pedagogical tools, offering students and teachers an avenue to delve into different realms and realities beyond the confines of the classroom. In addition to acquiring essential life skills such as communication, teamwork, precision, and perseverance, staging a theatrical production also enriches personal growth, fostering creativity, confidence, expanded vocabulary, and

valuable performance experience (Pedagogy 4 change, n.d.) In this line, students can fully immerse themselves in various creative pursuits, whether it's mastering the guitar, taking part in theatrical performances, or engaging in other artistic experiences (STU College Lindersvold, n.d.).

- **Art and Culture:** “Art is an important pedagogical tool which provides an opportunity for students and teachers to work with open-ended solutions. Creative expression can be highly beneficial, especially for students who find it difficult to articulate their thoughts or structure their tasks. Open-ended work like works of art is also perfect for students who are terrified of making mistakes.” (Pedagogy 4 change, n.d.) If the students are passionate about art, culture, and creativity, the art line at STU College Lindersvold offers the perfect opportunity to explore and express students' interests. The teachers begin by identifying activities that align with students’ passions and craft the STU course accordingly. Often, STU opt for project-oriented courses where the students dedicate themselves to a specific project for a set period, typically around four weeks. These projects culminate in exciting highlights, such as participating in festivals, concerts, theater performances, or similar events. Activities within the art line may include visiting art museums and galleries to experience curated exhibitions; exploring various art techniques, from watercolor painting and collage to charcoal drawing, graffiti, ceramics, welding, and stained glass; learning about vintage and trending fashion, as well as upcycling clothing; mastering textile treatments using sewing machines, knitting, crochet, and textile painting; contributing to set painting and costume design for STU's annual play, including sourcing props from thrift stores and assisting with lighting and background graphics; delving into specific cultures such as minority youth, manga, youth literature, or the LGBTQ+ community, and creating products like posters, flags, jewelry, or badges inspired by these themes; participating in creative workshops to craft recycled paper with natural inlays, cast concrete, make soap, or produce Christmas decorations for the annual market (STU College Lindersvold, n.d.).

- **Esports:** The primary emphasis is on Counterstrike, with interested students welcome to participate in tournaments. Regardless of their gaming experience level, whether seasoned or new, all students will find a place here, and playing with others accelerates their improvement (STU College Lindersvold, n.d.).
  
- **School Subjects:** In the academic-focused study line, students receive instruction in core subjects such as Danish, mathematics, and English. STU believes in making learning applicable to everyday life. In addition to standard Danish lessons, which involve reading short stories and writing essays, they also provide guidance on understanding municipal letters and teach budgeting skills in math classes. Furthermore, the study line offers classes in various subjects like social studies, history, geography, and biology. Exams and assessments, including those for 9th grade and single subjects, differ from traditional methods at Lindersvold College STU. Instead of conventional tests, they hold public exams four times a year, where students select the content to present (STU College Lindersvold, n.d.).

Engaging in these activities allows students to “learn by doing”, which involves acquiring knowledge and skills through active participation and practical application. This fosters independence and personal growth for the students. As they immerse themselves in practical tasks, students develop essential life skills that are integral to their daily lives. From caring for animals and tending to garden to mastering culinary techniques, students not only acquire academic knowledge but also cultivate valuable competencies that promote self-reliance and resilience. This approach to learning empowers students to navigate real-world challenges with confidence and adaptability, preparing them for success beyond the classroom. This provides structure to the students' routine, which is highly beneficial for them and through these experiences, students not only enhance their academic understanding but also foster a sense of responsibility and capability in managing the demands of everyday life. The aim is for the young person to gradually learn to manage tasks independently, with plenty of support in the beginning. By providing step-by-step guidance and gradually reducing assistance, they develop the skills and confidence needed to navigate their responsibilities autonomously. This approach fosters independence while

ensuring they have the necessary support to succeed. This approach to education goes beyond traditional classroom learning, providing students with a well-rounded and enriching educational experience that extends into the practical aspects of daily life (Pedagogy 4 change, n.d.)

### **3.3 Communication and language**

STU approach involves personalized communication methods tailored to each student's needs, fostering appreciative dialogue and comprehension of their specific learning prerequisites. Utilizing various tools such as pictograms, films, drawings, stories, and straightforward language, we ensure effective communication and engagement in the learning process. This approach acknowledges and respects each student's unique abilities and preferences, enhancing their overall learning experience. It also involves using gentle and calming language, when interacting with students who may be experiencing distress or difficulty in managing their emotions. Instead of reacting to their outward expressions of behavior or loud vocabulary, teachers respond with calmness and understanding, aiming to de-escalate the situation and support the individual in regaining control. By maintaining a low arousal environment and employing gentle language, we create a safe space for individuals to express themselves and navigate challenges effectively (STU College Lindersvold, n.d.).

### **3.4 Community**

STU incorporates the international community approach in collaboration with the Travelling Folk High School at Lindersvold, engaging in joint projects and tasks. Through this partnership, students explore diverse cultures, religions, cuisines, languages, music, and songs, fostering understanding and creating connections that may lead to friendships. STU students actively participate in communal activities alongside folk high school attendees, whether it's the lively dishwashing sessions or the inspiring cooking endeavors. Within this trusting and supportive environment, individuals are encouraged to express themselves freely, even in unconventional ways, fostering mutual understanding and

achievement. Furthermore, many STU students are drawn to English as a means of expressing their identity or experimenting with it. The international environment offers an ideal setting for them to explore and develop their English language skills.

Community engagement is also a strategy to enhance self-esteem, self-confidence, and independence. This involves hosting an Olympics event as part of the annual program, featuring approximately 60 different disciplines such as fishing, running, and puzzles. Around 500 participants, including children, young people, and adults, compete in various activities where orderliness, friendliness, and helpfulness are also valued and rewarded. Additionally, they utilize community involvement to boost self-esteem and self-confidence through theater participation. This includes taking part in a nationwide summer theater day, where individuals from residential centers, care facilities, and STUs come together to showcase theatrical performances to one another (STU College Lindersvold, n.d.).

### **3.5 Cultural experiences**

Utilizing cultural experiences as a teaching method, students immerse themselves in activities that challenge and engage all the senses. Collaborating with other accommodations, residential facilities, and STUs, they participate in nationwide summer theater productions and winter concerts. These events expose the students to a diverse array of musical genres, from classical to pop, rock, jazz, and beyond, fostering appreciation for different styles and emotional expressions in vibrant settings enriched with dance and theater. STU educational methodology includes annual study trips, both domestic and international, providing students with the opportunity to obtain passports and venture abroad within a familiar community. These trips expose students to diverse regions within Denmark, featuring distinct dialects and cultures, often encountered through interactions with fellow folk high school students. Additionally, the program includes a Christmas excursion to Lübeck, Germany, further enriching the cultural exchange experience. Students learn essential skills such as packing necessities for travel and understanding currency exchange rates in countries they visit (STU College Lindersvold, n.d.).

### **3.6 Trust, credibility and patience**

This approach involves employing diligence, credibility, and patience when supporting young individuals facing challenges with alcohol and drugs. Teachers address issues of abuse and its short and long-term effects, working closely with residential care centers to provide intensive support to those at risk of or already experiencing experimental substance abuse. While the school does not condone substance abuse, they recognize that many of the students have experienced significant neglect throughout their upbringing. Therefore, teachers prioritize standing by student's side and offering unwavering support during difficult times, including situations involving alcohol and drugs. STU experience has shown that by collaborating closely with individuals, they can achieve positive developmental outcomes even amidst challenging circumstances (STU College Lindersvold, n.d.).

### **3.7 Life skills**

The impact of STU selected methodologies is evident through individual evaluations conducted at monthly meetings. Within the curriculum, teachers emphasize the development of life skills to empower young people for their future endeavors. This is achieved through engagement in daily tasks, or "lifeskills," which are categorized into 14 distinct areas. Each area comprises various tasks, and upon completion, students receive a diploma. These 14 areas, meticulously designed by the school's educators and teachers from partner institutions like Magleby and Boserup, are as follows: Health and Well-being; Culinary Skills and Hospitality; Personal Style and Hygiene; Household Management; Kitchen Hygiene Certification; Psychological Resilience; Budgeting and Quality Management; Social Engagement and Cooperation; First Aid Training; Planning for the Future; Transportation and Mobility; Active Leisure; Navigating Public Services and Communication and Self-Expression. To ensure comprehensive learning experiences, STU often invites professionals from various fields to contribute. Through this holistic approach, they strive to equip students with essential life skills to thrive in various aspects of their lives (STU College Lindersvold, n.d.). Moreover, it's important to recognize that these

acquired skills extend beyond traditional educational contexts. They hold immense value in humanitarian work and are invaluable in facilitating effective communication and cooperation in intercultural settings globally. By nurturing these competencies, STU not only prepares students for personal success but also fosters their capacity to positively contribute to broader societal challenges and endeavors.

### **3.8 Evaluation and documentation**

STU College at Lindersvold is a small institution tailored to meet the needs of vulnerable young individuals with various diagnoses and limited cognitive abilities. Often characterized as isolated and struggling with low self-esteem due to past experiences of neglect and failure from adults in their lives. The chosen methods are deeply rooted in the values of our Lindersvold culture, aiming to instill fundamental qualities and skills in the students. The teachers strive to inspire and influence them to engage in meaningful collaboration within a supportive community where mutual responsibility is both given and embraced. Continuous evaluation and documentation play crucial roles in teachers' approach. By capturing moments through photos and journal entries, they provide tangible evidence of students' progress, particularly in engaging in courageous activities and overcoming personal barriers. This documentation not only serves as a reflective tool for the student but also aids in collaborative development planning with their respective municipalities. In particular, the use of photo documentation serves as a valuable aid during meetings, facilitating productive discussions about the young person's journey and growth (STU College Lindersvold, n.d.).

At STU College Lindersvold, the teachers maintain a diary called "Sofus," where they diligently record students' daily experiences, assessments, and attendance records. This documentation process involves collaborative efforts with each individual student, focusing on aligning notes with the goals and sub-goals outlined in their study plan, as well as relevant themes and processes. This documentation is reviewed and discussed during scheduled training meetings with the student's home municipality.

“UNO IT” is the daily documentation that serves as a vital tool for tracking development

and progress and functions as the communication platform with the supervisors of municipalities. Within this platform, all initiatives tailored to each student are meticulously recorded, along with descriptions of desired interests and ongoing efforts. These initiatives may encompass educational pursuits, internships, or employment opportunities, whether full-time or part-time with varying degrees of self-sufficiency. This collaborative approach aims to foster cooperation to advance the young person's development.

The incorporation of various alternative pedagogical methods is essential for nurturing the mental health and overall well-being of students. These diverse approaches are meticulously designed to cater to the unique needs of students, fostering a conducive environment for their growth and development. Through structured activities and innovative teaching strategies, these methods deeply influence students, not only shaping their daily routines but also instilling a sense of independence within them. Furthermore, these pedagogical approaches go beyond traditional teaching methodologies, providing students with opportunities to explore diverse learning styles and avenues for self-expression. By embracing these alternative methods, educators can effectively engage students in their learning journey, promoting critical thinking, creativity, and holistic development.

#### **4. Academic study: Mental Illness Inclusion and Transforming Education – A Focus on the Generation Z**

##### **4.1 Introduction: Mental illness**

In an era where mental health takes center stage, this article strives to raise awareness, deepen understanding, and emphasize the critical role of inclusion. It explores the pathways to making mental illness more inclusive and dismantling the prevailing stigma. Promoting and protecting the rights of individuals with mental health conditions is essential for creating a more inclusive and equitable society. Discussing mental illness has become a pressing matter nowadays, consequently, it's essential to touch upon its prevalence, dismantling the stigmas, promoting its awareness, and the positive impact such

conversations can have on both individuals and society. It's crucial to increase dialogue and foster a deeper understanding. With greater comprehension, we are better equipped to act thoughtfully and effectively in addressing the subject.

In meticulously conducting the data collection and research process for this study, a concerted effort was made to gather information from the most recent articles and research endeavors available. By incorporating insights from the most recent sources, the aim is to provide a thorough understanding of the subject, enriched by the latest developments and viewpoints. This approach not only adds credibility to the research but also shows dedication to keeping readers informed with up-to-date insights. Ultimately, this study contributes to the ongoing dialogue and progress in the field, reflecting its dynamic nature and our commitment to advancing knowledge.

This article is deeply connected to my internship journey at DRH Lindersvold, in Denmark, where I dedicated myself to providing support and guidance to young individuals grappling with mental health conditions and other backgrounds and challenges. The decision to delve into this topic stems from a profound belief in the significance of fostering inclusivity and understanding for young people navigating mental health conditions. It's imperative that they not only receive assistance but also feel embraced by society and empowered to thrive. My experience with DRH Lindersvold underscored the significance of cultivating a positive and inclusive environment for young individuals affected by mental health conditions. It extends beyond providing assistance; it involves fostering a feeling of belonging and empowerment. Through this approach, they cultivate personal development and fortitude among students, simultaneously challenging the stigma associated with mental illness and advocating for acceptance and compassion. DRH Lindersvold offers educational approaches that diverge from mainstream paradigms. By deviating from conventional methods, Lindersvold showcases how alternative approaches can serve as catalysts in tackling mental health challenges and nurturing an inclusive environment. Lindersvold serves as an example for inclusive environments tailored to meet the needs of young individuals with special requirements. This organization serves as catalysts for positive change, inspiring others to embrace diversity and work towards a more inclusive society.

The right to health, as recognized in international human rights documents, includes the right to mental health. According to the United Nations website mental health is a human right and an integral part of an individual's overall health and well-being. This means that individuals have the right to access mental health services and care that is of good quality and without discrimination. Regardless of age, gender, socio-economic status, or ethnic background, we universally regard our health as fundamental and indispensable for our well-being (United Nations Human Rights Office of The High Commissioner, n.d.).

A recent UN report concerning the right to mental health highlighted a troubling observation. Despite compelling evidence highlighting the connection between overall health and mental well-being, mental health worldwide faces an imbalance in attention compared to physical health in terms of budget allocation, medical education, and practice. The report revealed that only seven percent of global health budgets are designated for addressing mental health issues (Human Rights Council, 2017). This disparity in attention and funding between mental health and physical health has significant consequences for how society perceives mental health. Mental health has always received minimal attention from society, prioritizing physical health as more significant, even though mental health holds greater importance than physical well-being. This lack of adequate attention and resources allocated to mental health contributes to its stigma and underscores the misconception that mental health concerns are less urgent or significant than physical ones. Consequently, individuals dealing with mental illness may face discrimination, barriers to accessing quality care, and a lack of societal support. Governments have not adequately provided the necessary treatment, care, and support to address the needs of individuals with mental health conditions. Additionally, they have failed to safeguard their rights. This is what the report states about this issue:

Mental health has often been neglected and when it does receive resources, it becomes dominated by ineffective and harmful models, attitudes and imbalances. That has led to the current situation of the grossly unmet need for rights-based mental health promotion and care. People of all ages, when they have mental health needs, too often suffer from either an absence of care and support or from services that are ineffective and harmful (Human Rights Council, 2017).

Under International Human Rights Treaties, mental health rights are supposedly safeguarded. For instance, Article 2.1 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 1976), as well as Article 32 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities, 2008) serve as a normative foundation for offering technical support and strengthening the realm of mental health. But can we place our full trust in these international treaties to adequately safeguard mental health? These agreements, while essential, lack specificity regarding mental health concerns. There is a notable absence of a specialized treaty solely dedicated to addressing mental health issues within the realm of hard law. Although certain treaties touch upon mental health, they lack comprehensive provisions tailored specifically to establish concrete obligations for nations concerning mental health matters (Miller, 2022). Nevertheless, numerous jurisdictions lack sufficient legal frameworks concerning mental health. As per the World Health Organization (WHO), about a quarter of countries do not possess any mental health legislation whatsoever. This international discrepancy is apparent: while 92% of European countries have mental health laws, the figures drop significantly to 67% in Africa and a mere 13% in the Western Pacific region (Saraceno & Saxena, 2002).

Despite the high prevalence, people with mental health conditions have not been prioritized as a target of humanitarian aid, development activities, or law reform. Therefore, it becomes imperative to begin from the ground up, a comprehensive understanding of what constitutes a mental illness, its profound impact, and underlying causes is needed. Worldwide, mental illnesses rank among the top seven contributors to health-related disease (Global Burden of Disease, Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, 2019). In 2019, approximately 970 million individuals globally were living with a mental disorder, and in 2020 because of COVID-19, the number fundamentally increased (World Health Organization, n.d.). According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness: “Mental illnesses are medical conditions that disrupt a person’s thinking, feeling, mood, ability to relate to others, and daily functioning” (National Alliance on Mental Illness, n.d.). Mental illness is also referred to as mental health conditions which include psychosocial disabilities and various mental states linked to substantial distress, impaired functioning, or danger of self-

harm. In the following tables the different types of mental illnesses are explained, like depression, schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, eating disorders, obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), anxiety disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), borderline personality disorder, neurodevelopment disorders like ADHD and Autism Spectrum Disorder, and disruptive behavior and dissocial disorders (World Health Organization, n.d.).

Figure 16. Different types of mental illness

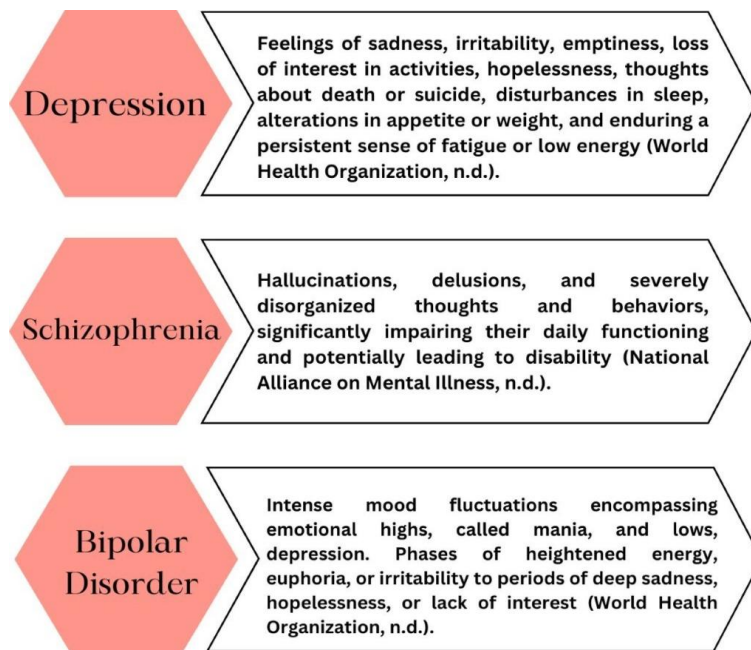


Figure 17. Different types of mental illness

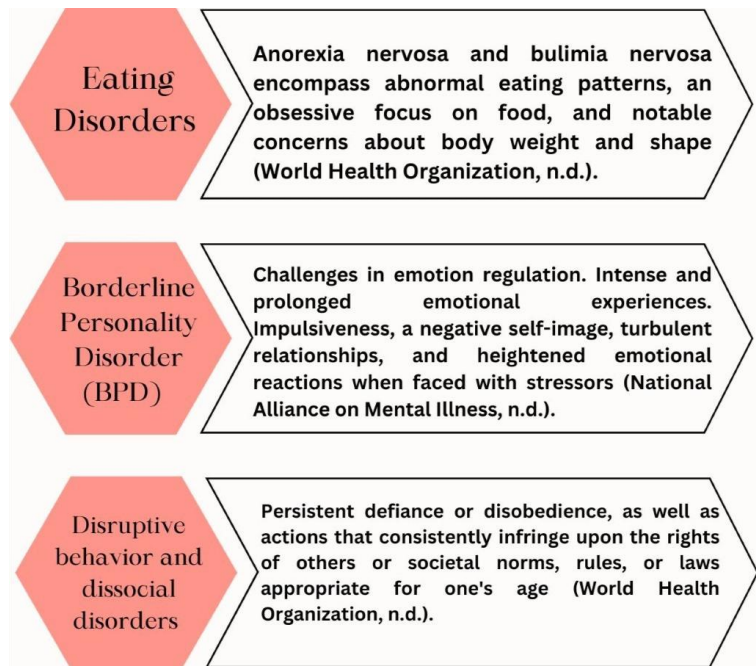


Figure 18. Different types of mental illness

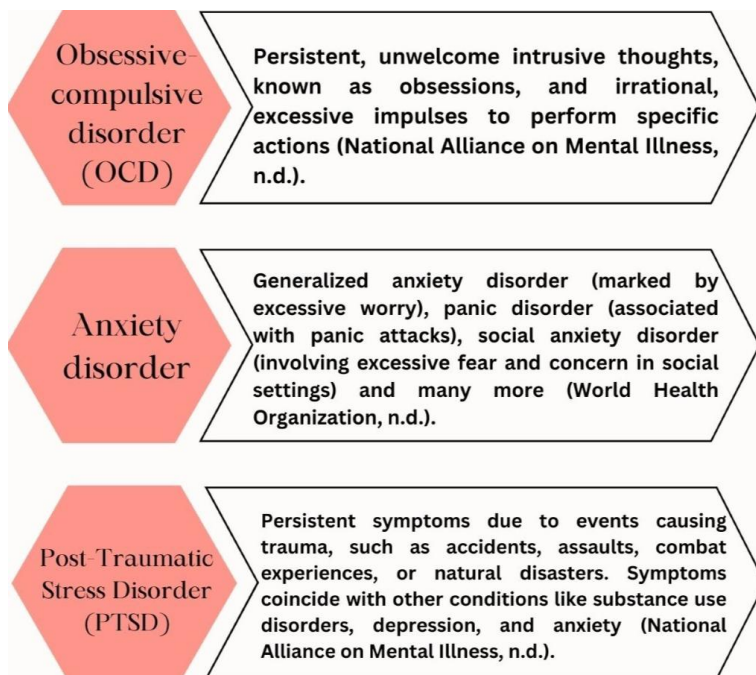
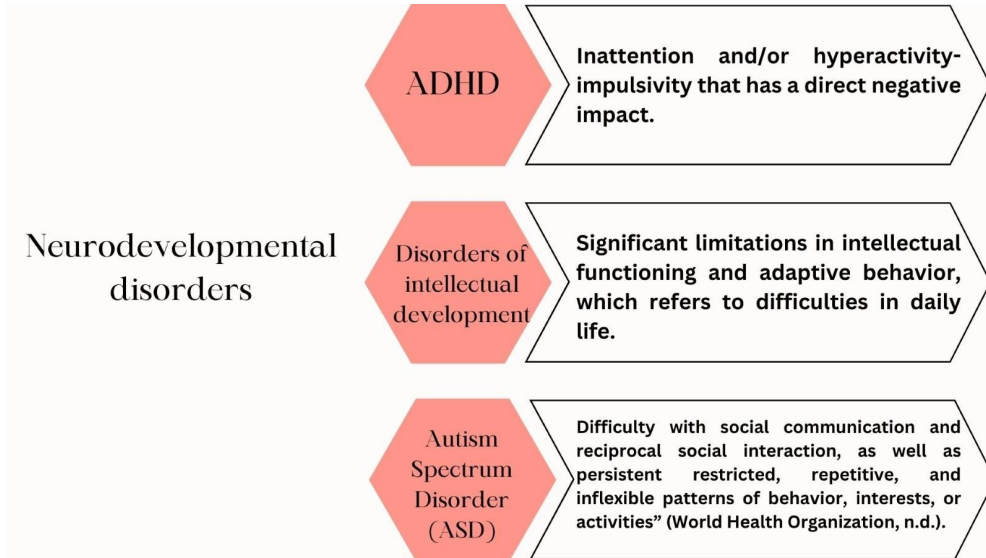


Figure 19. Different types of mental illness



Source: Tables made by the author with content from World Health Organization, n.d.

Mental illnesses impact individuals irrespective of their age, race, religious beliefs, or financial status. Contrary to common misconceptions, mental illnesses are not a reflection of personal weakness, character deficiency, or inadequate upbringing. Mental illnesses typically emerge during crucial phases of life, frequently affecting individuals during adolescence and young adulthood. Although mental illness can impact people of all ages, vulnerability is particularly high among the young and the elderly (National Alliance on Mental Illness, n.d.). The origins of mental health issues often stem from diverse causes. For many individuals, multiple factors interact in a complex manner, although certain influences may impact individuals more profoundly than others. For example, child abuse, trauma, bullying, social disadvantage, discrimination, domestic violence, use of drugs and alcohol, long-term stress, and isolation are all factors that could potentially impact the development of a mental illness.

According to research developed in 2019, childhood trauma is the primary cause of mental illness. The study emphasizes the significance of offering mental health and addiction support to parents with young children since several studies have highlighted that parental alcohol consumption can contribute to the development of mental illness in their children

(Zarse *et al.*, 2019). It's fundamental to keep in mind that mental illness also depends on genetics and environmental factors. A higher prevalence of mental illness is observed among individuals with family members affected by similar conditions. Specific genetic factors can increase the likelihood of developing a mental illness, often influenced or triggered by one's life circumstances. Additionally, prenatal exposure to various environmental stressors, inflammatory conditions, toxins, or substances like alcohol and drugs, along with experiences of abuse, could potentially correlate with the onset or increased risk of mental illness. Studies suggest that exposure to these factors during pregnancy might influence the developing fetus's neurodevelopmental processes and potentially impact mental health later in life. While these factors may contribute to increased susceptibility, it's essential to note that mental illness arises from a complex interplay of genetic, biological, environmental, and psychological factors, and each person's experience can vary significantly (Mayo Clinic, n.d.).

A recent study delved into how the stress experienced by pregnant women affects their emotional connection to their unborn child, known as prenatal attachment, as well as the various factors influencing this bond. The research revealed an interesting finding: as the levels of stress related to pregnancy increased, the strength of prenatal attachment tended to decrease. This indicates that heightened stress during pregnancy may impede the development of a strong emotional bond between mother and child before birth. Recognizing the significant impact of pregnancy-related stress on prenatal attachment, the study suggests implementing comprehensive screenings for pregnant women. These screenings should not only assess psychological and social factors but also consider the physical health of expectant mothers. By adopting this holistic approach, healthcare providers can identify and address stressors early on, potentially improving maternal well-being and fostering healthier relationships between mothers and their unborn babies (Şanlı & Akbağ, 2022).

Understanding the impact of parental mental health on children holds significant importance. It provides insights into how the well-being and emotional stability of parents directly influence and shape the experiences, behavior, and mental health outcomes of their

children. This understanding allows for better support systems and interventions aimed at promoting healthier environments for both parents and their children. The American Journal of Psychiatry undertook a study that followed the children of parents who experienced depression over a period of twenty years to evaluate their mental health as adults. The results showed that these children were three times more likely to encounter mental health problems and substance abuse disorders than children whose parents did not have depression (Weissman *et al.*, 2006).

Another research – *The Long-Term Impact of Parental Mental Health on Children’s Distress Trajectories in Adulthood* – highlights that individuals who grew up with parents facing mental health challenges tend to experience higher levels of distress throughout their adult lives compared to those who did not have such experiences. Furthermore, the study suggests that the longer and more severe the exposure to parental mental health issues during childhood, the greater the likelihood of experiencing distress in adulthood. In essence, this study underscores the significant role of parental mental health during a child’s formative years in predicting distress levels later in life (Kamis, 2020).

## **4.2 Stigma and inclusion**

Recent research indicates that from approximately 1996 to 2006, there was a noticeable improvement in public awareness regarding mental health issues. During this time, there was increased recognition of the differences between normal daily experiences and symptoms that may indicate diagnosable mental health conditions. However, from around 2006 to 2018, while societal stigma surrounding depression decreased significantly, negative perceptions and stigma towards conditions like schizophrenia and alcohol dependence intensified (Pescosolido *et al.*, 2021). Despite progress in mental health discourse, stigma remains a significant issue, continuing to affect individuals dealing with mental illness in today’s society (Corrigan & Kleinlein, 2005).

This persistent stigma not only prevents the understanding and acceptance of mental health conditions but also poses substantial barriers to accessing proper care and support for those affected. According to the Britannica Dictionary stigma is “a set of negative and often unfair beliefs that a society or group of people have about something” (The Britannica

Dictionary, n.d.). Within the realm of mental health, stigma encompasses negative beliefs, attitudes, and stereotypes that result in discrimination or marginalization against people dealing with mental health conditions. Stigma regarding mental illnesses exists in various forms. The first is public stigma, which reflects society's general perceptions of mental health conditions. Public stigma comprises three elements: stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination, as revealed by research. Additionally, there's self-stigma, involving these same three elements, where individuals have negative feelings and shame regarding their mental illness. This self-stigma can lead to a sense of shame and negativity towards their mental health status. The third form of stigma is institutional or systemic stigma, which involves governmental and organizational limitations imposed on individuals with mental illness. This type of stigma could entail constraints on research, reduced funding for mental health services, and policies that limit access to care and resources. These institutional barriers can significantly block the opportunities and support available to those dealing with mental illness (Corrigan & Kleinlein, 2005).

Stigma surrounding mental illness often emerges due to a fundamental lack of understanding and accurate information. It thrives in environments where education about mental health is absent or inadequate. This lack of education leads to misconceptions and stereotypes about mental illness, further perpetuating stigma and interrupting open discussions about these crucial issues. Additionally, societal attitudes and cultural beliefs can contribute significantly to the development and reinforcement of stigma related to mental health conditions. A study on stigma revealed that despite the recognition by the public of the medical or genetic origins of mental health disorders and the necessity for treatment, many people still maintain a negative view of those experiencing mental illness. This study describes stigma as a health crisis and mentions that the elimination of stigma surrounding mental illness and its acceptance in society stands as the ultimate objective. The goal of full acceptance and inclusion cannot be achieved unless healthcare systems address the issue of diminished care for individuals with mental health conditions (Vigo, 2016).

Stigmatization of mental illness significantly affects the lives of those experiencing them.

This stigma frequently results in mental, social, or even professional repercussions, causing exclusion and isolation among individuals facing mental health challenges. The presence of stigma and discrimination may exacerbate symptoms and decrease the probability of seeking treatment. An in-depth recent research review highlighted that self-stigma significantly influences the recovery process for individuals diagnosed with severe mental illnesses. Moreover, this self-stigmatization was noted to have adverse effects on various aspects of their recovery journey and increases the likelihood of them facing reduced self-esteem and diminished self-confidence (Yanos *et al.*, 2020). People with mental illness may face bullying, harassment, or even physical violence from others due to social stigma surrounding mental health. Additionally, they may encounter challenges in establishing relationships when others hold judgmental views about mental health. According to studies, those who undergo discrimination, social stigma, or self-stigma may have a higher likelihood of experiencing suicidal thoughts (Oexle *et al.*, 2018).

“Social exclusion of people with mental illness remains an unresolved global public health and human rights challenge” (Hall *et al.*, 2019, p. 1). Experiencing social exclusion is greatly determined by stigma. Globally, people with mental illness face exclusion from employment opportunities, and deprivation of legal rights such as voting, marrying, or owning land, and are often ignored. They also have reduced prospects in education and career paths that further complicate their challenges, restricting their possibilities in academic settings and progressing in professional fields. Due to mental illness, they frequently withdraw from school or tertiary studies. The resultant decrease in educational opportunities has impeded numerous people with mental illness from acquiring the essential knowledge and skills necessary for employment or achieving significant personal milestones. Due to stigma and prejudices, they also experience economic exclusion, encountering barriers while attempting to access and maintain formal employment and housing (Hall *et al.*, 2019).

While individuals with mental illnesses might lack the vital social and coping skills needed to navigate the competitive workforce and attain independent housing and often require an alternative form of education specific to their needs, distinct from the conventional educational approach, this limitation shouldn't deny them the chance to strive for these

goals. Denying them this opportunity impedes their path toward independence. How can they achieve autonomy if deprived of such opportunities? If we deny people with mental illnesses the opportunity to learn, be educated and obtain a job, how can we genuinely aspire to enhance their inclusion? Denying them these fundamental rights only perpetuates exclusion and prevents true inclusion and understanding.

It's crucial to acknowledge that all these various detrimental effects resulting from stigma surrounding mental illness are deep-rooted violations of fundamental human rights. Yet, despite this recognition, these violations persist, raising profound questions about our societal mindset. How do we persist in perpetuating these violations of human rights, neglecting the urgent need for inclusion, education and understanding? (Mfoafo-M'Carthy & Huls, 2014).

At present, the negative attitudes and stereotypes surrounding mental health persist as a problem in workplaces. According to a nationwide survey conducted in 2019, it was found that stigma associated with mental health continues to pose a substantial challenge within work environments. About fifty percent of employees admitted to feeling hesitant about raising mental health issues at work, while only one in five workers felt completely comfortable discussing such matters openly (American Psychiatric Association, n.d.).

The media also play a significant role in supporting negative stigmas surrounding mental illness. Oftentimes, portrayals of mental illness in movies, television shows, news articles, and other media forms tend to inaccurately represent these conditions. These depictions may reinforce stereotypes, misconceptions, and negative perceptions about individuals dealing with mental health conditions. This is what a study states about this issue: "When it comes to portraying people with mental illness, the media all too often resorts to stereotypes that are prejudicial and stigmatizing. Such negative representations affect not only the way in which society views people with mental illness, but the way people come to see their own mental illness" (Vermeulen, pp. 80-81, 2008). These detrimental consequences of media can prolong the delay in seeking assistance for individuals with mental illness, thereby elevating the chances of exacerbating depression, anxiety and other

conditions. This issue holds political significance as the media's impact both shapes and mirrors our societal norms and beliefs.

Another research discovered that people often form their perceptions of people with mental illness based on media portrayals when they lack direct experience. On one hand, what they affirm is that the media consistently exaggerates and misrepresents individuals with mental illness as violent, dangerous, and unpredictable. Nevertheless, it's important to recognize that owning a social media account comes with a responsibility. It significantly impacts your experience based on the content you follow and the connections you maintain within your online circle. It's also essential to remember that due to stigma people with mental illness face social isolation and marginalization, so they seek entertainment through television and social media for companionship and as an escape from life's pressures (Srivastava *et al.*, 2018). On the other hand, a 2019 study highlights the significance of social media in accessing peer support within the community of individuals dealing with mental illness. The findings revealed that two-thirds of participants utilize social media platforms to connect with others facing similar challenges and most of them use social media platforms to exchange personal experiences regarding their journey with mental illness and to gain insights from others. Social media holds the potential to expand the outreach or enhance existing mental health programs and services accessible to individuals dealing with mental illness (Naslund *et al.*, 2019). Amongst the various media pages and profiles, there are positive ones that are worth following. It's essential to be conscious that social media encompasses both negative and positive aspects. Ultimately, the key lies in our choices, in selecting what aligns with our values and recognizing what is beneficial and what is not.

#### **4.2.1 What strategies can be employed to tackle and mitigate the impact of stigma?**

Addressing stigma and its harmful impacts can find a solution through the lens of intersectionality. Intersectionality recognizes the distinct experiences of discrimination and oppression faced by each individual, emphasizing the importance of considering all factors contributing to marginalization. This perspective sheds light not only on social disparities but also on how multiple power structures perpetuate inequities within society. In the realm

of mental illness, intersectionality emerges as a crucial factor, influencing not just an individual's comprehensive mental health but also significantly shaping the impact of stigma on their experiences. Intersectionality examines the significance and repercussions associated with belonging to multiple stigmatized social groups ( Oexle & Corrigan, 2018). Based on research, factors such as institutionalized racism, prejudice, and external circumstances contribute significantly to the more severe and persistent experience of mental health conditions among people of color and Latino individuals compared to other racial or ethnic groups. The research examines the impact of racism on mental health and how discrimination affects ultimately a mental illness. Additionally, various factors related to race and ethnicity significantly influence the mental well-being of marginalized populations, emphasizing the need for a comprehensive understanding of these stressors. It revealed that black adolescents who experience racial discrimination have increased symptoms of anxiety and depression. This indicates the importance of recognizing how mental health symptoms among racial/ethnic minorities contribute to the amplified risk of mental illness (Williams, 2018). Another study makes a fundamental point: to effectively reduce the stigma around mental illness in society, it's important to understand and address the different challenges faced by people dealing with mental health conditions. Without an inclusive approach, there is a risk of continuing to discriminate against those who are most affected. The study points out how various factors, such as race, gender, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status, can intersect and significantly affect how individuals experience mental illness and stigma. It emphasizes that considering these intersections is crucial for researchers developing interventions to reduce self-stigma among individuals coping with mental illness. By recognizing the complexities arising from intersectionality, interventions can better resonate with and support individuals dealing with mental illness by acknowledging and addressing the multifaceted nature of their experiences. This research examines also the importance of “contact-based interventions”, remarking this:

Contact-based interventions are not universal but need to be adapted depending on the specific needs of the targeted stigmatized social group members and the cultural background, beliefs, attitudes, and preferences of participating community members. We believe that contact-based interventions have the ability to effectively address the implications of intersectionality (that is, multiple stigmas) among persons with mental illness (Oexle & Corrigan, 2018).

Recognizing the impact of intersecting identities in mental health treatment approaches can support in identifying service gaps and preventing or minimizing additional harm.

To reduce stigma the most important steps are acquiring knowledge about mental illness, being educated, understanding how these conditions can impact an individual and talk openly about mental health. Talking openly about mental health is a powerful strategy to combat the stigma surrounding mental illness. When individuals engage in open conversations about mental health, it promotes understanding, empathy, and acceptance within society. By initiating discussions and sharing personal experiences, individuals contribute to breaking down the barriers of stigma and discrimination. Open dialogue allows people to learn about the diverse experiences of those affected by mental health conditions, fostering empathy and reducing misconceptions. When people feel comfortable discussing their struggles, they are more likely to recognize warning signs in themselves or others and seek professional help before issues escalate. Early intervention is key in preventing mental health conditions from worsening. Encouraging open dialogue about mental health not only helps reduce stigma but also promotes a culture of understanding, empathy, and support. It empowers individuals to seek help, creates a sense of community, and fosters an environment of inclusion where everyone's mental well-being is valued and supported (National Alliance on Mental Illness, n.d.).

Another crucial step to reduce stigma and discrimination is using a more inclusive and welcoming language towards people with mental illness. Employing inclusive language involves taking measures to diminish the stigma surrounding mental illness and mental health in general. Inclusive language revolves around placing emphasis on the individual rather than their diagnosis or condition. It entails using words that instill hope and optimism regarding people's potential for recovery and leading fulfilling lives. Additionally, it means steering away from outdated, offensive, or inaccurate terminology when addressing mental health matters. By refraining from using labels that can be hurtful or dehumanizing, inclusive language aims to respect and dignify the experiences of individuals coping with mental illness (National Alliance on Mental Illness, n.d.).

In conducting inclusive language, it's essential to establish a quiet environment, free from disruptions, ensuring clarity and simplicity in instructions. Methodical and precise steps should be outlined, such as clearly stating what tasks will be undertaken, avoiding last-minute changes whenever possible, and informing participants of any alterations calmly and promptly. Mindfulness towards the needs of others, including those on the autism spectrum, is crucial. Adaptations must be made to accommodate additional support requirements, considering triggers that may lead to distress and providing appropriate coping mechanisms. Individuals may vary in their preferences for solitude or support, and breaks should be encouraged to alleviate stress. Understanding that social situations can be challenging for some, it's important to remain calm and patient, allowing any unusual behaviors to pass without judgment (Pedagogy 4 change, n.d.).

It's crucial to acknowledge the existing social stigma surrounding mental health, often leads to the immediate association with the term 'crazy.' Words like "crazy" or "insane" have historically been associated with mental health conditions, contributing to the marginalization of individuals dealing with such challenges. By revising these labels and fostering a more compassionate and understanding language around mental health, we can create an environment where individuals feel supported and encouraged to seek the help they need. It's important to promote a culture that emphasizes empathy, respect, acceptance and inclusion for those facing mental illness. When we remove the stigma associated with mental illness, individuals are more likely to feel comfortable discussing their experiences and seeking appropriate treatment. This shift in language and attitude it's essential and can significantly impact how mental illness are perceived in society, ultimately leading to a more inclusive place, to increased awareness, support, and improved access to care for those affected. Encouraging open discussions, educating communities, and advocating for inclusive language can contribute to a positive change in how mental health is understood and addressed.

Cultural beliefs, values, social norms, and practices can also significantly impact how mental health conditions are understood, perceived, and expressed within a particular society. It's crucial to consider the cultural context regarding mental illness. These

conditions are not solely influenced by biological or individual factors but are also shaped by the social and cultural environments where individuals reside. Therefore, mental illness and stigma may manifest differently within various cultures. It's crucial to understand these cultural beliefs while discussing mental illness (Scheid & Brown, 1999). A 22-year-old individual shares their perspective on this matter, as highlighted in a recent study: “Mental health is neglected back home (Dominican Republic) and a stigma is prevalent in the Latin American community. This led to me having a stigma about my own mental health issues and denying them, until I came to college” (Chevalier, Pratt & Sequeira, 2022).

Given the reasons discussed earlier, it is imperative to combat and eliminate the stigma surrounding mental illnesses. Undoubtedly, the reduction of stigma is significantly linked to enhancing inclusion. Creating an inclusive environment and a safe space for individuals experiencing mental illnesses is imperative. It's essential to cultivate an approach that is supportive and consider how our society can actively foster inclusivity and acceptance. This involves not only developing strategies to ensure individuals feel included but also recognizing the need for a more welcoming and accommodating societal framework. By fostering inclusivity, we can provide the necessary support and understanding, enabling everyone to feel valued and included in our communities (National Alliance on Mental Illness, n.d.). When we address societal stigmas, discrimination and misconceptions surrounding mental health, we pave the way for improved inclusion.

Increasing representation and diversity in the mental health field and incorporating mental wellness into employees' health benefits are vital steps. These measures facilitate a more supportive and accepting workplace culture, while also creating inclusive policies and practices. This includes offering flexible work schedules, reasonable accommodations, and mental health days, all of which play a central role in accommodating individuals with mental illnesses and fostering a more inclusive work environment.

The statement by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights encapsulates the essence of creating a truly inclusive society:

Inclusion means dismantling discrimination. Inclusion is also bound up with human rights. Inclusive societies recognize and build development policies around the diversity of their members and enable everyone's full inclusion and participation, regardless of their status. Inclusion is not only about including those who are traditionally excluded but must also be about dismantling the many forms of discrimination that contribute to the persistent marginalization of groups (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2015).

Ultimately, by being informed, educated, open, and working collectively to reduce stigma and discrimination, we take essential steps toward creating an inclusive society where mental illnesses are valued and supported.

### **4.3 Generation Z's impact**

Generation Z, often characterized as the generation born from 1997 onwards, lacks a precise delineation due to varying opinions on its starting point. While many sources commonly cite 1997 as the beginning year, the definition remains fluid, with alternative dates proposed by different studies and experts. Gen Z is recognized as the first generation to be immersed in the realm of the Internet right from their earliest years and is shaped by their upbringing in a digital age marked by rapid technological advancements. Their exposure to the internet, social media, and instantaneous access to information has significantly influenced their communication styles, social interactions, and worldviews (Dimock, 2019). Generation Z finds themselves traversing an era with continuous exposure to significant global events and important social transformations. This includes pressing issues such as the escalating impact of global warming, the prevalence of mass shootings, the pervasive challenges surrounding sexual violence, social media, and many other critical factors. The impact of eco-anxiety on Generation Z remains a significant focal point. Eco-anxiety, resulting from the ecological crisis, leads to negative emotions especially among this generation. These sentiments form an important link to Gen Z's activism for environmental causes, exemplifying the emotions associated with this issue. Eco-anxiety and climate-related concerns within Gen Z vividly illustrate their deeply emotional reactions to environmental challenges. Understanding and addressing the emotional distress of young people regarding ecological crises is crucial. Listening attentively to Gen Z,

acknowledging their emotional perspectives, and adopting an inclusive approach might help the way for alternate trajectories in ecological challenges. This is what the research states:

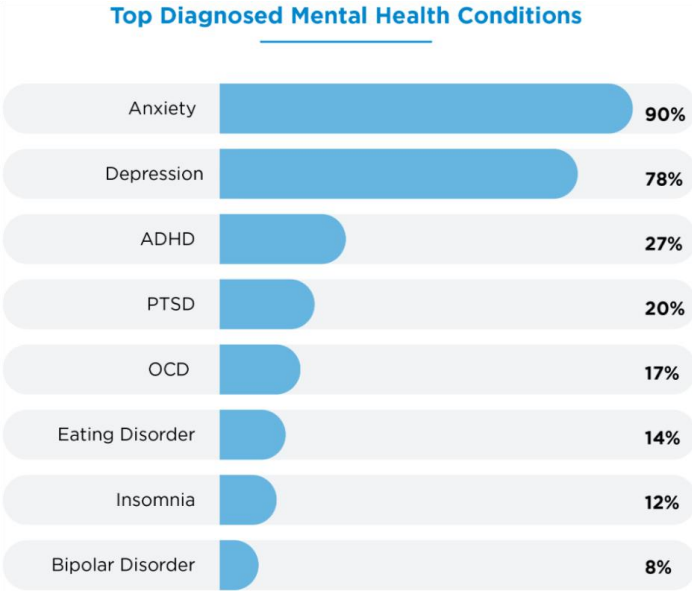
Furthermore, this study revealed that there is a serious tendency for the eco-anxiety of young people to be transformed into existential anxiety. On the one hand, this illuminates the existential dimension of the ecological crisis; on the other hand, it indicates that the severe magnitude of ecological disaster affects the mental balance and the willingness of young people to hope for and envisage a better future. For the first time, there is evidence that the ecological crisis is shaping serious existential questions in so many young people (Tsevereni *et al.*, 2023).

Alternative studies show a significant percentage of Gen Z individuals expressing concerns about the future. Many within this generation feel at a disadvantage compared to previous generations, experiencing a sense of financial instability. These challenges extend beyond environmental concerns and encompass broader social and economic uncertainties, intensifying the overall struggles experienced by this generation (Harmony Healthcare IT, 2022). On the other hand, even during these challenging events, a substantial percentage of Gen Z maintains a sense of optimism and hope for the future (Chevalier, Pratt & Sequeira, 2022). Gen Z is not just passively observing these events; they are actively involved in discussions and leading movements that advocate for change. They are vocal in amplifying their voices to address these pressing concerns, demonstrating engagement and determination to effect meaningful transformations. Through their awareness, activism, advocacy, and participation in various social movements, Gen Z is contributing to shaping a more inclusive and progressive society, attempting to make a tangible difference in the face of these significant challenges.

Because of these circumstances, Generation Z is profoundly impacted by mental health challenges more than any other generation. The collective weight of navigating through significant global events, societal pressures, and social media has contributed to a heightened prevalence of mental health issues among this generation. The constant exposure to such stressors has led to increased rates of anxiety, depression, and other mental health conditions, underscoring the urgent need for support, understanding, and accessible resources to address these concerns (LaFrance, 2023). In a survey conducted by

Harmony Healthcare IT in 2022, a data management firm specializing in health data and research. They involved over 1,000 individuals from Gen Z, aged 18 to 24, revealing an alarming 42% of this generation have received diagnoses of mental illnesses. This study sheds light on the significant prevalence of mental health conditions among Gen Z, underscoring the urgent need for attention and support to address the mental well-being of this generation. According to the study, 57% of Gen z are presently using medication to manage their mental health condition, while 39% attend therapy sessions at least once per week. Outlined below are the specific mental health conditions that have been diagnosed within this generation (Harmony Healthcare IT, 2022).

Figure 20. Generation Z’s impact



Source: Harmony Healthcare IT

It’s crucial to also consider the impact of COVID-19 which on the mental well-being of Generation Z has been notably worsened. About one in every four individuals was diagnosed with a mental illness during the pandemic. A significant proportion of this generation also shares that their mental health has been negatively impacted by the pandemic (Harmony Healthcare IT, 2022). In a separate study, it was discovered that 70% of Gen Z acknowledge their current need for the most attention or enhancement in their

mental health. This revelation sheds light on the profound awareness within this generation regarding the significance of mental well-being. Amidst the complex challenges they face, there is a growing acknowledgment of the crucial role mental health plays in their overall quality of life. This emphasis is a shift with Gen Z on mental health, prioritizing self-care as a vital element in safeguarding their mental well-being and seeking support to address these critical concerns (Chevalier, Pratt & Sequeira, 2022).

As per a report conducted by the American Psychological Association (APA), Gen Z is notably more prone to reporting mental health concerns compared to other generations. Additionally, they exhibit a greater willingness to discuss and communicate about mental illnesses, distinguishing their openness from other generations. Generation Z, being more open about discussing mental health, has displayed a greater comfort in sharing personal experiences and engaging in conversations related to mental well-being. This increased dialogue signifies Gen Z's higher engagement with mental health matters and their willingness to address mental illnesses openly. Consequently, this generational shift has led Gen Z to break away from the stigma surrounding mental health and mental illness, fostering a more inclusive environment. This shift is notably impactful in several ways. Firstly, mental health issues have gradually shed their taboo status compared to prior years, owing to Gen Z's heightened awareness and proactive discussions on the subject. Secondly, Gen Z places a significant emphasis on mental health prioritization and actively advocates for the importance of therapy, since discussions surrounding therapy are often still considered taboo in today's society. Importantly, Generation Z is playing a central role in educating older generations on essential topics. Their open approach to discussing mental health has initiated conversations that were once considered difficult or uncomfortable. Through their actions and advocacy, Gen Z is imparting valuable insights and promoting a more comprehensive understanding of mental health, consequently influencing older generations to be more open-minded and informed about these crucial matters (Bethune, 2019).

#### **4.4 The fundamental role of *education***

Education plays a central role in empowering individuals and creating pathways toward inclusion and acceptance in society. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights released this statement:

Education is critical to empowerment, inclusion and equality, unlocking human potential and achieving social transformation. The right to education means that every person is equally entitled to free, quality, inclusive education without any kind of discrimination. Minimum standards of adequacy, accessibility, availability, and appropriateness of education for all, need to be guaranteed by the state as part of a commitment to equality (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2015).

Education is not only a fundamental human right but also a practical solution for addressing mental illnesses. By incorporating mental health education, promoting well-being, and creating supportive environments, educational institutions can play a central role in improving the mental health of young people. Education equips individuals with the tools and knowledge to understand, manage, and advocate for their mental health, contributing to a healthier and more resilient generation.

Education is the one essential element that can reduce stigma by acquiring knowledge about mental illness, being educated, and understanding how these conditions can impact an individual. It's crucial to actively educate ourselves and others to diminish misconceptions and biased judgments. Encouraging open dialogues and ensuring access to accurate information empowers individuals to confront misconceptions and cultivate understanding. Education serves as a crucial tool in spreading awareness, removing stereotypes and improving empathy, empowering individuals to comprehend the complexities of mental health conditions. Encouraging educational initiatives and fostering an open culture within communities leads to the cultivation of a more compassionate and inclusive society. In such an environment, individuals feel embraced, comprehended, and understood in their mental health journeys (Shim, Eaker & Park, 2022).

The present education system appears severely outdated, failing to offer the necessary education for our evolving needs. The problem with the current education system is that it is anthropocentric, so it tends to center too much on the impact of the human race; it is ethnocentric, tending to focus on Western civilization and its legacy; it is individualistic, focus only on self-development and competition and it is reductionist, so it promotes a compartmented and fragmented vision of the world. How can we expect that an education system characterized by these traits will contribute to creating an inclusive and sustainable world?

Schools, meant for learning and personal development, increasingly prioritize numbers and competitiveness over genuine growth. Rather than nurturing critical thinking, they impose predefined thoughts and information that lack practical application. Essential life skills and creativity are often neglected, leaving us unprepared for the future. For many young people, the educational system has transformed their schooling experience into something they must endure. Due to the lack of connection between what's taught in the classroom and its relevance to the world outside, students often find themselves less motivated to engage with the content being taught. This disconnection inhibits their desire to understand the subject matter fully. Moreover, students are often presented with limited perspectives in history lessons, excluding stories of socially marginalized groups that many students can relate to. Crucial narratives are overlooked, emphasizing only what they perceive as significant while disregarding the importance of all historical accounts. This one-sided approach only diminishes inclusion (Boyce, 2019).

Many studies show that the way schools are set up can squash creativity. The structure of classes and the way subjects are taught often don't leave much room for students to express their creativity or think in imaginative ways. This lack of emphasis on creativity might make some feel like their original ideas aren't valued or encouraged in school. However, creativity is incredibly important, it helps us find new solutions to problems, think differently, and come up with innovative ideas. When the education system doesn't focus on nurturing creativity, it might block students' abilities to think creatively and adapt to new situations in the future. If schools actively promoted and supported creative thinking, it

could help students develop vital skills for innovation and problem-solving. This is what the article states: “We educate people in a very linear way. The whole assumption is based on a 1950s model, whereby children have to be processed in an orderly fashion through the curriculum and eventually go to university, get a good degree and then they’ll get a job for life!” (Robinson, 2009).

This lack of coherence in the education system raises concerns: How can we thrive in an environment that lacks inclusivity and openness? In an environment that overlooks the significance of mental health, how are we expected to truly grow and succeed? How can students sustain their enthusiasm for learning when they lack control over how they study, and the way information is taught? Therefore, a critical reevaluation of our education system is imperative to ensure that schools become nurturing spaces that not only impart knowledge but also foster critical thinking, practical life skills, inclusivity, and prioritize mental health. The present education system lacks a focus on inclusivity and often overlooks the needs of individuals affected by mental illnesses or other challenges. Inclusion, which should be a fundamental aspect of education, is often disregarded, leaving those with mental health conditions unsupported and excluded from the learning environment. Furthermore, the absence of support for individuals dealing with mental illness leads to a lack of understanding within educational settings.

#### **4.4.1 Decolonize education**

For these reasons, an approach that must be considered is *decolonizing education*. The concept of decolonization traces its origins to the mid-20th century during the anticolonial movements in Africa and Asia. These movements aimed to dismantle European colonial rule, asserting the right to self-governance and sovereignty among the colonized nations. Additionally, during the 1960s and 1970s, there were significant social movements advocating for Indigenous self-determination and anti-racist actions within settler colonial and European nations. Decolonization aims to effect change and address the historical and continuous repercussions of colonization and racialization and cultivate ways of understanding, living, and forming connections that they attempt to erase (Stein &

Andreotti, 2016). According to the British National Education Union, decolonizing education is the act of “examining the limitations and biases of the current curriculum; the omissions in initial teacher education and training; and examining the political and societal legacies of colonialism and how they have influenced education policies” (British National Education, n.d.). While the discourse around decolonizing education predominantly pertains to schooling in the Global South (former colonies), it is equally relevant and deserving of consideration in Western nations. This involves challenging and reconstructing the Eurocentric focus of school knowledge. It's about critically examining the link between knowledge and power, shifting away from the viewpoints of dominant groups and Western ways of thinking. The goal is to include and reflect the experiences, histories, and perspectives of indigenous and marginalized communities within the educational framework (Moncrieffe *et al.*, 2020).

It's imperative to recognize the profound impact of colonization on education, acknowledging how it has influenced educational systems through its ideologies, biases, and practices. To address this, a reevaluation of the curriculum is crucial, aiming to diversify it by incorporating a broader range of perspectives, indigenous wisdom, and contributions from marginalized communities. This effort involves integrating diverse voices and narratives into teaching materials. African countries offer valuable insights into educational practices that contrast with our existing system, which displays evident flaws marked by excessive individualism and ethnocentrism. A restructured curriculum that is decolonized can create pathways for educators and students from black and minority ethnic backgrounds to gain a deeper understanding of their identity, fostering a heightened sense of self-awareness. The desire for representation within the curriculum has prompted black university students to advocate for the decolonization of their curriculum and had led to some initiatives like the Rhodes Must Fall campaign at Oxford University and the “Why is My Curriculum White?” campaign at University College London. Younger individuals confront difficulties in reconciling the knowledge they acquire in academics with its practical applications in the real world. This disconnection between their educational experiences and the broader scope of life outside classrooms poses a challenge. The absence of cultural and historical teachings influenced students' acceptance of the narrative

presented in our educational institutions, feeling marginalized and disengaged. Furthermore, the lack of representation and a sense of confinement within educational institutions exacerbates their struggles (Moncrieffe *et al.*, 2020).

Decolonizing the curriculum is therefore about seeing and appreciating the world – past, present, and future – by ensuring that the views and voices of marginalized groups are heard, acknowledged, and appreciated. Such an approach benefits all members of society (Moncrieffe *et al.*, 2020).

According to a study, there are some essential steps to take to decolonize education and its curriculum. The primary step involves teachers emphasizing the 'why' behind teaching in the curriculum design, rather than solely focusing on the 'how.' It's essential to ask: Why are we studying this? What are the advantages? Why does it hold significance? Additionally, it's crucial to consider the relevance and inclusivity of the content to ensure representation and engagement for all learners. The second step is to unveil white power and white privilege which is one of the most challenging steps. Continuously discussing white power and white privilege leads to dismantling our exclusionary education system. Tackling these crucial issues plays a significant role in the process of decolonizing education. To confront 'white privilege' and enhance diversity in the curriculum, educators need to reconsider their approach to teaching. For this matter, it is crucial to have diverse content in the curriculum, educators must create a more comprehensive and inclusive curriculum ensuring that every student feels included and part of an environment that values their perspectives. The third step given by the study is to “*move away from a top-down, events-driven study of the past*”. This means that there is a need to shift from a method of studying history especially and other subjects that primarily focuses on major events and a hierarchical approach where historical knowledge is imparted from authorities or those in positions of power (top-down). Instead, it advocates for a different approach, one that moves beyond merely memorizing dates and events and emphasizes a more comprehensive understanding of history. This approach might involve exploring the broader contexts, societal impacts, diverse perspectives, and interconnectedness of historical events and themes, providing a more nuanced understanding of the past (Moncrieffe *et al.*, 2020).

Transforming the curriculum to be more inclusive and diverse requires altering both the content and methods of education. It also demands active participation and engagement from all sectors of society in the discussions and decision-making processes that drive this transformation. It's essential to introduce a curriculum that emphasizes diversity and celebrates different cultures. There's immense value in cross-cultural learning, where we can gain insights and knowledge from various cultures and nations (Moncrieffe *et al.*, 2020).

Decolonizing education has also the potential to contribute to inclusivity for individuals with mental illnesses. People affected by mental illnesses struggle also with a sense of identity and belonging. By integrating diverse perspectives, histories, and knowledge systems into the curriculum, it creates an environment that acknowledges various experiences and promotes empathy and understanding. Decolonizing education can also address biases and stigmas associated with mental health by fostering discussions, embracing diverse narratives, and promoting a more holistic understanding of mental well-being. Moreover, it encourages open discussions and awareness about mental health, promoting a more supportive and inclusive atmosphere for individuals dealing with mental illnesses. However, while it can play a role in fostering inclusion, comprehensive support systems and targeted initiatives specifically addressing mental health are also crucial for ensuring proper care and support for individuals with mental illnesses (Moncrieffe *et al.*, 2020).

#### **4.4.2 Mental health programs within educational institutions**

The second practical solution is to implement mental health programs within educational institutions. Without proper education, individuals lack the knowledge and skills necessary to comprehend, identify, and manage mental health challenges. When mental health education isn't integrated into school programs, young people might miss the chance to gain insights into mental illnesses, thereby perpetuating stigma. School can be an overwhelming period for students, given the pressure and extensive study demands. Enhancing students' social and emotional skills, including problem-solving and emotional regulation, correlates

with improved coping strategies, heightened resilience and decreased symptoms of depression and anxiety. Education about mental health serves as a valuable tool in aiding students to comprehend their emotions, thoughts, and behaviors. Developing self-awareness is vital as it allows individuals to identify and address their mental health (World Health Organization, 2023).

The school years are a period of rapid development, during which children and adolescents experience profound physical, social and psychological changes and during which the maturing brain is highly susceptible to environmental influences. Negative experiences at school, such as bullying, violence among peers or experiencing discrimination, contribute to poorer mental health and symptoms of anxiety and depression (World Health Organization, 2023).

Educational institutions play a vital role as central sources for accessing mental health resources and support services. Recent research findings indicate that implementing both group training and individual counseling within school environments significantly enhances mental health outcomes. Consequently, fostering parent–teacher cooperation, and seeking guidance from specialized counselors prove to be efficacious methods in offering practical solutions. These findings underscore the importance of prioritizing mental health initiatives and actively taking steps in this direction (Shahraki-Sanavi, F. *et al.*, 2020).

In addition to providing counseling services, educational institutions must actively conduct mental health workshops and raise awareness about mental illness among students. By equipping students with knowledge about available mental health resources, schools play a crucial role in ensuring that individuals have accessible pathways to seek help when they face mental health challenges. Offering comprehensive mental health support not only promotes early intervention but also encourages a culture of understanding and empathy within the school community. These initiatives help to break down stigma, encourage open conversations about mental health, and create a more inclusive and supportive environment (Wiedermann *et al.*, 2023).

Educators and school staff should receive comprehensive training in mental health awareness and support. Moreover, schools must actively engage with local community

organizations and policymakers to create an effective and inclusive mental health support system. Regarding policy, educational institutions must prioritize mental well-being in their assessment and disciplinary procedures. Schools must adopt an ongoing evaluation process to refine their mental health support strategies. Implementing these measures is key to fostering a more supportive, comprehensible, and resilient environment for students (Wiedermann *et al.*, 2023).

In addition to the mentioned measures, a crucial step is integrating empathy classes into the education system. These classes aim to cultivate empathy, understanding, and emotional intelligence among students, fostering a more compassionate and supportive environment conducive to mental health inclusion. Often overlooked is the fact that empathy is a skill you can learn, and teaching empathy from a young age has demonstrated benefits. It not only enhances children's emotional and social competence but also significantly decreases instances of bullying. Denmark has included empathy classes in its school curriculum since 1993. Empathy classes in Denmark begin in the first year of school until the age of sixteen. Students can express themselves and receive support, encouragement, and inspiration from others while learning the crucial value of mutual respect through active listening. Research indicates that empathy classes enhance emotional awareness, expressing effectively and understanding one's emotions, bringing a profound sense of satisfaction and happiness to children and fostering enhanced learning abilities in them. Empathy is crucial in effectively supporting individuals affected by mental illnesses in navigating their everyday challenges. Understanding their experiences fosters a more supportive and inclusive environment (Sanja, Stanko & Jasna, 2022).

#### **4.4.3 How can the education system be tailored for individuals with mental illness?**

Determining the optimal education system for individuals affected by mental illnesses remains an ongoing challenge. Providing education for individuals with mental illnesses requires a multifaceted approach that tailors to diverse needs. Despite the variety of pedagogical methods available, pinpointing the single best approach remains elusive and inconclusive. The most effective education system for individuals dealing with mental health conditions should prioritize creating an inclusive environment that values empathy,

support, and a lack of discrimination, fostering a safe and welcoming space for learning; it should focus on implementing specialized programs and classes for individuals with mental illnesses or other disabilities within educational settings. Frequently, these individuals encounter difficulties in keeping up with the academic pace of their peers due to unique challenges they face. Tailoring programs to address their specific needs not only supports their educational progress but also fosters an inclusive environment that recognizes and accommodates diverse learning requirements. As mentioned before, integrating mental health awareness programs, counselling and therapy within the educational structure is a crucial part that reduces stigma and cultivates understanding among peers and educators. The education system must encourage collaboration among educators, mental health professionals, families, and communities to establish a robust support network. While there isn't a definitive "best" educational model tailored specifically for individuals with mental illnesses, an approach that is empathetic, flexible, and all-encompassing is vital for providing meaningful support and education. These initiatives aim to provide personalized attention and support, ensuring that every student receives an equitable and fulfilling educational experience.

At times, we fail to recognize the significance of an educational system. During my internship at DRH Lindersvold, I discovered how fundamental it is. To achieve inclusivity, our education system requires substantial transformation. Though it demands effort from everyone involved, achieving this goal is not unattainable. By implementing these measures, we can foster inclusion of mental illness within our educational framework. We must redirect our focus towards crucial aspects. Introducing an education system centered on nature is imperative. This approach allows students to acknowledge the value of learning from other living beings while instilling a sense of responsibility toward preserving our planet's well-being. Equally crucial is a global-centric education where students explore diverse cultures and new territories, engaging with local communities and gaining exposure to languages not traditionally taught in schools. It's vital to recognize that learning is a lifelong journey and embrace the idea that teachers don't possess all-encompassing knowledge and that students require time to discover their identity and purpose is essential. Training students to become proactive global citizens, enabling collective decision-making

and fostering a sense of responsibility irrespective of their age, is pivotal. Understanding that motivation to learn stems from addressing personal or collective challenges or creating something innovative is key. The segmentation of knowledge into distinct subjects as commonly seen in schools doesn't reflect reality. Encouraging interdisciplinary knowledge and the ability to apply understanding in diverse settings is crucial. Therefore, unconventional approaches to knowledge acquisition are invaluable. No single subject holds superiority over another, contrary to the hierarchical structure in schools. Learning mathematics holds equal value as acquiring skills in time management, emotional regulation, and nurturing healthy relationships. I discovered that Denmark offers numerous opportunities for alternative forms of education, emphasizing community-based learning and innovative approaches. Institutions like DRH Lindersvold and others, such as DNS Teacher Training College, embody this philosophy by aiming to revolutionize traditional teaching methods. Through approaches like experiential learning, travel-based education, and more, these schools seek to redefine education. For this reason, we must begin posing pertinent questions and contemplating the significant issues of our era, examining education and schooling critically. Only through such introspection we can establish an inclusive educational environment.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this report serves as compelling evidence of how organizations like DRH Lindersvold serve as pivotal focal point for exploring pathways towards positive transformation, fostering collaboration, and cultivating an inclusive environment for young people with special needs. Through its findings, it not only underscores the significance of such initiatives but also highlights the critical role played by DRH Lindersvold in championing these efforts and driving meaningful change. This report unveils the transformative potential inherent in diverse pedagogical approaches, particularly within communities like Lindersvold that diverge from mainstream educational paradigms. By deviating from conventional methods, Lindersvold exemplifies how alternative approaches can act as catalysts in addressing mental health challenges and fostering an inclusive environment. It underscores the pivotal role of collaboration in instigating meaningful change, emphasizing the importance of collective action in navigating complex societal issues.

Achieving mental illness inclusion is within reach through a concerted effort in following key steps focused on awareness, education, stigma reduction, and fostering support structures. By raising widespread awareness and understanding about mental health, we establish a crucial foundation for inclusivity. Education about mental health conditions dismantles misconceptions and cultivates empathy, forming the bedrock of an inclusive society. Incorporating measures to include individuals with mental illness involves proactive steps in education, policy-making, and societal attitudes. Creating supportive environments, accessible resources, and fostering acceptance within communities are pivotal in this process. The imperative transformation of our current education system holds profound significance, particularly in fostering an inclusive environment for individuals facing mental health conditions. By prioritizing inclusivity, schools become nurturing spaces where those dealing with mental illness find acceptance, support, and tailored resources to aid their well-being. By fostering awareness and understanding of mental health and its implications, alongside actively advocating for the inclusion of individuals with mental illness, we pave the path towards a more inclusive society. By following all

these steps mentioned, we can create an environment that prioritizes understanding, offers support, and promotes acceptance for those grappling with mental health conditions. This effort will undoubtedly lay the foundation for a more compassionate and inclusive world for all individuals affected by mental illness.

This experience allowed me to become an integral part of the community, influencing and transforming lives while also shaping the world around me. By leveraging your unique skills and abilities to contribute meaningfully to the well-being of others, you not only make a positive impact on the world but also experience personal growth. Actively engaging with your talents in service to others empowers you, deepening your understanding of the world and enhancing your capabilities. This reciprocal exchange of benefit serves as a powerful reminder that fostering positive change enriches your own perspective and capacities in unexpected ways. This ethos embodies the essence of the school's mission.

Engaging with young individuals facing mental health challenges and coming from diverse backgrounds has been profoundly enlightening for me. It has afforded me a deeper understanding of the complexities they navigate, as well as the considerable challenges teachers encounter in providing adequate support. Recognizing the vital importance of fostering a positive environment for these students has become increasingly apparent. Indeed, creating such an environment is no simple task, yet institutions like DRH Lindersvold stand out in this regard, demonstrating a remarkable commitment to the well-being of their students. Through thoughtful initiatives and dedicated care, they prioritize the holistic development of each individual, ensuring they feel valued and supported in their educational journey. In witnessing these efforts firsthand, I have come to appreciate the profound impact that a nurturing and inclusive educational environment can have on young people's lives. It not only enhances their academic performance but also cultivates resilience, empathy, and a sense of belonging that are crucial for their overall well-being. By embracing diversity and promoting inclusivity, we can collectively create a more compassionate and supportive environment for all individuals, regardless of their mental illness, background or circumstances.

In essence, the work being done at DRH Lindersvold serves as a beacon of hope, illustrating the transformative power of education in nurturing the potential and well-being of every student, especially those facing unique challenges. DRH Lindersvold encourages us to defy the limitations imposed by societal conventions. It emphasizes the importance of collaborating and breaking free from these constraints, suggesting that true success lies in collective efforts and in transcending the boundaries that confine us. Adopting an attitude of openness isn't just recommended; it becomes a fundamental guiding principle in our journey toward fostering inclusivity.

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