

AIA GUIDE

HOW TO BECOME AN ACTIVIST



Colophon

Editors & authors: Pressure Line (The Netherlands), European Dialogue (Slovakia) and Dona Daria (The Netherlands).

The editors and authors would like to thank the following people:

In the Netherlands
Interviewed and portraited in the Guide: Sharon Prince, Pim de Vleeschouwer, Tevin Blancheville and Ruben Schilt
Portraited in the Guide: DAM Bookclub, Meike Koopman, Adjoa Kpeto and Jody Aikman

In Slovakia
Interviewed and portraited in the Guide: David Puchovsky, Milan Zvada, Radka Miksik and Tomas Rafa

Artwork cover: Diaspora (2024), acrylic paint and ink on canvas, Adjoa Kpeto, The Netherlands
Artwork backside cover: Embryonic (2024), acrylic paint on canvas, Adjoa Kpeto, The Netherlands

Design: Pressure Line, The Netherlands

This Guide has been written within the Erasmus + project AIA: Activism in Action: How to be an activist, project number KA210-YOU-C712A198.

This publication (in English), and further publications (in English, Dutch and Slovakian) and tools produced in the project can be downloaded free of charge at: www.activisminaction.eu



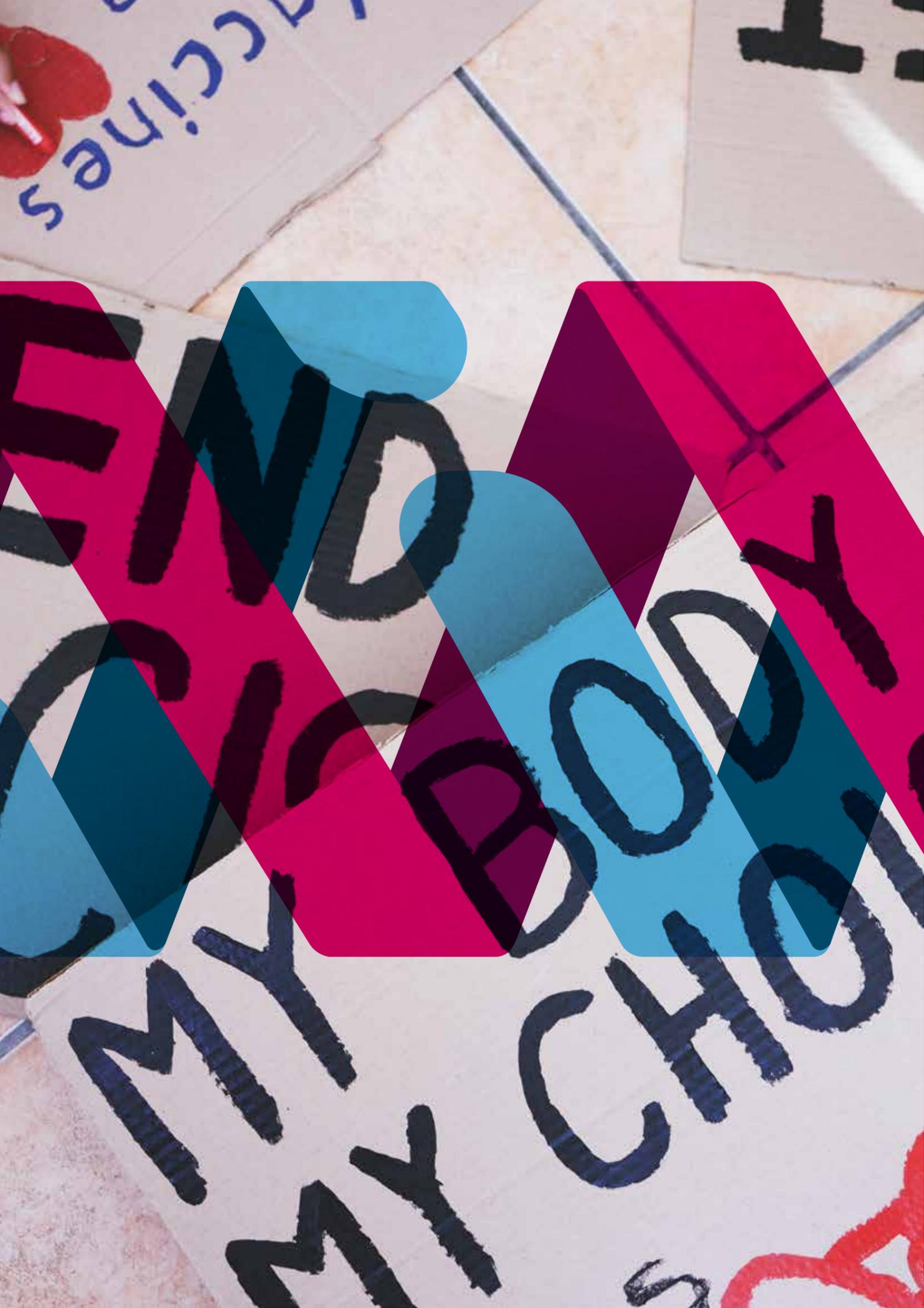
This work is licensed under Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International

AIA Guide, How to become an activist © 2024 by Project AIA: Activism in Action: How to be an activist is licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 4.0. To view a copy of this license, visit <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>



Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union and the National Agency Erasmus+ Youth and European Solidarity Corps. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

INTRODUCTION	5
WHAT IS ACTIVISM	6
WHY ACTIVISM MATTERS	7
GETTING STARTED	8
TAKING ACTION	11
COLLABORATION AND NETWORKING	14
OVERCOMING CHALLENGES	16
SUCCESS STORIES	18
PRACTICAL TOOLS	44
RESOURCES	50



INTRODUCTION

In a world facing immense challenges – whether it’s social injustice, climate change, or human rights violations – more and more people are feeling the need to stand up and make a change. If you’re reading this guide, you’ve likely had this idea too. But maybe you’re asking, Where do I start? or How can I, as one person, truly make a difference? Activism is a way to transform your passion into meaningful action. It’s about raising awareness and contributing to a better world. Whether through direct action, digital platforms, or organizing community events, activists have shaped history—and continue to do so today. However, becoming an activist isn’t always straightforward, especially for those who feel disconnected or insecure within society. That’s where this guide, and the AIA project, comes in.

What is AIA project about?

The AIA project aims to empower youth workers by equipping them with the tools and knowledge to inspire young people—especially those who are not currently active or feel uncertain about their place in society—to step into activism. This guide is designed to serve not only as an educational resource for youth workers but also as an inspirational tool for young individuals starting their own activism journeys.

By addressing a dual audience, this guide has multiple purposes. Youth workers can use it to facilitate discussions, workshops, and programs aimed at empowering young people, while those same young individuals can use it as a roadmap to get involved in activism, whether they’re passionate about social justice, climate justice, or human rights. Whether you’re a youth worker, a self-identified activist, or someone looking to start their activism journey, this guide offers practical advice, strategies, and insights to help you contribute to the causes you care about. It will equip you with the resources to make an impact, no matter how big or small your efforts may feel.

By the end of this guide, you’ll not only understand the fundamentals of activism but also be empowered to help others take their first steps toward becoming effective change-makers in their communities and beyond.

WHAT IS ACTIVISM

Activism is the practice of taking action to promote, impede, or direct social, political, economic, or environmental change. It involves efforts by individuals or groups to influence policies, attitudes, or behaviors that they believe need to be reformed or preserved. Activism typically arises from a desire to address issues of justice, inequality, or advocacy for rights and can take many forms, both peaceful and disruptive, depending on the context and goals.

Forms of Activism

1. Protest and Demonstrations

Public gatherings, marches, or rallies are some of the most visible forms of activism. These events raise awareness and draw attention to issues by mobilizing people to speak out together. Examples include civil rights marches, climate change protests, or anti-war rallies.

2. Civil Disobedience

This involves intentionally breaking laws or regulations as a form of peaceful protest to demonstrate opposition to unjust policies. Nonviolent civil disobedience can include occupations, blockades, or refusing to comply with discriminatory laws.

3. Digital or Online Activism

Often referred to as "hashtag activism," this form takes place on social media and online platforms. Activists spread information, raise awareness, and mobilize supporters using digital tools, campaigns, and petitions. Movements like #MeToo and Black Lives Matter gained significant momentum through online activism.

4. Grassroots Organizing

This type of activism focuses on building movements from the community level, where individuals and small groups work together to address local issues. Grassroots efforts can involve community meetings, letter-writing campaigns, or door-to-door visits.

5. Advocacy and Lobbying

Activists work directly with policymakers and lawmakers to promote change by influencing legislation. This form of activism typically involves research, policy proposals, and meetings with government officials to push for new laws or reforms.

6. Art and Cultural Activism

Some activists use art, music, literature, or performance to communicate messages and inspire social change. This can include protest songs, murals, theater, or films designed to raise awareness or critique societal issues.

7. Economic Activism

Activists use financial pressure to promote change, such as organizing boycotts of companies engaged in unethical practices or promoting "buy local" campaigns to support economic justice. Another example of economic activism is the boycott of Apartheid-era South Africa. During the 1980s, activists around the world pressured governments, businesses, and individuals to stop investing in or doing business with South Africa as a way to oppose its system of racial segregation and discrimination. Each form of activism plays a unique role in creating awareness, shaping public opinion, and pushing for systemic changes across different levels of society.

WHY ACTIVISM MATTERS

Activism has played a crucial role in shaping societies throughout history. Some of the most significant changes in society have been the result of grassroots movements:

Civil Rights Movement (1950s–1960s): This movement, led by figures like Martin Luther King Jr., fought against racial segregation and discrimination in the United States. Through non-violent protests, sit-ins, and marches, activists challenged unjust laws and practices, leading to landmark legislation such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. This movement not only reshaped America but inspired global efforts to fight racism and promote equality.

Women's Suffrage Movement (19th–early 20th century): Women around the world fought for their right to vote and participate fully in society. In countries like the United States, the United Kingdom, and New Zealand, women's suffrage activists organized rallies, lobbied politicians, and, in some cases, even faced imprisonment. Their efforts led to monumental changes, including the passage of the 19th Amendment in the U.S., granting women the right to vote in 1920.

Environmental Movement (1960s–present): The modern environmental movement grew in response to the increasing awareness of pollution and environmental degradation. Landmark events like the publication of *Silent Spring* by Rachel Carson in 1962 and the first Earth Day in 1970 sparked widespread activism to protect the planet. Today, climate justice movements like Fridays for Future continue to push for urgent global action on climate change.

These movements, and many others like them, show how collective action can drive significant social, political, and environmental change. They serve as reminders that activism is a powerful tool for creating a fairer, more just world.

GETTING STARTED

1. Find your cause: identify what is important to you

The first and most critical step in becoming an activist is identifying the cause that you feel passionate about. Activism thrives when driven by genuine conviction and personal investment. Think about the social, political, or environmental issues that resonate with you on a deeper level. Ask yourself, what makes you feel frustrated or moved? What problem in your community or the world do you think urgently needs to be addressed? Whether it's climate justice, human rights, racial equality, or something as specific as access to clean water in a local town, identifying your cause helps guide the direction of your activism.

A useful way to narrow down your focus is to list the issues that you care about and explore the root causes of these problems. This may require reflecting on personal experiences, engaging in conversations with those affected, or simply paying attention to issues that are frequently overlooked or neglected by mainstream media.

Once you've honed in on your cause, take the time to reflect on how this issue aligns with your values, experiences, and strengths. This alignment is essential because activism often requires long-term commitment, and personal connection to the cause can help sustain your energy and motivation. For example, if environmental degradation is a concern, perhaps your passion for the outdoors and experiences with nature could serve as a foundation for advocating climate justice or conservation efforts.

2. Set goals

Once you've found your cause, it's essential to set specific, measurable goals. Goal-setting helps clarify what you hope to achieve through your activism and provides a roadmap for your efforts. Activism, whether at the local or global level, often involves complex and multi-faceted issues. Therefore, breaking down your larger ambitions into smaller, achievable milestones can prevent you from feeling overwhelmed.

Start by asking yourself these questions:

- What change do I want to see?
- How will I know when I've made progress?
- What are the tangible outcomes of my activism?

Your goals should be both short-term and long-term. Short-term goals could include organizing a local event, building an online presence, or raising awareness through social media campaigns. Long-term goals could involve influencing policy, establishing a community organization, or even mobilizing national or international support for your cause.

Using a structured goal-setting framework such as SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound) can help you clarify and achieve your objectives efficiently. For example, instead of saying, "I want to help reduce pollution," a SMART goal would be: "I want to organize three community clean-up events within the next six months, focusing on reducing plastic waste in public parks."

3. Build knowledge: tips on researching and understanding the cause

Activism without a solid foundation of knowledge can easily become misguided or ineffective. Thoroughly researching and understanding your chosen cause is critical for meaningful action. Begin by reading books, academic papers, articles, and reports related to your issue. Explore multiple perspectives to gain a well-rounded understanding of the problem. Understanding the history and context of the issue you're fighting for will not only enhance your credibility but also enable you to craft more persuasive arguments and strategies. One useful approach to researching activism is to:

- Explore data and statistics: Use reliable sources such as government reports, research institutions, or credible NGOs to gather relevant data. Statistics can often serve as powerful tools to illustrate the scope and scale of the issue.
- Learn from previous movements: Examine past social movements and activists that succeeded in similar causes. Study their tactics, strategies, and challenges. Whether it's the civil rights movement or climate justice efforts, there is a wealth of knowledge to draw from.
- Engage with the community: Often, those most affected by an issue are the best sources of information. Attend local meetings, join community groups, or engage with organizations that are already working on your cause.

Understanding the policy landscape around your cause can also be crucial. Familiarize yourself with the current legislation, international agreements, or corporate policies that may affect your advocacy. Knowing the legal and political framework gives you a better sense of the challenges ahead and helps in identifying opportunities for change.

4. Skills needed

Communication skills: a.k.a. how to communicate your message

Effective communication is at the heart of all activism. Whether you're speaking to the media, engaging on social media, or addressing a crowd at a protest, your ability to communicate clearly, persuasively, and passionately can define the success of your campaign.

Start by crafting a clear and compelling message. What are the core issues? Why do they matter? And why should others care? Your message should be consistent across all platforms—whether written or spoken. Keep it simple and accessible, avoiding jargon that might alienate a broader audience. Consider using storytelling as a communication tool. Stories resonate with people on an emotional level and can make complex issues more relatable. Share personal experiences or those of others who are directly affected by the issue you're fighting for.

In addition, knowing how to adapt your message to different audiences is essential. What works for engaging young people on Instagram may not be effective in meetings with policymakers or during media interviews. Practice delivering your message in various formats to ensure you can communicate effectively in any situation.

Organizing and planning: how to plan campaigns and events

Organizing is a key skill for any activist. To bring about change, you need to mobilize people, resources, and energy toward a common goal. Organizing a successful campaign or event involves several important steps:

- Plan strategically: Start with a clear objective, and develop a step-by-step plan to achieve it. This includes setting a timeline, defining your target audience, and identifying key partners or allies who can help.
- Logistics: From finding venues to managing volunteer teams, logistical planning is crucial. Be mindful of details like permits for public events,

safety measures for participants, and accessibility to ensure inclusivity.

- **Promotion:** Successful campaigns often require strong promotion, both online and offline. Use posters, flyers, and media coverage to reach a broader audience. Social media platforms can also amplify your campaign's message at little or no cost.

Good organizing also involves flexibility—being able to adapt when plans change or unexpected challenges arise. Ensure that you have contingency plans in place and that your team is prepared to handle setbacks.

Knowledge on how to use social media and online platforms

In today's digital age, no activist can ignore the power of social media. Online platforms allow you to reach millions of people quickly, making them invaluable tools for raising awareness, sharing information, and mobilizing supporters. Learning to use platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook effectively can help amplify your message.

- **Choose the right platform:** Different platforms serve different purposes. Instagram is ideal for sharing visuals and infographics, Twitter works well for concise messages and engaging in public conversations, and Facebook can be used for event planning and group discussions.
- **Engage regularly:** Regular posts, updates, and interactions help keep your audience engaged. Answer comments, share relevant content, and collaborate with other activists or organizations online.
- **Be mindful of online safety:** With activism, especially in politically sensitive areas, comes the risk of online harassment or threats. Ensure your digital presence is secure by using strong passwords, being cautious with personal information, and using encrypted messaging apps when necessary.

Tips for speaking confidently in public

Public speaking is one of the most common fears, but it's a crucial skill for activists. Whether you're speaking at a protest, during a media interview, or to a small group, projecting confidence and clarity is key to inspiring and engaging others.

Here are some tips for improving public speaking:

- **Practice regularly:** The more you practice, the more comfortable you'll become. Start with smaller groups, and gradually work your way up to larger audiences.
- **Focus on your message, not your nerves:** Remind yourself why you're speaking. Focusing on your cause and the impact of your words can help reduce anxiety.
- **Use body language:** Stand tall, make eye contact, and use hand gestures to emphasize key points. Strong body language conveys confidence and authority.
- **Prepare and know your audience:** Tailor your message to the audience. For example, addressing local community members may require a different tone and content than speaking to a group of policymakers.

TAKING ACTION

Taking action as an activist involves transforming ideas into concrete steps toward change. You don't need to start big in order to make a difference. Even small actions can create a ripple effect, and over time, as you build your skills and network, your efforts can have a more significant impact. This chapter covers how to begin with manageable actions, ways to volunteer with local organizations, how to create an effective campaign, and tips for organizing and participating in peaceful protests.

Start small: how to begin with small, manageable actions

It's easy to feel overwhelmed when facing large-scale social, political, or environmental issues, but every activist starts somewhere. Starting small allows you to gain confidence and learn along the way. Simple actions like having conversations with friends or colleagues about your cause, sharing articles and petitions on social media, or attending local events or meetings are excellent first steps. You can also support existing campaigns by contributing in small ways, such as distributing flyers or raising funds.

Consider taking part in community actions. For example, if environmental issues are important to you, you could start by organizing a local clean-up or initiating a recycling program. These smaller initiatives help you practice organizing and mobilizing people while making a real difference in your

local area. It's important to remember that change starts on the ground, and even small wins can build the foundation for larger movements.

Tip: Focus on what's within your reach. Small, consistent actions can build momentum over time and give you the confidence to tackle bigger challenges.

Volunteering: way to get involved with local organizations and initiatives

Volunteering with established organizations is one of the best ways to gain experience in activism. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and local community groups often need help with various tasks, such as organizing events, managing social media, or providing logistical support. Volunteering allows you to learn from experienced activists while contributing meaningfully to the cause. Start by researching organizations that align with your values. Most NGOs have volunteer programs, and they're often looking for people who can assist with specific projects or campaigns. You can also reach out to community centers, student organizations, or local advocacy groups. Volunteering doesn't always require a long-term commitment—many organizations welcome occasional volunteers who help with one-off events or projects. Virtual volunteering has also become a popular option, especially for those unable to participate

in person. Many organizations seek volunteers for tasks like graphic design, writing, translation, or social media management. Even if the issue you're passionate about isn't prominent in your local area, you can contribute to organizations elsewhere through online platforms.

Tip: Volunteering offers a chance to build a network with like-minded individuals and gain valuable hands-on experience. It's also an excellent way to see how activism works behind the scenes.

Creating a campaign: steps to create and launch a successful campaign

Launching a campaign is a significant step in activism, allowing you to drive focus toward a specific cause and rally people around it. Whether you aim to raise awareness, influence policy, or organize an event, a well-structured campaign can amplify your message and achieve real results. Here's how to get started:

1. Define your objective: be specific about what you want to achieve. Whether it's pushing for policy changes, raising awareness, or mobilizing volunteers, having a clear goal keeps the campaign focused.
2. Identify your audience: Knowing who you want to reach is critical. Tailor your message to your audience's values and interests. For instance, if your campaign targets students, your tone and channels will differ from a campaign aimed at policymakers.
3. Craft a compelling message: The message is the heart of your campaign. Make it simple, clear, and emotionally engaging. Use storytelling to connect with people, share personal experiences, or showcase real-world examples that illustrate why the cause matters.

4. Choose your tactics: How will you spread your message and achieve your goals? Social media campaigns, petitions, letter-writing, protests, workshops, and community events are all possible tactics. Choose methods that resonate with your audience and match your campaign's resources.
5. Build a team: Activism is more effective when shared. Bring together people who are passionate about your cause and who bring different skills, such as communication, organizing, or technical expertise. Clearly define roles and responsibilities within the team to ensure smooth collaboration.
6. Create a timeline: Campaigns need structure to succeed. Create a timeline that includes milestones, deadlines, and responsibilities. This will help keep everyone accountable and ensure the campaign remains on track.
7. Launch and promote: Once you've planned the campaign, it's time to promote it. Use social media, email, and local events to spread the word. Make sure you have engaging content—such as visuals, videos, or testimonials—to draw attention to your cause.
8. Monitor and adjust: Track the progress of your campaign and be ready to adjust if necessary. Are you reaching the right audience? Is the message resonating? Flexibility is key—be open to making changes as you go along.

Tip: Don't aim for perfection right away. Campaigns evolve, and learning from mistakes is part of the process. Start small, measure your impact, and build from there.

Tips for organizing and participating in peaceful protests and demonstrations

Protests are one of the most powerful tools in an activist's toolkit. They can draw public attention to urgent issues and pressure decision-makers to act. However, organizing or participating in peaceful protests requires careful planning to ensure safety, legality, and effectiveness.

- Know the legal requirements: Before organizing a protest, familiarize yourself with local laws and regulations about public gatherings. Many cities require permits for protests, and it's crucial to ensure your demonstration complies with these requirements to avoid legal trouble.
- Prepare a clear message and purpose: A successful protest has a clear goal and message. What are you protesting, and what do you hope to achieve? Make sure all participants are aware of the protest's purpose and the key points that need to be communicated to the public and the media.
- Ensure safety: large gatherings can sometimes become chaotic. Prepare for potential safety concerns by appointing marshals or organizers responsible for managing the crowd and ensuring non-violent behavior. Also, make sure first aid supplies are available.
- Nonviolent tactics: Peaceful protests are far more effective at gaining public sympathy and media attention. Make sure everyone involved understands and agrees to nonviolence. Any form of aggression can undermine your cause and lead to negative consequences.
- Amplify the protest's message: Social media plays a crucial role in modern activism. Use it to document the protest in real-time, share updates, and engage people who can't physically attend. Live streaming, posting photos, and using hashtags can help amplify the protest's message and draw media attention.
- Debrief after the event: After the protest, gather

with your team to assess what went well and what could be improved. Discuss the impact of the protest and plan the next steps for continuing the momentum.

Tip: Protests are just the beginning. Follow up with the media and participants to keep the pressure on and consider organizing additional events or meetings to sustain the movement.

COLLABORATION AND NETWORKING

Building strong relationships is essential to effective activism. Collaboration and networking will strengthen your efforts and will allow you to achieve change on a larger scale. This chapter will explore how to recruit a team, collaborate with other organizations and activists, and seek guidance to support your efforts.

1. Tips for Recruiting and Working with a Team

Activism is usually not done alone. To grow your impact, you need to recruit a passionate and diverse team of people who share your goals. Here's how to do it:

Define Your Mission

Before recruiting, make clear what your cause is and what you hope to achieve. A clear mission helps attract people who have the same goals as you and are committed to the cause.

Create Your Network

Reach out to friends, family, or colleagues who may be interested in joining your movement. Use social media, emails, or face-to-face conversations to share your mission and invite others to participate.

Define Clear Roles

Once you've gathered a few people, give them

specific roles based on their strengths and interests. This can range from organizing events, managing social media, to fundraising. Having clear roles helps everyone know what's expected of them and creates responsibility.

Build a Supportive Team Culture

Encourage open communication and respect for each other. Hold regular meetings, both for planning and keeping the team spirits high. Activism can be challenging, so it's important to create good atmosphere where everyone feels appreciated.

Celebrate Successes

Celebrate the small victories along the way. When you see progress in each step your team will become more and more motivated and will get the energy to go on.

2. How to Collaborate with Other Organizations and Activists

One of the most effective ways to strengthen your cause is by collaborating with other organizations and activists who share your vision. Here's how to reach successful collaborations:

Look for Potential Partners

Look for organizations, community groups, or other activists who are working on similar causes. Attend events, join online forums, or use social media to connect with them. Make sure you share the same ideas before initiating a partnership.

Build Relationships

Successful collaborations are built on trust. Take the time to build personal connections with other activists and organizations. Start by offering support for their initiatives, which can lead to mutual respect and future collaborations.

Unite on common goals

When collaborating, it's important to define a clear, shared goal for the project or campaign. Be transparent about what each party hopes to achieve and ensure that the collaboration benefits both sides.

Share Resources

Collaboration often means sharing resources like tools, expertise, and contacts. Be open to shar-

ing your resources with other groups for greater impact. For example, if another organization has a strong social media presence, while your team is organizing events, combine these strengths to create more effective campaigns.

Communicate Regularly and Clearly

Keep the lines of communication open throughout the collaboration. Set clear expectations, timelines, and responsibilities for each team. Regular check-ins help prevent misunderstandings and keep everyone on track.

Collaboration and networking are the backbone of any successful activist movement. By building a strong team and forming strategic alliances, you'll be able to expand your influence, learn from others, and together create a greater impact.

OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

Activism can be a powerful force for change, but it's not without its challenges. In your work you may face obstacles that test your resolve and require creative solutions to push forward. This chapter explores some common challenges in activism and offers practical strategies for overcoming them.

1. Dealing with Burnout

The Challenge:

Activism can be emotionally and physically exhausting. Constantly fighting for change, especially in the face of slow progress, can lead to burnout.

How to Overcome It:

Set Boundaries: Know when to step back and take a break. It's important to prioritize your mental and physical well-being so you can continue contributing in the long term.

Delegate Tasks: Don't try to do everything yourself. Share responsibilities with your team or fellow activists, and trust them to handle things. This prevents overwhelming yourself.

Practice Self-Care: Make time for activities that help you relax and recharge, whether it's spending time with loved ones, engaging in a hobby, or simply resting. Remember, self-care is not selfish; it's essential for sustained activism.

2. Facing Resistance

The Challenge:

Activists often face resistance, whether from those who disagree with their cause, media scrutiny, or even backlash from governments or corporations. This can be discouraging and, at times, intimidating.

How to Overcome It:

Stay Focused on Your Mission: Remind yourself why you're fighting for your cause. Keeping your core values and goals in mind helps you stay grounded in the face of criticism.

Use Opposition to Strengthen Your Cause:

Criticism can be an opportunity to clarify your message, address misconceptions, and build a stronger case for your cause. Engage with opposition constructively when possible, using facts and compassion.

Find Support: Surround yourself with a strong support system of fellow activists, friends, or mentors who believe in your mission. Having a community of people who share your vision can help you stay resilient in difficult times.

3. Lack of Resources

The Challenge:

Many activists struggle with limited resources—whether it's funding, materials, or access to platforms for spreading their message. This can make it hard to scale up efforts or sustain long-term campaigns.

How to Overcome It:

Use Free Tools and Platforms: Use social media, online petitions, and free event-hosting tools to amplify your message without incurring major costs. Online platforms allow you to reach a large audience at little to no cost.

Fundraising and Crowdsourcing: Consider crowdfunding campaigns or applying for grants aimed at supporting social causes. Many individuals and organizations are willing to donate to movements they believe in. Start small and grow as your cause gains support.

Collaborate and Share Resources: Partner with like-minded organizations and activists who can help share costs, spaces, or expertise. Pooling resources can help you achieve more with less.

4. Slow Progress

The Challenge:

Change doesn't happen overnight, and this can be frustrating for activists. The slow pace of change, especially in systems or governments, can make it feel like your efforts aren't making a difference.

How to Overcome It:

Celebrate Small Wins: Every step forward is progress. Recognizing even small victories can help keep morale high and remind your team that you're making an impact, even if it's gradual.

Be Patient and Persistent: Social movements often take time to gain momentum and create lasting change. Stay patient and remember that persistence is key. Many successful movements took years, even decades, to achieve their goals.

Focus on Long-Term Goals: While short-term wins are encouraging, it's important to keep your eye on the bigger picture. Understand that real, systemic change is often a slow process, but with steady effort, it's achievable.

Every activist faces challenges along their journey, but these obstacles can be overcome with resilience, creativity, and support. Whether dealing with burnout, opposition, or resource limitations, it's important to stay focused on your mission, seek support from your community, and adapt when necessary.



JEFF & SHARON

DAM, BOOKCLUB FOR BLACK QUEER PEOPLE

SUCCESS STORIES

BREAKING BOUNDARIES

SHARON PRINCE ON QUEER
ACTIVISM, ART, AND THE
POWER OF COMMUNITY

Can you tell us a little about yourself and what motivated you to become an activist?

My name is Sharon Prince (x, 27) and I'm a queer curator, artist and producer in the cultural field. I became an activist without actually planning to, because being queer means you almost daily have to speak up about your own basic human rights. Experiencing this made me more aware of other situations of injustice. For both other marginalized groups as for the nature we're supposed to live with. I cannot live an ignorant life anymore, so I try to educate myself on how to be the best version of me, for myself and for my surroundings. And with that I also want to motivate other people to be aware of their impact on others, the world and themselves.

What specific issue(s) or event inspired you to take action in your community?

There is not a specific moment or event that inspired me. I think I kind of grew into it throughout the years. By not understanding why my own (queer) feelings could be wrong in any way, I tried to understand the different perspectives people could have. In my experience film, literature, art and other cultural expressions are the best ways to see what people are dealing with at that time. Art can be a sort of diary that saves emotions and is able to translate them to other perspectives.

Can you describe the initiative that you started or are involved in? What are its main goals?

I have been involved with different initiatives that show my activist side. Like the exhibitions COME ALIVE and Re_Nature and Queer Film Festival Utrecht. But my most recent project combines the love for queerness and nature in a multidisciplinary way. The event is called EQO and consists of an evening program, with workshops, art, performance and a dance night. We try to create an experience where we view a certain topic through the lens of different art forms and learn from each other. It shows the importance of community as well as the importance of intersectionality within both the queer community as our ecological system.

What were some of the biggest challenges you faced in your activism, and how did you overcome them?

My biggest challenge would be that sometimes your perspective changes a little bit after learning new things. This often causes others to doubt your statements and comment on you, calling you hypocrite. The comments also really cause me to doubt myself and sometimes stop me from taking part in activism. But if everyone would stop their action at the point they make a mistake, activism would not exist anymore. It is sad that criticism for the statements you make and have made in the past, causes a sense of unreliability, although it might be one of the most important qualities of an activist. Being able to reflect, grow and learn, makes you even more trustworthy in my opinion. So I try to think about this when I'm doubting myself.

What impact has your initiative had on your community or beyond?

EQO has only had a few editions and is still developing into an impactful event, but I hope it will bring people together and spread the love for our diverse planet. Through Queer Film Festival Utrecht I've heard a lot of stories where people were touched, inspired and educated on all different sorts of topics.

What advice would you give to someone who wants to make a difference but doesn't know where to start?

Ask questions. Find people or an organisation that's making a difference and send them a message. Surround yourself with people who you feel safe with, so you have your safety net. Be open, curious and creative. And dare to speak up. ■

FROM PERSONAL ACTION TO COLLECTIVE CHANGE

AN INTERVIEW WITH PIM ON ACTIVISM AND COMMUNITY IN EXTINCTION REBELLION



Can you tell us a little about yourself and what motivated you to become an activist?

My name is Pim, I am 33 years old. I've been active at XR for 3 years. I have always been socially involved. Why I became an activist? Because I didn't want any more to achieve things individually. I already ate vegan and didn't fly. But I wanted to belong to a community that did that too. Through a colleague of mine I joined an open evening event. And I found connection right away – like-minded people, everyone was there because they wanted to do something. I do this because it is necessary, not because it is easy. It's never finished so that's tricky, and I couldn't really stop because of that. The flame was lit.

What specific issues or events inspired you to take action in your community?

Nothing specific. My best friend in high school was left oriented. I studied social science and joined demonstrations there. XR itself was a real spark. Diving into an action, with that excitement involved, that was really kicking too. It was a great experience!

Can you describe the initiative that you started or are involved in? What are its main goals?

There are 3 very clear requirements of XR:

1. Speak the truth.
2. Act now.
3. Let citizens decide.

We want to raise public awareness about the climate crisis, because it's an urgent situation. We want transparent communication from governments and media about the scientific facts

surrounding climate change and biodiversity loss. We call for immediate action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and halt biodiversity loss. XR demands that governments implement policies that align with the latest climate science and international agreements, such as the Paris Agreement.

We are striving mainly to inspire people to take urgent action against climate change and environmental destruction!

What were some of the biggest challenges you faced in your activism, and how did you overcome them?

The problem is that the impact is very small of our activism, and we are critical of that. We are discussing with each other a lot, giving our emotions space.

What impact has your initiative had on your community or beyond?

We have contacts with political parties and managed to include the topic in the political agenda. Through our actions pension funds and insurers, stopped investing in fossil.

What advice would you give to someone who wants to make a difference but doesn't know where to start?

Celebrate your victories. Dive in, just do it. The clubs are very open and friendly. You can always contribute. You have nothing to lose by stopping by once. Find the community that suits you, there are lots of them. ■

FIGHTING DISINFORMATION:

DÁVID PÚCHOVSKÝ,
AN EX-POLICE OFFICER'S JOURNEY TO
ACTIVISM AND SOCIAL MEDIA ADVOCACY

Can you tell us a little about yourself and what motivated you to become an activist?

I got involved with social media while working for the police, where I served for seven years. Before that, I didn't really engage in this activity, but I started to enjoy it. Later, due to various political circumstances, I had to leave the police force, and I decided that I wanted to continue working on issues related to hoaxes on social media. I simply chose to follow my own path.

What specific issue(s) or event inspired you to take action in your community?

If we're talking about my very first project during my time in the police, it wasn't really my idea. My superiors instructed me to focus on hoaxes. It's a bit ironic because some of those same people later returned to politics and suddenly didn't like this activity. So, addressing hoaxes wasn't initially my initiative. At that time, I might not have even known what a hoax was, but after a short while of dealing with it, I created a separate Facebook page called Hoaxy a podvody. That's where my contribution to this whole story lies, and after leaving the police, I decided to restart it.

Can you describe the initiative that you started or are involved in? What are its main goals?

I founded a continuing project called Hoaxy, a podvody. It primarily operates on social media, and just like during my time in the police, we explain

hoaxes and frauds to a broad audience. We also run various campaigns, and we recently released our first podcast. We're planning to expand this project in ways that weren't possible while I was still with the police, such as giving lectures and participating in events of various kinds. In other words, we aim to take a more broad-spectrum approach.

What were some of the biggest challenges you faced in your activism, and how did you overcome them?

When we talk about this new project, the most challenging part was at the very beginning. Just a few days after launching, Facebook shut down our page. We wondered how this could happen, and to this day, we don't know why they took action against us. We're unsure whether it was due to automated reporting or if someone from government agencies might have misused their power to report us. Luckily, our friends worked in the same field and helped us return online. Of course, another ongoing challenge is building and maintaining the entire system for a project of this nature. We have quite a few very active volunteers, but keeping the system running smoothly is crucial so everyone knows their role and mistakes are avoided.

What impact has your initiative had on your community or beyond?

In our social bubble, the initiative had a positive impact. When I left the police, many people were



eager for the project to continue. After the restart, the project received much attention, especially during a fundraising campaign. I still see this project as motivational. It's perhaps also a source of hope for people, showing that something can work here. As for the impact beyond our social bubble, I don't feel confident commenting on that. In this context, it might be necessary to conduct some surveys to measure how successful we are in persuading people. However, these kinds of projects aren't meant for die-hard disinformers—they won't be convinced by anything. We deliver our message to those who follow us, and then it's up to them to convince their stubborn relatives or friends.

What advice would you give to someone who wants to make a difference but doesn't know where to start?

There are several options, depending on one's free time, energy, and resources. The least one can do is support various independent media or projects through donations. If one wants to be more active, they can reach out to us or similar platforms and get involved. In these times, everyone welcomes a helping hand.

What tools or resources have you found most useful in your activism?

When I was with the police, I used to say that the best "software" was people since we didn't have any specialised software available. Thousands of people followed us and provided many tips on hoaxes, so, at that time, we didn't need anything special. Now, of course, things are different, as we've only been operating for a few months, but I still think our numbers are excellent. We still receive tips, though not as many. As for specific tools, we're currently preparing a list of certain tools, but I wouldn't disclose them just yet. Plenty of resources are online; you just need to know how to search for them.

Are there any books, websites, or other resources you would recommend to someone looking to start their own initiative?

There are well-known public resources. For example, the European Union runs the website EU vs Disinfo, where you can find thousands of hoaxes explained. Unfortunately, this project is somewhat unappreciated, likely due to insufficient marketing. I imagine something similar being translated into Slovak, which would then have no competition. Other useful platforms include Manipulace.cz, AFP Fakty in Slovakia, Sebavedomé Slovensko, and Mladí proti fašizmu. These sites do great work and make things easier by saving people from having to search for information on the web painstakingly.

How would you engage other young people and encourage them to support your cause?

For us, the most essential thing is reporting hoaxes and disinformation. Additionally, financial support is helpful as it goes towards purchasing software hardware and funding our event participation. Of course, if someone doesn't have the financial means, we won't pressure them. There are many projects that also deserve financial support, so for us, the biggest contribution is when people report hoaxes to us, ideally through private messages on Facebook or Instagram.

What is the most important lesson you've learned through your activism?

There are many, but perhaps the biggest lesson is that sometimes it's hard to get to the truth because it involves analysing and gathering sources. You eventually find the truth, but the journey is complicated. Another lesson was realising just how easy it is to manipulate the masses with various lies spread by the creators of hoaxes.

If you could give one piece of advice to a young person who wants to become an activist, what would it be?

Never let yourself be broken or demotivated by people or actions that use the spread of evil, hatred, and untruths as their primary tool.

How do you balance your activism with other aspects of your life, such as school or work?

Sometimes, it's more challenging, especially in the beginning, but everything becomes manageable with a great team behind us. I believe the balance between responsibilities and personal life will continue to improve.

Can you tell us a little about yourself and what motivated you to become an activist?

I got involved with social media while working for the police, where I served for seven years. Before that, I didn't really engage in this activity, but I started to enjoy it. Later, due to various political circumstances, I had to leave the police force, and I decided that I wanted to continue working on issues related to hoaxes on social media. I simply chose to follow my own path.

What specific issue(s) or event inspired you to take action in your community?

If we're talking about my very first project during my time in the police, it wasn't really my idea. My superiors instructed me to focus on hoaxes. It's a bit ironic because some of those same people later returned to politics and suddenly didn't like this activity. So, addressing hoaxes wasn't initially my initiative. At that time, I might not have even known what a hoax was, but after a short while of dealing with it, I created a separate Facebook page called Hoaxy a podvody. That's where my contribution to this whole story lies, and after leaving the police, I decided to restart it.

Can you describe the initiative that you started or are involved in? What are its main goals?

I founded a continuing project called Hoaxy, a podvody. It primarily operates on social media, and just like during my time in the police, we explain hoaxes and frauds to a broad audience. We also run various campaigns, and we recently released our first podcast. We're planning to expand this project in ways that weren't possible while I was still with the police, such as giving lectures and participating in events of various kinds. In other words, we aim to take a more broad-spectrum approach.

What were some of the biggest challenges you faced in your activism, and how did you overcome them?

When we talk about this new project, the most challenging part was at the very beginning. Just a few days after launching, Facebook shut down our page. We wondered how this could happen, and to this day, we don't know why they took action against us. We're unsure whether it was due to automated reporting or if someone from government agencies might have misused their power to report us. Luckily, our friends worked in the same field and helped us return online. Of course, another ongoing challenge is building and maintaining the entire system for a project of this nature. We have quite a few very active volunteers, but keeping the system running smoothly is crucial so everyone knows their role and mistakes are avoided.

What impact has your initiative had on your community or beyond?

In our social bubble, the initiative had a positive impact. When I left the police, many people were eager for the project to continue. After the restart, the project received much attention, especially during a fundraising campaign. I still see this project as motivational. It's perhaps also a source of hope for people, showing that something can work here. As for the impact beyond our social bubble, I don't feel confident commenting on that. In this context, it might be necessary to conduct some

surveys to measure how successful we are in persuading people. However, these kinds of projects aren't meant for die-hard disinformers—they won't be convinced by anything. We deliver our message to those who follow us, and then it's up to them to convince their stubborn relatives or friends.

What advice would you give to someone who wants to make a difference but doesn't know where to start?

There are several options, depending on one's free time, energy, and resources. The least one can do is support various independent media or projects through donations. If one wants to be more active, they can reach out to us or similar platforms and get involved. In these times, everyone welcomes a helping hand.

What tools or resources have you found most useful in your activism?

When I was with the police, I used to say that the best "software" was people since we didn't have any specialised software available. Thousands of people followed us and provided many tips on hoaxes, so, at that time, we didn't need anything special. Now, of course, things are different, as we've only been operating for a few months, but I still think our numbers are excellent. We still receive tips, though not as many. As for specific tools, we're currently preparing a list of certain tools, but I wouldn't disclose them just yet. Plenty of resources are online; you just need to know how to search for them.

Are there any books, websites, or other resources you would recommend to someone looking to start their own initiative?

There are well-known public resources. For example, the European Union runs the website EU vs Disinfo, where you can find thousands of hoaxes explained. Unfortunately, this project is somewhat unappreciated, likely due to insufficient marketing. I imagine something similar being translated into Slovak, which would then have no competition.

Other useful platforms include Manipulace.cz, AFP Fakty in Slovakia, Sebavedomé Slovensko, and Mladí proti fašizmu. These sites do great work and make things easier by saving people from having to search for information on the web painstakingly.

How would you engage other young people and encourage them to support your cause?

For us, the most essential thing is reporting hoaxes and disinformation. Additionally, financial support is helpful as it goes towards purchasing software hardware and funding our event participation. Of course, if someone doesn't have the financial means, we won't pressure them. There are many projects that also deserve financial support, so for us, the biggest contribution is when people report hoaxes to us, ideally through private messages on Facebook or Instagram.

What is the most important lesson you've learned through your activism?

There are many, but perhaps the biggest lesson is that sometimes it's hard to get to the truth because it involves analysing and gathering sources. You eventually find the truth, but the journey is complicated. Another lesson was realising just how easy it is to manipulate the masses with various lies spread by the creators of hoaxes.

If you could give one piece of advice to a young person who wants to become an activist, what would it be?

Never let yourself be broken or demotivated by people or actions that use the spread of evil, hatred, and untruths as their primary tool.

How do you balance your activism with other aspects of your life, such as school or work?

Sometimes, it's more challenging, especially in the beginning, but everything becomes manageable with a great team behind us. I believe the balance between responsibilities and personal life will continue to improve. ■

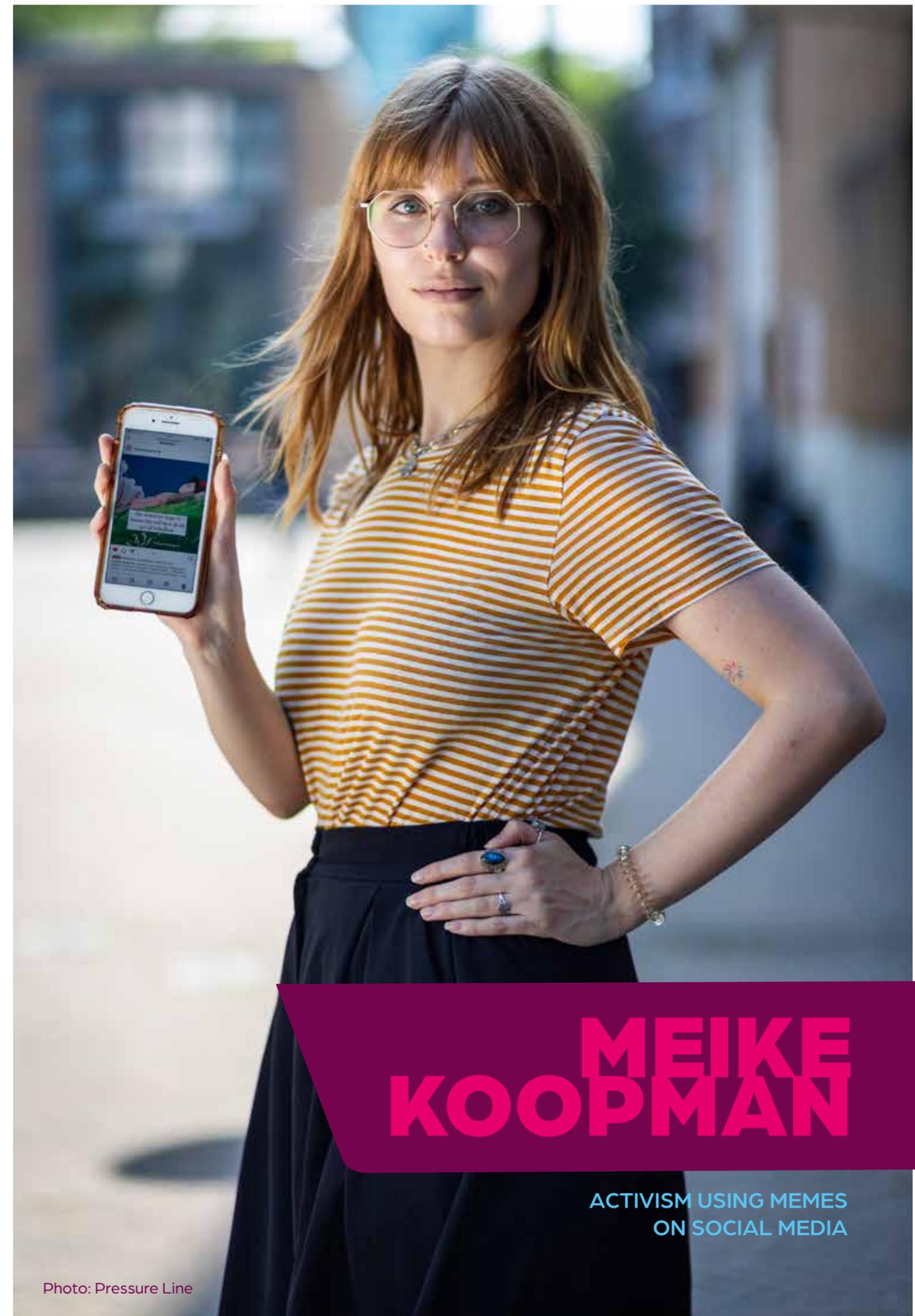


Photo: Pressure Line

TRANSFORMING WALLS INTO CANVASES:

**TOMÁŠ RAFA,
AN ARTIST'S JOURNEY OF ACTIVISM AND
COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT**

Can you tell us a little about yourself and what motivated you to become an activist?

The turning point for my activities came in 2009, or more specifically, the winter of 2009/2010, when, as a student at the Academy of Arts in Banská Bystrica, I responded to a situation that had developed in the town of Michalovce in eastern Slovakia. A segregation wall had been built there—the first of its kind in modern Slovak history. Since it couldn't be officially labelled a segregation wall, the town called it a "sports wall." This structure separated a local block of flats from a nearby Roma settlement. As a student, I wanted to react in a way that would simply comment on the situation, so I decided to play a sports match with the children from this settlement. A video recording of this activity was made and later shared on social media. That's when I realized that this approach to commenting on sensitive topics like cohabitation was an interesting position for an artist.

Can you describe the initiative that you started or are involved in? What are its main goals?

I came up with the ArtAktivista initiative after several years of visiting Roma communities and socially excluded areas in eastern Slovakia, where

concrete walls served as barriers between the community and the rest of the town. I started a project where we painted these walls with the children, as they hindered their daily lives. Later, I helped establish a civic association, and since 2014, we have annually visited the Roma settlement in the Habeš neighbourhood of Sečovce, organising creative workshops there. These workshops are also attended by invited artists who spend a short residency there.

What were some of the biggest challenges you faced in your activism, and how did you overcome them?

Each year, the challenge is that artists come up with a concept they'd like to realise, but it needs to adapt to how the children respond and what they want to create. This creative process evolves and requires modification. It's an exciting and positive challenge, revealing the children's creativity and potential, often unnoticed due to everyday circumstances. In just two weeks, we work on developing their creative thinking, offering them opportunities they don't usually have due to conditions like extreme poverty.



What impact has your initiative had on your community or beyond?

We realise how difficult it is to break out of poverty and socially excluded areas. We understand how hard it is for the children to live there and even imagine a future where they can find work or get a good education outside of their neighbourhood. The workshop provides hope or motivation that this could be possible. In the long term, it's rewarding for us to see participants later seeking ways to get scholarships or attend institutions like conservatories. These are potent signals we notice. The workshops also help children through tough times, as many have told us that they remember the summer workshops during difficult moments, which helps them mentally. This is part of the community feedback we receive, and they always look forward to the next year because it's not just an event but an experience that can shape their future. We also get positive feedback from the artists, many of whom integrate their experiences into their academic work, whether for their bachelor's or master's theses at universities in Košice, Banská Bystrica, or Bratislava.

What advice would you give to someone who wants to make a difference but doesn't know where to start?

In my opinion, choosing a workshop, even subconsciously, is important—someone might simply want to try something new, and that's perfectly fine. Participatory workshops are a great way to connect past experiences with future goals. This applies not only to ArtAktivista workshops but to any kind. Such experiences can spark new creative processes and help shape future career paths, goals, and strategies. It's not just about activism; workshops offer valuable opportunities for growth, whether at an arts academy or fine arts university. More workshops mean a wider range of choices and directions.

What is the most important lesson you've learned through your activism?

The most important lesson might be realising that we don't always have to stick strictly to our visions. Through collaboration, these visions can evolve in different directions, and the way these interactions and participations unfold is fascinating, primarily if we don't focus solely on the role of the creator—"me, my work, my output." In workshops, we often discuss how an idea might start with an artist, but new, beautiful things emerge as it mixes with the children's interactions. The artist's original idea blends into something shared, creating a collective work rather than one person's creation. ■



**ADJOA
KPETO**

VISUAL ARTIST

Photo: Pressure Line



FROM FASHION TO ACTIVISM

TEVIN'S JOURNEY

Can you tell us a little about yourself and what motivated you to become an activist?

My name is Tevin, I'm from Curaçao, and I'm a storyteller and fashion designer. I've always been deeply sensitive to societal issues, especially those that could affect the safety and well-being of my loved ones. That concern pushed me to research these issues more thoroughly, which eventually led me to take action and become an activist.

What specific issue(s) or event inspired you to take action in your community?

The real turning point for me came when the war in Ukraine began. I noticed how propaganda, misinformation, and disinformation were fueling division, both online and in everyday life. Seeing this manipulation of truth and its impact on people's perspectives made me realize I had to get involved and raise awareness.

Can you describe the initiative you started or are involved in? What are its main goals?

My first successful initiative was my fashion collection, FODDER 22, which put the experiences of people in the Netherlands into context and highlighted the dangerous effects of malicious propaganda. Currently, I'm working on a new collection called NET, which focuses on the environmental crisis caused by plastic pollution and discarded commercial fishing nets. Through my fashion work, I aim to raise awareness and spark conversation about these urgent global issues.

What were some of the biggest challenges you faced in your activism, and how did you overcome them?

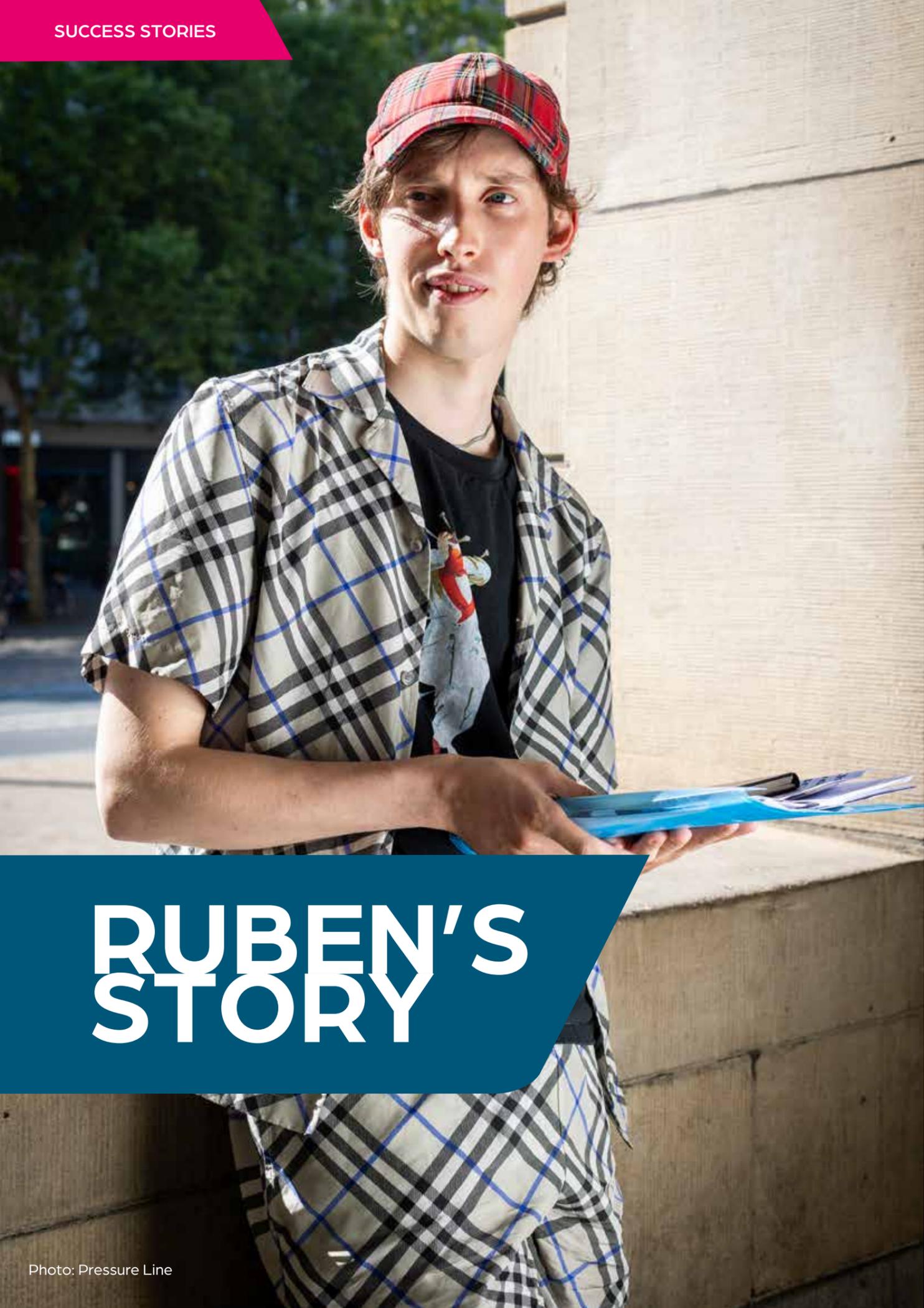
One of the biggest challenges I've faced is securing funding for my projects. It's an ongoing struggle, but I've learned to get creative with my resources and leverage my networks to keep the work going.

What impact has your initiative had on your community or beyond?

By exhibiting my collections at multiple venues and sharing my work with thousands of people, I've been able to raise awareness about both the dangers of propaganda and the environmental crisis. My goal has always been to tell the right story, and I believe that by doing so, I've helped people see these issues from a new perspective.

What advice would you give to someone who wants to make a difference but doesn't know where to start?

Start with your passion and back it up with thorough research. Compare sources, have open dialogues, and make sure you're well-informed about the issues you want to address. Staying authentic to yourself and your message is key—change doesn't happen overnight, but with persistence, you can create something meaningful and lasting. ■



RUBEN'S STORY

Photo: Pressure Line

Ruben Schilt, aged 23, is finding his place in the world of politics and activism. His approach is unique: instead of following the classic path of loud protesting or simply opposing, Ruben sees himself as someone trying to create change by working together with the system and policymakers. He doesn't just want to push against the system; he aims to improve it from the inside.

His inspiration came during the American elections. When Bernie Sanders, who combined a strong but nuanced activist stance with collaboration within the political system, didn't get a chance to become president and Donald Trump was ultimately elected, Ruben felt deeply motivated. Sanders' approach, in which he remained critical and idealistic but also constructive, spoke to him. It became a philosophy Ruben wanted to follow himself: to be critical and pursue change without giving up his connection to politics.

In Dordrecht, he played this role in an important issue involving Chemours, a large chemical company that has long been under fire for its environmental and public health impacts. As a committee member in the city council, Ruben discovered that the city was in negotiations with the company—something he saw as fundamentally wrong. He believed there should be no compromises with a company that caused so much harm, and he decided to make confidential documents public. In doing so, he broke the closed nature of the process and brought more transparency. This led to controversy and even a legal charge, but it achieved its goal: the public and media openly discussed the role of the city council and other authorities in the environmental debate.

Ruben explains that the issue with Chemours is complex. PFAS, the chemical used in the factory, is not easy to eliminate because it's essential in many products. Still, he believes that the necessity of these substances shouldn't justify endangering public health. For Ruben, it's important to work toward a solution that protects the environment without completely halting industry. His approach requires patience and constructive collaboration among government, business, and the community.

The biggest impact he sees from his work is that there is now much more attention on who is responsible for environmental damage and public health. Not only is Chemours being held accountable, but also the city council that grants permits and the provincial environmental service that oversees compliance. Where people might have previously pointed to one clear party at fault, there is now more awareness that various parties must take responsibility.

For young activists and politicians, Ruben has an important lesson. He stresses how valuable it is to have patience and be open to the opinions of others. According to him, many people start with high energy and expectations but get stuck in slow, bureaucratic systems. He believes that the system is sometimes slow for a reason. Therefore, he advises against trying to solve everything alone right away; instead, he recommends listening, learning, and taking the time to check and deepen your own knowledge.

Ruben's story shows how idealism and patience can go hand in hand and how, as a young person, you can make a difference by working with conviction and strategy toward the society you want to live in. ■

Denisa: Could you tell us a little about yourself and what inspired you to become an activist in the area of healthy relationships, sexuality, and safety?

Radka: Honestly, I don't like calling myself an activist. I would rather say I'm something like a "baby activist." However, I understand why people label me that way. Activists are inspiring individuals for me, people who push society forward in areas like human rights, education, the environment, and others. My journey began when I was teaching at the elementary school through the Teach for Slovakia program (now just Teach). Every day, I encountered situations related to relationships, children's self-esteem, adolescence... I noticed that all these issues had a common denominator – a lack of education about relationships. This led me to the idea of further educating myself and focusing on relational and sex education. It's not just about sexuality, as many think, but about the complexity of relationships between people and with oneself. Gradually, I began focusing on educating adults – parents and teachers – so they could guide children in these topics.

Denisa: How long has your journey been, and when did you start being involved with the organization where you work on this topic?

Radka: It started in 2017, when my colleague Zuzana Bendíková and I joined volunteer activities in an organization that had been active in relational and sex education for over 30 years. We volunteered, gained a lot of knowledge and skills, later we started working there fully, and new, skilled people gradually joined. Today, our organization is called inTYMYta, and it includes people with expertise in various fields – psychology, sexual pedagogy, pedagogy, medicine, and more.

Denisa: Could you describe some of the initiatives you've been involved in?

Radka: Over the years, we've worked on several initiatives. One of the most important was participating in curricular reform to make relational and sex education a part of the school curriculum. This involved not only professional work on the reform itself but also raising public awareness. In 2022, we launched a petition to increase general public awareness on this topic. I am pleased that we managed to bring together both the general and professional public and that relational and sex education is now part of the curriculum. Another significant project is "Dignified Menstruation," which started as a collection of menstrual supplies for people living in menstrual poverty. Later, we began producing Menstrual boxes, which we place in locations where they are most needed, while also organizing various educational activities. Our goal is to address this issue systematically, not just through volunteer initiatives. Today, Dignified Menstruation is an independent project of inTYMYta, led by Linda Moróczová and Natália Blahová.

Denisa: What impact have your activities had on the community or society at large?

Radka: The biggest impact is likely the success of our petition, which ensured that relational and sex education is part of the curriculum. This means that future generations of children will have access to education that will help them build safe relationships and prevent violence, bullying, and discrimination. Another significant impact is from the "Dignified Menstruation" project, where we receive great feedback. In areas where our Menstrual Boxes are placed, access to menstrual supplies has improved, and there are fewer cases where school cleaners find various alternatives to menstrual supplies, like rags, in trash bins.

RADKA MIKŠÍK:
TEACHING AND ADVOCATING FOR QUALITY
EDUCATION IN HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS,
SEXUALITY, AND SAFETY.

Denisa: What were the biggest challenges you faced in your activism?

Radka: There were several. From general societal resistance to personal threats. At the beginning, I often faced lies and attempts to discredit my work, which I managed to overcome by relying on data and facts. The hardest part, however, were the direct threats that came to me in messages. That was very challenging, and I had to learn how to cope with it. Another challenge is the frustration from bureaucracy when dealing with grants, which sometimes hinders professional work.

Denisa: What tools or resources do you consider the most effective in your work?

Radka: The most important are human resources and collaboration. It's always crucial to have a team you can rely on and who can share their experiences and skills. Furthermore, it's important to rely on expert information and to educate target groups appropriately for their age and needs. Social media campaigns, such as "Even at midnight, you should know..." were also very effective, allowing us to reach a wide audience.

Denisa: Are there any books, websites, or resources you would recommend to young people who want to start activism?

Radka: In the area of relational and sex education, I would definitely recommend the book *When I Was Your Age...!* written by Czech experts Dagmar Křišová and Marcela Poláčková. We at inTYMYta collaborated on it from the perspective of sexual pedagogy. This book is mainly intended for parents and teachers who want to better understand relational and sex education topics and respond appropriately in various situations. Besides that, I

recommend following organizations like Amnesty International, which have excellent methodologies on topics like consent. On our website, <https://www.intymyta.sk>, we also have many resources that can be helpful. But maybe our topic isn't what interests you most, so I recommend focusing on an area that you're passionate about. Don't hesitate to reach out to organizations directly. When I was still in high school or university, I thought I couldn't just write to an organization – that they only deal with experts. But if someone had told me back then that it's completely okay, it would have helped me a lot. So if you're interested in something, don't hesitate to ask.

Denisa: What is the most important lesson your activism has taught you?

Radka: The most important lesson is that I must be very mindful of where I direct my energy. Our resources are not endless, and if we don't put on our "oxygen mask" first, we won't be able to support others. It's essential to set healthy work habits, know when to rest, and recognize your limits.

Denisa: What single piece of advice would you give to a young person who wants to become an activist in their chosen field?

Radka: Clarify your values and motivations. It's important to know why you're doing what you're doing and to be honest with yourself. Educate yourself, collaborate with others, and don't isolate yourself. Activism cannot be done alone, it's a team effort. And finally, don't forget to ask for help when you need it – whether it's psychological or other professional support. That is key in work that can often be emotionally exhausting. ■



STANDING PROUD:
MILAN ZVADA ON DEFENDING LGBTI+ RIGHTS, COMMUNITY, AND THE POWER OF ACTIVISM

Denisa: Could you tell us a bit about yourself and what inspired you to become an activist for LGBTI+ rights?

Milan: My activism wasn't a fully conscious decision, and I wasn't always comfortable with the term activism. Growing up as a gay person in the 90s, I experienced societal prejudice firsthand. I started being active in the public space around 2015, particularly due to the societal atmosphere around the "Family referendum". Hearing stereotypes and biases in the media, from politicians, and even from religious representatives was painful. I felt the need to voice my position, which led to founding the informal civic initiative, Inokraj, aimed at connecting the world of LGBTI+ people with the rest of society. In 2018, we also began organizing Pride in Banská Bystrica, the third city in Slovakia to do so after Bratislava and Košice. I see my activism as a necessity—a way to stand up for my rights and those of others affected by prejudice.

Denisa: Could you tell us about the initiatives you've been involved in, whether as a founder or a participant?

Milan: Going back to 2015, I was approached by Amnesty International Slovakia to participate in their Living library project, where people from minorities share their stories in intimate, 15-minute settings to break down biases. This was incredibly valuable for me, deepening my understand-

ing of human rights and inspiring me to continue engaging in these "Living Libraries." At the same time, we launched Inokraj and started addressing these issues in our programming at the Záhrada cultural center, where I work as a project manager and dramaturge. Since 2018, organizing Pride in Banská Bystrica has been a big responsibility; it's challenging due to the societal expectations and resistance it can provoke. But Pride is essential—it's a march and a celebration of the right to exist and be visible. For centuries, LGBTI+ people have been marginalized or forced to hide. Having Pride is a declaration that we exist, and that's crucial in a democratic society.

Denisa: What impact have your activities had on the LGBTI+ community or broader society?

Milan: It's not easy to measure impact, but the attendance at our events shows that people value what we do. Recently, we opened a support group for LGBTI+ people, which has been well-received. In Living Libraries, I've seen how direct interaction changes perspectives. In those intimate settings, people have no choice but to listen and engage, which can lead to significant shifts in attitudes. Authentic stories often make more of an impact than arguments alone. These interactions can create lasting change, and I believe that if we keep these efforts going, it will eventually reach a critical mass that can drive broader social change.

Denisa: What were the biggest challenges you faced in your activism, and how did you overcome them?

Milan: The most crucial thing is to persist, but I also had to learn not to take negative comments personally. It's essential to separate yourself from the attacks on your identity and respond with composure rather than emotion. It's discouraging that some people doubt the motivations of activists, suspecting us of having hidden agendas, when in reality, many of us act from a genuine sense of duty and personal conviction. There are moments, though, when support comes from unexpected places, reminding you why this work matters. When someone tells you that your story changed their life, it outweighs the negativity.

Denisa: Which tools or resources have you found most effective in your work?

Milan: I'd say each person should choose the battles they have the resources and resilience for. Not everyone will attend Pride or join a Living library event, and that's okay. Sometimes activism can be as simple as standing up in a social group when someone makes a joke at the expense of a minority. It takes courage, but even small actions matter. Democracy allows us to speak up against injustice, and that's a privilege we shouldn't take for granted. I encourage young people to stand up for others, whether in school or at home. This openness creates a better environment for everyone and counters the prejudices often reinforced within families. Education, participation in Prides or Living Libraries, and trainings are powerful tools. Amnesty International and other organizations in Slovakia offer great resources. Independent cultural centers are also essential; Záhrada is part of Anténa, which connects over thirty such centers in Slovakia.

Denisa: Are there any books, websites, or other resources you would recommend to those wanting to start their own initiatives?

Milan: In Slovakia, there are several initiatives raising awareness of LGBTI+ rights. Inakosť in Bratislava, Sapliňq in Košice, and Prizma offer support and counseling for the community. Recently, a group of LGBTI+ parents released a book called *Niečo ti chcem povedať* (I want to tell you something), containing moving personal stories. Marek Hudec's book *Spúšť* also addresses the struggles of LGBTI+ people, with a chapter I contributed. Support groups and safe spaces are also available in larger cities and cultural centers, so I encourage people to seek out these resources.

Denisa: What's the most important lesson that activism has taught you?

Milan: I'd say don't expect immediate recognition, especially in Slovakia. If you're motivated by external validation, it can be disappointing. What matters is that you stand by your values, regardless of whether anyone acknowledges it. Online activism can help, but nothing replaces physical community work. Being yourself, and caring about the cause rather than appearances, is essential. And even if the impact isn't immediate, if you're doing something with good intentions, it will come back to you. Standing up for human rights or the environment is always a long-term commitment.

Denisa: What's one piece of advice you'd give to a young person who wants to become an activist?

Milan: Thanks to the internet, we can connect with like-minded people globally. Set modest expectations, and you might be pleasantly surprised by the positive impact you can have. Even if you inspire one person, that's success. ■

PRACTICAL TOOLS

To help you on your path as an activist, this section offers practical worksheets designed to guide you through self-reflection, planning, and action. The worksheets provide space for you to write down your thoughts, goals, and strategies, making it easier to organize your efforts and track progress. Use these tools as a roadmap for your activism journey, adjusting them as you evolve and your focus sharpens.

Self-reflection: understanding your interests and strengths

The first step in becoming an effective activist is understanding your own motivations and strengths. This worksheet will help you identify what drives you and what you can bring to the cause.

What are my interests?

List the issues or causes that are most important to you. These might include social justice, environmental sustainability, human rights, or anything else that sparks your passion.

Example: Climate change, racial equality, LGBTQ+ rights

What are my strengths?

Identify the skills, talents, or resources you bring to activism. Are you a strong communicator? Do you have organizing experience or expertise in research? Knowing your strengths helps you focus your energy where you can have the greatest impact.

Example: Good at public speaking, strong writing skills, social media savvy

What are my values?

Reflect on the values that guide your actions and decisions. These might be fairness, empathy, equality, or environmental stewardship. Your values will inform the type of activism you engage in.

Example: Equality, justice, sustainability

Setting goals and understanding your motivations
Clear goals provide direction and purpose. This worksheet helps you outline what you want to achieve and why you're motivated to pursue these goals.

What are my goals?

List your short-term and long-term goals. Be specific and think about what measurable outcomes you want to see.

Short-term example: Organize a community clean-up event.

Long-term example: Influence local policy on climate change.

Why do I want to change this?

Understanding your motivation will help sustain you when challenges arise. Write down why this issue matters to you.

Example: I want future generations to live in a clean, healthy environment.

What do I hope to achieve?

Describe the broader impact you want your activism to have. What will success look like for you?

Example: I want my community to be more engaged in climate action and reduce plastic waste by 30% over the next year.

Where to start and skills you need

Once you know your cause and goals, it's time to identify where to start and what skills you'll need to be effective.

Where do I start?

Write down the first few actions you can take. These might include research, contacting local organizations, or launching a small awareness campaign.

Example: Research existing climate organizations in my area and attend their next meeting.

What skills do I need?

List the skills you'll need to develop or improve to achieve your goals. Do you need better communication skills, organizing experience, or an understanding of social media campaigns?

Example: Learn how to organize events, improve public speaking, gain experience with social media strategies.

Who can help me?

Think about people or organizations that can support you, whether through mentorship, partnerships, or guidance.

Example: Reach out to local environmental groups, ask a friend who's a graphic designer for help with campaign visuals.

Action Plan

Turning your ideas into action requires a plan. Use this worksheet to map out specific steps to take, and assign deadlines to hold yourself accountable. What is my first step?

Start with one manageable action and set a deadline for when you will complete it.

Example: Step – Write a blog post about local recycling efforts. Deadline – Two weeks from today.

What is my next step?

Outline the next action to build momentum. This could involve organizing an event, building a social media presence, or volunteering with an existing group.

Example: Step – Organize a meeting with local activists to discuss future actions. Deadline – One month from today.

How will I track my progress?

Write down how you'll measure success. This could be tracking the number of people you reach, the amount of money you raise, or the impact of an event you organize.

Example: Track the number of attendees at my first event and survey their interest in ongoing engagement.

Checklist for success

This checklist is a practical tool to ensure you're prepared for each stage of your activism. Use it to stay organized and on track as you move forward.

I have identified my cause and interests.

- Yes
- No

I have outlined clear, achievable goals.

- Yes
- No

I know my strengths and areas for improvement.

- Yes
- No

I have a first action step planned and a deadline set.

- Yes
- No

I have identified resources or people who can help me.

- Yes
- No

I have a plan to track my progress and adjust as needed.

- Yes
- No

By filling in these worksheets, you're not just thinking about activism—you're actively planning and taking steps toward making a real difference. These tools are designed to be flexible, so you can revisit and update them as your skills grow and your activism develops.

Remember, activism is a journey. It requires thoughtful planning, resilience, and the willingness to adapt. Stay focused, keep learning, and continue pushing forward with the tools and support available to you. You have the power to inspire change, one step at a time.



**JODY
AIKMAN**

POETRY AND
SPOKEN WORD

Photo: Pressure Line

Resources

Books

- Alledaags Activisme, by Chris Julien, 2024, The Netherlands
- Ben jij al activist, by An Kramer, 2020, The Netherlands
- Castells, M. (2012). Networks of Outrage and Hope: Social Movements in the Internet Age. Polity Press.
- Democratie is niet voor bange mensen, by Marcia Luyten, 2023, The Netherlands
- Freire, P. (2000). Pedagogy of the Oppressed. New York: Bloomsbury.
- Ganz, M. (2010). Leading Change: Leadership, Organization, and Social Movements. Harvard University Press.
- Chenoweth, E., & Stephan, M. J. (2011). Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict. Columbia University Press.
- Levenslang activist. Hans Beerends en de strijd voor een eerlijke wereld, by Ellen Mangnus and Marc Broere, 2022, The Netherlands
- Shaw, R. (2021). The Activist's Handbook: Winning Social Change in the 21st Century. University of California Press.

Articles about activism

<https://www.ewmagazine.nl/onderwerp/activisme/>

Activist resources

<https://activisthandbook.org/nl/resources>. On this page, you find a list of resources for activists. We collected the best sites, books, podcasts, movies, academic articles and blogs related to social change-making. Brought to you by activists from around the globe.

Amnesty International, www.amnesty.org Amnesty International is a global movement of more than 10 million people who are committed to creating a future where human rights are enjoyed by everyone.

Slovakian resources

Shaw, R., 2013. The Activist's Handbook: Winning Social Change in the 21st Century. University of California Press.

Chenoweth, E., Stephan, M. J., 2011. Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict. Columbia University Press.

How to do grassroots activism [5 step plan]. 2021. Available at: <<https://www.ecanvasser.com/blog/how-to-do-grassroots-activism-5-step-plan>>

List of organizations that support youth activism in the Netherlands

Activist Lab voor jonge activisten
<https://justiceandpeace.nl/activist-lab-voor-jonge-activisten/>

PAX Activist Academy
<https://paxvoorvrede.nl/wat-wij-doen/programmas/pax-activist-academy/>

Youth for Climate NL
<https://youthforclimate.nl>

List of organizations that support youth activism in Slovakia

Amnesty International is a global movement focused on human rights protection. The Slovak branch works on campaigns to defend freedom of speech, the rights of marginalized groups, refugees, and women's rights. The organization also carries out educational activities on human rights and monitors their adherence in Slovakia. >
<https://www.amnesty.sk/aktivizmus/>

Saplinq, o.z. - Saplinq is a non-profit organization focused on supporting the LGBT+ community in Slovakia. It runs the PRIZMA community center in Košice, organizes events to raise awareness about LGBT+ rights, and hosts the PRIDE Košice festival. In addition to advocacy, it implements educational activities aimed at inclusion and fighting discrimination.>
<https://www.saplinq.org/>

Áno pre život (Yes for life) - This organization focuses on strengthening civic engagement and supporting active citizens. Through educational activities, workshops, and mentoring, it helps individuals and communities develop their skills to get involved in public life and advocate for their rights. >
<https://anoprezivot.sk/obciansky-aktivizmus-v-praxi/>

Donio - is a crowdfunding and donation platform in Slovakia. It allows individuals and organizations to raise financial support for various projects, ranging from personal and health-related fundraisers to public benefit initiatives. It is known for its transparency and support of a wide range of charitable activities. >
<https://donio.sk/obciansky-aktivizmus>.



 Co-funded by
the European Union

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union and the National Agency Erasmus+ Youth and European Solidarity Corps. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.