

# Peer Mediated Story Board Narratives: A Youth Group Activity for Mental Health and Psychosocial Support<sup>1</sup>

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## What is it?

The Peer Mediated Story Board Narrative (PMSN) activity is designed for individuals 15 years and older who can benefit from an arts-based way to reflect on and share their experiences. It was initially intended for forced migrant youth to express their experiences of migration and how these experiences have affected their identity, sense of belonging, and future aspirations. Experience has shown that this approach can be helpful for youth and adults who may need extra support to remember and make meaning of the past, externalize memories and stories pent up internally, share these mental contents with others, and hear the stories of peers who have been in similar situations.

## What do youth do?

- 1. Create a Story Board.** Youth create a picture showing aspects of their migration (or other) experiences important to them. For example, they may create a picture of their migration journey, including small scenes of critical events or using colours or drawings to signify a difficult experience, new opportunity, or people who helped or caused harm. The quality of 'artwork' is unimportant. The Story Board is mainly used as a medium for youth to reflect, remember, collect their thoughts and feelings, and prepare to open up about their experiences.
  - Youth can use any materials to create their picture. Providing a large poster paper, pencils, inexpensive paints, coloured pens, glue, scissors and other craft supplies is helpful.
- 2. Show and tell.** After creating their Storyboard, youth meet with 4 or 5 peers who have been in similar circumstances. For example, they may all have been forced to migrate and are living in transit. They may all have experienced gender-based violence. They may all have stayed back while parents are working overseas. Youth are asked to volunteer to show they Story Board and explain what it shows. They may go beyond what is shown on the Story Board, which is welcomed. The group continues to meet until all members have shared their Story Board and peers have mediated the sharing session. Often this is 3 or 4 sessions, each 1-2 hours long.
  - The group is led by a facilitator with some training and experience working with youth who have had difficult experiences. The facilitator starts by asking the group members to agree on rules for their interaction, such as: Keep confidentiality, Do not interrupt, Be sensitive when someone is telling about a difficult experience, Provide encouragements, Do not leave the group until all members have shared their stories.
- 3. Peer mediation.** The facilitator encourages peers to comment on the story teller's Story Board or on their account of their experiences. For example: Is there anything they would like to know more about? Is there something puzzling about the story? Was any part of the story similar to your own experiences?
- 4. Facilitator support.** After peers have completed their mediation, the facilitator asks questions to draw out the storyteller further, seeking more detail, and asking strategic questions such as: What did you learn about yourself from how you responded to events in this part of your story? Where did you find the strength to overcome the difficulty you have shared? Who or what helped you the most? What gives you hope?
- 5. An ongoing self-exploration.** Youth are encouraged to continue to work on their Story Board (or start a new one), adding or changing details as their self-reflection and peer sharing leads to more memories or insights.

The Peer Mediated Story Board Narrative activity has been used with forced migrant youth in Malaysia and Thailand. Youth greatly enjoy the activity. They like the opportunity to use arts/craft materials to express their story, sense of identity, belonging and aspirations. They have said it is good to have their story move "from inside the head to outside", which relieves stress. In many groups, sharing with similar youth enhances empathy and creates sustainable peer psychosocial support.

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<sup>1</sup> For more information, please visit [www.youthmigrationproject.com](http://www.youthmigrationproject.com)