Scenario 1 – Youssef, 17, Brussels | 6 months NEET, active refusal

What "I'm not interested in your programs" actually tells you

Before reacting, listen to what's underneath that sentence. It is rarely about the programs themselves. It's usually one of these:

- *"I've already tried and been disappointed."*
- *"I don't trust institutions."*
- *"I don't want to be seen as a problem to be fixed."*
- *"No one has asked me what I actually want."*

The worst response is to pitch a program anyway. That confirms exactly what he suspects: that you weren't really listening.

First-contact strategy

Step 1 — Agree with him.

Not sarcastically. Genuinely.

"Honestly, a lot of the programs aren't great. I get it."

This is disarming. It signals that you're not a salesperson for an institution. It creates a crack in the wall.

Step 2 — Get curious, not corrective.

Shift from persuasion to inquiry. Ask open questions with no agenda attached:

- *"What would actually be useful to you right now?"*
- *"What did you try before? What put you off?"*
- *"What's a normal day like for you at the moment?"*

The goal here is **not** to gather intake information. It's to signal that his perspective is the starting point — not your referral grid.

Step 3 — Don't rush toward a solution.

Resist the professional reflex to have an answer ready. Sit with what he says. Youssef is 17 — he likely has very good radar for when an **adult is listening versus waiting to speak**. Silence and genuine curiosity are more powerful than any program description.

Step 4 — Name the relationship, not the service.

"I'm not here to enrol you in anything. I just come by this area sometimes. If you ever want to talk, I'm around."

This removes the pressure. It repositions you **as a person, not a procedure**. With young people who distrust institutions, **the relationship is the intervention** — everything else comes later, if at all.

Step 5 — Leave something small and concrete.

Not a brochure. A direct number — yours. A specific time you'll be back. Something that makes the next contact low-cost and low-risk for him.

Assumptions to challenge

Assumption	**What to question instead**
"He's resistant."	Resistance is information. He's engaged enough to respond — that's already contact.
"Six months is a long time to be doing nothing."	What does his six months actually look like? Informal work, caring for family, creative activity, surviving something? **NEET is an administrative category, not a description of a life**.
"He needs to be motivated."	He may be highly motivated — just not toward what's on offer. The mismatch is between his goals and the available pathways, not between him and effort.
"He's the hard case."	An articulate, direct refusal is easier to work with than silence or compliance without buy-in. Youssef is telling you exactly where the boundary is — that's a starting point.
"My job is to get him into something."	Your job at first contact is to become someone he might talk to again. That's it.

The underlying principle

The refusal is not the obstacle — **it's the opening.**

He showed up to the conversation. He told you something true. In youth outreach, that's more than you often get. First contact is successful if he walks away thinking: *"that person was different."* Not if he signs anything.