Scenario 1 – Brussels: 8 disaffiliated youth, refused verbal workshops

Room + art supplies + camera → What do you build?

1. **First: why they refused verbal workshops**

Verbal workshops require you to:

- articulate things you may not have words for
- perform in front of others
- be evaluated, even implicitly
- trust that what you say won't be used against you

Disaffiliated young people have often learned — correctly — that talking to adults in institutional settings carries risk. The refusal isn't apathy. It's self-protection. Any activity you design has to make that self-protection unnecessary.

2. **The activity: "What they don't see"**

A photo and image-making project built around one simple, non-therapeutic prompt:

"Show something about your neighbourhood / your life / yourself that people get wrong."

No therapy framing. No "express your feelings." A concrete, almost journalistic task that positions them as **experts and authors**, not subjects.

3. **How you open the space**

What you don't do:

- Don't open with a circle and introductions
- Don't explain the "goal" of the session in outcome language
- Don't ask them to share anything about themselves first

4. **What you do instead:**

Walk in. Lay everything out on the tables — cameras, phones (if their own are allowed), art supplies, magazines, printed photos of Brussels neighbourhoods — without explanation. Let the materials create curiosity before you say a word.

Then say something like:

"There's no workshop today. We have this room and this stuff. The only thing I'm asking is: use it to show something true about your world that most people miss. You can photograph it, draw it, collage it, write on it — whatever. You don't have to show me anything you don't want to."

Then sit down. Do something yourself — sketch, handle a camera. Don't hover.

5. **The structure (loose enough to feel free, tight enough to hold)**

Phase	What happens	Your role
0–10 min	Materials out, silence, people drifting in	Présent, non-intrusif
10–30 min	Individual or pair exploration, no obligation to produce	Available if approached, not circulating to check
30–60 min	Making something — photo walk if they want to go outside, collage, drawing, annotating images	Follow their lead on collaboration
Last 10 min	Optional: lay everything on the floor and look at it together	*"What surprised you?"* — not *"What did you learn?"*

The final sharing is optional and never evaluated. The only question you ask is one you're genuinely curious about.

6. **Why the camera specifically**

The camera does something art supplies alone don't: it **reverses the gaze**.

These young people have spent years being observed, assessed, and documented by institutions. Putting a camera in their hands says: ***you decide what's worth looking at***. That's a significant symbolic shift — and for some, a genuinely new experience.

Photography also requires going somewhere, looking at something, making a decision. It creates natural movement and small collaborations without requiring anyone to declare that they're "participating."

7. **What you're actually building**

Not a portfolio. Not evidence of engagement for a funder report.

You're building **three things that verbal workshops can't reach:**

1. **A non-threatening reason to come back.** The session ends with something made — something that belongs to them, not to you. That's a reason to return.
2. **Lateral relationships between participants.** Side-by-side making creates conversation that a circle never does. They'll talk to each other about what they're doing, which is more valuable than anything they'd say to you.
3. **A self-image that isn't deficit-based.** They produced something. They had a perspective worth capturing. That's a different starting point than any intake form.

Assumptions to challenge

Assumption	What to question
"They need to talk to progress."	Articulation can come later — or through different forms. Making is also processing.
"The activity is the means, the verbal debrief is the goal."	For some young people, the making *is* the goal. Not everything needs to be converted into words to have value.
"Refusing workshops means refusing help."	It means refusing *that form* of help. The task is to find the form that fits, not to convince them the existing form is fine.
"I need to see engagement to know it's working."	Someone sitting quietly looking at what someone else made is engaged. Someone who photographs one thing and stops is engaged. Don't measure by output.
"Safety means no conflict."	A room where someone tears up a collage because it felt wrong is safer than a room where everyone is performing compliance. Real safety allows negative reactions.

The principle underneath all of this

Authorship is the intervention.

The moment a young person decides what the camera points at, they've made a choice that matters. That's where disaffiliation begins to loosen — not through a program, but through an experience of agency, however small, in a room where no one took it from them.