

2021 Slovenia Tune-In: Insights and Responses

Each insight and response seems to build on the other. Insights and responses aren't mutually exclusive. We also were thankful to have Rachel Berkebille, from Germany contribute her findings as well, so though we sought to analyze these insights within the Slovene context, some of our general findings were similar.

INSIGHT #1: There is a general awareness that we all have an internal struggle that needs attention and health.

Mental health is a trend right now. Actual knowledge among youth on the topic of mental health seems to vary widely. There is a wide spectrum ranging everywhere from the overuse and misuse of trendy catch-phrases from those informed only through social media to the other extreme of deep concern (especially highlighted during the pandemic) and incredibly intense and even traumatic personal experiences (therapy, suicidal friends, etc.). Either way, with mental health awareness and common terminology, **there seems to be a general understanding among youth that things inside of us are “messed up” and need to be cared for or need “help” moving toward health.**

RESPONSE #1: Let's pay attention to how we talk about “sin” and affirm this struggle!

Oftentimes we refer to “sin” as a “legal and moral action or offense against a Holy God,” which it is. But the emphasis can often lie solely on the *action*, rather than on the *heart*, which is the root cause or source of the action (Mark 7:15). We may want to pay attention to where youth are aware of their own internal brokenness and affirm that it exists. It may also be helpful at times when defining sin, to **use the language of “brokenness of the heart”** and as an issue or struggle inside of us that needs healing and rescue. This also leads to the obvious opportunity to point out that they need something *external* to rescue them or to bring them internal health, eventually pointing to the hope of Christ.

Furthermore, it is also worth considering that the youth in Slovenia seem to be quick to go to places of shame (this is a bonus insight #1b). For example, conversations about sin can quickly lead to “shame on you” for that illegal action or offense or end with them concluding, “I should just do better.” However, **affirming the internal struggle that youth are experiencing and agreeing with their awareness that they actually cannot, in fact, “do better” or act “differently” without something in their heart being made new or brought to health, could be incredibly freeing and refreshing news!** Additionally, we can be transparent about our own brokenness and talk about how Jesus came to bring freedom and health to us and that freedom and health is available to them as well! This leads us to our next insight and response...

INSIGHT #2: Youth are hit with a lot of general info and people telling them how to live and improve their mental health.

Being that mental health is a trend right now, there is a lot of buzz and noise on social media full of a variety of *general* advice and information. Additionally, based on the design of algorithms, this social-media content is structured, designed, and even developed not to *freely give* wisdom for life, but to *gain* the most likes, views, followers, and shares. Youth are overwhelmed and have highly developed filters for processing this information and advice because they are keenly aware of the fact that those creating the content want their attention for their own profit.

RESPONSE #2: Talk personally about Jesus, introduce young people to him, don't simply recommend the gospel as an abstract set of truths to adopt.

But we don't just have a general set of truths to adopt, we have personal experience. The gospel is the *person* of Jesus and we *know him*. He lives in us and we walk with him, and he shapes and transforms our lives every day. We may want to consider opportunities to talk personally about Jesus and our experiences

in real-time as we're walking with him each day. These kinds of real-time stories point to the intensity and the reality of the salvation that Jesus offers. Being honest, raw, authentic, and vulnerable with our experience and our story often gets past the fine-tuned "they're out to get something from me" filters that youth have developed.

INSIGHT #3: Youth want safe spaces to process and have meaningful and authentic conversation.

Possibly due to social media overdose, pandemic, and the mental health trend, many young people voiced their longing for authentic spaces where they can be with their friends, have true life experiences, and even process their thoughts and feelings in a non-judgemental environment. Additionally, and even ironic in light of their own admission that they can't often help or change themselves, youth expressed a desire to contribute toward the common good and improvement of society and the earth.

RESPONSE #3: Create and cultivate safe spaces for deep and meaningful conversations, in relationships and in the programs we design.

Consider creating a **safe space for conversations** about heart stuff, mental health, family/parent relationships, whether that be in a program or just in regular relationships and conversation. Become knowledgeable about mental health and gain a general understanding of the trends and advice out there so you can be aware and engage the topic in a meaningful way with youth and in a way that points to the hope of Jesus.

For example, in thinking about **camp, the types of activities we offer and even promote, can go far beyond "fun and games."** The invitation can be more than simply, **"come have a good time at camp."** It seems here that we have greater opportunity to be more bold and open with our intent to have deep and meaningful conversations during these activities, to advertise it even. This could include activities or events that include or are centered around experiential learning, outreach events, service projects, and types of activities that promote the "good of society." Additionally, we could offer a group experience that allows space for debriefing afterwards, talking about how it went in terms of: personal growth, fears, team strengths, weaknesses, challenges, being pushed, "doing real life hard things while talking about real life hard things", communication, personal development, etc. Activities that follow this two part "experience" followed by a "debrief" model meet both desires for meaningful connection with people as well as a space to process thoughts and emotions in a safe environment.

Additional insights from Staff Meeting 6.10.21

-They are hungry for safe places where they can feel heard.

-Question: What space do they see as a "safe space" - how do they cope with the loneliness?

-Longing for normalcy after Covid lockdown/quarantine.

-There is a sense of loss of identity. I.e. Pre Covid, would consider themselves introverts and now they are longing for connection and being with people.

-Hope for the future: school, money, approval, jobs they actually want to do and are passionate about, helping others, being "normal" in society's eyes (getting married, making my family happy, etc.)