

Group Work

Task 1

Alberte has written a debate post for a newspaper, where she describes how she has evolved since primary school.
Find the post on the last pages

Read the debate post and discuss

- 1) What do you think the red notebook represented to Alberte?
- 2) Why do you think it is difficult for Alberte to say that she needs others?
- 3) Why do you think it is important for Alberte to tell her story?
- 4) What message in the post do you think is the most important to give other young people?

Task 2

Martine talks about what loneliness has felt like for her. Find the film on the website.

Watch the film and discuss

- 1) What are 'the rules of the game' that Martine talks about, and what impact can they have on class communities?
- 2) Martine talks about how her class mates changed their behavior when they learned that she did actually want to be a part of the community. Why do you think they were unaware?
- 3) How does Martine's body language and tone develop during the film?
- 4) What message do you think is the most important to give other young people?

Task 3

Kasper puts loneliness into words and talks about how Ventilen has been a game changer. Find the film on the website.

Watch the film and discuss

- 1) What are your thoughts on why the others stopped inviting him?
- 2) Why do you think it took this long and became this serious, before Kasper sought out help?
- 3) What is Kasper's experience when he arrives at Ventilen?
- 4) What message do you think is the most important to give other young people?

Debate post

Community is not always a common thing

During my last few years of primary school, I had in my backpack a large red notebook. It became my escape from the schoolyard, a free space where I could draw and put my frustrations into words. In 2010, when I was 14 years old and attending 8th grade, I wrote:

"I tell myself I can do this. One more year. The same scornful glances. I say that I can, but fail every time. I fall in the sand, but get up with bloody knees, and a violent headache - with the urge to scream and cry. But I'm quiet, alone. Closing me inside myself. Closing off the mind and thinking too much."

In the end I had to give in to the disappointment and bullying and convince myself that I did not belong in the class community. I was not exactly being easy on myself, so when this year had passed and I was "free", it all became much more difficult.

Too actively and mostly without very up-front, I said no to communities - despite the fact that I am enormously social minded. I continued the bullying against myself, in fact, until two years ago. Suddenly, the scornful glances in the quote were no longer just from those in my school – they became the ones I saw myself with.

When I started my studies, I thought that this must be my opportunity to achieve what I wanted in primary school. To join a "group" and be part of a community. It did not take long before I fell back into the patterns of my 14-year-old self – telling myself that we are not invited, because we are not good enough.

The truth is I did not quite know how to behave in such a community. On the contrary, I have forced myself, with galloping anxiety, to go to the cinema and to the café alone. The scornful glances were now telling me that people who saw me would think that I am a weirdo without any friends. Because that is how I felt. I even spend New Year's Eve alone in hopes of fixing the enormous loneliness I had now built up.

It is not more than half a year ago that I put an end to that thought. We were on an outing with the class, and when we had some free time, I walked around by myself listening to an audiobook. Ironically, about vulnerability and shame.

When I got on the bus, one of my classmates said that I should have asked her - because then I could have gone with her and not be alone. Almost without thinking, I replied something along the lines of: "No thank you, I like to be alone." It is more or less a lie. I do like both, but right then and there I would have liked to have been with others. On the way home in the bus, it dawned on me that this was my vulnerability. Putting the cards on the table and admitting I need others. It was hugely embarrassing for me.

In fact, I ended up telling this to the girl a few weeks later. It is a step in the right direction. One is not always alone, and a community is not always something one a common thing. Nor is it often something you have decided for yourself. But with a friendly hand like the one I got - then you can make room for friendly glances.

Another step the right direction was becoming a volunteer at Ventilen Danmark. Suddenly I found myself in a community, a group. Even one with room to say these things out loud without the

associated shame - on the contrary with an enormous strength. All of a sudden I was no longer the weirdo I had felt for a long time, but I was the one who faced many people with a new kind of vulnerability and strength - hoping to inspire and make the world a little less lonely place. Because that was what it suddenly became to me, light and enormously humble.

So in the end, there was nothing to fix but a lot to share.

Alberte Dommerby Kristensen is a nursing student and volunteer at Ventilen Danmark.