I will present a case study of a Human Rights- photo exhibition made by young politicians at the Falstad Centre - in the aftermath of the terror attacks on 22 July. The title of the exhibition was “A reply from Norways Youth after 22 july”.

On 22 July, 2011 at 3.25 in the afternoon a 950 kilogram homemade bomb exploded at the Norwegian government complex in Oslo. 8 people were killed instantly, 10 people suffered life threatening injuries. Additionally the bomb caused traumas as well as minor injuries to a great number of people.

Yet more was to come. Aprox 35 km’s west of Oslo, 564 young people were staying at the idyllic Utøya Island attending a political Youth camp. They were the terrorist’s main target. Over the next two hours 69 people were shot dead at the island, an even greater number wounded and traumatized.

Massive material destruction was caused by the terrorist. Physical damage and traumas were brought upon, I dear say, a whole nation. “Norway” suffered a total loss of 77 human lives. The future democracy itself felt under attack. The young and their values, on that day, became a main target of terrorism. The Committed Youth who wanted to contribute to society. Young people who eagerly wanted to bring on to the future important values through their political work.

In the aftermath of terror many of us joined in and showed that we have a common belief in democracy, human rights and values like openness, togetherness and equality. But how could the Falstad Centre possibly contribute turning the traumatic terror experience into learning about, for and through human rights in order to empower young people to prevent human rights abuses in the future?

How to strengthen the belief in human rights and not least the capacity to act according to it, whilst dealing with terror experiences?
The Falstad Centre is at present a national memorial, museum and a human rights center situated in the middle of Norway. The Falstad main building has throughout history had several functions. Built as a reformatory school, transformed into a German Nazi prison camp, the SS Strafgefangenenlager Falstad in 1941, then after the 2nd world war transformed into a prison and labour camp for collaborators, eventually transformed into a school for children with special needs.

At present The Falstad centre is situated in the building that once served as the main building of the SS camp. Research and Education on World War II history and Human Rights are our core activities. The site itself is one of our most important tools for both learning about, for and not least learning through history and human rights.

Dewey states that all institutions dealing with education and learning processes have a responsibility to empower the young to reflect critically upon well established mindsets. Dialogue is our most efficient tool according to him. But if we are to create constructive dialogues across party-political divides, we have to find arenas where it feels safe to bring up important and difficult issues, and where everyone can feel that they are taken seriously.

The Falstad Centre has no religious or party-political affiliation, the place represents a past that, like the terror on 22 July, was experienced by many as traumatic. One can point out a line from the history of the place during the 2nd WW and to the creation of the Human Rights declaration as a result of the world’s determination to learn from history. Our mandate is to strengthen democracy and the Human rights legacy. It is therefore an ideal place for creating a common ground for dialogue on values basic for the UN declaration on human rights.

The Norwegian Prime minister on 22 July stated that the terror was to be answered with more openness and more democracy. He thereby pointed out a direction ahead. And it is his responsibility to lead the way but not to construct it. It is our common responsibility to build and maintain the road forward. And we depend on our young to participate, to be involved in the process. The Falstad Centre is but one appropriate arena for dealing with these issues. In fact we have an obligation to provide the sufficient framework for Young people to act upon any injustice.
In October 2011, in the aftermath of the terror attacks, the Falstad Centre gathered young politicians to a workshop on how to strengthen dialogue on what pillars the future democracy should rest on. Methods and content was planned in order to capture the three dimensions of learning about, for and through human rights.

During the dialogue workshop the young politicians were challenged to express themselves through photographs by creating one of our temporary exhibitions. The photos were required to illustrate their thoughts on important values for the past, present and future, as well as the importance of Human Rights, as a reply to the terror!

Some practical preparation for the exhibition was necessary. 15 Nicon Coolpix Cameras were bought at approx. 30 pounds each, the least advanced and equally least expensive camera on the market. Frames were bought from Ikea at low cost. Software was installed on a computer, in order to be able to edit the photos. In our case this was (adobe) Photoshop, but one might just as well use any editing software program. A local company was appointed to take care of the print. A photographer was hired to supervise on technicalities and motive, and my colleagues and I chaired and supervised too. A grand opening of the exhibition was prepared. The Mayor was invited to officially open the exhibition, and he eagerly accepted the invitation. The regional press was invited to cover the opening.

The photographers together made an exhibition that, in the aftermath of terror, expresses grief, loss and emptiness, but also openness, mutual dependence and a belief in humanity and the future of a democratic society.

Photography is a powerful medium. It can invoke reflections and feelings, it can also communicate what cannot be expressed in words. The photo exhibition “A reply from Norway’s youth” emphasizes important values such as freedom of speech, freedom from discrimination, solidarity and responsibility to promote and protect the rights of one self and others as a basis for the way forward after the terror attacks.
By being in charge of the exhibition the young politicians also were in charge of their own developing process, each contributing at their individual, subjective starting point. With adequate methods and means, competently supervised, if I might say so, and by creative social interaction and dialogue the young politicians empowered themselves and their ability to act for human Rights, learning through human rights; first and foremost through exercising their right to freedom of speech. They themselves constructed a common platform to deal with questions concerning the future.

The photo exhibition shows how a museum, memorial and HR Centre through active involvement of Young politicians in the development of the museum exhibitions, can strengthen dialogue on human rights topics across political divisions and through artistic expressions, in the aftermath of terror, hereby empowering the young people.

Young people’s commitment was attempted silenced on 22.july 2011 but is more than ever needed. Their reply to the terror really deserves to be heard and respected. So I will proceed showing some of the replys:


Photo page 9 in the exhibition catalogue: From Hanna, Kristoffer and Jiem-fuong: The photo has no title, but shows a strong belief in erasing divides, establishing a common ground in order to build the future with black and white separated in the first picture, but gathered and mixed in the last picture.

Photo page 25 in the exhibition catalogue: From Tore: ice cubes in water. The photo was commented as follows by another of the photographers Christine: After 22 July all the cold elements have, in a way, melted, and it’s much warmer now. We are much closer.

Photo page 13 in the exhibition catalogue: This reply is from Renate: Renate herself survived the terror at Utøya, but lost her boyfriend and many of her friends. Within the empty frames you can see more empty frames. The empty frames symbolize her loss and others. Renate
has a hope for the future; “these frames need to be filled again. During the work with the photo exhibition I understood that it is not my job alone to give these frames new content. We have to do the work together”!

Photo page 23 in the exhibition catalogue: The reply from Mari has no title, but is portraying a girl, the future herself maybe? The girl is literarily overthrown with positive expressions. This photo was by the way not edited. The girl on the picture is in fact standing in front of a word document projected on a wall. Words like love, peace, education, hope surrounds her.

Page 28, back of the catalogue: Although Evens reply “Shades of gray” was part of the exhibition, it is left out from the catalogue. Someone had second thoughts about participating in a picture that contained a swastika. You might know that the terrorist associated himself with the extreme right, and sympathized with parts of the nazi ideology. Through further dialogue, a solution was found, that seemed agreeable to all. Even wrote his thoughts on the future by commenting his own photo, and we published this reply instead of the actual photo. Even comments his reply to terrorism like this:

“In my photo four people are separated by a swastika, they stand with their heads lowered and their backs bent. But then they turn around and destroy what divides them. In the end the four individuals stand face-to-face with their heads raised and with the colors and nuances of the photo emerging. They are standing on the ruins of what separated them, a new future may now be built. “Four people, four pictures in one, one act. Young people fighting for recognition, love, music and much, much more. Young people fighting against injustice, bullying, hatred, homophobia, pressure, Nazism and far too much more.

Young people are the future, we will be the leaders of tomorrow’s world and we are going to live in it. We fight for what we believe in, and against what we find destructive!!!!”

Through the responsibility given them by making one of the museums temporary exhibitions the youth interacted and made a common ground as basis for tomorrow’s democracy. The photo exhibition was a result of dialogue as opposed to debate. It was a product of
explaining rather than accusing, for understanding rather than defending, and for acting together as opposed to competing. It was a result of the determination of our young politicians to find a common ground based on important values for our future democracy to rest on.

The Falstad Centre, by its role as human rights centre, supported by its past, on this occasion proved to be a suitable arena for empowering young people to protect human rights and to focus on preventing human rights abuses in the future dealing with traumatic terror experiences.