Professional Open Youth Work
Declaration of Principles
Mapping Professional Open Youth Work in Europe

Ten partners from various realities (grass root youth work, umbrella organisations, formal education) and nine European countries committed to a Strategic Partnership to draw a clearer picture of what we mean by professional open youth work in Europe. The project highlighted effects and values of this field of action and produced with LOGBOOK a new platform for information, exchange of knowledge and debate. Another important outcome is this Declaration of Principles of Professional Open Youth Work that gives an insight in a common definition and basic principles.

Introduction

There have been various attempts at finding common ground on youth work in Europe. Studies from 2009 and 2013 as well as the two European Youth Work Conventions (2010 and 2015) highlighted differences and worked on finding common ground. These exercises were often inclusive, trying to cover the whole range of different youth work practices. Still, they also motivated specific forms of youth work to develop their own clear profile and thus a common voice and impact on European Level. Consequently, professionals working with young people in an open youth work setting aimed at mapping their profession by creating a common definition and a set of working principles that could serve the field as reference point.
Definition

Professional Open Youth Work is a profession that is practised by trained and educated workers who commit to codes of ethic and quality standards and are paid for their work. It is a practice of non-formal and informal learning. It is offered on a universal basis and open for all young people who voluntarily choose to participate. It is based on pedagogical concepts that aim to raise the emancipation and empowerment of young people as well as their critical awareness. Professional Open Youth Work fosters the ability to critically evaluate one’s own individual situation in relation to others and society, applying a variety of methods aimed at the young peoples’ personal and social development and social inclusion, hence empowering them for social change. It especially seeks to support and empower young people that are in a marginalized or vulnerable situation. Its approach is holistic and inclusive of young people, focusing on their talents, potentials and interests, seeing them as an asset and not as a deficit. It provides for a professional stable relationship between young people and youth workers that is based on dialogue and which is not judgemental. It seeks to create a sense of belonging and strengthens resilience in young people. Offers are co-created with the young people, with support from the youth worker. It actively advocates and promotes the interests of young people at all relevant levels.

Professional Open Youth Work

- creates a safe space* where young people can experiment, associate, meet peers and grow as an individual in a positive and supportive environment.
- provides experiences and activities that foster the acquisition of new skills and competences, broaden horizons and contribute to their personal development.
- creates a stable, respectful and meaningful relationship, based on dialogue and complementary to other relationships such as family, friends, school and work.
- creates opportunities for young people to make positive experiences and supports their participation in their local community and the wider society for empowering them.
- raises the social and (inter-)cultural skills and competences of young people and thus fosters their inclusion in society.
- applies a holistic approach in all its interactions with young people and supports them during periods of transition, especially during their adolescent years.
- reaches out to all young people including those not actively attending youth work offers and fosters good relations with all other groups present in the community.

* safe space

A physical, temporal, digital or emotional space in which young people can interact with their peers and with youth workers in a positive and secure environment.
# PRINCIPLES

## PROFESSIONAL OPEN YOUTH WORK...

1. **is based on stable and meaningful relationships between youth workers and young people, where professionals build and maintain trust and clearly define boundaries.**

2. **is a low threshold practice with a welcoming, friendly and inclusive atmosphere, which is interesting and fun. It provides an open arena for young people to meet, where they can experiment with their own ideas, with different role models and social interaction in a non-judgemental and safe environment or receive need-based support in case of problems or difficulties.**

3. **applies co-creation and co-production as basic working methods whenever possible.**

4. **requires professionals to be aware of the influence their behaviour has on the young people and to act accordingly.**

5. **is responsive to the needs and aspirations of young people and reacts with empathy, flexibility and positivity to issues, changes of situation/mind or crisis of any young person involved. This includes maintaining a professional network and in case of need channelling young people to the appropriate service.**

6. **takes an active role in advocating and promoting the needs and interests of young people.**

7. **is aware of its position in relation to other fields of action concerned with young people and maintains active networks with relevant individuals / organisations with whom it cooperates for the benefit of young people.**

8. **describes, explains and promotes its work in a professional way.**

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9. **...is open to all young people on a voluntary basis.**

10. **bases its offers and services on a sound pedagogical knowledge. It adapts to the needs of the individuals and groups it is working with and is open to innovation and calculated risks. It is run by educated youth workers who are responsible for leading teams consisting also of other professions and/or volunteers.**

11. **uses informal and non-formal learning methods and adapts them to the respective needs of the process and the young people.**

12. **supports young people in realising their talents and developing their skills and competences also by providing a variety of services and facilitating diverse activities.**

13. **fosters responsibility in young people by establishing clear rules in its settings and drawing consequences while keeping the dialogue open also in case of initial failure.**

14. **gives young people a second chance by creating an environment that allows failure and uses it for educational processes without judging the person.**

15. **respects the individual it works with and treats the personal information given by young people with confidentiality. It emphasises the importance of mutual respect in all its activities and through dialogue supports the young persons in their own path towards a respectful interaction with peers and other parts of society.**

16. **applies a reflective and critical approach to its performance and uses quantitative and qualitative methods, valuing especially the feedback of young people themselves, to monitor and evaluate its work.**

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Professional Open Youth Work in Europe
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