

GOOD PRACTICE FOR YOUTH CENTRES

Support material for youth centres on establishment, development, support and involvement in cooperation

Foreword

Youth work at youth centres is called the STORIES.

Youth work is not about NUMBERS.

The growth and development of a young person is a PROCESS.

Participation in youth work is a personal STORY for every young person.

Youth work in Estonia is full of opportunities. Every young person can create their story, choose their development path and participate in the participatory process according to his or her opportunities. Today, various youth centres, hobby schools, camps, student brigades, youth associations, youth clubs, youth participation councils, youth activists etc. are active in Estonia. Youth work can function near a school, church or community centre. According to the diversity of services and activities, the specific features of a building etc., the name of a youth work agency may be a youth centre, youth house, youth hall etc. None of the youth work agencies or forms of participation mentioned above is more important than others. Each institution has its goals, specifications; however, they observe the principles of youth work. Meeting the needs and expectations of young people and society is fundamental.

This document focuses mainly on bringing out the values of establishing or developing a youth centre. A young person does not enter the door of a youth centre or hobby school knowing that he or she will take part in youth work. The role of people, leading and organising youth centres and others in the field of youth work, is to provide young people with the necessary support. A young person must be guaranteed opportunities based on his or her interests and abilities. The surrounding network has to take it into account, accompany it, play a role and support the young person as far as it is necessary.

The establishment of good practice for youth centres was conditioned by the fact that there is no coherent and uniform national regulation for youth centres in Estonia; there are no laws, standards or operational models for youth centres. Youth work is organised in compliance with the local authority's perceptions and capabilities, and therefore, youth centres and regional services are different. It enriches the landscape of youth work but does not always guarantee equal opportunities for young people.

Based on the above, MTÜ Eesti Avatud Noortekeskuste Ühendus (Association of Estonian Open Youth Centres, AEYC) started to develop good practice for youth centres in Estonia in 2012. Young people of youth centres in Estonia¹, the members of AEYC and experts from different levels in the field participated in the creation of the document, and this good practice for youth centres in Estonia reflects the experiences of the members of AEYC and common understandings of operating principles of youth centres. In 2018, the document was upgraded and improved according to other documents regulating the field, and based on the opinions and experience of the representatives of youth centres. The document has been funded financially by the Council of the Gambling Tax and the National Foundation of Civil Society. The document is indicative and in constant development, as is the landscape of Estonian youth work. It is not the final truth.

For AEYC, a youth centre means competent youth workers who knowingly act based on a targeted action plan/programme in an environment conducive to activities.

We hope that the Good Practice of Youth Centres will contribute to the creation of young people's own stories in your area!

¹Youth seminar 'Why youth work', supported by SANA

1. STARTING A YOUTH CENTRE

1.1. Starting a youth centre is a conscious choice.

- 1.1.1. In youth work, the needs and opportunities of young people in the region are mapped.
- 1.1.2. In planning the activities of a youth centre, activities already being offered to young people (hobby groups, hobby school, sports club etc.), have been studied.
- 1.1.3. The wishes of young people have been found out, and the age distribution of young people in the region, their preferences, problems, values and visions of the area taken into account.

1.2. Youth centre is open at least 20 to 30 hours a week and available to all young people in the service area.

- 1.2.1. A youth centre is located in a location, accessible to young people (for example, in the centre of the settlement), where young people move on a daily basis. Access to the youth centre, for example, by public transport, is guaranteed to young people outside the centre of the settlement.
- 1.2.2. A youth centre has access, and opportunities, for young people with special physical needs.

1.3. All young people have equal opportunities to visit a youth centre and use the service.

- 1.3.1. A youth centre is guided by principles of open youth work (see Annex 1) that ensure the voluntary participation of young people in the centre's activities, are developing, age-appropriate and correspond to a young person's abilities, are free of charge, and create equal opportunities for every young person irrespective of sex, skin colour, beliefs and cultural heritage.
- 1.3.2. A youth centre is an active, creative and identity-supporting, safe and inclusive development environment for young people.
- 1.3.3. A youth centre is apolitical, without a religious preference, and in its activities, is guided by the laws and legal acts of the Republic of Estonia, by supporting and directing young people in their interests.

2. PREMISES OF A YOUTH CENTRE

2.1. Youth centre has modern environment and opportunities for various activities.

- 2.1.1. A youth centre is located in a separate building, constructed for the purpose, with facilities for a variety of services. Should the youth centre be located in the same building with another establishment, the centre must be provided with a separate entrance to ensure neutral entry. For youth work activities, it is recommended to provide a room of at least 4 m² per young person.
- 2.1.2. A youth centre's premises are designed from a safety perspective and with the help of young people, based on their needs and desires. The premises of a youth centre meet the regional needs and opportunities. A secure and cosy environment creates a prerequisite for involving young people.
- 2.1.3. A youth centre has a wide range of operational tools, the acquirement, renewal and supplementing of which has taken into account the needs, suggestions, feedback and safety of young people.

2.2. Risk assessment has been carried out for the youth centre's premises, and the work environment has been adjusted for employees to comply with the laws of the Republic of Estonia.

2.3. The environment of a youth centre and the services provided must be in line.

- 2.3.1. Durable materials, used in a youth centre (colours, operational tools etc.), are not harmful to health and are based on the needs of young people. This contributes to shaping the development environment.
- 2.3.2. The interior design of a youth centre is based on functional furniture and the option of rearrangement if needed.
- 2.3.3. A youth centre has a so-called open space*. It is a neutral zone where young people can spend their time, communicate with other young people etc. The open space allows a youth worker to

directly establish contacts and develop a conversation, learn about young people, hear their opinions and address current issues, relevant to young people and give guidance on solutions, as well as support young people's initiatives based on their individual needs and preferences.

- 2.3.4. There is a space, that is separate from the open space, for carrying out various activities without interruption.
- 2.3.5. A youth centre has a space for a youth worker for individual work with young people.
- 2.3.6. A youth centre has a workspace for a youth worker for storing documentation, work equipment and documents related to sensitive data based on the Personal Data Protection Act².

3. PERSONNEL OF A YOUTH CENTRE

The Youth Work Act³ and the Child Protection Act⁴ outline the regulations for working as a youth worker.

3.1. Youth centre employs competent and motivated professionals.

- 3.1.1. Employees for a youth centre are found through competitions, interviews and training days.
- 3.1.2. A youth centre must have youth workers according to the number of young people visiting the youth centre. A specialist with a minimum of 0.5 workload credits is needed to manage the work of a youth centre.
 - 3.1.2.1. The working time of a youth worker includes the preparatory activities of the centre's work, the substantive activities of youth work, cooperation activities between youth work and associated field, participation in training, multi-day outdoor events, keeping up with changing needs etc.
 - 3.1.2.2. An employer provides an additional remuneration or additional day off to a youth worker for work outside working hours.
- 3.1.3. A youth centre must have support staff (e.g. a cleaning person, administrator etc.) in addition to the manager/youth worker.
 - 3.1.3.1. Planning the number of workers at a youth centre is based on the spatial needs of the centre and the number of young people visiting the youth centre. A youth centre should employ at least one youth worker for every 15 young people.

3.2. A youth worker has or is acquiring professional education in youth work or an associated field, and or has acquired the profession of a youth worker⁵.

3.3. Employees of a youth centre work in compliance with the Youth Work Act, the professional standard and professional ethics for youth workers⁶.

3.4. An employer is aware of a youth worker's training needs, and the options for refresher training courses are based thereon.

- 3.4.1. Employees are provided with an opportunity to take part in refresher training courses at least once every three months.

3.5. An employment contract and a work instruction specify the duties of the personnel of a youth centre.

3.6. An employer has developed a system for motivating and recognising youth workers. Every year, youth workers are recognised with an award ceremony and or a reward.

3.7. A youth worker is an education specialist in the field of non-formal learning. Terms and conditions of a youth worker's remuneration and rest period are related to terms and conditions of other specialists in the field of education (e.g. a teacher etc.).

² Personal Data Protection Act: <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/akt/130122010011>

³ Youth Work Act: <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/akt/104072017039>

⁴ Republic of Estonia Child Protection Act: <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/akt/106122014003>

⁵ Professional standard for a youth worker: https://www.entk.ee/sites/default/files/Noorsoootajaja_kutsestandard_2018_EST.pdf

⁶ Professional ethics for youth work: <https://www.kutsekoda.ee/et/kutseregister/kutsestandardid/10667774/lisad/10667802/lisa-4kutseeetika-noorsootoospdf>

4. LEGISLATION, DOCUMENTATION AND SAFETY

- 4.1. Youth work complies with the Youth Work Act and principles, nationally agreed goals and professional ethics.**
- 4.2. The sustainable activity of a youth centre is based on a sectoral development plan, the founding process of which also includes other youth organisations in the region as well as young people.**
- 4.2.1. Supporting documents of the development plan of the youth sector in Estonia⁷ and youth work at the European Union⁸ level have been taken into account in the establishment of the development plan.
- 4.3. The basis for a youth centre's activities is the articles of association/statutes and internal work procedure rules of the youth centre, also the regulations and orders of the local authority, the council and the management board of the non-profit association.**
- 4.3.1. Supporting documents of high-quality and targeted youth work are as follows: articles of association/statutes of a youth centre, sectoral development plan, job descriptions, service standards, rules of procedure, accounting regulation, wage regulation, service contracts, work schedules, cooperative agreements, information and communication plans, archiving regulation, procedure for recognising young people and youth workers, forms for participants, and other relevant and appropriate documents.
- 4.4. When planning activities, a youth centre proceeds from the development plan, based on which the annual action plan of the youth centre is prepared.**
- 4.5. At least once a year, a youth centre conducts feedback and satisfaction surveys. Young people have the opportunity to express their opinions and make suggestions anonymously, through interviews, questionnaires etc.**
- 4.5.1. Based on the results of surveys and studies, a youth centre prepares summaries and impact analysis, and presents the results to young people, other institutions in the field, local authorities and the community.
- 4.6. Evidence-based statistics (e.g. the Logbook) are regularly collected on a youth centre's visits and activities to analyse the participation of young people, the responsiveness of activities to needs, the stability of the youth centre, bottlenecks and challenges.**
- 4.7. Safety in a youth centre**
- 4.7.1. Safety requirements⁹ mean legislation on the activities of youth work, which ensure a safe and secure environment.
- Examples of safety requirements to be kept in mind:
1. the Public Health Act and health-protection requirements established on the basis thereof:
 - health-protection requirements for permanent youth camps;
 - health-protection requirements for swimming pools and water centres;
 - other relevant requirements.
 2. the Fire Safety Act and the requirements established on the basis thereof;
 3. safety requirements arising from the specifics of the camp for organising activities;
 4. the Building Code and the requirements established on the basis thereof for buildings, facilities and premises;
 5. the Water Act and the requirements established on the basis thereof for drinking water, sewage, catering, and toilet use and washing.
- 4.7.2. A youth centre has prepared a risk analysis of the working environment and thought out work processes and activities from the safety aspect. The youth centre has explained to employees through instructions and training courses, how to perform their work safely and in compliance with the Occupational Health and Safety Act.

⁷2014–2020 development plan of the youth sector: <https://entk.ee/nak-veeb/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/NAK-2014-2020-kujundusega.pdf>

⁸The European Commission's White Paper: <https://www.entk.ee/sites/default/files/Euroopa%20noortepoliitika%20Valge%20Raamat.pdf>

⁹Teaching and instructional materials, Estonian Youth Work Centre: <https://entk.ee/noorsootoo-korraldamine/noorsootoo-kvaliteedi-arendamine/noorsootootaja-kutse/opi-ja-juhendamaterjalid/>

- 4.7.3. A youth centre has the necessary tools for first aid, and the employees have undergone first aid training.
- 4.7.4. A youth centre has a guide on how to behave in an emergency. The youth centre holds regular exercises and has appointed the responsible person.
- 4.7.5. A youth centre has a functioning security system that allows the employee to place the premises under alarm when leaving the building. If possible, the youth centre's premises and the courtyard are equipped with surveillance cameras.

5. SERVICES OF A YOUTH CENTRE

5.1. A youth worker, in its duties, proceeds from the principles of organising youth work and applies different activities and methods depending on the specifics, purpose, target group, place of youth work and situation of youth work. A youth worker is aware of the reality of the life of young people, and the local environment, and is able to assess the situation and needs, choose and apply appropriate methods and analyse the effectiveness of the work done.

5.2. The organisation of youth work proceeds from the following principles¹⁰:

- youth work is performed for the benefit of and together with young people by involving them in the decision-making process;
- upon creating the conditions for the acquisition of knowledge and skills the needs and interests of young people shall form the basis;
- youth work is based on the participation and free will of young people;
- youth work supports the initiative of young people;
- youth work proceeds from the principle of equal treatment, tolerance and partnership.

5.3. Starting a youth centre and creating services is purposeful and a conscious choice.

- 5.3.1. Services of a youth centre are based on the interests of young people and regional needs, which are the basis of the goals of the youth centre's work.
- 5.3.2. Services of a youth centre are equally accessible to all young people at a suitable time outside school hours.
- 5.3.3. The open space of a youth centre is a place where young people have the opportunity to meet friends, listen to music, use a computer, play games etc.
- 5.3.4. A youth worker engages young people in the design, writing, implementation and reporting of ideas of projects and programmes. A youth centre supports the initiative of young people and provides project consultancy.
- 5.3.5. A youth centre is a facilitator of voluntary activities. A youth centre has a network of volunteering young people, to whom job and participation opportunities are continuously being offered; volunteers are awarded contracts and meet regularly for discussions. Youth workers organise discussions with volunteers on their skills and experience, and young people fill in the 'Youth Passport'.
- 5.3.6. A youth centre encourages and supports the emergence and coordination of youth participation councils/active groups, and supports the development of cooperation.
- 5.3.7. A youth centre organises mobile youth work (street work, work on the internet, providing youth work in another region, offering youth work to young people at their gathering places).
- 5.3.8. A youth centre has the readiness to carry out the target group (NEETs etc.) and case-specific youth work, working with various partners and network members, including parents, both locally and regionally.

¹⁰Youth work. Estonian Youth Work Centre: <https://entk.ee/noorsootoo/noorsootoo/>

5.4. Compulsory competencies for organising youth work¹¹.

- 5.4.1. Mapping young people's interests and development needs.
Studies the interests and development needs of young people in communication with them, and collects feedback; takes into account the information received in planning the daily work and gives feedback to young people.
- 5.4.2. Planning activities supporting non-formal learning.
Plans non-formal learning, in compliance with the purposes of study and the action plan, taking into account the interests and needs of young people and facilitating learning through cooperation.
- 5.4.3. Supporting non-formal learning for young people.
Organises activities of non-formal learning that comply with the purposes of study and the action plan.
- 5.4.4. Analysing the things experienced and accomplished in the course of non-formal learning with young people.
Helps young people within non-formal learning to understand their purposes of study by using an appropriate method; acknowledges achievements.
- 5.4.5. Using and developing diverse environments and methods of youth work.
Involves young people in environments of youth work by employing diverse methods.
- 5.4.6. Involving young people.
Involves young people in the planning and implementation of activities, taking into account the interests and needs of young people, including those with special needs, and adapting the conditions to their needs by using existing guidance and or teaching materials. If necessary, seeks advice and or cooperates with other professionals.
- 5.4.7. Supporting civic education.
Supports the formation of becoming educated citizens; motivates young people to participate in society, introduces different opportunities for the participation thereof.
- 5.4.8. Supporting youth entrepreneurship.
Introduces young people to the principles and opportunities of entrepreneurship and self-initiative, taking into account and encouraging young people's interests; supports the entrepreneurship and initiative of young people by providing them with opportunities for leadership in youth work and supporting/guiding them in this.
- 5.4.9. Supporting the development of healthy and eco-friendly lifestyles.
Introduces the principles and opportunities of sustainable and healthy lifestyles by using existing guidance and or teaching materials; supports the development of healthy and eco-friendly lifestyles for young people through various activities; notices (risky) behaviour, affecting health, and responds to it in a timely manner by involving specialists if needed.
- 5.4.10. Forming law-abiding behaviour.
Supports the emergence of law-abiding attitudes by using existing guidance and or teaching materials; notices (risky) behaviour and responds to it in a timely manner by involving specialists if needed.
- 5.4.11. Developing intercultural competencies and tolerance.
Introduces young people to the principles of intercultural communication; supports the development of intercultural competencies among young people by providing opportunities for participation in intercultural/international activities at local, regional and national level.
- 5.4.12. Sharing information for young people¹².

¹¹ Professional standard for a youth worker: https://www.entk.ee/sites/default/files/Noorsootootaja_kutsestandard_2018_EST.pdf

¹² Information for young people. Estonian Youth Work Centre: <https://entk.ee/noorsootoo/noorsootoo/noorteinfo/>

Shares reliable information with young people, based on their needs and interests, by directing interested young people to additional information or a specialist in charge of relevant information.

5.4.13. Supporting the development of young people's digital literacy.

Supports the development of digital literacy among young people by using digital technology and digital media; notifies them of dangers on the internet.

5.4.14. Primary counselling for young people.

Provides primary counselling for young people by following confidentiality requirements; refers young people to a specialist if needed.

6. YOUTH WORK AND YOUNG PEOPLE

6.1. Young people attend a youth centre for various reasons. Young people from different age groups, backgrounds, levels of development and interests attend youth centres.

6.1.1. Young people have different reasons for visiting youth centres: search for specific information, referral by a cooperation network, desire to study and partake in information days, hobbies, specific events, or meet with friends and occupy leisure time.

6.1.2. The primary task of a youth centre is to reach out to a young person and, based on his or her individual abilities and preferences, offer the young person developmental and meaningful activities.

6.1.3. A youth centre also helps young people with special needs to occupy leisure time, in terms of development.

6.1.4. The role of a youth worker for young people varies from a trustee to a friend, interlocutor, role model, tutor, supporter, teacher or mentor.

6.1.5. A youth worker helps to find and direct a young person to hobby groups in the region, creates opportunities for hobby activities for the youth centre, informs young people about existing youth organisations, provides information on youth projects, initiatives and opportunities, organises meetings with various specialists etc.

6.2. Youth centres have created a trusting environment, supporting and motivating young people.

6.2.1. Youth centres operate in a non-prejudicial, informal environment that joins various activities, the opportunity to develop in a way that is suitable to each young person, and receive support and help in activities they are interested in, and be recognised.

6.2.2. A youth centre engages, motivates and supports the participation of young people in various youth initiatives and funds. Under the guidance of a youth worker, debates, discussions, meetings, games, interviews etc. with young people, helping to identify and implement youth ideas/initiatives, are carried out.

6.2.3. A youth centre is open to all young people, and the open space allows a youth worker to directly establish contacts and develop a conversation, learn about young people, hear their opinions and address current issues, relevant to young people, and give guidance on solutions, as well as support young people's initiatives based on their individual needs and preferences.

6.2.4. The visibility of youth initiatives is necessary and important. It facilitates communication between young people and their youth worker, as well as the identification of new interests based on other young people, enables direct mentoring, monitoring and guidance by the youth worker, and supports communicative behaviour and prevents/reduces the risk of exclusion.

6.2.5. A youth centre has an annual recognition system and or event, developed for young people.

6.2.6. By participating in the activities of a youth centre, the young person can learn and experience responsibility, find answers to questions such as future career choices or differences in cultures and attitudes. Additionally, understand the globalising society, develop practical skills such as independent planning and the implementation of study and youth work opportunities.

6.2.7. The environment of a youth centre helps young people to find friends and sympathisers, creates a sense of community, and binds young people with their hometown.

- 6.2.8. A youth centre offers young people with fewer opportunities, including socially excluded young people, the opportunity to become successful and raise their self-esteem, helps them make positive decisions and teaches them to take responsibility for their decisions, which, in turn, helps to prevent them dropping out of education.
- 6.2.9. A youth centre helps to improve the availability of career services through practical outputs, formal and non-formal learning opportunities, and thus, supports the integration of young people's skills with the needs of the labour market.
- 6.2.10. In its work, a youth centre uses the possibilities of non-formal learning, which contributes to the early detection, stimulation and development of young people's talents and abilities.

7. NETWORKING

7.1. A youth centre plays a vital role in the network surrounding young people. A youth centre is active in organising and directing youth work in the region.

- 7.1.1. A youth centre regularly involves parents in the centre's activities.
- 7.1.2. A youth centre is in constant communication with youth institutions at a local and regional level to ensure youth well-being and development (e.g. regular roundtables etc.).
- 7.1.3. A youth centre is well-informed about other youth institutions in the region (hobby school, school, sports centre, library etc.).
- 7.1.4. When planning services/activities, a youth centre proceeds from the number of young people and the kind of youth work offered in the region, the rate of youth support, dominating social issues among young people, and the interests and wishes of young people.
- 7.1.5. A youth centre regularly participates in the process of designing young people's lives in the region and in the creation of regional development documents. A youth centre is an essential partner for the local authority in improving the quality of youth work.
- 7.1.6. A youth centre regularly meets with youth organisations and or student representations operating in the region, as well as the youth council, to exchange information, plan joint activities and events.
- 7.1.7. When planning activities/events, a youth centre includes local community institutions (school, community centre, non-profit associations, sports centre, kindergarten etc.).
- 7.1.8. A youth centre participates in regional, national and international networking.

SUMMARY of the main values of youth centres:

The implementation of an open youth work method ensures developmental and meaningful activity to all young people, based on their free will, individual abilities and preferences. The activities of youth centres affect young people to acquire and use the skills and competencies needed in their lives, encourage young people's initiative and entrepreneurship, support identity searches, socialise and shape values.

The integrated approach of a youth centre creates a developmental and interaction-encouraging environment for a young person at a time suitable for him or her outside the home and school hours. The activities offered at the centre promote, in particular, young people's initiative and non-formal learning, the acquisition of experience through activity and communication.

An essential advantage of a youth centre, in the field of networking and cooperation, is the early detection of youth problems and the flexibility of providing timely activities. A youth centre can focus on a specific topic by changing services, based on the needs of an individual or the target group, and thus, be more effective. The advantage and strength is the direct contact with a young person under their own free will. The value of a youth centre, especially in small areas, is the availability of services for young people from one agency; however, for cooperation partners, the opportunity to reach more and more young people at the same time.

Young people attend a youth centre for various reasons. They are attracted to the youth centre to be with friends and to translate their innovative ideas into practice. The experience of success motivates a young person to come back over and over, and discover new sides of him or her.

Youth centres operate in a non-prejudicial, informal environment that joins various activities, the opportunity to develop in a way that is suitable to each young person.

A youth centre is one of the institutions that contribute to the establishment and development of human capital. The values and patterns of behaviour, created and embedded today, will affect society as a whole in the future.

Annex 1

Open youth work method

One of the main features of a youth centre is the implementation of the principles of open youth work. The purpose of open youth work is to offer young people the opportunity to participate, on a voluntary basis, to support their activities and help them cope with social life.

Based on the purpose, activities must:

- be educational, which enables young people to develop their skills and knowledge;
- guarantee equal opportunities or be suitable for all young people, regardless of their educational background;
- be from an economic or social background;
- through a trusting relationship between a youth worker and a young person, encourage participation and be supportive so that
- the young person would like to participate in decision-making processes concerning him or her;
- support young people to understand and speak about issues affecting him or her and, at the same time, the whole
- of society.

According to the principles of open youth work, a young person is entitled to:

- make different choices and choose the one that suits him or her the best;
- receive enough support to reach his or her potential;
- develop his or her values, attitudes and ability to critically analyse the surrounding world and respond to it if needed.

The implementation of the principles of open youth work is subject to the open youth work method, which is a tool for creating conditions for the development of young people and where the activity:

- is open to any young person without any preconditions on his or her beliefs, abilities, skills, knowledge and financial possibilities;
- actively engages young people in initiating and developing activities;
- enables young people to communicate and develop at a time suitable to them outside the home and school hours by
- prioritising the development of a young person's initiative and creating conditions for non-formal learning, in particular, by acquiring experience through activity and communication.

Due to the open youth work method, the word 'open' is used in front of the name of youth centres. Youth centres are also known under the following names: (just) youth centre, youth hall, youth house, youth centre, children's centre, youth leisure centre, youth centre of interests, leisure centre, youth club, youth and lifelong learning centre etc. The names of youth centres are, in addition to the method used, tied to the location, youth centre's structure, appearance and the area or service to be highlighted.

In summary, the implementation of an open youth work method ensures developmental and meaningful activity to all young people, based on their free will, individual abilities and preferences. The activities of youth centres affect young people to acquire and use the skills and competencies needed in their lives, encourage young people's initiative and entrepreneurship, support identity searches, socialise and shape values.