

POSITION PAPER

SUPPORT FOR YOUTH WORK

Adopted at the 2015 General Assembly of the European Confederation of Youth Clubs in Cluj Napoca, Romania on the 15th February 2015

Note this is designed to be a living document which will be amended as necessary by the membership of ECYC at General Assembly. It will inform ECYC's policy and advocacy platform for work on supporting youth work.

Introduction

The European Confederation of Youth Clubs (ECYC) is made up of National Youth Organisations from 18 European Countries. Its aim for almost 40 years has been to develop, support and promote Open Youth Work on national and international platforms and envisions empowering the 1.2 million young people it works with to develop personally and socially through engagement in open youth work.

Open Youth Work

ECYC believes that the purpose of Open Youth Work is to offer young people, on the basis of their voluntary involvement, developmental and educational experiences which will equip them to play an active part in our democratic society as well as meet their own developmental needs. Open Youth Work takes place in youth clubs, youth projects, youth centres, youth houses as well as on the street through detached youth work. Open Youth Work offers, to those who participate important lifelong learning experiences within the transitional period between childhood and adulthood. The lifelong learning cycle then continues as young people attain leadership and volunteering roles within their organisations.

Core values of Open Youth Work

ECYC believes that the core values of open youth work recognise that:

Young people have the right to identify options/choices and choose the most appropriate one for them in any given situation.

Each young person should be given the support to achieve their full potential in a manner that has regard for the dignity and autonomy of the individual.

Young people should be supported to develop their own values and attitudes and develop the capacity to analyse critically the world around them and to take action in response.

Characteristics of Open Youth Work

- Open Youth Work is a planned systematic educational experience implemented outside of the formal school curriculum usually by voluntary groups and organisations.

- Open Youth Work promotes an experiential learning model where young people are involved in learning by doing in real life situations and reflecting in a structured manner upon the experiences encountered.
- Open Youth Work recognises that inequalities of opportunities exist in society and seeks to raise the level of awareness of young people about society and how to act upon it.
- Open Youth Work involves young people on a voluntary basis and begins with the issues and areas that are of interest and concern to them.
- Open Youth Work is a mutually beneficial, enjoyable and fun experience for youth workers and young people. Open youth work is a partnership between youth workers and young people involving adults working with young people, in a manner that prioritises the active participation of young people as partners in the process.
- Open Youth Work provides structures whereby young people participate in decision-making including planning, organising and evaluating.
- Open Youth Work enables communities to contribute to meeting their own needs.
- Open Youth Work is accessible to all young people irrespective of their race, culture, religion or belief, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic status or disability.

As well as the direct outcomes of Open Youth Work, it provides many unrecognised and invaluable benefits to society, Open Youth Work provides clear economical outcomes and value for money.

YOUTH WORK IN EUROPE - CURRENT SITUATION

POLICY

ECYC note the EU Youth Strategy (2010-2018) Council of Europe Agenda 2020, and fully support the implementation of both strategies. However it is also noted that there is a lack of specific youth policy in many European states and where there is policy in place it is not adequately implemented or resourced. ECYC is concerned that in some countries the governments have taken a top down approach to youth policy development not involving youth organisations in consultation.

YOUTH WORKERS, PROFESSIONALISATION AND TRAINING

ECYC believe that Youth workers can either be paid or volunteer to work with young people, that they come from a range of educational and occupational backgrounds and that they are involved in various different activities.

ECYC believes that professional youth work means youth work which is provided to a high quality standard in a professional way, we recognise that both volunteer and paid youth workers act complimentary to each other and carry out different roles in youth work provision.

There is an increased emphasis on specialist vocational, degree and post graduate education for youth workers. ECYC believes that regardless of whether youth workers are paid or volunteers, all youth workers should have adequate training and skills in developing the potential of young people.

ECYC welcomes an overall emphasis on professionalisation, recognition and quality provision of youth work while noting that in some states there is no official recognition of youth work.

FUNDING

ECYC notes and welcomes increased project funding available through Erasmus+ and the European Youth Foundation, however notes that it is more and more difficult for Youth Organisations to attain core operational funding.

Core funding for youth organisations however overall reduced across Europe, there is no evidence of overall funding increase for youth work and it is becoming increasingly difficult for Youth organisations to operate in a professional way.

RECOMMENDATIONS

ECYC notes the many evolving challenges facing youth organisations and the provision of Open Youth Work today. There is an ever growing demand for provision of youth work both in its traditional form but also a demand to expand our work into more intervention based work targeting particular categories of young people. There is a growing shift towards professionalisation of youth work and formally educated youth workers.

A growing emphasis on producing measurable outcomes for our work, along with a decline in structural and up front funding for youth organisations is creating an increasingly difficult environment to work in.

In order to protect, support and to develop youth work into the future ECYC makes the following recommendations:

POLICY

- ECYC recommends that each state develops a dedicated youth strategy, recognising the importance of youth work provision.
- ECYC recommends that non-governmental youth work sector is actively involved in the formulation of any local, national or international policies or strategies related to youth work at the appropriate level (local government involve local project, national government involve national organisation, EU involve ECYC etc).

YOUTH WORKERS, PROFESSIONALISATION AND TRAINING

- ECYC acknowledges the role of professional paid youth workers often goes far beyond that which they are contracted for and recommends that fair, transparent remuneration is provided in line with other professionals in the social sphere proportionately to the work carried out.
- While welcoming the increasing emphasis on outcome focussed quality youth work, ECYC asserts that the most effective way of quality assessment and development is through peer led processes and the non-governmental youth sector should be core partners in the development of any process.
- ECYC recommends that the non-governmental youth work sector is a core partner in the development of any curriculum development for professional qualifications for youth workers.

FUNDING

- ECYC recommends the provision of operational funding for the infrastructure (office, core staff, training) of youth organisations at a local, national and international level by statutory and governmental agencies.
- ECYC recommends that current youth programmes are retained at a European level and that further European programmes become more accessible for youth organisations.
- ECYC contends that volunteer led youth work is 'low cost not no cost'. ECYC recommends that volunteers are supported in terms of administrative support and training as well as professional development support and that volunteer led projects are supported to access programme funding.