



#YOUTH WORKWORKS



About the mission, the DNA, the effect
on the aspirations of youth work

Youth work truly makes a difference for many young people. And it also has an impact on their lives later on. We see and hear such stories every day. De Ambrassade (the Flemish bureau for youth affairs) asked the full range of stakeholders in youth work: why does youth work actually work? We see and believe that youth work is important... but do we really know why #YouthWorkWorks? How does youth work do it, generate impact, pay off?

These are difficult questions. Because when you ask 100 youth workers and young people what youth work means to them, you will get 100 different answers.* You'll get 100 different terms to describe youth work, 100 different stories.

We looked for commonalities between youth work practices: what unites us? We did not look for a rigid definition of youth work, because definitions delineate and exclude initiatives that are different or explore new paths. And that is precisely one of the strengths of youth work: it starts from the basis and gives young people the space and support to do their thing.



◇ **Ok, but what is youth work then?**

Youth work offers children and young people a space where they can simply be young, where they get a taste of the positive power of a group, where they can grow at their own pace, where they make friends and learn from their mistakes... Youth work is also an attitude that resolutely puts children and young people in the centre of the attention. Youth work is playful, fun, crazy, creative, diverse...

◇ **Youth work is constantly evolving and increasingly active at the intersections**

with education, culture, sport, welfare and more. Youth work is diverse in its methods and in its target groups. Youth work is experimental and gives children and young people a voice. Youth work offers powerful experiences for and by children and young people. Those experiences are unique yet universal, thanks to the power of the group, thanks to a first taste of true responsibility and commitment.

Youth work isn't self-focussed, on the contrary, it aims to empower children and young people. Half of all children and young people in Flanders and Brussels come into contact with youth work or take an active role in one of the 6,000+ different youth work initiatives. And the children, young people and their organisations increasingly face challenges.

◇ **Youth work has to stand strong, now and in the future**, to continue developing itself and respond to those challenges.

Therefore, it is essential that:

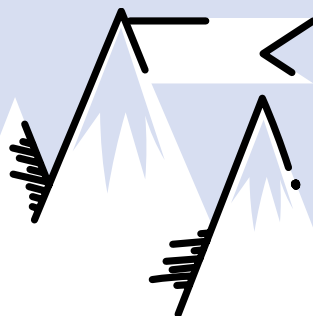
- **every youth worker** can point out the strengths of youth work,
- **society** recognises and appreciates the power and impact of youth work,
- **policymakers** invest much more in children, young people and their organisations so that there can be more youth work for even more children and young people.

At the #YouthWorkWorks conference in 2018, De Ambrassade, in collaboration with 500 youth workers, launched a common language to express the value of youth work. We developed the **mission of youth work** and the **DNA of the youth worker**. Now, five years later, we add **the impact of youth work** to our youth work language. That allows us to highlight the many outcomes of youth work even more.

YOUTH WORK'S MISSION

Where do children and young people really get space in our society? When are they still allowed to fail? Does their voice matter? Or do they just have to wait until they grow up? Do they get the space to organise the leisure projects they'd like? The answer is: *still not enough.*

Youth work creates that space for children and young people



Youth work's mission is to actively create space for four fundamental rights that children and young people should have. That way, every child and young person gets more space to be young.

#YouthWorkWorks

because youth work actively creates space for...

- ✧ ... the right to experiment and to learn by trial and error,
- ✧ ... the right to participate fully in society,
- ✧ ... the right to leisure, relaxation and cultural and artistic activities,
- ✧ ... the right to develop and grow up together.



We claim that youth work is a right for all children and young people.

This is in line with the **Convention on the Rights of the Child** that states that every child should be allowed:

- ✧ to grow and develop (*article 6*).
- ✧ to have an own opinion, and this opinion should be taken into account (*articles 12 and 13*).
- ✧ to have free time, play and participate in cultural and artistic activities (*article 31*).

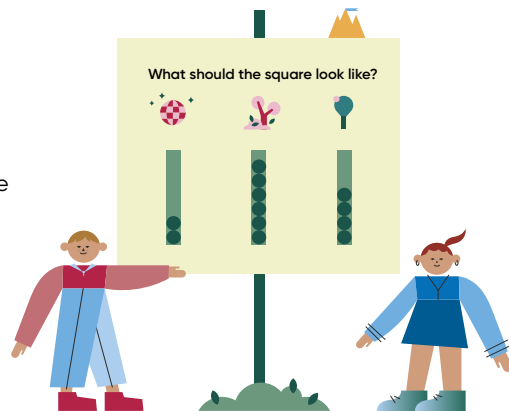
... the right to experiment and to learn by trial and error

Youth work is a 'safe haven' where children and young people can learn from their experiences. In youth work, children and young people are given the space to try out things and fail.



... the right to participate fully in society

Children and young people are fully-fledged citizens of society. Youth work associations help to make this possible. They provide relevant information, set up co-creation processes and support children and young people to participate in decision-making.



... the right to leisure, relaxation and cultural and artistic activities

Youth work is where children and young people can participate in many different types of leisure-time activities. It offers the space where children and young people can experience and create culture.



... the right to develop and grow up together

Youth work, as an educational environment, is part of the integral development of children and young people. In youth work, young people grow up together with their peers.



Dear youth worker, all children and young people have the right to feel truly young and they should get as many opportunities as possible to do so. Please, actively make space for these rights.

Dear policymaker, we need more youth work and, as a society, we should choose to invest more in children, young people and youth work.



THE YOUTH WORKER DNA



Whether a youth worker is a paid member of staff or a volunteer, every youth worker has a specific DNA that can only be lived, learned and experienced in youth work. Indeed, youth work is playful, fun, creative, dirty, rebellious, vibrant, passionate, wacky...

But youth work is above all an attitude: it is the way youth workers relate to the world and look at society. Not because they have to, but because they want to. Youth workers are the only ones whose thinking and actions fully start from the young people.

#YouthWorkWorks

because youth workers...

- ✧... consistently put children and young people at the centre of their actions,
- ✧... give children and young people ownership,
- ✧... give equal importance to process and product
- ✧... use the power of the group in a positive way,
- ✧... help shape society.

#YouthWorkWorks because youth workers...

... consistently put children and young people at the centre of their actions

Youth workers always start from the situation of children and young people. Youth workers offer children and young people their own social space, with room for what they are able and willing to do, based on their own interests.



... give children and young people ownership

Activities, group building, daily operations, processes, experiments: children and young people can manage these themselves. They find themselves on equal footing with their youth leaders, coordinators and youth work professionals.



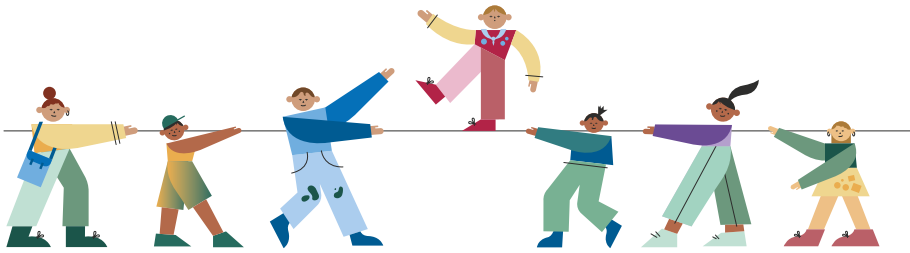
... give equal importance to process and product

Together with children and young people, youth workers work towards a product. But the road to reach the result is at least as valuable. Cycles of reflection and action alternate. In dialogue, from experience and in group, young people learn and take steps forward.



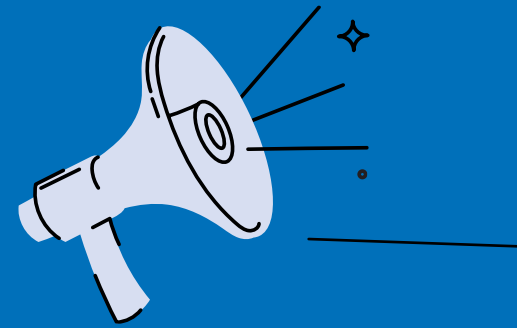
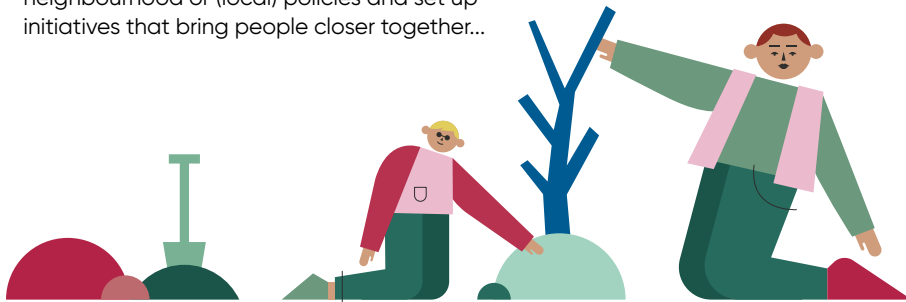
... use the power of the group in a positive way

Youth work connects children and young people by cooperating, linking to common interests, meeting each-other, networking and community building. That way, youth work provides a sense of belonging and creates openness towards other opinions or habits.



... help shape society

Youth workers support children and young people to grow up as active and committed citizens in society. Together with the children and young people, they think about their neighbourhood or (local) policies and set up initiatives that bring people closer together...



Dear youth worker, be proud of your DNA and propagate it every day. If everyone in contact with children and young people brings out more of the youth worker in themselves, we will reach a society that truly empowers children and young people.

Dear teacher, police officer, social worker, policymaker: do not put yourself above children and young people, but alongside them, adopting the youth worker DNA.

YOUTH WORK EFFECTS



Youth work's mission is to actively create space for children and young people so that they have opportunities to experiment, participate and enjoy (meaningful) leisure-time activities. That way, youth work creates a place where children and young people can be young, develop and grow up together. Moreover, youth workers do this based on their common DNA.

But what results does this lead to? What impact or effects does youth work have? Primarily on the children and young people themselves, but also on the neighbourhood in which they work or on society as a whole? And is this the same for everyone, everywhere?

If we want to show the value of youth work, we also have to make the impact of youth work visible. By impact, we mean the long-term effects stemming from youth work practice.

Many effects may quickly spring to mind, but they are not always easy to prove or explain. Take the test.

If you ever participated in youth work or carried out youth work activities: *what effect did this have on you? And why so?*

Campfire cards (Kampvuurkaartjes) a card game for bold conversations about youth work.

This card game is meant for participants, volunteers and (face-to-face) youth workers. In **40 questions**, the game makes you think about the impact that your commitment has on children and young people, on (new) initiatives from children and young people and on the neighbourhood, society and policy.

Have fun!



Download the game for free



Measuring impact is complex

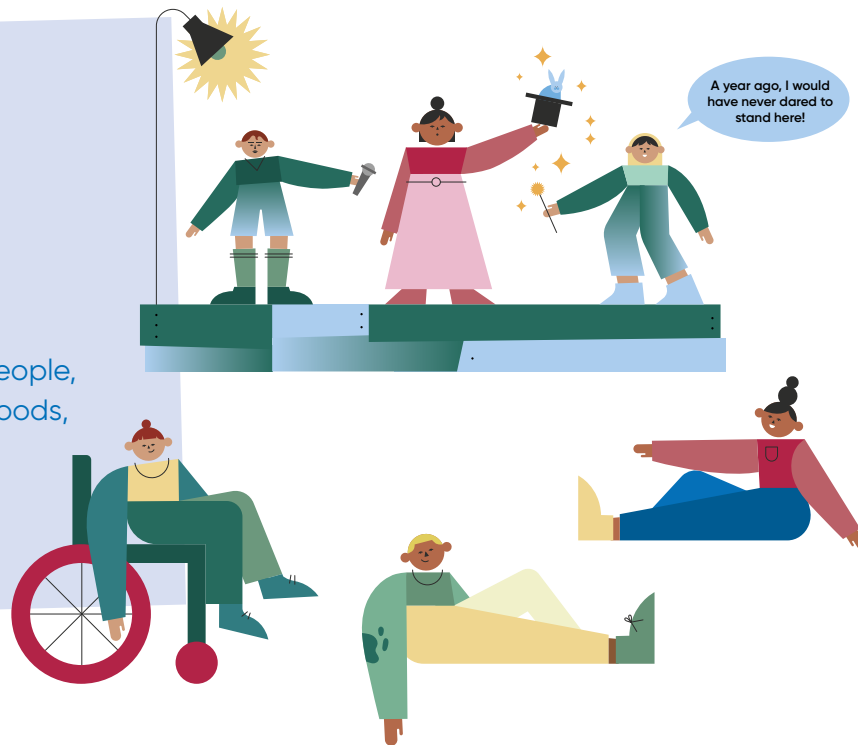
There are **many things that influence** the impact you want to achieve. Just think about the changes in **society** or the extent to which someone is involved. Moreover, children and young people also spend time at home, at school, in the music academy, sports club, at work, in public spaces... All these contexts have an impact.

In most cases, the relation between youth work practice and impact is complex. The long-term effect is the combined result of different practices and contextual factors. **Youth work contributes to those long-term effects.**

We spoke to youth workers and delved into research. This is how we came up with the following 5 youth work effects:

#YouthWorkWorks because youth work...

- ✦... strengthens and connects children and young people to grow,
- ✦... leads to (new) initiatives by children and young people,
- ✦... contributes to active and connected neighbourhoods,
- ✦... connects society across borders and sectors to tackle societal challenges,
- ✦... challenges and strengthens policies.



... kinderen en jongeren versterkt, laat groeien en verbindt

Youth work first of all has a **direct effect on children and young people**. Youth work empowers children and young people and develops their competences, values, skills and attitudes. Youth work creates a safe place for children and young people. It uses informal and non-formal learning and allows them to have new experiences. That influences who they want to become later in life. Youth work connects children and young people to develop and grow up together.

Youth work contributes to the (general) development of children and young people.

Youth work empowers children and young people:

- ✦ Youth work enhances the **self-confidence and resilience** of children and young people.
- ✦ Youth work contributes to the **independence and autonomy** of children and young people.
- ✦ Youth work increases children's and young people's **ability to learn**.

Youth work makes children and young people grow:

- ✦ Youth work increases **self-awareness** and has an impact on young people's **identity development**. Youth work reinforces reflection on who you are and who you want to be

Youth work connects children and young people:

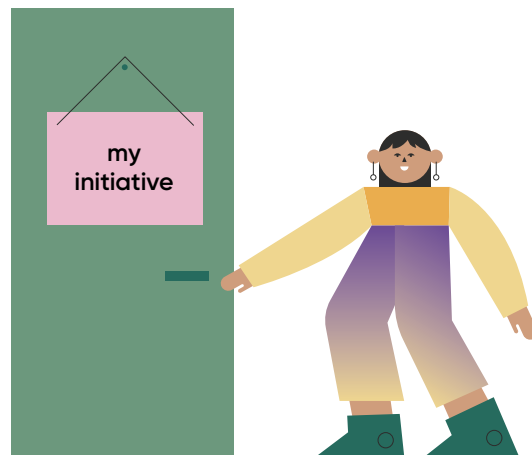
- ✦ Youth work is perceived by children and young people as a safe and trusted environment. Youth work offers children and young people a sense of **belonging** and a place where they can be themselves.
- ✦ Children and young people confirm the shared **values** they experience in youth work: fun, freedom, competence, recognition, safety, self-development, respect, connectedness.

... leads to (new) initiatives by children and young people

Youth work encourages children and young people to roll up their sleeves and be active. It contributes to an **entrepreneurial attitude** in young people. In youth work, young people acquire skills that empower them to **see and seize opportunities**. This helps young people to become independent and self-confident.

The **ownership** that children and young people experience in youth work makes **youth work a place where they can take initiative**. They are given the space and support to work with their own ideas and talents, even if they sometimes bend the rules to do their thing. Youth work is a kind of laboratory to try out new things in a safe environment.

All this experimentation generates a lot of (new) initiatives that are rooted in the children's and young people's world.



... contributes to active and connected neighbourhoods

Youth work brings children and young people together in cities and villages, at play initiatives, in youth and cultural centres or public spaces. In all those places, youth work takes shape and children and young people feel at home. Based on the value of connectedness, youth work helps take care of the neighbourhood and develops (new) ideas and initiatives. That is how youth work contributes to more dynamism in the local areas.

Youth work creates dynamism and contributes to active and connected neighbourhoods.

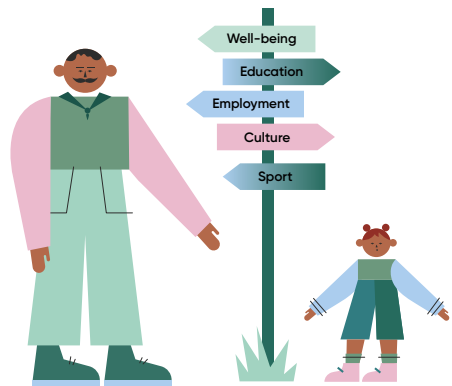
Youth work often is the place where children and young people explicitly **experience community for the first time**.

- ◇ Youth work **expands the network** of children and young people.
- ◇ Through youth work activities, children and young people **help shape public spaces**.
- ◇ Youth work creates mutual understanding and **strengthens social cohesion and connectedness**.
- ◇ Youth work invests in **cooperation**.

From experience, we see that youth work influences the relationship children and young people have with the wider community. It is a place where their social involvement takes shape. Children and young people who take up a commitment in youth work also tend to take up a **commitment beyond their own youth work**.



... connects society across borders and sectors to tackle societal challenges



Youth work is a **place where norms and values are shared**, such as safety, respect and solidarity.

Youth work contributes to the **general well-being of children and young people**, such as their employment, school careers or physical and mental health.

Youth work is never the one and only solution to a societal problem, but it can definitely be part of the solution. Youth work has a strong **preventive power**. For instance, certain youth work practices help reduce school dropout rates, curb crime, increase job prospects and promote healthier behaviour.

If we combine the social impact of youth work, the commitment of youth workers (both voluntary and paid) and the turnover generated by youth work organisations, we can only conclude that youth work has a positive **economic impact**.

Youth work aims to connect, not polarise. In youth work, we care for each other and take care of the environment, from a constructive, solution-oriented attitude. By actively collaborating across borders and sectors, we address societal challenges.

Youth workers mainly meet children and young people in their free time. But that is just one of their areas of life. Children and young people also go to school, live in a family or institution, do activities with their friends... In short, children and young people spend time in many places. That is precisely why it is so important to consider the intersections of different areas of life and actively work across areas and boundaries. That is how youth contributes to shaping society and tackles social challenges.

We see 2 kinds of effects here:

... challenges and strengthens policies



Youth work influences policy and how children and young people help shape policy. **Youth work strives for strong and broad youth policies that ensure that children and young people have enough opportunities to participate.** It defends the interests of children and young people. Youth work is not an expert on issues such as housing, poverty or employment, but it has expertise in bringing in the views and strengths of young people. Youth work represents the voice of children and young people and ensures that their needs, requirements and signals reach the policymakers.

Youth work strengthens policy

Youth work conveys the values of our democratic society and brings the voice of children and young people to the policymaking process. Youth work **informs children and young people in an adapted way.** It contributes to **more participation opportunities for children and young people** in both formal and informal contexts where policy is discussed. This makes youth work a committed and involved partner for shaping policy.

Youth work challenges policy

In youth work, children and young people **are trained to become critical citizens who are allowed to take up their role in society.** They take a committed look at policy challenges from their perspective. Children and young people with experience in youth work turn into strong and committed citizens. It is part of the youth worker DNA to help shape society.



ASPIRATIONS

6 priority themes



We enable quality youth work, by starting from the right to youth work for all children and young people, by strongly propagating the youth work DNA and by achieving impact.

If we still want to have strong youth work in the future we need to take action now. At the 2022 Youth Work Days, we explored the most prominent future challenges, together with youth workers.

We zoomed in on six priority themes with the content working group. For each priority, we formulate where we want to be in five years' time. Will we reach these bold ambitions?

We need to if we want the impact of youth work to be even bigger.

01.

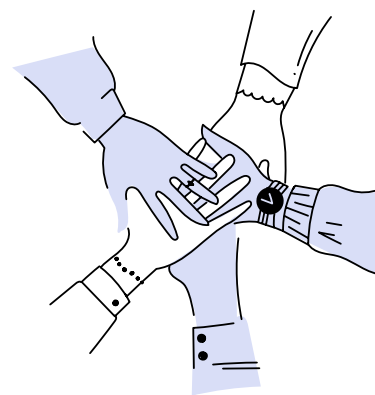
Voluntary commitment

Youth work is made possible through the commitment of countless volunteers. They help manage the organisations and are the driving force behind the many youth work activities.

Youth work organisations rely on the commitment, time and passion of many young adults who believe in youth work. These young people often volunteer to contribute to one of the many youth work initiatives.

This voluntary commitment currently faces enormous pressure. Life is becoming increasingly expensive, so it becomes less obvious to carry out voluntarily activities. Moreover, young adults experience pressure to perform well at school or to take on a carer role at home. That makes long-term commitment difficult. In addition, there is a growing focus on mental well-being, so young people think twice before saying 'yes' to all kinds of requests and opportunities.

To ensure that youth work remains accessible to young people and that more of these committed young adults (want to) volunteer in youth work, we need to **take action**.



→ 20,400 volunteers took part in the national 'DOE meter' (DO metre), a survey about volunteering by Indiville, Bpact and Give a day.

We zoomed in on respondents younger than 30. The main motivators for volunteering are an **interest in the activity** and the **good feeling** people get from it.



Some figures

94% of respondents under 30 indicate that their interest in the activity is the greatest motivation to volunteer.

61% of respondents under 30 share that their main reason to stop volunteering is the lack of time

26% Starting a job is the number two reason for ending their commitment.

12% Receiving no or too low reimbursement of expenses is the number three reason.

Our goal? ○

In 2028...

- ① volunteering in youth work is accessible to young people who are in a **socially and/or financially vulnerable position**.
- ② young people feel **encouraged to experiment and make mistakes** in youth work, thanks to **realistic expectations from society**, e.g. from parents, educators, youth work organisations and local authorities.
- ③ the commitment of young people in various types of youth work is **more valued in society**.
- ④ youth work organisations have a **balanced focus on young people, both to deliver youth work activities and to help them grow as individuals**.
- ⑤ volunteering in youth work is a **viable choice**.



Dear youth worker, prioritise a common language, vision and policy creation around (voluntary) commitment in youth work, so that we give young people the best possible opportunities.

Dear policymaker, stimulate more social recognition of volunteers. Recognise the needs of young volunteers and their organisations and adapt regulations/legislation accordingly. Help ensure that volunteering remains attractive.

02.

The voice of children and young people

Youth work listens and talks to children and young people and amplifies their message.



Children and young people are all too often underestimated. They supposedly would not yet have enough knowledge to understand politics or to have an opinion on societal problems. But nothing could be further from the truth. Many young people have a clear vision of how they want to see society evolve. And they make their voices heard too. They take to the streets during climate and anti-racism marches and have fierce debates online or at the kitchen table.

Young people who have the talent and guts to put their neck on the line to represent the voice of children and young people all often become the butt of public criticism. Despite their commitment, their voices are not listened to on equal footing. They are not allowed to vote and are rarely taken seriously. People talk more about them, than with them. **Young people already have a voice, we just need to learn to listen to it.**

In youth work, we excel at listening to children and young people. We exist for young people, but especially by young people. We start from their situation and give them ownership of our organisations. **We are not just listening, we also support them.** So that they can participate equally in the social debate and so that their voices are heard in all policy areas.

For the voices of children and young people to continue to be heard, both youth work and policymakers need to act.

Our goal? ○

In 2028...

- ① **every youth work organisation is a textbook example of participation.** Each organisation starts from the situation of children and young people, knows where and how to capture the voice of children and young people, and acts accordingly. Because if even we don't do it, who will?
- ② youth work empowers the voice of children and young people, so they can **participate fully and equally in the social debate.** Their voice matters and makes a difference.
- ③ youth work empowers the voice of children and young people to have a **full and equal seat at the table** at all levels of policymaking and in all policy areas that affect them.

Dear youth worker, youth work has extensive expertise in participation and being young, so take this role seriously. Capture signs of children and young people and offer tools to turn that voice into action.

Dear policymaker, children and young people are fully-fledged partners at every stage of policymaking and across all policy domains. Acknowledge and value their views, actively and critically experiment with different ways of participation, and show what young people's impact is and can be.



03.

Intersections

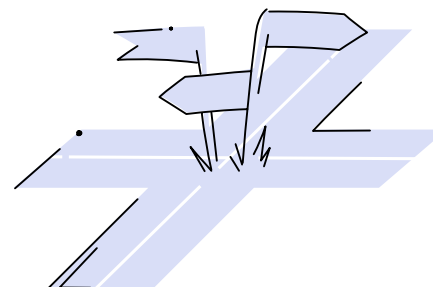
Youth work connects to the situation of children and young people and builds bridges across policy and life areas.

The life of children and young people cannot be dissected in separate areas. As a society, we cannot let this happen. We have to take action against this fragmentation. **Children and young people should be the focus, not the structures we have.** Youth work connects with the world of children and young people and follows them in all their areas of life: leisure, education and training, welfare, labour market...

But youth work cannot do this alone. **At (supra)local level, we need to work with bridge-builders.** They support youth work and other sectors to get to know each other and to take action across sectorial boundaries. This will strengthen the position of children and young people.

Youth work propagates its strength and DNA, making other sectors see and recognise it more. This results in **more exchanges with the youth work sector.**

Robust youth policy maximises the rights for all children and young people and starts from **broad youth policy plans at different policy levels with the involvement from all sectors.**



Our goal? ○

In 2028...

- ① policymakers recognise that the life of children and young people cannot be cut up in separate domains and sectors. Therefore, they **build bridges across policy areas**.
- ② **bridge-builders at (supra)local and Flemish level are structurally appointed and active**. These bridge-builders have expertise on and are present in the various areas of relevance to children and young people. They start from the perspective of children and young people.
- ③ **youth work organisations are given time and resources** to actively build or enable **bridges with organisations from other policy areas**. This to meet the needs of children and young people.
- ④ the (supra)local youth work has its bridge-builders and they actively participate in the search for answers for children and young people. **Local youth workers know their unique role** within the network and guard their own boundaries.
- ⑤ **children and young people know the structures and organisations around them**. The children and young people use them and make their voices heard across policy areas.

Dear youth worker, starting from your DNA, help build bridges between areas and recognise and enhance each other's strengths.



Dear youth policymaker, invest in cross-sectoral youth policy by making the policy for youth and children's rights and the related policy plan effective and participatory.

Dear organisation from another sector, help build bridges between different areas and recognise the power of youth work.

Policymaker from another domain, actively engage in effective cross-sectoral youth policy and encourage your sector to help build bridges across areas.

04.

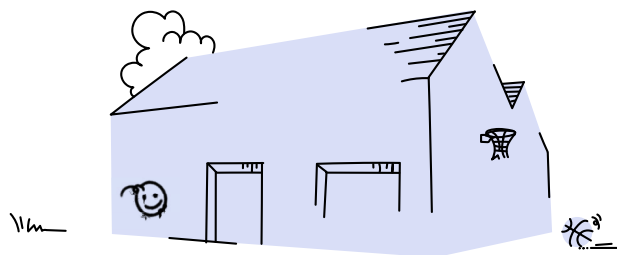
Youth infrastructure

Quality youth infrastructure gives young people ownership of the space and provides youth work a base.



Good youth infrastructure contributes immensely to the satisfaction of young people in and around these places. It offers a place where they can meet, feel at home and learn from and with each other. Also, multi-purpose use of youth infrastructure has an impact on the appeal and image of the organisation. **The corona pandemic, the energy crises and the rising inflation are hampering much-needed investments.**

The survey about youth work premises (jointly carried out by youth movements, De Ambrassade, VIVES College) and the research project 'Where were we? Open youth work after corona' (by Formaaf) clearly shows **that it is time to revamp the ageing youth infrastructure.** The Flemish as well as the local authorities urgently need to invest more to counter the 10-year long stagnation. This is the only way youth infrastructure can continue to contribute to quality youth work and a stronger social fabric in Flanders on local level.



→ In 2022, 928 groups from five different youth movements participated in the survey about youth work premises. The study was carried out by VIVES College in collaboration with KSA, KLJ, Scouts & Gidsen Vlaanderen, FOS Open Scouting, Chirojeugd Vlaanderen and De Ambrassade.



Some figures

75% of youth infrastructure is insufficiently isolated.

24% of youth groups do not know whether their premises will still be available to them in the next 5 years.

63% are satisfied with the capacity of their premises.

13% will lose their play area on or around their premises in the next 5 years.

Our goal?

In 2028...

- ① a **'contact point for youth infrastructure'** supports youth work with an extensive network and expertise.
- ② youth work has **sustainable and affordable quality youth infrastructure conducive to community-building.**
- ③ youth infrastructure **regulations** are **feasible, clear, simple, adapted and adaptable** to society's needs.
- ③ the **potential of local infrastructure and sites is activated** and used by youth work.
- ③ youth work has **financial models and cooperation opportunities to manage youth infrastructure**, in which the youth work sector, Flanders and local authorities are partners.

Dear youth worker, manage your youth infrastructure structurally within your network with an eye on the future: make it sustainable, high-quality and conducive to community-building.

Dear policymaker, work on a multiannual plan for youth infrastructure that provides a vision, actions and resources tailored to and in consultation with (local) youth work, beyond a single policy cycle.



05.

Mental health



Strong youth work contributes to the mental well-being of children and young people.

Young people are struggling with their mental health and waiting lists to get help are growing longer. In addition, we also hear from youth work that the situation for youth workers is becoming increasingly difficult. **The topic of mental health has become part and parcel of youth work**, but what role can organisations take up based on the youth worker's DNA?

Currently, counselling mainly focusses on problem-solving. When young people experience mental problems, they can seek help. **We should also focus on strengthening mental health to prevent mental problems.** The more we can focus on this and address mental issues early, the more we can ensure that children and young people feel good about themselves.

→ Through the Waddist app (What's up), young people aged 12 to 30 can share what they think, feel and experience on a daily basis. This makes Waddist THE tool to hear their views on the issues that are important to them. A young person entering the Waddist app is shown three multiple-choice-questions-of-the-day. Young people, organisations reaching out to young people, researchers... can send in questions.

The Waddist team reacts quickly, selects the questions and helps wording them.



Cijfers

78% of Waddist users who participate in youth work activities always or mostly feel good about themselves during these activities.

4% Only 4% of Waddisters indicate 'the place where my hobby is' as the place where they feel least comfortable.

34% School doesn't perform well.

12% As well as 'Home'.

Youth work can play an important role here. Youth work can provide safe environments where children and young people can talk about their problems. It can also promote mental health. But this is only possible if we take the following into account:

1. **We need to monitor the resilience of youth workers themselves.** It is important that children and young people feel comfortable in the group they are in. There needs to be a safe environment in which they can be themselves and where it is OK to deal with emotions. Emotional safety is not only important for the children and young people, but also for the youth workers who, in many cases, are young themselves.
2. **There should be more bridges between youth work and (mental) care.** Currently, the gap between health promotion and prevention activities on the one hand and care provision on the other is too wide.

Our goal? ○

In 2028...

- ① there is a clear and comprehensive network of welfare and mental healthcare organisations that young people and youth workers can turn to.
- ② experimental organisations or projects addressing mental well being of young people and youth workers are valued and, if successful, scaled up.
- ③ youth workers know their role regarding mental health and act accordingly.
- ④ the positive contribution of youth work to mental health is recognised by all.



Dear youth worker, be proud and conscious how you as a youth worker contribute to the mental health of children and young people. Get support inside and outside your organisation.

Dear policymaker, recognise the power of youth work and see youth workers as experts in connecting with young people and children.

Dear care and (mental) health organisation, organise training adapted to the realities of youth work.

Dear organisation from another sector, set up cooperation with youth work so that we both can contribute with our own expertise.

06.

Digital lifestyles

Youth work starts from the lives of children and young people and part of that is digital.

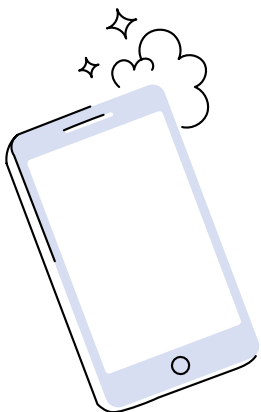
In youth work, we urgently need to catch up because **we run the risk of a widening gap between youth workers and the digital lifestyles of children and young people.** If we deliver more youth work that takes into account their digital lifestyle, we will appeal to more children and young people.

The need to embrace that digital lifestyle is strong because often there is a digital component when young people feel bad. Think for example of cyberbullying and online hate speech. The **Apestaartjaren** study shows that children and young people are all too often not taught about cyberbullying, sexting, digital balance and fake news at school. So, we should certainly not miss out to address media-savvy topics in informal learning environments (e.g. youth work, hobby and sports clubs).

The **Digimeter**, a study that captures trends in media and technology use in Flanders, also debunks the myth of the digital native. Digital literacy amongst young people born in a digitised environment appears to be declining. Also, they don't always have an outspoken positive attitude towards technology.

But we also see many opportunities:

- Youth work can help **correct misconceptions** about children's and young people's digital lifestyles.
- The digital world of young people offers opportunities to launch **new initiatives** or to make their **voices heard**.
- We can **improve access to the digital world for all children and young people** through youth work. Youth work organisations can do this by providing infrastructure and hardware, but also by sharpening their digital competences.

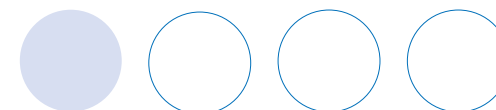


→ Through the Waddist app (What's up), young people aged 12 to 30 can share what they think, feel and experience on a daily basis. This makes Waddist THE tool to hear their views on the issues that are important to them. A young person entering the Waddist app is shown three multiple-choice-questions-of-the-day. Young people, organisations reaching out to young people, researchers... can send in questions. The Waddist team reacts quickly, selects the questions and helps wording them.



Some figures

1/4 of Waddist users sometimes lacks information or knowledge to use a smartphone, the Internet or other digital possibilities.



→ In 2022, 5588 primary and secondary school children and adolescents (both regular and special education) completed the online questionnaire for the Apestaartjaren study. **Apestaartjaren** is a biennial survey on the digital lifestyles of children and young people in Flanders and Brussels.



Some figures

One of the big misconceptions that persists even today is that gaming is supposedly anti-social behaviour.

53% children

58% young people

The majority of children and young people mostly play together with friends or people they know, virtually or in the same room.

Our goal? ○

In 2028...

- ① all youth workers are aware of **the digital world** of children and young people and recognise its opportunities and challenges.
- ② youth workers find it **self-evident** to **start from the digital lifeworld** of children and young people.
- ③ all youth work organisations provide **a safe environment** for children and young people to work on **media literacy**.
- ④ youth work offers an **accessible gateway to the digital world**.
- ⑤ we **appeal to more children and young people** through youth work that takes their digital lifestyle as a starting point.
- ⑥ youth work contributes to the **positive perception** of children's and young people's digital lives.



Dear youth worker, dare to experiment with different formats of digital youth work. See the opportunities as well as the need for it.

Dear policymaker, strengthen digital youth work, develop a vision, facilitate expertise sharing and recognise its added value.



Now, let's put all these elements together: our youth work mission, DNA and effects. This gives us a collection of building blocks that allows us to explain the value and impact of youth work.



Dear youth worker, actively make space for the rights described in the mission of youth work, be proud of your DNA and tell everyone about the effects of youth work.

Dear policymaker, youth work's mission, the youth workers' DNA and the effects of youth work demonstrate the power of youth work. Use this as a basis to invest more in youth work.

We also formulated bold aspirations within six priority topics for youth work. We give ourselves five years to realise these goals. If we manage to do that, we will succeed to provide youth work in the future that is at least as strong as it is now.



Dear youth work organisation, turn the aspirations into actions in your policy papers or future plans. That way, you help build high-quality youth work that responds to the needs of today's generation of children and young people.

Dear policymaker, engage with us and listen to our aspirations. Let's work together to make these ideas a reality.

I M PACT

of youth work



Youth work is a right for all children and young people, because youth work actively creates space for these rights:

experimenting and learning
by trial and error

leisure, relaxation and cultural and
artistic activities

participating fully
in society

developing and growing
up together

Youth worker's DNA



#YouthWorkWorks
because youth workers...

put children and young people at the centre

give children and young people ownership

give equal importance to process and product

use the power of the group in a positive way

help shape society

Youth work effects



#YouthWorkWorks
because youth work...

strengthens and connects children and young
people to grow

leads to (new) initiatives by children and young
people

contributes to active and connected
neighbourhoods

connects society across borders and sectors to
tackle societal challenges

challenges and strengthens policies

If we want to have strong youth work in the future,
we need to formulate **ASPIRATIONS** within these themes:



**voluntary
commitment**



**digital
lifestyles**



mental health



**youth
infrastructure**



**the voice of children
and young people**



intersections

