



Resources for Inclusion, Diversity and Equality

Needs Analysis Report

Country Report Italy



cesie
the world is only one creature

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Abstract

This Needs Analysis on youth work in Italy is the result of a research carried out through:

- 1) A **literature review** on the understanding of youth work, organisations carrying out youth work, education and training of youth workers and on the main issues affecting young people in Italy;
- 2) Four **focus group discussions** with youth workers and young people in Palermo focusing on the practice of youth work.

The main findings of the report are:

While there are no standards for youth work and for the education of youth workers in Italy, we could identify different study courses that most future youth workers follow; many of them include some courses on the topics inclusion, diversity and equality. Young Italians are heavily affected by the economic crisis and their effects, which can be seen in high unemployment rates and a high rate of early school leavers. In recent years, cultural differences have become an issue, as many young immigrants have arrived in Italy, coming mainly from Sub-Saharan African countries.

In our focus group discussions, economic, social and geographic obstacles and cultural differences were mentioned as the most important problems for youngsters in Palermo. Youth workers in Palermo use a number of different approaches and methods to make their services inclusive, but struggle with financing problems, hindering the establishment of permanent structures and the provision of continuous support for youngsters. Practical education and training for youth workers is needed, although a number of useful resources for youth work practitioners already exist.

1. Introduction

The following analysis is based on a review of literature on youth work. In the second part of the report we summarise the findings from our focus groups with youth workers and young people.

1.1 Understanding of youth work in Italy

In Italy there is not an official definition of *youth work* and *youth worker* is not an officially recognised profession (“Country Specific Overview Italy”, 2014). Even if there is no common agreed definition and translation of these terms, two main translations are usually used by public authorities and NGOs: *animazione socio-educativa* (the translation provided by the European Commission in 2009), and *operatore giovanile* (the translation provided by the Italian National Youth Council). These two terms seem to be the ones that match more closely to the definition of “youth work” adopted in Europe. (“Working with young people: the value of youth work in the European Union Country Report Italy”, 2014).

When talking about youth workers (*operatori giovanili, formatori, volontari, insegnanti, docenti di sostegno, animatori*), we usually refer to a person who works with young people with the aim of involving them in informal education process.

There are no national laws regulating youth work or focused on young people. The main players in youth policies are the regional and local authorities. Thus, there is a lack of coordination and information at national level leading to different standards in the territory.

The issues addressed by youth work are many, for instance: environment, youth policies, social and cultural activities, active citizenship, equal opportunities, entrepreneurship, social activities for children, integration of migrant people, etc.

1.2 Organisations undertaking youth work in Italy

Italy has a long tradition of socio-educational and leisure activities for young people implemented by third sector organizations. The reality of organizations undertaking youth work is very wide and diverse: associations, small formal and informal groups,



church groups, etc. In fact, most of them are people who want to spend their time and their professional commitment for young people.

However, there are some realities in Italy which have carried out for years a decisive engagement in the youth field:

- the National Youth Forum ([Forum Nazionale Giovani](#)), a National Platform of more than 75 organisations which represents about 4 million young people. The strength of the Forum is the variety of associations that are represented: there are Forum student associations, youth associations of professionals, associations engaged in non-formal education, associations of different religious faiths, Regional Forums, sports associations and many others. Its main objectives are:
 - to create a space for debate and sharing of experience between the youth organisations of different backgrounds and nature, between Italian and European institutions;
 - commitment to the involvement of young people in the social, civic and political life of the country by involving them in decision-making processes of the country;
 - to facilitate the establishment of Forum, advice and Regional Councils, provincial, territorial and local youth.
- “[Arci](#)”, the largest Italian association for social promotion, is committed to cultural and educational issues, peace, rights, welfare and democratic legality. It organises every year numerous initiatives involving many volunteers.

1.3 Education background of youth workers

In Italy, there are no specific educational or professional courses to follow in order to become a youth worker.

There are no minimum qualification standards for youth workers at national level. At regional level the situation is uneven: some regions, such as Piedmont and Lombardia, have stipulated regional laws between 2004 and 2008 that define minimum standard requirements for youth workers; while other regions have not.

Thus, anyone can become a youth worker, even if the following competences are considered an asset:



- professional experiences in organizations, associations, public institutions working in the social and educational field for young people;
- traineeships or volunteer activities in the field;
- training courses related to the field.

Youth workers in Italy tend to have considerably different educational backgrounds (e.g. social work, science education, psychology, sociology, sport instruction); unfortunately, no statistics is available on this.

Here are some examples of degrees related to youth work:

- Educational Sciences focuses on the issues and problems regarding the pedagogical sciences and the management of educational processes within institutions and training institutions, companies and public administration structures. It includes courses on pedagogy, early childhood pedagogy, philosophy of education, anthropology, etc. During the studies the student is enabled to have a professional experience, through internships and guidance, close observation of aspects and key aspects of their professional role, in a logic of empowerment. The degree aims to prepare students to act in professional contexts and educational tutoring acquiring technical and operational skills related to organisational culture of public and private educational contexts and developing a professional approach to work.
- Social and Cultural Education includes courses on pedagogy, psychology of adolescence, sociology, social inclusion processes, intercultural pedagogy.
- Social Sciences includes courses on pedagogy, sociology, developmental psychology, etc.

Further to academic studies, youth worker can follow training courses and traineeships focused on issues related to youth and in providing skills and tools for people working with youngsters.

1.4 Inclusion, diversity and equality in the education and training of youth workers

In Italy, there is no specific educational background that youth workers should have, so it is difficult to analyse the role of inclusion, diversity and equality in their education paths.

However, although these themes are not the main topics of the degrees analysed in the previous paragraph, most of them include some courses on social inclusion and promotion of diversities. By searching on some universities' websites, we found some examples of courses on these topics, such as:

- special education for inclusion¹: the course is focused on the epistemological, cultural and theoretical assumptions to develop an inclusive perspective and on the inclusion of disabled people at school and in society;
- psychology of disability and integration²: it also focuses on the integration of disabled children in the educational path;
- intercultural education³: to enhance the competences of the students in the intercultural dialogue and in the promotion of cultural diversities to promote integration;
- citizenship and new models of social inclusion⁴: aiming at offering to future educators some essential analytical tools for the study of social policies and the welfare state with particular attention to the dynamics of social inclusion and exclusion.

¹ Course at University Bologna:

<http://www.psicologiaformazione.unibo.it/it/corsi/insegnamenti/insegnamento/2014/372411/>

² Course at University Bologna:

<http://www.psicologiaformazione.unibo.it/it/corsi/insegnamenti/insegnamento/2014/372439/>

http://www.formazione.unimib.it/default.asp?idPagine=178&funzione=pagina_persona&personale=36&page_pers=272

³ Course to be found, for example, at University of Verona and at University of Bologna:

<http://www.dfpp.univr.it/?ent=oi&codiceCs=W23&codins=10569&cs=360&discr=&discrCd=&lang=it;>

<http://www.psicologiaformazione.unibo.it/it/corsi/insegnamenti/insegnamento/2014/386491/>

⁴ Course at University of Verona:

<http://www.dfpp.univr.it/?ent=oi&codiceCs=W23&codins=14014&cs=360&discr=&discrCd=&lang=it>

1.5 Main issues affecting young people in Italy

In the last years, social inequalities have increased in Italy, in particular due to the economic crisis. Likewise, in recent years the share of young people (18-24 years old) living in conditions of discomfort and social exclusion has increased. Italy ranks second to last in terms of intergenerational justice. Aside from the poor prospects for young people in the labor market, the country is one of the demographically oldest countries in the EU and carries also one of the highest public debts. The fiscal burdens for today's young people as well as future generations are thus immense. At the same time, investment in research and development has remained low with only 1.3% of GDP (Schraad-Tischler, 2015).

The main causes of exclusion are linked to a lower demand for labour and the lack of adequate educational opportunities for young people ("Information Template on Social Inclusion of Young People Italy", 2014).

In particular, due to the economic crisis, one of the most urgent issues is the increasing youth unemployment rate: 39,3% in January 2016 (Istat) – with huge differences between Northern and Southern regions: while in Calabria 65.9% of young people were unemployed in 2015 (the region worst off, but all Southern regions had an unemployment rate around 50%), in Bolzano only 11.9% of youngsters were without work. The number of NEETs has also increased in recent years: 26% in 2013 (Istat). The percentage of NEETs differs from North to South. While in the North, the percentage is about 21%, in the South, the percentage is about 36% (Istat).

Thus, Italian youth policies have been oriented towards two main directions: on the one hand, towards addressing youth unemployment young people involved in the labour market and, on the other hand, towards prevention of crime, delinquency and drug abuse (Formal and Non-Formal Education of Youth Workers, 2014).

In November 2011, the government adopted a package of measures entitled [*Diritto al futuro*](#) (Right to the Future) aiming at tackling "the precarious conditions faced by young people". It focuses on three key areas affecting young people's development and well-being:

- employment, i.e. measures to favour the employment of young people;



- housing and family, i.e. measures to facilitate the access to young people with atypical job contracts to mortgages for the first house and build their own family and family.
- study funds, i.e. credit funds for university students.

Another important issue in Italy have become young migrant people: the number of migrants has increased significantly in the last years: from 1.5 million in 2003 to 5 million in 2014; 35% of the migrants are between 15 and 34 years old. Many young migrants have difficulties with the integration into the labour market, especially with finding qualified work – 29% of foreigners work as unskilled workers in Italy (against 7% of Italians. Particularly at risk of being exploited are the minors arriving alone, without parents or accompaniment of other adults, in Italy. Around 10,000 minors currently live in Italian reception centres; however, more than 5,000 have left the centres and are not detectable anymore. To these numbers, one must add an unknown number of minors registered falsely as adults. Foreign minors are often under a lot of pressure to earn money, as they have to support their families at home and have to pay back the money spent for their travel to Europe, which can amount to 3,000 Euro. This is why many of them start working as illegal employees (Caritas Roma, 2015).

2. Methodology

We have organised two focus groups with youth workers in Palermo: the first focus group was composed of four youth workers working for different organisations, mainly with the target group of migrant youth (coming from diverse countries, but mainly from sub-Saharan African countries). The participants were between 25 and 31 years old and have between 1.5 and 5 years of professional experience in the field of youth work. The second focus group was organised at a social center in the city center of Palermo with three experienced youth workers – their age being between 36 and 51 years, and with between 15 and 32 years of work experience in the field of youth work, mainly with local youngsters from different quarters in Palermo, which can be characterised as socially and economically disadvantaged zones. With this diverse composition of focus groups, we aimed to get as many diverse views as possible.

The first focus group with young people was done with four youngsters from Ballarò quarter; all of them have been participating at a variety of activities of the Centro San Saverio. The second first group involved a group of eight youngsters between 18 and 25 years, some of them with migration background.

In all focus groups we used the questionnaire template provided by the lead partner of the IO. Focus groups started with a short introduction to the aims of the project and of the discussion group; we also asked participants to shortly introduce themselves at the beginning of the discussion.

3. Findings from focus groups

3.1 Main difficulties affecting young people

It is to be kept in mind that there are big social and economic differences between Northern and Southern Italy (as mentioned before) and that results from our focus group discussions can not be generalised for all Italian regions; if at all, other Southern Italian regions present similar issues as those we have found in Palermo. In our focus group research, we have organized discussions with youth workers and youngsters from Palermo. The following issues for young people were mentioned in the focus groups: educational difficulties, i.e. young people who left school without diploma. Although some of the youth we discussed with, had successfully completed secondary school, they were facing economic, social and geographic obstacles hindering them to integrate themselves into the labour market and to participate in further education (university studies) or in general in society at large. Many young people our interviewed youth workers are engaged with come from economically disadvantaged families. Most of these youngsters live in the center of Palermo, which can be characterized as one of the most disadvantaged urban zones of the city, with a number of social problems such as lack of employment opportunities, presence of organized crime organisation (the Sicilian Mafia), drug trafficking, drug abuse, parents with low educational level. For the youngsters with migration background, cultural differences were stated as reason for exclusion – because of language difficulties, or because of reservations by local employers to employ them / hesitation of local population to interact with them. Gender differences were also mentioned: especially in economically disadvantaged areas, girls



become mothers at very young age, which in turn prevents them from continuing school education and/or obtaining an employment. Further, some youth workers referred to disabilities and health problems (especially mental illnesses) as reasons for social exclusion.

3.2 Inclusive policies, approaches and methods of youth workers

Youth work practitioners in both focus groups underlined the importance of knowing well the local context as a basis for inclusive services and in order to be able to address the specific, the real needs of youngsters in an adequate way. Youth workers emphasised the need to be open for learning, open to listen to youngsters, have the ability to observe (paying attention also to smaller behavioural changes) and be empathetic with young people. All youth work practitioners agreed on the definition of youth work as an “accompaniment” of youth, i.e. as a way to stay close to youngsters, support them in life, in their personal growth, in defining their personal aims and objectives and the best way to reach them, without imposing own ideas and views on them. As one youth worker put it: “young people are a container of dreams and we adults should not burn them, but stay next to them, using a lot of sensitivity, supporting them with our knowledge of how life works in practice.” Another youth worker said that in quarters with youngsters at risk, the first objective of a youth worker should be to provide an anchor to young people (by building a relationship based on trust and respect), and in a second step to act as a mediator between youngsters and institutions, so that young people are encouraged and enabled to make use of the services offered by state institutions, such as help desks and other social services. Youngsters confirmed this view, saying that a good youth worker should be first and foremost a person they could talk with about their problems, and who organizes both fun activities (such as eating out in a restaurant) and provides support with different issues such as job search and preparation of school exams.

Youth workers mentioned also that informal methods have been proven to be useful for the inclusion of diverse groups of youngsters, including methods based on different kinds of artistic expression (painting, drama, music etc.) and sports activities. Regarding the policies and the approach to be used, there were different topics mentioned in the different focus groups, depending on the main topic youth workers/youngsters faced (rather cultural differences because of immigrant background of youngsters or rather

social/economic difficulties in the case of local youth in disadvantaged areas of Palermo). In one focus groups a youth worker remarked that sometimes, in the case of young immigrants, the first step of inclusion consists in letting youngsters know about opportunities they have and why there is need to learn the Italian language, in order to make use of these opportunities: these youngsters live in reception centres, where they receive all the basic necessities of life, without having much possibility, though, to get in touch with Italians and Italian society around, and so do not have much incentives to learn Italian or undertake activities outside the centres. On the other hand, it was remarked that inclusion must be also desired by young immigrants, and that it can not be imposed from outside. The role of youth workers in the inclusion of migrants, it was said, is also building a bridge to Italian society, by facilitating encounters with non-immigrant youngsters.

In the focus group of youth workers working with socially and economically disadvantaged youngsters, street work was mentioned as important instrument of work. The youth work practitioners said that only by being present on the street, by gaining the trust of some of the youngsters that could also act as mediators towards other youngsters, they were able to reach out to marginalized young people with their services. It was also mentioned that the gender perspective should be kept in mind: in economically and socially disadvantaged areas, girls often become mothers at young age; in order to reach out to them with educational courses or other activities, it is thus necessary to offer child care services, otherwise, young mothers would be excluded from participation at activities in the youth centre.

Informing and learning about traditions, customs and history was further mentioned as one way to facilitate inclusion: only by working on the own fears, by learning about the background of sayings and prejudices, it is possible to overcome preconceptions, for example about immigrants, as one youth worker put it.

3.3 Extra support put in place for marginalized youth

For those who are marginalised youth worker put in place projects which are easily accessible (in terms of place, organisational setting and surrounding), for which no formal education is needed, and in which everybody can participate and bring in own competences and strength. Such projects are, for example, arts projects, which take

place on the street. Youth workers also underlined the importance to use practical activities (e.g. renovating an old house together) for the work with disadvantaged youth, e.g. those who left school earlier and disabled youngsters. Also, in the case of socially and economically disadvantaged youngsters, youth work practitioners need to act as “mediators” between youth and institutions, e.g. to obtain support in drug, health issues etc. from local help desks, translating bureaucratic terms used by these institutions in understandable language. These “mediating” activities are also extended to smaller services, such as helping youngsters with drafting a CV, supporting them in arranging a job interview, printing out documents for them. The importance of creating a strong relational basis with youngsters was emphasised, as only on such a basis it is possible to provide further support in different fields of life (employment, parenting), which does not remain at the surface. Youngsters said that for them the main task of youth workers was offering opportunities to socialize, both with other young people, and with youth workers, in a respectful way.

In order to integrate migrant and local youth, youth workers mentioned the importance of being informed about diverse cultures, and to convey this knowledge to youngsters with different cultural background, creating thus “a bridge of communication” between diverse groups.

3.4 Evaluation of youth work interventions

Most of the youth workers we talked with work on a project basis, applying for funds that are made available by local, regional and national authorities or by the European Commission. In the application for these funds, usually evaluation criteria with qualitative and quantitative indicators for project success have to be developed. Evaluation in these projects differ, however, widely: in some projects, continuous supervision and feedback conversations are put in place, where participating youth workers come together once a week to exchange about their experiences and receive support from the other participants and/or from a supervising psychologist. In other projects, there are no specific monitoring mechanisms foreseen.

For some target groups, such as disabled children and youth frequenting the social centres, regular staff meetings are foreseen, where the development of youngsters is reviewed based on established evaluation criteria.

Youth workers also remarked that success can not always be seen at first glance: to understand in how far a project has contributed to the inclusion of youngsters, it is necessary to observe attentively changes in behavior and evaluate carefully the progress youngsters have made, e.g. in integrating into a group. Youth workers also said that quantitative indicators (e.g. the number of beneficiaries reached) should not be decisive in evaluating the success of a project – more important than numbers are the relationships established and the quality of these relationships (obtaining the trust of a youngster), which may also include cooperation relations with parents of youngsters. Very often, the feedback youth workers receive is informal, and difficult to measure, as already facilitating a discussion, letting youngsters reflect on topics such as inclusion, diversity, equality, is a step forward, and can have an impact. Such an impact may become visible only some time after the intervention, for example, when youngsters express interest in participating again in similar projects.

In general, it was remarked critically that the project-based work allows only a limited timeframe. In such projects different methods can be explored and evaluated, but they do not create permanent structures, which would be necessary to have an enduring impact on the local context.

3.5 Examples of successful interventions

Successful interventions mentioned in the focus groups were:

1. Street work projects in disadvantaged zones of Palermo: The method of work was based on the youth work practice in the *Favelas* in Brazil: the idea is that youth workers go to the places and streets where disadvantaged and marginalised youth live. It is important to build relationships based on trust and respect with youngsters, and it is helpful to find a mediator among the youngsters, a connection point to other youth. This kind of intervention allows reaching out to those who would not go to help desks or other places to get support, including drug addicts and drug dealers. In this intervention, weekly supervision conversations were made, to share experiences and get advice from the other youth workers. This weekly feedback was seen as a very important element, as support from other team members helped planning, structuring and reflecting on group dynamics and on sharing experiences with difficult situations that occurred (e.g. street shootings,



being observed critically as outsiders in the quarters by the Mafia). In this kind of work, it is also helpful to have a multidisciplinary team of psychologists, social workers etc. who can provide diverse input and approaches.

2. Using arts (painting) to let youngsters express themselves: when using arts it is important to let space for the own imagination, for own dreams, without providing schemes for paintings, but only the material (paper, colours, etc.) This way, it is possible to pull out from youngsters what they already have inside (without knowing it), stimulating their creativity – the idea is to let youngsters dream; to let them grow through their dreams.
3. Using participatory theatre activities (*teatro forum*) to educate about different topics (for example, drug abuse): the *teatro forum* is a form of the theater of the oppressed, where actors and spect-actors (spectators who may themselves become actors) develop together a scenic representation of a topic. In this practice the participatory aspect is fundamental, and the opportunity to explore a topic in an interactive way from different points of view.
4. Documentary realized by an Italian girl on young migrants at a reception centre: the girl stayed for two months with the young migrants, listening and participating in the daily life of youngsters. In this way, the young migrants felt very much appreciated, also because they could participate directly and because the Italian girl encountered them at eye level.
5. “*La città oltre lo sguardo*”, funded by *Fondo Europeo per l’Integrazione dei cittadini di paesi terzi* together with City of Palermo: in this project, together with a social centre for young immigrants, first a training course for female and male youngsters was provided on “*animazione di strada*” (participatory activities on the street with youngsters), then youngsters went around in different quarters of Palermo with the *ludobus* (games bus), facilitating on their own activities for other youngsters and children (with support of youth workers). This project was successful, because youngsters prepared and implemented activities for other youngsters, being able to talk and interact on the same level.
6. Facilitating regular encounters for young people and giving them the opportunity to share common experiences and activities: from sports activities to eating together,

going together to a party etc. What is important is that experiences are shared with the help of different instruments (e.g. arts, sports etc.) and that direct relationships and group cohesion are created. For marginalized youth, it is important to have a place to meet and to socialize in an informal manner, as they do not have so many opportunities for meeting and staying with other young people.

3.6 Education and training programmes on inclusion, diversity and equality

As already explained in the paragraph based on literature research, there is no specific education/training programme for youth workers in Italy. In one focus group, Educational Sciences were mentioned as a starting point for youth workers, although it was criticized that the study course provides only a theoretical basis for the work, and is not enough oriented towards the practice. It thus does not prepare very well for the practical work as youth worker. Other study courses mentioned were: Psychology and Social Work.

Youth work practitioners agreed that the only way of learning/being educated is working in practice, gaining experience through practice; in fact, many practitioners started with voluntary work in the field.

Youth workers can participate at international training courses co-funded by the Erasmus+ Key Action 1 Programme – Mobility of Youth Workers; these training courses usually focus on topics of inclusion, diversity, multiculturalism.

3.7 Existing resources for youth work practitioners

As resources for youth work practitioners, arts and sports were most often mentioned in the focus groups.

Many practical resources for youth workers can be found online, for example:

- Training kits for youth workers (including training essentials, social inclusion and intercultural learning), developed by experienced youth workers and published by the Council of Europe, available in various languages at: <http://pjp-eu.coe.int/fr/web/youth-partnership/t-kits>. Collection of training kits in Italian language available at: <http://www.eurodesk.it/materiali-gli-operatori>.
- The Compass Manual on Human Rights Education with Young People by the Council of Europe, which contains many different activities and methods on human-rights related topics (including equality topics, social rights, poverty,



health, discrimination and xenophobia). Available at:
<http://www.eycb.coe.int/compass/#>

- Salto-Youth toolbox and resources on cultural diversity and inclusion:
<https://www.salto-youth.net/tools/toolbox/> and <https://www.salto-youth.net/rc/inclusion/inclusionresources/>.
- Public Reports on International Training Courses and their methods organized by CESIE, available at: <http://cesie.org/?s=public+report&x=0&y=0>
- Manual Non Formal Education in Action. Building Democracy and Social Inclusion, with best practice examples for non-formal education from Italy, France, Greece and Armenia, published by Centro Sviluppo Creativo Danilo Dolci, available at: <http://danilodolci.org/educazione/nfe-manuale/>

5. Results and Conclusion

Our research has shown that youth work in Italy lacks both a clear definition and specific training and education programmes. Youth workers in Italy follow different study programmes (from Psychology to Educational Sciences, Social Sciences and Social Work) and thus have different starting points for their work. This is also the reason why it is difficult to indicate the weight of the topics inclusion, diversity and equality in the education of youth workers, as this differs from study course to study course. We have found out that in a number of universities courses on these topics are offered; mostly, these topics are treated on a theoretical basis, however, which means that future youth workers do not learn about practical tools and methods on how organizing inclusive services for young people. It would be therefore desirable to have a university module and a training course focusing on practical aspects of these topics.

Concerning the issues that youngsters in Italy face today, economic, social and geographic obstacles are the main difficulties: Italy has a very high unemployment rate among young people and an increasing number of young NEETs. In the Southern regions of the country, these problems are even more accentuated, with unemployment rates around 50% and a NEET rate around 36%; many of these disadvantaged young people live in peripheral or urban problem zones, and Southern Italian regions offer less facilities and social services for young people in comparison to Northern Italian regions. Practical implications of this situation are that Italian youngsters need support with basic, practical problems in life: in order to support social inclusion for young people, support with education and employment needed. Another, more recent issue, has become cultural diversity and inclusion of young migrants that have been arriving at Italian coasts in the last years.

In our field research in the form of focus group discussions with youth workers and youngsters in Palermo we have found out that many difficulties of youth workers in putting in place inclusive services are related to financial problems and to the fact that no effective, permanent funding from state institutions is available. This is why youth work associations in Palermo lack permanent structures, being constrained to work on project basis. Nonetheless, we have found a number of interesting interventions seeking to promote inclusion, diversity and equality of opportunities in Palermo. Creative



resources, arts and sport activities were most often used in these activities. The creation of a good, respectful and stable relational basis to the youngsters was mentioned several times, both by youth workers and youngsters, as a fundamental aspect for successful, inclusive youth work.

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