

Working with Young People Guide



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Working with young people is wonderful and exciting, and really important when working to strengthen communities. It creates connection and helps shape individuals and communities by preparing them for the future. Learning more about how to work with young people can help better inform your work when starting a Transition group. This brief document highlights the basic principles of youth work and some Transition examples.

Youth Work

Working with young people is often called youth work. This term encompasses all kinds of activities with, for, and by young people that aim to support personal development, increasing social integration, engagement, and participation in community.

Youth work is diverse

Youth work is very contextual so there is no one-size-fits-all. In some communities, it happens more organically, and it is less structured, while in others it is considered a profession, and it is very structured and formalised.

In places where it is less structured, youth work is implemented through different projects and activities with young people, usually run by civil society organisations. In other cases where it is formalised, youth work is a certified profession. Usually, in these contexts, youth centres also exist in the communities alongside youth policies and institutions that oversee these processes.

The focus and themes of youth work can differ greatly from place to place since it is related to the needs of young people in each community. In some places it can focus on youth employment and employability, while in others it might prioritise safe spaces such as programmes to improve mental health for youth.

No matter how it is practised or prescribed or what its focus is, youth work aims to change the lives of young people for the better. This is why it is seen as a priority in many communities. It creates opportunities for young people to build confidence, take initiative, and realise their potential (see [Respect for Diversity](#)).



Youth work is informal or non-formal learning

Youth work often happens outside of the formal system of education and it can comprise a variety of activities, like socialising, sports, project-work, leisure, entertainment, and so on. This is why youth work tends to be categorised as informal or non-formal learning.

Youth work can include youth of different ages

Youth work targets different ages in different areas. By definition, some nations consider youth to be young people aged 11-25, while others consider them to be 14-29 years.

Youth work is voluntary

One of the main characteristics of youth work is that youth participation has to be voluntary. Therefore, young people have to choose to engage with the programs and services themselves.

Basic Principles of Youth Work

1. Participation and Empowerment

Young people are viewed as equal partners in all activities, learning processes, and decision-making that might affect them. Youth work is focused on supporting young people in becoming equal partners in all of these processes. This means that youth work is focused on empowering young people by creating opportunities for them to share responsibilities, develop confidence and skills, and encouraging them to engage with the social, personal, and political context that surrounds them.

In practice, this means inviting youth to meetings, planning and idea generating sessions, getting to know them, and genuinely listening to their voices when it comes to processes and activities where they are involved. If they lack the confidence or skills to engage in these processes, this core principle implores youth workers to support them in gaining confidence or skills so they can participate. This can happen via mentoring, workshops, shadowing, and so on (see [Guide – Mentoring](#)).

2. Inclusion and connection

Youth work aims to include young people no matter their cultural, ethnic, gender, social, or racial identity, and attempts to establish genuine communication with them.

In practice, this means ensuring everyone can access and feel welcome during programmes, meetings, workshops, and projects. This happens by role modeling inclusive behaviour and getting to know young people better (see [Building Trust](#), see [Connective Activities for Meetings](#), see [Connection to Self, Others, World](#), see [Mainstream-Margin in Groups](#)).



3. Education and Development

Using an informal learning approach, youth work encourages and provides the means for young people to gain knowledge, skills, values, and understanding so as to better their personal and social development.

In practice, this means ensuring that proposed activities have something to offer to young people. The best way to ensure this is to ask what they need and include them in the planning and idea generation phases (see above Basic Principle 1 - Participation and Empowerment).

Levels of Youth Participation

Young people can participate at several different levels. Hart's ladder of Youth Participation (see below) is a tool that can help to evaluate the degree of participation and how beneficial it is. Try to avoid having young people participate only so you can tick a box, without having a genuine interest in them and their needs.





Youth Work and Transition

Here are a few examples of working with young people as part of doing Transition.

[Collab Youth](#) – is a youth-led Transition programme from Brasil that seeks to engage young people in climate action by creating spaces where they can feel seen and inspiring them to look inside themselves. This video describes the Hub’s Free University programme for young people. Over the course of four years, young people explore their dreams, interests, and needs before starting their personal and professional development journeys.

[Weavership Fellowship](#) - In 2025 Transition Network teamed up with YouthXYouth to host two Weavers Fellows for 4-6 months, a tandem from the Global South and the Global North. The Weavership Fellowship is a 10-month program empowering youth community organizers to transform education and create life-affirming futures. In partnership with the Weaving Lab, participants develop self-awareness, build diverse relationships, and mobilise communities.

[Our Voice, Our Future](#) - is a video project by Matteus Rable, uplifting youth voices on the topic of climate crisis from [Transition Lopez Island](#).

Related Resources

[Respect for Diversity
Guide – Mentoring
Building Trust](#)

[Connective Activities for Meetings
Connection to Self Others World
Mainstream-Margin in Groups](#)



References

[Quality Youth Work Framework - European Commission](#)

[Youth-Centered Design Toolkit](#)

[Youth Work Essentials - Council of Europe](#)

[Models of Youth Participation - Ministry of Youth Development Aotearoa/New Zealand](#)

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