

D2.1 GUIDELINES FOR YOUTHWORKERS



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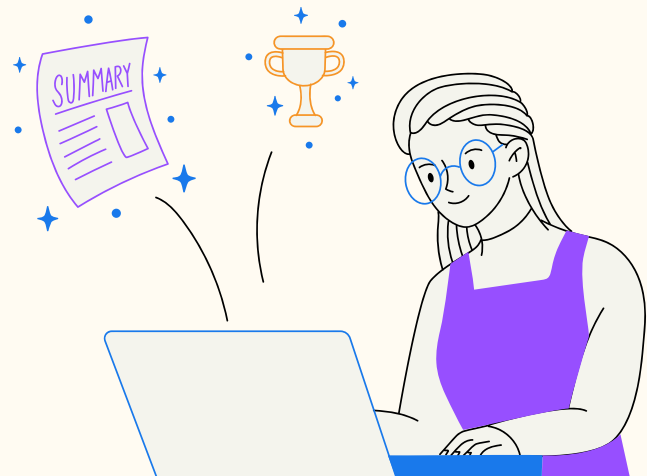
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CONTENTS

- ① What is youth work and who is a youth worker?
- ② Their job: what do they do and where
Skills and competence of a youth worker
- ③ Profile of the ideal participant
- ④ The importance of promoting inclusion among youth at risk and ex-offenders.
- ⑤ Youth workers as a tool for social rehabilitation for young ex-offenders or those at high risk of offending
- ⑥ Including the target group in youth programs: a guideline for youth workers.
- ⑦ SITOGRAPHY
- ⑧ BIBLIOGRAPHY
- ⑨



What is youth work and who is a youth worker



In some countries youth work is a relatively well-defined, distinct practice. In other countries (especially in southern European countries), the term is less known and there is no identifiable overall concept of **youth work**. In all countries however we observe a distinct, but diverse field of social and educational practices shaping a so called 'third socialization environment', next to family and school. Youth work is a form of informal education, which has an ambivalent position between private aspirations and public expectations, thus it is not possible, to impose a single concept of youth work. As a social and educational practice youth work intervenes in situations with a history of their own. Nevertheless, it seems clear that youth workers and youth policymakers across all countries do have a shared knowledge base when discussing youth work. There seems to be a shared set of values and methods in youth work^v practices all around Europe:

- voluntary participation of young people
- Listening to the voice of young people
- Bringing young people together

YOUTH
WORK

In the resolution on a renewed framework for **European co-operation in the youth field** (November 2009) youth work has been defined in such a way: 'Youthwork is a broad term covering a large scope of activities of a social, cultural, educational or political nature both by, with and for young people. Increasingly, such activities also include sport and services for young people.'

What is youth work and who is a youth worker



Youth work belongs to the area of 'out- of- school' education, as well as specific leisuretime activities managedby professional or voluntary youth workers and youth leaders and is based on non- formal learning processes and on voluntary participation.

Having defined what youth work is, we will consequently define a youth worker as a socio-educational animator,professional who facilitates the learning and personal and social development of young people so that they become autonomous and responsible citizens through active participation in decision-making processes and inclusion in their communities.

Youth workers are engaged in a variety of out-of- school spaces and projects where young people are provided with opportunities for learning, personal and social growth, development of skills useful for their own educational and career path, creativity, intercultural dialogue, volunteering, active citizenship, projectand associative initiative, dialogue with institutions, and active participation in public policy decisions at the local and national levels. Particular attention is given to themost vulnerable young people and the fight against all forms of prejudice and social discrimination against them.

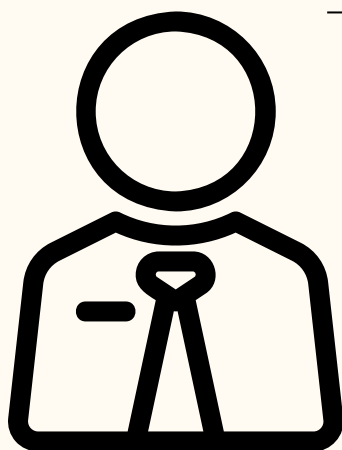
In this regard,the youth workeris to be considered a support figure.



Their job: what do they do and where



The status of youth workers is increasingly becoming understood as a **distinct profession**, but professionalism is not only about formal qualifications. Volunteer youth workers also integrate a professional approach to their work with young people. Youth workers are often qualified and/or specifically trained to carry out the activities they are involved with. Whilst there is evidence of some government support through training opportunities, recognition and validation of learning for youth workers, most commonly it is the youth work organizations themselves which are active in offering training or development opportunities for youth workers. Given the prevalence of in-house training, there is a need for greater external recognition of youth workers skills and competences, based on quality criteria against which skills and competences can be recognized. There are also some initiatives for clarification of common minimum competence standards for youth workers across the different organizations and roles. It is equally important to support youth workers as it is to support young people involved in youth work.



A lack of adequate support in combination with the pressures on the sector can discourage those who are working with young people and, in some cases, lead to high turnover. Youth workers operate in a plurality of forms and contexts, from cultural centers to the co-management of associations and spaces together with young people, from street animation to socio educational work through digital media, from youth exchanges at the European level to youth forums and councils.

Their job: what do they do and where



Through **Youth Actions**, youth workers and youth organizations involve young people in the **design, preparation, implementation and evaluation of activities and projects** that reflect their needs, interests and experiences. They then create a pathway of nonformal and informal learning in which young people acquire knowledge, skills, and values necessary for their growth, transition to adulthood, and autonomy.

Youth workers conduct activities with young people primarily in inclusive, open and safe environments, using engaging and creative techniques and methods, facilitating dialogue and bonding, preventing discrimination, intolerance and social exclusion. In summary, the youth worker has as a kind of vocation in guiding and assisting young people in their education and training. He is a worker engaged in voluntary or paid work. The figure of the youth worker is indeed essential in enhancing and empowering young people in building their future, allowing them to play a leading role.

Based on **SALTO Youth (Support, Advanced Learning and Training Opportunities)**, the youth worker is “a motor for change in a rural setting”.

In addition, “the youth worker stimulates young people to become active in their rural environment and improve their living conditions and opportunities”.



Their job: what do they do and where

The youth worker plans, coordinates and conducts workshop, games, hands-on and group activities for and with young people. He works in the field of nonformal education, planning and structuring educational and training interventions, with the aim of stimulating learning, dialogue and confrontation also and especially among peers, but also improving social, personal, professional knowledge and soft skills, through experience-based learning and a practical dimension. The methodology of "**learning by doing**" in fact, allows not only for the involvement of young people, putting them at the center of the educational process, but also for the reworking of content into knowledge, skills and abilities and thus for the enhancement of lived experience.

By relying on a youth worker, young people, who must actively participate in all proposed activities, develop fundamental personal, professional and entrepreneurial skills and abilities, such as teamwork, leadership, intercultural skills, project management, problem-solving skills and the development of critical thinking.

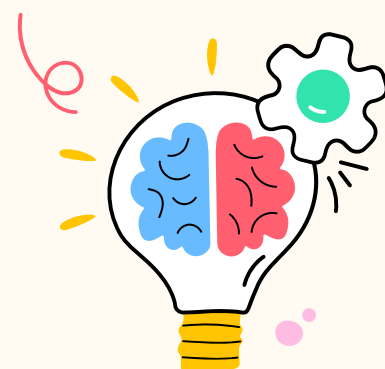
As a result of the definition of youth worker itself, a concept in which youth workers believe strongly and which they are tasked with conveying to youth in need is that of empowerment, the definition of which according to the Oxford Languages dictionary is "the gaining of self-awareness and control over one's choices, decisions and actions, both in the sphere of personal relationships and in that of political and social life."



Skills and competence of a youth worker

According to the **European Council**, a youth worker has to be:

- Youth-focused: responding to the needs and aspirations of young people;
- Developmental: aiming for the personal, social and ethical development of young people;
- Self-reflective and critical: seeking to ensure that he is doing his best to stick to his mission.
- Relational: seeking authentic communication with youth.

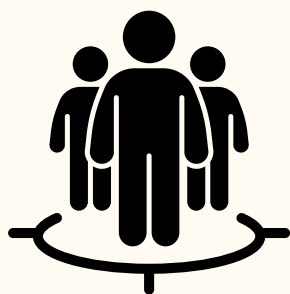


According to the Italian **association Associanimazione**, a youth worker must show:

- Familiarity with the digital field.
- Familiarity with technological and mathematical sciences.
- Mastery of several languages to increase one's communicative potential and connection between different cultures.
- Knowledge of literature and awareness and effective cultural expression.
- Entrepreneurial skills.
- Strong civic sense.
- Balance between learning skills and personal and social skills.



Profile of the ideal participant



SALTO-YOUTH is a network of seven Resource Centres working on European priority areas within the youth field. As part of the European Commission's Training Strategy, SALTO-YOUTH provides non-formal learning resources for youthworkers and youthleaders and organizes training and contact-making activities to support organizations and National Agencies (NAs) within the frame of the European Commission's Erasmus+ Youth programme, **the European Solidarity Corps**, and beyond.

The **target group** described by **SALTO in the report "No Offence"**, which represent the ideal participant for the project in object, are young offenders and ex-offenders and those young people at risk of offending. A group which you will not find represented a lot in international projects and more specifically in the Youth in Action program. There are many reasons for this. An obvious one is that the travelling possibilities for young people in prison are limited. Another one is that people working with this target group have considerable doubts about if it's possible to send this kind of young people on a European Voluntary Service-project to another country or to take a group of them on a Youth Exchange. A third reason could be that people simply don't know about the opportunities that the Youth in Action program offers.

Profile of the ideal participant

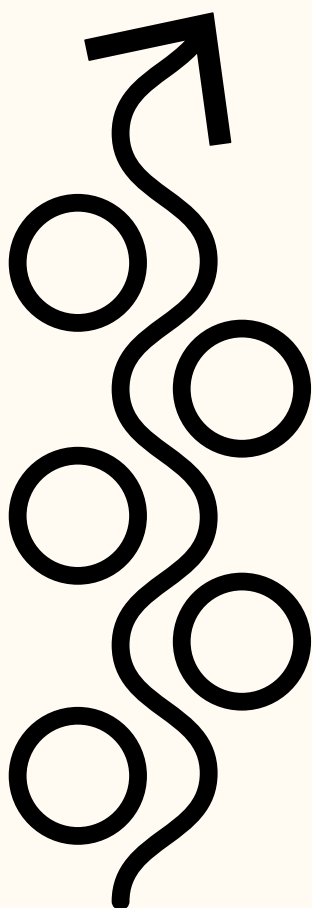
Within the European **Youth in Action** program the target group is defined by the obstacles they face. The term “fewer opportunities” means that certain young people have fewer possibilities than their peers. This can be for a variety of reasons:

1.Social obstacles: young people facing discrimination (because of gender, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, disability, etc.), young people with limited social skills or anti-social or risky sexual behaviours, young people in a precarious situation, (ex-) offenders, (ex-) drug addicts, young and/or single parents, orphans, young people from broken families, etc.

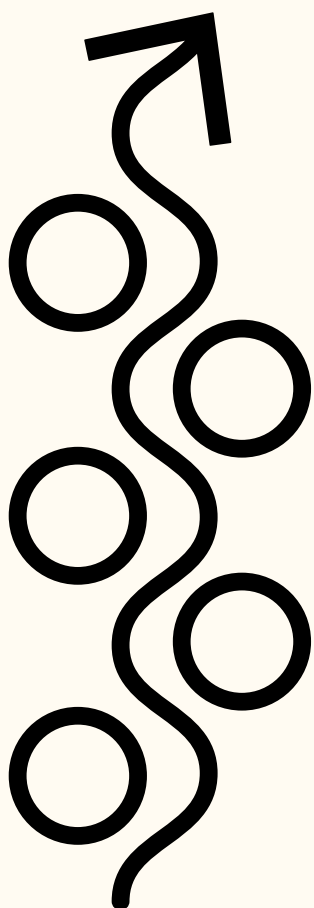
2.Economic obstacles: young people with a low standard of living, low income, dependence on social welfare system, long-term unemployed youth, homeless young people, young people in debt or in financial problems, etc.

3.Disability: young people with mental (intellectual, cognitive, learning), physical, sensory or other disabilities.

4.Educational difficulties: young people with learning difficulties, early school-leavers and school dropouts, lowly or non-qualified persons, young people that didn't find their way in the school system, young people with poor school performance because of a different cultural/linguistic background, etc.



Profile of the ideal participant



5.Cultural differences: young immigrants or refugees or descendants from immigrant or refugee families, young people belonging to a national or ethnic minority, young people with linguistic adaptation and cultural inclusion problems, etc.

1.Health problems: young people with chronic health problems, severe illnesses or psychiatric conditions, young people with mental health problems, etc.

2.Geographical obstacles: young people from remote, rural or hilly areas, young people living on small islands or peripheral regions, young people from urban problemzones, young people from less serviced areas (limited public transport, poor facilities, abandoned villages...), etc

Sometimes it is not easy to fit one person into one category, because they show a wide complexity in their difficulties.

The importance of promoting inclusion among youth at risk and ex-offenders



When we talk about young offenders or youth at risk of offending, we are overall talking about a group of young people on the outskirts of mainstream society. Those not enjoying the accepted normal life experiences of their peers. They may have chosen a different life through the friendships they have built and experiences they have bought into or may have had little support to choose a different lifestyle. Interestingly when you type Youth Inclusion into a web browser the predominant sites you are led to, all relate to social inclusion & crime reduction, describing how crime figures reduce as young people become more **'included in society'**.

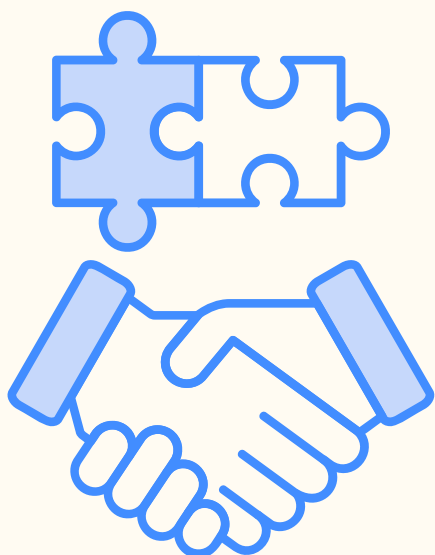
The importance of promoting inclusion among youth at risk and ex-offenders

The process of **reintegration** includes several dimensions, including securing employment, reestablishing social relationships, and addressing psychological needs. Employment is often cited as one of the most critical factors for successful reintegration.

According to Graffam, Shinkfield, and Hardcastle (2007), perceived employability of ex-prisoners is significantly lower compared to the general population, largely due to employer biases and a lack of relevant job skills. Training programs, skill mismatches, lower levels of education, and the need for certifications were common issues. In addition to employment challenges, social integration is a crucial aspect of reintegration. Ex-offenders often face social exclusion and stigmatization, which can impede their ability to form supportive relationships and participate in community life.

Psychological

challenges also pose significant obstacles to reintegration.



Ex-offenders often face social exclusion and stigmatization, which can impede their ability to form supportive relationships and participate in community life. Psychological challenges also pose significant obstacles to reintegration. Many ex-offenders suffer

from mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which can be exacerbated by the stress of reintegration.

The importance of promoting inclusion among youth at risk and ex-offenders

There is great importance in promoting inclusion in society for this target group, young people committing crime, on the verge of it or who have a history of committing crime have often got into a situation they feel they cannot get out of. They are often excluded from 'mainstream society' by their own doing, but when they wish to re-enter this accepted society, this can be much more difficult, than when they made their exit!

They now have **negative stereotypes** attached to them, they have made poor friendship choices and have little social or family support to re-engage with positive activities. Many of this target group do not know what support networks are available to them, and they would almost certainly be unaware of opportunities available through the Youth in Action program for example. These areas of education and support may very well be where our job as professional youth worker comes in – to offer knowledge of such programs which can include such a target group, then to provide the necessary support to engage. Hopefully leading these young people one step closer to inclusion.

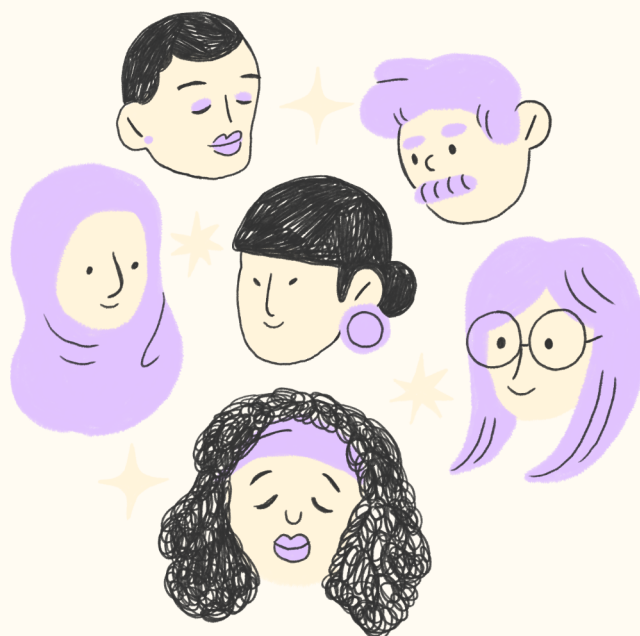
Social inclusion provides opportunities for the members of society “who do not enjoy the same level of privilege as others and striving to ensure that all aspects of society are “open to all”.



The importance of promoting inclusion among youth at risk and ex-offenders

According to the report "No offence", a young person can be said to be "**included**" when they:

- ∅ smile
- ∅ take their own initiative
- ∅ voluntarily take part in an activity
- ∅ make friends
- ∅ can concentrate on a task
- ∅ are accepted by the rest of the group
- ∅ observe the rules
- ∅ show up on time
- ∅ ask for help
- ∅ help or praise another young people
- ∅ contribute to a discussion
- ∅ are not afraid of physical contact
- ∅ show patience
- ∅ are happy



Youth workers as a tool for social rehabilitation for young ex-offenders or those at high risk of offending



One consequence of the tremendous growth in the number of persons under supervision of the criminal justice system, whether incarcerated, on parole, or on probation, is the effect of this criminal history on finding and keeping a job. Ex-offenders, especially those recently released from prison, face substantial barriers to many types of legal employment; nonetheless, stable employment is one of the best predictors of post-release success. Thus, policy makers concerned about high recidivism rates face an obvious need to improve the employment prospects of ex-offenders. Over the last 25 years, many programs that were designed to increase employment among ex-offenders have been implemented and evaluated.

The rehabilitation and treatment of youth offenders is a complex and debated topic within the criminal justice system, shaped by legal, social, and psychological factors. Public perceptions of youth offenders greatly influence policies, which vary across communities and are impacted by media, experiences, and social norms. Violence risk and gang affiliation complicate rehabilitation efforts, as seen in studies by Chu et al., highlighting the need for targeted interventions.

Youth workers as a tool for social rehabilitation for young ex-offenders or those at high risk of offending

Youth workers play a crucial role in the social rehabilitation of young ex-offenders and those at high risk of offending. They act as mentors and role models, providing guidance, support, intervention strategies and positive reinforcement to help young people reintegrate into society. Their work involves several key areas:

1. Building Trusting Relationships: Youth workers establish trusting relationships with young people, helping them feel valued and understood. This connection is vital for encouraging youth to engage in rehabilitation and change their behavior.

2. Positive Role Models: Youth workers provide positive examples and offer alternative perspectives on life choices, showing young people the possibilities for success and fulfillment outside of crime.

3. Skill Development: Youth workers often focus on helping young people develop life and social skills, such as communication, conflict resolution, and decision-making, which are essential for preventing reoffending.

4. Community Engagement: By connecting young people with community resources, youth workers help them rebuild their lives, fostering a sense of belonging and responsibility within the community.



Youth workers as a tool for social rehabilitation for young ex-offenders or those at high risk of offending

1. Personalized Support: Youth workers tailor their approach to meet the individual needs of each young person, addressing underlying factors like family issues, substance abuse, or mental health challenges that contribute to criminal behavior.

2. Prevention Programs: For those at high risk of offending, youth workers engage in preventive measures, helping them navigate away from criminal influences through education, recreational activities, and constructive peer networks.

By focusing on rehabilitation, skill development, and prevention, youth workers are essential in supporting at-risk youth toward positive life outcomes and reducing their likelihood of reoffending.



Youth workers as a tool for social rehabilitation for young ex-offenders or those at high risk of offending

The job of the youth worker or youth worker brings to bear skills and competencies that first and foremost stimulate **self-confidence through acceptance of diversity**. Some of the skills that a youth worker must have that can most help young people improve themselves are:

- Ability to work in a team, listen and communicate with others
- Ability to collaborate to achieve results
- Ability to listen to needs in order to plan interventions
- Leadership skills through a charismatic and nonviolent attitude
- Ability to believe in and promote values
- Ability to welcome other cultures and viewpoints
- Ability to pass on to others through nonformal and informal education methods
- Ability to be able to enjoy working
- Creativity

Youth workers as a tool for social rehabilitation for young ex-offenders or those at high risk of offending

These like skills are a part of their personal development: **topics such as budgeting, time management and communication** skills can help ex-offenders or people at risk to navigate everyday challenges. They can also provide ex-offenders with job readiness training, preparing them with resume writing, interviewing and workplace etiquette to enhance their chances of securing employment or with peer support groups, in which they can share experiences and challenges with others in a similar situation fostering a sense of community and accountability.

Giving responsibility to young people is the main goal of a youth worker. Young people need to establish a trustful relationship with the youth worker. During the entire life of young people, the emphasis has been on 'what they are not able to'. The aim of a youth worker is about keeping your eyes open for possibilities for young people to act and take responsibility, facilitating network opportunities with the community.



Including the target group in youth programs: guidelines for youth workers



Having in mind the complexity and difficulty of the backgrounds such convicted youngsters came from and experiences they had to live through and/or witness, makes them extra sensitive and vulnerable. This is why, having no prior experience in the field might determine some activities going not as wanted, despite all the planning efforts put way in advance.

Indeed, policies and support from local authorities, agencies, units, organizations, and individuals play a crucial role in facilitating the successful reintegration of individuals released from prison, particularly young offenders. By providing the necessary assistance and opportunities, these individuals can find stable employment and support themselves and their families, reducing the risk of them returning to a life of crime. When the community provides favorable conditions and support, young individuals can swiftly overcome their inferiority complex and successfully reintegrate, positively contributing to their family, locality, and society.

Including the target group in youth programs: guidelines for youth workers

After clarifying the scope of operability of youth workers and the complex background of the ideal participant, with all the related dynamics, guidelines follow that the youth worker can adopt to facilitate the process of inclusion and rehabilitation of these young people:

•**Education and Skill Development:** Implementation of programs that focus on education and skill development for young offenders while they are still in prison. This will equip them with the knowledge and expertise needed to secure meaningful employment upon their release. Understanding the psychology and aspirations of prisoners will help prison officials take measures to educate and influence their thoughts, feelings, and attitudes, assisting them in overcoming difficulties and preparing for reintegration into the community, especially for those approaching the end of their sentences.

•**Essential soft skills Development:** Teaching of skills such as conflict management, problem-solving, effective communication, and stress management, which can help young people reintegrate socially and reduce risky behaviors.

•**Vocational Training:** Offering of vocational training programs that align with current job market demands. This will enable ex-offenders to gain practical skills and increase their chances of finding employment in specific industries.

Including the target group in youth programs: guidelines for youth workers

- **Job Placement Support:** Establishment of partnerships with local businesses and industries to provide job placement support for ex-offenders. Encourage companies to consider hiring individuals with criminal records and provide them with the necessary support and training to succeed in their roles.
- **Individualized mentoring:** Integration of mentoring programs where young people are supported by experienced individuals who can provide guidance and continuous support, helping them set realistic goals and develop a plan to achieve them.
- **Positive role models:** Providing of examples of people who have overcome similar challenges to inspire young people and show them possibilities for success.
- **Empowerment:** Giving young people the opportunity to make decisions within the program, promoting their sense of responsibility and belonging.
- **Social integration:** Encouraging participation in social or volunteer activities that allow young people to contribute positively to the community, reducing isolation and increasing self-esteem.



Including the target group in youth programs: guidelines for youth workers

- **Community Support Networks:** Establishment of community support networks where individuals who have successfully reintegrated into society can mentor and support young offenders during their transition back into the community. For the social community and local government, effective coordination with social organizations and mass organizations is crucial in organizing propaganda and law dissemination sessions on community reintegration.
- **Access to support services:** Collaboration with psychologists or specialized counselors to provide emotional support to participants who need it, addressing issues such as trauma, anxiety, or addiction.
- **Engagement with families:** Where possible and appropriate, involve families or significant people in the young people's lives to create a strong support system.
- **Community collaboration:** Foster collaboration with other organizations, schools, or social services that can offer complementary support and contribute to the young people's reintegration into society.
- **Public Awareness and Rebranding:** Raise of public awareness about the importance of giving second chances and supporting the reintegration of ex-offenders. Rebranding them as individuals who can positively contribute to society will help reduce the stigma they face when seeking employment or housing.

Including the target group in youth programs: guidelines for youth workers

- Restorative Justice Practices:** Promotion of restorative justice practices that focus on repairing the harm caused by the crime, fostering accountability, and rebuilding relationships with victims and the community.
- Non-judgmental approach:** Ensure that young people feel welcomed without prejudice or stereotypes. It is essential to treat each participant as an individual and not label them based on their past.
- Safe space:** Create an environment where participants can express themselves freely and feel safe and accepted.
- Timely intervention:** Be ready to intervene quickly in case of signs of distress or risky behaviors, collaborating with external support services when necessary.

By implementing these solutions and working together as a community, local authorities, organizations, and individuals can significantly improve the chances of successful reintegration for young people who have violated the law. A supportive and inclusive society can create an environment where these individuals can rebuild their lives, contribute positively to society, and break the cycle of recidivism.





**THANK YOU FOR
READING**



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