

The face of Youth work in the Netherlands

What a youth worker does

In the Netherlands youth work is subdivided into age groups. There is child work (4 – 12 years of age), teenager work (10 – 14 years of age) and youth work (12 – 32 years of age). This brochure is concerned with the latter category as a professional discipline.

A youth worker (for youth 12 – 23 years of age) is a coach and counsellor for young people in their own living environment, acting as one of them. He or she knows the community, village or city. The youth worker also knows which youth need extra support. Vice versa, he or she is recognised by the young people.

Youth work in the Netherlands focuses primarily on underprivileged youth. It offers them opportunities and supports them to actually use them. It encourages them to develop themselves in a secure manner into independent individuals in their own community, village or city and in society. In addition it provides connections between these various environments. Youth work connects young people, unites groups of young people and (re)connects young people with society, if need be.

- What is youth work?
- What does youth work stand for?
- What are the tasks of a youth worker?
- Which abilities should a youth worker possess?
- More information on the occupational structure.

“The question why young people behave in a particular way makes the work so interesting.”

“I derive a great deal of inspiration from interaction with young people. That is what fascinates me about the work. I also enjoy responding to their wishes and demonstrating that many things are in fact possible. I have been doing this work for thirteen years now, and I have seen many changes. These days we see nine year olds, whereas it used to be thirteen, fourteen year olds. My work has changed as well. In addition to practice work I have been engaged in coordination and registration. I am glad that the competences have been laid down now. This is particularly important for youth workers just starting their jobs. Being able to bond with young people is the most important competence for me. I mean youth workers that have affinity, that can really empathise with young people and their different cultures. A good youth worker will ask: “Why is it that young people behave this way?” It is precisely this question that makes the work so fascinating.”

Danielle Lanzaat is youth worker in the town of Almere, (in the central polder area of the Netherlands).



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The importance of youth work

The Netherlands has approximately 1700 youth workers. They are the face of youth work. They talk about what makes their job so interesting, the tasks they carry out and the skills required. They also indicate what they feel is needed to continue to do the job well. The MOGroep Welzijn & Maatschappelijke Dienstverlening MOGroep WMD (The branche organisation Welfare and Social Work and Services) and ABVAKABO (The Union for employees in the public sector, such as civil servants, social workers, teachers etcetera) allow them to speak up in this brochure and thus focus more on youth work and its workers. Together with these organisations and BV Jong (the professional organisation of youth work) MOVISIE (The Netherlands centre for social development) has also drawn up a job competence profile, with the assistance of youth workers themselves. The profile clearly shows what the job can do for young people and the community. It also demonstrates the role a youth worker can play in the positioning of young people with regard to the quality of life within society. The confirmation of this profile by the branche resulted in this brochure in which youth work is being presented.

The Union for employees in the public sector, such as civil servants, social workers, teachers etcetera.

What is youth work?

How can all young people develop their talents and participate fully in society? That is the main question for youth work professionals.

Extra attention

Youth work is a low-threshold provision for –in principle- all young people. Eighty percent of the young grow up without encountering too many problems. For them youth work is a basic facility with an appealing activity range. But approximately 20% of the young require extra attention. For example, because they grow up in high risk circumstances. Youth work attempts to render their risk of problems at home, in school or in leisure hours as little as possible. And it provides a way back for young people that already have these problems.

Finally, there is a small group of young people that is insufficiently able to take care of themselves. Some are homeless, drug addicts, have committed serious criminal offences or have psychiatric problems. In this case the role of the youth worker is to refer them to the proper agencies.

The job is varied

The content of youth work depends on the questions, needs and problems of the target group and of local youth policy. In consultation with the local authorities the work addresses –generally speaking- the following goals:

- Promotion of youth participation
- Non-formal training and parenting issues
- Education in and out of school
- Reinforcing of social connections in the community
- Meeting people and recreation.

Working independently and cooperating

The youth worker operates fairly independently, but is also a team player and continuously asks himself: do our activities and my way of communicating match the target group's needs?

He or she is able to translate social developments into goals for youth work, devises methods, responds to unexpected situations and takes stock of the consequences of their own actions. Also, he or she is able to make an activity planning and cooperate with partners.

"MSN is ideally suited for one-to-one talks with young people".

"The competences that have been described so far are very welcome! Many people have a vague notion of youth work. The competences show that youth work is a profession. I have been doing this work for six years now and I still find the dynamics interesting. You see the coming and going of subcultures and the development of new trends in young people. I find that youth work and police work are getting closer to each other. And also that there is a fundamental difference between youth work in rural areas and in the cities. In rural areas young people are more creative and have better coping abilities, they can make something out of nothing. In the urban agglomeration in the western Netherlands there are more services.

Multimedia tools and applications are increasingly important in my work. I used to go out into the streets, now I surf the Internet. That is also a type of non residential work. For example, I find MSN ideal for one-to-one talks. To me, affinity with multimedia is important for youth workers. I also believe they must be streetwise, have a feeling for the street and they must be able to stand their ground. But the most important thing is they have to be environment-conscious. You must know what is going on around you, then you can make the connections and respond quickly."

Auke Zandstra is a youth worker in Heerenveen (midsize town in the north of the Netherlands).

Which approach is needed?

The youth worker:

- Responds to the living environment of young people in leisure time and develops relationships of trust with (groups of) young people, on that basis.
- Coaches young people on the road to adulthood (maturity)
- Thinks and works in an integrated manner in the interests of his or her target group.
- Pays attention to parents, residents, volunteers, organisations and agencies.
- Promotes participation and encourages young people to join in, to organise and to make decisions.
- Goes out to meet young people wherever they happen to be.

What does youth work stand for?

Youth work ensures that young people grow up to be democratic citizens in their own circles and in society. It supports young people aged 12 – 23 in their leisure hours. This is also done in groups. The primary target groups are opportunity seeking youth of lower socio-economical backgrounds and low levels of education. The youth worker goes out to meet the young people and makes them enthusiastic for setting up and carrying out activities of their own accord. In this respect he or she addresses their actual and perceived environment. The youth worker builds a relationship of trust with them and uses this to motivate them into new behaviour. 'Respect' and 'Fair Play' are key values here.

He or she cooperates actively with other parties, on the principle that *'it takes a village to raise a child'*, and also ensures that the 'village' takes its responsibilities.

Different types

There are different types of youth work, and combinations of types.

| Type | Where | Details |
|--|--|--|
| Youth development work, social work | Rural areas | Focuses on the support of volunteers |
| Open or urban youth work | The larger urban agglomerations | In separate and bigger youth centres |
| Accommodation-linked youth work and teen work | In the community | Often part of a more broad-based social work institution |
| Non residential youth work | In the streets | Focuses on problem youth and high risk youth |
| Street-oriented social work, teenage dropouts work | In the streets, usually in the larger urban agglomerations | Coaching on the boundary between youth work and youth care |

This is what an assistant youth worker does

An assistant youth worker is part of a team. He or she enters into and maintains contacts with the target group, organises activities with the young people, sees opportunities and problems and discusses them with the youth workers in his or her team.

The assistant youth worker has fewer responsibilities.

"Preventive youth work contributes towards a better society."

Our union is very pleased with the professional profile for youth workers. Our youth work members can use it to discuss high-quality youth work with co-workers, collaboration partners and their own organisation. And they can use it to reflect on themselves.

The union also believes it is very important that it has now been made clear that youth work focuses on the prevention of problems. Unfortunately it seems to be the case that at present many politicians only pay attention to or make funds available for youth work when there are nuisance complaints. Too often, youth work is used as a tool for repression. But youth workers are special social workers who feel strongly about *participation in society*. The union like to put the message across with our members, the professional association and the MOGroep that investing in (preventive) youth work is far from soft and contributes in a much more effective manner to a more beautiful and better society.”

Ben Hoogendam is a board member of ABVAKABO FNV.

Which tasks does a youth worker's have?

The actual tasks of a youth worker differ according to the situation in hand. This not only relates to the goals of the work, but also to –for example- the location: city, village or rural area.

Sometimes special attention is required for a specific subject, such as obesity, lover boys or drug addiction. This in itself entails other tasks. The expectations of the municipality or network partners also play their parts in the task performance, as do the conditions on which youth work is being carried out.

The *competence profile youth worker* describes extensively the core tasks of the profession. In its execution the youth worker continually weighs the pro's and cons, because it is often a case of various choices, areas of tension and dilemmas. Then it is necessary to strike a happy medium when choosing an approach or solution.

Choices, dilemmas and areas of tension can occur in the following instances:

- Dealing with diversity.
- Keeping the balance between commitment and distance.
- Choosing between combating symptoms and working in a structural way.
- Choosing between using a network or intervening oneself.
- Stimulating autonomy and security.
- Dealing with limited means.
- Consultations versus directives
- Switching between various parties.
- Setting clear boundaries.
- Choosing between supporting young people or reporting a nuisance to the police.

With the proper competences the youth worker will be able to find a professional balance in this respect.

This is what a senior youth worker does

The more experienced senior youth worker operates independently in all respects. He or she makes an activity planning, directs the execution and develops and improves the organisation's quality policy.

He or she builds a network and matches activities to parties involved. The senior youth worker must address more complex and at times unpredictable situations, is able to make an environment analysis, produces solutions to difficult situations and makes decisions when interests clash.

"This enables employers to further professionalise youth work."

"These competences provide insight into the state of affairs of youth work. The work is described correctly which is an advantage. The profile is an excellent basis for the further development of youth work. To me it is very important to invest in this and I think that all employers will be able to raise the professional level of youth work with this. The members of the MOgroep WMD will make an effort to promote this incentive to quality.

Youth workers themselves can also benefit. They can compare their practice against it and this will show them what they could improve."

Johan Brongers is vice chairman of MOG WMD and director of welfare organisation Wel-Com in Veendam, Stadskanaal and Pekela (core counties in the Northern part of the Netherlands).

"This is a landmark for the Professional Association Youth Work."

"By confirming a nationally recognised competence profile the Professional Association Youth Work reaches a landmark. As of 2002 quality circles have been created all over the country, in which youth workers have discussed, exchanged information and decided to improve the professional image. In 2003 the national professional association was created. Youth workers do not readily organise themselves: their heart is in the streets, with the target groups themselves. Gradually the notion is taking root that the development of their own profession is very necessary, on behalf of this very target group, that demands more and better youth work. Confirmation of a recognised professional code, professional registration and the devising of sound collaboration protocols with important partners such as schools, police and youth care are the next steps on the road to further professionalisation."

Henk Geelen is employed by welfare organisation Trajekt in Maastricht (major city in the southern part of the Netherlands and board member of de BV Jong).

Which abilities must a youth worker possess?

How many and which competences a youth worker must have, differs for each level. An assistant youth worker for example will need fewer competences than the coordinating youth worker.

Some competences also apply for many other professions in care and welfare. For example: entering into contacts, focusing on demand and need, goal-oriented and cost-conscious action, being initiative, availing oneself of opportunities.

In addition to this a youth worker needs a number of profession-specific competences:

- Developing meaningful relationships.
- Working in a location-oriented manner.
- Promoting young people's participation in society.
- Taking initiatives to build networks.
- Planning and organising activities.
- Creating a safe environment.
- Respectful and unambiguous action with regard to aggression and verbal abuse.
- Working on an intercultural basis.

This is what a coordinating youth worker does

This youth worker coordinates tasks, supports all youth workers and is overall manager of youth work. He or she has final responsibility.

The coordinating youth worker draws up the (activity) annual plan and participates in projects, consults with commissioning agencies (mostly local authorities) and his or her own board. He or she develops and improves the organisation's quality policy, is aware of the developments with the profession, translates these into policy proposals, build a network and is executive director.

"Youth workers must be able to speak several 'languages', also that of professionals."

"The competences from the youth worker's profile are very clear. They are important, because many youth workers operate alone, in the field as well as within their organisation. These competences show what they are capable of and what they do. Working in an integrated manner is an importance competence, but with regard to this many youth workers still have a lot to learn.

I notice that many youth workers are very able to speak several 'languages' when dealing with young people. But not everyone manages this equally well with a chief of police, an alderman or a housing association. Training is required in this respect. Particularly because at present young people's reputation gets tagged in a negative way. Youth workers are expected to solve the problems caused by young people. It is an advantage if they are able to express adequately what they are doing and why. And what it is they expect and need from the network partner."

Sietske Horneman is a teacher of pedagogics and security in the public domain at the faculty of Social Work of Hogeschool Zuyd.

Would you like more information, or would you like to order?

The youth worker's profile was drawn up at the close of 2008 in a Dutch publication Jongerenwerker Beroepsstructuur Zorg en Welzijn. (Youth worker's Professional Structure Care and Welfare). In addition to the description of youth work, this discusses extensively recent developments in society and elsewhere and their relevance for the profession. The complete profile (in Dutch) of the youth workers can be ordered in print or downloaded from www.movisie.nl

More information on the professional structure

These stories and those of many other professionals are the core and the point of departure for the new professional structure for the branches of welfare and social work, care for the disabled, youth care and children's day-care.

It has been mapped out what professionals are able to do and what is needed if they are to meet the requirements of the job in times to come. The professional structure is a joint product of the organisations and unions of this branche. It is the basis for vocational training and was described in the publication "Prepared for the future".

The profiles of the professional structure

The profile Youth worker is one of the profiles that has been drawn up within the professional structure. Other job profiles comprise:

- Motivation therapist
- Professional Regional Child Care Services
- Professional primary process care for the disabled
- Group leader children's day care services
- Group leader out-of-school day-care
- Care assistant care and welfare
- Group leader community work for pre-school children
- Social worker
- Support workers for senior citizens
- Educational counselling service worker
- Community worker
- Welfare rights officers / welfare service worker
- Independent living support worker

Information in Dutch on tasks, choices, dilemmas and competences of the professionals in care and welfare can be found on www.competentieweb.nl. Competentieweb is an instrument for branches, professional organisations, institutions for care and welfare and their employees. They can use this website to check whether the competences of professionals meet the requirements of a changing society and whether they meet the changing demand of clients, citizens and volunteers.

Colophon

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Order from: www.movisie.nl

More information: www.abvakabofnv.nl/welzijn

www.mogroep.nl

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