



Selling youth work

By Eliza Popper



How do we convince people outside of youth work of its value?
Some thoughts, some questions, some proposals here...



There is no hiding it, we are living within our bubble. Even when we are trying to sell youth work, we end up trying to sell it to those who are already believers. It is almost like convincing a 6-year-old boy that Santa exists when he already is preparing for Santa's visit.

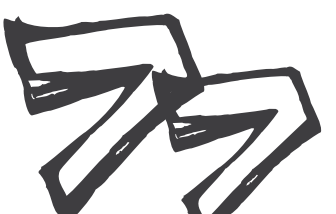
Youth workers know their value. Youth workers know what youth work is about. Youth workers know why we need to invest in youth.

But I wonder how wide the understanding of youth work is. How wide is the recognition? It seems that outside of our bubble, youth work has been somewhat of a "Cinderella" service – one that has been rather ignored or treated as less important than others.

Surely, there are numerous studies, publications, articles and what-not, proving the worth of youth work, so there is no need for me to list all the reasons, evidence and stories. And let's face it, even this article in this very magazine will only be read by those within our world.

So, dear co-habitants of the youth work bubble, let's look together at how we can sell youth work outside of our bubble.

If you look at effective television advertisements, there is one thing that makes an ad stand out: it sells emotion and a promise. So how can we frame our promise? What is our promise?



When you search "youth work" on YouTube, you will find mostly explanatory videos, such as this one (www.youtube.com/watch?v=w_dRh3grAik), created by the European Union-Council of Europe youth partnership. The video has a nice graphic design and explains what youth work is. Does it play on the viewer's emotions? No. It's a historical review of how youth work started, and what it did in the past and what it does today. It gives you a basic understanding of the principles of youth work, talking about its aims, approaches and methodologies, as well as looking at challenges youth work faces today. It is a good summary, yet it's long (5 minutes) and is clearly meant for those in the bubble. The call for action at the end of the video is to find a common ground and work together.

What would our message outside of the bubble be? What would be the right format? What emotions should be touched on? And what can our promise be?

We could bring in the often-used "golden circle" to see how to formulate our message. It is believed that Apple is so successful in their communication because they follow the rule of the golden circle.

WHY YOUTH WORK?

We believe young people have the key to changing society for the better.

WHAT DOES YOUTH WORK DO?

Youth work empowers young people to reach their full potential in order to enable them to become actors for change.

HOW DOES YOUTH WORK DO THIS?

Youth work helps young people develop personal and social skills through non-formal and informal learning.

The trick is to turn your message upside down from how you would normally formulate it. Often we start with the "what" and the "how", and the "why" is either missing or is somewhere in brackets at the end. The rule of the golden circle suggests you bring the why forward, because that is what makes people listen. It tunes into people's emotions, and that is what we need!

So what is our promise? That we will help young people to fulfil their potential and bring positive change in society. Many campaigns have used the following call for action: "Invest in youth, invest in the future!" It makes me wonder whether the word "future" might make people less interested in a sense. We live in the present; we have enough to deal with – the future is not our problem at the moment. I'd like to propose a change of perspective: "Invest in youth, invest in society!" Young people have a fresh perspective and are willing to question the status quo. And so they should! We need young people to be critical. We need their somewhat naïve approach, their belief that anything is possible. Once you grow older and experience a lot of things, you lose the motivation to fight. You think it's never going to change. Young people are the key. They are the hope for a better society!

