

A trainers' guild, a work in progress

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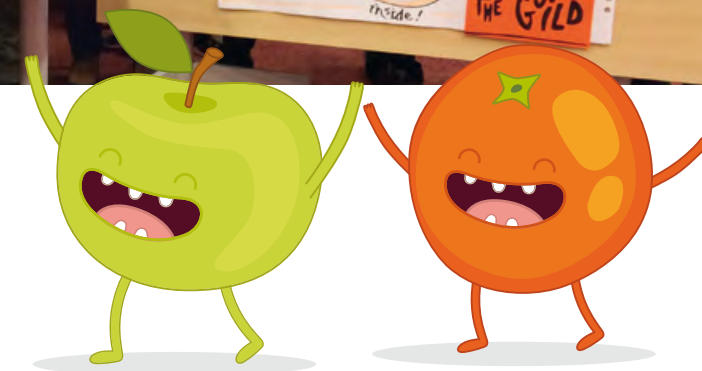
Photos courtesy of the IYWT Guild



What is it that international
youth work trainers need?

- ✓ A common voice
- ✓ A platform to exchange practices,
success stories and concerns
- ✓ A home and a source of inspiration,
peer support and innovation
- ✓ A clear definition of trainer status,
identity and quality standards
- ✓ A joint representation to lobby
for trainer interests

Well a lot of this is happening as you will
read in this article – here is the story so far.



Working with Trainers III, Sofia, Bulgaria

In September 2013 trainers and national agency staff members met for the third edition of Working with Trainers, a meeting held by SALTO and several national agencies. It was a full agenda as we started to explore and identify the quality issues of trainers working as part of “trainer pools”. Discussions and activities led us down many paths that included: trainer competences, trainer challenges, professional practice and development, quality standards, the European Training Strategy and so much more.

It was from our time together here that the idea of some sort of trainer-led association or network developed. It was clear many had thought of something along these lines individually but never found the opportunity to share, challenge and explore it with others. In many ways it gave us more questions than answers: for whom? for what? why? As well as what are we talking about here exactly? A union? A professional practice association? A network? These questions proved to be the catalyst and momentum for a small number of interested trainers coming together to work on an application for a meeting in Ireland for other curious trainers. An Irish associate organisation agreed to apply; the application was submitted and later the platform, for more trainers identifying more questions, was approved.

An Irish adventure

In March 2014, trainers from across Europe and its neighbouring regions gathered to take the next steps on this journey of development. A total of 24 trainers from 21 countries arrived to meet like the Celtic chieftains of old, to discuss the future, confirm boundaries, identify resources and how they can work together to make sure the future was theirs. The meeting was supported by two external professionals, one to facilitate the process and another to document the gathering.

An itinerary for the meeting had been mapped out and the landmarks included questioning who we are, what we could be as a network, what we want and where we want to go. It was an open process which invited everyone to participate and contribute. The journey wasn't an easy one and challenges and demons were faced, and we knew that they would not be the last we met on our continued adventure.

It still wasn't clear which direction we would be going in, but it was agreed that the network would be for trainers and by trainers working in the youth work sector who met quality standards, and that it would have a positive impact on youth policy and non-formal education in Europe and hopefully beyond.

During this time, the group also sought to consult with the wider sector through an online survey to establish what the definition of a European youth work trainer and what the needs of such a network would be. Additionally the [IYWT blog](#) was brought to life to document the process and serve as a record of the meeting and discussions. A working group was agreed and a small number worked on another application for a meeting, this time to be hosted by an associate organisation in Budapest.

Slow boat to somewhere

Budapest, Hungary – October 2014 and the group were back together with some of the original trainers from Ireland along with a collection of newcomers at the Fortuna Boat Hotel. The group worked over three days to establish a network strategy, including aims and objectives, structure, culture and communications strategy. They also considered a consultation process to ensure the wider informal community of trainers in Europe (and neighbouring regions) could contribute to its development and some clear next steps for the coming 12 months to move the guild forward.

At the outset of the Budapest sessions the group identified four themes which would need to be kept in mind in order to make a success of this stage of the process.

- Too many leaders but no leadership
- Dreaming to create the network
- Participation to be inclusive
- Balancing outcomes and objectives with relationships

The group also decided on seven top measures for success for the network to be considered over the next 12 months:

1. recognition by trainers and other stakeholders;
2. defined quality standards for trainers;
3. voice and a representative body;
4. a sense of belonging for members;
5. support for trainers;
6. joint action;
7. creating methodology.



We also settled on two final statements about the guild. The first is on who “we” are.

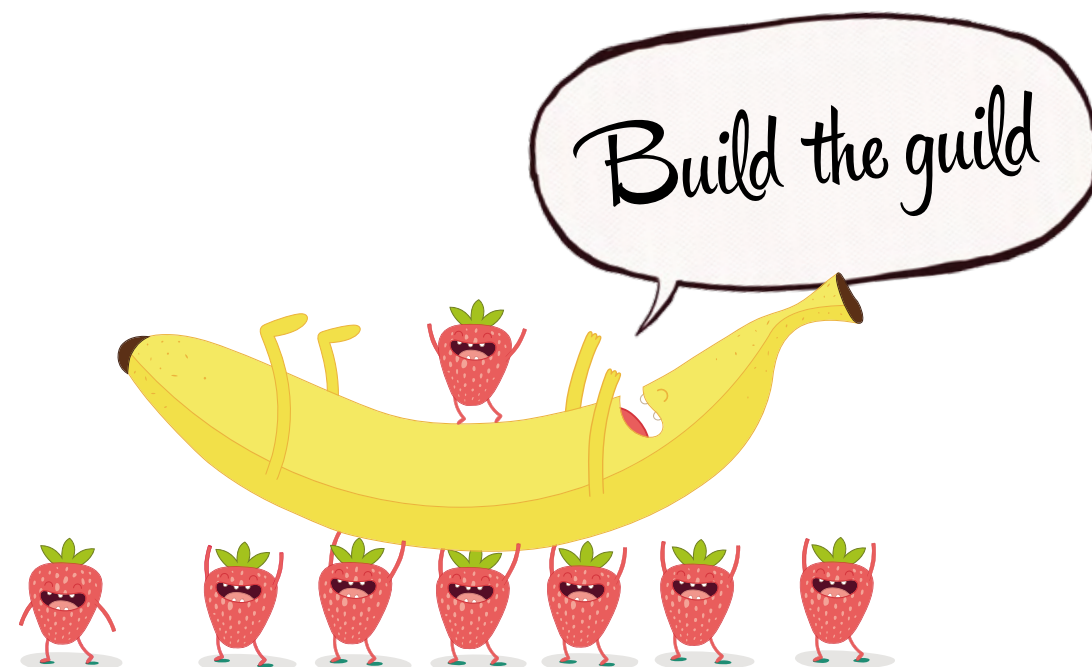
“An independent supportive community of trainers in the youth work sector that advocates on behalf of and contributes to each other’s professional development.”

And the other is on what “we” do.

Members aim to ensure defined quality standards in delivery of training activities. The network endeavours to have a positive impact on youth policy and non-formal education as part of lifelong learning at all levels within Europe and neighbouring regions. It will do this by communicating recommendations to decision makers and advocating on behalf of its members.

We also at this point defined the name of the guild through a public vote of the people attending the group and so the IYWT Guild (International Youth Work Trainers Guild) was born.

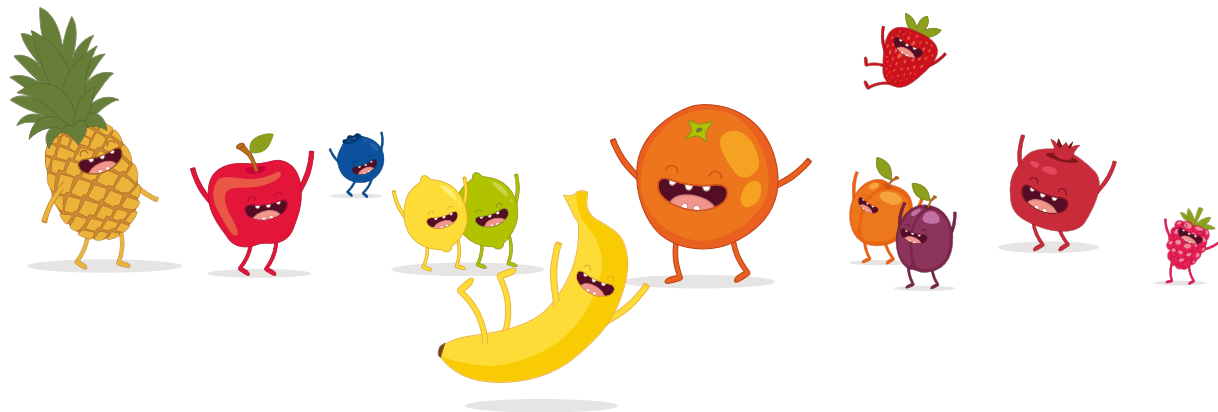
At the end of the three days, the group also elected a steering group following a process of nominations. Twenty of the participants voted to accept the nominations with only one abstaining. The newly formed steering group included Sabrina Apitz from Germany, Buzz Bury from the UK, Zora Csalagovits from Hungary, Mieke Neven from Ireland, Yuliya Stankevich from Belarus, Natalia Nikitina from the Russian Federation and MarCus Vreecer from Austria. It was agreed that this group would be responsible for co-ordinating the network and moving it forward towards its goals but could change when the organisational structure was more defined or through elections at annual assembly meetings. It is also important to mention that the steering group has been supported by a flock of fellow trainers providing expert input on various issues.



One small step for trainer-kind

February 2015 and the steering group for the guild are meeting in Blackpool, UK to further developments. This is a focused and very practical meeting as teams work on the membership and application process, website development, statutes and the process for the IYWT Guild to be officially registered and recognised in Germany. The guild was starting to feel real and possible, but who could know what was round the next corner?

So with positive thoughts and wishes an IYWT Guild statute was presented to officials in Germany in the middle of 2015. They came back with comments and questions and we have been working to finalise the official registration ever since. However as an organisation officially in the process of registration we were able to move forward with opening a bank account.



“Oranges are not the only fruit”

December 2015 and the steering group and several other supporters who have been a part of the journey manage to find themselves together again in Budapest for Tool Fair X. So in break times, in the late evenings, people met to continue with the website, membership process and with preparations for an official launch as part of the Tool Fair activities. As the market place opened and the customers arrived with empty shopping baskets and high expectations for innovation the IYWT Guild was launched. People registered interest, buying an array of fruit and vegetables with some IYWT Guild currency and thus contributing to the process of consultation. The market place and launch concluded with a celebratory glass of bubbles, people were happy with what they had created.

Then like driving without fuel the vehicle came to a stop, the membership forms on the website were working for some but not for all. As people who thought they had the technical knowhow voluntarily worked on trying to resolve the issues, it became clear the system was just not working. It was here we realised the importance of having somebody on board the guild with some technical expertise, and the classic challenges of working purely on a voluntary basis. We are still faced with some technical issues with the membership process but are working to resolve these in the near future. At the same time the individuals who had already tried to register offered feedback on the application process, which we have taken into account for the new process to be implemented.

Ireland - Testing the 360

One thing the IYWT Guild agreed they wanted to explore was a 360-degree appraisal and reflection tool for its members. So in April 2016 a “gang” of trainers (what do you call a group of trainers?) met in Ireland to explore and test a process of professional development for trainers through feedback and reflection. The method will include collecting feedback from four sides – the trainer, colleagues, participants of the training courses and commissioners. The assessment will be based on the ETS trainer competences and will aim to provide a full 360-degree perspective to help trainers to plan further their own professional development.

This tool was identified by the trainers who created the IYWT Guild as a starting point for its members and a space to create common ground. It is seen a process that promotes individuals using reflection and feedback as a means for trainers to take responsibility for their own professional development, improvement and practice as well as positively influencing the quality of training programmes delivered in the future.

Where to next? Can you read the signposts?

The journey that has brought us to where we are now has not been an easy one; it was often three steps forward and two steps back. We are still working and growing the guild and it is a work in progress. Those involved are learning a lot about themselves, each other and the commitment it requires to create something like this. As you can imagine, communication and time are our two nemeses when trying to move forward. We are finding our way, exploring ways that “we can manage time and not let time manage us” and working towards improving communication between the guild's steering group, its members and the wider world.

“Communication leads to community, that is, to understanding, intimacy and mutual valuing.” Rollo May

We are here even if the adventure is far from over and we would very much like to thank the people who have been a part of the journey so far and those who have been a part of working groups, written applications, dedicated time, offered encouragement and so much more. We are working towards finding that common voice; creating a platform for exchange; building a home of inspiration, support and innovation; identifying opportunities to represent and lobby; painting a picture of quality in our work and championing the professional development and identity of trainers.

See you all in a training room somewhere, sometime with some people soon.

Are you interested in joining us and becoming engaged with the guild?
We now have three levels of engagement; Subscriber, Associate and Member.
Check out the website for more information.

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