

Professionalisation of youth work through codes of ethical practice



VISIBLE VALUE: Growing Youth Work in Europe, Budapest

HEILI GRIFFITH

1st June 2023

Welcome!

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Heili Griffith

- Experience in youth field for over 20 years: volunteer, church youth work, Tallinn city government and now managing director at the Estonian Association of Youth Workers. (since 2019)
- I have lived and worked in the UK, mostly with immigrants.
- MA in Social Sciences in Youth Work Management. Tallinn University.
- Youth worker qualification level 7.
- Human rights activist (workshops and trainings for young people and youth workers).



Erasmus+ KA2 Project “Strengthening the professionalisation of youth work through the codes of ethics”

The aim of the project was to establish a strategic partnership between Estonia, Iceland and Australia to strengthen youth workers’ professional associations and provide an impetus for the greater application of Youth Work Codes of Ethics.

Tasks undertaken within the project:

- to establish a long-term strategic partnership between youth work professional associations and universities training youth workers in Estonia, Iceland and Australia for the purpose of furthering a youth work agenda of professionalisation through ethical practice using peer learning and utilisation of an international experience;
- to strengthen the evidence base by undertaking research and comparative analysis and mapping of the application of Youth Work Codes of Ethics and the professionalisation of youth work in the three countries;
- to increase the level of knowledge and understanding among youth workers on the importance of ethical practice in youth work and how it relates to the professionalisation of the sector;
- to provide guidance and collate practical examples for the use of youth workers to support the application of the Codes of Ethics in their youth work practice.

1. Professionalisation of youth work in Estonia, Australia and Iceland: Building an evidence base

KEY FINDINGS

“What are the main challenges related to the professionalisation of youth work in Estonia, Iceland and Australia?”

- Specific education and training
- Commitment to professional service
- Recognition by society

2. The application of youth work codes of ethics and practice in Estonia, Australia and Iceland

KEY FINDINGS

A common finding across all countries was the need for greater awareness of the Code, particularly by those not formally trained in youth work, and the importance of taking a systematic approach to promoting the Code of Ethics. This promotion should start with the grassroots of the youth work field itself, making the Code more visible, practical and known among youth workers in and for their everyday practice. There was also agreement on the review of the Code as and when necessary to meet the changing needs of the sector and wider society.

2. The application of youth work codes of ethics and practice in Estonia, Australia and Iceland

KEY FINDINGS

A common theme in the three participating countries is that those who are qualified in youth work know the content of their countries' Code of Ethics quite well, but less so do those who are not qualified.

It is apparent that in Australia and Estonia, the Code is used as a foundation of professional youth work. In contrast, the Code of Ethics is seen more as an extra tool for youth workers in Iceland.

They further agreed that the Code lays the foundation for the values and professional standards that must be safeguarded and not compromised in youth work but can also be used to promote youth work to others outside the youth work field.

2. The application of youth work codes of ethics and practice in Estonia, Australia and Iceland

KEY FINDINGS

In all countries, participants mentioned that the Code of Ethics was useful for informing good youth work practice, and in Australia, it was mentioned that the Code of Ethics is useful for managers and team leaders to work with staff members about the values and purpose of youth work.

In Estonia and Australia, it was mentioned that the Code of Ethics is a professional standard that promotes professionalism and is useful for purposeful, reflective learning on the job.

In all focus groups, it was seen as important to promote the Code of Ethics to youth workers as well as people outside the sector.

Participants discussed how much space should be provided for case studies within the Code of Ethics that allow for professional evaluation on particular issues or circumstances. Some participants wanted the Code of Ethics to make judgements using examples of what is right or wrong. However, others wanted the text to be based on more general principles and values and trust that the youth workers would apply the principles and thus find the right answers within that frame. There was no clear conclusion to this discussion other than providing a range of options for those both new to the sector and for those with many years of experience.

2. The application of youth work codes of ethics and practice in Estonia, Australia and Iceland

KEY FINDINGS

All countries mentioned that it is important to regularly review the Code of Ethics, to have discussions and update it according to changes in government legislation and society, without losing the core values and foundation of the Code of Ethics, such as human rights.

3. Youth Work Codes of Ethics in Estonia, Australia and Iceland: Their use in reflective practice

Yip (2006, p. 777) defines reflective practice as ‘a process of becoming aware of the influence of societal and ideological assumptions, especially ethical and moral beliefs, that sit behind professional practice.’

Reflecting on workplace experiences can be helpful for workers in training and established professionals in providing emotional support, an understanding of theoretical models, ethical professional practice, self-awareness and developing solutions to emotional and intellectual dilemmas (McNamara, Lawley & Towler 2008). It is also a way of improving professional practice by reducing the disparity between what the theory says professionals do and the realities of what actually takes place in practice (Fook 2007).

3. Youth Work Codes of Ethics in Estonia, Australia and Iceland: Their use in reflective practice

Reflective practice can also help resolve ethical dilemmas faced by youth workers (Banks 2010). Youth workers are committed to following ethical principles when working with a young person. For Banks (2010), an ethical dilemma occurs when a particular course of action seemingly breaches an ethical principle, leading to the potential occurrence of harm.

Reflective practice in youth work

Four key questions for reflective practice:

1. Who? (Describe who are the actors/people involved in the event e.g., worker, other professional, service user/young person, agency/employer?).
2. What? (Describe the event e.g., What is the problem? What happened? What did I do? What did others do? What did I feel? What did I think? What was I trying to achieve/change? What were the results/outcomes?).
3. So, what? (Analysis of event – So, what is the importance of this event? Why is it a problem/ issue? So, what more do I need to know about this? What is positive or negative? So, what has been learned from this event? So, what are the implications? How does this apply to me, or others, or the agency or organisation?).
4. Now what? (Propose actions, a way forward/ response/action following an event. These could be based on reflecting on a professional code of ethics: What could I do? What should I do? What could others do? What should others do? What would be the best thing to do? What could I have done differently? What will I do next time?).

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Reflective practice in youth work

Coaching and To GROW model

To - Topic

G – Goal: What are the long- and short-term goals?

R – Reality: What is the situation right now? What is your story?

O – Options: What's possible? What options and thoughts do you have to take you forward?

W – Wrap-up: Clarity/commitment, support – What will you do and what support do you have?

Group discussions on a case study on ethical dilemma

DISCUSSIONS

MORE INFO

More on the KA2 project and project outputs:

<https://enk.ee/eng/erasmus-ka2-project-strengthening-the-professionalisation-of-youth-work-through-codes-of-ethical-practice/>

**Lunch break and back at plenary
at 14.30.**

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