

How to Become a Trainer in European Youth Work...

The ways of becoming a trainer in European youth work are as diverse as the notions and reality of what it actually means to be one. Coyote asked three "European youth trainers" from different countries and organisational backgrounds to tell their stories of how they got involved in European level training. Underlying their different experiences and motivations are some common elements: some experience in working with young people, the interest to work with the specific dynamics of international groups, curiosity and the conviction that there is a lot that we can learn from each other.

"Am I the trainer? But I am the one who is learning!"

by Finn Denstad



How do I think of the term "training"? Training is not about one person teaching and all participants receiving information and learning something. Training is an interactive process! Every time I have participated in a youth activity as a trainer, I am sure I learned just as much as the participants did. Self-development is one of the most rewarding aspects of being a trainer, as is the satisfaction of getting positive and constructive feedback from participants.

To me, a trainer is a facilitator above all else. One's task is to bring people together, make participants aware of their own capabilities and potential, and provide the necessary information so as to realise this potential. Then, of course, training is just as much about how to provide this information in the best possible way, using the right methods.

I grew up in Norway, a thoroughly "organised" society with an average of four NGO memberships per capita (yes, it's true, the statistics say sixteen million memberships in a population of four million!). My first training experience was at the age of 14, and I still remember it as if it were yesterday. For a year, I had been involved in the Norwegian Good Templar Youth, a youth organisation promoting peace and fighting against the use of alcohol and illegal drugs. I was asked to participate as assistant trainer at a seminar for school pupils only a year younger than myself, and I did a session on peer-pressure and the impact of alcohol on young people. I wonder who learned the most from that experience!

Since then, I have enjoyed being involved in different youth organisations in Norway. However, it was not until I was employed at the Norwegian Youth Council (LNU) that I started gaining experience at

the European level, also as a trainer. My fields of training today correspond well with some of my areas of work in LNU, which are project development and management as ways to improve the work of youth organisations, in particular in Central and Eastern Europe. Reciprocity and mutual partnership are for me key words in international co-operation, and intercultural and active communication are elements which, if they are overlooked, can cause much frustration in, and even the destruction of international partnerships.

Over a number of years, I have developed a great interest in youth work in Central and Eastern Europe, and during the past year I have become more involved in South East Europe on behalf of LNU. To work with youth NGOs and young people in the Balkan region is fascinating, complicated and challenging. Two related fields of training I hope to "dive" more into in order to improve my skills and usefulness in this region are Conflict Management and Human Rights Education. But I have become so interested in the Balkans that I know I will stay involved in this field for years to come.

This brings me back to the starting point of my essay. Who is learning the most from a training – the trainer or the trainees? Hopefully, both categories learn something. For myself, I know that the reason why I keep on is that I learn so much from it!

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