

## Chapter 5

# Young people and their context

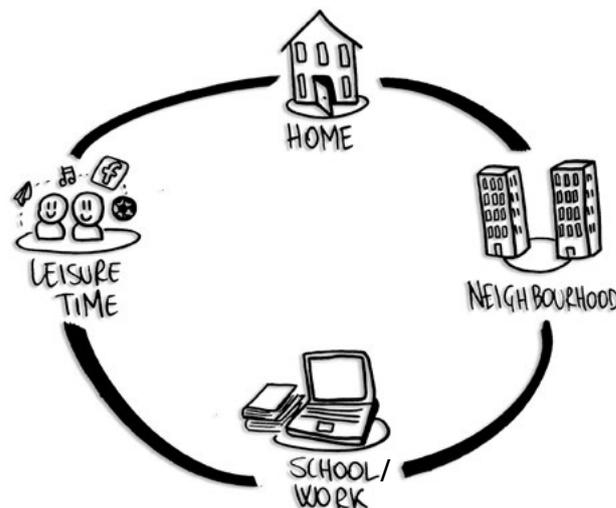
This chapter explores the role of the four main dimensions that have an essential impact on youth social inclusion: home, neighbourhood, school/work and leisure time, as well as the importance of youth workers' interactions with the stakeholders of these four dimensions in developing projects aiming at reducing the social exclusion of young people. The second part of the chapter is dedicated to defining the broad principles that could lead to setting up partnerships between youth organisations and the other actors in the community to develop and implement projects aiming to ensure youth social inclusion.

### YOUNG PEOPLE IN THEIR COMMUNITIES

Young people do not live on an island. They are embedded in a social structure composed of different people (parents, teachers, trainers, employers, etc.) who all have different expectations and interactions with the young people in question. Though the first priority of youth workers is with the young people, it would be impossible to ignore the influence of the people in their surroundings.

Paulides and ten Thije (1997) divide the world of young people into four parts:<sup>20</sup>

Figure 3: The four parts of young people's lives



In all four parts, young people are in contact with other people: friends, parents, colleagues, fellow students, neighbours, shopkeepers, policemen, teachers, coaches, etc. All these people have contacts with them and influence their behaviour. Therefore, it is important as a youth worker to obtain the support of these actors when developing projects with the young people. They are also a valuable source of information for getting to know youth and their world better. It is important to stop and reflect for a while on how best to get these people on your side.

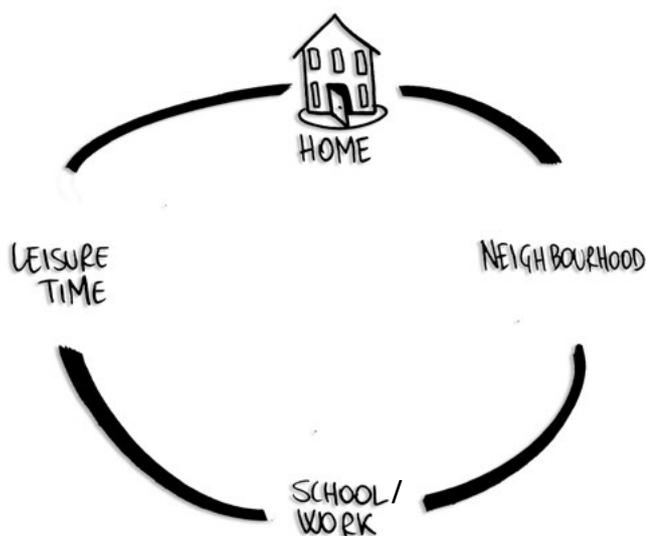
20. Paulides H. and ten Thije N. (1997), *Bemoei je ermee!*, De tijdstroom, Utrecht.

It is not easy for youth workers to position themselves in this spider web of relationships. Youth workers should remain very clear and honest with the young people about the positions they take and will not or cannot take. When talking or co-operating with people around these young people, they should be transparent about what they are doing. This will help enormously in building up a relationship of trust with the young people as well as the other actors in their environment. This element of mutual trust must be the foundation for all other work.

The four different environments of young people, as defined by Paulides, can be approached in different ways and for different reasons. Below you find an overview.

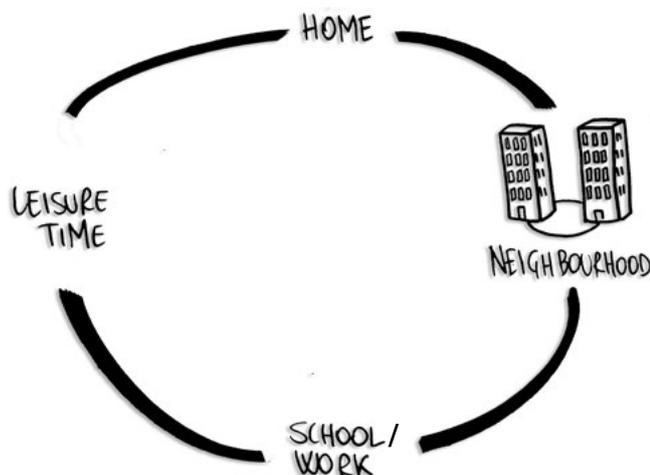
**Figure 4: The four environments of young people**

**1. HOME**



The first environment is formed of the people directly surrounding young people: their family. It is important to have a good connection with this group as the participation of a young person in your activities can depend on the family's approval of your work. A way to reach the parents might be by organising open door days, home visits or consultancy hours. Take into account that it sometimes takes some perseverance, as the parents might face barriers in interacting with you, such as lack of time, language difficulties, disrupted home situations or distrust towards official institutions that might tell them what to do. One way around this is to meet the family in other places such as community centres, to talk to people on the street, and to be available. It is important for the parents to know you and to understand what it is you are doing in order to build a relationship based on trust.

**Figure 5: NEIGHBOURHOOD**



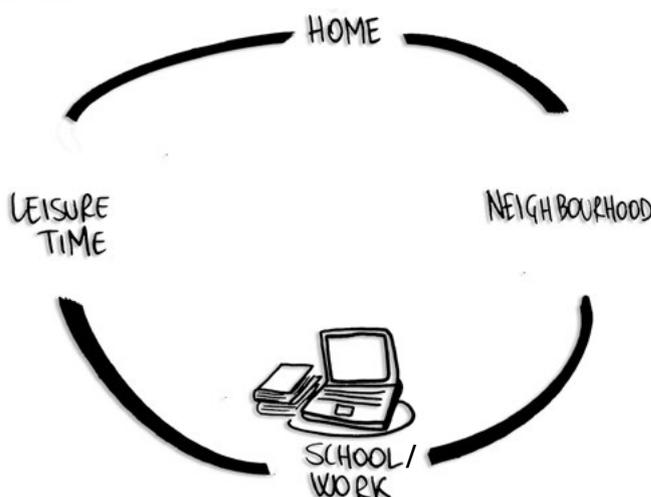
Networking with the people in the neighbourhood is also important for the success of your youth work. When this relationship is good, they will be more willing to participate when their help is needed, and will also come to you when there are problems. A way to work on your public relations is to involve local radio, television and newspapers. The more everyone – not just the young people – know about your activities and feel involved in your work, the better it is for the final result.

**Roma Youth Information Club (RYIC), Sumnal Association, “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia”**

Sumnal was established in 2004 and is based in Topaana, Skopje. Its work with young Roma people is one of its priorities. More generally, Sumnal’s work encompasses the fields of education, advocacy, access to health education and services, prevention of domestic violence, and promoting children’s rights. The organisation is one of the founding members of the National Youth Council, the project implemented by the Association for Roma Community Development SUMNAL. This project was conducted between 2010 and 2011 in Skopje and was initiated and co-ordinated by Elez Bislim, who took part in the first edition of the ENTER! long-term training courses of the Council of Europe.<sup>19</sup> The RYIC targeted Roma young people aged between 13 and 18 with the aim to improve their competences to gain access to rights and to develop their capacity to access social resources. This was achieved through providing advice and information, counselling, peer education, guidance about employment and health services, and opportunities for personal and social development. The project also provided access to leisure activities. There were practical workshops addressing the needs of the local young Roma. These included continuing education, finding employment, and accessing social/human rights. Experts were involved in the delivery of workshops, while others provided consultations relating to their personal and organisational experience. To implement the activities, Sumnal established a wide range of partnerships, consultations and co-operative relationships with a variety of institutions and organisations at both local and national levels. These included the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, the Centre for Social Work, the Ministry of Education and Science, and the Employment Agency. Around 300 Roma young people took part in the project. As evidence of the increased competences of this group, many were seen to have achieved better access to services and social rights. They were also engaged in learning about their rights, and the work and responsibilities of the state institutions. In the summer of 2013, a camp was organised for young Roma, focusing on human rights education. Based on this experience and the outcomes from the original RYIC, Sumnal lobbied the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy for support and, as a result, premises for a Roma Youth Information Club were opened in the Topaana settlement. The club provides information about public services and social and economic opportunities available that are intended to foster the integration of Roma into mainstream society.

Another group in the direct surroundings of your target group are peers – their friends and acquaintances. Peers are important since their judgment of your work can determine the view that their friends have of the activities you are doing. When you manage to convey the message to young people that your activities are fun and they can learn something interesting at the same time, the chances of them joining your project increase rapidly. Again, local media can play an important role in the image building of your activities, so make use of them as well.

**Figure 6: SCHOOL/WORK**



21. Available at <http://enter.coe.int>, accessed 24 October 2016.

Schools can supply a youth worker with basic information about the neighbourhood, from the number of young persons at the school to the cultural structure, the number of school leavers and the level of education. But you might also consider co-operating with teachers or even employers when setting up non-formal education programmes. An additional advantage of this is that it could be possible to use equipment and space available in the school. A disadvantage, however, might be that the young people are already averse to school and unwilling to spend more time there, so careful preparation and deliberation is necessary.

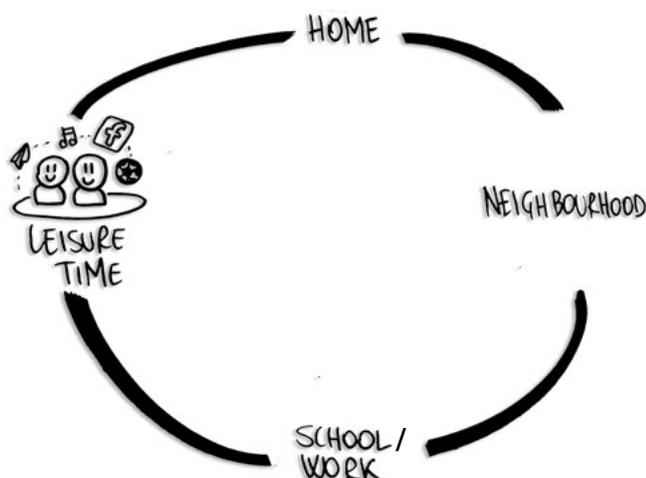
More and more young people are leaving education and training before achieving upper secondary qualifications. In the long term, the lack of qualifications can determine risks and barriers, both structural and personal, and affect the chances of young people getting a job or accessing personal and professional development schemes. "Second chance" education programmes might be a solution to invest in the motivation and confidence of young people to continue and successfully complete education or training, as they include training and learning activities tailored to the needs and interests of young people.

### Matosinhos second chance school, Portugal

AE2O (Associação para a Educação de Segunda Oportunidade) is a non-profit association that aims to promote "second chance" education, particularly for young people with fewer opportunities and low levels of school and professional qualifications who are at risk of social exclusion. The main activity of the organisation is to run in Matosinhos, Portugal, a second chance school, within the scope of the European Association of Cities for Second Chance Schools (E2C). Escola de Segunda Oportunidade ("Second Chance Schools") offer to young people a chance to access quality training suited to their needs. They develop a set of learning activities, exchange of practices and sharing of ideas. Second chance education offers youngsters an alternative learning experience, based on a strongly motivating environment supporting development of various competences (both social and vocational), tailored to individual needs, desires and capabilities. AE2O develops training programmes that combine the acquisition of necessary skills with practical training in the context of work and society. This is where young people are accompanied in discovering their interests and building their life projects. The project is based on shared social responsibility among local authorities, institutions, associations and businesses within a broader policy context of urban regeneration and social reintegration. Second chance education is not only aimed at young school dropouts; it is, rather, a versatile project, able to perform various functions and address different audiences. It functions in conjunction with the systems of formal education and training, and is a new measure of public policy at the service of education and training, as well as a new way to tackle the problems of qualifications and social integration of young people.<sup>20</sup>

More about good practices in second chance education, their success factors, and their transferability to initial education and training are available in "Preventing early school leaving in Europe – Lessons learned from second chance education", [www.youthreach.ie/wp-content/uploads/Finalreport.pdf](http://www.youthreach.ie/wp-content/uploads/Finalreport.pdf)

Figure 7: LEISURE TIME



22. See [http://vision.citilab.eu/visionwiki/index.php/Association\\_for\\_the\\_second\\_chance\\_education.html](http://vision.citilab.eu/visionwiki/index.php/Association_for_the_second_chance_education.html) and [www.segundaopportunidade.com](http://www.segundaopportunidade.com), accessed 24 October 2016.

The fourth sector in which young people move is that of leisure. Youth work can also be situated in this sphere. Creating links with other people organising leisure-time activities can be very useful, allowing the exchange of ideas, experiences and resources pertaining to work with young people with fewer opportunities. We will discuss this further in the following section.

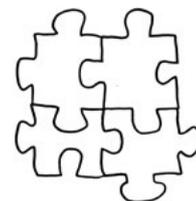
### Foyer, Brussels, Belgium

Foyer is a non-profit organisation founded in 1969 as a youth centre. Situated in Molenbeek, it is active at local, regional and international levels, focusing on social cohesion and on the empowerment and integration of people of immigrant background. Foyer wants to contribute to an inclusive society, in which all people, regardless of their personal background, can participate.

Important to keep in mind is the fact that it is not possible to build a good relationship in one meeting with these different environments surrounding young people: it requires a long-term investment of time, effort and resources. All opportunities should be used to build up this network of trust to move together towards common or similar aims. This is the basis for future co-operation.

## SETTING UP PARTNERSHIPS

Working on improving the situation of young people with fewer opportunities does require consistent and co-ordinated cross-sectoral co-operation. EU policy documents have also laid down the need to set up partnerships and cross-sector initiatives. The EU Youth Strategy states the need for mainstreaming cross-sector initiatives that ensure youth issues are taken into account in youth policy development, impacting thus the development of opportunities for young people to access education, employment and health services so as to improve their well-being. Working together with others will not only multiply efforts and resources directed towards similar aims, but will also generate a more holistic and strengthened approach to work with the target group. It is important to share views and experiences with other professionals dealing with similar issues, not least to boost one's motivation to continue putting efforts into a common cause.



### Questions:

- ▶ With whom would you team up to develop youth initiatives?
- ▶ Who are your partners in developing projects with and for young people?
- ▶ Whom do you ask for advice and information to learn more about the young people you work with?



Youth workers may have their own professional contacts or may get to know others (e.g. street workers, teachers, social workers and the police) who work with the same young people. These people are working with the same target group (e.g. young people with fewer opportunities) in different fields of their lives and at different moments. Often, meetings or seminars around societal topics related to youth are a good place to meet different actors working on these topics (inclusion, drugs prevention, AIDS education, etc.). You may find the right contacts for co-operation opportunities when setting up activities, but these synergies may also turn into longer-term partnerships between organisations.

Especially when working with young people with fewer opportunities, it is important to create partnerships between organisations that reach the target group in different fields of their lives, because the impact of youth work might be continued in the classroom or in other projects.

There are some requirements to consider before you set up working partnerships:

- ▶ the partners should share common aims in their work or they should at least be compatible with each other;
- ▶ the target group (young persons with fewer opportunities) should be at the centre of the interventions. The objective could be, for example, to empower the young people or to coach them through further steps along their pathways in life or towards social inclusion;
- ▶ partners should be willing to join in such a partnership, and time and resources should be freed to work on co-operation;



- ▶ the different actors should share common educational principles, or their differences should be reconcilable;
  - ▶ the working spirit or organisational culture should be compatible or there should be strong motivation to open up and adapt to each other's working cultures;
  - ▶ last but not least, there should be efficient communication channels and time set aside to discuss, plan, implement and evaluate the partnership.
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### **Developing Detached Youth Work Practice, Erasmus+ (September 2014 – September 2016)**

This project is funded through the EU's Erasmus+ Programme and is a partnership involving Aġenzija Żgħażaġħ in Malta, the Centre for Sustainable Community Development in Romania, Stichting JONG Rotterdam in the Netherlands, and YMCA George Williams College in the UK. For 24 months, partners representing governmental bodies, NGOs and educational institutions are working in a cross-sectoral partnership aiming at developing innovative youth working methodologies tailored to existing youth needs in deprived neighbourhoods in Romania and Malta. The project aims to develop and strengthen detached youth work services in the partner countries through the exchange of good practice and peer learning and support. The project evaluates existing services as well as newly established services and will develop quality assurance tools that can be used in a detached youth work setting, working with youth at risk of social exclusion. It draws on the experience achieved by the Dutch and UK partners to enable the Maltese and Romanian partner organisations to develop their practice in a manner consistent with best practice. Expected outcomes include an increased capacity of the partners to implement detached youth work projects and to monitor their effectiveness as well as offer the required support to youth workers involved in service provision.<sup>21</sup>

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23. See [www.agenzjazghazagh.gov.mt/Categories/910/Developing\\_Detached\\_Youth\\_Work\\_Practice\\_\\_Erasmus\\_/916](http://www.agenzjazghazagh.gov.mt/Categories/910/Developing_Detached_Youth_Work_Practice__Erasmus_/916), accessed 24 October 2016.