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A Conscious Inclusive Approach in Youth Work

Foundations of Inclusive Youth Work



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Erasmus+

SALVA VITA

Methodology introduction and overview

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What do we mean by youth work with additional support needs?

Inclusion is a human right, not a charitable act.

What do we mean?

- Accessible, safe and participatory youth work
- Not special care
- Not therapy
- Not only disability-specific programmes
- A conscious way of designing youth work

What makes it youth work?

- Voluntary participation
- Active involvement
- Non-formal learning
- Personal and social development
- Relationships and community
- Planned activities
- Reflection and evaluation

Young people are not only recipients; they are active participants and co-creators.



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Young People with Additional Support Needs

Who are we talking about?

Physical and sensory needs

mobility impairments, visual or hearing impairments, chronic illness

Neurodiversity and learning needs

autism, ADHD, dyslexia, learning difficulties

Mental and psychosocial needs

anxiety, depression, trauma, emotional distress

Social and environmental barriers

poverty, NEET status, isolation, discrimination, lack of support networks



The focus is not on the diagnosis, but on the barriers within the environment.

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The paradigm shift & the 4 pillars of inclusive practice

1. The paradigm shift

From:
"fixing the young person"

→

To:
adapting programmes, attitudes, spaces and systems

The problem is often not the young person's motivation, but the barriers around them.

2. The 4 pillars of inclusive practice

1. Accessibility
space, information, communication, digital access

2. Safety
physical and emotional safety, predictability, dignity

3. Participation
choice, voice, flexible ways to contribute

4. Support & boundaries
adapted support, clear limits, cooperation with specialists



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The role of the youth worker

Youth worker: supporter, not therapist

1. Youth workers are:

- relationship-builders
- facilitators of participation
- barrier-noticers
- activity adapters
- safety-holders
- boundary-setters
- connectors to specialist support

2. Youth workers are not expected to replace:

- therapists
- doctors
- special educators
- crisis services



The role is to support participation, safety and inclusion — not to replace specialist services.

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UDL + individual learning

Universal Design for Learning (UDL): plan different ways to:

Engage

- raise interest
- offer choice
- connect to real life

Understand

- use clear language
- visuals and examples
- step-by-step information

Express / Contribute

- multiple ways to respond
- speak, write, draw, act, use tech

Then add individual support when universal design is not enough: accommodations, assistive tools, extra time, breaks, emotional support, specialist input.

Design for diversity first.
Adapt individually when needed.

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Participation continuum

Participation looks different for everyone and can change over time.



Observe

I am here, I am getting to know.

Choose

I choose what or how to join.

Write/Draw

I share my thoughts in my way.

Support a task

I take part in the activity in my way.

Join a pair

I work together with one or two others.

Speak in group

I share my ideas with the group.

Lead / Co-facilitate

I take a leading role and inspire others.

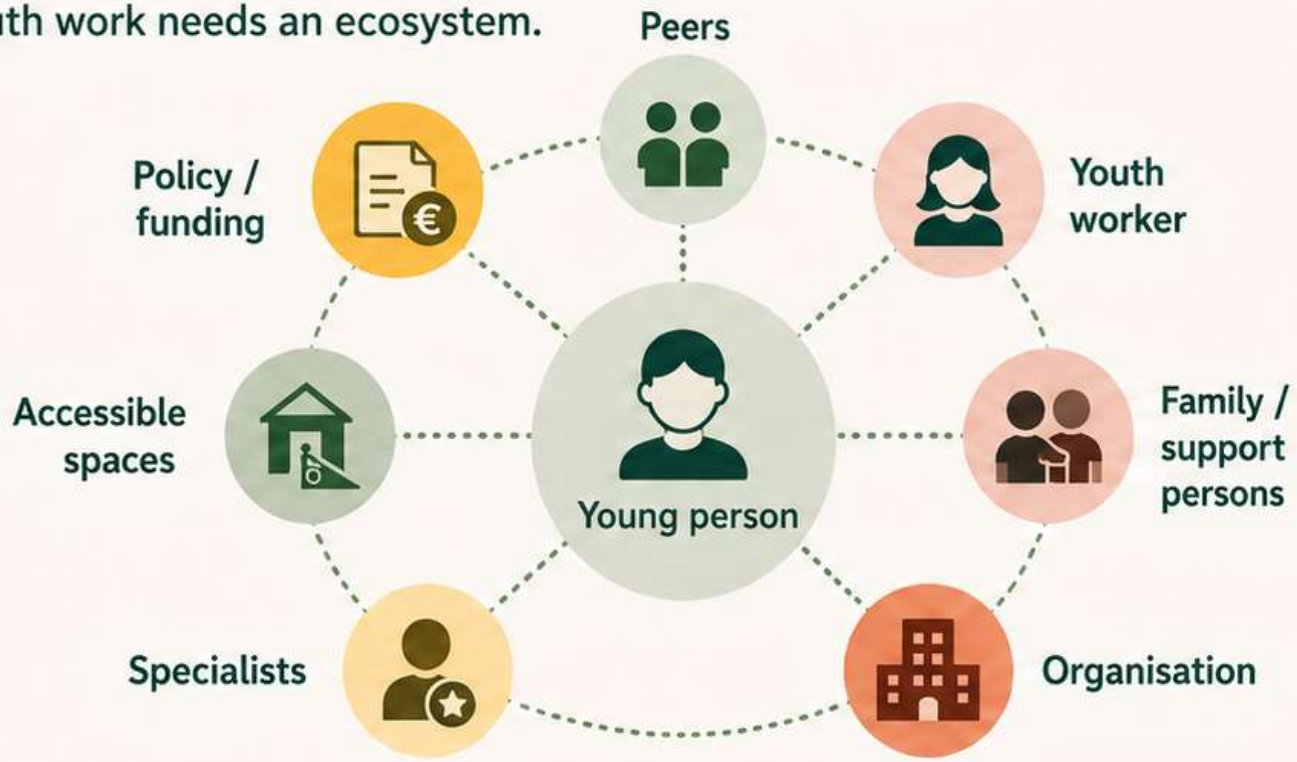
Not everyone participates in the same way or at the same speed.

Our role is to offer options, remove barriers and walk the path together.

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Inclusive youth work ecosystem

Inclusive youth work needs an ecosystem.



Inclusion is strengthened by relationships, structures, environments and support around the young person.

Inclusive youth work means creating conditions where young people are not only present, but able to belong, contribute and grow.

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Redesign the System, Not the Youth



Inclusion begins not when a young person **adapts to the system**, but when the system **adapts** to the young person.



You are the architects of belonging.
Use these tools to build spaces where every young person is **expected, respected, and empowered.**