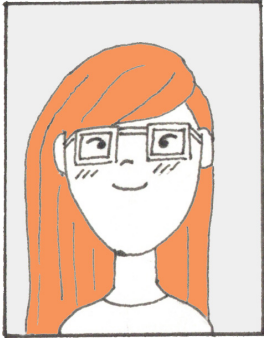




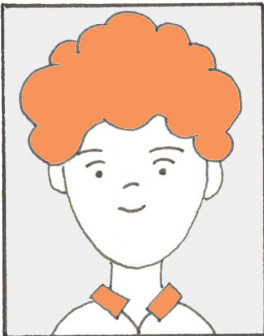
# Youth Workers for Open Youth Work

## Profile

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We believe that youth workers are the most important element in the success of youth work. The young people are able to accept and shape the spaces and the place for their needs, to appropriate it and enrich it with their own ideas. However, this requires youth workers who not only enable this, but promote, support and demand it. For this, youth workers must have different competences, skills, views and character traits. Some can be learned and trained, others are anchored in the personality of the workers.



We would like to name, assign and elaborate on these in the following section. We have designated different roles for youth workers, each with its own set of tasks. We have named these roles as:

**The host** is entitled to greet newcomers into the youth centre and to introduce them to youngsters already attending activities and the youth centre itself;

**The facilitator** gives the kick off to the implementation of activities for youth, helping them create bonds and taking care of their personal development;

**The fundraiser** has one eye on budget and another on chances to acquire funding and grants;

**The logistician** knows everything about the youth centre and its items, being also able to make minor repairs in order to maintain the proper functioning of the structure;

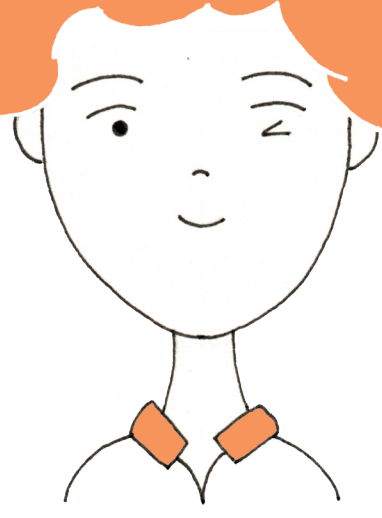
**The communicator** takes care of both public and internal relations of the youth centre, networking with partners and addressing youth;

**The coordinator**, like a mythological hero, has to coordinate the team, to supervise the activities, to have a constant vision of the overall state of the centre of youth workers and of youngsters engaged and involved in the activities.

We realize that most youth centres do not have six staff members and therefore different roles have to be combined in one person. In this respect, youth workers are often egg-laying wool-giving milk ows.

Together with the tasks come specific features. In fact, each role needs to master some specific competences, and it's important to emphasize

COMMUNICATIVE  
CHARISMATIC  
FACILITATOR NICE  
RESPONSABLE *relaiable*  
EMPATHETIC  
REFLECTIVE OPEN MINDED  
KIND FUNNY  
FLEXIBLE *tolerant* APPROCHABLE  
ENERGETIC





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those features that should be common to all the roles designated and, we believe, to all youth workers. First of all, we would like to talk about the profile that all youth workers should have, regardless of their role in the youth centre. We believe that these attitudes, behaviours, skills, and knowledge are the basis for a successful youth centre.

A youth worker has to pay attention, in the widest possible meaning, to different target groups and situations: attention to youngsters, using and practicing empathy, open-mindedness and trustworthiness; attention to the team, always acting and being a team player; attention to the background of each youngster in order to design a specific individual growth path; attention to the separation of private and professional lives in order to have the chance to set boundaries and spaces in which they can move easily and avoiding the risk of being too involved in situations that could affect the quality standards of their work.

Youth workers also need some skills, like the ability to empower self-reflection and active listening both for themselves as professionals and for their target group. At the same time, a youth worker has to always look approachable, without considering youth like an entity that needs to be constantly lectured and always staying grounded and on the same level as the beneficiaries of their work.

Youth workers need to know how youth work was born and its development, what are its legal bases and its standards on local, national and European levels. They also need to be aware about the importance of multiculturalism and how to empower the valorization of diversity as a useful tool for growth, exploring the field of prejudices and stereotypes, connected to the concept of diversity, to be able to fight any exclusion episodes that might arise.

Youth workers need a compass to follow in their interactions with youth. If, as we assume, a youth worker is going to be identified as a role model, it's impossible not to consider **integrity, adaptability, equality, confidentiality and humbleness** as the directions of the compass that youth workers use every day in their relationships with the universe of youth.

Now that we have defined a general profile of the youth worker, let's focus on two of the roles we have previously identified and that we believe are essential for both youth and youth centers.



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### **The host**

First of all, each youth centre should have a host, a youth worker which welcomes people, especially newcomers. This is of special importance. During their first visit, young people will develop a feeling for whether they meet people there who treat them with respect and whom they can trust, whether they can do things in the youth centre that are in their area of interest, whether they feel comfortable in the rooms and with the people. In short, they will make a decision for themselves whether they feel welcome and want to come back. Therefore, this initial contact is particularly important and should be done by people with special attitudes, skills, knowledge and behaviour.

The host must be focused mainly on engagement and on the techniques to generate it. The spark to ignite the host's attitude to engage youth can be identified as charisma, enjoyability, energy and kindness. Such elements will bring the host to have a successful communication with the target group and to realize easily when it's needed to not use formal ways to interact with people and instead to embrace and enjoy the non formal ones.

The skills a host needs are strictly connected to observation and creativity. A host will have to observe the context youngsters live inside and outside the youth center. The awareness about the background, the lifestyle, the beliefs of young people, must be constantly practised in order to be able to find creative solutions to problems or issues that might occur and to adapt the behaviour to the group of youngsters that the host is taking care of.

Understanding the youngsters coming to the youth centre helps the host notice which situations need an intervention or a deeper reflection and which ones do not. For these reasons, a host also has to know what youngsters like, what are the trends among youth, and what are the consequences of the time they are living in. This knowledge can be granted just through a constant development of the knowledge itself. The host can not dwell in the past but must always be focused on the present. Sure, foreseeing the future is also a big help and, since they invest in the future, youth workers are able to do it.

Working with young people is a glimpse on how the future will be and the host has a great responsibility for it. This is the reason why a host has to always be approachable and easygoing, never pretending to be almighty or a know-it-all person: youngsters can not be scared to talk to the host, they must know that the host



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and the youth center are their shelter from the storm. This goal is reachable if the hosts make no assumption about their guests and their future actions and know when to say sorry or when to accept feedback. Sorry doesn't have to be the hardest word but the kindest of them all, when needed.

### **The facilitator**

Together with the host, the facilitator has a very important task: taking care of the activities and fostering the self-development of the youngsters attending the youth centre. The role of the facilitator is strictly connected with the transfer of values to young people, both as a group and as individuals, and with the opportunity to ensure that youngsters can see the youth centre as a place in which their growth as a person and a citizen is granted and taken in consideration constantly. In order to respect such intentions, we strongly believe that a facilitator needs to possess and master some particular features when it comes to attitudes, skills, knowledge and behaviours.

The most important attitude of a facilitator is the eagerness to learn and to take advantage of each learning situation that might happen, whether it is a failure or a personal experience. Constant learning is fundamental in facilitating activities and all the chances to learn must be welcomed and accepted, especially if they come from young people: it is very important not to take things for granted and always take into consideration the perspective of a youngster to better understand if the direction that an activity is taking is the right one or the wrong one for them. Doing this will help the constant use and development of critical thinking in order to keep finding new ways to put themselves in the youngsters' shoes and to figure out what could be the best for their own development.

To enhance such performances, facilitators will need to foster and motivate youth in participation and involvement, empowering them in sharing, organising and implementing their own ideas and activities to give them the most important position possible inside the youth centre, the one they deserve as beneficiaries. That being said, constantly dealing with different individuals that might not merge all the time inside the group, the facilitators also need to be ready to change their plans, to be able to manage deal with initial conflicts and to make everyone feeling valuable and necessary, in the context of the activities.

Considering the importance of their work and their tasks, facilitators



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need to possess at least basic knowledge of motivational techniques and youth psychology but also to be well aware about social inclusion and non formal methodologies since they could easily represent pillars on which to base all their work with youngsters starting from the beginning.

The involvement of young people can also be fostered through some particular conducts that facilitators can show to their target groups. A facilitator needs to be someone that youngsters can rely on and this can be achieved by always showing them patience, first of all, and a steady coherence between actions and words, acts and speech. Is it enough? No, it is not. A facilitator has to know how to support and involve youngsters, not giving them immediate solutions nor answers, but instead helping them to reach their own. This is a way to help youngsters understand that they always need and are able to stand for their needs, their dreams, their wishes and ideas and their political views.

It is undeniable, in fact, that part of youth work involves a political dimension since one of its goals is to help and foster the growth not just of youngsters as individuals but also, and perhaps most of all, as citizens — and there couldn't be active citizenship and participation without a defined political dimension.