
CONFERENCE ABSTRACT

Research based youth care?!: An equal partnership between youth, their network, professionals, and researchers in youth care.

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In the interdisciplinary research program VOICe (Voicing youth at social risk) at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel, we focus on developing collaborative research practices with young people 'at social risk'. We share the mission to enable young people and professionals to enter a dialogue in an equal and investigative manner about what they really find important in their daily life context and to adjust this together if necessary. For the past ten years we have been developing collaborative research practices in education in collaboration with schools under the name 'Research based School?!' to enhance the learning and well-being of students. We would like to further explore, adapt, and possibly roll out this experience with a collaborative model in the context of youth care. This project is based on the idea that quality of care stands or falls with the expertise and commitment of the facility.

"Research based youth care?!" sees a facility as an environment in which everyone bears a responsibility in each other's development. The focus is on the provision that dares to come forward as a learning community. This learning community enhances the growth of all involved by challenging them to tackle questions in partnership.

This project embraces a collaboration model in which care providers, researchers, young people, and their network adopt an investigative attitude together. The use of problem-solving strategies and the exchange of knowledge through participation in a learning community with structured research activities are paramount in this project. It is important that the youth, their network, and the professionals realizes that a problem he/she is confronted with in the facility also affects others (colleagues, management, parents, other youth...). By including these different perspectives, the problem is supported within the entire social context and the chance of carrying out improvement actions is greater.

In a first step, we will build a basis for the collaborative model within youth care, in which we will bring involved parties together to discuss the conditions for equal participation between young people, their network, professionals, and researchers. We have started experience experts and managers sharing their experiences in a professional learning community and to enter a dialogue to design a workable model to further involve other professionals and youth in subsequent phases.

With this trajectory, the university and the professional field join forces with the aim of professionalizing themselves and promoting the development of young people, starting from their own practice; relevant for the facility, the care provider, the youth, and their network; as a full partner; and in dialogue between practice and theory.