

Strengthening and further developing child and youth work as an important part of child and youth welfare

We youth associations and councils are responsible for child and youth work. With our offers we reach a large number of children, adolescents and young adults. In addition to public child and youth welfare services, the youth associations and councils Germany have for many years provided most of the child and youth work services recorded in the official statistics¹. For us, value orientation, voluntariness, co-determination and self-determination as well as voluntary work are the core of all child and youth work. As a representative of the interests of all young people, we are committed to creating framework conditions that enable good, high-quality child and youth work to be carried out across the board and encourage young people to constantly adapt it to current requirements and needs.

²Articles 165 and 166 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU set out the European legal framework for youth work, which in recent years has been given concrete form through a joint EU youth strategy (Renewed Framework for Cooperation in the Youth Field 2010-2018, 2019-2027). In Germany, the mandate of child and youth work is uniformly regulated nationwide in § 11 of the Eighth Book of the Social Code (SGB VIII) - the Child and Youth Welfare Act: The aim of child and youth work is to enable young people to determine their own lives and to encourage them to become socially involved. It is geared to the interests of young people and focuses on their participation and co-determination. Participation in child and youth work activities is always voluntary.

In contrast to almost all other services and regulations in child and youth welfare, the child and youth work services are to be made available to all young people - regardless of personal needs and situations. It is deliberately not a question of orienting oneself to individual problem situations and, for example, reacting to formally identified needs of individual children and young people in the help planning procedure, but rather of ensuring through an appropriate infrastructure that all young people can participate voluntarily in the offers.

Which measures, offers, facilities and structures are to be publicly financed is decided by the experts of the independent and public agencies together with the administration and politicians in the youth welfare committees at state and municipal level as well as in the working groups according to Section 78 SGB VIII according to law in Germany.

An important feature of child and youth work is continuous quality assurance activities. One of the most important instruments for the youth associations and councils are broad training, further education and further education offers, the concepts and contents of which are continuously reviewed and further developed in order to adapt them to current needs. The best known of these is the Youth Leaders Card (Juleica). The Juleica training offers a nationwide guarantee of quality through minimum standards and the central application procedure. Through the country- and association-specific regulations and training components as well as the many thousands of providers, it simultaneously stands for the necessary diversity, plurality of values and constant further development. Juleica stands for partnership and cooperation between public and private sponsors, and the training courses are usually financed jointly.

In its diversity, child and youth work is characterised by focal points, different forms and forms, different institutions as well as values and regional characteristics. The youth associations and youth councils stand for almost all forms of child and youth work. In recent years, they have incorporated into their structures newly formed youth associations from the field of migrant*internal youth self-organisations. In addition to their associational

¹ cf. official statistics of youth work offers according to § 11 according to § 98 (1) clause 10 SGB VIII

² Title XII - Education, vocational training, youth and sport

work, they thus cover the various forms of child and youth work as mentioned in Section 11 (3) SGB VIII: extracurricular youth education and in particular political education, youth work in sport, play and sociability, work-related, school- and family-related youth work, international youth work, child and youth recreation and youth counselling³.

International youth work is a core component of child and youth work and is largely implemented and managed by youth associations and councils. Central elements of this work of the youth associations and councils are life and learning experiences, which promote global and intercultural learning in a special way. Youth associations and councils stand for value-oriented encounter work at eye level with partners from other countries and promote mutual tolerance. Of particular importance is the participation of young people in the planning and implementation of international youth exchanges. International youth work is an important and competent mediator and actor because it acts independently of government agencies and contributes to the participants' own formation of opinion and critical debate - especially in countries where the political framework conditions are difficult for civil society actors.

Further developing child and youth work

Child and youth work requires constant further development in line with the needs and interests of young people and social developments. The youth associations and councils are currently providing an important impetus together with the other sponsors of child and youth work with their commitment to a regular Federal Congress on Child and Youth Work, which is intended to provide a space to shed light on current developments and conduct necessary discourses on sustainable child and youth work, bring science and practice together and thus set important impulses for the future of child and youth work.

At the European level, the 3rd European Youth Work Convention will be a relevant milestone for the further development of child and youth work in Europe. Despite different traditions and definitions, it is important and right to consolidate a common, European understanding and to promote non-purposeful and subsidiarily organised child and youth work in the interest of children and young people in Europe.

The ongoing process of further developing Book VIII of the Social Code has less of a focus on child and youth work, although some debates - not least the long-awaited introduction of the inclusive solution - will have a clear impact. In addition, the separate debate on the legal entitlement to all-day care at primary school age has a very direct influence on the future of child and youth work, as it has been understood at European and national level to date. Depending on the results, it can massively restrict the possibilities for child and youth work to offer its services to young people in accordance with the basic principles anchored in § 11 SGB VIII, among others, for example, if municipalities reduce or even stop financial support for work with children because they are "already looked after throughout the day".

Child and youth work under pressure

In an international comparison, the hitherto good federal legal framework for child and youth work in Germany becomes clear, which is expressed not only by the legal anchoring in Book VIII of the Social Code but also by the participation rights in the decision-making structures of the youth welfare committee as well as by an understanding based on subsidiarity and partnership between the public and independent agencies. Nevertheless, child and youth work has come under increasing pressure in recent years.

³ cf. § 11 (3) Sections 1- 6 SGB VIII

Public spending on child and youth work is falling from year to year in comparison with the total expenditure on child and youth welfare. This is not only due to the fact that child and youth welfare has taken on more tasks overall and thus the total expenditure is rising, but also to the fact that funds for child and youth work are rising less than the rate of inflation throughout Germany. As a result, the funds decrease in price-adjusted terms, which means that quantity and quality can be less and less assured. This is aggravated by massive differences between the individual federal states.

Bureaucratic requirements and requirements, on the other hand, are constantly increasing. This increases the personal, legal and financial risks for all those involved, especially the volunteers. Since child and youth work, as it currently exists in Germany, is unthinkable without strong voluntary commitment, the pressure on child and youth work also increases. The promotion of child and youth work is increasingly secondary to other services of general interest. In spite of the clear legal situation, which states that Sections 11 and 12 SGB VIII are mandatory tasks, the funds for child and youth work in many municipalities, but also beyond that, are wrongly regarded as voluntary benefits. This often leads to child and youth work losing importance. It appears less frequently in the perception of society as a whole, is also less often the subject of the deliberations of the youth welfare committees, and in youth welfare planning it is often at best only rudimentarily included.

Child and youth work is increasingly less taught and researched at German universities and other training centres. A gradual reduction in the number of chairs has been observed in recent decades. Professional training of youth workers becomes a marginal phenomenon. The aggravation of the shortage of skilled workers especially for child and youth work is a consequence. In addition, the occupational specialisation and the function and role of skilled workers in the field are interpreted differently, both by training institutions and universities and also by employees.

Cooperation between public and independent child and youth welfare services has been an essential feature of child and youth welfare services in Germany for decades. However, this has changed dramatically in recent years in child and youth work, among other areas. Whereas it has hitherto been determined by partnership and the application of the subsidiarity principle in the sense of section 3 (2) or (3) SGB VIII, principles of the market economy increasingly dominate. Instead of securing the necessary infrastructure (facilities, personnel, structures, etc.) through appropriate long-term funding, largely only individual measures will be subsidised. These are then often no longer promoted according to section 74 SGB VIII by selecting the best concepts after proper assessment, but the services are put out to tender and purchased according to an award procedure oriented to economic efficiency. The interests of young people and quality, especially if they cannot be expressed in figures or are even sustainable, are hardly taken into account.

Conflicts also arise where state parallel structures are set up that compete with the independent agencies and neglect both the subsidiarity and the agency principles. We are already beginning to perceive this in the German context - particularly in connection with European players or project financing. We can see where this creeping departure from the subsidiarity principle can lead in neighbouring European countries, where the establishment of parallel structures is forcing civil society actors in child and youth work to restrict their work or to stop it altogether. In particular, government constellations within and outside Europe, which propagate an increasingly authoritarian and illiberal understanding of the state, have increasingly led in recent years to the prevention of the involvement of non-governmental child and youth welfare organisations.

Child and youth work, which gives civil society organisations many opportunities to participate in shaping the future in accordance with the subsidiarity principle, is to a certain extent a guarantee for an open democracy. We observe that in particular the work of youth associations and youth councils, with their special role as self-organisations and as representatives of young people's interests in other European and non-European countries, is increasingly being restricted, which is now also evident in parts of Germany.

At the same time, child and youth work is increasingly used for other purposes, such as day-care services in connection with all-day schooling, extremism prevention and other prevention tasks. Child and youth work was and is willing to make its contribution to these important social tasks. However, this must not be at the expense of their original tasks: Ensuring participation for young people, providing scope for personal development and creating leisure activities for young people.

It is planned to introduce an individual legal entitlement to full-day care for children of primary school age. The legal claim is to be anchored in the SGB VIII and regulates the claim of a care in the afternoon. In view of the general conditions (lack of skilled workers, spatial conditions in schools, financing, etc.), this very ambitious project raises many questions. No conceptual approaches are yet known as to how full-day care should be ensured. However, the effects on child and youth work depend on these.

Child and youth work in our responsibility

We as youth associations and councils are just as much in demand to further develop child and youth work. We must broaden our view and be able to perceive the debates on inclusion, digitisation, intercultural diversity and special needs in structurally weak regions in child and youth work, including those of youth associations and councils.

Child and youth work must remain a central field of action within child and youth welfare - with the appropriate framework conditions and the necessary support.

That's why we're demanding

- Strengthen subsidiarity and partnership! The relationship between the public bodies, i.e. the federal states and municipalities but also the federal government, and the independent bodies responsible for child and youth work must again be characterised more strongly by subsidiarity and partnership. In the everyday life of child and youth work it must again become noticeable that the "public youth welfare service works in partnership with the independent youth welfare service for the benefit of young people and their families and in doing so respects the independence of the independent youth welfare service in the objective and implementation of its tasks as well as in the design of its organisational structure"⁴. This also means that public youth welfare services will refrain from taking their own measures where appropriate facilities, services and events are operated or can be set up in good time by recognised bodies providing free youth welfare services⁵.
- Strengthen mandatory structures of participation at all levels! Youth associations and rings are experts* in child and youth work. As independent sponsors, they bring together young people who volunteer their time. Their role in child and youth work should be recognised and strengthened. For this reason, there is a need at the various levels for the independent agencies to be able to participate in the process in a spirit of partnership and in accordance with the subsidiarity principle enshrined in law. The successful mechanisms in the Child and Youth Welfare Act, which also strengthen the municipal, state and federal levels, must be transferred to the European structures in Germany. For example, the awarding practice of European funding will in future require mandatory structures for the participation of youth associations and councils as well as binding monitoring bodies for civil society.

⁴ cf. § 4 (1) SGB VIII

⁵ cf. § 4 (2) SGB VIII

- Enable free space! In the context of the planned "all-day care for children of primary school age", we do not consider a care offer to be sufficient. Local educational landscapes must be designed in such a way that the providers of child and youth work have a realistic opportunity to contribute themselves and their offerings to the whole day in the interest of the children. That is why it is necessary to choose freely where the child and youth work offers take place. We reject a pure school centering. Instead, it must be ensured that offers can continue to be made on a voluntary basis and that the wish and the right to vote as well as the pluralism requirement resulting from Book VIII of the Social Code, according to which the diversity of youth organisations is to be promoted, are not restricted. This applies in particular to the offers of youth association work and other group-related offers which are dependent on regularity. All-day childcare services for primary school children must be and remain part of child and youth welfare services and meet their standards. In addition to the question of quality, comprehensive and demand-oriented youth welfare planning and thus sufficient equipment and financing must be ensured so that full-day care in the municipalities is not at the expense of child and youth work.
- Reduce formalisation and bureaucracy! Especially for charitable and voluntary child and youth work, regulations must be found which fulfil their respective purpose and at the same time do not overburden volunteers. For example, the protection of children and young people is elementary - especially for us youth associations and councils. Protection must not necessarily be sought through formalisation and bureaucratisation, such as Section 72a SGB VIII. The aim is rather to jointly develop practice-oriented protection concepts and handouts, to offer regular training, and to have contact persons in the youth welfare offices who can also be reached outside normal office hours. Bureaucratic regulations, such as travel law, make voluntary child and youth work increasingly impossible. That demotivates young people. Legislators and administrations are called upon to differentiate between commercial offers, private space and youth association offers in the dialogue and on the basis of absolutely justified goals in the concrete implementation. In the field of international child and youth work, rigid promotion criteria in particular restrict the exchange of ideas. There is a need for more flexibility in the eligibility criteria, for example the recognition of costs abroad.

- More research! We need reliable and meaningful statistics as well as qualitative empirical research in order to present the achievements, possibilities and developments of youth work and thus underpin its relevance. Science helps us to keep our offers up to date and to initiate developments. Unfortunately, the current forms and procedures of youth work statistics are not suitable for presenting child and youth work in a transparent way. This leads to false assumptions, especially when statistics are the basis for policy decisions. Because of its diversity, child and youth work is difficult to record statistically. All the more reason, therefore, to make greater scientific efforts to adequately investigate child and youth work and its individual fields of action.
- Strengthen and expand professionalism! The expertise in child and youth work needs more attention. This requires a clear competence profile, which training institutions and universities can make the basis of their curricula. Child and youth work is inadequate in the social work degree programmes. As a result, we expect fewer skilled workers and ultimately major problems in recruiting personnel for child and youth work. We also see the need for a professional debate on the role and impact of child and youth workers.

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