

# PONT-ON: bridging the gap between mental health and youth work

**Name of the organisation**

OverKop Gent

**Website of the organisation**

[OverKop Gent](#)

**Location of the organisation**

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**Good practice aspect(s)/themes of youth work**

- Diversity
- Non-formal education/-learning
- Lobbying/advocacy for youth work

**Good practice category**

A practice of processes and methods

**Good practice aim & purpose**

PONT-ON is a project that aims to bridge the gap between youth work and mental health care. The project originated from the organisation OverKop Gent, which is an open house for youngsters between 12-25. OverKop supports youngsters with a mixed methods approach in a cross sectorial cooperation between different youth work and mental health care partners.

We support youth workers who are facing challenges related to the mental health of the youngsters that they work with, their colleagues or themselves. We do this by organising free trainings, workshops and interventions related to specific mental health topics, giving consultation to youth workers related to specific cases or general topics, and by referring them to the organisations with the right expertise to help them. We also work with mental health services to make them more aware of the opportunities and challenges youthworkers are faced with, and coaxing them to make their services easier to use by youth workers.

The PONT-ON project started as a small project with support of the local government in 2021. It was quickly picked up as a innovative practice and motivated the Flemish government to allocate more resources to similar projects in the Flanders region.

### **Good practice description**

PONT-ON reinforces the bridge between mental health and youth work in three ways:

- Free consultation tailored to youth workers giving advice on how to act in a certain case, which services are best suited to refer to, evaluating the next steps the youth worker can take, giving advice on how to reinforce the team of youth workers etc... The consultation is valued highly because it is based on the cross sectoral expertise of the OverKop partners (youth workers and mental health professionals)
- Monthly workshops, intervention on mental health topics, specific to the role of the youth worker (how to recognise the signals, how to handle the conversation, where to refer to). We have an open offer where any local youth worker can sign up for, but also give workshops tailored to an organisation.
- We connect youth workers and mental health professionals by speaking at events, informing both sectors of the advantages of a stronger collaboration and advising the city in policy making.

### **Good practice result & concrete effects**

Even though the project is quite young, we note some positive outcomes:

- Youth Workers feel empowered to act when they have concerns about a person, and know better how to act.
- Youth workers are more likely to contact the expertise of a mental health professional when it is a familiar face that is easily accessible.
- Mental health professionals have a better understanding of what youth work entails, the role youth workers play as confidant for youngsters, and the benefits of working together.
- Youth workers get free training on topics that are relevant for them
- Youth workers feel supported when they are facing mental health challenges within their team

After a positive evaluation of this small local project, the Flemish government allocated funding to the OverKop Network to install similar projects spread across Flanders.

### **Good practice chapter of the European Charter on Local Youth Work**

Core principles of youth work