

How Detached Youth Work Can Make a Difference: The Birzebbuga Case Study

Name of the organisation

Aġenzija Żgħażaġħ

Website of the organisation

<https://youth.gov.mt/>

Location of the organisation

Youth Village, St Joseph High Road., SVR1031 Sta Venera, Malta

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Good practice aspect(s)/themes of youth work

- Youth work in urban areas
- Community work
- Participation of young people in decision making
- Active citizenship/activism

Good practice category

A practice of processes and methods

Good practice aim & purpose

Through detached youth work, Aġenzija Żgħażaġħ wants to make contact with young people in a range of settings, build beneficial relationships with them through dialogue and the effort to understand their situation and perspective, identify and respond to the needs and agendas of individuals and groups of young people by developing strategies for action which are both learning-oriented and fun, and to build bridges of understanding between adults and young people.

AŻ wants its youth workers to approach young people in the streets of different localities through interactions to learn and explore how to address the needs of the youth. These needs can vary from youth information to providing individual support, from job hunting to establishing links with the local authorities and organisations in the community. The agency can engage with young people outside youth organisations through this approach.

One of the localities where this service has yielded the desired results was in Birzebbuga, where the detached youth workers facilitated the process of voicing the young people's request for a skatepark with various stakeholders, from the actual implementation to continuing to meet the youth in this space.

Good practice description

Birżebbuġa is one of the localities where the AŽ youth workers encountered various young people spending their time around the streets and the waterfront of the locality. Two youth workers, twice a week, would visit the locality in the late afternoons to establish contact with the different young people in the area. Since the youth workers were consistent with the visit, the young people started to understand the role of the youth workers and that they could engage in conversations which concerned them as youth.

A salient query was the need for a space for young people to practice skating boarding and BMX freestyling. The young people shared that the local council had promised a skatepark, but it had not yet materialised. The youth workers looked into the matter and discovered that the local council had a designated area but lacked funding for such a project. The young people were invited to draft a proposal stating the benefits of having such space would mean to them, other young people from close neighbourhoods and the local community. Armed with this proposal, the young people presented it to the Malta Trust Foundation (MTF), a philanthropic Association whose goal is to set up projects for Children and Young People in communities. Two years on, the skatepark was built with hundreds of young people using this space weekly.

The work of the AŽ youth workers did not stop there. They continue to meet with young people weekly at the Skatepark and nearby areas. The work of the youth workers varies from assisting young people with individual matters like dealing with challenging situations to organising activities together with young people, such as clean-ups in various areas of the locality. Furthermore, through the close association with the young people, various stakeholders are approaching the youth workers so they can engage with the youth. The Community police are one such stakeholder. Regularly, the young people meet with the Mayor to discuss different initiatives for the locality. To assist in changing the young people's outlook on police, activities like football matches and outdoor activities are held between the young people and the police officers.

The youth workers have an active role in liaising with the local council and the Malta Trust Foundation to address needs and raise matters related to the infrastructure of the skatepark. There are ongoing discussions to refurbish parts of the skatepark as proposed by youth who are using the premises. In this respect, AŽ was the catalyst of engaging the Maltese Street Sport Association with the other stakeholders and are now Annual holdings the Urban Street Festival in Birżebbuġa.

Good practice result & concrete effects

Using detached youth work to build relationships with young people and listen to their concerns has had several concrete effects in Birżebbuġa. These include:

- The construction of a safe and dedicated space for young people to skate and BMX freestyle, which has been used by hundreds of young people every week, providing them with a place to socialise, exercise, and have fun.
- The reduction of crime and anti-social behaviour in the area.
- The building of strong relationships between youth workers and young people, providing them with support and guidance.
- The development of leadership skills among young people and their involvement in their community.
- The connection of young people with other stakeholders, such as the local council and the police, to improve the quality of life for young people in Birżebbuġa.
- Regular meetings with the Mayor of Birżebbuġa

These effects demonstrate the positive impact that detached youth work can have on the lives of young people. By building relationships with young people and listening to their concerns, youth workers can help to create safe and supportive spaces for young people to thrive.

Good practice chapter of the European Charter on Local Youth Work

Organisation and practice