

The power of youthwork

Name of the organisation

Vlaamse Dienst Speelpleinwerk

Website of the organisation

www.speelplein.net

Location of the organisation

Lange Ridderstraat, 22, 2800 Mechelen, Belgium

E-mail address of the organisation

VDSinfo@speelplein.net

Good practice aspect(s)/themes of youth work

- Participation of young people in activities (planning, preparing, carrying out, etc.)
- Participation of young people in decision making
- Non-formal education/-learning
- Outdoor activities

Good practice category

A practice of processes and methods

Good practice aim & purpose

The Flemish Playground Service (VDS) has been an expert in supporting holiday work for 50 years. Every playwork-organisator can come to us for training, support and information on all aspects of its operation. Our knowledge and expertise are built on our years of service as an umbrella organisation for playground work in Flanders and Brussels.

Besides playground work as a unique form of youth work, there are many other playworkorganisations. Our service is aimed at all organisers setting up a play offer during holiday time. What is useful for playground work can be used for all playworkorganisations. On Flemish and federal level, we bring their questions, concerns and our experiences with the target group to the table.

Good practice description

The VDS is best known for its training sessions and courses. During these training sessions, we train young people to become youth workers. They receive a lot of content and concrete tools to then take on a commitment in a local playground. The official training courses (= 50 hours) are recognised by the Flemish Government. Young people who pass their course and then complete an internship receive an official certificate.

In addition, the VDS itself is youth work and a voluntary organisation. We have about 250 volunteers who are part of our daily operation. They take on commitments themselves to help teach courses and organise activities, among other things. They also receive extensive support.

PLAYGROUNDS ARE A UNIQUE FORM OF YOUTHWORK

Anno 2024, there are 395 playground organisers. Together they organise 608 playground operations spread over 319 municipalities in Flanders and Brussels. Only 19 municipalities have none. On an average holiday day in summer, 43,000 children play on a playground every day. Together they reach almost 185,000 different children and 23,000 animators.

Diversity is an asset, a part of our identity. Alongside the differences, there are many traits we share and allow us to take the name “playground”.

- Playing is the main goal
- children as the target audience: from toddler to teen
- young people carry out the playing system and are involved in shaping it
- participants choose for themselves how long they participate
- it's active in the holidays, mostly without sleeping over
- Actively pursue accessibility

Good practice result & concrete effects

By handing so much ownership to young people and allowing them to embrace it, young people learn to organise, take responsibility and educate themselves. They thus become valuable citizens in their local community. They are working on their own qualities that will be useful in many areas of their future lives.

Youth work is a unique environment to experiment, fail and learn. Playground work therefore also focuses on training, coaching and supporting young people in their responsibility. In the presentation we give an insight in how we, as VDS, support the youngster on different levels. We take participants through our training sessions and courses to strengthen that power of youth work.

Good practice chapter of the European Charter on Local Youth Work

Organisation and practice