

bOJA - bundesweites Netzwerk Offene Jugendarbeit (nationwide network for open youth work)

16/10/2025 - Actions in EGL



We had the pleasure of meeting **Stephanie Deimel-Scherzer** and **Felix Meier von Rouden** from bOJA – nationwide network for open youth work in Austria. bOJA is a competency center for open youth work, acting like a service and networking agency, a key point for standards in quality development, and a political voice for open youth work at national and international levels. Founded in 2009, bOJA established a broad and deep presence in Austria’s youth work sector, providing knowledge, tools, and resources for quality development of local youth work.



What are the main activities of bOJA? What issues and challenges in the youth work is your network solving?

bOJA is the Austrian umbrella organisation of open youth work and represents over 700 youth centers and youth street work initiatives. The main activities are quality development of youth work, lobbying for better conditions, and the representation of open youth work in different networks, national and international projects.

Due to our activities, open youth work in Austria has significantly grown over the last decade and gained a stronger voice and more visibility. In terms of bOJA's functions, we do not fund the youth centres directly, but in the framework of projects or activities, in certain cases, we can also allocate resources. In the last years, the development of health literacy has become an important focus area for bOJA, besides our ongoing topics such as youth participation and inclusion, advocacy, activism, and many others.

What are your goals and key focus areas for open youth work in Austria?

Our goal is to strengthen open youth work in our country and support good quality standards in the field. We want municipalities to see what they can gain by financing open youth work and what change it makes in the lives of young people. Amongst others, child safety is an important focus area, but also other aspects or working principles like youth participation and children's rights.



Tell us more about your publication 'How to implement open youthwork in municipalities and cities'? How does it boost skills and the key focus areas important for the local youth work?

The idea behind this [publication](#) was to support the decision-makers on the local level to build capacities in managing budget, calculating the costs for the implementation of open youth work, and in general to understand which steps are important in this process. This publication includes practical examples of how municipalities managed to install open youth work, sometimes in cooperation with neighboring municipalities, and how they arranged all activities around it. It also presents testimonials of the benefits of having a youth center or mobile youth work in the municipality. The publication has been of great interest, so we are currently working on an updated version we will publish accompanied by public relations activities.



Offene Jugendarbeit

IN DER GEMEINDE

ein Leitfaden zur Gründung von Jugendräumen/Jugendzentren/
mobilen Angeboten in Gemeinden und Städten

How would you describe the results or key impact of your programs within the open youth work in municipalities and cities so far?

Since we mainly work on the national level, we support open youth work in the municipalities by offering support in quality development with a method known as the *quality dialogues on the local level*. Together with the Ministry of Health, we have implemented an award for health-literate youth clubs or streetwork offers that went to over 100 institutions. The methods include nine criteria of health-literate youth work, enabling a deeper understanding of health literacy standards in practice.. We provide the overall guidance, but municipalities are still the key players who decide whether they

are going to finance and support the open youth work.

What were the challenges for these programs? What's coming up next in terms of further developing competencies for open youth work?

The austerity measures in our country are challenging for us right now, and there are, unfortunately, already consequences in the open youth work field. Competence-wise, there are so many important topics we are working on, and that would be important for the youth work practitioners and young people. One topic is media literacy and the influences of AI. There are projects around youth culture and art, as well as a strategic partnership we are currently having on lobbying and communicating what open youth work does and achieves.

Learn more and get in contact with bOJA:

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