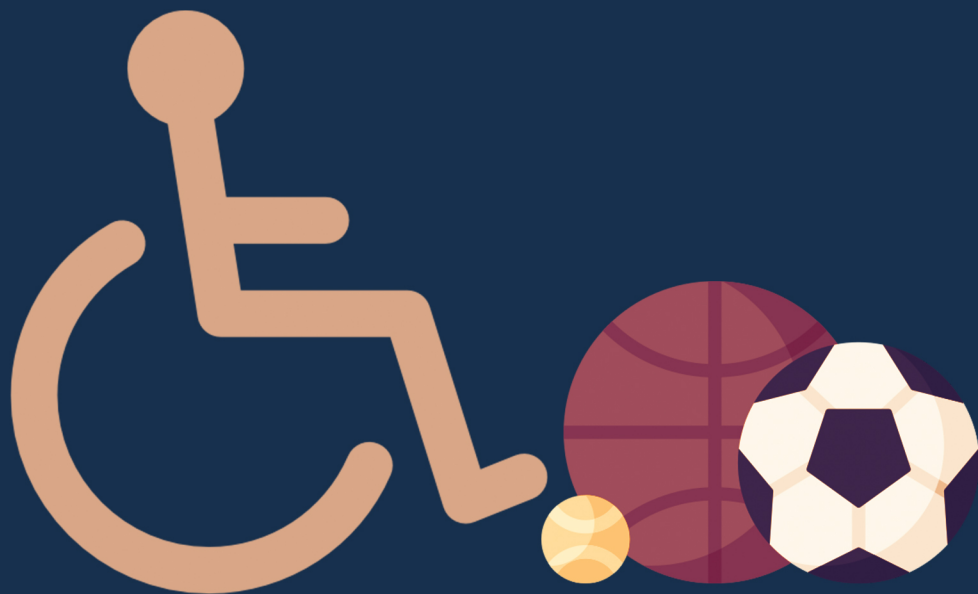


# THE COMPETENCY FRAMEWORK FOR YOUTH SPORTS WORKERS

FOR THE INCLUSION OF  
YOUNGSTERS WITH DIFFERENT ABILITIES



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# INTRODUCTION TO THE PROJECT

According to WHO and their Factsheets on Health-enhancing physical activity (2015), more than half people in the EU above 15 years of age never/ seldom engage in any kind of physical activity. Research also indicates that people from low socioeconomic backgrounds, minorities, as well as **people with disabilities engage in less physical activity and are harder to reach than others in terms of the promotion of physical activity.**

Typical barriers for people with disabilities to participate in sport include lack of awareness on the part of people without disabilities as to how to involve them in teams adequately; lack of opportunities and programmes for training and competition; too few accessible facilities due to physical barriers; and limited information on and access to resources.

Disability evokes negative perceptions and discrimination in many societies. As a result of the stigma associated with disability, persons with disabilities are generally excluded from education, employment and community life which deprives them of opportunities essential to their social development, health and well-being.

**Sport can help reduce that stigma and discrimination, as it can transform community attitudes about persons with disabilities by highlighting their skills and reducing the tendency to see the disability instead of the person.**

Through youth/sport work and sports, persons without disabilities interact with persons with disabilities in a positive context forcing them to reshape assumptions about what persons with disabilities can and cannot do.

Main **AIM** of our project is Building capacity of youth organisations, their youth workers in Non-Formal Education for youth/sport work with/for **different abilities' youngsters**.

## OBJECTIVES:

- ◆ Support youth workers to develop key competences for using sport methodology in youth work for inclusion of different abilities' youngsters;
- ◆ Enhance knowledge management of youth organisations with new innovative resources and training models/curricula within the project topics;
- ◆ Provide the linkage of youth with other sectors through their cooperation during the study visits and local dissemination events, and thus to further build capacity of our youth (work) organisations for inter-sectoral cooperation;
- ◆ Develop the competency framework for youth/sport workers for inclusion of different abilities' youngsters;
- ◆ Allow youth workers to practice their skills to manage creative youth/sport work projects on European level (through YE), as well as on national level (through workshops), and thus further increase competences of participating youngsters in inclusion of youngsters with disabilities;
- ◆ Engage into intensive dissemination and exploitation activities of newly produced products and attract more different abilities' youngsters to our youth/sport work activities, and thus increase inclusion among youngsters.

The competency framework for youth/sport workers for inclusion of different abilities' youngsters, that we plan to develop within this project is fully innovative, as there are no toolkits for inclusion of different abilities' youngsters, which makes our Toolkit also fully innovative.

# INTRODUCTION TO THE GUIDEBOOK

The goal of this guidebook is to provide youth workers with a **Competency Framework for youth sports workers for the inclusion of youngsters with different abilities**. This framework is fully innovative and based on our first-hand experience as youth workers.

Before introducing the framework, however, we deem important to introduce some basic definitions and methodologies that should be known to organize and deliver quality work.

For this reason, **Chapters 1-4 contain the theoretical and methodological framework** connected with youth sports work and youth work with youngsters with different abilities.

**Chapter 1** is dedicated to a definition of youth work and non-formal education, which represent the main concepts on which our work is based.

**Chapter 2** is dedicated to the inclusion of youngsters with different abilities in youth work activities, as we deem it important to provide a brief introduction to the target group of youngsters this booklet aims to include.

**Chapter 3** is dedicated to the concepts of youth sports work and education through sports, emphasizing the differences and similarities between youth sports work and “regular” sports activities.

**Chapter 4** is dedicated to including people with disabilities in sports activities, providing a few starting points to organize sports activities including people with different abilities.

**Chapters 5-6** introduce the **Competency Framework for youth sports workers for the inclusion of youngsters with different abilities**. This part, fully innovative, presents the competencies needed to perform quality youth sports work including youngsters with different abilities. We also explain how to adapt the framework to different organizations, to ensure the material could be useful in different settings with different goals.

**Chapter 5** will define competency and explain what a competency model entails. Then, we will provide a few tips on how to customize and adapt our model to suit the needs and goals of your specific organization.

**Chapter 6** will present the Competency framework for youth sports workers for the inclusion of youngsters with different abilities. Our framework includes and describes eight competencies that we deem necessary when organizing and developing youth sports work activities including youngsters with different abilities. The competencies will be divided into core competencies and functional competencies.



# 1

## A GENERAL INTRODUCTION TO YOUTH WORK

### WHAT IS YOUTH WORK?

Youth work is a broad term which encompasses a variety of educational, cultural, and social activities with the development of youth as a focus. According to the Council of Europe, youth work is “a social practice” (Council of Europe, Youth work, 2022), as it facilitates the active participation of youth in society emphasizing their role as decision-makers. In other words, youth work enables youngsters with the competencies needed to become a responsible and active part of their community, to improve society as a whole.

Youth work can take place anywhere and involves several different techniques and activities. Generally speaking, we can identify centre-based youth work, which takes place in dedicated premises like after-school clubs, youth centres, youth clubs, youth counselling centres or sports premises; and outreach youth work, which requires the youth worker to venture into youngsters’ typical gathering places like parks, gardens, school premises and neighbourhood hang out spots.

## YOUTH WORK AND NON-FORMAL EDUCATION

One of the essential components of youth work, regardless of where and how the youth work takes place, is **non-formal education**. Non-formal education is usually defined in opposition to the other recognized components of education: formal education and informal learning.

**Formal education** is unarguably the most straightforward to define, encompassing all the activities which take part in a formal education setting, like schools and universities. It usually aims to achieve precise knowledge and it most often culminates in a specific recognized certification, like a diploma, a degree, or any other kind of qualification.

**Informal learning** encompasses all the non-structured and non-planned learning experiences which take place in everyday interactions and experiences. It is spontaneous and non-institutionalized, and the learning experience is not evaluated. To clarify, simple everyday leisure activities like meeting a friend or going for a walk in a park lead to informal learning, assuming the person does or observes something new, knowingly or not.

**Non-formal education**, the pillar on which youth work is built, has some aspects which merge the two worlds. Similarly to formal education, it involves structured learning experiences which aim to provide the person with new capabilities, although more often in the sense of competencies and not mere knowledge.

Similarly to informal learning, however, it is not limited to a formal classroom setting but might happen in a variety of settings and places, involving many different methodologies. The Council of Europe (Brander et al. 2020, 31) effectively sums up how non-formal education should be:

- ◆ voluntary
- ◆ accessible to everyone (ideally)
- ◆ an organised process with educational objectives
- ◆ participatory
- ◆ learner-centred
- ◆ about learning life skills and preparing for active citizenship
- ◆ based on involving both individual and group learning with a collective approach
- ◆ holistic and process-oriented
- ◆ based on experience and action
- ◆ based on the needs of the participants

Considering these features, it is clear that non-formal education techniques strive to actively involve the learner in the learning process, valuing their input and encouraging them to experience and take action.

There are many techniques and methodologies involved in non-formal education, most of which rely on cooperation among participants and/or among the participants and the facilitator. Classic methods of non-formal education like group discussions, brainstorming sessions, role plays and open spaces all encourage the development not only of the competencies strictly connected with the learning experiences but also of social competencies like communication skills, conflict resolution, tolerance and responsibility towards others.

In addition, these methodologies allow the youth worker and the young person to develop a peer relationship and to become partners in a mutual learning process: the young person, therefore, becomes central in their learning process, feeling empowered and motivated to take on an active role in society.

For this reason, we can consider non-formal education as a holistic methodology, which helps in achieving not only specific competencies but also develops the person as a whole, and, as a result, develops society itself.

## 2

# YOUTH WORK FOR THE INCLUSION OF YOUNGSTERS WITH DIFFERENT ABILITIES

## WHAT ARE DISABILITIES?

Youth workers must understand the specific terminology and framework connected with disabilities to effectively involve youngsters with different abilities in youth work activities.

First, it is useful to define disability. **A disability could be broadly defined as “any condition of the body or mind (impairment) that makes it more difficult for the person with the condition to do certain activities (activity limitation) and interact with the world around them (participation restrictions)”** (World Health Organization, 2001).

There are many different types of disabilities and each one of them requires specific accommodation strategies.

The World Health Organization published the model known as the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF)

(World Health Organization, 2001). Following this model, we can identify four main types of disabilities:

- ◆ **Physical disabilities**, which affect the physical capacity or mobility of a person.
- ◆ **Sensory disabilities**, which affect senses (sight, hearing, touch...)
- ◆ **Intellectual disabilities**, which affect the areas of communication, learning, and retaining information.
- ◆ **Mental illnesses**, which affect a person's thinking, behaviour, and emotional state.

It must also be kept in mind that some disabilities might be temporary, for example resulting from an acute illness or an injury, while other disabilities might be permanent. Among permanent disabilities, some might be resulting from birth while others might be acquired due to illnesses or injuries. Also, it is important to know that disabilities could have different paths: some might be cured or treated, while others might be progressive.



According to the World Health Organization, there are three dimensions of disability:

- ◆ **Impairment**, which involves the structure and functionality of body parts.
- ◆ **Activity limitation**, which is the limitation in activities caused by the impairment.
- ◆ **Participation restriction**, which is how the activity limitation impacts the person with a disability in his personal and social life.

For example, the loss of a leg is a physical impairment. This impairment results in the limitation in doing an activity like walking: the person might not be able to walk without a mobility aid or might have to use a wheelchair.

This limitation restricts their participation in society of the person: for example, they might be prevented from taking part in activities which require walking or standing for a long time. This model emphasizes the concept of disability in relation to the surrounding environment: in this sense, disability is something that affects the life of a person with disabilities when their participation in society and specific activities is restricted. When participation is not restricted, the disability does not impair the experience of the individual.

This means that when a specific activity does not restrict the experience of a person with disabilities (so to say, an inclusive activity accessible to people with mixed abilities) because it does not involve activities for which they have limitations, then in that case the impairment does not have any limitation at all.

## HOW TO INCLUDE YOUNGSTERS WITH DISABILITY IN YOUTH WORK ACTIVITIES?

This way of defining disability has important consequences for the inclusion of people with disability in youth work – and in society in general. As youth workers, we are obviously not able to affect the impairment or the limitation in activities which directly result from the impairment, nor we are asked to. However, a lot can be done to positively impact the participation issue: **organizing and developing inclusive activities which suit the need of people with mixed abilities can break down the wall of participation restriction**, although the impairment will remain and so the consequent limitation in specific activities.

When planning an activity including people with disabilities, it is very important to provide suitable accommodation for the different disabilities involved, as they have diverse and specific needs. Moreover, it is fundamental to keep in mind that two people with the same disability might have different capabilities and require/prefer vastly different aids or accommodations. Every person is different; therefore, their needs and wishes will be different. Our best advice is to ask the person directly which accommodation they need, if any: they are the ones which know best how to deal with their own capabilities.

The inclusion of people with different abilities in youth work is crucial, as they are among the target groups which could benefit the most from it. The Council of Europe strives “to enhance equal opportunities, improve the quality of life and independence of people with disabilities, guarantee their freedom of choice, full citizenship, and active participation in the life of the community” (Council of Europe, Rights of persons with disabilities, 2022) which implies that, as youth workers, we should strive to provide to youngsters with disabilities the chance of active participation in the life of the communities through specific youth work that targets their specific need.

As stated by the authors of the booklet *No barriers, no borders*, it is of the utmost importance “not to work towards ‘disability projects’ where the young people with a disability are secluded again, but [...] to promote ‘mixed-ability projects’ where peers with and without a disability have a meaningful and positive experience together and get to accept each other in the process, regardless of their abilities or disabilities” (SALTO-YOUTH Inclusion Resource Centre, 2006).

Despite the best intentions, organising activities specifically targeted at youngsters with disabilities perpetuates the stigma that they cannot do the same things as the others.

This is not true: providing that the activity organized is inclusive, people with and without disabilities could effectively take part and enjoy the same experience in ‘regular’ activities! In addition, dealing with a mixed-abilities group is a learning experience for all, as people without disabilities learn to develop a positive and respectful relationships with people with disabilities.

On the other hand, people with disabilities benefit from the inclusive environment and could greatly improve their self-confidence seeing that they can take part in ‘regular’ activities with their peers.



# 3

## YOUTH SPORTS WORK

### YOUTH WORK AND SPORT

As brilliantly analysed by the authors of the Fit for Life - Inclusion through Sports booklet, youth work and sport “share many of the same basic philosophical aims”, for example, “each side encourages the health, general well-being and personal development of young people” and “they both strive to reinforce positive values like health, discipline, honesty, fair play, solidarity, etc.” (Schroeder, 2011, 7).

In other words, youth work and sport are linked by the same attention towards the development of young people, providing them with an environment that encourages core values useful for all aspects of social life. Through taking part in youth work activities and sports activities as well, youngsters develop positive values and competencies that facilitate their growth into responsible, active, and caring individuals ready to become valuable members of society.

However, despite these shared elements, it must be remarked that there is indeed a gap between youth work and sport. First of all, sports activities often result in competitions, which might foster an environment that values unhealthy competitiveness and a detrimental focus on a better-than-you mentality.

It is unarguably true that qualities like perseverance, hard work, and striving to overcome their own limits are indeed often acquired through competitions and result in personal growth; however, we must emphasize the risk of developing feelings of inadequacy and low self-esteem when the competition does not go as planned, but also excessive boldness and arrogance after a winning streak.

For this reason, a culture of valuing the learning process instead of the performative result – as youth work strives to do – might be overall better suited for the emotional and social development of an individual. This does not mean in the slightest that youth work is better than sports work: as a matter of fact, sports activities for youngsters often benefit from resources, visibility, and outreach potential that youth work does not always have. For example, when choosing an after-school activity for their kid, the average parent will be immediately familiar with what a kid might do in a football or a gymnastics club, while – due also to the diverse nature of youth work – it might not be as clear (and therefore less attractive) what the kid might end up doing in a generic youth club.

Another important difference between youth work and sports activities is the target they gather to. Sports clubs most often require a fee to join the training – although indeed volunteering-based sports clubs exist– which means that the youngsters and their families have the financial means to provide the experiences, and the youngsters participates because they have a predisposition to the sport and want to become good at it. Meanwhile, youth work often gathers youngsters with a diverse background, who might not have the means to afford sports training, and – especially in the case of outreach youth work – might not necessarily be enthusiastic and spontaneously drawn towards taking part in the youth work activity.

These peculiarities also reflect in the competencies involved either in being a youth worker or in being a sports trainer for youth. Generally, sports coaches are specifically trained in physical education and, therefore, possess the knowledge about anatomy and physiology necessary to coach correctly and safely to achieve a good performance in the sport. They are often skilled in elaborating training and gameplay strategy, especially when training in team sports.

Youth workers, on the other hand, might have a recreational and casual knowledge about different sports and might be able to effectively supervise and participate in sports events with the youngsters, but their knowledge is not necessarily specific and does not guarantee (nor aim to) achieve peak performances of the youngsters involved.

However, youth workers often have more experience in interacting with young people from less opportunity backgrounds (people with disabilities or people from poorer communities), as usually they deal with them regularly as part of their job. By contrast, usually, youngsters with fewer opportunities are excluded from regular sports practises, for a variety of reasons like the absence of sports infrastructures in their community, facilities or activities non-inclusive for people with disabilities or the impossibility to afford the fees to pay for the training or use the sports facilities.

To sum it up, youth work and sports training for youngsters share many aims and aspects; however, they partially differ in the type of learning experiences provided, in the target group and the competencies of the educators involved. Here comes into play the concept of **youth sports work**.

# YOUTH SPORTS WORK AND EDUCATION THROUGH SPORT



Doing youth sports work means using sport as a tool to achieve the same education purposes as regular youth work. Youth sports work does not mean merely supervising youngsters doing sports activities: it means encompassing the sports activities in a well-defined educational scheme which follows the principle of non-formal education listed above. In this way, doing sports is not only a recreational activity but a holistic learning experience which shapes and educates the youth. The youth work methodology known as “education through sport” (ETS) embraces these principles:

“Through ETS a lasting social change is supposed to happen. It aims to enable empowerment and provoke a sustainable social transformation. ETS requires many elements which go from using sport and physical exercise to provoke a strong lifelong learning outcome such as improving tolerance, solidarity or trust among nations. ETS should be seen more as a plan for reflection than as a field action. From a methodological perspective, ETS consists of adapting sport and physical activity exercises to the objectives of the planned learning project.” (MVNGO SPORT BRANCH, 2022)

In other words, youth sports work means using sports activities as one of the many tools available in planning a well-rounded, lifelong learning experience which educates youth towards being active and responsible members of society.

Sport is indeed a powerful tool in getting youngsters involved in educational activities, especially the ones with fewer opportunities. As said by Hartmann and Kwauk (2011), “sport provides the “hook” that draws otherwise disconnected, marginalized young people into a program, and then that gets them actively involved and invested in its activities taken as a whole”.

Sport, as a widely recognized and beloved activity, is often one of the first tools used by youth workers to engage and interact with marginalized youngsters to get them later involved in further developmental activities. As said above, the practice of using sport as an educational activity and not only as a mere recreational/leisure activity has the advantage of building an environment of self-development in which to acquire precious personal and social competencies.

Moreover, the inclusion of youngsters with different abilities is often facilitated in an educational sports setting rather than in a recreational sport setting: as we said before, usually the youth worker is more equipped than a sports trainer with the competencies needed to facilitate an inclusive environment in which the special needs of youngsters with different abilities are met.

When encompassing sports activities in youth work, it is easy to see that sport could be a powerful tool to develop the core values embraced by non-formal education. All the personal and social values whose development is usually an aim in youth work, have often a direct application in sports activities.

For example, through youth sports work youngsters could develop personal values like openness and curiosity (trying different sports), autonomy (in evaluating/practising their physical skills needed in the sport), creativity (in finding different gameplay strategies or solutions), self-control (in managing their needs and desires in comparison with what is best for the team); but also social values like responsibility and respects (for the rules and the other players), communication skills and teamwork (in communicating with other team members), conflict resolution (in solving potential conflicts arising between team members or different teams).

It is understood, then, that merging youth work and sport (performing the so-called youth sports work) is an effective way to provide valuable educational experiences to youngsters.



# 4

## SPORTS AND PEOPLE WITH DIFFERENT ABILITIES

Today is widely accepted that people with different abilities can successfully partake in sports activities. In many countries, kids and youngsters with disabilities have the chance to participate in dedicated sports opportunities and training, from recreational/beginner level up to elite and professional level – for example, people competing in the Paralympic Games.

There are different types of sports activities in which people with disabilities can partake:

- ◆ The same sports practised by people without disabilities, for example, Paralympic swimming.
- ◆ Adaptation of sports practised by people without disabilities, for example, Wheelchair basketball.
- ◆ Sports created specifically for people with disabilities, for example, Torball.
- ◆ Sports in which people of different abilities can partake together, through specific minimal adaptations, for example, Unified Sports or Mixed Abilities Sports.
- ◆ Sports invented specifically to ensure the participation of people with and without disabilities, for example, Baskin.



When planning a youth sports activity with youngsters with different abilities, regardless of the type of sport or activities, there are many different tools on which the youth sports worker could – and should – intervene to guarantee an inclusive experience:

- ◆ **Facilities and physical environment:** the youth worker should ensure that the facility is accessible and does not pose any danger to the youngsters involved. Adaptation could also involve the field of play, for example, widening it to allow wheelchair users to move freely or reducing it to minimize the mobility involved.
- ◆ **Social environment:** the teams or the groups could be composed and adapted to achieve an overall equal capability.
- ◆ **Equipment:** the equipment should be adapted to not pose any danger, for example using wider/softer balls to play regular sports activities.
- ◆ **Regulations:** regulations should be adapted to ensure fair play and a positive experience for everyone involved. For example, the timing of the play could be extended-reduced or the participants with disabilities could be granted specific accommodations, such as throwing free-throws closer to the basket.
- ◆ **Language:** the language used should be inclusive and adapted to be easily understood. It could also become a tool to aid participants with reduced sight (for example, descriptive language could help a blind person navigate the field of play).



When adapting the activity, however, it is important to avoid offending the sensitivity of the participants. The adaptation should not single out or emphasize the limitation of the participants but should be presented as a solution to improve the experience of everyone involved.

To normalize the adoption of inclusive practices and accommodations, here there are a few tips that the youth worker could use:

- ◆ Minimally adapt the original activity, positively introducing the changes as a tool to make the experience pleasant and fulfilling for everybody.
- ◆ Recognize and emphasize what the youngster can do, rather than what they cannot do.
- ◆ Involve the youngster in the process of adapting the activity, rather than assuming which accommodations the youngster might need.
- ◆ Encourage a cooperative attitude rather than a competitive attitude.
- ◆ Do not excessively limit or “protect” the youngster: let them free to experiment and test their abilities in a safe and controlled environment.
- ◆ Strongly condemn any stigmatization, mocking or bullying which might arise in the group.

# 5

## AN INTRODUCTION TO THE COMPETENCY FRAMEWORK FOR YOUTH SPORTS WORKERS FOR THE INCLUSION OF YOUNGSTERS WITH DIFFERENT ABILITIES

### WHAT DOES “COMPETENCY” MEAN?

To develop and use a competency framework, it is necessary to briefly clarify the definition of “competency”.

According to the Council of Europe, **competency is the “ability to do something successfully or efficiently”** and, consequently, when someone is **competent** it means that **“they can apply what they know to do a specific task** or solve a problem and they are **able to transfer this ability between different situations”** (Council of Europe, Youth Work Competence, 2022).

The definition is necessarily broad, as the variety of fields, professions, and activities in which a person can achieve competence is endless. There are, however, two main corollaries deriving from this definition that we think deserve specific attention:

- ◆ **Competence is a broad and flexible concept**, meaning that it can be achieved in any kind of task, activity or project performed in any kind of professional and/or personal environment.
- ◆ **Competence is transferable**, meaning that when someone is competent in a specific task/field they could use said competence to solve a further problem or to implement some solution also in related – but different – situations.

In our specific case, it means that the competencies needed for youth sports work involving youngsters of different abilities are not a specific set of competencies that must be built from scratch. In fact, it means that competencies specifically needed for youth sports work with youngsters with different abilities can be borrowed and developed starting from the solid base of competencies that any youth worker already possesses.

Specifically, this means that even youth workers who do not (yet) have experience in youth sports work and/or in youth work involving youngsters with different abilities nevertheless possess a solid number of competencies that can be applicable and advantageous when transferred into the framework of youth sports work with youngsters with different abilities.

To sum it up, **every youth worker already possesses several competencies that – specifically adapted and integrated – will allow them to implement quality sports youth work also with youngsters with different abilities.**

Before listing those, however, it's worth defining more precisely what are the different dimensions that make up a competence, as it is understood that competence is a cluster of highly interrelated capabilities that make a person able to perform the tasks as intended, or, in other words, to be indeed competent.

A widely recognized model used to describe competencies is the KSA model, which describes **competencies as the result of three interlinked dimensions**, each one equally relevant: **knowledge**, **skills**, and **attitude**.

**Knowledge** is related to the cognitive processing of information; and refers to the theoretical expertise needed to perform a task. Knowledge might also be acquired through non-formal education; however, it requires the cognitive elaboration of what has been learnt: it includes cognitive processes like retaining, recalling, understanding, reflecting, planning, and applying.

**Skills** are related to the ability to perform a task. They involve applying the knowledge to solve a practical problem or to perform a specific activity. In this regard, knowledge could be considered a prerequisite to skills. Skills are, therefore, strictly connected to the concept of performance, which could then be measured or otherwise evaluated.

**Attitude** refers to the values, beliefs and willingness needed to embrace the process of developing competence. It could be said that attitude is the prerequisite to developing the knowledge needed to then perform a task; in this regard, attitude could be, so to say, the core foundation for further competence development: for example, a youth worker must have the willingness (attitude) to create a meaningful learning experience for the youngsters, and this willingness kickstarts them into acquiring knowledge to develop the experience.

However, it's important to emphasize that attitude must not drive only the first steps towards the learning process, but the whole process itself up to the very last phases. In this sense, we remark that attitude is a dimension as relevant as knowledge and skills.

Following the Competence Model for Youth Workers to Work Internationally (Evrard & Bergstein, 2016), we'd like to include in the model the fourth dimension of competence: **behaviours**.

**Behaviours** are the actions that a person performs, which must be contextual and appropriate to the task at hand. As behaviours involve performing a task, they are the most immediately visible component of competence.



It's very important to emphasize once more that there is no hierarchy between these components: they are interlinked and closely interact to make up the concept of competence as a whole. This means that working on developing and improving one dimension of competence will have a cascade of positive effects in developing the competence as a whole: for example, someone with a strong motivation and beliefs could develop their competence by acquiring further theoretical knowledge, while it is also true that acquiring theoretical knowledge in a specific topic could kickstart the willingness to put it into action, increasing the attitude of a person.

To conclude, then, it is understood that **these four dimensions are equally important and necessary to develop competence**: attitude without solid knowledge might result in reckless behaviour; mere knowledge without the will to act won't benefit anyone but the one with the knowledge; etcetera.

In the previous few pages, we have been clarifying what is competence. Now, we will move on to defying **what is a competency model and why a competency model** is useful in youth work, especially in youth sports work targeting youngsters with different abilities.

## WHAT IS A COMPETENCY FRAMEWORK?

**A competency model is a framework of competencies needed to perform a job or a task**, in our specific case it will be organizing and managing youth sports work involving youngsters with different abilities. Our competency framework is a collection of competencies that a youth worker should possess to provide quality youth sports work including youngsters with different abilities.

## HOW TO USE THIS COMPETENCY FRAMEWORK?

As it has been proved in the introductory chapters, youth work (and youth sports work) is a broad concept, which involves many diverse methodologies applied to perform thousands of different practices and activities all around the world, in a variety of settings, with different resources aimed to specific target groups. In other words, every youth worker does unique work in the environment in which they are located. For this very reason, it is impossible to provide a universal competency framework that could encompass the very diverse situation in which youth sports work with youngsters with different abilities is performed.

Therefore, the list we provide is inevitably not an exhaustive one. We purposely tried to include broad competencies which stand at the deepest core of youth sports work; however, this does not imply that they will be strictly valid in any setting; and also there might be specific competencies needed in some settings which are not present in this list.

For this reason, **we encourage fellow youth workers to use the framework we provide to draft their own**, targeting the specific competencies needed to take up the unique challenges of their setting. Targeting the framework to a specific setting will be useful especially to define the final behaviours and actions taken up by the youth workers, which will necessarily vary broadly according to the setting.

There are many ways in which a competency framework might be useful for an association, and this is why we strongly encourage fellow youth workers to sit down with their teams to customize and implement our framework to tailor it to their own specific needs.

First, creating a competency model implies creating a shared language used to describe what is expected: through the competency model, all the youth workers will be provided with a clear picture of how to behave, what knowledge to acquire, and which skill to use in their working day. This helps with setting clear expectations to achieve the goals set for the youth work.

Secondly, a competency model could be relied on for personal assessment: comparing the competencies listed in the framework with the one possessed by the youth worker ensure reflection on their specific strengths and weaknesses, showing them clearly in which aspects of the competencies it is necessary to improve.

Thirdly, the competency model could be a starting point to analyse the competencies of the team altogether: comparing the personal assessment of the whole team against the referenced competency framework helps the whole association in defining the common strength and weaknesses of the whole group. In this way, it is possible to effectively organize activities which the team could carry out with competencies, exposing also in which areas it would be necessary to improve.

## HOW TO ADAPT THIS MODEL TO THE NEEDS OF MY ORGANIZATION?

Before introducing our model, we would like to share a few possible tips regarding how to adapt this model to match the specific needs of different youth work settings and organizations:

- ◆ Focus on the specific activities implemented by your organization and verify whether and in which measure the competencies listed are effectively needed.
- ◆ Feel free to add any competence that might be required in your particular setting, using this as an opportunity to reflect on the knowledge, ability and attitude required.
- ◆ List the specific behaviours you would like to see implemented in your organization and use them as a starting point to outline the knowledge, skills and attitude required to achieve that behaviour.
- ◆ You might as well start by writing down the knowledge or skills that are strong points in yourself or your team and use them as a starting point to expand towards the broader concept of competence.
- ◆ Do not neglect the precious input that youngsters might have in drafting a competence model: this could be a useful opportunity to gather their suggestions and their idea towards creating an inclusive space that matches their needs and expectations.
- ◆ Keep in mind that competence models are a flexible and adaptive tool: you can create a broad competence model to encompass your activities as a whole – as our model will do – or create a very specific model related to a precise and limited activity, for example, a competence model to organize a precise activity with a specific group of youngsters. Feel free to specify our model to match your specific needs.



6

# THE COMPETENCY FRAMEWORK FOR YOUTH SPORTS WORKERS FOR THE INCLUSION OF YOUNGSTERS WITH DIFFERENT ABILITIES

We will now finally introduce the competency framework we created for youth sports workers for the inclusion of youngsters with different abilities. As we said, we purposely listed very broad competencies which are generally necessary for most of the activities involved in youth work, so that our model could be applied to several different organizations and activities.

We decided to list 8 competencies that we deem particularly relevant when doing youth sports work with youngsters with different abilities. We drafted this list by combining, merging, integrating, and adapting to our specific case two established and recognized competency frameworks for youth workers: the Youth Work Competence Portfolio by the Council of Europe (Council of Europe, Youth Work Competence, 2022) and the Competence Model for Youth Workers to Work Internationally by SALTO (Evrard & Bergstein, 2016).

Both of these tools use the KSA model to describe each of the competence listed: we will do the same, as we feel it leads to a better understanding of the competence, what it entails and what to do to improve.

In addition, we decided to divide the competencies listed into two different categories: core competencies and functional competencies.

Core competencies are the “defining pillars” of the organization: they are deeply connected to the vision of the organization and permit to carry out actions that embody their inner values. Although they must be supported by knowledge and skills, they are strongly driven especially by attitudes, behaviours, and values.

Functional competencies are the competence needed to actively carry out a task. Although they also rely on the core values of the organization, they entail more specific action and a more concrete set of skills. Since they are connected to specific functionality, they might vary according to the working title: for example, the functional competence of a project manager might differ from the one of a facilitator or a youth worker. The functional competencies which we will list are broad and could apply, on different levels, to each of these professional figures.

For each of the competencies listed, we will provide a short description to precise what the competence entails, a couple of examples of knowledge and skills which pertain to the competence, some good practice behaviours which occur when applying the competence and a couple of practical functionalities which can be dealt with using the competence.

## THE CORE COMPETENCIES

Firstly, we will present five competencies which we deem deserving of a central spot when organizing youth sports work targeting youngsters with different abilities. These competencies, combined, ensure that the youth work is carried on in an enriching, fulfilling and educational way, which meets the needs and desires of young people. When these core competencies are applied, youngsters have the opportunity to grow, learn and experience an environment that is inclusive, supportive, kind and respectful.

As you will notice, most of these competencies are borrowed from general youth work settings: indeed, you will realize that your general experience and competence as a youth worker will be fundamental in building new competencies targeting specifically youth sports work including youngsters with different abilities.

According to our experience, these are the five core competencies for youth sports work including youngsters with different abilities:

- ◆ Address the needs and aspirations of young people
- ◆ Provide meaningful learning opportunities for young people with different abilities
- ◆ Support and empower young people in taking on an active role in society
- ◆ Communicate meaningfully with others, facilitating communications and team cooperation
- ◆ Display sensitivity and tactfully addresses challenges, facilitating an inclusive and supportive environment

## ADDRESS THE NEEDS AND ASPIRATIONS OF YOUNG PEOPLE

As we know, one of the main principles of youth work and non-formal education is to **put the learner at the centre of the educational experience**. This implies that the activity must strive to **take into consideration the needs and aspirations of the youngsters** who will participate. If the needs, aspirations, and interests of youngsters are met, they will be more enthusiastic when participating, which will result in a productive, flourishing experience for everyone.

By contrast, if you organize an activity that, although well planned, does not meet the needs and interests of the youngsters, the participation will be low, and so will the results.

This competence results in the following good practises example behaviours...

- ◆ The youth worker actively involves the youngsters in planning, delivery, and evaluation of the activity using participatory methods which value the inputs from the youngsters.
- ◆ The youth worker inquiries about the needs of the participants, with special regard towards the needs of youngsters with different abilities. The youth worker does not presumptuously assume the needs and ability levels of the youngsters; it uncovers them together with them.
- ◆ The youth worker discusses with openness the aspirations of the youngsters, guiding them in understanding their feasibility and in which ways they could work towards them.
- ◆ The youth worker plans activities that are interesting and engaging for the youngsters, tailored towards their needs and that help them achieve their aspirations.

To develop this competence, you could work towards this knowledge and skills:

- ◆ The knowledge about specific needs of youngsters with different abilities.
- ◆ The knowledge about inclusive sports techniques and methodology.
- ◆ The skill of active listening.
- ◆ The skill of needs analysis.

This competence relies on these attitudes and values:

- ◆ Openness and sincere curiosity towards others' needs and opinions.
- ◆ Sensitivity, empathy and patience when dealing with people with different abilities.
- ◆ Respect, privacy and confidentiality in addressing personal challenges/difficulties.



## PROVIDE MEANINGFUL LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE WITH DIFFERENT ABILITIES

As we explained in the introduction, one of the goals of youth work is to provide learning opportunities for young people. When working with youngsters with different abilities, their specific capabilities and needs are to be taken into peculiar consideration. However, the main goal should be to provide a meaningful learning opportunity for all the parties involved, with or without disabilities.

This can be achieved by establishing dialogue and cooperation opportunities which aim to share different views, opinions, and experiences, creating a path towards common learning and development.

This competence results in the following good practises example behaviours...

- ◆ The youth worker uses a range of educational methods and techniques which are inclusive and results in a learning opportunity for all the youngsters involved (with or without disabilities).
- ◆ The youth worker creates a safe, supportive and inclusive learning environment, in which participation is encouraged regardless of the ability and capability level.
- ◆ The youth worker encourages activities that lead to communal and shared learning, for example, doing something that is new/unusual for everyone regardless of the capability levels.

To develop this competence, you could work towards this knowledge and skills:

- ◆ Knowledge about specific inclusive methodology and techniques (for example, sports activities which could be done by people with mixed abilities).
- ◆ Knowledge about different learning styles and learning preferences, and how to adapt them to be inclusive (for example, learning by doing, learning by listening, learning by reading).
- ◆ Training and facilitating skills throughout the whole learning process (planning, developing, evaluating)
- ◆ Coaching and mentoring skills to encourage the youngsters to further develop their learning autonomously.

This competence relies on these attitudes and values:

- ◆ Support and encouragement for the youngsters involved in the learning process.
- ◆ Valuing the roles of youngsters with different abilities as an important part of society.

## SUPPORT AND EMPOWER YOUNG PEOPLE IN TAKING ON AN ACTIVE ROLE IN SOCIETY

Although youth work could lead to impactful and powerful activities developed in youth centres, sports facilities, and also international settings, it is of the utmost importance that the competencies acquired by the youngsters in these activities could then be transferred to other aspects of their life in society. In other words, youngsters must be equipped to bring the values, knowledge and skills that they acquired during the activities also in the “real world”. Youth work should not remain a “bubble” in which positive behaviours and values are practised and then discarded once the activity is done and the participants are back home.



At the end of their learning process, youngsters should have as well learnt how to transfer the competencies in their daily life, to become active decision-makers in their society.

This competence results in the following good practises example behaviours...

- ◆ The youth worker encourages and facilitates discussions about community and society.
- ◆ The youth worker directs youngsters towards ways to become active and proactive members of society (for example volunteering, sharing the outcomes of their learning experiences with other friends and family, and taking part in other community projects and activities).
- ◆ The youth worker leads and supports the youngster in advocating for an inclusive society (tackling discrimination and injustice, promoting inclusive practices...).
- ◆ The youth worker helps youngsters develop their critical thinking regarding the issues in society.

To develop this competence, you could work towards this knowledge and skills:

- ◆ Knowledge of civic education, power relations in society and communities, and existing policies and regulations about the issues that youngsters are passionate about.
- ◆ Participatory decision-making skills and democratic leadership skills.

This competence relies on these attitudes and values:

- ◆ Be open to changes and transformation.
- ◆ Be a proactive leader of meaningful, positive change in society.



## COMMUNICATE MEANINGFULLY WITH OTHERS, FACILITATING COMMUNICATIONS AND TEAM COOPERATION

Meaningful communication is one of the defining aspects of youth work. As a youth worker, you might be required to communicate not only with youngsters or their families but also with colleagues, partner associations, international partners, decision-makers, and policy officers.

In addition, when dealing with youngsters with disabilities you might need to communicate with other professionals involved in their care, for example, therapists, educators, and medical personnel. Meaningful communication is caring, respectful, and empathic and requires the handling of emotions, of yourself and other people.

This competence results in the following good practises example behaviours...

- ◆ The youth worker listens to the other carefully and without judgment.
- ◆ The youth worker uses respectful and inclusive language which does not hurt feelings and emotions.
- ◆ The youth worker matches their language and their choice of words to the audience, adapting it – if necessary – to different knowledge and/or comprehension abilities.
- ◆ The youth worker facilitates an environment in which everyone is free to express themselves and is heard, seen, and supported by others.

To develop this competence, you could work towards this knowledge and skills:

- ◆ Knowledge of the principles of active listening and non-verbal communication.
- ◆ Knowledge about inclusive communication and no-hate speech.
- ◆ The skill of communicating in a way that is easily understood by everyone that is involved in the communication.
- ◆ The ability to encourage people to share their ideas and take part in a group conversation.

This competence relies on these attitudes and values:

- ◆ The youth worker values the experience of every single youngster.
- ◆ The youth worker is sensitive, empathetic, and open to diversity.
- ◆ The youth worker is willing to deal with potentially difficult emotions which might arise when discussing sensitive topics.

## DISPLAY SENSITIVITY AND TACTFULLY ADDRESS CHALLENGES, FACILITATING AN INCLUSIVE AND SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT

As youth workers often deal with marginalized youth or youngsters with fewer opportunities, they are usually equipped with skills related to tactfully approaching sensitive topics or addressing harsh situations. This is even more relevant when dealing with youngsters with different abilities: when including this target group in sports activities, many difficult moments could arise. For example, a youngster might not feel comfortable taking part in one specific activity or might feel challenged out of his comfort zone.

Sadly, it might also happen that the group is not inclusive and stigmatize the youngster. For a youth worker planning to engage in sports work with youngsters with different abilities, it is of the utmost importance to acquire the competence of being sensitive, tactful, and able to foster an inclusive and supportive environment.

This competence results in the following good practises example behaviours...

- ◆ The youth worker actively cooperates with the youngsters to assess their ability level and gets direct input from them on how to involve and support them in the activity.
- ◆ The youth worker can tactfully and sensitively communicate with the youngsters about their needs and challenges.
- ◆ The youth worker is firm in shutting down and condemning potential non-inclusive and stigmatizing behaviours which might arise in the group.

To develop this competence, you could work towards this knowledge and skills:

- ◆ Knowledge about different kinds of disabilities and specific adaptations they might need to take part in the activities.
- ◆ Knowledge about inclusive sports activities.
- ◆ Skills of active listening and meaningful communication.

This competence relies on these attitudes and values:

- ◆ The youth worker is empathetic, sensitive, and tactful towards youngsters with different abilities.
- ◆ The youth worker strongly believes that people with disabilities or with fewer opportunities are valuable members of society.
- ◆ The youth worker strongly condemns discrimination, exclusion and segregation.

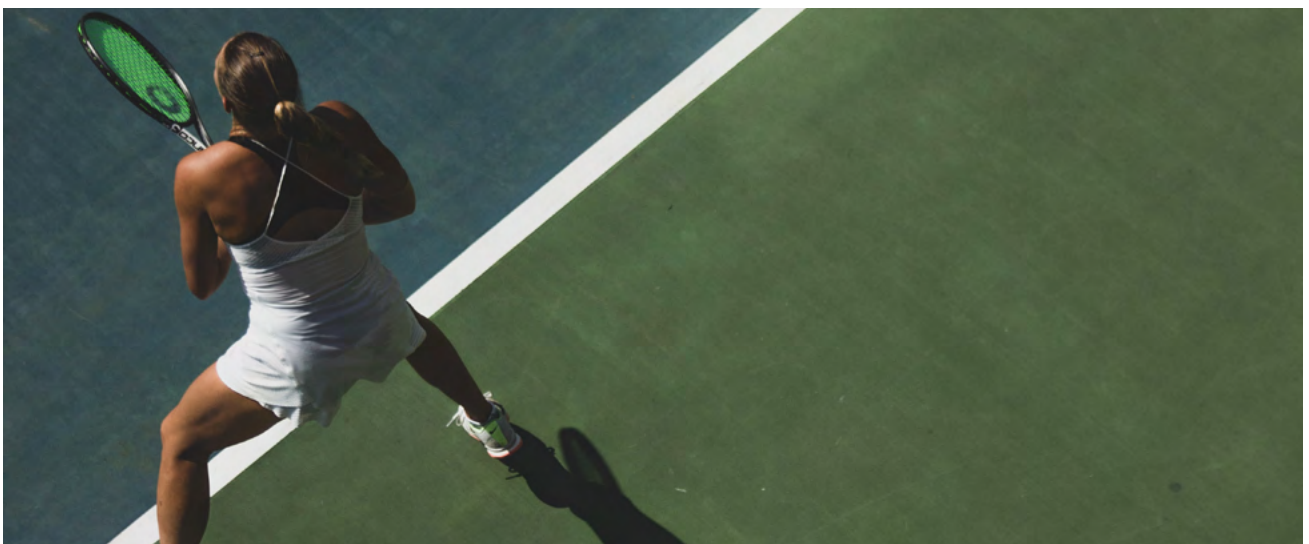
## THE FUNCTIONAL COMPETENCIES

The core competencies listed above will be particularly useful when reflecting on the motivations, aspirations and visions that lead your willingness to organize youth sports activities involving youth with different abilities.

However, to transform that aspiration into achievable plans and successful activities, more competencies are needed. These will be the so-called functional competencies. These competencies are connected with general project management area, networking and advocating capabilities, and the overall possibility to actively contribute to the development of your organization. Strengthening these competencies is fundamental to make sure that the activities planned might be successfully carried out, and might result in enriching, educational experiences for the youngsters involved.

According to our experience, these are the three functional competencies for youth sports work including youngsters with different abilities:

- ◆ Developing, conducting, and evaluating programs, projects, and activities
- ◆ Networking and advocating
- ◆ Contribute to the development of the organization



## DEVELOPING, CONDUCTING, AND EVALUATING PROGRAMS, PROJECTS, AND ACTIVITIES

To ensure quality and good results in the actions taken, it is necessary that they are well planned, conducted and evaluated. These managerial aspects are necessary both in organizing small-scale activities (for example, a specific sport activity with a target group of youngsters) and more long-term, complex projects or whole programs.

To develop effective actions, the youth worker needs a good understanding of how to manage a project, organize resources and perform proper evaluation.

This competence results in the following good practises example behaviours...

- ◆ The youth worker is well-organized and can meet deadlines.
- ◆ The youth worker can carry to term the actions planned, including the evaluation part.
- ◆ The youth worker can foresee potential issues or difficulties arising in planned activities and can promptly address them.
- ◆ The youth worker effectively uses the evaluation results from previous actions to coherently plan the following ones.

To develop this competence, you could work towards this knowledge and skills:

- ◆ Knowledge of project management processes and techniques.
- ◆ Knowledge of assessment and evaluation practises.
- ◆ Knowledge of how to turn ideas and projects into actions.
- ◆ Organizational skills which ensure the efficient development of action.
- ◆ Planning and scheduling skills.

This competence relies on these attitudes and values:

- ◆ The youth worker is responsible, self-organized and can be trusted with completing their tasks.
- ◆ The youth worker is capable and willing to deal with unforeseen circumstances.
- ◆ The youth worker is honest and reliable.

## NETWORKING AND ADVOCATING

Youth work can not be done in an isolated way. As we said, a critical goal of youth work is to ensure the youngsters are prepared to take on an active role in society, which implies that youth work must be carried on in a way that integrates fully into society. Especially when dealing with marginalized categories (in our case, youngsters with different abilities), the youth worker must be able to network with other relevant actors involved in their care and support.

Also, the youth worker must be a proactive advocate for positive changes toward a more inclusive and supportive society. They also should equip youngsters in becoming confident and independent in advocating for themselves.

This competence results in the following good practises example behaviours...

- ◆ The youth worker supports and encourages partnership and cooperation with other actors which could help carry out sports activities with youngsters with different abilities (for example educators, sports associations for people with disabilities, sports trainers, therapists...).
- ◆ The youth worker is proactive in advocating for a more inclusive society (for example, advocating with political decision-makers).
- ◆ The youth worker is ready to share their knowledge with other partners and actors, learning and improving together to ensure better holistic experiences for the youngsters.

To develop this competence, you could work towards this knowledge and skills:

- ◆ Knowledge about relevant policies and regulations in your community.
- ◆ Knowledge about possible advocacy opportunities in your community.
- ◆ Ability to identify and evaluate possible partners and relevant actors in your community.
- ◆ Ability to successfully network with a variety of partners and actors.

This competence relies on these attitudes and values:

- ◆ The youth worker is willing to cooperate with different individuals and associations.
- ◆ The youth worker accepts and values input and ideas coming from different individuals and associations.
- ◆ The youth worker is open to being confronted with different work approaches.

## CONTRIBUTE TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE ORGANIZATION

Every youth worker, regardless of their specific tasks or functions, is directly responsible for the development of their organization. How the competence is carried out might change according to the specific role or task, for example, someone in a managerial position might contribute to the development of the organization by expanding the network and ensuring funds for the project, while someone responsible for direct work with youngsters might be contributing to the development involving more and more youngsters and ensuring the quality of the activities done.

Regardless of the specificities, however, every youth worker must have the competence of improving and developing the organization, to guarantee more and better opportunities for the youngsters.

This competence results in the following good practises example behaviours...

- ◆ The youth worker is proactive in planning, developing, and evaluating development practices in the organization.
- ◆ The youth worker openly and correctly assesses their strengths and weaknesses and is open to new training and development opportunities.
- ◆ The youth worker openly addresses possible weaknesses in the organization, elaborating an achievable plan to turn them into strengths.

To develop this competence, you could work towards this knowledge and skills:

- ◆ Knowledge of assessment models like needs analysis and SWOT analysis.
- ◆ General knowledge about project management tools and research and development tools.
- ◆ Cooperation skills towards participatory decision-making.
- ◆ Organizational skills in managing human resources.

This competence relies on these attitudes and values:

- ◆ The youth worker is self-aware of their competencies and willing to improve.
- ◆ The youth worker is proactive in taking on development and training opportunities.
- ◆ The youth worker is ready for continuous learning.



## CONCLUSIONS

With this booklet, we aimed to provide fellow youth workers with a framework of necessary competencies to successfully plan, develop, and evaluate youth sports work activities involving youngsters with different abilities.

As stated in Chapter 5, competencies widely change depending on the type of activities or programme which they refer to, but also depending on the target group of youngsters and the environment in which the youth worker operates.

For this reason, we strongly encourage fellow youth workers and association to not take this framework for granted, but to use it as a tool: feel free to integrate and modify it to match the specific settings and needs of your associations, always keeping in mind the development of youngsters with different abilities as the main goal.

As it is clear from our framework, there are no “unique” competencies needed to perform sports activities with youngsters with different abilities: the competencies needed to perform “regular” youth work will be a solid foundation on which fellow youth workers could expand on, always keeping in mind the peculiar need of youngsters with different abilities. Therefore, including this target group in youth sports work should not be intimidating: you will realize that you already have a foundation of solid competencies which will be useful in this new experience.

For this reason, we deeply encourage fellow youth workers to take on the “challenge” of including youngsters with different abilities in youth sport work, as it will lead to unique development opportunities for everyone involved, regardless of their abilities or disabilities.

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