

## EUROPEAN ACADEMY ON YOUTH WORK - WORKSHOP REPORT

### First ADR Kit – Mediation in Youth Work

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#### TOPIC DISCUSSED

The aim of the workshop was to introduce participants to the idea of Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) with a special focus on mediation. This involved reflecting on its usefulness in the context of youth work, discussing practical examples, inspiring in particular youth workers to explore this topic more and presenting the results of the “First ADR Kit” project.

Mediation is still not well known or widespread in youth work. Usually, people place it in a legal context, regarding it as a complicated process without any reflection on its benefits in everyday life. In fact, it is a powerful method that can be used by anyone, especially with or by young people in a non-formal learning context. Mediation is more than just resolving conflicts with the support of a third party. It is a set of useful skills that improves communication between individuals in general and supports mutual understanding.

This contribution was based on the outcomes of the project “First ADR Kit”. One of the outcomes is “The handbook on conflict resolution education for young people”, which is an introduction to ADR in the context of youth work. It consists of twelve workshop scenarios, two educational games, a summary of the research and a list of literature devoted to the topic.

#### CHALLENGES IDENTIFIED AND THE ROLE OF MEDIATION AND ADR

The research on ADR education for young people was conducted in Poland, the United Kingdom, Estonia, Italy and Norway. It shows that there is insufficient education in conflict resolution for young people, who often struggle to deal with problems and react with aggression. Dispute resolution education is needed in curricula and should be available more widely, and even be a compulsory topic in schools and youth clubs, especially for young people in their teenage years or early adulthood. These young people often find themselves engaged in highly emotional conflicts and even violence. Their environment is usually very competitive; they struggle against their peers, families and society. Very often, they lack opportunities to take part in decision-making processes. Especially today, when radicalisation and hate speech are becoming more common, it is important to teach young people ways of dealing with and managing their own conflicts. Mediation is a tool that can help them to deal with issues and decide for themselves.

At the beginning of the workshop, participants’ associations with the word “mediation” were gathered. These helped in the further discussions and to build a common understanding of the term. We defined ADR as practices that are an alternative to legal action, outside “court”. In youth work, “judge” refers to a person who holds power and who can take decisions about a solution, e.g. a teacher,

coordinator or school director. However, a decision that comes from a third party, which fails to resolve the conflict, may result in it flaring up again very soon. Parties can feel punished by an “external judge”, unhappy with an imposed solution or even treated in an unfair way. They do not feel they have been understood or heard and quite frequently, their motivations and interests are not explored. Often, the root of the conflict is about something completely different from what it first seems to be, but to find the real reasons, the parties need to go deeper into discussion and focus on each other’s interests. In mediation, the parties agree to the settlement and the role of the third party is to facilitate the process and help the parties to understand their needs, interests and behaviours.

The aim of mediation in youth work is to prepare young people for managing their own conflicts. Firstly, youth workers should raise awareness about this way of solving conflicts and work through the process of mediation, its rules and principles, so that young people are ready to invite a mediator when there is a need. In subsequent sessions, they might act as mediators and take part in a peer-to-peer mediation process.

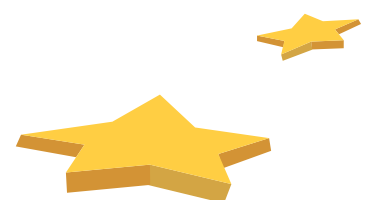
Further discussion during the workshop was stimulated by yes/no questions, where participants had to decide whether they agreed or disagreed with prepared statements and explain their position. Participants reflected amongst themselves on the degree to which a mediator can influence the final settlement: whether the mediator should meet separately with the parties; whether is it appropriate that they be engaged in the conflict or have a private relationship with one of the parties.

These statements were an introduction to presenting and discussing the main principles of mediation in a youth work context. The principles are: voluntary participation, neutrality, objectivity, confidentiality and acceptability.

The conclusion from this part of the workshop was that the philosophy of mediation is a peaceful and respectful way of solving conflicts. At the same time, it is understood as a set of skills, attitudes and knowledge that are necessary in today’s world, which young people can use every day. When learning about mediation, young people develop active listening and negotiation skills, learn how to ask appropriate questions, develop empathy and learn how to deal with emotions, create options and solutions and identify needs and interests. They develop respect toward others as well as skills in mutual understanding, non-violent communication and intercultural education.



ADR IS A POWERFUL TOOL, ESPECIALLY IN YOUNG PEOPLE’S HANDS, AS THEY LEARN HOW TO BE RESPONSIBLE FOR THEIR OWN DECISIONS.



## KEY TRENDS

Mediation is an example of a conflict transformation trend in youth work. However, it tackles a specific aspect of this topic. It is orientated towards peer-to-peer processes and solving conflicts that young people face in their everyday lives. It shows ways of dealing with conflicts from young people's individual perspectives, with visible respect towards all parties involved in the process and the responsibility to find their own solution. In ADR, the emphasis is shifted from competition between conflicting positions towards understanding each other's priorities, recognising values, clearing the emotional stress and finding creative and sustainable solutions. That is why this is such a powerful tool, especially in young people's hands, as they learn how to be responsible for their own decisions.



## FEEDBACK FROM PARTICIPANTS

Participants were highly involved in the discussion; however, time was too short. They considered the topic as useful and needed. To conclude with one of the feedback quotes: *"Loved it. Participatory, thought provoking, great discussions. Would have wanted to spend more time on the issue"*.

## FURTHER INFORMATION AVAILABLE ONLINE

Materials regarding mediation in youth work including the Handbook can be found on the website: <http://firstadkit.org/>

Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/firstadkit/>



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