

## EUROPEAN ACADEMY ON YOUTH WORK - WORKSHOP REPORT

### Overcoming the Three Divides in Self-Care of Youth Workers

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#### TOPIC ADDRESSED

There is growing evidence in Europe and in the world that mental health is a concern for the well-being of young people and society in general, with an increasing level of burn-out and stress. One of the causes is “compassion fatigue”, understood as a consequence of too much caring for others and little caring for oneself. The initiative “Overcoming the Three Divides in Self-Care of Youth Workers” links with and provides an effective contribution to the implementation of the new framework of lifelong competences, in particular number 5, and the youth goal on mental health.

#### METHODOLOGY

The workshop was a combination of practices (mindfulness meditation and the use of essential oils), sharing of personal stories and input on the topic of well-being and self-care in the context of youth work.



## KEY ISSUES RAISED SUCH AS CHALLENGES

The stress and burn out increasingly present amongst youth workers across Europe belongs to what is defined as “compassion fatigue”, a consequence of too much caring for others and little caring for oneself.

Self-care is often neglected and considered not so important, often even considered a luxury that comes after having dedicated time to all duties. Increasingly, the situation is such that the list of duties is never-ending and, therefore, the time allocated for self-care is inexistent.



## INNOVATIVE RESPONSES

The workshop presented the initiative “Self-Care of Youth Workers”, which is based on the outcomes of the project “Emotional Intelligence in Youth Work”. This initiative intends to reach out to youth workers and trainers across Europe to create an informal network providing an effective and practical contribution to the implementation of the new framework of the lifelong competences, in particular number 5, and the youth goal on mental health.

The approach presented and experienced is innovative because it invites the person to look at the question: “how can I take care of myself?” as an act of responsibility, overcoming the old idea that taking care of one-self is an act of selfishness. The approach is based on the concept of the three divides intended as the dis-alignment of thoughts, emotions and bodily sensations that are present in internal conflicting situations and that influence our decision-making process and actions. The dis-alignment leads to a state of unworthiness, a feeling of not being adequate and able to do what one is supposed to do or would like to do.

Linking and supporting practices that can be easily introduced in youth work through scientific research and approaches to self-care brings evidence and solidity to the approach also for those who can be sceptical to introducing elements to youth work which are traditionally not represented and can be seen as belonging to another field.

## KEY TRENDS

The initial invitation to the participants to identify the emotional challenges that they face as youth workers created a very long list of challenges, giving a clear picture of how emotional challenges are present and hidden at the same time. The list ranged from a too wide spectrum of tasks, deadlines and roles to a series of difficult cases and over-challenging situations when working with groups or in one-to-one cases. The identified challenges and emotions were then clustered and linked to the dis-alignment of the three brains (encephalic, cardiac and enteric), thus bringing the focus to the identification and recognition of how feelings, memories and beliefs impact on our body, emotions, and thoughts.

The introduction of practices like mindfulness meditation and essential oils in sensing and responding to emotions was welcomed and appreciated as beneficial in creating little regenerative moments. The practices proposed can be replicated back home in the participants' personal and professional contexts, individually and in groups- thus making the benefit sustainable.

## FEEDBACK FROM PARTICIPANTS

The workshop was considered deep in spite of the simplicity of the exercises done. Interest in following up was expressed.

## FURTHER RESOURCES AVAILABLE ONLINE

- <http://www.emotion-wise.net>
- <https://www.facebook.com/groups/emotionwise/>
- Emotional Intelligence in Youth Work (Nov 2018): [https://www.limina.at/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/O1\\_EQ-in-YW-v1.0-31012019.pdf](https://www.limina.at/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/O1_EQ-in-YW-v1.0-31012019.pdf)



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