

Henrike Hofstede-Stam

Kenniscentrum Pedagogiek Zwolle
The NHL-University of Applied Science
Zwolle, Netherlands
E-Mail: Stam900@kpz.nhl.nl

Youth work in Staphorst

Staphorst is a small, conservative municipality in The Netherlands with a very religious character. The tradition in this municipality is that the responsibility for the care of children and youths lies mainly with the family and the church. However, Dutch policy now regulates that municipal councils must take much more control over the youth policy. The youth chain for children up to 12 years old is well-organised in Staphorst. The assignment was to analyse whether the youth work can fulfil a role in the youth chain ranging from 12-23 years old.

The research had two sub-questions:

- What does the youth chain look like in the Staphorst municipality and are there any gaps in that?
- Can the youth work satisfy the needs of youths?

This research was done by making a list of the needs (both qualitative and quantitative) and by means of action research. This last part made use of the critical-emancipatory paradigm (F. Migchelbrink). As known, youths cannot be asked questions about whether they need youth work if they do not know what youth work involves. That means that youths have an important role in the research; as subjects being researched, but also as researchers of the own situation.

There are many good initiatives in Staphorst with regard to youths, but these are not linked together. As a result, there is a danger that youths fall between two stools. The youth work can hereby fulfil the role of the spider in the web. The importance of youth work in the youth chain quickly became clear. Youths were not in the picture among the providers of care. This aspect will be examined in detail in the presentation.

Another, equally important role that the youth work can fulfil is to stimulate the participation of youths in the society. In the new developments in the Netherlands in the area of youth policy such as, for example, the Centre for Youths and Family, attention is especially given to the care aspect. Attention at the time when there is already a problem. The youth work also plays an important role before there is a problem. The youth work tries with its activities to promote the participation of youths in the society. This can have a preventive effect through which youths will need care less quickly. And if they do need it then, the youths will then be in the picture in the youth work, which can then rapidly and adequately refer them to the correct place in the youth chain.