

## SUPPORTING NON-FORMAL EDUCATION AND YOUTH WORK

Well-planned non-formal education projects should set out clear and definite objectives. Non-formal education is defined as:

*voluntary learning that takes place in a diverse range of environments and situations for which teaching/training and learning is not necessarily their sole or main activity. These environments and situations may be temporary and the activities or courses that take place may be staffed by professional learning facilitators (such as youth trainers) or by volunteers (such as youth leaders). The activities and courses are planned, but are seldom structured by conventional rhythms or curriculum subjects. They usually address specific target groups, but rarely document or assess learning outcomes or achievements in conventionally visible ways.<sup>17</sup>*

Furthermore, the Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education defines non-formal education as:

*any planned programme of education designed to improve a range of skills and competences, outside the formal educational setting.*

The Council of Europe's Youth Work Portfolio defines the characteristics of non-formal education as follows:

- ▶ learning takes place outside the structures of the formal education system and differs from it in the way it is organised and the type of recognition it confers;
- ▶ learning is intentional and voluntary;
- ▶ learning aims above all to convey and practise the values and skills of democratic life.

In the context of the Enter! project, non-formal education programmes have frequently proved to be an effective way of helping young people who have missed out on formal education to overcome the disadvantages they experience and become active contributors to the development of their communities and society in general. However, together with youth work, non-formal learning does not get the social and political recognition it deserves and too often youth workers are considered "low-status" professionals.

The following example from the Enter! project – a youth theatre festival in Berlin designed to promote social rights for young immigrants – demonstrates how non-formal education can be used in youth work.



### The introduction of the following measures would increase the value of youth work and non-formal education:

- ▶ responsible educational and other relevant public authorities should recognise and value youth work as an important contributor to community cohesion. This can be done by:
  - consulting youth workers on the development and implementation of policies and strategies that are of concern to young people from disadvantaged communities;
  - providing funding to youth organisations and ensuring that funding procedures are clear and simple;
  - facilitating the provision of lifelong learning opportunities for youth workers;

17. See EU Youthpass Programme website, available at [www.youthpass.eu/en/youthpass/for/youth-initiatives/learn/information/non-formal-learning](http://www.youthpass.eu/en/youthpass/for/youth-initiatives/learn/information/non-formal-learning), accessed 10 June 2016.

## JugendtheaterBüro Berlin – Das Unternehmen "Freedom Festival" (Youth Theatre Office Berlin), Germany<sup>18</sup>

In July 2009 the NGO initiative Grenzen-Los! e.V. started a new project, the Youth Theatre Office Berlin. The project organised a theatre festival, the Freedom Festival, based on non-formal methods, in 2011. The organisation of the festival involved young people from disadvantaged neighbourhoods in Berlin aged between 14 and 22, mostly with immigrant and Muslim backgrounds.

The project included a range of perspectives on human and social rights and related opportunities, and aimed at the participation and competence development of those in attendance. It focused on rights such as the right of non-discrimination, the right to education, and the right to participate in social and cultural activities and receive vocational guidance.

During the three years of the project, regular meetings, workshops and training programmes on the whole organisational process for the festival were held. These covered all the relevant disciplines needed to run a theatre festival: acting, filming, lights, sound, public relations, administration, construction of masks, decor, costumes, teaching and presentation methods, and so on.

New theatre productions were developed, organised and staged by the participants themselves. The project, therefore, included aspects of vocational guidance in a creative field, supported the young people in developing ideas for the future, and facilitated their access to the job market.

Through this participative approach and by using non-formal education as a tool, the project workshops covered such key topics as:

- ▶ identity;
- ▶ hate and love;
- ▶ social inclusion;
- ▶ freedom;
- ▶ human and children's rights;
- ▶ gender;
- ▶ discrimination;
- ▶ diversity;
- ▶ racism;
- ▶ tolerance;
- ▶ democracy.

With the knowledge gained during the project, the young people developed positive and creative competences and learnt to become active and more involved within their local communities.

18. More information at [www.grenzen-los.eu](http://www.grenzen-los.eu), accessed 10 June 2016.

- facilitating an exchange of expertise between youth workers and other professionals working with young people;
- improving the working conditions and the status of youth work;
- ▶ national and local policies should support youth organisations and youth workers, through legislation if necessary, to help them deliver "best practice" non-formal education and learning programmes;
- ▶ sustainable funding and physical support should be provided to ensure a suitable environment for youth workers and their organisations to deliver non-formal education and learning programmes in disadvantaged neighbourhoods.