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Anu Reinsalu: “Good youth worker must spend most of their time outside their comfort zone”

Introduce yourself and your organisation (incl. the structure in which you operate in the youth field).

I have been working as a chief expert in a local cooperation and development unit of the Estonian Youth Work Centre for four years. According to occupational standard, I am a level 7 youth worker, although I am a communication specialist by education and have previously worked in the communication area in private sector, for a human rights field in a non-governmental organisation, and in the field of labour law in a ministry. For 20 years, our organisation has been a national centre of excellence for youth work. We help shape and implement the national youth policy of Estonia. Although I do not work with young people in my daily job, I work every day for their better involvement in decision-making and ensuring the quality of activities offered to them.

What makes your job exciting?

What makes my job exciting is people. People with whom I work with for our common goal and people that I have contact with in the course of my work. What makes it also exciting is an opportunity to invent new approaches. Fortunately, the area of youth work is not over-regulated like some other policy areas, leaving more room for creative approaches tailored for young people that take their needs into account.

What are your dreams as a youth worker?

As an idealist, I dream about changing the whole system so that youth work and the profession of a youth worker would be valued and noticed in society and treated equal to formal education. I see every day that youth work is a form of prevention as well as a solution for many sore points, and I wish that people involved in youth work would be more noticed and valued.

Why did you choose youth work?

I chose youth work for several reasons. Firstly, I was fascinated by the regional dimension of my work – I now know how youth work is carried out in many Estonian regions and people involved



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in this area. Secondly, I liked the idea of being able to develop processes from the start. I was also drawn to the opportunity of remote working, which I use daily, and the team of people with sparkling personalities who are committed to the same cause as I am. The ability to remain young yourself in this area is not insignificant, as all your thoughts and patterns are related to youthfulness.

How has youth work / being a youth worker influenced you? (What have you learned from it?)

I feel that a good youth worker must certainly spend most of their time outside their comfort zone. I have learned that young people are right even if older people do not like it. The right to decide for oneself is the right to make mistakes and ... it is simply right. I have learned that sometimes, it is the simple solutions offered by young people that work. But not always and it is OK. The world will not stop.