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Marijana Jović: “I would not be the same person without youth work”

Introduce yourself and your job.

I am a psychologist and a youth worker. My work is intertwined with my personal identities – a feminist, an activist and a lesbian. The youth work I am doing means I get to work with vulnerable young people, mainly with those who suffer from intellectual difficulties, mental disabilities and youth living in social protection institutions.

What makes your job exciting?

The most exciting part of my job is observing the changes that happen with the young people I work with. Recognising the moment where, - through the activities of the youth work - they get to know and see themselves as someone worthy of love. The moment when they discover who they truly are, and that they are entitled to be loved and respected as much as anyone else.

What are your dreams as a youth worker?

Being a youth worker means I have many dreams, but if I am to talk about the achievable ones – I would like to see the values promoted through the youth work become represented and respected within the society in whole. I would also like to see more young people and youth workers ready and determined to truly live and represent those values. Furthermore, I would like to see the youth work being recognised as a generally useful and valuable approach of working and educating young people.

Why did you choose youth work?

Growing up and living in a patriarchal society divided by wars and conflicts, which later turned into a society marked by violence and violations of basic human rights – for me this was the way I could do something for myself personally, as well as for the others and the society in whole. In fact, this was the only possible way for me not to give up and to keep going without breaking my personal rules and beliefs.

What is your most memorable experience as a youth worker?

There was a number of unforgettable moments throughout my working career. Some of them relate to young individuals I used to work with for a long periods of time. The others relate to



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specific changes within the social groups my work led to. The one specific example I could point out is when I participated in a youth exchange group where young people with intellectual difficulties spent a week with their peers from the general population. I witnessed breaking of prejudice and stereotypes through joint activities, such as studying, playing and having fun together. This has really left a strong impression on me.

How has your job affected you and what have you learned?

The youth work has brought so much for me – I don't think I would be the same person without it. It taught me to really see the people behind the disability or disadvantage. It taught me also to truly live by the rules I am teaching the young people to respect and value. This is not the way I used to live before, but it turned out that while teaching them – I started to really understand and live the same values. I became more courageous, forever curious, it brought me lots of humour, an ability to better understand the weaknesses but also to work on them and many other skills.