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Youth Information and Counselling

In Merikivi, Jani & Timonen, Päivi & Tuuttila, Leena (eds.)
SÄHKÖÄ ILMASSA - NÄKÖKULMIA VERKKOPERUSTAISEEN NUORISOTYÖHÖN.
(CHARGED UP AND ONLINE: ADVANCES IN YOUTH WORK).

FINLAND

Nuorten tieto- ja neuvontapalveluiden kansallinen koordinaatio- ja kehittämiskeskus

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Fedotoff, Jaana & Pietilä, Mika (2011). Youth Information and Counselling. In Merikivi, Jani & Timonen, Päivi & Tuuttila, Leena (eds.) SÄHKÖÄ ILMASSA - NÄKÖKULMIA VERKKOPERUSTAISEEN NUORISOTYÖHÖN. (CHARGED UP AND ONLINE: ADVANCES IN YOUTH WORK). Finnish Youth Research Society, The University Of Applied Sciences (HUMAK) And City Of Helsinki Youth Department: Helsinki.

Translated from Finnish to English by: Elina Rinne-Kangasluoma

1. Authors

Jaana Fedotoff, Community Educator, has worked since 2006 as a Coordinator in the National Coordination and Development Centre of Youth Information and Counselling Services, one of the Ministry of Education and Culture's service and development centres for youth work in Finland. Since 1987, Fedotoff has been involved in communication issues as well as matters concerning youth information, guidance and counselling at a European and a national level. She has also taken part in the coordination group of EU's Youth in Action programme since 2000 as well as on several international projects. Through her work for web-based youth democracy service, Aloitekanava.fi, Fedotoff helps support dialogue between young people and society and encourages young people's involvement and participation. Her other youth work related interests include social media, media education, web-based youth work and online democracy.

Mika Pietilä, Community Educator, works as a Planning Officer in the National Coordination and Development Centre of Youth Information and Counselling Services, one of the Ministry of Education and Culture's service and development centres for youth work in Finland. Since 1996, Pietilä has been involved in youth information and counselling issues, cultural youth work and the promotion of young people's involvement in society and internationalisation. Pietilä is a member of ERYICA's (European Youth Information and Counselling Agency) Governing Board 2006–2013.

2. Summary: Youth information and counselling

According to one definition, the principal tasks of youth information and counselling are the provision of information, guidance and counselling to young people. How does this work change when it goes online? Do the approaches and requirements change from meeting face-to-face? Which professional skills are emphasised and what are the prerequisites for online counselling? In this article, Jaana Fedotoff, Coordinator, and Mika Pietilä, Planning Officer from the National Coordination and Development Centre of Youth Information and Counselling Services attempt to address these questions by comparing meeting face-to-face with meeting online and by considering the principles of the European Youth Information Charter.

The 2010 amendment of the Finnish Youth Act (2006) placed a greater emphasis on developing information and counselling services directed at young people. The fact that youth information and counselling was mentioned in the Youth Act as one of statutory services for young people was a strong indication of the importance of these services for people working in the sector. The first youth information and counselling services were provided in the 1980s at various service centres and points. These services also included web-based information provision and counselling. After the recession in the early 1990s, this service provision model has become more popular. At the same time, co-operation and networking with other organisations in the youth service sector – even when it comes to creating web-based services for young people – has become more and more important. First and foremost, youth information and counselling services in every shape and form are preventive youth work, aimed at supporting young people's equal opportunities for a good life and healthy development.

In this context, the concepts of provision of information and guidance as well as counselling have a similar meaning, regardless of medium or operating environment. However, the tools and environment do have an impact on the nature of the work and bring to the fore certain special features, such as ethical issues. Over recent years, the tools and channels of web-based youth information and counselling services have become more diverse. In addition to websites, social media also present new opportunities, and they have made available an expanding, diversifying matrix of services and organisations.

3. Youth information and counselling

According to one definition, the principal tasks of youth information and counselling[i] are the provision of information, guidance and counselling to young people. How does this work change when it goes online? Do the approaches and requirements change from meeting face-to-face? Which professional skills are emphasised and what are the prerequisites for online work? In this article, we attempt to address these questions by comparing meeting face-to-face with meeting online and by considering the principles of youth information and counselling.

3.1 Youth Act as the basis of the work

The Youth Act (2006/72) that entered into force in 2006 had a major impact on youth information and counselling work in Finland. The Act states that its purpose is to support young people's development and independence, promote their active citizenship and strong social involvement and improve the conditions in which they grow up and live in. Meeting these targets is the ultimate purpose of all statutory services mentioned in the Youth Act, including youth information and counselling services[ii].

The amendment of the Finnish Youth Act put a greater emphasis on developing information and counselling services directed at young people. The fact that youth information and counselling was mentioned in the Youth Act as one of statutory services for young people was a strong indication of the importance of these services for people working in the sector. The first youth information and counselling services were provided in the 1980s at various service centres and points. These services also included web-based information provision and counselling.

In this context, "web-based" or "online" comprises both real-time and non-real-time guidance and counselling as well as extensive Internet-based information resources directed at young people. Workers' expertise concerning matters related to young people's life and pedagogical skills play a key role in web-based work. All guidance and counselling, whether it takes place online or face-to-face, should be based on the educational targets set for youth information and counselling so that it provides support for young people and guarantees equal opportunities for all of them. Besides an educational approach, familiarity with the possibilities of the virtual world is important. These elements of professional expertise make up the foundation for high-quality work, in web-based services and elsewhere.

3.2 Coordination of work based on European principles

Finnish youth information and counselling services follow the sector's European guidelines. The principles were adopted in 1993 and updated by the European Youth Information and Counselling Agency's (ERYICA) General Assembly in 2004. In 2009, ERYICA adopted the European Principles for Online Youth Information. The provision of services is based on the idea of providing access to information and counselling services for all young people. The aim is to guarantee the equality of access to information for all young people, regardless of their situation, ethnic background, gender or social category. Special attention should be paid to disadvantaged groups and to young people who may have specific needs. In addition, services should be easily accessible without any appointment being required, and the information available should be primarily based on young people's information needs. Each young person should be treated and respected as an individual and the response to his or her question should be personalised. It is also important that the services are free of charge and that information is given in a way that respects young people's privacy. (European Principles of Youth Information and Counselling, 2004; European Principles for Online Youth Information, 2009; the latter are annexed to this book.)

3.3 From provision of advice to e-services

The oldest, best known way of providing youth information and counselling services is through service centres and points. As early as the 1950s, Helsinki and Turku had advisory and information offices for young people who had moved from the countryside. These advisory offices provided information for young people on issues such as flats for rent and jobs. The basis for the services was not unlike what it is today: responding to young people's information needs and offering high-quality advice, counselling and support. The tools and methods, however, have varied and changed over the years. There has been a wealth of various experiments and pilot projects in order to find the best approaches and processes. Even so, it can be noticed that young people's needs for information on matters that concern them has not disappeared, but the questions are now asked about more diverse issues. Another change took place when a problem-based approach developed into a preventive one. The intention is to offer, at the earliest possible stage, information on the available choices, so that young people can apply this information when they are making decisions in their own life. (Heikkinen, 2010,19.)

The slogan "*Let's go where the young people are*" has remained true in youth information and counselling services. "Advisory offices were meant to be places where a newcomer could get information on the workings of the city. This was perceived to be important, because there was no single city authority that would have had a comprehensive responsibility for young people who had

just moved from the country. In the very beginning, it was thought to be important to provide information on leisure activities, but it was soon noticed that young people were more interested in jobs, studies and flats. The ultimate purpose was to promote integration and help in keeping loneliness and insecurity at bay." (Heikkinen, 2006.) The history of youth information and counselling services has been made in railway and bus stations, schools and clubs, wherever young people have been – sometimes even in places that did not exist yet! By this, we mean that there were web-based services even before the Internet. An example of this that fits very well within the concept of web-based youth work is Nuorisotietopankki ('Youth Information Bank'), a videotex-based electronic information tool. The idea for the national Nuorisotietopankki system was taken from the French Infotel system. France had an electronic, Infotel-based service system for the provision of information to citizens. Kansalaiskasvatuksen keskus (Centre for Citizenship Education) established the Finnish Nuorisotietopankki in 1987. The original idea for the service came from the French members of the ERYICA network. Nuorisotietopankki provided information on various topics, but it also offered young people an opportunity to participate in the information provision process with its interactive channels (Heikkinen, 2010, 60).

From today's perspective, Nuorisotietopankki was cumbersome as a system, but in spite of its awkwardness it was a landmark effort in the history of the development of web-based services. This pilot project, funded by the Ministry of Education, set in motion the dream of a web-based youth information and counselling service.

3.4 Waking up to the possibilities of the Internet

From pre-Internet solutions, such as the aforementioned Nuorisotietopankki, municipalities in the 1990s moved on and, little by little, started providing web-based youth information and counselling services on the Internet. The idea was to improve the availability and accessibility of youth information and counselling services, and Internet was perceived as a new information provision channel, the possibilities of which should be explored. People working in the sector at that time quickly understood that the Internet would become a popular medium among young people. Resistance to chance among workers was low, and in general, the Internet was received well and welcomed as a new possibility. Thanks to Finnish youth information and counselling workers' positive attitude and quick adoption of the new tool, the workers soon became a model case in European youth information and counselling networks, where IT skills and understanding were highly valued and needed.

In several municipalities, local youth information and counselling services had their own websites, and in the middle of the 1990s a national Q&A service, Pulmakulma, was introduced in Nuorisotietopankki, which had now been transferred to the Internet and was operated by the Finnish Youth Co-Operation Allianssi. Answers in Pulmakulma were provided by youth information and counsel-

ling service workers from all over Finland as well as experts from various fields. This sort of open attitude, and their dedication to the cause, helped youth workers build a solid foundation for their future stance on web-based youth information and counselling services and for the later adoption of those services.

4. Educational objectives of youth information and counselling

In addition to following European principles, the foundation for youth information and counselling services lies in children's and young people's right to access information, stated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms. The Finnish youth information and counselling service network has also taken into consideration the European Union's proposed Youth Strategy 2010–2018 in its work, the objective of which is to improve access to youth information and help disseminate information through all possible channels at a local, regional and national level.

It is a pleasure to see that in 2010, youth information and counselling services are provided in 271 municipalities. These services include 144 service points or centres, located in youth centres, libraries and schools or operating as independent service points. In addition, individual municipalities or sub-regions operate 36 web-based service points. These figures do not include municipal youth departments' external information sites. On the basis of approximate visitor counts, it can be concluded that these services are very much in demand. A recent survey on visitor numbers indicated that the number of individual visitors to all web-based youth information and counselling services was almost 1.2 million.

The European recommendations on youth information and counselling state that the services should be based on young people's perceived information needs. These information needs must also be confirmed every now and then; for this reason, it is recommended that surveys should be conducted on young people's information needs, studies carried out on the users of the services, and feedback collected on both planned and existing services.

4.1 Providing information to young people

At this stage, it is essential to take the working concepts – provision of information, guidance, counselling – into further consideration and deal with them in the context of web-based youth information and counselling. In his book *Ohjaus- ja neuvontatyö* ('Guidance and Counselling Work'),

Jussi Onnismaa (2007) has examined the purposes of provision of information, guidance and counselling as well as the relationship of these actions to knowledge, the roles of a recipient of counselling and a professional and the procession of a dialogue between them.

Provision of information is often seen as one-sided communication from an organisation to interested parties (Juholin, 2001, 301). According to Onnismaa, the purpose of information provision is to provide the customer with the information that he or she needs. Dialogue is made up of the customer's question and the worker's answer. The customer is seeking information that he or she does not have, and once information is received, puts it into practical use. The professional's role is to provide the customer with the information he or she is looking for and to ensure that the information is accurate and appropriate (Onnismaa, 2007, 28). In youth information and counselling, whether it takes place face-to-face or as a web-based service, information provision should involve a more profoundly customer-based approach. In this case, information provision is directed particularly at young people, and the tools and methods employed should be ones that they would like to use. Using content and content provision methods targeted at young people and tailored for them – preferably so that young people themselves take part in the content production process – is characteristic for information provision in youth information and counselling.

4.2 Guidance and counselling

Guidance[iii] and counselling[iv] means getting deeper and closer to the young customer than mere information provision allows. The purpose of guidance is to promote, through dialogue, the young person's ability to improve his or her life in the manner that he or she prefers. On the other hand, the purpose of counselling is to give the young person advice on suitable courses of action, but it is ultimately his or her task to decide whether these courses of action should be followed. Guidance emphasises the facts that matters are open to many interpretations and that there are several options available, whereas in counselling the advice given is based more on expert knowledge. The difference between guidance and counselling is in the role of the customer. In guidance, the customer takes an active role in solving the problems and questions under discussion, and it is the customer's interpretations of the situation and objectives that motivate the process. In a counselling situation, the customer is expecting to get expert advice on a problem, and it is his or her role to ask for advice and to receive it. In both guidance and counselling, customers are experts in their own life, and it is their task, on the basis of guidance or advice received, to decide how to proceed. (Onnismaa, 2007, 28.) The concept of "being an expert on one's own life" is also emphasised in youth information and counselling. The young people concerned are masters of their own situations and should be helped and supported in taking responsibility for their decisions and working for their own interests.

In counselling situations, advice is based on expert knowledge and the worker is an expert in assessing various courses of action. However, this does not mean that the worker is an expert in everything. Expertise is based on the fact that the worker knows more about the matter under discussion than the customer, and also on the fact that the worker possesses skills and tools required in providing information and guidance to the customer and giving advice on what the customer should do in a given situation. It is the worker's responsibility to ensure that the advice provided is professional, understandable and easily applicable to the customer's situation. (Onnismaa, 2007, 28.) In web-based youth information and counselling services, the latter is particularly apparent in that the advice and instructions provided to young people must be correct, checked and up-to-date. The advice should guide the young person to the right expert.

Hence it can be concluded that the characteristics of expertise presented by Onnismaa also apply to web-based youth information and counselling. The ability to use new IT tools and a solid knowledge of various electronic databases and sources are highlighted in web-based work, as are good written communication skills. The concepts of provision of information and guidance, as well as counselling, have a similar meaning, regardless of medium or operating environment. However, the tools and environment may have an impact on the nature of the work and bring to the fore certain special features, such as ethical issues.

5. Professional community-building and networking

Particularly before 2006, web-based youth information and counselling services were established independently by the municipalities. In 2006, the Ministry of Education and Culture founded the National Coordination and Development Centre of Youth Information and Counselling Services. Between 1987 and 1997, the coordination of these services on a national level was the responsibility of Finnish Youth Co-Operation Allianssi (Timonen-Verma & Fedotoff, 2003). Between 1998 and 2006, no single Finnish body coordinated or developed the services, and municipalities and sub-regions established their own services without any coordination. As a consequence, there has been a lot of criticism of the extensive number of different web-based youth information and counselling services. These services were established according to the needs of the time and "impetus". However, active dialogue never ceased despite the conditions, but the tools or personnel resources did not allow a more extensive or comprehensive solution.

Special features in Finnish youth information and counselling are long distances, municipalities' relatively small populations as well as young people who live in remote areas, far away from other youth services. For these and other reasons, information and counselling service providers have started to develop local and sub-regional interactive web services. These web services also con-

tain more static information on various matters. By combining resources and by centralising services on a regional and sub-regional level, it has become possible to provide extensive, high-quality youth information and counselling services even on the Internet.

Despite this fragmentation, Finnish web-based youth information and counselling services are leaders in a European context. Since 1989, Finnish youth information and counselling workers have participated actively in their respective European professional networks. Workers have showed their enthusiasm as trainers and experts in European working groups, training events and seminars. This enthusiastic attitude is still there, and special priorities emphasised at the current time include young people's Internet security issues, the quality of information and counselling in web-based services, and media literacy.

Since 2006, the situation has improved, and a more comprehensive approach has been taken towards planning and developing web-based youth information and counselling services. Currently, there is a national web-based service under construction that would bring together the existing youth information and counselling services and improve the quality and accessibility of youth counselling, guidance and information. Coordinated networking helps to make better use of the existing resources and enter a more cost-effective solution by employing, for example, community-based content provision. Community-based content provision and multi-professional networking are key themes in the service. The service will be completed in 2011, and it also facilitates a national marketing of regional services, as resources can be focused in the marketing efforts of a single product. Regional services will not disappear, but instead of content provision, resources in municipalities can be directed at meeting young people face-to-face or through web-based youth information and counselling services.

5.1 National coordination of the work

For the reasons stated, a significant change in the development of services took place in 2006. The National Coordination and Development Centre of Youth Information and Counselling Services has operated under the auspices of City of Oulu's Centre of Youth Affairs as one of the expert and support services for municipalities and organisations appointed by the Ministry of Education and Culture. Since its beginning, the Centre has received an annual operating grant from the Ministry. In autumn 2010, the Ministry of Education and Culture made a decision-in-principle on the national structure of youth work service and development centres. The purpose of the Centre is to promote equal accessibility to youth information and counselling services and develop the service in Finland by using a variety of tools and methods. This task also includes web-based youth information and counselling services and their development. Even so, municipalities develop and oper-

ate their services completely independently. The Centre develops and puts into practice new tools and methods together with municipalities, provides necessary training and so on.

6. Requirements for workers in web-based youth information and counselling

Besides provision of information, guidance and counselling, web-based youth information and counselling services involve producing information content on various themes for young people. This information deals with topics that relate to young people's life and constitute a sort of permanent information source. Producing this information content is challenging. Workers have to process all available knowledge and pick the relevant, usable and easily applicable pieces of accurate information. The skills of information management and handling or absorption of information and its deciphering will not necessarily have been in the curriculum during the youth worker's professional training. This is a challenge that should be addressed even more effectively in the future.

Youth workers that we have met in various training events have, in many cases, stated that their skills and expertise in working with young people in various web-based environments are not appropriate. There is not enough knowledge on the possibilities of social network services, and technical skills are inadequate for working in an online environment. There is also uncertainty about real-time online interaction. However, the quantity, quality or availability of web-based services targeted at young people should not boil down to the fact that workers do not possess adequate skills and expertise for web-based work. It is not enough to know various forums and platforms of social media; such knowledge should also be supplemented by a deeper understanding of the meaning of digital operating environments and cultures and their impact on individuals and communities. An overemphasis on tools only gets in the way and prevents a deeper vision of the work's educational objectives being realised.

In Finland, youth information and counselling is based on professional provision of information, guidance and counselling on various themes relating to young people's life. Information is provided to young people through various channels and with various methods, and personal guidance is available as a localised service at service points and through different web-based services. Young people's participation and involvement as well as dialogue with them are supported, and they are provided with a space as content providers and active service developers and given the possibility to assess the quality of the services.

6.1 Two types of web-based information services: real-time and non-real-time services

Over the recent years, the tools and channels of web-based youth information and counselling services have become more diverse. In addition to websites, social media also present new opportunities, and they have made available an expanding, diversifying matrix of services and organisations.

In existing web-based services, questions drawn up by young people, their parents or others closely involved with young people are mainly sent to non-real-time Q&A services. However, there are also services with a real-time chat function. In Q&A services, such as Pulmakulmas in sub-regional and regional services, questions posed by young people are usually answered within five working days, depending on the service concerned. Both the question and the answer are usually published on the Pulmakulma page. In some services, it is possible to send a question with a request that the question and the answer should not be published online, but for the answer to be sent directly via e-mail. On Q&A pages, other readers of the page may usually post comments and, in this way, share their experiences on the matter.

When answering questions sent to a Q&A page, the youth information and counselling worker makes an assessment on the basis of the nature and topic of the question and his or her own professional experience whether the approach to be adopted should be a guiding or a counselling one. It is possible that the worker may have to act in a situation where additional questions cannot be asked. A challenging feature in these services is that the gender, age, home town or home district of the person making the question are not always known. The answer, however, must be written in such a manner that the customer receives enough information and can make an informed decision.

A much-debated issue among people working in youth information and counselling services is whether web-based and face-to-face services are essentially different, and if they are, where the difference is. In 2010, participants in the annual basic training course on youth information and counselling arranged by the National Coordination and Development Centre considered the question of whether face-to-face situations are more challenging in one respect or another, than contacts made by young people through non-real-time online services. The participants concluded that a particularly challenging feature in face-to-face situations is that the worker is immediately thrown into interaction. A guidance situation begins instantly, and even a little uncertainty about the subject or the situation may cause young people to grow anxious or hesitant about asking their questions. The worker's skills and professional expertise are immediately at stake, and a professional support network is not always available. A web-based, non-real-time service is more forgiving in this respect, as it gives the worker time to think about the answer. A non-real-time service often

lacks external, disturbing factors that may have a negative impact on the worker–customer interaction. When the theme was discussed with the participants of the basic training course, they also paid attention to the fact that a web-based service, whether it is real-time or non-real-time, makes it possible to ask even sensitive questions. This may be at issue particularly in small towns where "everyone knows everyone else" and asking face-to-face questions may be more difficult for privacy protection reasons.

6.2 Real-time service demands a lot from the worker

An example of real-time information and counselling services is a one-to-one chat service between the customer and the worker. Chat functions now are provided with most web-based youth information and counselling services. Experiences of one-to-one services have been encouraging. In these situations, a well-functioning interaction is easy to achieve, and work can be based on a guiding approach. In this type of dialogue, the customer takes an active role in solving the problems under discussion. The worker then strives to strengthen the recipient's ability to function and avoids offering ready-made solutions. Factors that often limit the possibility of offering real-time online services are limited resources and the practical organisation of the service. A real-time online service needs specified business hours, and it always demands personnel resources and premises at certain times of day. The required IT facilities must also be available.

What has been perceived as challenging in real-time services is the dialogue with a young person in an acute crisis situation and the support and help provided to them. The worker's experience and expertise and agreed courses of action contribute to a quick understanding of the situation and a subsequent solution, as does a good knowledge of the youth support and crisis services. Also, the fact that support and crisis work specialists are available helps to shorten the time it takes to assist the customer. Emergency and crisis situations are always unique, and much depends on what information the customer provides for the worker to have an overview of the situation. The worker should ask further, tentative questions in order to assess whether the situation is genuine and how serious it is, where the person is, whether there are any other people present, what sort of mood the person is in and whether there are any adults nearby. The purpose of this is to offer the young person mental support, give confidence and advice for a possible resolution on the matter, as well as help find the individual or the organisation that can provide the most appropriate help in the situation. Solving emergency and crisis situations is challenging and mentally strenuous for workers. Often there is no certainty that the young person has followed the advice given, and the case may haunt the worker for a long time. It is crucial that workers have the possibility of discussing such cases – for example, in regular, supervised sessions. Peer discussions relating to young people's questions and situations are also necessary in the working community. Regular, high-quality training for workers guarantees high-quality dialogue and supports workers' well-being at work.

6.3 What does quality mean in web-based youth information and counselling?

In web-based guidance and counselling, quality assurance is another challenging area. This is a particularly acute question if young people's questions are answered by several people, but common principles for answering questions do not exist or are not known. An example of this could, for instance, be where one worker thinks that an URL without any further information is an adequate answer, while another collects information from several sources, checks the accuracy of the sources, uses them to draw up a reliable, comprehensive answer to the question and, if necessary, refers the person asking the question to an appropriate specialist. Which answer is better quality and who should assess it?

As a rule, the quality is assessed by the young person who asked the question. It is, however, reasonable to ask whether young people are able to demand enough information and whether the worker is able to provide it without this being specifically requested. The objectives of web-based youth information and counselling services are young people's educational guidance and strengthening their social identity. Quality can also be measured by assessing how counselling and guidance provided contribute to these objectives.

Concern about the quality of web-based youth information and counselling was one of the motivations for ERYICA, the European umbrella organisation for youth information and counselling services, behind initially drafting its Principles for Online Youth Information. These principles provide general directions for establishing and operating web-based services rather than giving detailed advice concerning, for example, web-based counselling and guidance. However, the principles can be employed as quality guidelines when youth information and counselling takes place online (Annex).

7. National online youth information and counselling service

In 2009, the National Coordination and Development Centre of Youth Information and Counselling Services started to develop a national online youth information and counselling service. A motivation for the development work was the message sent by the network on the necessity of combining resources and sharing content provision. Other motivations included the possibility of increasing the services' visibility and people's awareness of them by creating common pages and launching joint marketing campaigns. After some brainstorming and numerous discussions, the development of the web service was steered towards a considerably larger solution than the original idea. Planning, implementing and particularly scheduling such an extensive development project demands a

lot of resources. Once complete, the project can then best address the information needs of young people and professionals and new forms of social networking environments.

The national online youth information and counselling service has separate sections for young people and for professionals. From the perspective of young people, the most important aspect in the development work is the easy accessibility of local youth information and counselling services, whether they take the form of service points or web-based local or regional services. For professionals, the online service offers an open and a restricted environment, which both contain tools intended for various purposes for youth information and counselling professionals. A shared zone for both young people and professionals is the national Pulmakulma section where all local Q&A services are grouped. The service will also allow joint content provision and disseminating content to different web-based youth information and counselling services. In the course of the development project, all services will be provided with a joint publishing system, making the latest technology available to even outdated online services.

7.1 Future outlooks and perspectives

If Facebook fan pages are the only available youth information and counselling tool, this does not meet the criteria for high-quality provision of information, guidance and counselling. However, social media services can be utilised in supporting provision of information in youth information and counselling work. It is important that the provision of youth information and counselling services also takes into account local service points. Some youth information and counselling service providers have, often in co-operation with young people, developed new approaches to youth guidance and counselling. These services are suitably complemented by web-based services that help make guidance and counselling available even to young people who live in remote areas. In addition, they are available to young people who, due to one limiting factor or other, cannot use their local services. For them, web-based youth information and counselling services constitute an important source of information and support.

In terms of geography, youth information and counselling services are generally available in every part of the country, and web-based services – in particular, the utilisation of social media – have further improved their availability. However, some increase in the regional inequality in the availability of these services has been detected, and, sadly, even a slight decrease in the number of face-to-face services. Reasons given for this include the availability and accessibility of the Internet to all young people as well as the scarcity of resources. From the perspective of national coordination and development, professional skills and attitude are often more decisive than financial or personnel resources, as the Ministry of Education and Culture awards aid to several dozen youth information and counselling development projects every year.

In the future, multi-disciplinary and multi-professional co-operation will play a key part in the planning and development of web-based services. There are also several non-profit organisations that offer web-based youth information and counselling services, which is why mutual dialogue is important, if not crucial, in order in avoiding the duplication and over-supply of services.

Development of the necessary additional services related to local and web-based services is important from the perspective of equal access. It is impossible to predict future technical progress and the associated possibilities, but it is likely that the development of web and mobile services will open up many new options. Society expects even young people to be critical media users and to be able to adopt new things quickly, solve complex problems and collect information independently, but in planning and implementing these services, a customer-orientated approach and interactivity should be kept in mind. Increasing regional and social inequality challenges people working with youth-related issues to adopt new professional skills and react quickly to societal change. (Hoikkala & Sell, 2007, 424.)

The national online youth information and counselling service currently under construction collects and produces national information content in co-operation with various organisations and individuals, allowing, for example, local services to take responsibility for providing local-level information content. This enables the more effective targeting of resources on information quality and gives local youth information and counselling service workers more time for interacting with young people, either face-to-face or online. From a national perspective, the new service will, in all likelihood, steer national project funding towards support for young people's inclusion in service planning and quality development.

8. Terms

Provision of information

Provision of information means providing the customer with the information he or she requires. The required information consists of facts. The customer is seeking information that he or she does not have and is the recipient of information. The customer also makes practical use of the information. The worker's role in provision of information is to provide the customer with the required information and to make sure that the information is accurate and adequate. Dialogue is usually made up of the customer's question and the worker's answer. In some cases, the worker may also offer information on his or her own initiative. The dialogue is usually short. It may also be the case that the provision of suitable information may require further questions; for this reason, the process and length of the dialogue may vary. (Onnismaa, 2007.)

[i] Youth information and counselling

A form of service in which young people are provided with professional help, support and information concerning various issues relating to young people's lives. On the one hand, youth information and counselling means providing young people with the possibility of solving their own problems – if they wish – by using various tools (brochures, booklets, the Internet). On the other hand, it means personal guidance and counselling (one-to-one discussions, telephone conversations). (European Youth Information Charter, 2004.) According to the Youth Act, youth information and counselling services are one of statutory municipal services for young people.

[ii] Youth Act (2006/72) http://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/ajantasa/2006/20060072 Youth Act, referenced 21 October 2010.

[iii] The purpose of guidance

To use dialogue to promote the recipient's ability to improve his or her life in the manner that he or she prefers. Guidance emphasises the facts that matters are open to many interpretations and that there are several options available. The recipient of guidance takes an active role in solving the problems under discussion. It is the recipient's objectives and interpretations that drive the process. The customer who receives guidance is an expert in his or her own life. During the dialogue, the worker strives to strengthen the recipient's ability to function and tries to avoid offering ready-made solutions. Guidance dialogue usually takes place in many phases, and has no rigid structure. How the dialogue proceeds is influenced by the recipient's initiative on the one hand and the wor-

ker's approach on the other. Dealing with a task may require several guidance sessions. (Onnismaa, 2007.)

[iv] The purpose of counselling

To provide advice to the customer on the appropriate course of action. The customer is expecting to get expert advice on his or her problem. Advice is based on expert knowledge. The customer's role is to ask for advice and to receive it. It is, however, for the customer to decide whether he or she wants to follow the advice given. The worker is an expert in assessing various courses of action. The worker knows more about the matter under discussion than the customer, and it is the worker's responsibility to ensure that the advice is professional and understandable. (Onnismaa, 2007.)

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