

Young People in the Nordic Region
– Mental Health, Work, Education

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN YOUNG PEOPLE AND WELFARE SERVICES



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Nordic Centre for
Welfare and Social Issues



The Nordic Centre for Welfare and Social Issues project, Young People in the Nordic Region – Mental Health, Work, Education, was commissioned by the Nordic Council of Ministers for Health and Social Affairs. The main aim is to provide knowledge that will be useful in developing initiatives for young people at risk of mental ill-health and social marginalisation. One objective of the Nordic countries is sustainable welfare, and one area of focus is the work to prevent mental ill-health, early retirement and exclusion, and to promote rehabilitation. One constant challenge is how to ensure social security at a time when the labour market is undergoing constant change. The direct target group for the project is politicians, officials, practitioners and researchers in the Nordic countries, and the indirect target group comprises the young people aged 16-29 who are at risk of exclusion.

The Finnish Youth Research Society (FYRS) is a multidisciplinary scientific organisation, founded in 1983, which runs about 25 youth research projects annually. As a leading expert organisation in the field of youth research in Finland, it has extensive experience of research on young people, youth cultures, youth work and youth policies, both in an academic and applied manner. The society has coordinated numerous research projects, both at national and international level. FYRS's activities have expanded greatly in recent years, and it has established international contacts with a large number of renowned research institutes. The society is active in the field of youth research, both as a publisher and a research coordinator.

Relationship between young people and welfare services

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PREFACE

This report is the result of a collaboration between the Finnish Youth Research Society (FYRS) and the Nordic Centre for Welfare and Social Issues (NVC) project Young People in the Nordic Region – Mental Health, Work, Education.

The Finnish report was published by the FYRS, and we at NVC felt that it was so important and relevant for the rest of the Nordic region that we decided to translate a short version to English. Important knowledge should be disseminated, and FYRS and NVC were in agreement about this report and translation.

We know that the group of young people known as NEETS (Not in Education, Employment, or Training) is extremely heterogeneous, and that they need different types of support. What is unique about this report is that the authors have identified three major categories within the NEETS group, and linked these categories to the welfare sector. The report also discusses how the services can be adapted and better organised to meet the different life situations and needs in the group.

The study is based on a total of 29 interviews, 19 with young adults aged 18-29 and ten with different professionals working in the welfare sector in two towns in Finland. We who are adults today do not know what it is like to be young today, so it is important to raise the perspective of young people in everything we write and do. We must ask young people for their views, and this is the common thread running through the report.

Increasing numbers of young people in the Nordic region are reporting mental ill-health. Many of them end up in the NEETS statistics, and are labelled ‘deprived’ or ‘marginalised’ groups. For various reasons, some young people are at risk of finding themselves in vulnerable situations. We have many good organisations in the Nordic region who make a difference for this heterogeneous group... but we can do more and we can do it better.

In the project Young People in the Nordic Region – Mental Health, Work, Education we examine initiatives that can prevent early retirement of young people aged 19-29, and ways of supporting young people who are at risk of long-term exclusion because they neither work nor study.

In many areas, the thresholds to support and help are too high. For many young people with poor health, and those who have dropped out of education or perceive they have nothing to offer the labour market, there are no easy ways to access the support. We must take young people seriously and focus on strengths – everyone is good at something and can make a contribution – and we must work to lower the thresholds to provide easier access to support services.

In this report, we describe how we can adapt our support structures in the welfare sector to meet varying needs among young people.

Throughout the Nordic region, we work in a similar way with the heterogeneous group of young people who for various reasons are at risk of ending up in vulnerable situations. At the same time, our approaches are sufficiently different that we could take inspiration and learn from each other. Something that does not vary are the young people's experiences – there are no major differences to being a young person in Finland compared to the rest of the Nordic region.

We extend our grateful thanks to Sanna Aaltonen, Päivi Berg and Salla Ikäheimo for their fantastic work! The original report was abbreviated by Sanna Aaltonen, who also formulated suggestions for further action.

The Finnish Youth Research Network is committed to promoting vibrant Nordic dialogue around the current issues relating to young people and their position in the welfare services. Context-sensitive comparative analysis is needed, to develop welfare structures and practices that are meaningful for young people, regardless of their backgrounds and positions in society. We hope that the fruitful collaboration with the Nordic Centre for Welfare and Social Issues will continue in the field of youth and welfare policy.

Thank you to everyone involved in the collaboration, and we hope you enjoy reading the report.



Ewa Persson-Göransson
Director
Nordic Centre for Welfare and Social Issues



Leena Suurpää
Research Director
Finnish Youth Research Society



I think social exclusion of youth, and stopping it, should be the whole society's responsibility. I mean, it's not enough to have the Youth Act and the Youth Guarantee and so forth, they're good, and I'm glad that they're there, but it's not enough. It's the responsibility of the whole of society. It starts simply with supporting kids and adolescents, so that preventing social exclusion of youth would be on the agenda already during maternity and in child health care services and primary education, and especially that every professional group had the chance and the obligation [to report incidents], and then they could intervene if they saw something, something that might later on be the cause of social exclusion. Well, that's the ideal situation, but we can always dream, can't we? (Professional)

Yeah, I've been following it [the debate on social exclusion of youth]. I watched a re-run [on TV] for a minute and they were talking about social exclusion of youth. It's true that those people or, like, the decision makers, they don't really know what they're talking about. They mostly just call adolescents lazy and it's not like somebody decides to be excluded, nobody wants that. So mainly it's, like, I wouldn't say that they're socially excluded, I'd say that they're excluded by society. (Young person)

SUMMARY

The core issue of this report is how the youth, social and employment services treat young people aged 18-29 and meet their needs. There is an abundance of studies and reports on youth exclusion, but many neglect or completely ignore the social position of young people, their perspective, and their experiences in the service system. The aim of this report is to illustrate the perspective of young people using welfare services and, simultaneously, the perspective of professionals providing the service, thereby giving a voice to both sides of the service counter.

The report draws on qualitative interview material compiled in Espoo and Kouvolaa (N=29). Of those interviewed, 19 were aged 18-29 and using various services, and ten were customer service professionals from TE employment offices, job service centres, social work, outreach youth work, Vammos, and youth information and advice points. The data enabled the young people to be divided into three groups on the basis of education, work experience and general situation in life and life history: 'troubled', 'worker-citizens in the making', and 'victims of recession'. This distinction illustrates clearly how young people do not form a unified group, and that their life histories, situations and needs all differ.

Overall, the young people interviewed were mostly satisfied with the services. However, long waiting times were a problem, and professionals were frustrated by young people not keeping appointments. Particularly in the mental health services, accessing emergency treatment was difficult. The services were not always sensitive enough to meet the needs of young people with reduced functional capacity and who are not capable of working or studying, and therefore

excluded from the Youth Guarantee. Supporting the wellbeing of young people should be given priority; only if a young person feels well can they be steered into education or employment.

The professionals emphasised the importance of building trust and gaining the confidence of the young person. This takes time, which is often a scarce resource. Many young people wanted to see more drop-in office hours or the chance to visit the offices in person, highlighting the need of face-to-face services along with online services. Instead of one-door services, the interviews with both the young people and the professionals highlighted a need for a single person who would coordinate work relating to the young person.

The report is based on a joint research project conducted by the Finnish Youth Research Network and the National Institute for Health and Welfare of Finland (THL), and was funded by the Ministry of Education and Culture in Finland.

INTRODUCTION

The public debate on social exclusion of young people has become more intense in recent years. The debate on youth disadvantage and growing inequality is important, but reference to an oversimplified group of *socially excluded youth* has resulted in pigeon-holing and stigmatising. This simplistic rhetoric assigns young people the role of a helpless target in need of controlling measures and moral panic. Most commonly, the term *social exclusion* is used to refer to a process where risk factors include lack of parenting, disconnection from school life, falling outside education and/or the labour market, and problems with life management. Social exclusion is manifested when a person is outside the societal mainstream, institutions and/or relationships, limiting life choices, whereas young people connect social exclusion primarily with loneliness (Törrönen & Vornanen 2002)

Public concern over social exclusion of youth is not a new phenomenon. The debate in Finland exhibits three distinct waves of concern. The first started in the 1980s, when social exclusion was connected to the research traditions of disadvantage and poverty studies; the term was introduced to the vernacular of researchers and the media, as well as society in general. The second wave came at the beginning of the 1990s. At that time, social exclusion was connected with the consequences of the Finnish recession, and the public was concerned over young people outside education and employment (Järvinen & Jahnukainen 2001, 129-130). The third wave of debate using social exclusion rhetoric started in the late 2000s, and gained momentum in the early 2010s.

While an attempt has been made to recognise *socially excluded youths*, according to Otso Sandberg (2015) “... the risk of social exclusion has spread to include almost the entire population.” The current debate has relied on Pekka Myrskylä’s 2012 report *Hukassa – keitä ovat syrjäytyneet nuoret* (“Lost – Who are the socially excluded young people?”), which aimed to demonstrate through quantitative empirical research the number of socially excluded people, as well as how social exclusion is manifested. In the year following the report’s publication, concern over youth and a growing need for information materialised as *the Youth Guarantee*¹ and various politicians commissioned three reports touching on the issue of social exclusion and the effectiveness of services provided (Notkola et al. 2013; Ristolainen et al. 2013; Sipilä & Österbacka 2013; cf. Ervamaa 2014). These reports drew similar conclusions: basic services are important and prevention is more cost-efficient and effective than rehabilitative measures.

Although there have been recent studies and reports on youth exclusion, many neglect or completely ignore the social position of young people, their perspective, and their experiences of the welfare service system.

One objective for this report is to augment the perception created by previous studies of young people at risk for social exclusion. This report is based on the *Nuoret ja palvelujärjestelmä* project (“Youth and the service system”) conducted by Salla Ikäheimo from the National Institute for Health and Welfare (THL), Sanna Aaltonen (principal researcher) and Päivi Berg from the

¹ See http://www.nuorisotakuu.fi/en/youth_guarantee

Finnish Youth Research Society (FYRS). The project was run during 2014 and was funded by the Ministry of Education and Culture. In addition to the questions and objectives shared by the National Institute for Health and Welfare and the Finnish Youth Research Society, both institutions had set their own specific objectives and requirements for data that would provide the framework for examining the relationship between young people and the service system. The results of the project were compiled in a Finnish report (Aaltonen, Berg & Ikäheimo 2015), but the main focus of this English translation is its chapter based on qualitative interview data².

The *Nuoret ja palvelujärjestelmä* research project conducted by the Finnish Youth Research Society aimed to introduce the perspective of young people using the social services. These young people are clients of the welfare services and development projects, as well as experts on social exclusion. While studies on youth participation and young people's influence over municipal services are common (e.g. Gretschel & Junttila-Vitikka 2014; Gretschel & Kiilakoski 2012), the need for information has been recognised, and many institutions have begun investi-

gating these issues in recent years, a natural reaction to the public debate on social exclusion³. The rise of experience-based knowledge is also connected to growing importance of expertise by experience as a method of rehabilitation and development in child care services. Experiences and expertise by experience of socially excluded young people seem to be in public demand, so critical examination is needed to observe the structural issues and individualisation of the problems.

This project aimed to discover the perspective of young people using welfare services and that of professionals, thereby giving a voice to both sides of the service counter. Between these two perspectives lies the critical gaze of researchers investigating whether the two ever meet.

This report is primarily an aid for planning, administration and decision making, but also offers a new perspective for researchers and workers in the field, and certainly for young people themselves.

2 The THL project assessed the health services used by young people at risk of social exclusion and the associated costs. The study tried to improve the accuracy shown by previous estimations of the cost of social exclusion, although the goal was not to provide a single, definite number as 'the cost' of social exclusion. Salla Ikäheimo analysed administrative record data on the use of basic services. A key finding was that the cost of health services for chronically socially excluded young people is no less than seven times greater than those of youngsters who were not at risk of social exclusion. If the data on health care costs had included missed visits, the costs would have been even greater. Consequently, the costs are not merely influenced by young people but also by the inflexibility of the system (scheduling appointments / missed visits) and unrealistic expectations placed on young people. Social exclusion is not necessarily the cause of the high costs; the reasons behind the costs are the same reasons that cause social exclusion.

3 Examples are reports from projects funded by the EU or RAY (Hirsikoski, et al. 2014; Fraktman & Hakala 2014; Reponen 2014) whose areas of study and methods are quite similar to the research chapter in the FYRS publication. The projects drew on material collected through discussion events, hearings, interviews and online service descriptions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

NECESSARY CHANGES TO THE WELFARE SYSTEM

- Clients require a flexible service system: it is unreasonable to assume that young people are able to directly conform to the rules of a complicated system.
- The length of time between making an appointment and the date of the appointment should be shortened.
- Young people should be provided with assessment and emergency services, or at least a short appointment after initial contact.
- Young people who are clients in multiple services should be provided with a professional responsible for coordinating the network and who is informed about all client relationships.
- Existing online services should be improved, but must not replace existing personal services that many young people value and require.
- Counselling requires a multi-professional network and other outreach providers.
- Supporting the wellbeing of young people should be given priority; only when the young person feels well can they be steered into education, employment services or employment.
- Improving wellbeing necessary for participating in employment or education requires a sufficient number of low-threshold mental health services.
- The views of professionals working with clients should be more widely considered in assessing the implementation and effectiveness of political decisions.
- Regional equality must be attained in terms of accessibility and youth-orientation of services; this may involve developing mobile services in areas with great distances between people and services.
- Managing the affairs of young people demands sensitivity to their individual situations and awareness of the frameworks limiting societal and social services.



CONSIDERING THE VIEWS OF YOUNG PEOPLE

- Young people's identities always involve other characteristics than 'unemployed' or 'addict', and labelling or prejudice must not affect the rights of young people or deny them access to necessary services.
- Young people must retain an option to change their mind and find their own path even if it deviates from a direct 'ideal transition'.
- It is more important for activities to be meaningful for young people than using the activities as 'storage'.
- Young people want respect and to be heard, so it is important that professionals are aware of their importance in young people's lives and that they often represent a rare contact with an adult.
- Young people must have a voice in improving the services, expressing their wishes and discussing negative experiences.
- Young people should be recruited to the social services as experts by experience or peer-instructors.

SUBJECTS FOR FURTHER STUDIES

- What factors connected to social services facilitate young people moving into the mainstream?
- How could measurement of the impact and efficiency of social measures, as described by the experiences of young people, be made more accurate?
- How can we obtain feedback from young people using methods that are simple and not formulaic?



PERSPECTIVE OF YOUTH

RESEARCH ON YOUTH SERVICES

Qualitative research about young people has traditionally attempted to discover their various experiences and how they interpret the world, thereby helping to improve and correct authorities' perceptions of young people and their activities. In order to produce relevant information about young people that does not rely solely on socio-politically and quantitatively coloured information on social exclusion, youth researchers conduct research and develop new methods of gathering data with the aim of outlining and recognising the experiences and hopes of young people who are overlooked in statistics, questionnaires and official inquiries. The voice of young people and experience-based knowledge are significant in order to ensure young people's legal protection, as well as to establish high-quality services. These rights are guaranteed by the right to be heard enshrined in Finnish law, and they have been a subject of much public debate (e.g. Ombudsman for Children 2012) as well as in regard to special groups (Hakala 2014).

Previous studies have found that young people's expertise by experience has been largely ignored in social exclusion research. Improving the system surrounding the phenomenon and using this method may add understanding on the accessibility and effectiveness of preventive measures (Suurpää 2009). Emphasising experience-based knowledge should not mean that problems faced by young people are excessively individualised, placing responsibility for solving the problems on young people's shoulders. Gathering experience-based knowledge should not be superficial, and should instead include a promise of change or at least the possibility of change (Beresford 2009, 248).

Many previous studies have described the young people at risk of exclusion as elusive: they might not complete questionnaires or volunteer for interviews (see Siisiäinen 2014, 92). When evaluating experience-based knowledge it should always be asked which young people are the subject of study, whose voices are heard, and whose experiences are left in the dark.

Preventive measures against social exclusion include interaction and negotiation between young people and institutional authorities. The relationship between young people and institutions has been particularly examined in social work research from the perspective of institutional regulation, control and governance over young people (Satka et al. 2011). Public debate demands information about young people as the targets of preventive measures or as the clients of social services. This framework, however, may easily overlook the various lifestyles young people lead (Aaltonen & Suurpää 2013).

At the heart of this study are the experiences of young people interacting with established institutions specialising in preventive and rehabilitative measures for social exclusion, including social work and public employment services. The focus is therefore on the relationship between young people and institutions, and how the services are connected to the everyday lives of young people. Studies on social work have often examined client relationships (e.g. Laitinen & Pohjola 2010), including Laura Holmi's (2011) study on experiences of social work shared by authors of a writing competition on the subject of poverty. Holmi applies Michael Lipsky's term

‘street-level bureaucrats’ for professionals in the public sector who work with clients and whose responsibilities include administrative and decision-making skills requiring relevant expertise. These include police officers, social and health service workers – people who implement government policy.

Clients seek assistance, help and benefits, while professionals seek to manage the service process as well as their work load. In client relationships, the mechanisms of respect, shame, punishment, control, power, and the system are all simultaneously present (*ibid.*) Services and service paths aimed at young people have been previously assessed (Pietikäinen 2007) and interactions between young people and institutions have been examined from the perspective of professionals in outreach youth work (Puuronen 2014), but only a few studies have focused on the experiences of young people with the service system. One example is a report by Elina Palola, Katri Hannikainen-Ingman and Vappu Karjalainen (2012) focusing on the effects of changes in the Act on Social Assistance on young people and government officials. The report describes a ‘jungle of obligations’ that is equally confusing to young people and social workers. Other studies on youth-oriented services, projects and development programmes raise a concern over young people and the level of dedication to their affairs, but also the fragmentation of the services and their inability to reach the young people in need (Määttä & Keskitalo 2014; Närhi & Kokkonen & Mathies 2013).

The adult population has always been concerned about young people, but the focus seems to have shifted from disruptive local ‘problem youths’ to an ever-growing group of ‘problematic youths’ who are feared to represent an excessive burden

to social services and Finland’s economy. Public concern is also connected to these young people not playing their part in solving Finland’s productivity deficit, a role assigned to them by the inter-generational contract as well as the deteriorating dependency ratio.

If it is acknowledged that some young people are becoming socially excluded, an area of focus must be on how welfare services and street-level bureaucracy can bring young people back into society and bind them to it. Welfare services and special services tailored to young people can be thought of as a type of glue holding young people in society, and service encounters can be viewed as concrete attempts to establish and strengthen these ties (Aaltonen 2014). The focus of this study is not on the individuals in the margins of society and their alleged ‘problematics’ but instead on the relationships between individuals and welfare institutions, which also allows a critical inspection of institutions (*cf.* Aaltonen 2011).



DATA AND METHODS

This study uses interview data to outline experiences of interactions between young people and welfare service providers in two cities: Espoo and Kouvola. Espoo is of particular interest as it is part of a metropolitan area with an inflow of migrants from other municipalities. In contrast, Kouvola has undergone major structural changes due to municipal mergers, and the city has a significant outflow of migrants.

At the end of 2012, Espoo's percentage of people aged 18-74 in employment was greater than that of Kouvola's, and the population of Espoo had higher levels of education than the population of Kouvola. At the end of October 2014, unemployment in Finland was 12.2 %, but in Espoo it was 9.0% and in Kouvola 14.2%. Differences in the number of long-term unemployed were not significant. In Espoo, unemployment among people under 25 increased 11.0% from the previous year, while the same number had increased 24.3% within a year in Kouvola (Statistics Finland 2014).

The services involved in this study are TE offices (public employment services, PES), Labour Force Service Centres (LAFOS, in Finnish known under the acronym TYP), adult social work, outreach youth work (Kouvola), Vamos youth services (Espoo), and youth information and counselling point (Espoo.)⁴ The data comprised 29 interviews, ten of which were conducted with professionals and nineteen with their 18-29-year-old clients. The youth inform-

ants are referred to as *young people*, *youth* or *young adults* in this study. Nine professionals were women, while the young people comprised ten women and nine men. All the informants spoke Finnish at native speaker level, although some young people were born outside Finland.

The interviews, which lasted between thirty minutes and two hours, were recorded, after which they were transcribed verbatim⁵. Participants in the study signed a research contract that included a clarification of researchers' responsibilities towards the study's participants (secure storage of data, anonymising). All young people were asked for permission to contact them for a follow-up study; only one refused, while the rest submitted their contact information.

A professional working in customer service with young people aged 18-29 was contacted by the organisational management and assigned the role of contact person, as many offices have an assigned professional for this specific age group. The management and contact people were informed of the study and its objectives via email. The contact persons were requested to assist in recruiting either their own or their colleagues' young clients aged 18-29 who were not in education or employment. Interviews with the professionals were conducted in their workplaces, and some professionals organised places to interview young people. Interviews were conducted in offices, but also in cafés, outdoors and in libraries. Some interview locations were

4 Research permits for the interviews were granted by Uusimaa and South Eastern Finland TE offices, the Education and Culture Services of the City of Espoo, and the city's Health Services' Planning Committee; and by the Youth Services and Social Services of Kouvola.

5 Kaisa Kivipuro and Janne Hakanen transcribed the qualitative data, and we thank them for their comprehensive work.

suggested by the young people. The young people participating in the study in Espoo received a cinema ticket, while those in Kouvola received a gift voucher of equal value to a local store.

The interviews were mainly conducted individually, while the participants of three pair interviews knew each other previously. The semi-structured interviews were conducted during May-August of 2014 (see Appendix 1 and 2) with questions on the young people's life history up to that date, services they currently used, and their assessment of the effectiveness of the services. Interviews with the professionals focused on young adults as a client group and interactions with these clients. The questions were formulated on the basis of the research objectives stated in the research plan, earlier literature, and a desire to improve understanding of some key concepts used in the public debate and by the government (social exclusion of youth, social empowerment, and expertise by experience).

The selection process for the young people interviewed for the study was organic for many reasons. Some professionals forwarded the interview request to all their young clients, while some tried to acquire young people representing 'both extremes' for the interviews. 'Both extremes' probably means one person in a less challenging situation and another whose situation seemed problematic. While some professionals considered the recruitment of young people to be relatively effortless, some experienced more difficulties, which may reflect the different situations of the young clients and various relationships between the clients and services.

Young people selected for the interviews were required to go through the interview process, attend appointments, and express themselves

verbally. Some youngsters reported that they had appeared as interviewees in local newspaper features or in other reports. This might suggest either that professionals selected the same young people as representatives in different situations or that these young people wanted to be heard and deemed it possible, effortless or enjoyable.

Most interviewed young people seemed to be accustomed to explaining their situation and life, because they all had experience of doing so with many professionals of different services. It could also be caused by a desire to please the professionals (or researchers), to be perceived as cooperative, or to be compensated for the interview. However, none of the young people seemed to rush the interview or wanted to terminate it – this was tested by giving some young people the compensation at the start of the interview, and others at the end. Many young people said voluntarily, either to the researchers directly or through the professionals after the interview, that they found the interview experience interesting. Every young person (and the professionals) arrived for their interviews at the agreed time or contacted the researcher if the appointment had to be rescheduled. In addition, either the professionals or the researcher reminded some young people about the interviews by sending a text message.



— PROFESSIONALS' PERSPECTIVE ON — YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE WELFARE SYSTEM

The following chapter is based on interviews with professionals working in welfare services. The interviews illustrate the practical aspects of client relationships with young people, and how these are perceived by the service providers. The services examined are TE offices (public employment services) of Espoo and Kouvola, Labour Force Service Centres (LAFOS), adult social work services, outreach youth work of Kouvola, and Vamos youth services and youth information and counselling point in Espoo. A brief introduction to the interviewees is followed by an examination of their views on young people as clients, and the interviewees' perceptions on how services can meet the needs of young people. We have anonymised the interviewees and do not reveal whether they are from Espoo or Kouvola. Italics indicate expressions used by the interviewees.

EDUCATION AND EXPERIENCE OF THE PROFESSIONALS AND THEIR NUMBER OF CLIENTS

Many of the professionals interviewed were women and most held a degree in a social studies subject – social work, social instruction or social services. Some held a university diploma in youth instruction and a degree as a community educator, while others were graduates in education or the arts. The professionals' experience in working with young adults varied from six months to ten years. Three professionals had fixed-term contracts and were generally less experienced, while others had worked in the service for decades. Every professional had

previous working and/or volunteer work experience with young people. A few professionals were close to the clientele's age group, but the rest were older.

The offices provide services to a great number of clients, particularly social services and the TE offices, where one professional may have 200-400 young clients on their books. In Labour Force Service Centres, one professional handled approximately one hundred clients, Vamos had a total of 130-140 clients, divided between nine professionals. Over the course of one year, four outreach youth workers had handled over 100 young people.

The professionals reported that the gender ratio of the clientele varied from an equal number of males and females to 80% male clients. Most professionals presumed that young males constituted more of the client base than young women. However, not every service compiles statistics on their clientele, and in these cases the professionals' estimations were used.

HOW CLIENT RELATIONSHIPS START, AND TYPICAL CUSTOMER SERVICE SITUATIONS

Young people become clients in social services through different paths: they might seek them out themselves or they might be directed to the services from elsewhere. Young people may be introduced to social services via social allowance applications,⁶ customer service, different

networks, or the criminal sanctions agency. Parents may have taken the initiative, and a small group come via national service call-ups. Some young people became clients via after-care of child welfare services, which is aimed at young people aged 18-20 who have experienced placement outside the home minimum of six months. When young adults come to social services, they usually complete a social allowance application, after which social workers make an appointment to meet with them. In an hour-long appointment, a social work situation assessment is prepared which determines whether the client requires long-term social support or temporary financial aid. In an hour the discussion cannot *get too deep* because *building trust* takes time. In the appointment, clients may explain what they need help with. They may also receive assistance via telephone, and some professionals interviewed are on call via personal phone services during working hours. The great number of clients increases the difficulty in arranging client appointments.

After establishing a client relationship, the professionals maintain contact with the clients by calling them, answering their calls, sending letters and corresponding via email. The young adult clients were mainly dependant on social assistance; the professionals referred these clients as *people without income*. This group were unable to manage housing and living costs with benefits provided by Kela which was, in turn, connected with homelessness and completion of merely basic education. In addition, *life management problems*, substance abuse and mental health problems

were mentioned as issues for this group. Another group the professionals mentioned were students who apply for social assistance during the summer if they fail to secure a summer job.

Most client relationships last for several years, while other young people might move forward with a little counselling; it was particularly people suffering from mental ill health who stayed on as long-term clients. If clients failed to arrive to an arranged appointment, the professionals would call them if the matter was urgent. Some professionals, however, contacted their clients only if they missed two consecutive appointments.

Unemployed people are obligated to register online as jobseekers at the TE services with their personal banking identification code or an identity card with a chip, after which a professional calls the person. If young people are unable to produce either of the identification methods, they must contact the TE office in person. If the jobseeker is under 25 years old or is a 25–29-year-old recently graduated unemployed jobseeker, they are under the Youth Guarantee⁷. When this type of young person registers as a jobseeker, a plan is drawn up involving services that promote employment; these are offered to the person after maximum of three months of unemployment.

6 Social assistance is a last-resort form of income security granted for housing costs, rent, water rates, electricity bill, heating, minor health care costs, prescription medication and home insurance. From 2017, social assistance will be administrated by Kela, Finland's Social Insurance Institution.

7 See http://www.nuorisotakuu.fi/en/youth_guarantee

Clients are divided into three different programmes at the TE offices. The first employment service programme comprises young adults who are oriented directly towards the labour market and who have completed general upper secondary or vocational education. Professionals felt that this programme should not include any young people. Although these youngsters have an education, they *lack basic skills on how to apply for work*. If appointments reveal that the young person needs services from *know-how* programme or *supported employment* programme, an appointment with a professional is arranged.

The second programme promotes *know-how development* where additional training is arranged for the clients. A typical customer service situation involves a young client who has left school or finished a job without a clear direction in life. The youth either *lacks education, previous experience or guidance*. The client relationships continue for some weeks or for over a year. Some return after completing a programme, and the professional *must at that point take a minute and consider whether the programme is the right one for them or if they should transfer to another one*.

The third programme is for *supported employment*, where clients require more individual assistance and multi-professional services. Professionals explain common practices and income security to new clients and their situation is assessed. According to the professionals, however, the path of clients does not lead directly to a job, but instead *it has many bends before that*. Most of the clients in supported employment programme are line transfers from jobseekers and know-how development programmes.

They're [young people] not moving forward in the service programme, they don't show up for appointments and it becomes clear that they have problems with life management and everything else, so they're transferred to us. But it can also come as a surprise that the person's situation assessment reveals that their situation in life or the situation is such that they need more support than the average person.

In the case of health-related restrictions that hinder the pursuit of employment or post-compulsory education, clients are directed to the supported employment programme. Young people may also arrange an appointment at the TE offices during office hours. According to a professional working in the supported employment programme, young people with an established relationship with a professional may contact them directly, but *young people are bad with names*. Young people who cannot recall the number of their case worker must therefore call an extension number, which alerts the professional who then contacts the client.

Client relationships are long term in the supported employment programme. The programme also handles a great number of clients and a professional in the supported employment programme stated that new clients used to be assigned appointments within the first two weeks, but *for example now it couldn't be done*. If a client fails to turn up to an appointment, TE offices do not call to check on them as a rule. The reason given is the significant client load and their difficulties in reaching the clients: phone numbers tend to change often and emails fail to deliver. Apparently traditional *jobseekers* register as jobseekers online; when they are assigned an appointment they fail to arrive and instead register online again. These jobseekers therefore

demonstrate to social workers that they are intermittently actively seeking a job, but they remain clients who *can't be seen or heard*. The professionals emphasised a legal adult's responsibility: the client's situation will not change if they do not show initiative. In these situations, another professional sends a letter with their contact information so that the client may visit the offices for an appointment *when they feel like it*.

People under the age of 25 without general upper secondary or vocational education are under special regulations in terms of unemployment security until they complete general upper secondary or vocational education or participate in services supporting employment. These services include job seeking and career counselling, education and work try-outs, vocational labour market training, independent education for immigrants supported by integration aid, independent education supported by employment security, and rehabilitative employment.

Labour Force Service Centres (LAFOS) offer fixed-term, rehabilitative and activating employment, education and rehabilitative services supporting employment for long-term unemployed people over the age of 17 who require support in order to resolve problems hindering them finding employment or with life management in general. A person becomes a LAFOS client by referral from TE offices or social work if they find that the client requires multi-professional support or, as a TE office professional states, *their life is in a mess*. New clients receive a letter from Labour Force Service Centres inviting them to an appointment, after which the client can choose whether or not to remain as a client. The procedure dictates that TE office professionals and social workers meet new clients

together and they all assess the client's personal history and situation and *think what the young person is telling us, what their hopes are*. This information is gathered into a plan signed by all parties involved.

One of the professionals will commence the process according to the young person's wishes about participating in counselling services for employment or education, or services supporting employment. Labour Force Service Centres participate in multi-professional work with substance-abuse treatment, psychiatric clinic, maintenance treatment, and outreach youth work. The clients are asked to sign an agreement allowing the authorities to exchange relevant information and documents concerning their employment or health information, as well as opportunities involving employment, education and rehabilitation.

I really do think that, with us, it's maybe about seeing the light at the end of the tunnel on behalf of the customer, I mean that often some people have pretty much given up, so they sort-of don't see the future [...] Little of our work is just ushering people into working life or education or something else, I mean, it's obviously our main task, but unfortunately we here at the labour force guidance don't get to do too much of it.

Usually, the client is given the first appointment within a month of their initial contact with employment service centres, after which appointments are made monthly. If the client, for example, is attending some activities recommended by the LAFOS, the client's appointments are once every third month. Client relationships are long-term, and a professional described how *after three years we get to the root of the real issues, we've created trust and we're talking about the*



real issues and then we can guide people to the right treatment, for example. Another LAFOS professional stated that contact with the clients is maintained via text messages and telephone. The difference between TE offices and LAFOS is that clients are met more often and appointments last up to ninety minutes. Another professional, however, stated that *if you could do this job like you'd like to, it'd be challenging, now it's unfortunate how much time we have to spend doing things that can be measured*, so to speak. The current system determines the actions and, although *eloquent speeches* refer to ideals of client-based and individualised services, they are difficult to put into practice.

One professional stated that they must accept the fact that youngsters might arrive at the services because they are frightened of losing their benefits or because something else in their life prevented them from dedicating themselves to the activities provided. LAFOS protocol dictates that professionals must call young people if they fail to arrive for an appointment and arrange another appointment, but *with some, it's like trying to hold on to a bar of soap: they manage to slip away somehow.*

Youth information and counselling point, yESBOx, aimed at young people aged 13-25, is arranged by the youth services of the City of Espoo, and is located in a shopping centre. Anyone can walk in, call or send an email to receive service. In yESBOx, young people can look for information online, browse guides, collect brochures, and talk with youth counsellors. Questions are also answered online. Most young people in Espoo visit yESBOx once, while multiple visits or appointments occur mainly when a teen is deciding where to study or is about to leave Finland. Visits that concern job seeking

can usually be solved by going through the process once. Espoo previously had more counselling points, but at the time of the interviews only one remained. In the service, youngsters can divulge as much information on themselves as they wish, and they may define *what they want to ask about, so we don't influence it.*

The professionals do not obtain the young person's contact information, but if this information is recorded in relation to handling an issue, and a client fails to arrive to an appointment, professionals may contact them. The most common situation is where *even the young person doesn't know exactly what they are asking.* The professional's duty is then to clarify what the person needs help with. The service does not *dictate that a young person should do this or that*, but instead professionals introduce options and explain them in practice. However, the ultimate choice is made by the young person *because they are the so-called experts of their own lives.* In addition, the counselling point organises events and courses in, for example job seeking. The professionals also visit schools, where they hold sessions in post-compulsory education options or how to manage personal finances.

Outreach youth work in Espoo is aimed at young people aged 15-28 and in Kouvola for those aged 16-25 who have dropped off the service systems or are in danger of it. Outreach work is focused on preventive work and early intervention and complements youth support services. It also empowers young people in managing their everyday lives. The activities are carried out in cooperation with an established multi-professional network. Outreach youth work attracts clients who have discontinued school due to multiple absences caused by *problems managing their everyday life, substance abuse and mental*

health problems, according to one professional. Discontinuing studies can possibly result from choosing a *wrong* programme, financial reasons, a lack of motivation and *ineffectiveness*.

A typical situation in outreach work involves a vocational institution alerting the service of a young person discontinuing their studies. Outreach youth workers then call the person and ask about their plans for the future. If the young person does not have another school or a job arranged, an appointment is made to meet with the person, either in the service location or in the young person's home. At this meeting they assess the situation and what services the youth may need, and then the professional contacts the TE offices or LAFOS. The frequency of the appointments depends on the young person's needs: some appointments are arranged weekly and some daily. Meetings are often held once a week in the beginning and then become less frequent as the relationship develops, every two weeks or every month.

In youth outreach work, some young people's issues are resolved in one session, but some relationships can go on for years: *They're not active relationships but they're always kind-of in the background, so that we keep regular contact and guide them forward*. Old clients maintain contact via text messages and have expressed wishes for the professionals to join WhatsApp *because you could message them when you've ran out of minutes*. The professionals also have Facebook profiles. Email is not as popular among young people, and clients prefer to *just march through the door or call*. Young people may come to the service unannounced and are always welcome. Since the service is not *connected to the young people's benefits* and participation is voluntary, meetings are missed every week. The aim of out-

reach work is to arrange appointments during the same week as they contact young people, and if they fail to arrive, the professionals call them. If young people have difficulties with the meeting place, the appointment is arranged somewhere else: new clients in particular *are a little nervous about coming*.

Vamos services are a part of the Helsinki Deaconess Institute. The services are aimed at young people aged 16-29 in Helsinki and Espoo. The activities focus on improving young people's mental resources and strengths, and encouraging young people to commit to the individually evaluated and planned path for their future. According to a professional at Vamos, most young clients are those who have not been reached by other services, and Vamos was founded to meet this demand. Approximately twenty percent of the clients have *no method of income* when they enter the system and receive no social assistance or labour market support. Young people become clients of Vamos when professionals call them and arrange an appointment, at which two professionals assess clients' current situation. The appointment takes place within two weeks of the initial call, and may also involve a professional from another service through the authority network.

Vamos operates low-threshold services where participants can attend 1-4 days per week depending on their interest and abilities. These services focus on counselling young people on their *daily routines, life management and interaction skills*. A client must wait a couple of weeks until they can join StarttiKaista ('Starting Lane') which provides low-threshold, goal-oriented and regular group activities; during the waiting period, professionals keep in touch with the person because *for young people, the time can*

feel like forever. StarttiKaista is aimed at *people in a bit better condition* where strategies for the future are planned together. The group changes theme every six months, when they discuss specific activities to which young people may transfer. During this phase many clients move within Vamos to individual career services where *we start to scope out even more efficient strategies for the future.* Young people may attend individual and group activities simultaneously and this strategy has proved to be effective.

Building *a relationship based on trust* requires time. Due to the voluntary nature of the services, clients can leave at any time *if they feel like they just can't.* If a young person does not return to Vamos, a professional calls them and emphasises that they can return the service at any time. According to the professionals, Vamos saw less missed appointments than other services examined, which the professionals attributed to a familiar face at the service. Vamos focuses on *interactive work* that aims to interact with the young person without any prepared plans. Building on young people's needs, the work focuses on assessing their strengths and clarifying which aspects of previous, discontinued vocational training had been successful. Vamos also stresses that not all young people wish to live according to society's expectations.

Approximately 60 percent of Vamos clients are male, and the largest age group is 20-25. Young people's parents occasionally contact the services, indicating that the issue has *escalated quite far.* A professional stated that they believed that the services do not reach nearly every young person because some *won't leave the house for anything.* The City of Espoo has outsourced group counselling and career services to Vamos. Client relationships at Vamos

are long-term, especially those concerning individual services. Some clients exhibit symptoms of mental health problems, which cannot be *medicated away:* learning difficulties, ADHD, Asperger syndrome. Vamos attempts to usher these youths to the intermediate labour market, work try-outs and pay-subsidised work. According to a professional, young people who have been unemployed for two years have difficulties finding work in the free labour market, but some clients have achieved employment. Vamos directs most young people into vocational training and work try-outs, and professionals at Vamos regard the paths young people take as processes that evolve in a way that is enjoyable and not simply a way of shuffling them from one work try-out to another.

We always try to see from the young person's perspective what the work try-out can lead to, that is, we try to see it as a process. I know there are employment projects that usher the youngster into a work try-out outside the project and then they stop working with the youngster. We don't end the relationship there, but instead go to the workplace to see how things are going. If something happens, I cooperate with the employer, obviously with the youngster's consent, and the youngster can contact us. In general, we try to organise work try-outs that are as short as possible, max a couple of months, where the employer gets the idea of what's the deal. We've got enough people who are stuck in the intermediate labour market shuffled from one work try-out to another with a stretch of unemployment in between.



According to a professional, work try-outs might not necessarily lead anywhere but can instead be damaging, as they may label the youth as passive and procedure-dependent in the eyes of a potential employer (see also Standing 2011).

It's completely insane that if a person has a certain amount of them on their cv, the employer thinks that 'they'll probably get stuck this time, too'. That's our biggest problem in this otherwise supported, well-financed system, that we have the intermediate labour market. People get stuck in it and it's not cheaper for society, well maybe a little cheaper.

In addition to the services mentioned above, workshops, rehabilitative work activities, mental health services (youth clinics, youth psychiatric clinics, social and primary health care services), substance-abuse services (substitute treatment, detoxification treatment), housing services (youth housing), and services provided by Kela and health centres are provided for young people

YOUNG PEOPLE AS CLIENTELE

Professionals were asked how young adults differed from other clients as a group. According to them, young people are more focused on the future, methods of *moving forward* in life, and moving on from the services than older clients. One professional emphasised that during *an interaction* young people must feel that they are welcome, so professionals must create a safe environment. The professional must also communicate *tactfully*, as the slightest wrong word might be highly destructive for young people who feel like they are *being dissed, put down or someone implies that they are doing the wrong things or that they are somehow defective*. Young people are more adept in using online services, but are not as aware of society's services or social security as older age groups.

But I can say that many are completely lost with these basic systems, like where to apply for money from Kela or TE services or social assistance, so the process is an incomprehensible jumble for many.



With these people, the process starts *from the very beginning*, but they exhibit potential and often just a little guidance can assist them to *move forward*. One professional described young people as *bending willows* and that they seize opportunities offered to them. It is important to find every young person's *own thing*, even if it is a *generic version* of the young person's dreams that helps them move forward.

In LAFOS, working with young people requires more *support and guidance*, professionals meet with them more often, they miss more appointments, and professionals call them. Another LAFOS professional compared people born in the 1980s and people born in 1990s. The professional thought that the people born in the 1990s were *more rootless, inefficient and short-sighted*, potentially with severe substance and mental health issues. They have not participated in any training and *are afraid to apply anywhere*. According to the professional, young people born in the 1980s *resist growing up more* and look for their own vocation, which leads to these people commencing many different training programmes.

Young people are characterised by requiring everything to be *fun*. This issue was also raised by one outreach work professional:

[A young person] is willing to work, but it has to be fun. And maybe not eight hours a day, and that's surprising to see [...]. Dealing with disappointment is poor, like for example, we had this boy in one group who lost to another boy in a board game and he never came back.

The last comment by the professional illustrates clearly how fragile the contact to young people may be and how a young person who has been 'reached' can easily be 'lost' through circumstances beyond the control of the professionals.

POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE CLIENT INTERACTIONS, DIFFICULT AND IDEAL CLIENTS

So, a bad case is probably when you can't connect with the youngster or when they're just like a bar of soap in wet hands, so they just keep slipping away no matter how you hold them, you can't get a hold of them. Or another case is when they just say 'yeah, yeah, yeah' to everything but when the door closes, it's like a bubble has burst: 'Yeah, I don't give a damn.' However, a good case is when I can get young people to think about their situation, think about things and start saying to themselves 'wait, I haven't thought about that, and I could think about that, too', and it's a pleasure to say to them that they can come again in a couple of weeks after they're done thinking and we can figure out the future together. But if a youngster asks if 'they have to come back in six months and if this is over for a while again', then you know you've lost them.

Questions on positive and negative client interactions did not aim to classify the youngsters, but instead to discover professionals' views on a functional client relationship and what situations lead to difficulties in forming a connection with young people. Every professional associated a positive client interaction with both parties experiencing a meaningful connection and being on the same wavelength, as well as a relaxed atmosphere built on trust. Many professionals emphasised the significance of building trust with the clients. Situations where a client leaves *by slamming the door behind them* may even prove positive as well, because it signifies that the meeting has inspired some thought. Another important aspect raised was that clients should feel like they received help and they are starting to move forward, where something sparks their interest or that they find motivation.

According to the professionals, the clients do not *have a lot of trust towards authorities*, and positive situations were ones where the client has been nervous about the meeting and might say at the end that *it wasn't that bad*.

Professionals described a negative client interaction as occurring when professionals are exhausted or when clients are excessively *closed off* so that it is impossible to connect with them. Professionals working in phone services and social service counselling associated negative interactions with frustration on the part of the clients, which may result in calling the professionals names. Negative situations seemed to be those where clients lacked motivation or professionals were unable to connect with them.

Professionals of TE services described challenging situations as the ones where youngsters lacked *the realities of working life*, that is, they were unwilling to participate in work try-outs or education, but instead wanted to work although they had not had work for many years. A professional also stated that they had difficulties with a lack of determination or an attitude of *well, how much will I get from this [work try-out], and I don't want it because I get more from welfare*. Professionals also mentioned those youngsters who do not *wish to participate in society's rat race*. These types of clients have made a conscious choice that they are *happy with this* and that *life's too short for working*. However, they can change:

I just had this client who I met several times and we kept contact. Nothing interested them; they didn't want to do anything; and they didn't stick with anything, two days of civil service and society stinks and nothing. Now recently we held activation [classes] in social work offices and in walks a totally different fellow, physically even:

nice clothes, trendy glasses. Turned out that they had been admitted to vocational labour market training, it was a totally new person with a new attitude. And they were so proud of themselves, 130 applicants with 18 admitted. [...] The question was, what caused all this, but it was such a wonderful thing.

None of the professionals found clients difficult, but instead they saw that young people's situations were challenging and *services not meeting the person's needs* caused additional difficulties. These situations occurred with people who suffered from severe mental ill-health or substance abuse problems in which the professional was insufficiently trained, as well as situations with learning difficulties that might hinder interaction and communication. Professionals also brought up housing problems, criminal behaviour and combinations of all the above issues, while they recognised that some situations are aggravated by the fact that *everything has been set into motion well before adulthood, so we can see that the situation has become pretty bad well before they're in front of us at the age of 18*. One professional also suggested that young people may have something on their mind, making focusing difficult. Professionals also recognised the limits to their own efforts, but still they had to find motivation for their work somewhere.

It's hard to find a gauge that shows the youth's situation or how much they're empowered or aren't empowered when we meet with them. Of course you recognise the fact that the youngster can look one way in front of me, but when they go out the door, and if they don't have anything supporting them, then, of course, it makes this office-bound counselling work challenging [...] I have to think that they can be like seedlings that grow out of the ground in a couple of years. We're just planting the seeds, so to speak.

Negative client interactions were reportedly the only ones in which the professional is left with a feeling that the young person gained nothing or they are unaware of what they want, and the professional is unable to help them. When a discussion seems to be failing, appointments may evolve into talking about something else completely, *things that really interest them, and it happens often*. On the other hand, clients who *seem to be really lost* might become ideal clients as soon as professionals recognise that they have benefitted from the information given to them. Clients might be frustrated and angry as they arrive and question the professional's skills, but the more times they come, their situation improves.

Ideal clients are open to suggestions, able to discuss issues and interact with people, are determined to remove themselves from their client status, cooperate well, and are motivated and committed to the work. The totally opposite client relationship is one where clients are *apathetic and see no need to or are unwilling to commit to anything*. Ideal clients are those who do not actually utilise the services and are well adjusted and find placement in education, employment or somewhere else. However, according to a professional of the TE offices, ideal clients in the service system are young people who have clear professional goals and a strong will to reach those goals. These young people employ the professionals in order to secure a work try-out position and gain work experience.

Ideal clients may also be those with many problems, but who have a *passion and a desire* to resolve their issues and *move forward*. They also have a fundamental belief that life will prevail. Another perspective expressed was that a young

person arriving to an appointment is a win in itself. According to one professional, everyone has a passion in life, but finding it requires time and trust, which is not built instantaneously. Ideal clients may also be ones who *have the same logic* as the professionals. A professional also saw that *wellbeing of boys increases and decreases* depending on whether they have a girlfriend. A common perspective was that client relationships are excessively based on talking, and not everyone is equally strong in that area.

This authority culture of ours favours the people who can talk and are good talkers, and the same goes for those treatments and therapies, because they're pretty heavy on talking. And if we think about the young men we have, many aren't big talkers. Many are, but not everyone, and it's like pulling teeth getting one word out of them, so is this the only option we have [...] or could we do like exercise therapy or bro therapy (laughs) or woodworking therapy, all of which we don't have much of. [...] So that it would be rehabilitative, but not just orally centred. I don't know if it'll ever be a reality but I do think that some types of people get more out of doing than talking, or everything, that it would be involved somehow, doing, I mean.

CLIENT RELATIONSHIPS IN OTHER SERVICES AND MULTI-PROFESSIONAL WORK

This study paid particular interest to the various paths young people take in services and the networks they cultivate in them, which were also assessed in interviews with professionals. Knowing the clients' other client relationships is also important for most professionals who chart them in the first client meeting. However, some connections are discovered only as the relationship develops. Social workers are able to see from their own system any previous contacts with social services or substance abuse services; however, they are unable to view records connected to health care or mental health care services.

One professional stated that they did not wish to have any previous information on young people because they felt that *it's only fair to the client that you can start with a clean slate in that sense*. TE office professionals do not have access to any previous contacts the client may have, but the professionals will contact social offices and mental health services about clients if they feel that *everything's not right*. LAFOS professionals actively ask clients about their relationships with other services, and young people are often happy to pass on this information. In outreach work and Vamos, the professionals must trust clients' explanations, and young people may be unable to recall or may be unwilling to divulge their other service contacts.

Social workers are aware of the client's other contacts, particularly any longer relationships, which may include psychiatric and substance abuse services, TE offices, LAFOS, outreach youth work and Vamos in Espoo. Other services often transfer to Vamos *people without income who haven't done much since basic*

education, because Vamos can focus more on a plan of action, which is pretty hard in here, and there isn't anything like it in employment offices. Professionals and their clients often arrange appointments with different authorities and service institutions:

The most people at a meeting I've ever seen in one place had probably ten officials or health care representatives or representatives of some sort. [...] So that we don't do the same things over and over again, or give conflicting instructions. Actually we don't meet up without clients, or naturally if a client doesn't show up, then we're all there, but we don't make any plans without the client.

Professionals of other services also discussed cases where 5-6 different parties *are tangled up in the client's affairs*. Due to this, TE offices sometimes use vocational counselling.

It bothers me personally if clients have many different agencies to work with; every one of us tries to pull them to our direction, and the youngster is kind-of at the end of an elastic band and is just bounced around from place to place. I think it's easier if we all sit around one table to discuss what we have in mind and figure out what our common goal is. What actions could get us to that common goal [...] but we have our own schedules and the volume of clients is so great that it would be hard to make a timetable for a long-term multi-professional thing.

Actions of LAFOS are based on multi-professional networks, and young people may introduce any agency they feel is necessary to the activities. LAFOS professionals, however, say that having many different cooperatives may prove problematic:

Sometimes it feels like youngsters are confused and that's not a good thing, I think, that we're kind of spread out, so everyone just handles the case for a while, and that's not a good system either, I think.

A professional of Vamos raised the issue of the expenses of upholding a vast service network and how no-one *interacts with the youngster comprehensively*. Vamos is the only social service that has a staff member assigned to coordinate the complete service network.

Professionals also reported how multi-professional work is visible within their own services. It may involve different educational backgrounds, cooperation among social office workers, social instructors and social workers. In addition, clients are directed to other services, and professionals may accompany their first visits. Cooperation meetings are also held with representatives from other services. Similarly, outreach youth work begins by building a network for the clients.

Professional turnover is high in social services, which is why cooperation is upheld by continuous reminders *that we're still here*. Cooperation

amongst polytechnics and TE offices is *under improvement and becoming closer*. Information and counselling services increase cooperation continually with schools and other institutions, and the services also visit schools to provide information. Services also collaborate with private enterprises, such as S Group, a network of companies operating in the retail and service sectors, to organise courses during which young people occupy trainee positions in S Group's business locations. Information and counselling services organise courses on applying for summer jobs and learning the rules of working life. Information and counselling services collaborate with Omnia education and regional development centre, and have started collaboration with Vamos.

Although proficient services are abundant, according to a professional, it poses a problem that the ones working in the services do not know what is being done for the client, which might entail inefficient use of resources. This may be particularly true in large cities; the service system of Espoo was described as *fragmentary*, which led to positive things *getting kind of left behind*.

YOUNG PEOPLE'S ACCESS TO THE SERVICES

Public debate has awakened to the need for low-threshold services, which implies that engaging services is somewhat problematic for young people. The interview questions for the professionals also touched on these issues. Interviews with social workers concluded that young people are able to complete income support applications and register as a jobseeker online with ease. One professional, however, stated that young people *need more personal contact so that we could just pick them up and bring them here rather than just refer them to the online registration form for jobseekers or an income support application.*

Professionals felt that social services provided easy access through telephone services where professionals return people's calls, although clients may not necessarily reach their assigned case worker. Different social offices also had different policies on allowing social workers to give out their personal phone numbers to clients. Depending on the situation, the professionals were able to give out their email address to the client. The offices welcomed walk-ins between specified hours, because the number of social offices has been reduced in recent years, so the distance between client and office has significantly grown. If necessary, social workers assist clients in completing forms, especially those relating to their own services.

Clients without a personal banking identification code experienced added difficulties in accessing online services. These clients included immigrants with alien's passports, persons with

no permanent address, and people with credit problems. Because these clients are unable to access online services, they contact the services via telephone. Professionals reported that completing physical forms was difficult for people whose native language was not Finnish, as well as people with concentration difficulties. Young clients also had troubles comprehending *who gives out housing allowance, what comes from what, and where you can get the forms.*

At the time of the interviews, the social services in Espoo were about to pilot a chat service that clients could access via their personal banking identification code. They were also considering setting up a Facebook page for the service. Kouvola was developing workshop activities for youth *in the most challenging positions* in the 'Key to the Mind' project.⁸ The target group is those who are not able to participate in working life or education. The project aims to provide low-threshold activities such as workshops. Professionals, however, doubted somewhat that lowering the threshold would help:

At least for youngsters in the most difficult positions, who never leave the house or leave it very seldom, then even if we think that the purpose is to reach these people in the most difficult positions, I'm not too sure about that. [...] So maybe if through outreach work we got to pull them from their houses, and that way we could motivate them.

⁸ According to a professional, the Key to the Mind project in Kouvola involved social work, the local medical centre, and psychiatric clinics. The project aims to create an effective model for mental health and substance abuse services.



Professionals at TE services had conflicting views on how easy or difficult their services were to access. One professional thought that young people had no difficulties accessing their services since young people's parents and grandparents would know about the services, because TE offices are by no means a new phenomenon.

People are familiar with our services. Young people can walk up to the offices and say that I was told at home that I need a Sanssi card⁹. But there must be some youngsters, at least ones I see, I take a walk-in client between clients, if there's a convenient time slot, and they're the ones who leave here happiest, because they got to take care of their problem straight away. Then the case starts to move into some direction.

At the start of this year, another TE office location had completely stopped walk-ins, which had prompted complaints from young people because *they needed something where they can just show up*. A professional also stated that young people have criticised how difficult it is to use the services provided. They view the TE offices as a big, faceless organisation, whose professionals are difficult to reach, and young people have difficulties remembering their assigned workers' name.

One professional speculated on how the geographical location of a service affects the user's experience: people coming to the services from all over the city have different levels of difficulty in obtaining the services. The LAFOS office opening hours are between 9 and 10, and during that time young people may call or visit

between their appointments. Previously, LAFOS provided one full working day of open office hours weekly in addition to this.

These reforms that came with the new Government Programme are why we don't have those so-called assessment services for new jobseekers any more, or those kinds of services where people can just walk in, those are gone. And they were effective with young people, because when you have pressing problems and you want to come and solve them, it's not too comforting to get an appointment after two or three weeks. [...] Like, there's always those people who want to deal with their issues in person and I think people should be able to do it. [...] At least in our clientele, some people have real difficulties even keeping their appointments, so the fact that you would know that, okay, Wednesdays, you could come by, and then that would serve the purpose of actually reaching the people who we don't otherwise reach.

Another professional at LAFOS also speculated that the very first meetings can be pretty torturous, because in the situation there are two *older people in an office room* talking in *official jargon*. The professional guessed that the uneasiness subsides over time as trust builds.

Sometimes, TE office professionals help clients with their forms, but young people can also ask assistance from 'online support' stationed in the lobbies of the offices. A professional stated that the registration form for jobseekers is not *the easiest to fill out*. The first form to complete in LAFOS is an agreement form, and the professionals at LAFOS

9 The Sanssi card is developed to help young people look for jobs. If a young person has a Sanssi card, the employer receives a subsidy towards the salary costs. See:

http://www.te-services.fi/te/en/jobseekers/finding_job/young_people/sanssi_find_job/index.html

assist clients with their Kela and income support applications on the public computers. According to professionals at LAFOS and TE offices, most young people find the documents complicated and they have difficulties in distinguishing which forms relate to which service: clients might bring *Kela slips* to TE offices. Professionals at LAFOS and TE offices did not report problems regarding lack of a personal banking identification code as much as social workers. This is partly because immigrants arriving as clients to LAFOS only do so after an integration plan has been completed, which is done at TE offices.

Vamos has received positive response from young people, who particularly mentioned easy access and a warm welcome. According to a professional, low-threshold service does not mean service without appointments but instead how professionals conduct themselves in the offices and how they welcome young people: *Low-threshold services might turn into high-threshold services when a youngster crosses the threshold and feels like I'm not welcome.*

In Vamos, the professionals conduct an initial assessment, which is documented. In individual appointments, professionals assist with income support applications, but *many have become used to dealing with the service system, they're sharp and smart, so they pick it up pretty fast.* Applications may prove challenging for people with learning difficulties. Professionals also assist clients with online job applications if necessary:

For some people, it's really hard to sit at the computer for half an hour and carefully fill out your information, and then you have to describe yourself somehow, and they don't know what they should put in this and that column, so go

and do that then and get a job. Those questions in the applications are actually pretty hard for anyone.

Outreach youth work aims to maintain a low-threshold service, and they have even decorated their offices to *reflect the youngsters*. In the past, young people have been encouraged to paint the walls anyway they chose and this tradition continues. Low-threshold services are also achieved by professionals meeting young people in their homes, in a café, or meeting them at another service's offices where the person feels comfortable. Outreach work particularly assists young people with their first applications for income support and housing allowance, and some young people return to the offices monthly to complete follow-up applications, because *they lose their temper sooner or later with the computer, but when there's someone sitting beside you, guiding you on, you can manage it all the way through.*

Youth information and counselling points assist young people completing applications for the Finnish Youth Housing Association, FYHA, and other housing applications, as well as online applications concerning job seeking.

IN WHAT TYPE OF SITUATIONS HAVE PROFESSIONALS BEEN UNABLE TO ASSIST YOUNG PEOPLE, AND WHERE HAVE THEY BEEN REDIRECTED?

Anne Määttä and Elsa Keskitalo (2014) have described the service system as two-tiered, and state that professionals possess great power in directing clients from the outer ring to more specialised services located in the inner circle. Similarly, professionals can figuratively catch, pass or block the clients (ibid.). Individual professionals have the power to aid and guide, but they act within the boundaries determined by their institutions, while negotiating the boundaries of the actions available for the clients.

One social worker shared that they felt helplessness in situations where clients manifest signs of mental health problems, but do not consider themselves affected. In these situations, clients may be insulted by suggestions of treatment. Another challenging group are homeless young people, whose self-assessment of their skills for living independently does not correspond with the professional's view of their need for supported housing. In these situations, supported housing may be construed as patronising, which may be the effect of childhood experiences with institutions.

A third challenging group are those *stuck at home* who may become clients via a care provider, and are in need of support with everyday services. If necessary, a vocational support person may be assigned to them by social services, or they may be directed to outreach youth work. One social worker described experiences in accompanying clients to the A-clinic, health stations, Mother and Child Homes, employment service centres, as well as meeting land-

lords. Professionals of TE offices have directed clients to services including, in emergency cases, outreach youth work, the A-clinic, social work and rehabilitative activities. In LAFOS, a nurse can also accompany the client to health stations.

A professional raised the issue of insufficient support personnel:

Even though we have this network, it's like, well, who goes with them. It's a bit like, we need those mums and dads [...] that type of support people, for living support or anything, those basic everyday things which may not be that clear for everyone. Then when those issues pile up, it's obvious that employment issues are the last things on the youngsters' mind.

For a youngster to receive mental health care in youth psychiatric clinics or regular psychiatric clinics, they must be referred by emergency care. If the person is already a client of these services, LAFOS's nurse is more easily able to help the person receiving treatment. According to one professional, Kouvola has a shortage of doctors and psychiatrists, which aggravates the situation. LAFOS also provides a path to further youth services: in addition to outreach youth work, they direct young people to youth education available at adult education centres, city youth work, and after-care.

Information and counselling points direct young people to Vamos, Nupoli, Youth Crisis Point and youth substance abuse clinics, and discuss their issues with their school social worker, counsellor or the school nurse. Vamos readily provides access to many services, excluding mental health services. In order for young people to receive inpatient care they must be *a serious threat to their health or others*, which means that young

people who *are unwell, but not unwell enough* do not receive the care they require.

Inpatient care takes place on an extremely short-term-basis, after which youngsters are returned to Vamos, which *has no capabilities*. Take, for example, youth psychiatric care in Helsinki, which directs people who they have no capacity for here because where else could they direct them to? There's nothing [laughs]. Obviously there's a disconnection here. Clients in Vamos range from young people with severe mental health problems to those who require less or short-term support.

Outreach youth work attempts to rapidly locate a care facility for the clients. An outreach worker shared the following example of insufficient mental health care services:

A few weeks ago a young person came here [at 1pm] and said that they needed someone to talk to, an appointment with a psychiatrist, and began dialling the number to the health station on my phone. The young person said that they needed an appointment for a psychiatrist soon, and the nurse on the phone told them to call again tomorrow morning, because appointments are made between 8 and 12. The young person seriously did not want to hear what other options might have been available at that point, so they lost their temper and just said 'okay' and hung up on them. I was bothered by the situation, and wondered who was at the other end of that call. I had this youngster here, but because they weren't there in person in the situation, and tell them to call the next day, that's pretty risky. [...] It's hard to get any low-threshold mental health services in here.



ASSESSING EFFECTIVENESS

Effectiveness generally refers to the changes that services aim to achieve in the client or their situation. These may include employment, admission to education or rehabilitation, but professionals understand effectiveness in a broader sense.

According to social workers, their support to the clients can be assessed through the improvements to the client's situation and their functionality. Together with the client, social workers prepare a client plan in which they detail what measures have already been taken and what is the plan of action. However, according to a professional the details written down are *pretty trivial*.

A young person's current problems may consume their thoughts, so that visualising the future or making long-term plans is difficult. In these cases, the professional is responsible for seeing past the present moment and to plan steps for young people to take in order to improve their current situation and achieve even greater goals. Although plans are drawn up, young people are the players and decision makers in the situation, which may lead to changes to the plans. Success is when young people perceive a gradual improvement in their situation, such as anxiety relief. Open and honest interactions are considered a success that lay the foundation for future collaboration. Considering these perspectives, professionals perceive that assessing effectiveness using methods valued by politicians is problematic.

I don't know if looking at it from another point of view, success is when people become full-fledged citizens so that they can provide for themselves, if so then I don't know [laughs]. I guess they'll become that at some point, but

that's way in the future. All in all, it's difficult to measure impact or success or moving forward. I can see how it's important that we could measure them and especially that we could show people upstairs, the decision makers, what kind of results our work has. But how to do that on a larger scale, so that we could get data that's easily accessible, that's the question we're trying to figure out everywhere.

At a larger scale, follow-up is quantitative: tracking the number of clients and people in temporary housing. Professionals are monitored for their numbers of decisions, client meetings, situation assessments, and client plans completed.

TE offices also considered measuring the impact of support provided. A satisfied client is a revealing gauge: a young person is admitted to a satisfying work try-out or is offered paid work *after a suggestion that they approach a particular workplace*; another works reluctantly for six months in a field that does not correspond with their education, and thinks about pursuing upper-secondary education in this new field; a third client reluctantly attends career counselling and emerges from it happy with a work try-out contract.

Another type of result may be that a young person begins rehabilitative work three days per week and eventually wants to increase the number to five days per week; or when a young person participates in a work try-out, acquires an education, becomes employed and does not require help anymore. Professionals, however, state that it is difficult to assess whether these changes are due to their work or completely different factors, including other networks the young person may have used. Nonetheless,

impact means young people moving forward in their lives, which is also the purpose of the work.

TE offices also keep statistics on people who have registered as jobseekers after receiving paid employment, or who have remained in working life three months after paid employment. A professional stated *that statistics don't show the big picture. It just assigns numbers to the way people move around, nothing else*. Professionals must also meet quantitative goals regarding the number of offers of employment and the activation rate. Professionals also criticised how their employers sent statistics *as if to say how many you've done, we're talking about people here*. Not all work conducted is reflected in statistics and not all of it is measured.

Professionals at Vamos and outreach work emphasised *moving forward* as a measure of assessing impact of support provided, but they also emphasised the difficulties in accurately assessing it. According to a professional at Vamos, the effectiveness of support provided may be measured by examining how professionals have succeeded in guiding young people to move forward, as well as considering young people's experiences with the service. However, the goal is not simply to prepare for or force young people into work:

We don't try to prepare young people just for work, but of course we end up doing just that, so that if what the youngster wants to do is the same what society wants, then that's okay with us.

The degree to which young people have been able to find employment or education is significant for measuring individual progress, but the clients' own experiences are just as significant

measures as quantitative aspects. Vamos maintains contact with young people even when they are no longer in the service and have proceeded to education, as long as they need the support.

According to an outreach worker, the impact of the support provided may be evaluated by investigating the results. The purpose of the work is that youngsters may move forward at some point and find a place they've been guided towards.

Sometimes it can be like really small stuff. For example, I have this young person here who's been with us for years and it started off by us going to their house and emptying the mail box and going through a week's worth of mail and now they work well with others in a group and have gotten positive feedback on how they've changed during these last few years. How they're kind of a leader of their group and take others into consideration. I think that these are the cases where, even though we move forward slowly, we keep moving forward, when even if they're not under any direct measures, they make progress. And then we obviously have all these school placements and those types of things are the results of everyday support leading somewhere.

Outreach work uses Facebook to oversee young people who have left the services, for example, where they're friends with the professionals. Because the service is located in a small town, the professionals may run into the young people from time to time, or the professionals may hear about the young people through their friends. Outreach work reports annually their actions to the Ministry of Education and Culture.

LAFOS keeps statistics on why young people leave the service and whether they become employed in the open labour market or attend

post-compulsory education. A professional at LAFOS feels that the pressure to *get results* has decreased because *statistics definitively show that LAFOS gets results*. Young people do not appear in the statistics after they stop being clients of TE offices or LAFOS services. If clients from LAFOS gain vocational qualification, they may remain clients until the end of the term, because if everything does not go as planned *there's no point in them going to TE offices and going through the whole shebang all over again 'til they're back here with us. It's pointless*.

Information and counselling services focus on *quality*. For instance, Ansio courses are held three times every spring, which include training on applying for a summer job, how behave at a workplace, and the rules of working life. Young people also complete 12 hours of training in one S Group business location and *hopefully, after completing this set they have a better shot at being employed or maybe get a summer job at the S Group, a job for some time at least*. A professional wondered which would be the more impressive feat: to draw a full house at an event at a huge indoor arena or that these 30 young people at the Ansio courses *would actually get, like, something out of it*. The courses also ask for feedback. Information and counselling services also collect data on the people who use their services, what type of guidance they receive when using measures from youth services and their own methods. However, according to a professional, it is impossible to estimate how guidance has affected the people visiting the centre or what has occurred since the visit.

HOW YOUNG PEOPLE INFLUENCE THE SERVICES AND HOW THEY MAKE THEIR VOICE HEARD

Youth research and youth work have traditionally shared an interest in hearing about young people's experiences and their 'voice', as well as taking them seriously. Anu Gretschel (2011) discusses 'influence participation' in the context of youth work, which refers to empowerment of young people, the empowered subject position. Participation, on the other hand, refers to including young people in producing, conceptualising, designing and realising the services, as well as evaluating them, and influencing decision making (ibid. 9-10). How young people exert influence refers to professional's views on how much influence young people have over decisions made regarding them. In order for young people to gain influence, it is imperative to hear their voice. Questions in interviews with the professionals aimed to operationalise youth participation, agency and expertise by experience.

The perspectives of social workers on young people's methods of influencing social services varied. One thought that young people had no way to exert influence, since they could not choose their assigned worker. Another thought that a young person was able to influence *how they could move forward in life if they wanted to do so*. A third stated that young people were able to influence social services up to a point. The person went on to say that trust and openness were key factors in whether the client's experience of the service matched their needs and hopes. The person, however, also speculated that *many youngsters think that they can't have what they want, especially when it comes to money*. This refers to *the consumer society*



defining the consumption norm, i.e. choosing the right phone, clothes, etc. Still, the person thought that services provided *valuable guidance and counselling and correct information on what type of services the person needs*.

The same professional mentioned the limited nature of resources and the strictness of the framework; although social work guides young people to services for substance abuse or mental health, or TE offices, *there's the wall that we hit and the inevitable disappointment that comes with it*. Moreover, social work offices can be *scary new things for young people*, so it is *imperative to consider what would be a kind of easy environment or a place for a youngster to come to, so that the first encounter and experience would be, in a way, encouraging, and not the kind where you don't want to come back*. Another social worker says that *this [social work] is somehow so constricting and regulated from above that I don't know if anyone can influence it*. The person also suggested that clients should be included in designing online services, and stated that clients have been invited to plan group work activities.

Kouvola has introduced client panels to rehabilitative work activities and other services. In Espoo, a social worker and a deacon have led a Kipinä group aimed at young people who are not in education or employment. The group meets once a week, and in the meetings they examine a specific service or engage in more informal activities. Young people have been eager to help improve the service by developing activity ideas. The group was advertised via mail and telephone to young people who were not admitted to polytechnics or universities. Reaching these hundreds of young people had been a *huge operation* funded by the church and, in the

end, social workers could not reach even half of them. Eventually five youths joined the group, but a professional stated that they lacked commitment.

I kind of feel that, even though they had planned the activities themselves, they weren't terribly committed to them. For example, there could be a person who had showed the most interest towards the subject, then they would be absent from that session, and the rest of us would be just like, okay, what do we do now?

Despite the lack of enthusiasm, young people gave positive feedback on the group. Espoo has also hosted a Kipinä development group that made a film about using social services. Social workers from Espoo and young people from the Kipinä group watched the film. One social worker stated that the film helped them realise how their work was *dictated by social assistance*.

In the movie, they criticised how the first thing the youngsters are asked is to bring a bank statement to the meeting and that sort of stuff, [...] so it brought up a lot of things for me about how it feels like you're not meeting the young person on their level, respecting their problems or the situation, maybe that kind of things.

A professional at a TE office stated that hearing young people's voice means to *forget that you're the grownup* and allow the person to communicate their thoughts. However, it also includes clarifying *the realities* of the situation to the person: for example, it might not be wise to apply to medical school with poor grades, lack of interest in mathematical subjects, and aversion to blood. Another example the professional cited was to emphasise to the clients that

apprenticeship training requires more discipline and time management than in school, unlike most preconceived notions. On the other hand, if a young person is absolutely determined, *if they're a hundred percent sure, then you have to let them bang their head against that wall as long as they want*. The professionals associated unrealistic plans with young people, and the workers *just have to repeat the same things they need to hear over and over again*. However, professionals must sometimes implement tough love and deny negotiation.

I can tell them what to do [...], that's not a problem. That's the last resort, to lay down the law and say that there's not an option A and B. It's this right here, and we're going to do this, whether you like it or not. You have been given options to think what you want to do, and what the better choice is, but if you're not willing to do that, then I will make the choice for you. And that's all there is.

Another professional put forward the view that hearing young people's voices means to discuss their hopes, which the labour market operators should aim to match:

So many young people have a burning desire to study, but they might not have the financial resources, and there's a lot of people with learning disabilities or such and they wouldn't be caught dead in a school, but they do want to work. And now that working life in a way has changed so much and a lot of unskilled jobs are no longer there [...] so would it be possible for employment administration to influence labour market operators so that there would be jobs in the labour market which these young people could do, even the people without a specific education?

Professionals also reminded that hearing young people's voices requires collecting young people's feedback on information provided on the services, for example. A professional stated that TE services should develop new methods for listening to young people in order to avoid receiving feedback based solely on existing services, but also to hear young people's hopes for the services. At the moment, the *line workers* have limited influence, even if they hear young people's wishes or notice issues:

It doesn't matter what we, line workers, think. It just feels like things don't get passed on, so even if we grumble about things to the bosses, they may or may not grumble to people above them, but still, after the guidelines are drawn somewhere, it feels like if the ship has been redirected, then we're sailing straight to the destination without any detours.

In Espoo, a TE office worker had held office hours for young people at Vamos, and the response had been overwhelmingly positive. People at Vamos also believed that *taking social work to young people might be the way of the future, and we've got really good feedback on it and young people have actually used those services*.

According to a professional, young people may influence the services provided by Vamos *completely, because we do not offer them anything they aren't interested in*. Group activities are also conducted, placing young people first. Vamos continues to develop new methods that would allow young people to influence the services more effectively and may increase participation, which has been the subject of many studies. Vamos also had a concrete proposition to evaluate and improve the service system in place:

We've actually decided that, fuelled by our disappointment in the relationship between young people and the service system, we're going to gather them at the same table, or the goal during this autumn is to organise opportunities for dialogue between young people and, for example, representatives from social work and different authorities from TE organisation and so forth. The goal would be well facilitated discussions, which young people could attend with an open mind and also the professionals with an open mind, and we could discuss what things have been successful and what's been less successful and we could avoid the overly formal aspect which is a risk with those types of events, so that's why they have to be well planned.

Information and counselling services design their services completely for young people *within the confines of my resources and abilities*, i.e. their work focuses on hearing and listening to young people. A young person is not merely someone to whom the professional *feeds* the necessary information; instead they are *the player in the situation who guides the situation in a way by deciding which direction we're going to take*, and the professional's duty is to *navigate the situations so that young people's hopes are clarified*. The professional continued to explain that they were unable to estimate the extent to which the courses stem from young people's needs, but the courses are developed based on feedback provided by young people and their parents.

A professional of outreach youth work was clear to emphasise to young people that professionals were certainly unable to know everything but that they could find out the information

the young person was seeking and help them proceed with the issue. Complying with young people's wishes, outreach work had also commenced a weekly *men's exercise group for quiet boys*. The group later became open to both genders, again at the request of young people. During summer, a group met twice weekly, and they took young people's wishes into consideration.

Outreach youth work has cooperated with Rotary Finland, which has provided outreach youth work clients with varied leisure activities. The young people can try different activities, and if one of them develops an interest in it Rotary may provide initial funding. The objective is to encourage young people to find a leisure activity and *to get out of the house*. Outreach work also plans to organise designated groups, for example a group for young mothers that would meet six times. The group activities aim to get young people out of the house and meet other people. Again at the request of young people, outreach work has collaborated with the youth centre for Nuotta¹⁰ training. In outreach work, the focus is *not to judge* young people but to listen what they want:

We don't want to be the place that says that they have to do this and this and this, but we show what type of opportunities they do have and then we build from that. And of course they can participate in the planning, whether it's planning their lives, but more than anything, in group activities.

10 Nuotta training, developed by Finnish Youth Centres, provides individual and group-based support for young people, see <http://www.snk.fi/en/services/nuotta+training/>

HOW DO PROFESSIONALS DEFINE SOCIAL EMPOWERMENT?

The Youth Act (2006) defines social empowerment as “measures targeted at young people and geared to improve life management skills and to prevent exclusion”. The measures vary in broadness and intensity, so professionals differed in how they translated social empowerment into practical work. Social workers perceived that social empowerment and its measures included drafting the plan together with the client, possible support received elsewhere (e.g. a support person, group activities, rehabilitation contact, support networks), conversation with the client, providing guidance, working to promote change, and open communication. Another professional connected social empowerment with functional cooperation with different agents.

A professional at TE offices considered social empowerment to include work try-outs, training courses, and career counselling, as well as discussing normal daily routines. These were reportedly problematic for many young people along with being on time: *They have trouble telling the time*. Professionals also considered social empowerment to include rehabilitative work activities and previous *steering training courses* (e.g. ‘Getting your life on track’ and ‘Finding a direction for your life’) that TE services no longer provide. Young people entering TE offices today must have sufficient *life management skills*, since employment administration does not currently provide social rehabilitation. This shift has partly strengthened the division between social service providers.

We provided sweatpants and trainers and they went bowling in there [bowling alley] and the main focus was to have the client show up and

spend 5-6 hours per day, but TE services don’t consider these things to be our responsibilities any more. So these things are gone and we focus more on employment and business services and all kinds of industry-related things, so yes, those services are no longer there.

Nowadays various institutions and Kela provide rehabilitative services. Job coaches at TE offices provide young people with *personal guidance*, but the coaching focuses on job seeking. Despite this, a professional stated that young people need social rehabilitation today as much as they did before.

A professional at LAFOS was irritated by the term ‘social empowerment’. They felt that, while all their work was social empowerment in nature, the resources required to achieve real social empowerment were insufficient. Capacity in education or employment is insufficient to facilitate everyone, so *it’s not the young person’s fault if they’re alone, sitting around at home*. The public debate surrounding social empowerment reinforces the stereotype of omnipotent professionals, although most of the progress depends on young people showing initiative and responsibility.

Let’s imagine that we professionals are omnipotent, and we can just say this and that to young people and they get right on it. But we all know that they won’t do it even if you talk about something for two years non-stop, then maybe they’ll do it during the third year. So, in other words, it’s always the individual’s and young person’s own responsibility if they want to change it, if they can change their life.

Information and counselling services felt that social empowerment occurred when one *truly*



encounters young people – in other words, they placed importance on seeing and hearing the current situation of young people, as well as encouraging and motivating them. Measures for social empowerment may also include hosting workshops on housing for pupils attending general upper secondary education. These workshops would address questions young people may have on moving out of the house or moving to a school some distance away. In Vamos social empowerment is included *in everyday work in all of its forms*. This may translate into daily telephone conversations or sending young people text messages reminding them to maintain their daily routines.

We think how we can change their daily routines, so at some point they can go to school at eight, which you can't take for granted. Every person has a strength, but the question is whether anyone has time or skills to figure out with the young person what their strength could be. Our aim is to make time for just that.

All things mentioned relate to a key principle of social work: encountering the client. From the perspective of outreach youth work, imperative measures for social empowerment include *managing everyday life*, supporting young people to leave the house more often to attend group activities or to commit to appointments, and ensuring that *they're registered as jobseekers if they're not able to do anything else, so that they're connected to something, at least.*

HOW DO PROFESSIONALS INTERPRET THE PUBLIC DEBATE OVER SOCIAL EXCLUSION?

The debate in public forums and the Finnish Parliament over social exclusion has presumably touched the work of all interviewees. Consequently, it was natural to inquire how they, as the implementers of the measures planned to prevent social exclusion, interpreted the current debate. Every professional group brought up identical themes connected to the public debate.

The first theme mentioned was the normative nature of the debate over social exclusion. Professionals stated that the concept of social exclusion itself was *defined from the outside*; they saw that the debate was one-sided, generalising and stigmatising. A statement given by one young person in the media that “social welfare pays for everything” is readily generalised to represent every young person’s thoughts. Young people may not regard themselves as socially excluded, and some professionals thought that young people should be included more in the discussion. On the other hand, some professionals wondered whether being outside the norm is wrong and whether it could be a conscious *choice* made possible by modern society. Young people may have *sufficient networks and other activities besides this normative working life we know*. Many factors affect young people’s individual situations, including inter-generational impoverishment and poverty. Education structures that the person is unable to influence, such as failing to gain admission to post-compulsory education, also affect the situation.

What's going on in their life? That's a question that should be asked and answered more. What type of problems they have? What's the family situation and background? How much

guidance, counselling have they had? What are their living situations like? Have they been bullied? Every situation has just gone wrong, so to speak. They really have to struggle to escape their situations.

Professionals also emphasised that young people generally, or young people at risk of ‘social exclusion’, do not represent a homogeneous group. Professionals showed particular concern for those young people who were uneducated or unwilling or unable to gain an education: *So what’s the future like for them?* Professionals speculated that *people above* do not comprehend that the Youth Guarantee cannot save all young people, especially those in the most difficult situations, i.e. those who are incapable of work or education do not qualify as jobseekers and therefore are not included in the Youth Guarantee (see also Ervamaa 2014). While the name implies something else, the Youth Guarantee does not guarantee services to all young people equally, but only for some.

Another example of how the debate is removed from reality is connected to conditional social security:

Like for example this participatory social security discussion, I don’t know if you can get the results you want by forcing people to do things they don’t want to do. The real issue is how can we build models where it would be enjoyable for everybody involved, while simultaneously working and allowing independent problem solving?

The second theme the professionals emphasised was connected to resources allocated to preventive services and services preventing social exclusion. Services should not be viewed as *overlapping* and this type of reasoning is connected to a discussion proposing that *the whole society is responsible* for preventing social exclusion. This discussion, in turn, is connected to public debate over early intervention on one hand and the individual’s responsibility on the other. For example, in Kouvolaa, professionals viewed the relationship with the Youth Guarantee and massive drop-outs to be particularly problematic.

Every year we lose those young people who weren’t admitted anywhere. They apply the next year and the previous ones leave and some drop out. It’s a vicious cycle if we don’t have anything to offer them: There’s not enough workshop positions; people aren’t admitted to work try-outs. I think it’s good that nowadays we don’t just offer people sick leave after sick leave, because the most challenging thing is to activate young people activated after three years on sick leave. But we should also organise more activities.

The third theme in the public debate on social exclusion noted by social workers was that it was common to focus on *the negative side* of things and dismiss *the positive*. For example, the majority of young people are not at risk of social exclusion. Professionals felt that the concept of social exclusion of young people is merely a current *trend* and *broadcasting* it does not help solve the issue¹¹.

11 This referred to previous trends in youth work, including online youth work, outreach youth work and participatory youth work.

How exactly has the debate over social exclusion affected the professionals' work? Some professionals felt that some young people have a preconception that the services will have nothing to offer them, and the professionals had to work hard to deter this idea. Many professionals also thought that the Youth Guarantee had added pressure to their work. New projects and training programmes had allowed professionals to work with more *arrows in their armoury*, but these require more management. However, despite this, professionals felt that they had little to offer those in the most difficult situations:

You see, they're not like parcels you mail out, so it doesn't matter what type of structures we build: if we don't listen to young people, then it's kind of useless to build these structures.

Many professionals were unclear about the relationship between existing systems and new plans, and were forced to *stay tuned* as the situation unfolded. Many of the new measures were already in place; for example, activating young people using mandates and qualifying periods was an existing practice, and some offices required professionals to offer young people services and to use a *stick*, if necessary.

So it hasn't really become clear to us what the purpose of this participatory social security is, because we already require young people to participate in rehabilitative work activities after a certain time of receiving social allowance, and we also have all these options to reduce the amount of social allowance they receive.

One professional felt that the current atmosphere, combined with the fear of exclusion, forced young people into working life via education, and this direct route does not allow young people to make any detours that are essential to the individual find-

ing their own path in life. The professional tried to deter this way of thinking and communicate to young people that they *are allowed to search for their own path and also say that this wasn't for me and make another turn*. Young people, however, are pressured to make the right choice and continually achieve things. School, parents and young people themselves feel the pressure to not only participate, but also to succeed in everything, including leisure-time activities. Society demands a great deal from young people who worry that if they do not gain an education in a field with high employment rate, *everything's* lost.

According to a professional at Vamos, the public debate over exclusion has lowered the threshold for private companies to cooperate: *We even receive calls asking to work together with us, which is not something you would expect in a project for long-term unemployed people over the age of 50, so if I'm being totally honest with you, it's not necessarily a completely bad thing*. An outreach youth worker saw that the visibility outreach work has received due to the debate over social exclusion has been *positive*, because their activities have received additional funding. Occupational training courses offered by TE offices have received additional funding, but often this comes from private companies, so courses for young people may prove to be a lucrative business for certain professions.

THE MEANING OF EXPERTISE BY EXPERIENCE IN SOCIAL SERVICES

During recent years, expertise by experience has become prominent in adult mental health and substance abuse services, providing either peer support or trained professional training (on services provided for the disabled, see Hakala 2014). Hearing the experiences of young people at risk of social exclusion or considering utilising experts by experience with these individuals raises multifaceted and even conflicting questions. It is therefore relevant to examine how professionals view the process of selecting experts by experience.

During the interviews, discussions on expertise by experience often brought up the Kipinä groups, and one social worker stated that there should be more similar projects where young people are included in the design process. A Kipinä group in Espoo was planning to include a third counsellor, a *peer-counsellor* but scheduling conflicts prevented this venture. A professional felt that, in group activities, young people could possibly provide peer support to each other. The person also thought that, in Vamos, where all activities are conducted in groups, expertise by experience may have even more applications. With this strategy young people who have been involved in the activities longer may provide expertise by experience to new arrivals.

Another professional had asked some of their clients who had moved forward in life and *been aware of their development* if they could speak to other young people, for example on homelessness. However, these types of functions have yet to be organised, and the *next step is to arrange some kind of forums where we would discuss*

these things. A third professional emphasised the meaning of experts by experience sorted by their area of expertise – young people with experience of substance abuse and mental health rehabilitation may share their expertise. Group activities may rely on peer-to-peer support, but this is not completely unproblematic:

The idea is that people who participate [in group activities] could experience other roles than the ones they're used to: young unemployed people, socially excluded, poor. But if they're gathered into a group where they're all the same, will they get cast in different roles?

A professional at TE services understood the concept 'expertise by experience' to mean using examples to explain different things to the clients, including using the professional's own children as an example. The person also perceived career training to be considered expertise by experience groups, because in these groups young people in different situations can discuss things with each other. Another professional also mentioned career training as a possible venue for experts by experience, and they suggested that young people could visit the groups and explain *what was my path*.

I believe it really doesn't matter what us old ladies tell them, but I think when young people hear another young person telling their story, I do think that it makes a difference. They can't dismiss something as easily when it isn't coming from above or from the parents or someone – that can create a natural resistance, because it's an authority figure telling them to do something.

The third professional mentioned that during client meetings professionals receive suggestions on how to improve the services or specific activ-

ities, *but it is up to the higher-ups* to allow the information to be systematically taken up the administrative chain. According to a fourth professional, expertise by experience occurs mostly when a friend refers another person to join the services. The professional stated their surprise in the effectiveness of this word-of-mouth spread of information, and that young people who are invited for an interview are eager to attend (other professionals also mentioned this phenomenon) and the person wondered if this phenomenon could be utilised somehow.

Information and counselling services aimed to get young people *into service production*. A professional felt that information *hits the target better* if it is given by another young person. However, it has proved challenging to find young people who are willing to share their experiences. One professional reported success with expertise by experience in the Pulmakulma

online forum where young people may ask questions, but also comment and answer questions alongside experts. Some young people have participated in developing the website by adding pictures, but hopefully in the future young people will participate also by hosting blogs. Young people have been approached to be involved in the website by visiting schools, but the professional found it difficult to engage young people in a meaningful way and commit to the project even for a short time.

Vamos has provided internships for young people, and has held events designed and organised by young people, for example a *professional library event*. Young people invited people from different professional fields to be available for *lending*, where the lender could converse with the professional. Some young people may even hold some dreams of becoming a professional in social services.



Interviewee: [The whole operation] is centred on expertise by experience, because we don't have any services where we don't consult the young person in question. We're actually getting more interns this autumn, and the goal is to use them also as experts by experience.

Päivi Berg: Have you had any young people come up to you and say that they want to work here permanently?

I: Yeah, of course, a lot of them. But unfortunately it's not a possibility right now, it takes longer.

PB: But you probably give them information on how that would go?

I: Yes, of course. But I have to say that few have the patience to go through the university route; they're quite old at this stage and, in general, even upper secondary education is a burden for them.

At the moment, expertise by experience in **out-reach youth work** translates into meetings that may be organised, for example, with an expert with experience of mental health rehabilitation. The service has also planned a tour in a local school with a young person as the spokesperson, to encourage young people to continue their studies in upper secondary education.

The person said that 'it pisses me off that I still don't have a profession' and that they were willing to come by and share their own perspective. We all thought that it was actually a fantastic idea, and we will most definitely use it in the future.

All in all, professionals in social services understood expertise by experience as peer support instead of expertise that professionals could utilise in their work.

WHAT MUST CHANGE IN ORDER FOR YOUNG PEOPLE TO RECEIVE THE SERVICES THEY NEED?

The professionals described the current services, but also shared their views on what they felt should change and what should be improved either in their own area of expertise or in a broader scale for the whole service system. According to **social workers**, in order for young people to receive the service they need, changes must be made both in the service structure and in the initiative young people show – the services require more resources and must be in closer contact or even under the same roof, and young people must show more initiative.

More resources would allow more contact with the clients and shorten young people's waiting periods, as well as bring the services closer to the clients and make them more available. It should be self-evident that a request for help should be met *faster than after a month*, when the client may not remember or have the courage to come to the appointment. Young people include *inbetweeners* for whom insufficient services are available, for example supported housing. Workshop and day centres should be available for *inactive* young people, and the activities should be *actually enjoyable and something that leaves you feeling accomplished instead of bored in a different location*. According to one professional, the salary young people receive in the services should be sufficient in order to keep young people motivated.



Consequently, at the moment the services do not fully meet young people's needs:

Maybe counselling or just figuring it out together what would be the way to go, those are the things that there should be time for. Now there's Vamos, which has been good in the sense that they've had the resources to work with young people in there, and figure out their path and go over different options, and the kids can actually try them out and maybe find another direction. [...] Of course, we would be more than happy to do those things, too, if we didn't have so many clients already.

Another professional criticised the number of different services, which forced young people to travel between many different locations. Professionals should be in closer contact. The same professional also referred to Vamos and LAFOS as an example of successful integration of two services under one roof:

If you're a client with us, and also with the psychiatric clinic, LAFOS, and Vamos, that creates a real mess. Even I get confused trying to keep track of every place a young person has a client relationship with, never mind knowing who their assigned worker is in every place. It's really very complex trying to keep on top of that. Of course, it's great that we and TE offices now have online options for people who have the tools for those.

A third professional thought that young people are provided with plenty of opportunities, but that they are *apathetic*. Young people would be content *being by themselves with money coming in and rent being taken care of*, playing video games during the night and sleeping all day. The professional referred to Virpi Suutari's

renowned documentary on unemployed young people *Hilton* (2013), which portrayed the bleak everyday life of some young people very authentically, but it also showed the various reasons for these situations:

I hope that movie would be seen by decision makers, those people in the big offices, so they'd have an opportunity to understand it [unemployed young people]. I think that in Finland people live in isolated layers, so it [disadvantage] doesn't show, and people don't know what that kind of life is like, when a person is outside the so-called normal rhythm. Obviously they have their own reasons and experiences and everything that makes them settle for that kind of life or want to live like that, so there's reasons that can always be discovered if a person gets a chance to figure them out and investigate the situation.

A professional at a TE office stated that young people should be provided with *emergency services* that may suit their needs better. This is also connected with the issue mentioned above by a social worker that young people should not have to wait for an appointment for weeks on end, and should be given their initial assessment as soon as possible. Young people have trouble remembering appointments far ahead, and the next available time may be a month from the previous one. The professional would also prefer more appointments to be conducted in person instead of via telephone, because it is *easier to read* people in the same room. The services do not correspond with young people's needs because uneducated young people cannot get a job even if they would like to work. This professional also thought that mental health services were difficult to access.

Similar to the social worker, a professional at the TE office of Kouvola stated that more workshops with different activities are needed. For example, young people with an education in metalwork had very few options for workshops in this field, even though the demand was high. Workshops should introduce the open job market to young people, to *market them from the workshop to the wider world*. Education should be something in which young people can find employment. Careers that are *glamorous*, such as the media industry, provide few employment opportunities.

Vocational adult education centres have recently included training from the Young Adults' Skills Programme (NAO) that provides independent vocational education to be completed within 18 months. A professional at the TE office of Espoo stated that current services do not meet young people's needs because places in labour market training programmes and work try-outs are difficult to obtain. Kouvola also reported that young people have difficulty accessing work try-outs. NAO training programmes were not suitable for everyone, and professionals in Espoo hoped for more social rehabilitation and rehabilitative work activities:

Those NAO training programmes are for rather sharper people than, for example, my clients. I would have hoped that they would have put the money in labour market training programmes, because they allow young people access to labour market subsidy – this would help them with their finances and they don't have to keep going to social offices which in turn adds to their anxiety when they constantly have to fill out one form or another. [...] This way you could get a foot in the job market with training and such. I do wonder why they don't invest in that side

[labour market training]? I've also wondered if it's because it creates inequality, because then some people would study with the study grant and other [financial aid for students], and then other people would be in labour market training. I've been thinking about what's the big picture here, why can't we do it like this, why can't we transfer money to the employment administration and so to young people?

The professionals emphasise, however, that rehabilitative or low-threshold work activities should not underestimate young people and offer merely a place to 'hang out', which also adds to some people's social anxiety. In other words, rehabilitative activities should also be goal-oriented.

[Social services] should provide truly low-threshold activities that would not include merely bagging knick-knacks and offer something worthwhile but also with guidance so that the activity would have a goal. [...] They [young people] can't sit through some career counselling session where they have to talk in a group about something, many of them have difficulties with that. We sort-of need some kind of middle-ground in this society, and I think that it's located in social rehabilitation, and that it should provide something new. I do feel that employment administration does a lot of good, and we provide all kinds of things, if young people are able to benefit from them, and if the person is well enough we have this, that and the other to provide for them, and in those situations I just think wow, get in and here's how you get even further. But for that to happen, you have to be capable enough.

The professional cited above stated that social services should offer more *emergency* services.

A young person whose life is *all tangled up* may have *the desire and will* that should not be halted by a slow service system. Reacting to young people's needs should not be *overly complicated because of all kinds of procedures with referrals and other forms*.

Professionals working in Kouvola reminded that young people may slip through the cracks at many different points in the services. Kouvola provides young people with a guidance forum about life after basic education without attending an education institution. The forum presents young people with different options for activity, including a voluntary additional year of basic education, preparatory instruction and guidance, Kouvola Region Vocational College, general upper secondary education, OTE workshops for young people, Parik Foundation, apprenticeship training, TE offices, and outreach work. The objective of the forum is to find a place for everyone even if they discontinue with the activities at some point. At the time of the interviews, Kouvola had initiated piloting low-threshold workshops at OTE workshops for youth that aimed to reach those young people who were not reached through the existing workshops.

In Espoo, **Vamos** collaborated with the city of Espoo, as well as the third sector. A representative of TE administration visits Vamos once every two weeks, where they may make appointments for young people to meet a professional at TE offices. Vamos is also visited once every two weeks by a psychiatric nurse from Nupoli, the health services of the city of Espoo, who conducts treatment assessments and continues with any necessary treatment over at Nupoli. The A-clinic and youth station also conduct group meetings intermittently at Vamos. Vamos is visited by specialised youth workers from the

local parish, who provide counselling on housing, finances and debt management. This has proved to be an effective arrangement because some young people may have negative experiences from previous client relationships with these services.

Our attitude here [in Vamos] for this work is not the traditional 'oh well, we do this service here'; instead we attempt to get all the services young people may need under one roof. Of course, we don't succeed all the time, for example on the homeless. We have about 25 homeless youths and during less than a year we've got about half of them, like 12-13 of them, an apartment of their own, because the situation is that if you have unpaid rents and no payment plan in place, then we have real trouble setting up supported housing. You really need to make a lot of calls to find out which administrator is willing to do that right now.

Professionals at Vamos also accompany young people to social services, TE offices and the youth psychiatric clinic, and they stated that they accompany young people *anywhere they want*. According to a professional, in order for young people to receive the services they need, the services must be *easily accessible*. Social workers have so many clients that they do not have time to meet with all of them.

If social workers don't meet with clients, then who does? I think this is a good question because it's the social worker's responsibility to coordinate all the different aspects like income, well-being, housing, and if they do all that without ever meeting the young person, it can't go too smoothly. In that way, I think, we need different services and I don't even think it would have any additional costs.

The resources for psychiatric services were considered too scarce considering the demand for the services. On the other hand, Vamos also works to shine a light on young people who have been considered lost up until now:

It's possible that we're doing a huge disservice to the municipalities by introducing a lot of young people to social allowance [laughs]. [...] Youth unemployment in Espoo rose so rapidly that it must've set off some kind of alarms, most

recently when the numbers passed Vantaa's youth unemployment, it was like wow, what's going on here. It is a solid indicator and then they were like where are all those young people.

A professional at **information and counselling services** thought that social services do meet the needs of young people who are *active or extroverted*, but only a few possess these qualities and some are completely unaware of available services.





— YOUNG PEOPLE’S PERSPECTIVE ON — SOCIAL SERVICES AND ON BEING CLIENTS

This section examines the other side of the counter: the perspectives of 19 young people on their status as clients, their position in the service system, and the role different services play in their lives. This provides a unique and limited perspective, but also provides a broader view of the role of a client and young people’s status in the service system, rather than merely showing the opinions of individual interviewees.

The group of young people cannot be regarded as a clear-cut group of ‘socially excluded young people’; instead, the objective of this section is to compare the status of the interviewed young people as well as in relation to a normative concept of an ‘ideal’ young person – a straightforward, uninterrupted transition into adulthood that is supported by universal basic services. The young people interviewed for this study have experienced some transitions away from this ideal model or other types of disruptions, and have therefore experience of different social services. The common thread is that they all are clients of multiple services and most were not studying or working (they are also referred to as NEETs: Not in Education, Employment or Training). The data gathered allowed the young people to be divided into three groups based on their education, work experience and general situation in life and life history: *‘troubled’*, *‘worker-citizens in the making’* and *‘victims of recession’*.¹² This distinction illustrates clearly how young people

do not form a unified group and that their life histories, situations and needs all differ.

Young people belonging to the group named **‘troubled’** all had issues that severely hindered their participation in education or working life. These issues included homelessness, mental health problems, health issues, notable transitions in their lives, substance abuse, learning difficulties and lack of support from their families. While these problems may appear common among young people, this group struggled with a problem or entangled problems to such an extent that they are constantly preoccupied with them or they must actively attend to them in a way that prevents them from applying for education or employment.

The young people in the group called **‘worker-citizens in the making’** have been on the path of becoming worker-citizens: they have enrolled in one or several vocational programmes but discontinued their studies at some point. However, in their current situation they are interested and able to complete an education programme or secure a job.

The third group **‘victims of recession’** represents young people who are educated, motivated and have work experience, but live in an area with no jobs.

¹² This distinction was made on the basis of the data, so does not aim to nor can it accurately depict the entire service field. For example, disabled youths are not included in this study.

The three groups are flexible and form a continuum with movement between them: educated and motivated young people may face issues that prevent them transitioning into working life or their educational qualifications may become irrelevant. Most of the interviewees were considered ‘troubled’ or ‘worker-citizens in the making,’ while ‘victims of recession’ was by far the smallest group.

The next section describes the groups in more detail. In each group, we discuss the type of journey the young people have experienced, where they currently stand, where they are headed and what significance the service system has held in their lives. The study focuses mainly on client relationships of young people and their relationship to the service system, but the examination also includes consideration of young people’s close personal relationships and everyday lives. The data has been anonymised, but a conscious effort was made to highlight young people’s perspectives and opinions using the expressions they used in the interviews, which appear in italics. The researchers have contextualised and selected the quotations. Note that the young people interviewed may not categorise themselves in the groups that were selected for them.

VICTIMS OF RECESSION

This group comprised three men under 25. Each was a client at TE services and some were also clients in Kela or social services in order to receive social allowance. All three had enrolled in vocational institutions directly after basic education and obtained a qualification, some even in two programmes. One interviewee still lived at home, but the other two lived alone. Two of the interviewees still resided in their hometown while one had moved multiple times, including abroad, with his family. All the interviewees

possessed a driver’s license and two owned a car. Intoxicants were not significant in their lives.

Compared to other groups, these youths had not experienced many changes in their lives. One interviewee reported a life change when he decided to stay in Finland and live independently while the rest of his family moved abroad. Another interviewee stated that social services had provided him with motivation to look after his own health and represented a significant change in his life. Examining the life histories and current situations of the ‘victims of recession’ revealed that they required assistance from the services only during the transition to working life.

CURRENT SITUATION

Well, things that are good is that I’m still alive, that’s a big one. I’m not sick in any way and I have a roof over my head. Those are maybe the most important ones. Negatives are probably that finding work seems impossible. Well, really that means that I can’t live the life I want to live because I don’t have a job or a steady income and have to spend all my days at home.

Health, personal finances and work were the critical variables in these young people’s lives. They valued their health, and if health issues caused problems in their lives they wanted to change the situation. The men’s financial status varied from the financial struggles experienced by the person quoted above to a reasonable income. Clearly unemployment, or rather joblessness (Siisiäinen 2014), was the most significant issue affecting their quality of life, choices as well as autonomy: *Because I don’t have a job, and TE offices keep hanging those courses over my head.*

Young people in this group were satisfied with the qualification they had obtained in terms of both the actual education and that they had completed the task. One interviewee felt that choosing what to study after basic education had to be decided *so quickly that you have to choose a job or a profession [you want to do for the rest of your life]* and he felt that a family member had pressured him into the field he had chosen. After completing the first qualification in what he felt was a somewhat unsatisfactory field, he applied to another programme more in line with his own interests and completed that qualification as well. He considered completing two qualifications to be a personal accomplishment, but he felt that it was even more impressive considering the people around him: *When you see people who are the same age as me, some have dropped out and they're even worse off.*

The interviewees were satisfied with their education and their chosen field despite difficult times in one interviewee's field. According to the media and a trade union publication, unemployment, co-determination and lay-offs were prevalent in the field. The person had chosen the field at a time at which it provided plenty of jobs, but, the situation changed and the jobs disappeared when the economy hit a slump. He stated that the dilemma between employment and education was that, although a field has jobs to offer, it is important not to rush into them but complete a qualification first. However, another young person described his own situation where he had attempted to improve his status in the job market, but was hindered by health issues.

Well, you could say that [I'm] a pretty desirable professional, but on the other hand [I'm] really hard to employ [laughs]]. [...] I know that I'm well educated, I have various categories in my driving licence, and so on, but physically I'm not able to do a lot of things.



On completion of their education, the ‘victims of recession’ had only been offered work try-outs, and none had received a permanent position corresponding to their education. One youth had a strong and coherent professional identity, but the others had perhaps not fully formed their own professional identities which may have been due to histories of short-term employment in different fields. Each member of this group was willing to work with different jobs, but like other jobseekers, some options were more appealing than others.

I just feel like I'm bouncing from one profession to another. In my head, I constantly just say to myself that I want this, I want to do that, I just don't know. [...] I'm really open to anything, I could work in a shop, I could work in a garage, but I really don't want to work in construction, it's really, or it's like the last thing I would do. The last resort, but other than that I'm pretty much willing to do anything.

Competition was fierce for jobs that did not require any specific education and the young people may have considered to be heavy work: *I did apply for that [a job that required no education] but I didn't get it.* The interviewees applied for jobs that did not correspond with their education, but particularly the young people living in Kouvola were aware of the limitations in their town. One young person had also checked out the employment opportunities in his neighbouring municipalities, but jobs in his field started so early in the morning that he could not arrive on time using public transportation. And buying a car would have been an investment beyond his means at the time of the interview.

I do look, even though it's just masochism, at jobs that are available [in another town] the rea-

lity is: how could I possibly get there. [...] It's impossible to leave here and try to get there by eight and they call you to say that you can stay home, because they already have people working here.

Applying to another education institution is one option for moving forward. Nevertheless, retraining is not always a viable option, for example, in the case of the young person who had already acquired two qualifications. Another interviewee spoke about a similar instance: *I've heard of people finishing one qualification, being unemployed, finishing another qualification, and staying unemployed.*

It is reasonable for an educated young person to hope to find employment, and it is equally understandable that finding motivation for studying may prove difficult at times.

You can study at any age, but right now I'll pass, thank you. Now it's high time to get a job at my age [over twenty] and I haven't accomplished anything like that. Right now I'm slowly moving on up, but I can't seem to get into the professions I'm interested in, at the moment I would prefer to work than study.

The person with two qualifications did consider pursuing yet another vocational qualification or obtaining a hygiene proficiency certificate and an alcohol passport in the hope of improving his position in the labour market. One interviewee had held a work training position for three months at the time of the interview. He enjoyed the training which provided him with extra remuneration on top of the basic unemployment allowance, and he was able to continue in that position for the next three months. The person was also interested in work apprentice-

ship, but he had not been offered such a position at that time. He also thought that if there were no jobs available *you could always get another qualification*. However, acquiring another qualification is not always simple, because positions in education institutions are available under the same competitive conditions as job openings: *One year they accepted fifteen people from over a hundred applicants*. The person also reminded that a new qualification is not as valuable if it is not in a field that provides jobs in their hometown: *Let's say you apply to a programme for a convention stager, well, Kouvola holds conventions once a year, so you'd be employed only then*. This illustrates how structural issues drive young people into a corner from where they must escape using their own skills.

SERVICE ENCOUNTERS

These young people were clients in TE offices, social offices and Kela. The young people interviewed were not unanimous in their opinions on combining the services under one roof. Two preferred separating the services, because they had become accustomed to the existing system and suggested that, if the services were combined, *you'd get all confused*, as one person expressed it. A third interviewee thought that it was *pretty annoying to run from one service to another* and that it could prove effective if Kela, social services and TE offices were located under the same roof.

These young people were generally satisfied with the services and thought that lowering the threshold was not a priority for them. Young people had discovered their own preferred methods to access the services. One stated that online services catered to his needs and he visits the service locations only *when I have a problem*. Another preferred to visit Kela without an appointment because he stated that the appointments are often fully booked.

The most critical person was a person with education that perhaps allowed him to view the service structure and businesses of Kouvola from a more analytical perspective. He felt that welfare services provided by Kouvola were quite slow, which he guessed was simply the result of layoffs: *They gave the boot to a lot of people*. He also hoped for more consideration for locality in national services and more human touch.

Positive comments

This group experienced very few difficulties accessing the services they required. At the beginning, some may have experienced difficulties filling out forms correctly, but the repetitive nature of forms had created a sense of routine and a trust that working with other offices would not pose difficulties if they followed their instructions.

At first, because I didn't know anything, they showed me what I should fill out and when there wasn't anyone there I had to call them [people at TE offices] every hour to figure out how to fill out this and that, what to write here and do you have to put something there? But once you get the hang of things, there's no problem, and especially with Kela, because they have that auto-fill in their selection. [...] Probably they have something like it here [in TE offices] so you can just press a button and see that 'oh, I have to go there now'. So yeah, it's pretty easy.

One interviewee, who also had experience of the social offices, found their services satisfactory. He preferred to mail physical forms and *that's really the extent of the contact*. Services that may be preferable to access from home are often repeated routine matters, but the interviewee thought that if the routines changed, they would have to be learned in person in the office.

Services involving face-to-face contact remained relevant in these young people's lives. They enjoyed talking with TE office workers and catching up. One interviewee considered two LAFOS workers as his *confidantes* and he communicated with them as often as he needed. One person valued communicating with a *familiar face* and hoped to continue in this relationship, and thought that having a relationship with the worker lowered the threshold for communication. However, another person accepted the fact that TE office workers were not always the same ones, because they could obtain his files and results of previous appointments on their computers.

The young people generally felt that they received the services they needed from TE offices, which were delivered smoothly and with

expertise. These young people were also satisfied with some of the work try-out positions they were offered. When asked about their possibilities for influencing the services, one person stated that *we're pretty much always on the same page when we're talking about something [with a social service professional]*. These young people obtained appointments as necessary, either when a professional arranged one or young people wished to discuss a suitable job offer.

Negative comments

Young people in this group had not experienced any significant difficulties in the services they frequented, but had some critical comments about methods of service and changes made to the services. One interviewee felt that the services provided by TE offices had become more difficult to access during his relationship with the offices, and was apprehensive about whether he had learnt the correct procedure. He thought that the offices' phone numbers changed so often that he had to check them online, and appointments had to be arranged in advance, although he would have rather waited for a turn in person. He attempted to access online services, but he was uncertain whether the messages reached the professionals and whether his information was up to date. Another interviewee preferred to visit Kela in person or call them rather than use their online services, even though queues for service were long hence *the wait would take some time* in the office. The person also remarked how he thought that TE office's website was poorly designed for easy accessibility.

Being heard and affecting decision making

TE offices and LAFOS aspired to find employment for young people or improve their desirability as job candidates. Once young people committed to working with the offices they were eligible for social allowance. TE offices in particular obligated the professionals and the young people to commit to strict rules that limited client relationships and the young people's decision making powers. Young people reported that they were unsure how they could services, especially if they had no other services to compare them with.

However, most young people felt they were able to influence the services somewhat, although influencing was limited by *standards*. According to one young person who transferred from TE offices into LAFOS, TE offices suggest different *jobs*, assess the situation and assign another appointment, but in LAFOS, professionals devote more time to each client and provide *more personalised service*. The person continued that if LAFOS was not able to provide employment, they provided courses on job seeking, mature education as well as *these work trainee positions all over the place from here and there, which might be available* instead. Young people had some autonomy about returning to TE offices from LAFOS and in choosing the activity they preferred. For example, some work trainee positions may be located so far away that the interviewee declined the position, and he was not forced to accept the position.

It may be concluded that social services respected the authority and voice of young people, but there were some circumstances beyond the influence of the young people or the professionals. Young people must compete for employ-

ment opportunities or education places alone, and structural factors limited their possibilities for these positions. Opting for additional education did not guarantee a place in an education institution, nor did two qualifications guarantee employment.

Courses and activities provided by TE offices aimed to improve the chances of young people finding a job, yet one interviewee spoke long and critically about his experience of the training TE offices provided after a certain period of unemployment. Although he thought that TE offices provided a variety of training opportunities, they were mandatory and during a long period of unemployment the range became less. TE offices had registered him twice to a course with the same content: creating and updating a CV. The person was interested in the course the first time, but the second time was just frustrating, *taking your medicine and kind-of just like 'let's review,' 'let's review,' 'let's review'*. He stated that other participants agreed with him, and that updating a CV was a source of frustration if there was nothing to add to it: *You could use that time for more useful things like actually finding a job*. The interviewee thought that the courses represented the manifestation of a larger phenomenon: TE office workers do not have the best interest of the client at heart, but instead they are under obligation to register them to different courses, because shuffling people *from one paper to another* looks better in the unemployment figures.

The young man cited above hoped to find a job and felt that TE offices would make this a priority. Only *if you honestly can't find a job, then you should all start to figure out how to move forward*. He felt categorised in a certain way and, rather than providing him with suitable

activities, these were the same *for everyone in the same category*. The person had attended two work apprenticeships, and it was a great source of frustration that they had not improved his efforts to find employment. TE offices could only provide him with the label of being unemployed even though he would have wished to be something else. He also criticised businesses that, according to him, took advantage of the unfortunate situation of the unemployed. He felt that businesses employed people through TE offices for a trainee position, which means that they hire young people to work full-time for free. The person reported that, after the traineeship, he had inquired about a permanent position; although the company was under-staffed, they were not prepared to pay for an employee and would have continued the contract only as an unpaid trainee. Moreover, the person did not know anyone who had been offered *real* work with the same employer.

I thought to myself 'no thank you' I don't intend to work for free, because they only pay as much as the unemployment benefit. So it's the same to sit at home than it is to work. You should at least get an increase to your unemployment benefit if you worked somewhere. [...] And now

employers' attitudes are just 'let's get someone cheap' like for example when I was in lower secondary school I worked eight-hour days for [another employer] for free, to be honest.

Voices in the public debate and in social services have suggested that young people should consider becoming entrepreneurs or self-employed. A young person, who had received this advice stated that these options did not seem realistic because becoming an entrepreneur required capital and existing networks.

This group of young people did not receive any meaningful guidance from the service system. TE offices had steered one interviewee to Kela in order to apply for unemployment benefits and he had not required any additional assistance. Another had been steered to LAFOS and thought that *that was the last thing they had to offer*. For a third interviewee, TE offices had considered his options for working abroad. The option sparked his interest and he had *decided that because there's no-one here to tell me what to do, I should do what I want*. One interviewee had been steered into specialised health care services.



The interviewees stated that TE offices had not shown interest in their opinions on the services. The courses organised by other service providers did collect feedback, but only on *what we had learned and that sort of stuff, what we'd done, but no, no-one's asked our opinions*. One interviewee had discussed *mind-numbing* CV courses with different social workers, but *once it's decided, that's the way it goes*. Conversely, one interviewee had been complimented on his good attitude by a professional, which improved his self-image.

SUPPORT OUTSIDE THE SERVICES

All the interviewees received intermittent financial support from their families if they had requested it. In the Kouvola area, many interviewees had friends who were in similar situations due to poor job prospects. One interviewee had attended courses with his acquaintances and they had *laughed about* the courses. Another interviewee had advised his friends to seize some opportunities the services provided so that *they wouldn't get denied unemployment benefits*. He had never been denied unemployment allowance, nor did he wish to be, but the threat of denial was a strong motivator.

One interviewee estimated that half of the people who had attended the latest course he had participated had since become employed, but some jobs did not correspond with their training. The interviewee spent his days at home alone. He had moved to the area because of a relationship that had ended. The move had also been influenced by social relationships from which he had wished to escape. The man was social, yet he had decided to *be more careful picking friends to hang out with* which resulted in him lacking local friends at the moment.

WHAT DOES THE FUTURE HOLD?

What can the service system provide?

Young people interviewed did not have any specific wishes for social services, since they had mainly received good basic care and one interviewee had received sufficient guidance in proceeding with his health problems. One interviewee wished that TE offices would display their opening hours and services with exterior signs as well as make their services more accessible *with reasonable hours*. The person thought the services were overly bureaucratic, which was manifested in his suggestion to change the name of 'TE offices' back to employment office *instead of this silly 'employment and economic development offices'*.

Dreams and the ideal life

The interviewees dreamed of finding employment in their chosen field, which was also included in their vision for ideal life. The dream was to *honestly, make money; find a permanent position in a nice job* nearby; or *get the opportunity to work*. Most importantly, their dreams were to take care of themselves, provide for themselves *and others if that were the case*. One person seemed to hold solving his health problems as the key to untangling everything else in his life and opening up new opportunities.

WORKER-CITIZENS IN THE MAKING

Nine interviewees aged 18-29 were included in the group ‘worker-citizens in the making’; six were women and three were men. These young people, living in the Espoo and Kouvola areas, were clients in TE offices and Kela, some received social allowance, and some also worked with outreach youth work or Vamos. Most had been or were actively treated by a psychologist or a psychiatrist. One had also experience in detoxification services and substance abuse rehabilitation. Many in this group had worked with a school counsellor, school psychologist and, later, a guidance counsellor at a vocational institution.

This group had thrived in primary education, but had little success in lower-secondary education for various reasons. Most had fallen behind a year and had subsequently attended a voluntary year of basic education and significantly raised their grade average. Every person in this group had commenced with one or several vocational education programmes directly after completing basic education. Two had obtained vocational qualifications and one was in the process of obtaining one. Only one young person was employed while many had participated in part-time work or temporary jobs in the past.

Nearly every person in the group was in a relationship or married. Some of their partners were employed while others were unemployed. Three of the interviewees had children. Four lived in their childhood homes, two were homeless and the rest lived alone or with their partner. Most interviewees had a driving license and a car. At the time of the interviews, substance use was part of only one interviewee’s life. Some had experienced or struggled with drug use (mar-

ijuana, ecstasy, pills, subutex). Only one had required professional help in abstaining from substance use.

The group’s most significant choices, as well as positive or negative changes in their lives, included their parents’ divorce, death of a parent, birth of their own child, leaving an abusive childhood home, being left by their partner, gaining a trusted friend, and receiving additional rehabilitation treatment after detoxification. Only two had experienced a healthy and problem-free childhood.

Unlike the ‘victims of recession’ group, these young people had received help already during lower-secondary education, in the form of foster families, reception homes, psychiatrists, school health care, social services or support persons. One interviewee had begun her relationship with welfare services after she ran away from home as a teenager. She *got involved with social workers* also because of a teenage pregnancy, which involved both monitoring and assistance in acquiring baby equipment.

This group of young people had not experienced as much childhood and adolescence intervention from an authority as the young people in the ‘troubled’ group. Some felt that the number of organisations offering support was overwhelming. The next passage illustrates well how people with good intentions may become a burden, and that young people must exercise their own activity and skill to relieve the situation.

I had that psychiatrist, and then the school nurse or counsellor, and then I had a support person, and then I don’t know, maybe there was one more, but anyway, there were a lot of



them. Then I saw them all the time and I just had to repeat the same stories over and over and I couldn't keep track of who I'd told what. And finally I just had to say that it had to stop, I can't tell these things to so many people.

Most of this group had attended a voluntary additional year of basic education in order to improve their GPAs or attended general upper-secondary education, but discontinued their studies because they *didn't have what it takes to study*. Those who had discontinued their vocational education did so for various reasons, including mental health problems. Looking back, some wondered if they *just should've pulled myself together, but I just couldn't*. Mental health problems affect people in different ways, so while one young person had discontinued their studies even after speaking about their problems with a doctor, another was able to finish their vocational qualification because they felt that they had received sufficient support with their mental health problems.

The group reported many things influencing their decision to discontinue studying, including the relationships they had in school. One person stated that they were shocked after relocating for their studies and discovering that their expectations of new, *smart* school friends were shattered when they discovered that most of their new school mates used substances recreationally, mostly marijuana. This person had limited contact with these people and consequently may have distanced themselves from their studies. Staying in school was mainly influenced by peer relationships as well as the amount of support received from home: people discontinued their studies more when they were not supported by their families or felt homesick after a move to another city.

Discontinuing studies was also caused by the feeling of choosing a wrong field of study. One young person had been told by adults that they were in the wrong field after instances of lateness or unsuccessful work try-outs. Some young people had discovered that they were in the wrong field during an internship because they did not enjoy the work or wish to continue with that line of work. One person said that assessing the situation now they felt should have *finished the whole thing so I would've got a qualification*, especially after the person understood how they may could have applied the education, but continuing with their studies seemed impossible at the time due to mental health problems.

Although the young people had decided to discontinue their studies, they often found themselves *not in studying, not working*, but some later regretted the decision and felt embarrassed about their situation. As an illustration, one interviewee had reapplied to a vocational institution to finish their qualification, but they applied to a completely different institution because they were embarrassed to return to the one where they had dropped out of two previous education programmes. This also illustrates how some youths had discontinued multiple programmes in order to find a suitable field for themselves.

Some of the young people had attended multiple courses. One had attended courses through TE offices, attended vocational education which they later discontinued, finished another qualification without direct vocational application, and was currently working with Vamos. During their time at the vocational institution, the person discussed discontinuing their studies with a school counsellor due to difficulties they experienced in on-the-job learning, because

they had difficulties adjusting to working life and the issue occupied the person's mind even in their leisure time. These issues seemed to be still relevant even at the time of the interview, and the person was trying to find a resolution to them because they prevented making long-term plans. Another young person had been guided to outreach youth work services after discontinuing studies at a vocational institution after two years of studying.

Most of the young people had experience in fields and jobs that did not require formal education. One person had obtained temporary jobs, but it proved problematic because the jobs were short-term and unpredictable in nature: *It wasn't for me, waking up really early every morning just to wait and see if you're working that day.*

CURRENT SITUATION

Two young people had finished vocational training, and had worked in their chosen field for several years. Both wanted to change fields and study something else. Another young person had used stimulants in order to improve their work performance, but in the end *the work took second place* to a substance abuse problem, and the person decided to apply to a job only after getting clean. The following citation by the person illustrates perfectly how work always comes second for a drug abuser or a recovering drug abuser albeit for different reasons.

Most people who become marginalised have some kind of substance abuse problem that takes precedence [in their lives]. If they can't shake that problem, they really don't want to work, because working and money is so secondary when a person starts to care about themselves and about their health. I fought hard to get

out of maintenance treatment, because I realised that the people I was hanging out with there were even worse than the friends I had before. They even call it hospice care.

One interviewee stated that discontinuing their studies represented a type of time-out – he *thought about things for six months* and then decided to move abroad to work, away from the racism prevalent in Finland. At the time of the interview, the person was interested in studying or working. Some young people had various options without a clear vision of their own interests: *We'll see what life has in store for me.*

This sentiment was shared by the only person in the group currently in education. The education programme had been recommended to the person by their guidance counsellor and the person had started studying directly after basic education, but the field did not feel right. People must decide what they want to study *when they're so young* and because the interviewee was not able to make a decision, they *just randomly chose one* institution in their home town. After a parent passed away, the person halted their studies for a while, but did not wish to discontinue their studies because of new legislation that stipulated that it was obligatory to attend adult vocational education if a person chose to change fields. However, the interviewee had a positive view of education, and had discussed the option of post-compulsory education with their guidance counsellor.

In conclusion, most young people in this group intended and wanted to return to their studies or join the labour force. Some were receiving treatment for their mental health problems, yet at the time of the interview they were relatively healthy and able to participate in rehabilitative

work activities or were hoping to attend new training. One person had been involved with child protection services after giving birth. The person's family had been directed into their services by the maternity and child clinic after which they had received child care assistance through social services, and were in the process of finding a support family. Despite the family's initial apprehensions, the child protection services had provided crucial support with their child and encouraged them to seek psychiatric care. Every parent in the group utilised day care services, which were particularly important for those parents who had mental health and coping difficulties.

That's the main thing, I think, that my child is happy and well. When you're in a place where you're not able to provide everything they need every day, food and such, that there might be days when you might even forget or you're so tired that somehow you can't.

At the time of the interview, things that were positive in the interviewees' lives included family support, a committed relationship, friends, home, health, a functioning support network, and rehabilitative work activities. Many felt that their lives were happy. One interviewee stated that they had goals and were *moving forward in life*. Another interviewee thought that they were doing well even though someone in their situation – homeless with little money, debts, no parents or friends – might be *slashing their wrists and go out drinking every night*.

Things that the interviewees mentioned as negative things in their lives included homelessness, constant stress, lack of money for hobbies, health concerns, relationship issues, waiting for school to start, as well as youthful indiscretions

that they had not resolved with authorities and still received letters about. In addition, unemployment consumed their thoughts: *Money is something I think about every day.*

SERVICE ENCOUNTERS

Some interviewees were familiar with **social services** from their own childhood or when they were expecting a child of their own. They had been provided with a variety of services in various situations in their lives including income allowance and other financial benefits, help with questions concerning job seeking and education, financial assistance for a hobby, and a personal support person. Young people had mainly positive experiences of social workers: they were *nice*, easy-going and they had provided information and counselling on education, for example.

One person, however, stated that they were relieved that Kela was about to manage their financial matters instead of social services. While the person was familiar with income support application and stated that they had no difficulties in working with the services, the person was not versed in online services and had difficulties with them. The person wanted to file their papers in person and work with their *own social worker*, their assigned *own person* particularly if the alternative would be to communicate a matter in writing when it could be delivered to *just anyone*. Again, young people appreciated working with a familiar social worker. This person also expressed that they were honoured that their social worker had suggested them for this interview study.

Social workers seemed to make appointments as often as young people needed them, which is illustrated by a young person who had returned to Finland, so had met often with their assigned

worker in recent months in order to *put things in order*. The person was unable to study full-time because, according to them, the person had been *careless* and had debt issues, which they wished to pay off rapidly. The person's social worker had suggested an apprenticeship training, which the client thought would be an interesting, new opportunity. At the same time the person was about to start working with Vamos and possibly attend a workshop.

Social services also proved to be flexible for another young person, who needed a support person for family reasons although she was not officially entitled to it. According to the interviewee, support persons are usually reserved exclusively for child protection service clients, and the need for a support person is reviewed every six months. The young person's support person therefore varied according to their assigned worker; however, every time the support person changed, they tested the person's suitability *because you can't just decide that you and that person work together from now on and that's it*. If the young person wished, they could be allocated a different support person.

Depending on the programme, TE offices require different levels of activity from young people, which may be observed in the interactions between clients and the professionals. One interviewee described the interactions in TE offices as providing guidance and information, but instead of forcing people to participate the person said that the professionals said: *Apply there if you're interested*. Another young person shared similar experiences and stated that when they were in substitute treatment, social workers *let me be and just registered me again [as a jobseeker]*. When the person expressed renewed interest in the services and finding work their

assigned worker had *jumped into action and because of that I started getting somewhere again*. After the initial assistance, the person had shown assertiveness, because *I do know how to apply for a job*.

One young person's experiences with TE offices had been more mixed when they had attended a work try-out. TE office workers had questioned the person's abilities to function in a working environment because of their mental health issues:

[W]hen I tried to explain my background and stuff they just said that everyone has their history but people had to endure. Then in my final review they said to my face that they had to give me the lowest marks just because they had to compare my performance to a regular professional with an education. I just said that how can you do this, because nobody had trained me or showed me how to do things, but yet you expect me to know how to do everything, and then on the last day tell me off [...] when I've had enough trouble just getting to the point where I'm able to work.

While the person had been on a sick leave for a significant period before the work try-out and not fully capable for work, according to the regulations of work try-outs the person was classified as a regular professional. TE offices disagreed with this decision, but they were unsure if there was another type of classification that could be applied to the person. These types of uncertainties had continued during the work try-out due to a work-related accident. The young person had sustained an injury on their hand while moving a heavy load according to the employer's instructions, which left the person in a cast for three weeks. Neither the

employer or TE offices had known the procedure in that type of situation, nor who should be liable for the medical costs. However, the young person in question praised a TE office worker who *contacted me right away and took care of everything, and even though they didn't know how to handle it they started handling everything straight away.*

This story illustrates the unclear position in which young people find themselves and inflexible definitions that may not apply directly to every person and describe their situations. Psychiatric care had initiated a transfer for the young person in question to a supported employment programme of TE offices, because the personnel thought that the professionals at TE offices would be able to *counsel and help them better* and through the transfer the person would be able to receive a health examination. Despite all the upheaval, the young person was satisfied with the service received at TE offices:

TE offices worked really well for me, because I had that wonderful assigned worker [...] I can always contact them and they always call back. We really do have a good relationship, so it's actually nice to call them and visit and just to know that I can get help with anything from them.

Young people had been directed by different authorities to the services examined in this study. Some had been instructed by social offices to work with LAFOS on receiving social allowance after moving away from home. Others had started working with Vamos through a housing allowance course organised by Sininauhasäätiö¹³ ['Blue Ribbon Foundation'] to which

they had been directed by social offices. Vamos and LAFOS encouraged young people to pursue education, which was common practice across all social services, and while the services could not mandate this type of behaviour from the young people they did feel pressure to move forward in their lives.

One young person had considered applying for education but, because they doubted their ability to endure the pressures of studying and did not want to *take a place from another student*, they came to Vamos. This person was aware of the goal-oriented nature of Vamos groups and that they recommended that young people *get moving in some direction within six months*. However, at the time of the interview, the person had no clear vision of their future, even in this goal-oriented environment. As a client at LAFOS, the young person had to negotiate between different obligations and their own abilities. The person had discontinued their studies in vocational education in the past, but with encouragement from LAFOS, they had applied to an institution that had not previously accepted the person. This decision to apply for an educational programme had stemmed directly from their fear of being actually accepted. On the day of the interview the young person had been informed that they had been accepted to the programme, and they were anxious about attending school:

I've honestly dropped out so many times, because I just don't have what it takes to be in school. And now when they all keep nagging me to apply and go to the entrance exam if I qualify, and it's kind-of overwhelming to decide what to do. Like now, for example, I got the notification

13 A Christian foundation working with substance abusers providing housing and support services.

yesterday that I got in to the school, [my] head gets kind-of messed up trying to figure out what to do – do I go or not.

The interviewee had applied to this particular programme in the past, and graduating with this qualification would have meant working in their dream job. Yet the person was concerned that participation in education *wouldn't work out [...] that's why I'm working now, because I dropped out because it's just so horrible sit still for hours on end.* On the other hand, the person thought that they would regret it if they dismissed this opportunity. They had discussed the issue with their therapist, partner and parent, and was about to bring it up with their LAFOS worker. The interviewee wanted to obtain an apprenticeship training position, but LAFOS had communicated that those positions were highly coveted; the interviewee had experienced this first-hand after contacting potential professionals in the area in vain during the previous year.

Many young people discussed how unemployment and just *lying about* affected their mental wellbeing and some were considering seeking mental health treatment. One youth had received psychological treatment for their panic attacks and wondered if they should seek treatment again, because they were doing worse after a change in their situation in life, particularly due to unemployment.

Positive comments

Some in this group had been involved in long-term client relationships and may have known their assigned workers well if they had worked together with the same person for a long time. The relationship was more productive if the worker knew the client and was familiar with

their background. According to a young person who visited LAFOS monthly, client relationships *were nice enough*, matters were always resolved and *they usually just check if they have time for me, that there's no line of people waiting for their appointments and then we can just talk about everything [laughs].*

Many of the young people stated that they chatted with the professionals and discussed their future plans and opportunities. The workers steered young people within the service system and they discussed together how to proceed, how to navigate the services and where to send all the applications. Depending on the service, these conversations included reminders of the obligations and goals for the young people: *I still have to apply for schools because I'm under 25.*

Some young people thought that their assigned worker at TE offices or outreach youth work was *wonderful*. Young people considered outreach youth work offices to be a *safe haven* and their case worker to be someone they called many times to *vent* about feeling overwhelmed. Young people appreciated that someone cared about them, was accessible, listened to them and helped them.

[Outreach youth workers] are there for you mentally and they give their all, you know, to help us, so yeah, this is a good place to be. I just don't know if there are other places like this around Finland, like, these are really nice, you can get so much help in here like when you don't know what to do with yourself or whatever, you can come here and get an idea of where to go, like, you know not all psychologists or people like that can help, so this is also good for that.



Those people who did not require meetings attended LAFOS and other services only when a professional asked them to visit. Similarly, people felt that Kela provided an effective online service, and *if there's something going on, then you just call them up, there's no need to go there*. Income support applications can be mailed and people developed a routine for doing this after some time.

Negative comments

Young people in this group visited more services and more frequently than those in the previous group, so more difficulties were experienced. Two interviewees thought that the services would be more accessible if they were *under the same roof or closer together, at least, because you go there to take care of the same things*. The young people had different ways of using services of different offices, for example they preferred to visit social offices in person but preferred to call TE offices. However, they criticised the current telephone services because they felt it was impossible to get through to a professional. As an illustration, they thought that an hour-long waiting time for social offices was *ridiculously* long; social workers were inaccessible via phone and they did not inform their vacation schedule in advance. One interviewee had struggled to find the LAFOS office.

While the young people reported that having a familiar assigned worker helped in using the services, they thought that it was problematic when their social worker seemed to be different *every single time*. Clients often did not know who their assigned worker would be ahead of time, or could not *get used to* the worker they had been assigned. One young person stated that they *didn't care anymore* that they had to explain the same things repeatedly to different

professionals. The statement illustrates a mild frustration, but also that they could not exert any influence over the lack of regular social workers.

While many young people felt that attending services had a low threshold, one interviewee cited many difficulties they had experienced. The person had not been informed by TE offices about services on supported employment; their psychiatrist had provided the information. They thought that TE offices *don't promote their services*, although it would be imperative that young people were aware of their services, and the person knew many people who were unable to apply for work independently. This person was accepted onto a supported employment programme after a psychiatric nurse called TE offices and requested a transfer for the interviewee, because they were unable to *seek and get things done all by themselves*. The same psychiatric nurse was present at the appointments at TE offices in which the interviewee renewed their registration for jobseeker status, usually monthly. The interviewee had been laid off from a temporary job in social work and received earnings-adjusted unemployment allowance. After securing a position in a work try-out the person had begun receiving nine euros per day on top of the allowance. The person was unaware that the work try-out was considered as unemployment and was disappointed by this. In addition, the person had received negative feedback from the work try-out, which depressed the person further.

It just felt like the nine euros was all for nothing. I thought that it would be like a place that would knock the cobwebs out of my head and get me back into the working life mentality, so yeah, that didn't really pan out like that.

Young people are able to access their own files on the 'CV-net' online service. One interviewee thought that one worker had vaguely explained their history in maintenance treatment. Although the file mentioned the person's work history, they were afraid that people that read the description would think that they were *a lost cause* who would be unable to work and was about to request changes to the description. Employers, however, cannot access these files, so apparently the person was worried that changes to their workers could affect the quality of the service negatively.

Being heard and affecting decision making

One person stated that people at the services *were pretty good at listening to people, but sometimes it feels like you have to spell things out for them*, which was a common sentiment among the young people. Service workers listen

to young people, and they are able to affect the decision-making process, and services do not dismiss young people's decisions. For example, support persons are there to support young people and work according to the wishes of young people and make mutual decisions. For their part, young people were required to participate actively in order to achieve their goals. Young people could make progress if they were in control of their problems, considered themselves as people who *can ask for help if you need it*, were curious, and *took initiative* in seeking information. Access to many services, however, cannot be requested by young people, and professionals were crucial in order for young people to obtain information about all the different services available. For example, if a client wanted support in everyday chores and child care, social work should make these dreams a reality by providing a family counsellor and a support family.



While financial support was granted depending on the individual case, young people sometimes were financially compromised when automatic deductions or limitations were applied. One young person wondered how they must remember to report all temporary work in which they were involved, because otherwise it affected the amount of social allowance they received. Living with an unemployed partner also adversely affected the amount of social allowance they received. One interviewee felt that this was illogical, but they could not influence these decisions. Some structural limitations prevented young people from moving in the direction they wished. Some people who had completed a tertiary education and were unable to work in that field experienced difficulties in gaining education because of their previous degree. One interviewee stated that TE office workers were attempting to find a solution to this problem.

Being heard includes the social worker being willing to listen to young people, but also what young people are willing to discuss. One young person told of their first encounter with a social worker and how they doubted *if that person could do anything, would they know anything about the labour market or my profession*, and thought about not returning. Fortunately, the second appointment had been more successful and during the interview the person stated that they were *chummy* with the worker. The young person's outlook on life had improved because of time spent abroad and conversing with their social worker.

The interviewee had shown initiative in acquiring an apartment: they *had to harass them everywhere and call and message them and e-mail them* before they could get an interview with the Finnish Youth Housing Association. The

association then agreed that the person should be granted supported housing. The person had filled out two applications for supported housing services together with their social worker in the past, because the first application was rejected. They had also discussed that the young person may benefit from attending a workshop, and they had applied for Vamos. Although the queue for housing may be as long as six months according to the social worker, and the interviewee was anxious for an apartment, the young person was satisfied with the service they had received and did not have any suggestions for improvement: *There's a lot of services and opportunities so I think they're all right.*

Young people also enjoyed having control over their lives and knowing how to act, particularly those who felt that their parents did not lend much support: *Because knowing how to do some stuff but still getting to talk things through with someone while you're getting things taken care of, it just makes you feel better inside.*

Young people who are inexperienced in working with the service system may experience more difficulties in expressing their wishes or assessing the quality of quality accurately; in contrast, young people who were more experienced at using different services saw that there were different methods of working in different services. For example, one young person with a history of substance use compared social work and health services and felt that social work helped the person more and did not stigmatise them like health services did. Being labelled a substance abuser affected negatively how the person was treated in the health services; when the person requested medical assistance for their sleeping problems they were denied it: *It's just about getting a person to sleep and work.* One

young person had similar experiences after sharing openly their history with marijuana use with a social service professional. The information affected their service in that, after learning it, *older workers* do not seem to *listen to anything I say, they're just like 'once a junkie, always a junkie'*.

One interviewee compared LAFOS and outreach youth work, and stated that the two places had professionals with different attitudes towards their jobs, so they provide a different setting for sharing.

I don't think you can talk about your things so openly in LAFOS, but it's a good place, don't get me wrong, they're just different [outreach youth work and LAFOS], so I think you can't really compare them and I don't think this [outreach youth work] is so connected to LAFOS. This is more like a place where you can share a little bit more. At LAFOS, maybe, and in social offices [...] they maybe should change their attitudes to be more gentle. Like, they could be more like the people working here [outreach youth work] for example, maybe a bit happier too, to be honest, even if they're fed up with their own jobs.

The young person who was critical about employment services thought that their possibility to affect the services was poor at TE offices and LAFOS, but saw a difference between the services. At LAFOS users could *seemingly* affect the services, while at TE offices there was no way to affect them at all. While social service system workers attempted to place and steer young people in the right place, TE services also have different internal programmes in which to place young people. Although TE offices have implemented a new programme system in order to better serve young people, young people are

caught in a situation where people try to mould them into service system clients. One interviewee had been transferred from programme number three of TE offices into LAFOS where *people are shipped off to when they can't make it anywhere else*, but the workers *sent* the person back to the third programme, because people at LAFOS *said that I'm in a situation where they can't help me move in any direction*. At the time of the interview, the person was a client at Vamos.

However, another interviewee considered themselves an example of a successful transfer and was happy with their latest assigned worker at supported employment, with whom they had a *really good* working relationship. For this person, other programmes had proved unsuccessful:

I felt like when I was on a regular employment programme, I didn't really get anything out of it, like when I tried to ask for advice they always just said that 'you have to figure it out for yourself'. So it was pretty challenging.

One difference between TE offices, LAFOS, outreach youth work and Vamos is that the latter two do not enforce employment policy, so the atmosphere in those is, to quote an interviewee, *a lot more relaxed*. The person quoted had not attempted to influence services at Vamos, but thought that *you could influence them pretty well*, and compared to other services Vamos had flexible schedules and that someone could miss a meeting *for no particular reason* by notifying the professionals beforehand. Although social and employment services were allotted more resources, and were therefore able to employ more methods, the interviewee differentiated between an 'official' service and, say, Vamos by stating that they had not received any other

help from official services apart from *ideas or little things like that*. Nonetheless, both sectors could steer young people to services in which they would be able to receive help; for example LAFOS had steered the aforementioned person to a psychologist and Vamos had helped them fill out an application for housing in order to address the person's acute need for an apartment.

Although young people may have felt that they were listened to, they were not aware of what would happen to them or where they would be transferred. One young person had been given three choices of rehabilitative activity from which to choose: the Parik Foundation providing rehabilitative work, a nursery, or work with the aged. The person was able to negotiate their schedule and was happy with their choice, and began to gain *some resemblance of structure in my life* after spending *six months staring at the walls* at home. The person met with two LAFOS professionals and occasionally their therapist at LAFOS, so many people discussed and listened to the person's situation. At the beginning, the interviewee was *super nervous* about this type of arrangement, but got used to it after a few visits, when the person had become more acquainted with the professionals. The passage of the interview below illustrates clearly how the wishes of young people should correspond with mandates from authorities. Young people can discuss their hopes and fears, but social workers must steer their hopes into a more realistic direction.

Sanna Aaltonen: Well, can you leave something out or tell them 'I don't want to discuss this?'

Interviewee: I think so, yeah.

SA: Or say 'I don't want to go to any school,' can you say things like that here?

I: I have said that.

SA: How did they react?

I: Well, what do they usually say, that if you're under 25, you have an obligation to go to a school, but they can't like physically force you to go there.

LAFOS was an organisation for the long-term unemployed and young people who require more guidance and support than others. LAFOS seemed to provide some young people a place where they can talk relatively freely and explore different options available to them. The next example illustrates how every young person may lack strong hopes or interests, and they need professionals to suggest future occupations for them.

[The professional] helps with job seeking or applying for schools, and they know something about what I want, because I'm not so sure about it myself. But I do feel like in those [services] I've figured stuff out and, for example, in career counselling we assessed my situation and they really were able to clarify what I would like to do.

A professional at LAFOS had steered the person cited above into career counselling after failed efforts to find them a work try-out position or a suitable education programme. The interviewee referred to this as a joint decision and an agreement. The professional had also steered the young person into workshop activities, in which the person had participated already at seventeen, but at that time they did not *offer any courses connected to my field*, so *I wasn't really interested*. During the previous year, the interviewee had participated in activities provided by two workshops, but had finally stopped attending the workshops because they felt that they were not skilled enough for them. The young

person had attempted many different activities at the professional's suggestion, but had stopped attending many of them and had been on sick leave intermittently. The person had worked with the same social worker for many years and was happy to work with someone who knew them and their history and could pass on their information and keep them up to date. Although the young person felt they had benefitted from participating in different activities, they were somewhat embarrassed about *jumping around from place to place* and guessed that their assigned worker thought: *Is that person still here, did they come around again, why do they keep dropping out of everything?*

While young people are directed to services according to their wishes or according to mutually agreed guidelines, the services young people are offered do not necessarily correspond to their expectations. While the young people in the examples above wondered if they were suited for the services, in the next example the young person was disappointed in the rigid nature of the services and that they did not live up to the promises and sales pitches made about the rehabilitative power.

I was at a [workshop], [which was a] rehabilitation multi-function centre, really, and it was one of those places TE offices said would be a really good rehabilitation centre. It was really work, where you had to clock in and if you were two minutes late then they considered you late and during the six weeks I was there I was late four times, so altogether less than half an hour, and I was fired. So now usually when they try to give you some pamphlets or offers at TE offi-

ces, I don't trust them because the sales pitch is always better than the activity in reality.

Another example one interviewee gave of social services being more counter-productive than productive was maintenance treatment. A person was trying to escape an environment of substance use and decided to seek treatment, but instead the maintenance treatment had introduced the person to a more powerful addiction to methadone. The person thought that A clinics¹⁴ should view people as more complex beings than just troubled souls. The clinics should encourage and motivate and weaning off maintenance treatment should be included in the rehabilitation programme.

Young people may also experience periods when they wish to be clients in the services, but do not wish to participate in the activities they provide. This type of participation may be important, because it allows the services to retain some kind of contact with young people by handling routine matters. The young person in the following quote criticised TE centres and compared their activities to *factory work* that no-one can influence; however, the interviewee had assumed a passive attitude towards TE offices, which they felt were effective.

At some point I was honestly that kind of job-seeker who isn't really seeking anything or even planning anything to get somewhere from there [TE offices]. It worked for me then, so if I didn't want to do something, they wouldn't offer me anything. There was never a time when I would've been a 'diligent jobseeker' so I don't really have a clue about how the whole thing should work or how well it really works.

14 See <http://www.a-klinikka.fi/in-english>



Another young person thought about their relationship with services provided by TE offices and stated that *this unemployment is a killer, it's really horrible, like, you can hack it for the first few months but when it goes on for a year it really does tear you apart*. The person was eager to find employment or information on adult education and was happy with their assigned worker, who was good *with* providing information on job vacancies. The interviewee thought that the key to the effectiveness of the service system was the client's attitude combined with services that presented opportunities they would not be able to find on their own.

If you just really want to work and go there and say that you want to work and put some effort into it, and just sincerely want to go back into working life, then TE offices can help you.

For this person, their active attitude had truly born fruit. The person suggested that in order to receive effective service it helped to know something about it beforehand, so that the client could choose from the various options the professionals could offer.

I had one job after a long treatment period, because I read somewhere that the city has an obligation to provide a job for six months for people who've been in after-care or in prison for over two years. I took advantage of that, so I got a job for six months [...]. The worker just chose stuff from the city computer like 'do you want to be a cleaner?' No 'What do you want to do then?' Office work. 'Do you want to go here or here or here?'

One young person had visited the doctor for unrelated reasons after their parent had passed away and asked for a referral to a psychiatrist,

whom they subsequently visited a few times. The person was forced to take initiative in order to receive treatment, because a social worker had only given them *some phone numbers*. The person influenced the decision to end psychiatric treatment, but it was also affected by the professional who, at some point during the treatment, began asking the client *do you think you need me anymore?* While the young person thought that they could have continued with the treatment, they were willing to stop because the acute pain they were experiencing had passed and they understood the pressures under which the professionals were working brought on by the high number of clients. The client was given an emergency number for a psychologist.

Young people also retain the right to change psychiatrists if *the chemistry is off* and at least one young person reported this type of experience.

I went there and we sat in silence staring at each other and after a while the person just asked 'what type of service were you looking for?' and I was just like, shouldn't you suggest things because a client can't know what you have to offer. Now things are good, I got a new assigned worker and they suggest and try out different things that they have to offer. They know how to explain things and sometimes call me at home to ask how I'm doing and it's all just getting better. Apparently you have to be pretty active to get things done.

The professionals speculated whether waiting times are too long for many young people, and said there was a genuine need for walk-in services. This idea was repeated in interviews with young people. One young person described a situation where they had requested an appoint-

ment to discuss workshops, courses and other options for them with a professional working with programme number three at the TE offices. However, the next available appointment would not have been for a few months, which the young person felt would have been too late to address their needs.

Because TE services are a part of a larger organisation, the form and content of the service may vary according on the location, programme or even worker. While one young person had been disappointed that TE offices did not return their calls, another interviewee praised their assigned worker for their availability and promptness in returning calls. Service situations also varied and one young person had different experiences in social services depending on the worker, some positive, some negative. Young people were also confused by the fact that sometimes the workers seemed unaware of the services their offices provided.

I think [work]shops are like this system that TE offices has and all that. So one day I go to the TE offices to the person at the counter and just ask what's the deal with workshops. 'Oh, what workshop, I've never heard about that'. And I was just like, what is going on here, I mean, really?

One young person recalled a time four years earlier when TE offices had directed them to a course called *Suuntaa elämälle* ('Finding a direction in life') which had motivated the person and introduced *a better feeling* to their life. TE services' course selection, however, does not provide these types of courses any longer. As was stated in the professionals' interviews, employment administration is no longer responsible for social rehabilitation and young people

must be able to participate in working life when they join TE services.

It [rehabilitative course] was something they assigned for me and if I remember correctly, they had to really force me to go there, I think. I did enjoy it, though, like, it wasn't just filling out a bunch of papers but it was just somewhere where we really got to know each other and did sports and it was just invigorating and motivating. What I've heard about them nowadays is that people don't do anything but paper work and job-related stuff. So I really doubt that they're as nice as they were back then.

Often young people thought that professionals knew pretty much everything about them, *probably my whole life story, or a little too much about some things and too little on other things*. Young people were not always aware that social and TE services do not have access to their health records except when young people are referred by health services. One interviewee stated that they wanted to be open and honest, because professionals must know the person's background in order to provide a suitable service for them: *Otherwise you end up with nothing*.

According to young people, professionals rarely requested feedback on the services. One interviewee stated that a workshop had requested feedback with a comment card, another interviewee had pressed *the button machine* or the feedback collecting machine, and a third person had *filled out some paper* at a therapy session. One interviewee had praised an outreach youth worker in person, and another person had been asked for their opinion on a support person.

SUPPORT OUTSIDE THE SERVICES

The interviewees received support outside the services in the form of advice, a sympathetic ear and financial support from friends and some from their parents, siblings or other relatives, and their partners. Some looked for information on the Internet. Some interviewees had clearly parted ways from their former friends, with whom they did not wish to associate due to different interests and goals. The interviewees' goals were connected to education or employment, while their former friends either lacked goals or they *drank* or used drugs. On the other hand, separation from a former environment may pose difficulties because of the expenses of moving, which young people with poor credit history had trouble obtaining.

The interviewees shared information with friends in similar situations about the type of things for which social offices would provide financing, how Kela may cover some medical expenses, or how the city must find employment for six months for people after substance rehabilitation, for example. One interviewee stated that, because their friends are also clients in social services, they were hesitant in sharing their positive experiences with them. Another interviewee thought that help was not needed with TE services because:

You go there to re-register as a jobseeker so that you can have money from here [social offices]. You just have to go deal with it, so when they send those job applications, you send the application to wherever it's from, you can only win. Like, you don't have to accept those jobs, but the most important thing is that you make an effort and send them in.

Many interviewees said that they wished their parents had been more caring and supportive when they were children. The young people also wished that their parents had intervened when they showed signs of problems at school, such as truancy or bullying, had been more supportive of their education, and enforced stricter rules. Those young people with a history of child protection services or who had resided in a foster home wanted attention from their parents. One young person thought that they should have resided in a foster home or with their grandparents due to an abusive parent. At the time of the interview, some youngsters still wished to have a family and a *caring and loving* parent.

WHAT DOES THE FUTURE HOLD?

What can the service system provide?

Some young people experienced difficulties in expressing what type of services they required and that they lacked the necessary resources to consider how the services should be improved. Young people have needs relating to income, housing, employment or education, and they hoped the service system could provide assistance. For example, some homeless young people had experienced difficulties in gaining housing without money, which seemed absurd considering that the area had more available apartments than homeless people.

Although most young people certainly had a basic comprehension about applying for jobs, they hoped for help with securing a job. One young person visited TE offices' website at least once a week to view job vacancies and sent applications, yet they never received a job offer.

I don't know what I'm doing wrong, what do I say in the applications that I shouldn't, because I've been looking for a job for a couple of years

now and I've always got a job through someone I've known, so I need that type of guidance now. Like today, I was at the social services to talk about that and what I should put in my applications, or if I should send them out on neon coloured paper to get them to notice them or what?

One young person suggested that TE offices should *vouch* for a job applicant, or in other words recommend them to a potential employer who could hire the applicant for a two-week internship. After a trainee period the employer could hire the candidate. The interviewee stated that there should be more activity like this, because the core problem is that employers and potential employees should be brought together, which TE offices could facilitate as they have information on both.

Young people wished that the service system would provide more confidential, open and honest contact with *sensible people*. These contacts were particularly important for people with troubled family relations. Speaking from experience, one interviewee thought that social workers should not *be mean or aggressive people* but instead they should encourage young people to talk about their problems and provide potential solutions. The interviewee felt that professionals had *lied* to them when they were younger, which was why they had troubles trusting social workers. Therefore, young people who question services base their opinion on previous experiences that may mar the relationship for a long time.

Young people also wanted professionals to be friendlier and try to see things from young person's perspective. Young people felt that the ideal situation would be that the services would be more tailored to every individual, so

that you could customise them according to the person instead of moulding people so that they are suitable for working life. While some people appreciated the stability the services introduced into their lives, others wanted more flexibility in terms of scheduling so that they could finish their rehabilitative work as piecework. Young people valued voluntary activities and services providing motivation because *usually when you force people to do something, it doesn't really work*.

The dream many young people shared was of a place where *you could do whatever you wanted and see if that's your dream job*, which is telling of a current atmosphere of young people searching for their dream. However, when young people do not have a specific dream it may cause them anxiety and set impossible expectations for the service system to discover their dream.

Young people also wanted the service system to be more active at providing information on different education possibilities and qualifications required, *and not just online or as a service in TE offices but actually like those street signs you see during elections or something to inform you when a new programme starts*. Those who experienced difficulties already at school wished that schools had provided more psychological support and people such as outreach youth workers to check up on young people and provide help, if needed.

Few young people had a clear opinion about whether services should be available in the same place or separately. One young person who lived far away from the services was understandably frustrated that it took an entire day in order to attend to one issue, and that two issues would be impossible to manage during one day if it

involved visiting two different offices. Many young people felt that, if the services were under the same roof, it would possibly simplify working and cut *the red tape*. One person thought that there may be a need for home visits for people who found it difficult to visit the services.

However not all the interviewees unanimously supported a single-counter model from which all the services could be accessed. They thought that it may lengthen processing times; one counter would result in massive queues and more mistakes because the professionals would have to know a little about everything. One interviewee also pointed out that the number of services correlates with jobs for people.

Dreams and the ideal life

Young people dreamed of basic things in life: to have a job or a place at an educational institution, to be closer to their parents, to have greater control over their finances, and to have meaningful daily routines. A flat was a dream for all young people who were officially homeless or who still lived in their childhood homes. Some mentioned having a family, child or a pet, or moving to the countryside as a dream. The interviewees emphasised the meaning of work and supporting themselves as keys to a successful everyday life.

I mean, working simply is a big part of everyday life. So I just feel that there's something fundamentally wrong, or missing from our everyday lives. [...] When I worked for six weeks back then I, like, actually enjoyed it, I was just like 'yes!' I get to work on Monday, I was just like 'wohoo!' I get to go to work and other people in my workplace were just like 'Ugh, Monday.' Like, you can see it when you're unemployed for

a long time, that you start appreciating those little things.

Planning for the future was hindered by uncertainty caused by structural factors such as a poor employment situation in their hometown. One young person had completed a qualification in a field that, they said did not currently provide any jobs. They had attempted to find a programme in post-compulsory education that would provide employment, but said that *it's just hard to know these things*. Another issue for that interviewee was that they did not know what their *place in life* was. Imagining the future was also difficult for a person who had problems coping at work. They doubted the financial benefits of work try-outs and thought that outsiders and service professionals would think the person seemed lazy, but hoped that some people would understand that the issue lay elsewhere. Interviewees agreed that a good life was balanced and happy, but difficult to achieve. People also mentioned that a good life included a job and secure income, but also the ability to meet their own basic needs and the needs of their families. The interviewees did not expect to be rich but they did not dismiss the value of money: *I don't understand why people say that money can't buy happiness, it really does [laughs]*. A good life also involved friends, stable relationship with parents, good health and personal satisfaction.

Otherwise I'm really happy with it and I think I'm just living a good life. I don't know if it's because I'm getting older or something, but the most important thing for me is my family. I'd rather spend time with my family than go out at night. I just value family and spending time with my family and doing things together.

TROUBLED

Seven young people aged 19-27, four women and three men, were classified as 'troubled'. These young people had experienced many things that hampered their potential to move through life according to standard transitions. Many of these experiences were beyond the young person's control. This group included young adults from Espoo and Kouvola who were clients in social services, youth services and TE centres, many of whom had multiple consecutive and overlapping client relationships with different service providers and offices. None of these young people lived with their parents; all lived alone or with a flatmate or a partner and/or a pet.

Stories the young people shared about their background described various scars they had acquired through broken homes, sickness or death of a loved one, poor care, neglect or physical abuse, homelessness, personal substance abuse or that of a close relative, and or mental health problems. Some had experiences of all the aforementioned issues while others had experienced just some of them. However, all the young people had experienced some type of mental health problems in the past or were currently suffering from them. Five people said they had suffered from debilitating depression, one described a situation where *I just curled up in the couch and was depressed and became isolated*, and another had experienced symptoms of schizophrenia. The people presented these things as types of obstacles between them and participating in education or working life, problems they had to solve in order to move forward in life. Their life events were woven into complex stories during the interviews.

The group's family histories varied from a nuclear family to a child of divorce and single-parent households. One interviewee wondered whether their parent's divorce and inadequate parenting due to a parent's alcoholism had led to their isolation and depression later in life as well as clinginess in their relationships. Only two of the group had lost one or more parents, although some were simply not communicating with their parents. Social work had affected the housing situation of some young people.

The members of this group were able to recognise factors unfavourable to their upbringing or school success. These included insomnia, depression, and unstable home environment, as well as medication that had powerful side-effects such as lethargy and aggressive behaviour. The interviews did not always reveal whether anyone had intervened in cases with unstable home environments, but some interviewees said that no-one seemed to notice their problems.

Some of the young people had experienced difficulties already at primary school, but others had fond memories of early schooling and only began having problems when they entered lower secondary education. In the light of the stories young people shared, it seemed unfair that their problems at home came out in school, which caused the teacher to view the child or adolescent as a menace who could not adjust to the school world and school work. Many of these young people had troubles after compulsory education, because they had struggled in school and had poor grades, which made decisions about the future harder to make. Taking into consideration the mental health problems and unstable home situations, it is understandable that school was a struggle for them.

Many in this group had contact with various services within the system, including short-term and long-term client relationships, experienced various support methods, and authority interventions during childhood or adolescence. Young people had visited personal, family and cognitive therapists, psychologists, psychiatrists, and outpatient care nurse, and been involved with other clinics and child protection services. Some had found important support from, for example, a school counsellor, and the interviews reflected a great appreciation of activities directed towards and reaching out to young people during compulsory education. One example mentioned was drug awareness activities during lower secondary education that offered activities for young people.

Experiences varied greatly among the young people, as did their assessment of timing, adequacy, enjoyment, and success of the services.

I've never had anything, like, a real treatment relationship, like, I've just bounced around from place to place, so it's never been like a solid thing, I've just got help at different times from a lot of different people, but I don't really feel like I've ever had enough help with those things.

The interviews showed that young people's problems were typically cumulative, overlapping and in some cases continued for a long time. Young people are not able to control the death or serious illness of a loved one, but these things cast a shadow and are reflected in many aspects of their lives for a long time, and for some they represent a turn for the worse (see also MacDonald & Shildrick, 2013). Overlapping problems were recognisable in one case, where a person suspected that a pet's death triggered their depression. Some people explained that they had recovered from depression or substance abuse problems, but some were currently coping with those issues.



Many young people could identify turning points in their lives that represented a development for the worse or the better. These turning points may have been connected with relationships or interventions conducted by authorities. Termination of close relationships, such as a break-up from a girlfriend, a death of a grandparent, parent or friend, or the incarceration of a close relative had represented *tough times* in their lives, moments that had triggered depression or a drug problem. On the other hand, the birth of a niece or a nephew was mentioned as a moment that *changed my life a lot* for the better. Key events initiated by various institutions, such as intervention by child protection services, were connected to escaping a negative home environment either temporarily or permanently.

Interviewees were asked to share their views on what type of help they or their families would have required earlier. Some struggled with the question and it is important to remember that children and young people should not be responsible for innovating services. However, they did have some specific ideas on what was missing, what things should be increased or provided earlier. Some answers recognised the importance of school and its potential for providing victims of bullying with group or team activities in sports, art or culture. Schools should also provide a meeting place with a support person outside the school, *someone more involved than a school counsellor*, someone who would have provided regular counselling especially during lower secondary education: *If you were hurting you [could], like, open up*. Similarly young people wished for better career counselling and that learning difficulties could be detected earlier.

One life story included physical and sexual abuse perpetrated by adults, neglect and erratic behaviour of a parent, and a parent intermittently in involuntary treatment due to suicide attempts. This story illustrated how problems accumulated over a long period of time hidden away from the service system. The interviewee had visited child protection services *for some hearings* after their parent had attempted suicide, but the person perceived the visit as not meaningful for them. Still harbouring resentment towards adults, the interviewee felt that they had not received the help they required, and that seeking help seemed too difficult at the time.

Even though I was seventeen at the time, I should've, even just to spite them, could've called some child protection thing to say that I've been neglected, like, what should I do [...] Now I do wish that someone would have done something, but I don't know what they should've done.

Some youngsters were deprived of parental protection because of the parents' (alcohol) issues and/or divorce. While divorce does not translate into a loss of wellbeing for every child, in these cases it put too much responsibility on the shoulders of the young people, and they became isolated and lonely, which was still evident as marginalisation. Children who were brought up in families affected by alcoholism had a clear vision that their parent or both parents needed help at that time – not just detoxification treatment but help with the problems at the root of their alcoholism. Young people were surprised that no-one outside understood the situation, illustrating how alcoholism can be concealed from others, but undoubtedly also showing the Finnish alcohol culture: *Me and my [siblings] all needed some help but no-one noticed anything.*

Young people had varying experiences of the service provided at child protection and social offices, which is connected with the complexity of the situations as well as the success of the service. While some people remembered that home inspections *just kind-of led nowhere* and failed to introduce the type of help they required, others viewed those services to be successful, at least later on. However, some people remembered that they had a negative attitude towards social workers when they initially offered help. Young people called social workers ‘sossutantta’ that is “social worker ladies” which reflects the fact that social work manages emotionally sensitive and difficult matters. While an intervention may be necessary, it involves crossing borders which provokes conflicting feelings.

Well, child protection services helped me really a lot, because when I finally got, got to tell them, or they got it that it's not my fault that my home situation is what it is, and they did something about it and I got out of there, and I'll be grateful for the rest of my life to that worker.

As the quotation illustrates, unappreciated social workers can make significant changes to young people's lives; some of the interviews linked this to helping to secure an apartment due to unrest at home or homelessness.

Young people were sometimes unsure about the person who had offered or provided help, what had been their service path, or who had guided them where. The process had not necessarily been transparent for the clients or they had not been interested in tracking it and, undoubtedly, confusing situations as well as long, complicated service paths posed difficulties in remembering details. Young people may have begun seeing a youth psychologist or psychiatrist

during primary school, after which they may have been outside the service system for a while and returned as a client transferring to adult services at the age of 21. During a long client relationship, professional changes were possible, some of which were desired while others were unwanted. When the changes were initiated by the client, the chance to change experts was experienced to be especially important for their recovery.

Medication represented a central part of health care for at least four young people interviewed. Medication with powerful side-effects, switching medications and long-term use caused different and new problems for them. Mental health problems are exceedingly common both in this group and among young adults in general, which may lead to physical health problems being diagnosed as psychosomatic symptoms.

[A chronic illness] was diagnosed last May, even though I had been showing symptoms for eight months before that. It's just a constant battle to get them to take me seriously, because they just wanted to chalk it up to a psychological problem, so yeah, it wasn't a dissociative problem or attention deficit disorder or anything like that, nobody believed to me that it could be, like, a [real] disorder.

Everyone in this group had finished compulsory education, one had begun general upper secondary education for adults but had discontinued their studies, and another had completed general upper secondary education. Some had experience with workshops and different courses provided by TE offices. Some had begun a vocational education programme, but had discontinued it. One person had a vocational

qualification, but due to mental health problems was unable to utilise their training, which was understandably a source for remorse: *In the end it remained just a childhood dream job*. One interviewee explained that they had discontinued their studies, but were still motivated to return to school, while others had discontinued a number of programmes.

The interviewers described nonchalantly their history of discontinuing their studies at different institutions, but also in a way that reflected their regret, disappointment and understanding that they lacked something that they were expected to have. These young people were motivated to educate themselves and wanted to find a suitable field; this was shown by their perseverance to begin various programmes. One young person showed this perseverance particularly well: they had finally been awarded an internship position at the eleventh place they had applied for one.

Talking about the decision to discontinue studies in vocational education or refusal to participate in career counselling, the interviewees said that the decision had not been made lightly. They gave the reasons as a parent's death that was followed by sick leave, severe side-effects of medication treating a chronic illness, and unsuitable medication prescribed for mental health problems that caused delusions, hallucinations or learning difficulties. In some cases, the teachers also felt that the decision to discontinue studies had been correct.

One young person, who after completing general upper secondary education had been offered a place at their dream institution located in their hometown, said that they had succeeded in their studies for several years and discovered their niche in that field. The person was currently

motivated to continue in the same programme, but the previous studies had been terminated in the final years because of mental health problems and experimentations with drugs. The interviewee justified this by saying it relieved emotional pain and enhanced studying. They were forced to take leave of absence for health reasons, but during the period of absence the right to study was revoked before they had graduated. Young people with experience in vocational institutions had similar opinions to those expressed by the previous group, i.e. that social relationships impact greatly the feeling of belonging at school. One young person discussed at length how their classmates were interchangeable, many skipped school, and they were scattered. The person stated that they did attend parties together, however, which also increased the interviewee's alcohol consumption.

At the time of the interview, while some young people had discontinued their studies, some had experiences of short-term employment. Although they viewed participating in working life and earning their own money as positive things, they felt that sometimes they were not appreciated as employees and were out under pressure to be extremely flexible although they were minimally compensated and often paid cash-in-hand. One young man stated that he had served in the military, which is mandatory for every man in Finland, *without any troubles*, but no-one else mentioned military service in their life histories.

CURRENT SITUATION

None of the young people were employed or attending training at the time of the interviews. When asked about things that were positive and negative in their lives, they mentioned their own home or flat, family, friends and pets as positive

things, and emphasised how friends and pets introduced a routine and enjoyment to their lives.

Well, emotional recovery is still pretty much a work-in-progress, it's still a long road ahead of me, but let's just say that Vamos and my friendships are pretty okay right now, and yeah, I have a lot of work to do with handling my finances and other things, but even those things are not getting worse, so I've done pretty well.

Some people chose not to get into all that and discuss the negative aspects of their lives, but those willing to discuss them stated that negative things included loneliness, frustration, *general lousy feeling*, physical and psychological health problems, *social anxiety* or in other words, they were consumed by uncertainty in their lives, failures and the disappointment caused by *not being able to take care of my duties, like, normal people*. Other things mentioned were the lack of education, employment, i.e. a purpose in life – *I hate every aspect of my life*. The interviewees associated negative things in their lives with emotional unrest and their unsatisfactory situation, but these things also stemmed from comparing their lives to society's expectations. Life's multi-layered nature and the fact that positive and negative aspects coincide in life was illustrated by young people who listed even serious problems in their lives, and yet concluded their statements with a remark: *Otherwise life's really good*.

I got [chronically] ill when I was six years old and I was diagnosed with [attention deficit disorder] a year ago, but all in all I'm pretty healthy.

While life was not always easy for these young people, many thought that they were currently

in a better place than before, for example that they had reduced their alcohol use and found ways to be happy sober. Their previous hardships provided perspective to their current situation.

Like, in a year I've never woken up on the wrong side of the bed. Like, I've always gone out the door feeling good. Obviously being on sick leave was a bit tougher, especially because it was during the winter, but I got through it, I didn't have any acute problems and on the other hand, I got that it is understandable that when you're unemployed, on sick leave, literally in the dark and lonely because a lot of my friends were studying or working, but still I understood that it is a little bit harder now, and I don't have to pretend to be all, like, happy-go-lucky.

Like the interviewee quoted above, many measured their happiness by their feeling in the morning. The quotation showed that the young person in question was doing well but, for some, getting out of bed every morning was a *social hardship that stresses me out a lot*. This anxiety forced young people to manage their frustration caused by their inability to wake up *just in time for work* and to return home with a feeling of accomplishment.

Young people said that their everyday lives and situations were affected not only by their moods and relationships but also by material wellbeing. Many struggled financially and explained how they had to budget their lives carefully with a monthly income of EUR 507 or EUR 540. Because young people earned a small income or had negative experiences in the past, their everyday lives included times of poverty especially towards the end of the month, borrowing money, living in debt, stressing about lost pay-

ment agreements, managing debt arrangements, denied benefits because of discontinued studies, while also dreaming of a larger labour market subsidy.

When you've lived a couple of months adding up your groceries at the market with a cell phone just by accident, this teaches you for the next month, and then when you can just go to the grocery store and see what you're going to buy and count how much it's going to cost down to the last cent, it's a really big deal for me and I get like a buzz for months from that, so yeah, you get your kicks from small stuff like that [laughs].

Lack of money prevented most people from having hobbies, yet many hobbies people talked about during the interviews included activities they did at home, such as caring for their pets, arts and crafts, painting, and listening to music. Only a few hobbies they mentioned occurred outside their homes, including occasional horse riding.

SERVICE ENCOUNTERS

At the time of the interviews, the interviewees had been clients in many services for many years, including social offices, TE offices, LAFOS, mental health services, health stations, substance abuse services (detoxification and rehabilitation treatment), outreach youth work, rehabilitating work activities and Vamos. Client relationships and visiting social services seemed to be a significant part of many young people's lives and, for some, being a client meant that they were constantly either resolving an issue or changing workers: *I really should figure out my pain issues and change psychologists.* In other words, client relationships translated into completing forms either online or at the service location, visiting offices, arranging and keeping track of appointments, having conversations, requesting advice, messaging, and negotiating.

Many young people felt that remembering and minding affairs connected to their client relationships was problematic.



I've got my appointments with the shrink or talking to a nurse in addition to that rehabilitative work, now what was I going to say about that? I've been on meds for a while now, and it kind-of messes with my memory asking about something and stuff, and now I'm a bit late and scrambled cause I lost one paper I shouldn't have but I just moved and everything.

This young person also thought that it was wise to prepare for appointments by making a note of symptoms in advance for example, because *I won't remember it all when I get there.*

Status as a client may also mean regular participation in rehabilitative work activities or workshops, either daily or weekly. This arrangement was successful for those young people who, in their own words, required *a little bit of a routine in my life and new friends and other activities* than just being at home. Structured activities created much needed order in young people's lives and filled *a big void in my life* after sick leave. Young people were also able to move to services requiring more commitment that *moved their lives forward*, and felt that they were beneficial. Motivation for these activities came, on the one hand, from young people themselves and, on the other, from institutions that had vested interests in motivating young people and introducing routines in their lives. *Life management* was a term young people had adopted from bureaucrat jargon, and it was used as a key to solve everyday problems, even those caused by mental health problems such as panic attacks.

The significance of client status in young people's everyday lives became clear as they described their routines through visiting the services. For example, they had weekly appointments at the psychiatrist and rehabilitative work activities

Monday to Thursday, but that *otherwise I'm free*. In other words, visiting different services was seen as comparable to working and created a sense of purpose during the week.

On Mondays I come here to take care of things [with an outreach worker], on Tuesdays they have that group thing, on Wednesdays I go to TE offices, on Thursdays I go to social services and on Fridays I go to Kela.

This young person thought that visiting services was a preventive activity against exclusion. They felt it was positive that they were able to visit various offices while they felt that studying or working was impossible at the time, and being sedentary would have been too depressing. The person also favoured offices being separate, because they thought that concentrating the services under one roof would probably reduce the resources and number of professionals. In order to work professionally, professionals required specialised training, expertise as well as broad networks, and the ability to steer people in the right direction.

Lately, the public debate has focused on the need for low-threshold services and that all the services should be under one roof; the interviewees touched upon these aspects. Because some people already *took zero initiative* and struggled to remember their appointments, they were exhausted just by *running* from one office to another. Young people placed importance on receiving help and advice from one low-threshold institution that would steer young people to the correct services.

In the next example, a young person received counselling addressing their many problems, which exceeded the person's expectations. One

service provider also continued *cooperating* with the young person, and provided advice even after the official client relationship had ended.

Actually, the most valuable thing has been [vocational institution previously] having a counsellor, a guidance counsellor and a social worker. Like, the social worker knew a lot about counselling and education paths and stuff. My counsellor helped me a lot with my finances, so they weren't just... they just helped me a lot, you know, mentally, they knew kind of everything. And through them I discovered career counselling and Vamos, so, yeah, maybe that's been the most valuable thing for me, because they've been there for me, like my counsellor was there to talk sense into me, when I told them once how I'd experimented with marijuana [...]. So they helped me a lot, and helped me to realise how that's really ruining everything I accomplished at the workshop.

Lack of support in their childhood was reflected in young people's need to reflect on their childhood and adolescence with a professional. Young people who were undergoing mental health treatment and regularly met with a social worker were often interested in visiting a counsellor of a rehabilitative service, which reflects their need to talk to someone while actively pursuing resolving their problems within the framework of the services provided. It was time consuming to resolve problems that had accumulated over many years, or *to exorcise ghosts from the past* as one person put it, and these issues could not be resolved with one predetermined therapy treatment programme.

Young people who had been long-term clients in the service system had learned about the

system, as well as completing forms and the conventions of service procedures. They also learned about how individual social workers exercised discretion when it came to issuing a bus pass, or how easily a doctor would write a referral or prescribe specific medication. In particular, questions on medication, such as correct dosage, coping with withdrawal, getting on or off medication, and switching medications represented concrete examples of how young people must exercise discretion and care outside social offices. One interviewee explained how they had modified the *flexible* dosage their doctor had recommended and took the medication *kind of liberally*. Another stated that they stopped taking their antidepressants and, as a result, their conditions had deteriorated significantly. On the other hand, using one's own discretion with taking medication may prove to be a successful decision.

I had, well, I've been off antidepressants for two months now, because it was hurting more than it was helping, so there was no point to it because I haven't been depressed for a long time now. It's more like panic attacks or social anxiety. And they were a little too stimulating, like I was sweating a lot, and I got this impulsive [attack], where my heart was beating out of my chest and then I could take another drug that levelled my heartbeat.

As young people become clients in the service system, information about them is compiled in a file, and this information may be shared by different offices. Young people were not always privy to this information on their lives. As an illustration, one young person had requested their diagnosis, but instead received *a massive pile of papers on what I've said and how they've written it down*. Young people were unaware of

the information that formed the base of their client relationships, but they assumed that different authorities mainly knew only what the person had divulged to them. In this way, they were able to control relatively well what information was used for specific decisions. On the one hand, this could be interpreted as allowing young people to start with a clean slate, but on the other, information flow between different offices was ineffective, so many had to explain their situations many times, and every treatment relationship had to be built up again from the start. This was a source of uncertainty, especially among those with a long history with the service system and unaware of what information was included in their file.

I don't know if the info only moves within them [organisations] because I've talked with people at four different buildings, at least, and, oh yeah, there's also those school counsellors and others, but I do feel like we always start with the same basics.

Poor communication between different sectors was hardly the only problem, but also that the professionals varied often, sometimes due to administration. Professionals, however, were not viewed as faceless bureaucrats, because many young people referred to their assigned workers by their names or stated that when they required help, they called always that one social worker.

They [social worker 1] got me an apartment in [area] and then I was transferred to that area's services and there was [social worker 2] but, I don't remember exactly what happened, if they had a vacation or something because I got another social worker and, um, [area] office was shut down and then this weird thing happened because I was with [social worker 3] and yeah,

it was because of that they changed around again and then I got [social worker 1] again [the person referred to all the social workers by their names].

While young people were able to celebrate their progress and positive aspects in their lives, they compared their situations to society's expectations about 'constantly moving forward', and whether they could meet these expectations. Some people felt guilty that, while they felt were achieving something for forming friendships or acquiring a flat, at the organisational scale they were merely moving between services or progressing and then digressing.

I kind of think that I just keep spinning my wheels, or let's say that I've never been too active in finding work or education, and it's probably because of the depression, but to be fair, I've never been the most active person in those things. Sometimes it just feels like I just go from place to place. I've got some things done, too, so I'm pretty happy with that.

Some young people who were satisfied with their current situation had difficulties imagining their future after departing the services. One person in their early twenties was already nervous about their 28th birthday, because after that they were ineligible for outreach youth work: *Like, what will I do then?*

Positive comments

Young people in the 'troubled' group were mostly satisfied with services they used. Many explained that they had experienced consecutive treatment periods, or that they had been admitted to drug rehabilitation or psychiatric clinics as soon as they required treatment. In particular, the interviewees praised outreach youth work

services and Vamos and, while they had no particular problems with social services offices, they often requested help from outreach workers. Outreach work and Vamos represented in many cases *a safe haven or a guardian angel*. They were seen as efficient, relaxed and approachable places, truly low-threshold services that people could visit *almost every day or when you have problems or things you want to talk about*, providing support outside office hours and even outside the official attendance period. The lack of family support created a need in young people for long-term support from a single source.

It's felt like home in here, like, the things we do in here aren't always that interesting, but there's always people here who motivate me to get out of bed. And the staff are really nice and funny, so there's always a good vibe in here.

Young people partly related services to working because they lacked other obligations due to their situation and health. Members of this group did not have the mandates that compelled the group 'worker-citizens in the making' or young people who had completed a post-compulsory education and were transitioning into working life. Young people recognised that they had been steered toward targeted services because they required *structure in life* but at the same time these services did not focus solely on pushing them forward. Young people were able to access services that were not goal-oriented, but just relaxed informal discussions about anything that encouraged them to move forward, but according to their own resources.

Well, we talk about how I've been and if I have any plans for the future [...]. Then I listed some things, and [LAFOS professional] was just like don't over-think things, because you can't burn

yourself out again, so you have to focus on not stressing yourself to death, and then I thought to myself, 'I told them like two or three things I've been kind of thinking about' so like okay, they're really looking after me here.

Services that were customised to fit the needs of young people seemed to be flexible in that rehabilitative work could begin according to the person's wellbeing. The number of working hours in a week would be assessed based on the person's abilities and could be adjusted if the amount of time seemed overwhelming. This was important to those young people who had difficulties in coping because of various anxiety issues and phobias. It is noteworthy, however, that the universal service system seemed to allow negotiation and flexibility. One young person explained how they had visited a health centre and subsequently a youth clinic due to depression, in addition to the times the person had received acute treatment and psychiatric care in different facilities. In psychiatric care *we all decided* that the person would be transferred to a third facility to receive psychiatric care from a doctor with whom the person was *actively in contact* and who they were able to *talk to* if necessary. In contrast, another young person felt they were well enough that the services from a clinic seemed useless to them and their visits had become infrequent.

Young people thought that a successful encounter was one where they were taken seriously and steered to another service according to their need, instead of *pushing too many pills*. Encounters in services were possibly important to people who were lonely, and while they recognised that sometimes they were viewed as sad, they also took comfort in it.

But then on the last day when I put on that long-sleeved shirt and stuff, then that [physical therapist] became like this (laughs) adorable grandma-type character, who's just like oh, you, what happened to your arm [scars from cutting] and what've you done. Well, it was kind of like what happened with my therapist, they pulled me aside and said, while they still could, that this is my last visit and they also tried to cheer me up and listened to me and asked questions and yeah, it's been mostly good, the service I've been given.

Young people also valued meeting new people through the services and extending these friendships to other aspects of their lives.

You could say that I've been spending more time with these new friends from Vamos than with my old friends.

Young people were positive about online services, depending on the user-friendliness of the service provider's website, and they were satisfied with telephone services if they were able to reach a familiar person. One interviewee mentioned that they exchanged text messages and e-mails with their assigned worker and was amused when *a psychologist or someone like that uses emoticons in their messages*. Some professionals continued to follow up on young people online via Facebook. Some youngsters valued interaction that was sufficiently effortless and did not require a visit to the offices, for example that *social service things get taken care of just by me dropping a form off to the mail*. However, many appreciated personal visits, face-to-face interaction and a welcoming environment.

I always like to visit the offices in person rather than handling it over the phone, like for example

I think it's good to go to Kela if I have something I want to ask them, because I always get good service there or sometimes I don't but then I don't [laughs] [...]. It's usually fun to come here [to LAFOS] but I might get nervous because I'm not sure if I'm on schedule, but otherwise it's fine and usually I leave here giggling, so yeah, I like coming here.

Negative comments

At some point my treatment was halted there [a treatment institution] for a month because I didn't have the energy to go to my appointments, and then they sent a letter saying that I had to come by for an appointment or they would consider my treatment discontinued.

While young people had generally a positive outlook and positive experiences, they also had some negative experiences that they perceived as blind spots in current bureaucracy. One interviewee stated that they were denied some services because of limited resources or because the service provider had exhausted their annual budget. The services were relatively flexible, but client relationships were built on young people taking initiative and interacting with the services correctly, such as completing forms on time or maintaining regular treatment schedule.

Interviewees said they sometimes felt intimidated visiting offices and that they needed support for that. For example, some young people had been unwell and unable to manage their client relationship according to the obligations and subsequently had suffered sanctions which made their situation even more troublesome. This mainly applied to educational situations. If they had *messed up* filling a form and spent a month without money, they had learnt to fill forms correctly after that mistake.

I ran out of, I think, sickness allowance and I should've started getting partial sickness allowance, but I didn't have time to apply for it and didn't realise that it would take so many months to process the application, so I was totally without money and called social allowance because I thought there must be something I could get, but they said no and that I would only get back-pay at some point [...]. That was one learning experience.

Occasionally young people felt that people were suspicious towards them, and interpreted even illness-related absences as non-compliance, resulting in termination of employment. People with a history of substance abuse or medication misuse felt that the label was hard to erase and it affected their treatment. Doctors would refuse to prescribe certain medication even if young people felt that they could manage their administration with a pill dispenser, still, *they question me about any medication*. Another young person explained that they were subjected to verbal abuse as well as suspicion in rehabilitation and detoxification facilities concerning their sobriety: *[they] didn't believe me at all and just ran their mouths, so yeah, now I finally called it quits with that*.

A few young people stated that social office workers were rude and suspicious of them. It is illuminating that young people remember even comments made in passing. This describes the inferior position held by young people in these offices: on the one hand they are eligible for benefits, but they on the other they are under the authority of office workers as they are in charge of administering some benefits.

Last time I was there [social office during walk-in hours] they were a bit nasty to me

because they asked if I wanted food coupons, and then they said that they couldn't give those to me, and that I should go pick dandelions or go to a nice granny who could make me some soup [...]. But whatever, sometimes you get knocked back a bit.

Positive relationships were imperative for the professionals and young people in order to guarantee effective service. Problems or disappointments therefore may be caused by interchangeable workers, such as a primary nurse transferring elsewhere or a doctor who listens and is *empathetic enough* quits immediately after the first appointment. In some instances, young people began working with another primary nurse, but were not told the new person's name.

Working with a new person in mental health care may mean literally starting from the beginning. One interviewee explained that they had agreed that their information could be transferred, but they still noticed that they had to explain old things to the new person. Moreover, the person had begun cancelling appointments because they seemed unnecessary.

If you think about shrinks, and how I have to start another treatment relationship with another person then I know that it's just going to be the same thing all over again for a long time. [...] Those things never go anywhere, like, it's just them saying 'Poor you' and not much else and I think we always deal with the wrong things. [...] I don't mind talking about myself and I usually hear the same comments and stuff and they say that talking helps, but I don't really see it.

Another person stated that their psychologist failed to help them move forward and kept focusing on the past, so the relationship was terminated after three sessions. The importance of positive relationships was brought into focus in mental health care, which requires good rapport between young people and the staff. If this is lacking, young people may not tell the truth or they fail to arrive to appointments *because we never really had a connection*. Another problem is when a young person does not get along with their nurse, they are expected to make their feelings felt.

I got a new one [a nurse] and I didn't really like that one, but then I wasn't really able to tell them that, and someone said to me that I had to tell them. To be able to tell a person that I don't like them, I can't really do that, say that 'I just don't get along with you' [...] and then there's the fear that after I tell someone that I don't like them and then they stay and you're stuck with a person who knows that you don't like them.

While some young people had been admitted to treatment quickly, their care was affected by professionals taking holidays, for example, and young people often had to wait: *When you're waiting for something all the time and you can't do anything about it, it's really annoying*. Some people were not accepted to the services they had requested. Others were unable to find a suitable mental health rehabilitation peer-group that would correspond with their diagnosis, which was sometimes due to living in a small town.

One person wanted to see a therapist and received treatment at a youth psychiatric clinic where *they couldn't have been less interested in me in there, so yeah, I was disappointed with*

that place. The interviewee said the workers did not consider them crazy enough to receive treatment, but they stated that they had:

[...] so many different traumas and mental tangles that affect my life a lot and I'd like to learn to deal with them and to be able, like, to take part in normal life and society and stuff.

Another negative aspect of the service system, according to some young people, was that rehabilitative work seemed unreasonable or exploitative.

Well, rehabilitative work just started with me cleaning for five hours a day there for 6 euros per day, and I started comparing lunch breaks with city professionals, so I just thought that this place isn't for me anymore.

Being heard and affecting decision making

Naturally, young people moved forward along their service path according to available services and their wishes and suggestions. Young people learned the correct protocol in the service system in time and they felt that they were able to affect the services by asking questions and making suggestions. *You know, now I'm pretty good at taking care of my things myself [...] I figured out that it's not really that hard to do. Okay, I don't always get bureaucracy, but to get things moving isn't really hard at all. I'll contact my social worker, like, for example, to ask if I qualify for labour market subsidy and sometimes I'll get the wheels turning if I feel like they're taking forever and I need to pay rent.*

Although many interviewees trusted the expertise of the professionals, some felt that their own suggestions were also necessary. The interviews illustrated that young people are not always



informed about all the benefits for which they are eligible and they discovered these occasionally by chance.

I found care allowance when I was just in the waiting room at Kela and picked up a brochure and was just like, 'Oh what is this?' And it said that I had this option, too, and it was another miracle that I actually filled out that form.

Professionals are essential for navigating the service jungle as the young person from the above citation noted *I had no idea that there was such a thing as open rehabilitative employment before [a social worker] told me about it.* Young people were able to affect situations in which they were asked to choose between two options, for example participating in either open rehabilitative employment or activities at a day centre. However, some people were satisfied with the mere illusion of affecting the process. Yet, the services that are provided for young people cannot depend on how convincingly young people express their wishes or research the possibilities of the service system.

If you're eligible for a Kela benefit, then you're usually at a point in your life where it's really hard to find them by yourself or think about these things.

The young people who had been with the service system longer possibly comprehended better what the system had to offer, what they could wish for, and how to achieve these wishes. One interviewee had participated in special therapy that had cast the person's issues in a different light, which the youth felt was helpful. However, they were denied further similar treatment although they had requested it, so they thought that *If I ever move to another city*

I won't tell them that I've already participated in that therapy so I could get admitted to that again [laughs]. This interviewee currently had a standing appointment at an adult psychiatric clinic approximately every two weeks, and felt that it was not sufficient. However, there was insufficient resources to provide more treatment. The interviewee had applied for financial aid for psychotherapy from Kela, and had found a suitable therapist. *I think it would help me more at this moment in time.*

Some young people could not mention things that they could directly impact or remember making suggestions, and they felt that professionals were in charge, but many felt that they and their ideas were heard. Young people saw outreach work and Vamos, in particular, as places where they were able to freely express their experiences unlike in *social offices* or *TE offices*. In outreach work these stories did not influence how young people were treated or whether they were able to continue with the service. However, it may be concluded from the earlier example of the young person and special therapy that professionals who decide how resources are distributed may exclude young people from services they see as beneficial.

Young people had varying opinions about whether they had been heard or received meaningful help. Some people could not say what they were lacking because they were satisfied with regular services and personal networks they had acquired. Others felt that the opportunities provided where they could talk about their problems were not sufficient, although these opportunities were plentiful.

Everybody has helped me in some way, yeah. But there were some times when I felt like some

things weren't helping at all, but now, my psychiatrist is something I'm so happy about now. It's actually the first, like, treatment outlet in a long time I think has helped me a lot.

Young people had accumulated apprehensions about what type of services they would be offered if they asked for help, and they felt that these potential services would not meet their needs. This particularly concerned medical treatment, which seemed to be surrounded by a variety of negotiation. One interviewee had researched different medications and wanted to make their own suggestions on their treatment, yet their suggestions were dismissed. In contrast, another interviewee was granted a voice in decisions about their medication even though they were not interested in the matter and could not express an informed opinion on it.

I went to the psychiatrist on Monday and they asked me which medication I'd prefer. I went there in the first place to treat my ADHD, and the doctor asked me which one I want and I didn't even know what the medications were, I didn't know anything about them. [...] I said to the psychiatrist that people's problems can't be cured with medication, you know, just pop a pill and everything's going to be fine, and people are walking around like zombies, out of it, their heads in a fog.

Young people reported different practices for collecting official feedback and using their expertise in the services. Most people could not recall that they had been asked anything, but some had participated in another interview that examined the efficiency of social services. Young people, however, did not know about how the feedback they had provided would be used.

SUPPORT OUTSIDE THE SERVICES

Young people received support through the services but also from their families. In ideal situations, young people described their relationship with their parents as great, and considered them as a source for support and security that they could always call upon. Some people had complicated relationships with their parents: young people possibly had a close and warm relationship with one parent and the other relationship filled with resentment and conflicted feelings. Young people's relationships with their siblings, however, varied between aloofness and closeness.

Some had disjointed family ties because of neglect that they were still processing. While some young people had bitter experiences, conflict and neglect in their past, they were still eager to have a relationship with their parents and regretted the animosity between them. Even in cases where the parent had overcome their problems and showed renewed care for their child, improving the relationship required a great deal of understanding. In some instances, children were more aware of their parents' problems than the parent was of the child's problems. While parents may have provided material support and company, according to young people they were uninterested in hearing about their lives or to take more worries on their shoulders.

Well, yeah, maybe I'd like to have more of a relationship with [a parent] and [sibling] of course, but I don't know if it'd be a good thing for me right now.

Support from parents involved spending time together, occasional material support, and advice. Some parents shared information they had discovered online about treatment facilities but

were possibly unaware of the framework of bureaucracy. Nonetheless, young people tried to manage their affairs independently and none of these young people seemed to depend on their parents' support. Quite the opposite in fact: going to buy groceries with parents *was really embarrassing but it's great that they help me out every once in a while*.

Earlier studies have discovered the importance of friends in young people's lives. Young people interviewed for this study confirmed this. Friendships represented a source of mental and material support, and took on additional meanings among the young people interviewed in this study. Those suffering from mental health problems and social anxiety struggled to maintain relationships, and one young person suffered further anxiety because their friends did not accept their reasons for poor contact. Two interviewees hoped for more friends, either because they had moved to a new area and struggled to form friendships, or because some of their earlier friendships had ended due to substance abuse. Nonetheless it seemed to prove difficult to form new friendships as an adult.

All of my friends and good friends are pretty much still in [former place of residence] and I haven't really got to know anyone and it's not easy at my age, you know, when you're little you just go to the sandbox and it's as simple as that.

Those young people who had got to grips with substance use, for example, compared their situation to their former friends whose situations seemed comparatively poorer and had *ended up taking worse care of their lives*. Their old friends mirrored their former situation and provided a way to measure success.

Most of my friends are probably worse off than me because I have, like, a direction in life and got accepted to school and I'm not excluded anymore because I have things to do and a direction to move in.

Young people received tips on available services from friends and family: *A couple of days ago my ex-girlfriend sent me a message about an available apprenticeship saying 'apply there'.* Those closest to the young people also taught them about bureaucracy and being tangled in red tape. One interviewee explained how their live-in partner had been involved in an unskilled drug investigation that prolonged the amount of time the partner was required to comply to drug tests. According to the person, after their partner had issued a complaint about the professional, the issue had become even more complicated which caused additional stress and anxiety. Only after the issue had been resolved was the partner able to *consider applying for a traineeship or post-compulsory education or something again*.

Some young people did not share their experiences in the service system with their friends but, for others, their friends who visited the same services provided valuable information. One interviewee who had positive experiences of outreach youth work services said they had told their friends about outreach work and referred people who needed advice to them. Some young people recommended certain therapists and doctors to their friends or warned against them. Others said that their advice was often tricks on picking the right social worker in order to receive a particular allowance or the right doctor who prescribed medication lightly.

It is important to remember that these were all services they needed and for which they were eligible. While authorities may use discretion in their decisions, it is natural that also young people use discretion in their activities.

Well, for example, how you can get the most out of social services and stuff, and I think it's totally justified because if society has failed me this bad I think I have the right to get everything that I have coming my way.

WHAT DOES THE FUTURE HOLD?

What can the service system provide?

Young people felt that the help they received comprised listening to their problems, giving advice, introducing structure to their everyday lives, and providing support relating to income, transportation and housing. While young people felt that emotional support came largely from outreach workers, social workers were able to address more practical matters.



My current social worker was the one, when I was homeless and couldn't get an apartment to save my life, the worker picked up the phone and called around and got me that apartment.

Medication was imperative in the wellbeing of these young people, but they had varying experiences of success with prescription and suitability. Some required medication, but others criticised the manner in which they were pushed and how problems were solved by prescribing *pills*.

Young people said that effective and suitable services such as low-threshold services should be made flexible and voluntary – for example, that lateness would not be automatically sanctioned or made up at a later date, *that it wouldn't be the end of the world if you didn't show up*. Interviewees wished that different offices would share their files, and that services knew about each other's' practices. In other words, a single place dispensing basic information is necessary even if every service would not be under one roof.

That they would know how things worked in other offices, I think that would be really helpful because then you wouldn't have to run around if there was someone who could explain the basics of everything and not just how things worked in that office. [...] At least I've heard that since they combined all those services in LAFOS that everything works fine over there.

Young people valued the structure services introduced to their lives, and that they encouraged young people to get out and have a reason to get out of bed. However, some interviewees felt that moving physically from one place to another at a prearranged time did not provide sufficient help and they wanted more activities. One stated that, according to their experiences, day centres provided merely a place to hang out, which exacerbated apathy. Young people also hoped that municipalities would create more open and equal activities such as ski-trips, youth cafes or support for individual's hobbies.



One interviewee looked at the service system they had encountered through their personal life history and, while they supported distribution of food aid, they felt that social allowance created apathy. The person had read about a practice of 'forced labour' in Denmark and thought that young people should be more obligated to participate in education and work which would provide a regular salary. This interviewee had also a clear perspective on providing multi-professional support already during basic education.

Every school should have a few [outreach youth workers] hanging around, so if you're not doing well or like I said before, if it's hard to go talk to a counsellor, there would be somebody to talk to. And classroom assistants or whatever, too, because I remember when I was in school and there were 30 pupils and one teacher and we were in woodwork class two times a week for eight hours and made, like, a stool, then there's one teacher, 30 pupils and no-one knows what they're doing and when the teacher is helping one student then the remaining 29 just sit around [...]. Or there should be a therapy dog for those who just aren't interested in anything.

Some of these young people had struggled with education based largely on theory, and hoped that practical subjects as well as industrial arts and crafts would become more prominent in education. They also hoped that the number of rehabilitative jobs where young people could prepare for working life would be increased.

The current public debate is focused on the significance of childhood and early intervention. However, this must not diminish the importance of helping young adults, especially if early intervention has been fruitless.

How to prevent child, like, abuse and how to deal with those kids? But then I was just like, damn, what can you do when somebody's not in that situation anymore, like, it seems like there's nothing for those who've been through that, like, it's all just prevention or helping, but no after-care.

Dreams and the ideal life

I don't think I really want anything else, because if I got [therapy] then I'd have some chances for working or studying, so yeah, that's the goal.

Young people's dreams and plans included small purchases and hobbies which brought them joy, but also required money and taking initiative in contacting adult education centres. Many of their dreams involved lifestyles changes and acquiring the basic tools for life. Young people dreamed of a *normal* life while simultaneously recognising that *life for an ordinary, normal person is a broad concept* and that life always includes hardships. Nonetheless young people wished for regular things in their lives: friends, family, health, sobriety, money, education, work, and balance. For some, achieving these things signified gaining a purpose in their life and waking up without anxiety.

Probably what everybody wants is just not having to count every cent and constantly wondering if you have enough money and you could just go to the market and buy whatever you wanted and that you didn't have to be constantly going to the Internet bank checking how much money you have left. So maybe to have more scope for using money.

One young person had secured a post-compulsory education place through a young adult's learning programme, and they had a goal for the immediate future.

Well, now I'm in a situation where I have good plans for the future and I'm going to start getting more support financially, and I'm going to start school in autumn.

Some people had interest in or plans for specific education programmes, but first they needed to become healthy, by taking care of their mental health problems or physical issues. In these instances, expressing education or employment dreams was mixed with concern and doubting their wellbeing and abilities.

YOUNG PEOPLE'S PERSPECTIVE ON THE DEBATE ABOUT SOCIAL EXCLUSION

While adults may perceive that the public debate on young people largely focuses on youth marginalisation, few interviewees had followed the debate. Some interviewees said they were unaware of youth marginalisation, but still expressed opinions on the issue. The interviewees had four ways of referring to the issue. Three were mentioned across all the groups, but the fourth, which emphasised the responsibility of the individual and their own situation, was only mentioned by the 'troubled' group.

The first way in which young people discussed marginalisation was to refer to the inadequacy of TE offices and the Youth Guarantee, as well as the limited number of jobs, or in other words, the structural factors of marginalisation that they cannot control. Some said that young people are often accused of being lazy even though no-one wishes to be excluded. Instead

of saying that you are marginalised you should say that you are placed in the margins. This type of marginalisation was connected to the loss of jobs as well as enrolling young people in courses that did not move them forward in life. This increased their distrust in society and a sense that *I'll never get a job anyway*. Young people mentioned the Youth Guarantee only in response to direct questions about it, and even in those instances they thought that it may work in a neighbouring city but not in their hometown.

Another way in which young people referred to exclusion was to mention exclusion from social relationships; these were sometimes illustrated with examples from their own social circle. While some questioned the existence of excluded youth and wondered if it was merely a theoretical, indefinite category, most described social exclusion as meaning being stuck at home or when relationships are severed. In some instances, people attributed exclusion to depression or bullying. Some people wondered if they fit the description of an excluded person: *I do spend a lot of time at home and I'm kind of a lone wolf*, but mainly they perceived exclusion in other people.

I had this friend and someone just told me that they spend 24/7 in their room, stuck inside four walls and they're literally an excluded youth.

The third way to brace the issue of excluded youth was to consider if people who are labelled as excluded are, in fact, satisfied with their lives. These comments illustrated that being excluded is a label assigned by others who value normative lives and who do not consider other people's different values and goals. One interviewee discussed how those who participated in the public debate may be estranged from other lifestyles: *Is it really any better to skim all that cash and*

just become a person who can't even understand what it is like to be excluded?

You know, I have this friend, a good friend, who you could say was excluded, or, I don't know. They've never been interested in work or anything, really, and they graduated from the same vocational institution as me and so on but they had zero interest in work and stuff. Then LAFOS ordered them sick leave and through that they're now in retirement at the age of 25 [laughs] but I don't know. This is the happiest I've ever seen them.

The fourth rhetoric identified focused on the responsibility and situation of the individual. This rhetoric was utilised only by young people in the 'troubled' group, who spoke about young people's inability to take initiative and *waiting for a miracle* at home. These comments, however, also recognised that young people may not be well enough to take initiative and that some services increase apathy in young people. Some people also suggested that aspects that were perceived as a lack of initiative may in reality represent personal choice: *The only thing you can't get out of in this life is death, not even taxes are inevitable. You really don't have to anything if you don't want to.*

YOUNG PEOPLE'S PERSPECTIVE ON EXPERTISE BY EXPERIENCE

Yeah, absolutely, I'd rather listen to somebody who's, like, somehow in touch with the problem, whatever it is, than someone who just spews stuff they learnt by heart.

Young people were asked to share their views on expertise by experience, how they would define it, and how it could be applied to young people who share their situation. Some were

unfamiliar with the term, but most interviewees grasped the concept quickly and thought that people who have been troubled in the past have valuable experiences which may be helpful to share.

The young people categorised as 'victims of recession' struggled to grasp the concept of expertise by experience. They interpreted it as a person or professional who has experienced specific things in their lives. This group also lacked a specific view on which services these people would be able to improve. One interviewee thought that they could be utilised during vocational or general upper secondary education.

Yeah, I think it'd be good, because in school nobody believes, like, a nurse who says that drugs are bad with, like, half of the class clowning around while the others just look around. I do feel like if you'd take like a person who's been through the whole process. Like, someone who's actually been so low that they're like... and comes round to talk about it, then yeah, I feel like pretty much 90% of people would listen to them.

Some members of the group 'worker-citizens in the making' were more familiar with the term 'expertise by experience'. They believed that young people would be more likely to listen to other young people speaking from experience than social workers because *teens hate social workers*. The interviewees felt that having experience in the matter would increase honesty and lend credibility to the speaker, and some were interested in exploring this role. One young person had assumed this role in their social circle and intervened in the actions of their younger sibling. Another young person had experience in speaking with a support person.

I've also been to see, through my social allowance person, they had these new support families and social allowance people, and I went to talk with them about what it's like to be a support child [...]. but it was kind-of just like, they didn't ask me really anything and they were just like that, so I just tried to tell them all kinds of stuff.

Some young people, however, thought that experts by experience on youth exclusion would prove useless in compulsory education. At that time, young people do not listen to anyone and *nothing gets through to them*. One interviewee stated that only special education would benefit from expertise by experience during lower-secondary education. Some other suggestions for expertise by experience included career counselling or other courses provided by TE offices, youth homes, as well as detoxification treatment.

Like youth homes, for example, you're there because you've been such an idiot, but you can do better. Because that's the place where I was, and you're there for a moment and if you can't behave then you're sent away but if you can play by the rules you can go home.

The oldest members in the group 'troubled' mentioned often how they gained new perspectives due to their hardships in life. Some people thought that it would be *really awesome* if sharing their story, experiences and views generated by hardships would be valuable to hear. While some would have shared gladly their experiences but considered themselves to be nervous speakers, others were aware of experts by experience and interested in training for it.

That's when I was just like, shoot, I should get trained to be an expert by experience, because

I think with my experience of substance abuse and especially recovery, because it'd be better for people in detoxification to hear that they can kick the problem [from someone like me than] some professional who's probably never done drugs, ever.

The interviewees emphasised the significance of school, basic education, and vocational institutions, as suitable places where expertise by experience could be used to provide preventive care and to explain *how to really avoid becoming excluded*. These young people wanted to share stories of homelessness and having low credit scores and *where it can lead and how to prevent it and how to recover from it and how to move on*. One interviewee was excited about preliminary plans to visit a lower secondary school as an expert by experience. Their view was that, in secondary school, it is necessary to open people's eyes and to motivate them, even if some people are not interested in learning from adults.

It'd be good to visit like a guidance counsellor class or, like, some ninth or eighth graders because they're the ones who are just about to leave school so it'd be good to tell them to honestly go to vocational school. I'm twenty and I'm emotionally pissed that I don't have a profession and I don't have a job. [...] Young people are not ready for what's about to happen after lower secondary school, not by a long-shot, they just leave with their heads tucked under their arm and enter the real world. I would've liked if a twenty-year-old had come by and told me, like, what not to do, maybe it would've turned out different. And I know that when I was a kid and people, adults talked and said stuff, I didn't listen, I wasn't interested and that's going to happen with a lot of these kids, too.

Young people associated expertise by experience with preventive measures, but also with peer-support that may be provided in specific courses or in group sessions at psychiatric clinic in accordance with other group activities and occupational therapy. A type of expertise by experience is applied in substance rehabilitation treatment in which the staff included recovered substance abusers.

[In rehabilitation treatment] you learn from people who were former drug addicts and users and who are like regular professionals, like, they [recovered addicts] speak from experience and, you know, know exactly what it's like to be in that habit and stuff.

It seems to be noteworthy that due to their position, a few of these young people have been interviewed before either in news articles discussing social exclusion, *school assignments* requiring interviewees, or reports on services provided by the city.

Some young people may have been empowered to find value in their own experiences as a resource for expertise by experience. On the other hand, one perspective to expertise by experience was that being a source for support and leading by example would improve the situation of those helped by these experts just by changing their attitudes. However, this perspective does not consider the structural factors that young people cannot control.



SOCIAL EXCLUSION, YOUNG PEOPLE AND SOCIAL SERVICES

The objective of this report is to describe the status of young people aged 18-29 in the service system. Another aim is to illustrate the perspectives of professionals and clients in the service system on the relationship between young people and welfare services. Most of the interviews with the professionals and young people chosen for this study have shown a positive impression of the relationship between young people and the people working in welfare services. The professionals were sensitive about the situations young people were in, and young people, even those in the 'troubled' group, were satisfied with the services that they received and had high regard for the efforts professionals made to listen and support them. Professionals and young people alike criticised some individual workers or young people, and also perceived some activities or services to be ineffective and even detrimental, which suggests a need to improve the service system. In the final chapter, the results of this study are presented, compared with the overall study, and proposals for service providers are presented.

MULTIPLICITY OF YOUNG PEOPLE – FROM SELF-EVIDENCE TO CLARIFIED UNDERSTANDING

This study confirms a conclusion made by earlier research that young people outside employment and education do not form a unified group, and that the category of 'excluded young people' is an oversimplification. While most young people who are clients in social services share a common thread in that they are not employed or lack a qualification, their needs and situations in life vary greatly. Some may be able to engage in employment or education and require various services, but others are prepared to enter working life and are frustrated by the difficulties of securing a job. These aspects are commonly stated facts in youth studies but what do they mean in reality?

This study has divided the interviewees into three groups with different service needs in order to illustrate the multiplicity of these young people and the various levels of status they hold in society. Some young people were classified as 'troubled' because their lives were filled with long-standing problems that made participation in education or working life difficult. These problems included homelessness, mental health problems, great changes in life, substance abuse, learning difficulties and the lack of familial support. This group required more low-threshold mental health services.

The group 'worker-citizens in the making' comprised young people who had discontinued their studies in one or more vocational education



programmes, but were interested and able to secure a place in education or a job. This group required the services to provide them with encouragement to move forward as well as an ability to view their resources in a realistic manner.

Everyone in the group ‘victims of recession’ had obtained one or more qualifications and/or working experience, and they were motivated; however, they lacked employment commensurate to their qualifications, at least in their home area. This group wanted an opportunity to earn a living in paid work.

Across all the groups, the parents included people from the middle-class as well as working-class, people currently employed, and disability pensioners and unemployed. Nonetheless, the interviewees’ parents were rarely highly educated or a member of the upper middle-class. Some interviewees’ siblings were studying at universities or participated in working life, while others were unemployed or stay-at-home mothers.

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Consequently, young people represent a heterogeneous group and their positions and situations are not static; instead, they move fluidly between the status of being unemployed and a student/ employed /involved in a programme

and possibly revert to unemployment (see also Shildrick et al. 2012). This is confirmed by the analysis of the register data (see chapter by Ikäheimo in Aaltonen et al. 2015) as well as the life paths depicted in the interviews.

Young people in the groups ‘worker-citizens in the making’ and ‘troubled’ explained that they had experienced impoverishment from an early age and in varying ways. The members of ‘worker-citizens in the making’ had experienced conflict during lower secondary education and people in the ‘troubled’ group already during primary school. These experiences were connected with feelings of detachment and inadequacy, as well as bullying. For some, their histories of being bullied and being a bully were intertwined. People in both these groups had discontinued their studies in multiple vocational education programmes.

It is noteworthy that those young people who were interested in education had interests that lay almost exclusively in practical and vocational education instead of university education. Some interviewees had begun experiencing problems long before entering social services, and these issues were possibly hidden from the service system. Others had been long-term clients in the service system, engaging in overlapping, consecutive and disconnected service relationships. Resolving long-standing problems may be a slow and expensive process for society, and frustrating and discouraging for young people. Poor health and detachment from working life may coincide and thereby marginalise young people even further from mainstream employment and education, but also from social relationships and pleasurable leisure activities.

Some comments by the young people interviewed reflect that they blame society, or feel that it has failed them, but also show their desire to move forward. They talk about a dysfunctional labour market or their dissatisfying experiences at work try-outs, which illustrate that the labour market must be examined critically. While their situations varied and they had different backgrounds, their dreams were similar.

Their ideas of a good life illustrated that young people's lives and their wellbeing are centred around working. Educated young people applied for all vacant jobs, not just those corresponding with their qualification. Unemployment or inactivity was not reflective of a personal choice for most, but they were the result of a structural problem in the labour market that the service system could not resolve. If educated and motivated youngsters are unable to find work, it stems from the failings of the labour market instead of those of young people. Young people yearn for activities, but they also should be compensated for their efforts. There is a need for activities resembling 'real' work that properly compensate young people who struggle with their finances and develop anxiety over these issues. An important question is whether society is able to meet this need?

SERVICE SYSTEM FOR YOUNG PEOPLE – BROAD BUT DISCONNECTED

Social services available for young people are two-tiered. Mental health and addiction treatment services, outreach youth work, social work, and labour force service centres aim to increase wellbeing among young people and remove possible obstacles to education. These services and those to which young people are directed may be referred to as rehabilitative

services. Other objectives of social services are to provide young people with counselling, help them find a job or an education programme, and/or improve their credentials in social services or TE offices.

Young people outside employment and education in the service system form a heterogeneous group with varying backgrounds, needs and abilities, according to the professionals who stated that most of them require little guidance. Interviews with the professionals revealed that they were often familiar with their clients' situations and attempted to find solutions within the resources allotted to them. Nonetheless, the scope of most services was defined and limited by guidelines, obligations and objectives 'stipulated from above' and professionals felt unable to influence this framework. They celebrated even the small steps their clients took forward and stressed that numerical measures reflected only a minimal part of their work and its significance. Many professionals felt that measuring the effectiveness of their work was difficult and that current measures guide the work in a manner that does not necessarily seem fruitful.

According to professionals, numerous services are available for young people, but not all young people are able to pursue them, or are even aware of their own rights. The interviews also indicated that the system may be inflexible at times (concerning making and missed appointments) and project expectations may be unrealistic. In services with a great number of clients, it is assumed that young people are aware of the services for which they are eligible, that they subsequently apply for those services, and that they assume responsibility for their treatment, although the parameters of the service may be unclear and vary according to the

situation. Young people were also submitted to long waiting periods for treatment, yet are expected to conform to strict time-frames set by the system.

It is noteworthy that some clients are insufficiently adjusted for employment or education and therefore not protected by the Youth Guarantee (see also Ervamaa 2014). In order for young people to receive labour market subsidy or social allowance, they must be sufficiently adjusted and, according to some professionals, the number of services available for those in the most challenging positions is insufficient. It seems that the services currently available do not meet the needs of young people with impaired ability to function. These young people use health services excessively, and their costs are great. Young people outside education or employment suffer from more health issues than their peers and to combat this their health care should receive more resources. Both young people and professionals emphasised that resolving health problems takes first priority, and professionals felt that insufficient mental health services and lack of prompt treatment posed a problem.

A broad service system provides young people with various forms of support in Finland but it also presented dead-ends and roadblocks, particularly in mental health services. Some services may be described as loops that do not move young people forward, but instead send them back to the beginning before a new procedure commences. Young people explained how they had discovered different support possibilities and services only by their own initiative; this illustrated the complexity of the service system that possesses hidden resources of which even the professionals were unaware. Professionals

must strive to maintain knowledge of the ever-changing field of welfare services, actively dismantle dead-ends and loops, and locate hidden resources.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF TIME, TRUST AND PERSONAL CONTACT

Interviews with professionals and young people revealed that time is an essential and occasionally scarce resource. The number of clients with whom professionals at different social services worked varied greatly: TE and social service workers had 200-400 clients on their books, LAFOS professionals had 100, outreach youth workers approximately 25, and Vamos professionals had 15 clients. The services with most resources available for young people, and those that could enforce most restrictions, had the lowest number of professionals per client. Young people perceived the most difficult aspect of the services to be inconvenient office hours and long waiting times, for example. health services. The professionals said that missed appointments were a problematic aspect for efficient service management.

The interview data reveals the importance of trust. Interviews with the professionals emphasised the meaning of building trust in client relationships, which requires time and a long-term relationship between a client and a professional. Only after trust is established are professionals able to identify the needs of clients and the best resources for help. Building trust should emphasise personal service, which seems to be lacking in institutions dealing with a great number of clients, according to the interviewees. Young people who are not eligible for many current services regard trust as being particularly important. Low-threshold services are marked by

flexible appointment times, convenient locations and a welcoming attitude.

One trend that has affected the range of services and client relationships is transferring more services online. From a governmental perspective this may signify savings, and providing advice and guidance online has yielded a positive reaction (e.g. Gretscher & Junttila-Vitikka 2014). However, many young people want the option of walk-in office hours or visiting the offices in person, so online services may decrease the accessibility of these services. Not every young person is willing to use email to manage their social services and phone services may be perceived as unreliable and unavailable.

Some professionals try to utilise new communication methods suggested by young people, thereby improving the availability and accessibility of the services. It may be prudent to improve emergency services by including them in new online platforms that are more accessible to young people. Professionals noted that some clients struggled to complete electronic and traditional forms due to learning difficulties, ADD or other problems. If young people are not helped to overcome this, the situation may escalate and become more expensive to resolve: young people are denied benefits and potential treatment to which they are entitled, and this may reduce their abilities to become employed. This same phenomenon occurs in mental health services.

Of course, not every young person requires or wants intensive support: these people could be described as 'light clients' because they are able to move forward with little guidance or are skilled users of online services. Because every young interviewee criticised problematic opening hours of the services, as well as long waiting times,

individualised assessment services without an appointment would benefit those who need support, both in the short term and long term.

ONE COUNTER OR ONE PERSON?

Since young people are individuals, a single steering procedure cannot be applied to everyone and specialised services must be used to meet various needs. Yet differentiating services leads to problematic fragmentation, which reduces efficiency for both young people and service providers.

Specialised services signified multi-professional support for young people engaged in multiple client relationships with a long history in the service system. They also signified relationships with multiple offices where young people had to repeatedly describe their situation. Young people who were clients in various offices were often unaware of the information the professionals held about them, and the situation would make it increasingly difficult or confusing to manage their affairs. From the professionals' perspective, clients who worked with multiple offices may seem like a disorganised situation in which professionals were unaware of the parties or people involved in young people's support network. Professionals were eager to improve communication and cooperation between different services.

A key question concerning the service system is whether diverging and establishing specialised services can benefit young people without fragmenting and complicating the lives of those in the weakest positions. Measures aimed at improving the service system have been conflicting. Some services have already been diverged, such as the removal of services providing social em-

powerment or rehabilitation from labour force administration and transferring those services into other sectors.

The ‘one-stop shop’ model has been dismantled, but the public debate over social services for young people has stressed the need for one-stop services. This principal has been adopted by some services, but it is not completely unproblematic for young people. One-stop services would require a sufficient number of professionals and constant training for them in many service sectors. The need for services available under one roof comes out in the interviews, but the interviewees emphasised that the most imperative aspect would be that one person would be assigned to manage and coordinate young person’s services; this person would know what is in progress, who has initiated a programme and the current direction. In this scenario, the

responsibility for navigating specialised services would be on the shoulders of a representative of the social services who is better equipped to assess different service paths than young people. One-stop services, especially working with an assigned person, may lower a mental threshold to engage in services and evoke trust between professionals and young people. This type of service method may also improve the efficiency of sharing information.

Whether services are acquired from one or more stops, they will be accessed mostly by young people who are accustomed to visiting various services. The real challenge is to reach ‘troubled’ young people and to lower the threshold for social services in order for people facing challenges to connect with sources for support and perceive them to be engaging and worthy of commitment.



REGIONAL EQUALITY IN REALITY

While this report did not draw any direct comparisons between Espoo and Kouvola, the study did suggest some regional differences. Basic services are available across Finland but their accessibility depends on the size of the municipality and the public transportation available. Espoo, which is located in the capital region, provides some services that are not available in Kouvola, including a youth substance recovery clinic and low-threshold youth clinic, Nupoli. Espoo's services included an information and guidance point, which is available only as an online service in Kouvola. A significant difference between the services available in these two areas is the Vamos service centre, which is only located in Espoo (and Helsinki). Espoo therefore appears to provide more versatile and accessible services for young people than Kouvola. However, an isolated example describing how a social worker had arranged an apartment for the interviewee after a single appointment may illustrate a more favourable housing situation, or the flexibility of the service system, in a smaller location.

YOUNG PEOPLE AND EXPERTISE BY EXPERIENCE

One objective of this study is to tap into the knowledge of young people who used social services and who are the target of public concern, and to examine the significance of expertise by experience in client relationships in social services. Utilising the knowledge young people have gained through their experiences may improve client relationships, and also satisfy financial goals for efficiency and quality. Professionals criticised the measures used to gauge impact, arguing that these measures were strictly statistical; their view is that the impact and results of

the work should be examined more through the experienced eyes of young people. It is imperative to discard old, formulaic methods and develop new and simple ways to collect feedback from young people.

Young people's experiences vary, which is a point raised in discussions on expertise by experience: young people with knowledge suitable for a position as an expert by experience are very different. A recovered addict may inspire other young people with their survival story, while an unemployed jobseeker does not have a survival story to share, and their experiences of frustration may not find a similarly captivated audience. Equally, client relationships and the dynamics of different services and young people vary greatly, and social services must find the balance between mandating and motivating, diagnosing and labelling, and providing guidance based on professional opinion and considering the expertise and hopes of young people.

The status of young people in the service system can be raised by inviting them to act as experts by experience on the other side of the counter. Young people who are experienced in working with social services may be partnered with government officials, and could provide support and guidance to young people with their everyday tasks outside the office (Aaltonen & Berg & Rajaniemi 2015). Similarly, by utilising experts by experience, officials could be helped in reaching young people in the most challenging situations, as well as encouraging young people by providing an opportunity to see the value in their hardships.

COUNSELLING YOUNG PEOPLE REQUIRES SENSITIVITY TO THEIR SITUATIONS AS WELL AS TO THE FRAMEWORK OF SOCIETY

Every basic service and specialised youth service aims to steer young people towards becoming active citizens and a part of the educated labour force, using various activation instruments. While it is appealing to consider activation of young people as a solution for social exclusion, it is insufficient and problematic. Young people interviewed for this study represent people lacking material, social or mental health-related resources to become active citizens or initiate change in their lives. Consequently, this study questions activation as a key method to improve the lives of young people. It may be prudent to pose the question whether services for activation move young people forward or trap young people inside the activation system, a vicious cycle of exclusion (see also Shildrick et al. 2012). Another significant point is that the push for activation in relation to youth exclusion creates jobs in certain fields and guarantees further funding for current services¹⁵.

A critical juncture in activation measures occurs when a person's wellbeing is assessed for school or employment, and the sensitivity of service providers in recognising when young people require encouragement and when they require reassurance and support. Some of the interviewees suffered from problems that had accumulated over time, and they must resolve housing, income and health issues in order to make a meaningful change in their lives. In order to improve the situation of marginalised people,

other types of services than merely employment services or job seeking counselling must be provided. Instead of labour force activation, which is one-sided, course-based and sanction-driven, the focus should be on wellbeing improvement through health and mental health treatment. Rehabilitative services are required alongside preventive services, and more low-threshold activities are required, in workshops for example.

It is important to note the educational background of the professionals working with young people, because the professionals' education must provide knowledge of the service system as well as prepare them for working with young people or in social rehabilitation. Professionals must steer young people into stimulating services, but also into ones that may result in disappointment and discouragement. While many services strive to be youth-oriented, they must also critically examine whether young people can influence the services they are directed to, and also manage feedback or potential disappointment.

Short education paths shorten the road to the labour market, but the labour market provides (mostly) uncertain temporary work and project work for people with basic education. Is it accurate to state that this system traps young people in a long-standing cycle of exclusion and pushes them into a status that provides low-paying, temporary jobs and where everyone is replaceable? Some services currently provided for young people at risk of exclusion are temporary, and even service professionals may be working under temporary contracts.

15 Even young people were aware that courses provided by TE offices were outsourced. In all three groups, at least one young person knew that, for example, a career counselling course that TE offices provided had been delegated to an external service provider that they could name.

Recent public debate has stressed the importance of early intervention, as well as investment in early education and childhood welfare, to prevent social exclusion (e.g. Sipilä & Österbacka 2013). While these initiatives are valuable, they must include the notion that youth exclusion is not attributed to the individual and that people can re-enter the mainstream at every age and situation.



APPENDIX

1 INTERVIEW STRUCTURE: PROFESSIONALS

Background information

- Name, position and employer
- Qualifications, time in the field, previous working experience with young people

Client relationships, practical aspect

- Describe a typical interaction with a client. What happens? How do you proceed?
- What constitutes a successful/unsuccessful client appointment?
- Why do young adults aged 18-29 become your clients?
- What is the typical length of client relationships?
- Do you know what other services your clients are in contact with?
- Are the services/communication methods aimed at young adults low-threshold services / one-stop models?
- At the moment, there is discussion over multi-professional group work. Does your work demonstrate multi-professionalism?
- Are young people a distinct client group? Do they have specialised needs?
- What is the procedure when young people become clients? How do they contact you? (telephone / online / visit the office)
- How simple is it to use your services?
- Applications: are they completed online/on paper/at home/in the office, can young people complete them independently?
- Have you experienced situations where young people require support that you are unable to provide? Where have you steered them?
- Are there 'difficult' clients? How would you describe them?

- And ideal clients?
- Do young people often miss appointments? What is the procedure in these situations?
- What do you think is the best method for measuring the impact of support you provide for young people? Describe successes and examples of progress.
- Follow-up with young people?

How young people can exert influence

- How much can young people influence the services they are attending or how they use the services?
- What could hearing the voice of young people entail?
- Some sectors have discussed the use of experts by experience – could they be applicable in your service and, if so, how?
- Do your services meet the needs of young people? What do you think must change in order to offer young people appropriate services?

Youth exclusion

- What are your thoughts on the debate on youth exclusion? How has the public debate impacted your work?
- How is the social empowerment mentioned in the Youth Act visible in your work? How do you interpret procedures stated in the act?
- The purpose of the Youth Act is to (1§) 'support young people's growth and independence, to promote young people's active citizenship and empowerment and to improve young people's growth and living conditions.' Social empowerment refers to (2§) 'measures targeted at young people and geared to improve life management skills and to prevent exclusion.' (Youth Act 2006.)

2 INTERVIEW STRUCTURE:

YOUNG PEOPLE

Background information

- Name, age, place of residence
- Describe your family / Who do you live with?
- What is the occupation of your parents and siblings? What is their education level? How would you describe your relationship with your parents and your siblings?
- Are you comfortable financially or do you experience periods of financial instability?

Life history

- Describe your life in your own words. (Childhood, primary education, lower secondary education, family, friends, housing, school, leisure-time, substance use, mental state)
- Significant changes in your life? Have you experienced some changes or made choices that have transformed your life?

Experiences as a client and service paths

- How did you become client in this service? Who steered you here?
- How would you describe your client experience?
- Do you feel people listen to you, that you can influence things?
- Have you been steered elsewhere? Where?
- Have you been asked to submit feedback on the services?
- What information about you do the professionals have?
- Do you have friends in similar situation as you? Can you obtain 'unofficial' information on how to communicate with authorities?
- Do you have a person who you can ask for help with appointments/advice about life?
- What services would you like to have? What would help you?
- What things are positive and negative in your

life? Can the professionals see your situation?

- Describe a situation in which things are good. Describe a good life.
- Have you been or are you currently a client in another service? (school counsellor, child protection services, youth psychiatric care)
- Have you found your way between different projects and services?
- Who/what institutions have helped you? Describe any intervention you have experienced.
- What type of help would you or your childhood family have needed?
- Describe your dreams for the future. What are you interested in?
- Describe your hobbies.

Views on:

- Public debate on youth exclusion
- Expertise by experience as a concept
- Low-threshold services, one-stop services

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Vi arbetar med unga i Norden. (We work with Youth Issues in the Nordic Region).

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During 2016 you will be able to download more reports, so follow the project:
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