

5 important things I learned as a volunteer in the youth work field



I always dreamed about becoming a teacher. I kept imagining how lovely and kind I will be. I wasn't thinking that I could have any problems while communicating with youth. Come on, I'm young myself and I know all the bloggers they are watching!

Then I got a real opportunity to work with teenagers in Tartu as a volunteer for Anne Youth center. And "What's going on?" was the main phrase in my head for the first two months.

Of course, I was fascinated by the opportunities I had here. I was going to do activities related to the topics I was interested in, talk with youth, inspire them and make the world better. Also, I was going to attend different events, meet new people, cook new food, dedicate more time to my numerous hobbies (like fashion illustration, scriptwriting, reading non-fiction, etc).

And here is a perfect place to insert some "expectations-reality" memes.

The truth is the first few months I mostly spent adjusting to the environment, people, and most importantly to my new job. I had never worked in the youth field before. I had never thought about it seriously. And here I was, bachelor in advertising, copywriter and editor of 8 years, doing her first steps in the youth work field. And it's a complicated but also a very lovely journey.

As a youth worker, I discovered the tough side of me. I'm trying to be cheerful and kind, but with my hyperactive kids you should act sometimes like a strict gloomy lady. I remember that in the first few months they were even calling me "the woman who loves to talk about serious stuff" because I was doing a lot of lectures and presentations on some global issues. It was really hard to talk with them because they were easily distracted. I changed my attitude many times and I'm still learning. But I already can tell you the most important things I learned during my volunteering service so far.

Listen and watch

The games they are playing, the videos they are watching, the music they're listening to. Fortunately, I knew most of their favorite musicians and video bloggers. Still, sometimes I have the feeling that I'm too old for some things. Then I'm laughing at some stupid TikTok videos with them and feel like I'm 13 again. But even if I don't know something or someone, my kids are always willing to tell me everything. And that's truly precious.

You can't be lovely all the time

And you shouldn't. It's hard to always be a nice kind lady when you're working with active kids. It's hard for them to follow the rules. It's hard for you to watch them not following the rules. While communicating with kids I try to remember how I was at their age. That helps me to understand their motives and not get angry.

Sometimes you won't understand them

And they won't understand you. And that's ok. We're coming from different generations. It's fine if you're not interested in something they're into. And vice versa. At first I was getting really sad when they were not interested in some activities I was doing for them. Now I know that it's totally fine. And I've learned a lot of things from that.

Talk to kids while planning something for them

Kids know better what makes them happy. So it's better to talk with them while planning something. They always have something good in mind. Also, they feel important and appreciated when you ask for advice.

Don't underestimate and depreciate their feelings

My lovely teenagers are very often upset because of some small and not important issues. But it's essential to remember that these things are stupid and small only in my subjective opinion. Telling them something like "oh, you won't remember that in 1 hour/day/month/year!" is not working. For most of them, all that matters is NOW. And now they are upset. It's better to listen to them and express some empathy.

These were the main 5 things I've learned. I can't wait to explore the field more and share my experience with you!