



**Outreach Youth Work and The Health and Social Services Reform  
Outreach Youth Workers' Perspective**

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MASTER'S THESIS

November 2023

Community Work and Multicultural Management

## ABSTRACT

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The Health and Social Services Reform and Youth Work. Outreach Youth  
Workers Perspective

Master's thesis 67 pages, appendices 4 pages

November 2023

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After the 2018 economic crisis, Finland established several policies and services called Youth Support Systems, creating the Outreach Youth Work. This service, structured and legislated by the Ministry of Education and Culture as part of youth legislation, has great relevance in the Youth Act (2017).

Outreach youth work aims to reach young people in need, or what Mäkelä et al. (2021) and Mertanen et al. (2020) define as "at-risk". Those responsible for this task are the Outreach youth workers. Without Outreach to youth workers, the risks would lead young people to drift toward social exclusion passively (Mertanen et al. 2022).

This master thesis is based on three stances: legislative analysis, the search for scientific theory, and the collection of empirical data. From May to September, six open interviews with Outreach youth workers have been conducted. These experts, those individuals who carry out their work in the youth field, are the appropriate ones to detail their perspective on their professional work, their relationship with young people, and their cooperation with the corresponding County.

This thesis contains data on what Outreach youth work is, how it is developed in Vantaa and its direct or indirect involvement with Vantaa and Kerava County from the perspective of the Outreach youth workers.

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Key words: youth work, outreach youth work, outreach youth worker, health and social services reform

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

Youth work and social work have been linked in my life even before I started studying social work. Working with young people has consistently been present in my growth as an active individual in municipal activities, youth volunteering, and implementing activities in youth associations with civil impact, gender, leisure and free time. Before finishing my studies as a social worker, I wrote my thesis about a municipal comparison between Spain and Finland from the point of view of youth services in the public sector. Since then, my professional career has also been linked to youth work. Due to the deep and sincere interest that this area arouses in me, it is indisputable that its development will be bearable and entertaining.

In recent times and with the change of government, the topics of Youth, Outreach youth work and at-risk young people occupy some of the recent headlines in the national press Yle (search in Yle.fi, October 2023). Youth work is a practice of social and political education, community education, and, in a certain way, informal learning. Youth work is characterised by a direct relationship with education, in which dialogue is one of the essential bases for establishing social relationships. (Batsleer J., 2013)

Back to the 2018 economic crisis, Finland established several policies and services called Youth Support Systems. Creating these policies conceives what Mertanen et al. (2020) define as the "Youth Problem", so the Outreach youth work was conceived. Outreach youth work, as a youth service, is structured and legislated by the Ministry of Education and Culture as part of youth legislation. It has great relevance in the Youth Act (2017).

Outreach youth work aims to reach young people in need and support to help them access services and participate more actively in society Mertanen et al. (2020). Mäkelä et al. (2021) and Mertanen et al. (2020) define these young people in need of help and support as "at-risk".

The Ministry of Education and Culture legislates the professional to carry out this investigative work: the role of outreach youth workers. Without Outreach youth workers, the previously mentioned vulnerabilities would lead young people to drift toward social exclusion passively. (Mertanen et al. 2022).

Outreach Youth work is a field that requires more remarkable municipal attention, but also at the government level, even more now when we find ourselves in the middle of the transition from the call The Health and Social Services Reform. Since January 2023, after the implementation of the reform, Vantaa municipality (Kaupunki) has ceased to be responsible for the operation and development of health and social services, handing over this task to the so-called counties. Although youth work, specifically outreach youth work, continues to be managed by the Vantaa Kaupunki, health and social services are responsibility of the Vantaa and Kerava Hyvinvointialue (County).

This master's thesis aims to discover what Outreach youth work is, and how is implemented in Vantaa Kaupunki, from the perspective of Outreach youth workers. It is our interest to analyse the Health and Social Services Reform transition while attempting to reflect the interaction of a municipal service from the perspective of Outreach youth workers.

## 2 PURPOSE, RESEARCH QUESTIONS, OBJECTIVES

### 2.1 Purpose

This master's thesis purpose is to describe what Outreach youth work is, and how is being implemented after the Health and Social Services Reform. To this end, these possible changes, benefits, and conflicts will be investigated and analysed from the perspective of Outreach youth workers. It is also a matter of interest to comprehend how Health and Social Services Reform can contribute to and favour the development of youth work, concretely, how the counties can collaborate with Outreach youth work. Getting this standpoint from employees assembling these transformations and the "participatory" issue of the services will be engaging.

The municipality selected for the development of this thesis is Vantaa Kaupunki. The reason why this collaboration has been chosen is simply due to personal work familiarity when selecting a municipality. Therefore, and based on the Health and Social Services Reform, the county to which Vantaa Kaupunki belongs is Vantaa and Kerava Hyvinvointialue.

Considering the regulations and legislation in which work with young people is framed: *The Act on Youth 2017* (Ministry of Education and Culture 2023), Youth work aims to promote young people's active citizenship and participation. The critical goals of youth work include social empowerment, independence and improving young people's growth and living conditions. As the Outreach youth work is based on promoting participation (Youth Act 2017), it is necessary to assess this point from the vision of the youth workers in terms of changes and improvements to enable these matters of relevance.

## **2.2 Research Questions**

### **1. What is Outreach youth work, and how is implemented in Vantaa Kaupunki?**

The first step is to investigate Outreach youth work: legislative basis, its objectives, development and implementation, and the services with which it collaborates within the Vantaa municipality but also with corresponding county.

### **2. What is the role of the Outreach youth workers?**

The objective is to collect empirical data concerning the perspective of Outreach youth workers regarding their work, role, and above all work performance in the municipality but also corresponding county.

### **3. What are the most significant changes that Outreach youth work service has been facing after the Health and Social Services Reform?**

From this perspective, the aim is to collect data and analyse the possible changes, benefits, and conflicts involved in developing a municipal service within the corresponding county.

## **2.3 Objectives**

### **1. To compile concrete and specific information on the operation, development and implementation of Outreach youth work services.**

The interest is to obtain empirical data on outreach youth work at the municipal level and its development within the corresponding county service. Outreach youth work is a municipal service that carries out a precious job: finding at-risk young people. Considering recent times and the focus on youth conflicts, it is deemed relevant to analyse youth work service-oriented and the long-term impact of this service.



## **2. To research the role of Outreach youth workers.**

The interest is to obtain empirical information about the work that outreach youth workers do daily at the municipal level and within the corresponding county service. Outreach youth workers carry out highly valuable, front-line work in finding, accompanying and contributing to the personal aspects of at-risk young people. This work takes place far beyond the walls of the service; most of its work is collaborative in public health and social services.

## **3. To analyse the changes, benefits, and conflicts of the Health and Social Services Reform concerning the Outreach youth work.**

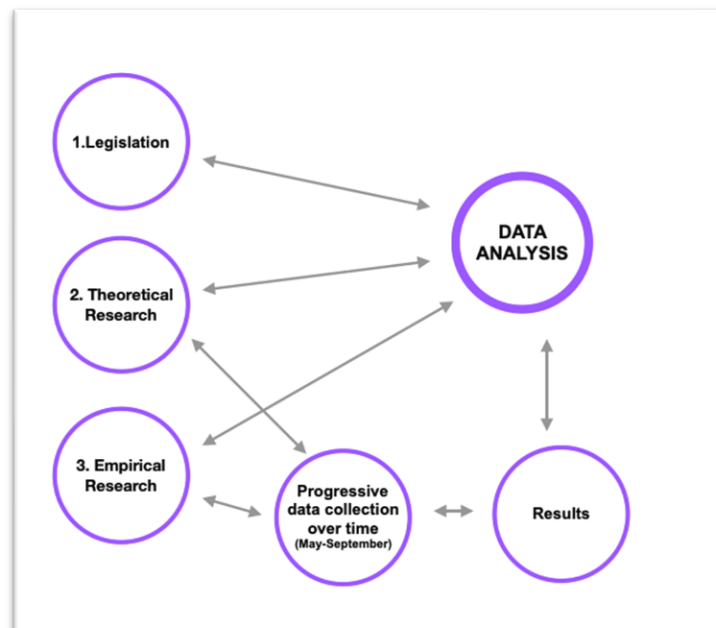
Considering that municipal and county services are directly connected, the aim is to hear from youth workers their experiences, impressions and opinions on the Health and Social Services Reform in their work. This information is of great value since the reform has only recently been implemented, and there are still many areas that need to be adjusted. This information can be of great value, considering that municipal services and the corresponding county services must collaborate directly or indirectly day-to-day.

### 3 IMPLEMENTATION OF THE THESIS

#### 3.1. Research Approach Methodology

The research approach follows the line of an ontological selection being the starting point of the research. Open interviews have been conducted, as part of the empirical research with the subject of this study: Outreach youth workers.

1. **Research strategy.** As Kendra Cherry (2022) describes, a case study is an in-depth study of a person, group, or event. In this case, the subject of the thesis is the Outreach youth workers. The research strategy to assess data collection comes from three sources: legislative, theoretical, and empirical data. These three data sources will be throughout the entire process, compared and analysed together.



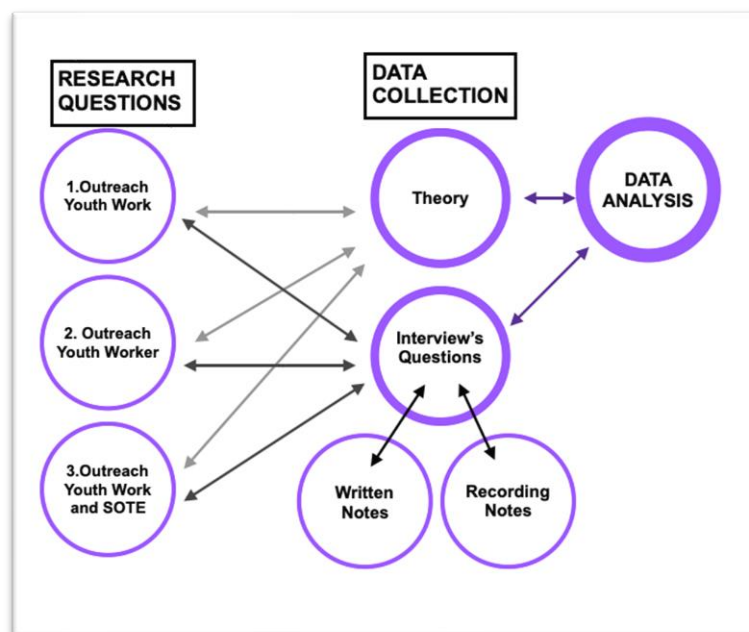
Picture 1. Research Design

As seen in Picture 1, this thesis has been designed to obtain data based during the months of May-September.

2. **Data collection method.** The qualitative research method is what is known as Hermeneutic-phenomenological. The data collection has been

compelled from two perspectives: empirically, since scientific concepts and theories are represented, and data collection through the open interview, conducted more like “in dialogue” with the outreach youth workers. Cherry (2022) states that discussions are one of the most relevant methods for collecting information in case studies. In this case, the interviews have been unstructured but somewhat directed by open questions, allowing the interviewee to guide the discussion.

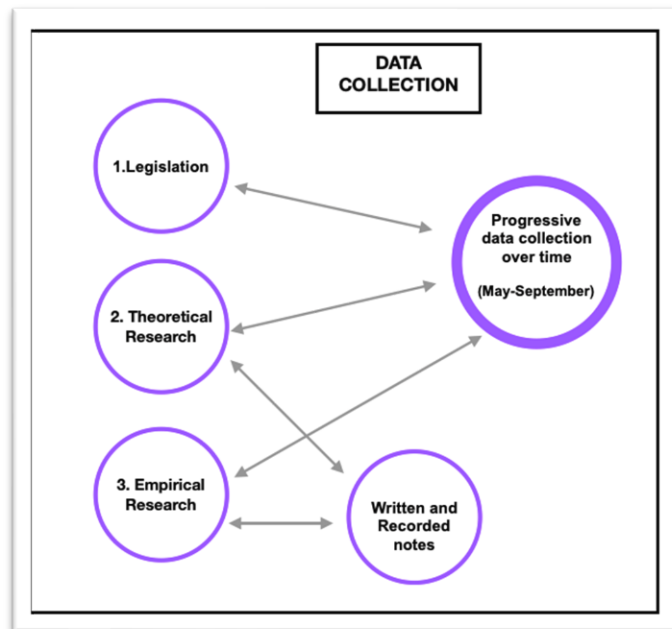
3. **Data analysis method.** The interpretation of the data has been processed in content analysis. McCombes (2023) suggests that by exploring the topic from different angles and analysing its meanings and implications, it is conceivable to compare theory with reality. Thus, it is also necessary to expose contextual details about the case that have similarities with literature and theory and, in turn, argue and analyse the information objectified. To interpret the data, path analysis has been designed based on theory-driven analysis. As of Picture 2. It is possible to observe how the data collected based on the research questions will be considered. Once the theoretical bases have been obtained, open interviews will be conducted based on the theoretical findings.



Picture 2. Data-Driven Analysis

### 3.2. Empirical data process

After completing the thesis plan in March 2023, the head of municipal youth services in Vantaa Kaupunki has been contacted. This person provided the appropriate contacted service to request the corresponding permits, [Appendix 1](#). Once permission was obtained in April 2023, contact was made with the person responsible for Outreach youth work. After obtaining research permission, the interviews were established gradually between May and September 2023. Once the master's thesis is completed, it is necessary to submit a copy of the corresponding service, as proof of the completion of the empirical search process in the service.



Picture 3. Data Collection Process

As seen in Picture 3, the results of this master thesis come from three critical perspectives: legislation, theoretical search, and empirical search.

Legislation has facilitated the immediate understanding of the meaning of this thesis, so the path forward regarding data collection has been immediately adapted.

As explained, because the data collection has been carried out progressively, it has been possible to compare and analyse the results actively and constantly.

This fact has facilitated that, as the data has been collected, there is more excellent knowledge not only at a theoretical level but also at a practical level. This fact has made it easier for the last interviews to contain data of a higher emotional, concrete and more personal level compared to the first interviews. So, the final conversations provide data of higher quality content. Guide to open interview questions attached [Appendix 2](#).

### **3.3. Compilation of empirical data**

Six outreach youth workers from the Outreach youth services participated in these interviews. Five out of six interviews have been conducted in Finnish language to facilitate workers' participation. One out of six interview was conducted in the English language.

The discussions have been collected as a recording on the computer device or written notes. Regarding the recordings, three out of six interviews have been recorded on the computer, and three interviews have been collected in paper notes. All the written notes are in the English language.

Four interviews have been carried out in person. Two in the vicinity of Outreach youth work in Vantaa, Kipinätaalo. One of the interviews was in the vicinity of Liito, and one of the interviews was in a Coffee place. Two interviews have been carried out online. All agreed dates have been written on the teams' university calendars.

The interviews dates, scheduled time and place detailed as follows in Table 1.

Interview's date	Time	Location	Collected Data Method
19.05.23	13.00-14.00	Online	Voice notes
26.05.23	16.00-17.00	Coffee Place	Voice notes
04.07.23	08.00-09.00	Kipinätaalo	Paper notes
04.08.23	08.15-09.15	Kipinätaalo	Paper notes
15.09.23	09.00-10.00	Liito	Paper notes
26.09.23	13.00-14.00	Online	Voice notes

Table 1. Interviews summary.

All the interviews lasted about an hour each. The accumulated minutes of the recordings amount to a total of 92.69 minute. Approximately 30 minutes extra have not been recorded since it includes personal information of the interviewee. Handwritten paper notes amount is to up to seven pages. The audio recordings remain on the computer as voice notes. [Appendix 3](#). The analysis of the collected data is based on open interviews; in one way or another, both the data collected in audio notes and the written notes have been utilised. The three research questions find their answers based on the empirical data obtained.

The ethical review of this thesis is based on the guidelines of the Finnish National Board for Research Integrity TENK (2019). The following points have been considered:

1. Respect people's dignity and autonomy, as well as their privacy, identity and/or sexual orientation, language or political ideology. So, to preserve the anonymity of the people, the interviewee's identity has always been suppressed.
2. Consent permissions. Before conducting the interviews, participants had declared their total liberty in participation. Each participant has completed the necessary Consent Form with the corresponding licenses. These documents are attached in the [Appendix 4](#).
3. The research has been carried out without significant risk or harm. All participants have completed the interview from start to finish, in their place or method of choice, facilitating their safety and comfort.

All the people interviewed are of legal age, over 18 years old. Each interview has been carried out individually. Each conversation has been perceived as sincere, warm, close, and natural. Each of the youth workers interviewed stands out for one characteristic: the way they refer to young people is always from a positive perspective. The young person needs support not only by talking about them but by understanding the problem in general. This leads me to understand that these workers love their work. But above all, they want the best for young people.

## 4 LEGISLATION AND WORKING LIFE PARTNER

### 4.1. Legislation

In Finland, The Ministry of Social Affairs and Health (2023), one of the responsibilities of the public sector is to ensure the health and well-being of the population. The new Health and Social Services Reform (2023), implemented at the beginning of the year, defines that municipalities will persist in organising certain services, including childcare, education, sports and cultural services. This reform seeks to be orchestrated exclusively in a people-oriented practice. (Health and Social Services Reform 2023).

One of the notorious modifications this reform introduces is the creation of counties, in which the services offered will be public law bodies exercising autonomy within their regions. The highest decision-making body in each welfare services county will be a provincial council elected by popular vote. Since January 2023, Vantaa's health and social services are managed from the Vantaa and Kerava County. (Health and Social Services Reform 2023).

The Ministry of Education and Culture is responsible for developing youth work and its policy (Ministry of Education and Culture 2023). The government and local authorities are responsible for creating framework conditions for youth work and supervising the funding and implementation.

By *The Act on Youth 2017* (Ministry of Education and Culture 2023), Youth work is appointed to promote young people's social, mental, and civil development. Among the fundamental purposes of youth work include social empowerment and autonomy, by enhancing young people's growth and living conditions. Youth Work spheres, based on the legislation include "*Youth engagement, Youth organisations, Municipal and National youth centres, youth research, and last, the area of interest: workshop activities and outreach youth work*" (Areas of Youth Work, Ministry of Education and Culture, Finland 2023).



The current Youth Act came into force on the 1st of January 2017 (Ministry of Education and Culture, Finland 2023). Its goal, as it is described in the Youth Act, is:

*“To promote young people’s social inclusion and opportunities for exerting an influence; improve their skills and capabilities to function in society; support their growth, independence and sense of community and facilitate the acquisition of knowledge, adoption of skills and pursuit of free-time hobbies and activities in civic society; as well as to promote non-discrimination and realisation of civic rights while improving young people’s growth and living conditions. Underlying these objectives are the principles of solidarity, multiculturalism, internationalism, sustainable development, healthy lifestyles, respect for life and the environment and cross-sectoral cooperation”. (Youth Act, 2017, §1).*

Youth Act 2017, 1: Government proposal 111/2016, including amendments made by the Education and Culture Committee.

The Youth Act (2017) encloses Youth Work as part of youth education, reinforcing the educational responsibilities such as home, school, but also the community.

#### **4.2. Working Life Partner**

Based on the Youth Act (2017, section 10), Vantaa Kaupunki assumes the responsibility of organising outreach youth work in the municipality. *Vantaan Etsivä nuorisotyö* is the only Outreach youth work service in Vantaa Kaupunki, so its development in terms of collaborations with health and social services is determined in consideration of Vantaa and Kerava County. This means, regardless of whether *Vantaan Etsivä nuorisotyö* is a service specifically for Vantaa, it has a direct relationship with the Vantaa and Kerava County. (Vantaa Kaupunki 2023).

## 5 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### 5.1. Youth Work

Considering the impact of Social Work, Johnston-Goodstar K. et al. (2014) reflect on how social work is an explicit method of practice or theoretical core. Social Work connects with voice, power, resistance and collective narrative.

Social work is the agent that must enable both individual and community development, especially of those marginalised or most vulnerable voices. Social work must underscore lived experiences as a central component of social life, seeking opportunities that favour the empowerment of vulnerable and marginalised groups. Social work must adopt a more critical form of practice that considers issues of power, participation and social justice. Thus, these practices must adapt social work practices to develop youth social work. (Johnston-Goodstar K. et al. 2014).

The government and local authorities are responsible for creating framework conditions for youth work and supervising the funding and implementation (Digital Youth Work, A Finnish Perspective 2017).

According to Batsleer J. (2013), Youth work is a practice of social and political education, community education, and, in a certain way, informal learning. Youth work is characterised by a direct relationship with education, in which dialogue is one of the essential bases for establishing social relationships. Batsleer J. (2013) acknowledges that it is thanks to Pablo Freire that, in contemporary years, youth work has focused more on an interventional level, rather than the simple construction of relationships and associations. Youth work as a practice develops towards awareness of issues of power and empowerment, human rights movements, anti-social behaviour, credentialing and formal accreditation of youth learning.

Youth work has become an important vehicle through which we aim to achieve a higher level of participation. Currently, youth work encompasses a wide range of

social, cultural, educational or political activities, carried out by, with and for young people. (Ord Jon. et al. 2022). Youth work must provide power and opportunity to young people through close collaboration with the public, private and independent sectors. The objective should be to improve the quality of life of young people. (Evans, P. 2012). Youth work has essential directing principles, including appreciation but also reflecting on concern for young people: needs, aspirations, interests, and goals. Youth work should be voluntary, youth-centred, self-reflective and critical, values-driven and relational practice. (Ord Jon. et al. 2022).

Youth work can lead to goal-oriented educational activity that brings together methods to achieve the goals of youth work. (Kiilakoski et al. 2015). According to Tomi Kiilakoski (2017) working with youth is about education. It is about supporting young people to live good lives by helping them seize opportunities as unique individuals. Youth work is about long-term relationships. It's not just about specific events or workshops; It has to last several years. It is necessary to focus on the objectives but also on the process. The educational process of youth work provides favourable results by involving them in activities with other young people.

Understanding youth work requires an analysis of what it means, legislatively but also theoretically. In recent years, youth work has gained a priority at the European level and, of course, at the national level. This development is visible through the publication of political documents that place youth work in a relevant place to fulfil a series of political objectives. (Ord Jon. et al. 2022). These documents provide essential information on youth work background, policies and a global perspective on the issues to focus on when working with young people. (Evans, P. 2012). Currently, most European policies concerning youth have to do with the evaluation of the youth labour supply, but also at a participatory level in which activities and volunteering are the topic of interest. (Ord Jon. et al. 2022).

Due to the 2018 economic crisis, Finland established several policies and services called youth support systems. The creation of these policies conceives in what Mertanen et al. (2020) define as the "youth problem". Finnish youth work policies and their implementation are regulated from two angles: National legislation, mainly by the Youth Act (2017), but also partly by EU governing bodies

such as the European Commission. These guidelines allow us to additionally analyse the criteria and values by which young people in Finnish society develop. Among these policies, we found the Youth Guarantee, youth outreach work and the Comprehensive Guidance Centers Steering Cabin (Ohjaamo). (Mertanen et al. 2022).

The implementation of the Youth Guarantee meant an increase in services and support systems offered to young people, and other services such as management cabins of the comprehensive guidance centre (Ohjaamo), but mainly in services such as outreach youth work. (Mertanen et al. 2022).

The purpose of outreach youth work is to reach youth who are considered in need of intervention. The support systems, the management cabins of the comprehensive guidance service (Ohjaamo), bring together under one roof a network of public and private services, such as public employment services, youth work, the social work office and assistance municipal healthcare, providing individual advice and training to young people seeking help.

These policies are currently included in the Youth Act (2017), placing Finland in an exemplary place at the European level. The Finnish youth work requirement and support systems are an achievement and an example of so-called "best practice". (Mertanen et al. 2022).

## **5.2. Outreach Youth Work**

As described by the Ministry of Education and Culture (2023), Outreach youth work aims to assist young people who require support to access the services they need. (Mertanen et al. 2020). In the Youth Act, outreach youth work is presented as a solution, a response to the problems and challenges of young persons identified as "at risk". (Mertanen et al. 2020). In the Youth Act, the meaning of youth outreach work states:

*"The purpose of youth outreach work is to contact a young person who needs support and help them access those services and other*

*supports that help their growth, independence, participation in society and other life management skills, and access to education and the labour market. Outreach youth work is based on young people's voluntary participation and cooperation” (Youth Act, 2016 §10).*

According to the Youth Act (2017), outreach youth work aims to reach young people in need and support to help them access services and participate more actively in society. Mäkelä et al. (2021) and Mertanen et al. (2020) define these young people in need of help and support as “at-risk”. At-risk is a change agent for youth support systems to uncover and recognise young people who need intervention.

To define at-risk, it is necessary to consider all individual and social aspects. So Mäkelä et al. (2021) define at-risk as young people from diverse backgrounds and life circumstances commonly known to have challenges with employment, higher education, the transition from education to work and social engagement. These are primarily young people who are not employed studying or receiving training.

Young people considered at-risk are generally seen as a threat to economic growth and the future success of society (Kiilakoski 2014), and usually cost the state much more money than they generate since they do not contribute taxations or labour and often require psychiatric care. (Takkunen 2014).

Another perspective on how to define youth at-risk is defined by Ulla-Maija Takkunen (2014). In her interview, Takkunen (2014) highlights the term "*hidden youth who have been forgotten.*" Those young people who, over time, isolated themselves in their homes to the point of losing absolute contact with the outside world. As time passes, these young people lose their social skills, normalising loneliness and increasing the risk of developing physical and mental health problems.

Based on these two perspectives, at-risk young people are perceived as a threat to economic growth and development due to their low activity level and are con-

sidered to interfere with society's future success. Thus, the only way to compensate for these losses is to redirect and guide them towards education, employment, or other forms of economically recognisable activity (Kiilakoski 2014). Considering the Finnish Youth Act (2017), the objective of Outreach youth work is precisely this: to find these young people at risk and guide them in accessing essential services and participating more actively in social affairs. Outreach youth work mainly aims to act as a search agent, a detective, that is, going out into the streets, shopping centres and train stations in search of at-risk youth. (Mäkelä et al. 2021). In this context, Outreach youth work strives to solve the problems of welfare politics by searching for young people at-risk to activate them into the market logic (Brunila et al. 2019). The reality is that municipalities decide how they organise and develop youth outreach work (Mäkelä et al. 2021).

The reality is that acting as a detective who strives to search for young people without a job, and encourages them to become taxpayers, is not a simple assignment. Young people have often been defined as in need of specific requirements, guidance, education, counselling and different skills for life management and employability. At-risk youth do not necessarily have the resources nor the skills to attempt for themselves, on their own, to cope in the everyday life. Many of the young people have physical and/or psychological problems, and many remain without a treatment, or even worse, without a diagnose. (Mertanen et al. 2022).

Municipal services function as different organisational structures. Outreach youth work strives to become the bridge between these multiple actors, creating a more comprehensive network, facilitating the understanding, and improving the interests among young people but also other professionals. Youth workers and public and third-sector organisations develop multiple opportunities for young people, and Outreach youth work serves as the connection among these different services. (Mertanen et al. 2022).

To promote this network and support, outreach youth work considers assisting young people under 29 years of age. In this way, an attempt is made to support a larger group and enable them to access services that will facilitate their growth, independence, and participation in society, strengthen their life management

skills, and provide greater access to education and services, labour markets. (Mertanen et al. 2022).

### **5.3. Outreach Youth Workers**

The Ministry of Education and Culture legislates the role of outreach youth workers and its support for recruiting social workers for outreach youth work. This legislation also includes youth work as part of youth education, which supports the educational duties of home, school and the surrounding society. (Nolas 2014). Colvin S. et al. (2020) believe youth development programs should increasingly focus on youth empowerment and leadership, with youth workers embracing new roles and practices.

Among the various definitions of being a youth worker, we agree with Mertanen (2022), who defines them as detectives. (Mertanen et al. 2022). That is, finding clues, searching for the young people and their whereabouts, and guiding them back away from exclusion and self-exclusion. So-called youth workers carry out outreach youth work. (Nolas 2014). Without Outreach youth workers, the previously mentioned vulnerabilities would lead young people to drift toward social exclusion passively. (Mertanen et al. 2022)

The official functions of Outreach youth workers are related to providing companionship to young people, offering them the opportunity to have safe and confidential contact, building trust with adults and motivating them to cooperate with authorities. Outreach youth workers carry out their work at different levels, from the emotional level, cooperation in rehabilitation work and forms of training, and psychiatric/psychological or other behavioural support and evaluation. These data and diagnoses help young people access social benefits, minimum wages or unemployment benefits. (Mäkelä et al. (2021).

From this perspective, it is possible to understand the positive development of youth work and the relationship that moulds and builds the youth worker with the

young person. This relationship-based youth work in specific spaces can be enabled for the participatory objective. (Nolas 2014).

Youth workers emphasize the importance of long-term relationships with young people to ensure closer and more intimate connections, thus promoting mutual connection. (Mäkelä et al. 2021) call this *The Will to Know*. Those proliferating practices and activities make the topic knowable so that networking with other professionals is aimed at guiding, helping, coordinating and empowering young people. (Mäkelä et al. 2021).

According to Mäkelä et al. (2021), youth workers consider that young people cannot immediately open to strangers. There must first be a relationship, as with other young people. Once relationships and trust are established, youth workers can begin to coordinate and guide youth toward job training, rehabilitation work and workshops, and finding part-time jobs, all of which typically fall within the process of cultivating the employability of young people. (Mäkelä et al. 2021).

The outreach youth workers base their work on what Mäkelä et al. (2021) define as "*The imperative of positivity*". It is a broad viewpoint, Mäkelä et al. (2021) refer to what is known as the positive psychology. This is a strengths-based education, where the person built and refers to positive pedagogies such as social abilities. Among this we can include empathy, confidence, self-esteem, resilience, and a positive learning. Outreach youth work connects to various "rehabilitation work" systems that strengthen young people's subjectivity towards employability. The social abilities have a huge impact when developing the client-worker relationship. (Mäkelä et al. 2021).

#### **5.4. Youth Participation**

Although Youth Participation has less relevance in this work, it is necessary to include it when developing the theoretical framework since it is impossible to talk about Youth without participants. (Verke 2017).



It is worth clarifying that it is well known that the stage of Youth is largely recognised as a stage of life in which biological and psychological developments coincide with social and institutional processes. Overcoming this stage means concluding with transitioning to adulthood, socially, economically and biologically determined or established. Young people must orient their lives towards being primarily economic contributors, prioritising educational qualifications, skills and employment. Thus, participation at the civil level, as a citizen, is mainly relegated to the monetary contribution to the state. (Harris A. et al. 2021).

From a European perspective, participation is mostly directed towards the civil field and social issues. (Harris A. et al. 2021). This is called Youth Civic engagement. (Collins, M.E. et al. 2016). Thanks to European policies, (Hartung, C. 2017), youth civil participation in Finland continues to grow, to the point to emergence of the young citizen as a global priority.

The problem arises that the contradictory messages about youth create an environment in which some adults see the capabilities and want young people to evolve and take part in the decisions, and another group of adults only see the negative side of the age range. (Collins, M.E. et al. 2016).

The problem comes from a political level and, undoubtedly, has an impact at a social level. The challenges are not only at the participatory level, but most of these issues are caused by a lack of access to support systems, a deficiency of networks that reinforce the employment and education systems, and an insufficiency of life management skills, independence, and growth. That is, far beyond what is merely known as financial participation.

In other words, young people are considered not only at-risk but also a risk that needs to be managed. (Mertanen et al. 2022). Participation in society is related to the skills and abilities that young people need to function as members of society. That is, before asking them to be actively participatory beings, there must be a support system that facilitates these skills and abilities. The Youth Act (2017) describes a problematic representation of those unskilled and non-participating

young people who have potential. This potential in young people at risk needs to be supported. (Mertanen et al. 2022).

If we consider that it is thanks to the economic crisis of 2018 that the policies and services called youth support systems emerged. (Mertanen et al. 2020). We understand that the biggest problem is because young people are unemployed, and they cost the government more than they contribute. (Takkunen 2014). This strategy notes that the "situation" of youth unemployment is due to a lack of suitable jobs. (Mertanen et al. 2022).

Mertanen et al. (2022) write the possible solution to the "problem" of youth unemployment: the strategy should focus on young people's education and training to overcome these daily life problems. Solution plans should encourage young people to move towards independence and socialization, focusing on developing the necessary skills and knowledge to close the gap and become fully functional members of society.

Mertanen et al. (2022) write the possible solution to the "problem" of youth unemployment: the strategy should focus on young people's education and training to overcome these daily life problems. Solution plans should encourage young people to move towards independence and socialisation, focusing on developing the necessary skills and knowledge to close the gap and become fully functional members of society. As many of these young people need to be found, recognised, and provided access to services, according to Mertanen et al. (2022), the most appropriate service for this task is Outreach youth work.

## 6 RESEARCH RESULTS

### 6.1. Implementation of Outreach Youth Work in Vantaa Kaupunki

Based on the first research question of this thesis, Outreach youth services in Vantaa Kaupunki are aimed at young people between 16 and 28 years old, (Vantaa Kaupunki 2023). This age range is predetermined by the Youth Act (2017), it has relevance and significance since it is the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment (2023) that stipulates that:

*“A young person can enter a permanent employment relationship at the age of 15 years old only if this person has completed the basic education programme”* (Labour legislation, Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment 2023).

Based on the Youth Act (2017, section 10), the main problem related to young people is that those who need support are somehow lost. The solution to this problem is for youth outreach work to get in touch with these lost youth and help them access the services and support systems they need. (Mertanen et al. 2022).

The mission of youth outreach work in Vantaa, based on the Youth Act (2017, section 10), is to find young people who need assistance and provide access to services and other supports designed to promote their growth, autonomy, social inclusion and life skills, life management, as well as enhancing access to education and enabling entry into the labour market.

Thus, Outreach youth work aims to search for those who require support in whichever area and guide them towards the most appropriate municipal services in Vantaa or, to the Vantaa and Kerava County. Outreach youth work is a bridge between young people and different services to support their life situations. Guidance is offered so that the service is accompanied and supported, promoting young people's independent growth. (Vantaa Kaupunki 2023).

Vantaa Kaupunki Outreach Youth Service receives information and contact regarding young people from four different sources: Military service, high school or vocational school, the youth's parents or relatives, or the youth themselves. Sometimes, it is a young person who talks to another young person about the service. (Vantaa Kaupunki 2023).

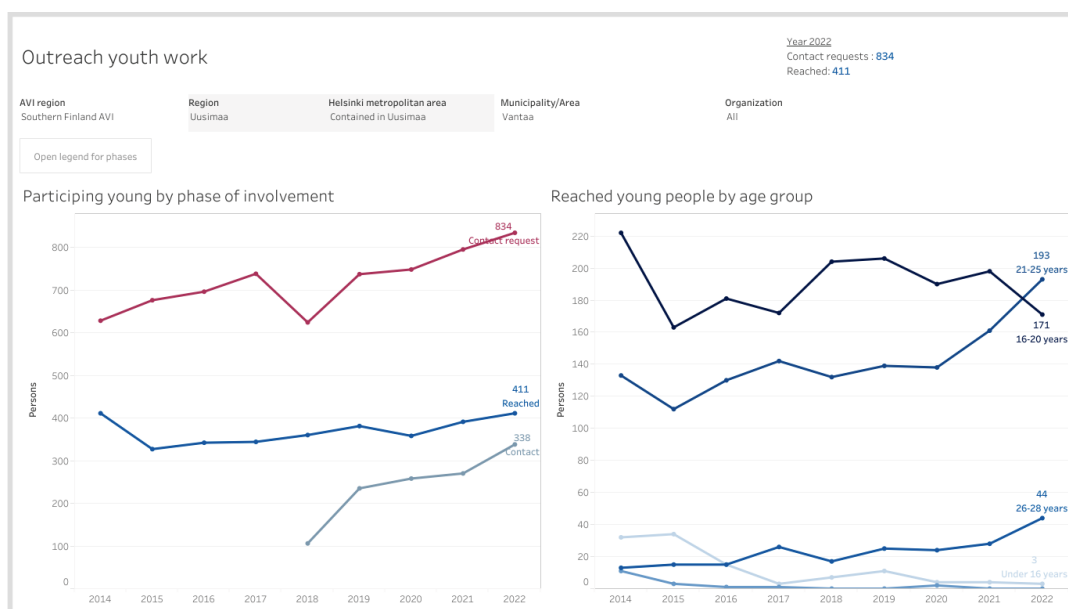
Both the military service and the high school or vocational school are legally obligated to inform if the young person drops out of school. This information is automatically processed towards Outreach youth work services. This information regarding school absences can also be notified as a child protection notification if the youth is a minor. It may be the case that the young person has both reports processed. When a person wishes to contact the service independently, contact can be made through the website, phone call, and occasionally, social media. (Vantaa Kaupunki 2023).

Based on the Youth Act (2017), the Outreach work service is voluntary and completely free. That is, the young person decides for himself if he wants to start contact or not. In Outreach youth work, youth workers work in team pairs to which a client, a young person, is assigned. Individual work is done on the young person's own terms, attempting to take advantage of/increase the young person's own interests, such as games, art or exercise, and other activities. As the entire service is by and for the young person, the activities are carried out in places preferred by the young person. These places can range from your own home, a cafeteria, a restaurant, a specific leisure place, or Kipinätalo.

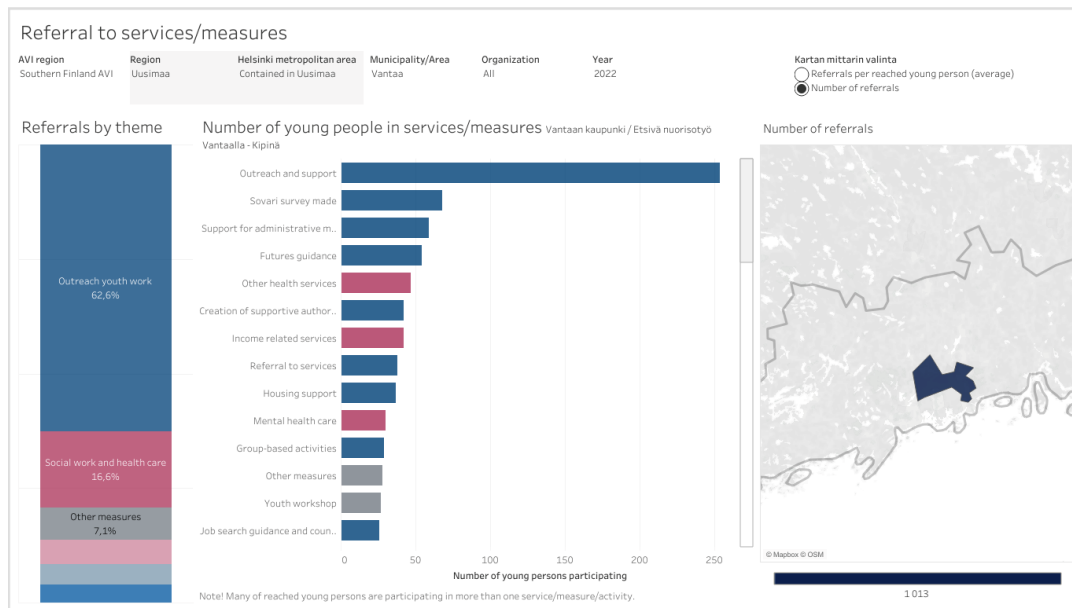
The *Kipinätalo* house, translated into English as "Spark" is in the Tikkurila municipal centre area. The house is near the train and bus stations and has two shopping centres nearby. Vantaa Outreach youth work also organises small group activities, especially during the summer. The activities are aimed mainly at young people served by youth outreach work, that is, at young people who are part of the clientele. These activities can be organised based on the young people's desires, hobbies, and needs. Activities can vary between exercise, excursions, games, creative activities and cooking. The main objective of these activities is to connect young people with other young people in a safe environment.

## 6.1.1 Outreached Young People in Vantaa

Thanks to the Finnish Youth Work statistics, we can see concrete and precise information regarding youth and the service between 2014-2022. In Picture 4, it is possible to see that since the Youth Act (2017) implementation, Outreach youth services in Vantaa have facilitated the first contact with young people compared to previous years. It is also possible to appreciate a difference in the age range of young people contacted, with young people between 21-25 being the age group with the most significant representation.



Picture 4. Participating and Reached Young People in Vantaa (Finnish Youth Work statistics, recovered 01.10.23)



Picture 5. Number of young people in services. (Finnish Youth Work statistics (recovered 01.10.23))

In Picture 5, it is possible to appreciate that during 2022, most young people who require a service from the municipality of Vantaa have been redirected to Outreach youth work services. That is, 66% of the young people who require some guidance, help, support is coordinated in collaboration with Outreach youth work. These numbers affirm the relevance of the service, and the importance of working with young people.

### 6.1.2. Outreach Youth Cooperation in Vantaa

Outreach youth work implementation, based on the Outreach youth work handbook. (Ministry of Education and Culture 2022), the steps of an outreach youth work-young person relationship, or what it is called: *cooperation*, or in other words, the action or process of working together to the same end. (Oxford Dictionary 2023).

Guidance and initiating cooperation. Cooperation begins only if the young person agrees. The Youth Act (2017) establishes this type of collaboration, which specifies that cooperation must be voluntary, and that the young person agrees. The cooperation process and benefits work only if the young person wants guidance. Cooperation is established from the first contact,

but the relationship development is based on trust and getting to know each other. On some occasions, the young person comes to the service as someone has proposed the service or has requested help from Outreach youth work, or they are referred from other services. These circumstances may result in the young person not being fully accessible to cooperation. In these cases, the youth worker attempts to establish cooperation until the young person expresses otherwise. Of the established relationships, those that last and have the most significant benefits for the young person are those in which they seek help at their own expense.

*"...When a young person wants to cooperate, it is noticeable, even without knowing what specifically he/she want, you can perceive that he/she is ready for change..." Outreach youth worker (2023).*

*"... In this service we work only if the person wants it... here putting pressure on someone doesn't work at all..." Outreach youth worker (2023).*

*"...In my case, I have seen how young people are reluctant to cooperate, due to the uncertainty that this produces..." Outreach youth worker (2023).*

*"...For a young person to seek help on their own is an extremely huge step. You have to be brave to take it..." Outreach youth worker (2023).*

Getting acquainted and building a trusting relationship. Getting to know someone is not an overnight task; it is a process that requires time and dedication. This step-in cooperation demands the youth worker to take the role of "active listener," that is, paying attention to all the information the young person shares. This connection is based on trust and acknowledging the information the young person shares. But also, that the youth worker must

offer something of themselves in the relationship. Mertanen et al. (2022) mention this: how to make yourself known equitably.

*"...To get to know someone it is important to take time and be patient. Be honest..." Outreach youth worker (2023).*

*"...We must keep in mind that many young people do not have the ability to trust people, so time is essential..." Outreach youth worker (2023).*

*"... The young person has to have space and time to let themselves be seen as they are, it is important to give that person that space..." Outreach youth worker (2023).*

Interaction, walking beside the young person, doing things together. As Takunen (2014) describes, outreach youth workers are experts at meeting young people and doing what the young person wishes together. Although among the activities that youth workers offer to young people are those of leisure and free time, hobbies, etc., many other times it is simply walking side by side. It is essential to reflect that the young person must determine the goals and processes they want to take to define their future. The youth worker provides information, help and support, particularly in *finding the best possible service for the young person*.

*"... Among the activities we organise can be going for a walk, taking a walk, going to eat... it really depends on what the young person wants to do..." Outreach youth worker (2023).*

*"...Sometimes, all we do is go visit the young person at her house...for example, if she hasn't been out in a long time, we offer the possibility of taking a walk together..." Outreach youth worker (2023).*



The outreach youth worker carries out extensive, exhaustive, and profound work. This interpersonal relationship goes from discovering the young person's strengths and the resources they possess to everyday basics direction. In addition, the youth worker must identify the objectives of working with the young person and look for ways to achieve them. The youth worker must be able to visualise and understand the young person's thoughts, even when the young person does not know what they want. The outreach youth workers experiment, question, and investigate. Likewise, the youth worker must be able to reflect on the emotions that arise during the collaboration, facilitating the young person to identify them. All this is within professional and ethical limits while collaborating with other professionals. (Ministry of Education and Culture 2022).

Ending the cooperation. Like any support process, work, or relationship, the main objective is to facilitate the client's autonomy, assisting when necessary but empowering the young person to continue independently. So, ending the cooperation does not necessarily mean that the young person breaks the relationship with the youth worker but that the established objectives have been achieved. Because Outreach youth work is a voluntary service, termination is also voluntary. That is, the person feels that they can cope with various situations.

During the termination process, the young person has the right to offer their point of view regarding support and can speak from their personal experience. Likewise, the youth worker must allow the young person to ask for help if she believes she needs it, and similarly, the youth worker must maintain contact, even if it is sporadic. This makes it easier for young people to cope with their conflicts independently, knowing they have someone they can count on.

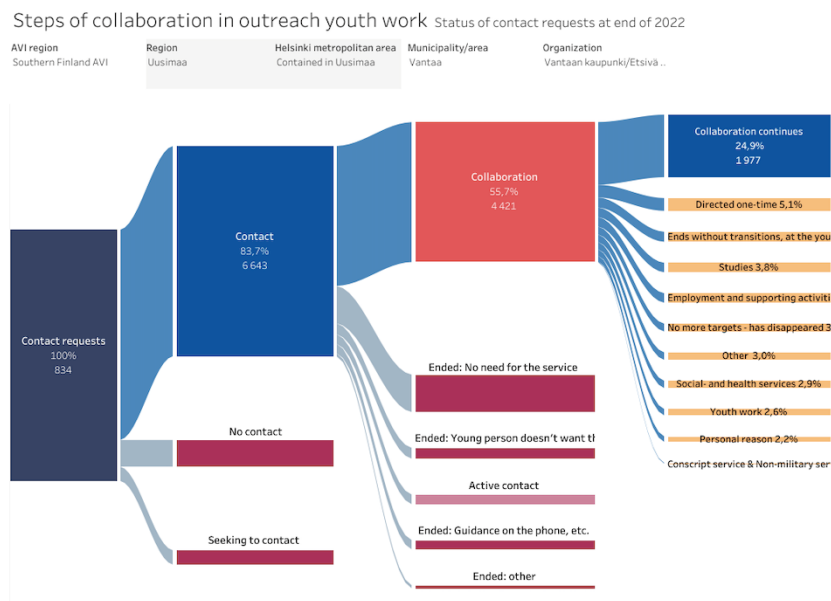
*"...Sometimes, cooperation is based on obtaining what the young person is looking for-> I need a job, I don't know where to look-> I receive the guide-> I get a job-> the cooperation ends... some other*

times, we can contact with the young person for years...” Outreach youth worker (2023).

“...Saying -goodbye- is never easy, especially for a person who has had many difficulties, for example social... it is important to make it clear that here there will always be someone you can count on...” Outreach youth worker (2023).

“... Some of the clients have been there for more than a year, some are more active than others... some reject help at first contact but may seek support sometime later...” Outreach youth worker (2023).

“... The best thing about this job is seeing that young person who was aimless, with so many problems, can carry out activities on its own...” Outreach youth worker (2023).



Picture 6. Steps in collaboration in outreach youth work (Finnish Youth Work statistics, recovered 01.10.23)

Detailed list of collaboration end state

	Count	% of requests
Collaboration continues	1 977	24,9%
Directed one-time	404	5,1%
Ends without transitions..	318	4,0%
No more targets - has dis..	248	3,1%
Gain employment in the o..	192	2,4%
Move to other region	161	2,0%
Other reason	161	2,0%
Continue their 2nd degree..	120	1,5%
Social work	104	1,3%
Started 2nd degree studi..	102	1,3%
Referred to other outrea..	85	1,1%
Other studies	80	1,0%
Workshop	74	0,9%
Mental health care	70	0,9%
Other measures	63	0,8%

Picture 7. Detailed List of Collaboration End State (Finnish Youth Work statistics, recovered 01.10.23)

Based on Picture 6 and 7. In the steps of collaboration in Vantaa, it is possible to affirm that most of the required collaboration contacts succeed. In 2022, 83% of the people contacted accepted the contact. That is, they responded positively to the contact. Of this 83%, 55% accepted the collaboration. Once the relationship was established, of the 55.7%, 30.2% were transferred to another service. (Finnish Youth Work statistics 2023). This information is specifically relevant since this thesis directly connects to how municipal services and County services are currently managed.

## 6.2. Outreach Youth Worker Role

Vantaa Kaupunki, in the words of the workers themselves, has never had such an active service, with the best possible resources. Around twelve youth workers carry out Outreach youth work. Each of these workers has an average of 12-15 young people. Some even have up to 20 contacts. The budget for carrying out individual activities with young people is between 300-500 euros per year. One

of the issues of greatest interest has been being able to immediately perceive the identity of each worker as a youth worker. (Vantaa Kaupunki 2023)

At Vantaa, Outreach youth workers have endless skills and knowledge, regardless of their work experience. All those interviewed affirm that part of the work is done with other youth workers.

*“...The best thing about the job is that, even if the young person requires something I don't know, I can always contact another colleague. I don't need to know everything. We can actually find out together ...” Outreach youth worker (2023).*

Outreach youth workers work as "trusted adults" who aim to give time and walk alongside young people (Ministry of Education and Culture 2022).

*“...Sometimes the work is simply listening to the young person without needing to say anything more than physical presence...” Outreach youth worker (2023).*

Outreach youth workers are experts in social empowerment. Workers must understand how to facilitate the growth and well-being of young people and how to reflect on their actions as an educator (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2022).

*“...Sometimes, a young person needs simply the strength of another to take action. That's when we are there, giving that support...” Outreach youth worker (2023).*

This interaction is respectful from all points of view. (Ministry of Education and Culture 2022).

*“...When a young person says they do not want to do something, they are respected. They are given the time and opportunities to decide for themselves. While our job is to empower, we never decide for anyone. We facilitate and support; we give options, and think together with the young person...” Outreach youth worker (2023).*

The workers do their jobs with empathy and show genuine concern for the young person. (Ministry of Education and Culture 2022).

*“...Many young people have no one to listen to them, no one to ask how they are. Sometimes work is simply that, worrying about knowing how that young person is doing that day...” Outreach youth worker (2023)*

*“...Empathy is undoubtedly an essential social skill at this job; to provide support, it is necessary to understand the other person...” Outreach youth worker (2023)*

Outreach youth workers practice active listening. Listen to what the young person says without waiting for something specific. (Ministry of Education and Culture 2022).

*“...Much of the work is listening more than saying. Asking questions always helps to understand the other person but also the young person can find out about him/herself. Sometimes, we can even get to know what they want by just listening what they talked about...” Outreach youth worker (2023)*

Outreach youth workers are reliable agents who can be trusted. The work is carried out with strict confidentiality and the principle of transparency. (Ministry of Education and Culture 2022). During all interviews, the language regarding clients is generalised, without details that could violate the client's identity.

*"...Once, the young person told me that a friend had a problem....and needed our help..." Outreach youth worker (2023)*

Cooperation with a young person always happens on the young person's terms, in the direction of their individual goals. (Ministry of Education and Culture 2022).

*"...Many of the young people suffer from what is called <social anxiety>. Therefore, we always respect the times and places where they want to see us. Many do not keep the appointment, or cancel it last minute, and we say it is okay. There are no recriminations, the important thing is that the young person knows that we will be here if the young person wishes so..." Outreach youth worker (2023).*

Outreach youth workers require sensitivity to recognise the difference between motivating and encouraging young people versus putting pressure on them and knowing things better than them. (Ministry of Education and Culture 2022).

*"...This service is voluntary, and the work can be done only if the young person so wishes. The challenge is to find the balance between motivating and pressuring. Waiting, giving time, and being patient is essential. One must remember that the young person behaves as he or she can at that moment. Encouraging is fine, but it is also important to let go..." Outreach youth worker (2023).*

*“...Many young people come to the service without being ready for change. One must want to change in order to make the change. Insisting is very different from motivating. Motivating is holding the hand and saying I am here if you want me to be here. To insist is to say, “I am here whether you want it or not.” Outreach youth worker (2023).*

From this point, outreach youth workers must critically examine their professional behaviour and identify personal conflicts that may arise—the influence of power relationships at work vs. the role of support and guidance. (Ministry of Education and Culture 2022).

*“... In this job, it is essential to take things from a strictly work perspective. We must remember that each young person can decide about their own life, even as a professional, if they believe they are wrong...” Outreach youth worker (2023).*

*“...On many occasions, the messages or calls with young people do not go through, or the young person simply does not come to the appointment. And that is okay. The important thing is that, if the young person contacts, there is always a positive attitude on our part...” Outreach youth worker (2023).*

Outreach youth workers developed their work through active reflection. Reflexivity is a vital component of the professional identity and practice of workers. Self-reflection, reflection with colleagues, and career guidance are methods of learning new things, getting support and widening perspectives at work. (Ministry of Education and Culture 2022).

*"...Working in pairs helps to understand things better. Many times, having someone with whom to talk about the thoughts and feelings of young people's conflicts also helps to understand the work that is needed..." Outreach youth worker (2023).*

*"...The work we do here is cooperative and always in a team group. There is always someone to ask a question or ask for help. The work is together..." Outreach youth worker (2023).*

Much of the profession of Outreach youth workers is within the organisation and in networks. Comprehending this collaboration network requires clear structures and competent management that recognises the values and basic tasks of Outreach youth work. Workers often act as interpreters between young people and other services when networking. That is, decoding and verbalising the needs of the young person, adapting them to the nomenclature of the service system, and translating the services and decisions into the young person's language. (Ministry of Education and Culture 2022).

*"...Many young people are not aware of the services that the municipality has, and the steps that must be taken into account..." Outreach youth worker (2023).*

*"...Before starting to work, I was unaware of the number of services in the municipality to help young people..." Outreach youth worker (2023).*

*"...We carry out active cooperation, for example, with Ohjaamo, the service to guide people in their search for work and studies, help fill*



*out Kela forms, or help with school applications..." Outreach youth worker (2023).*

*"... Much of the work has to do with being the connection bridge with other services..." Outreach youth worker (2023).*

*"...We have connections with youth psychiatry, child protection, Nuppi (Nuorten Mielenterveys ja päihdepalvelut), Kela, vocational training institutes and schools..." Outreach youth worker (2023).*

It shows that Outreach youth workers can address any problem and work for young people. The network can vary from the individual to the local, regional and national levels. Its scope is extensive. (Ministry of Education and Culture 2022).

*"...I have helped a young person to seek, for example, legal help regarding the debts he/she had..." Outreach youth worker (2023).*

*"...I have helped my client's friend. We had to make the young person our client in order to provide him/her with the best possible services..." Outreach youth worker (2023).*

*"... Once, we had to get to work helping a minor without any documentation, and all the bureaucracy that that implies..." Outreach youth worker (2023).*

*"...Sometimes the help we provide is simply inviting them to Kipinäitalo to meet other people..." Outreach youth worker (2023).*

*"...I have accompanied a young person to his appointments with the nurse..." Outreach youth worker (2023).*

*"...We have sent child protection notifications when the young person has shared with us what was happening to him/her..." Outreach youth worker (2023).*

In short, Outreach youth work has a unique opportunity to observe how the system and social services work. That is why their professional perspective is precious for this thesis.

To define the professional identity of Outreach youth workers, we rely on the words of Colvin S. et al. (2020) that describe youth empowerment and leadership, in which youth workers carry out innovative work from the perspective of new roles and practices. From the same perspective, we rely on Mäkelä et al. (2021) and what they define as The Positivity Imperative: Outreach youth workers carry out their work at different levels, from the emotional level, cooperation in rehabilitation work and forms of training to support and psychiatric/psychological or other behavioural evaluation. Moreover, finally, we see them as detectives, according to Mertanen et al. (2022), in finding clues, searching for young people and their whereabouts and keeping them away from exclusion and self-exclusion.

Thanks to the Outreach Youth Work Handbook, The Finnish Way from the Ministry of Education and Culture (2022) it makes it more effortless to understand theory with practice. Outreach youth workers are educational and interactive work professionals who act as youth experts. Outreach youth workers must interact with people from a perspective of respect and inclusion. When interacting with young people, workers must also evaluate, among other issues, communication, the use of voice, gestures and body language, and consider non-verbal aspects. (Ministry of Education and Culture 2022).

### **6.2.1 Outreach Youth Worker and Young Person Relationship**

One of the most relevant parts of Outreach youth work is the relationship that the youth worker develops with the young person. Based on the data collected from the workers, the relationship must be direct but, above all,

established from the same level. In other words, like what Mäkelä et al. (2021) mention, young people always want to establish relationships from a youthful, friendly, egalitarian, non-authoritarian perspective.

*"...Communication is essential, and for that, you have to know the slang, the idioms, and understand them..." Outreach youth worker (2023)*

*"...To establish the first contact, you must understand the context and maintain a friendly attitude above all. Formalities such as talking about services or institutions do not help to establish a relationship..." Outreach youth worker (2023)*

That is, workers carry out their professional work one step ahead of everyday work: the absolute understanding of what a young person is, always with respect, and at the same time as a guide and agent of empowerment. (Ministry of Education and Culture 2022).

*"...To provide support, you have to listen. No one listens to many young people. On the contrary, they have people scolding them all the time..." Outreach youth worker (2023)*

*"...Many young people only hear how bad they do..." Outreach youth worker (2023)*

*"...Many young people perceive that they are asked to do nothing more, without listening to their aspirations or desires..." Outreach youth worker (2023)*

*"...There are many reasons a young person does not want to attend school. Maybe they are bullied, they do not understand what the teacher tells them, or their abilities are not at the level that the school demands..." Outreach youth worker (2023)*

*"...Many are helped with the basics: putting into words what they have in their thoughts..." Outreach youth worker (2023)*

Outreach youth work in Vantaa is always approached without assumptions or biases. That is, the youth worker works with the information that the young person himself provides, and at the same time, the worker requires self-reflection, sensitivity and positioning. (Ministry of Education and Culture 2022).

*"...We work with the information the young person gives us..." Outreach youth worker (2023)*

*"...Sometimes we receive information regarding our clients. If possible, we ask the young person about it..." Outreach youth worker (2023)*

*"...I always trust and believe what the young person tells me, why would not I?..." Outreach youth worker (2023)*

*"... It is common that at the beginning of the relationship, the young person hides or excludes information. This is not bad, but rather, it is part of the process..." Outreach youth worker (2023)*

In developing this relationship, establishing mutual understanding is essential—confidence, assertiveness and keeping in mind that we are all human beings. The objective of Outreach youth work is the person. It is the young person. (Ministry of Education and Culture 2022).

*"... Many young people find it difficult to open up because either they have been failed before, or they feel judged..." Outreach youth worker (2023)*

*"...Sometimes young people suffer from social problems, for example, and changing that requires much patience and, above all, assertiveness. It is very little help to tell them - do this-..." Outreach youth worker (2023)*

*"...On one occasion, a young person mentioned that people expect more from this person than he can give..." Outreach youth worker (2023)*

*"...There are young people who fail because the expectations that others have for each of them are not in line with what they can give. It must be frustrating..." Outreach youth worker (2023)*

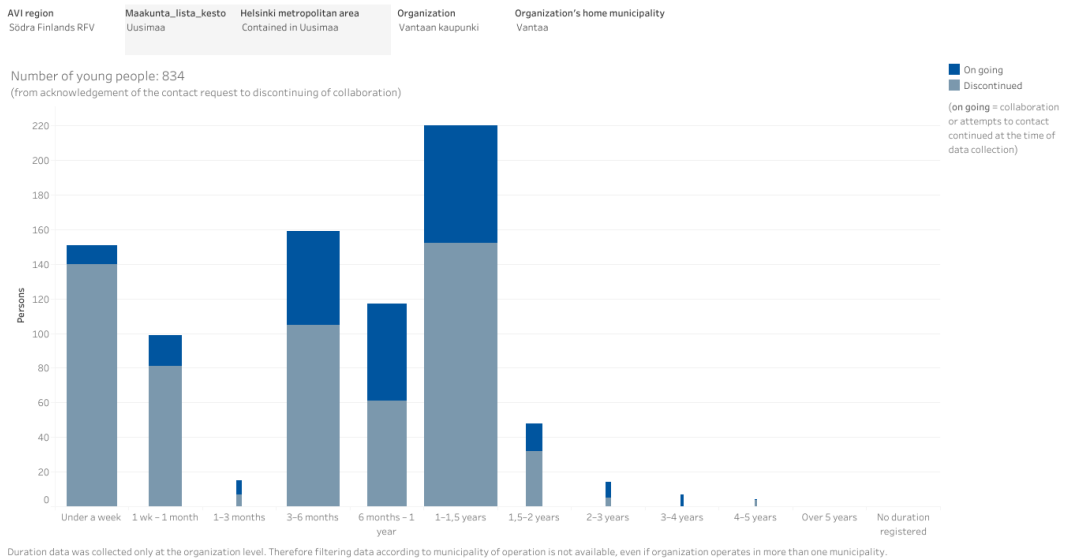
This concerns what Takkunen (2014) reflects on regarding public systems or organisations and their need to expect a person to change too soon. Many young people are not ready to change; many others do not see the need to change. So, the Outreach Youth Work Handbook establishes a series of steps for working with young people. These interaction principles are also observed in incidental or spontaneous meetings with young people. (Ministry of Education and Culture 2022).

### **6.2.2. Outreach Collaboration Period in Vantaa**

While one of the main objectives of Outreach youth work is to activate those young people who are unemployed (Youth Act, 2017), evaluating this progress is more complicated. This participatory perspective can be reflected in the service's continuation period.

Considering that the Outreach youth work service is entirely voluntary (Youth Act, 2017), the young person can end the collaboration at any time. If we analyse Picture 8, we can see that most young people accept collaboration for about a year.

## Duration of contact



Picture 8. Duration of the contact (Finnish Youth Work statistics, recovered 01.10.23)

As the second group with the most significant representation, we find the collaboration of approximately 3-6 months, almost less than half the average. In third place, we find those young people who decide to collaborate in less than a week.

These data show us two crucial questions. 1. Young people who are prepared to receive support continue the collaboration until they are established. 2. Once the young man has established himself, he abandons contact almost wholly.

*"...Many young people continue in the services until they achieve what they are looking for..." Outreach youth worker (2023)*

*"... Some young people may send a message later; it is not usually common, but it can happen..." Outreach youth worker (2023)*

*"...When a young man does not want the service, he does not answer the messages directly. It is usually almost immediate..." Outreach youth worker (2023)*

"...Some young person tries the service, especially if he is not sure if he needs the collaboration, but the one who knows that he does not want it does not waste time and finishes..." *Outreach youth worker (2023)*

Among young people who continue in the services for more than a year, it is possible to perceive participation in the civil sphere and social issues (Harris A. et al. 2021). For example, if Outreach youth work in Vantaa organizes an event with social purposes, active young people are more likely to be included in the plan because they have a stable relationship with the youth worker. This is what Collins, M.E. et al. (2016) call youth civic participation.

"...We often organise activities with Ohjaamo, for example, and some young people attend voluntarily..." *Outreach youth worker (2023)*

"... As some young people know the services and know the activities, it is usually easier to invite another friend..." *Outreach youth worker (2023)*

"... It is possible to organise activities based on the suggestion of young people..." *Outreach youth worker (2023)*

About European policies and participation in youth activities at an international level. (Hartung, C. 2017). Outreach youth work can serve as a connecting bridge between international associations and projects.

Regarding labour development, whether young people from the services decide to work or study, it does not depend so much on Outreach youth work but rather is connected from a more political, municipal perspective, and about *Hyvinvointi Alue*. Mertanen et al. (2022) explain that the challenges are not only at the participatory level but that most of these problems

are caused by the lack of access to support systems and a deficiency of networks that reinforce employment systems, and education, an insufficiency of life management skills, independence and growth. It is from this perspective that we can affirm that Outreach youth work depends, in its entirety, on municipal policies.

### 6.3. Outreach Youth Work in Vantaa and Kerava County

As mentioned, the law on health and social services has been put into practice since January 2023. Vantaa Kaupunki stopped functioning independently to join the municipality of Kerava, becoming known as Vantaa and Kerava County. Youth, education, and leisure services, among many, remain functioning as Vantaa. Thus, Outreach Youth Work, corresponding to Youth services, remains in Vantaa Kaupunki.

The county of Vantaa and Kerava brings together two municipalities with around 280,000 inhabitants (Vakehyva 2023). Based on the Tilastokeskus census data on Picture 9, as of December 2022, the youth population between 16 and 28 years of age amounted to 45,379.

**Population 31.12. by Area, Age, Sex, Information and Year**

	2022
Vantaa and Kerava wellbeing services county	
Total	
Population 31 Dec	
16	3,272
17	3,043
18	3,194
19	3,156
20	3,090
21	3,070
22	3,193
23	3,434
24	3,471
25	3,814
26	3,907
27	4,233
28	4,502
Young People total	45,379

Picture 9. Tilastokeskus. Population according to age and sex by area (Vantaa and Kerava County, Recovered 21.10.23)



This data proves that around 17% of the population in Vantaa and Kerava counties are young people between 16-28 years old.

Since January 2023, social services for children, youth and families are managed from Vantaa and Kerava County. Among these services, we find adult social work, substance and mental health services, oral healthcare, services for children, youth and families, emergency services, health services, services for the disabled and services for the elderly. Among these services, those relevant to this work are those related to social work for young adults (18-24 years) and youth mental health and substance abuse services (Vakehyva 2023). Apart from this, child protection services concerning young people are also critical.

Although the protection of minors is within the minor law (Lastensuojelulaki 417/2017), Outreach youth work carries out its work with young people between 16-17 years old, which the law counts as “child” (Child Welfare Act, 417/2017 section 6). From Vantaa and Kerava County information, Outreach youth work can be found under adult social work services.

During the six interviews, all information regarding Vantaa County and Kerava has been relatively imprecise, uncertain and with very little information. That is due to two issues of great importance: Outreach youth work is legislatively dependent on the Ministry of Education and Culture, and therefore, the Youth Act 2017 remains in force. On the other hand, the implementation of the reform is so recent that many of the changes have either not yet been implemented or have to do with minor, almost imperceptible modifications. From another perspective, half of the youth workers have started their employment at Outreach Youth work after the reform.

*"... The truth is, I'm not sure what this reform plan is and what it means..." Outreach youth worker (2023)*

*"...I started working after the implementation of the reform, so I don't have an opinion on it..." Outreach youth worker (2023)*

*"... At first, it was complicated because the services changed email and phone numbers, but nothing that is not easily resolved..." Outreach youth worker (2023)*

*"... The truth is that, since we function independently, I have not noticed anything to highlight..." Outreach youth worker (2023)*

*"...We continue working in Vantaa. Kerava has its own outreach youth work..." Outreach youth worker (2023)*

What does seem to have a great impact is unanimity regarding collapsed wellbeing services. The logical explanation is that, with the reform, the services of any municipality now function at the county level as the services of a specific municipality are shared at the county level. So, if before the Vantaa service had to provide service to the municipality's inhabitants, now they offer it to Kerava. This has a direct impact on queues to access services, especially those concerning young adults, and mental health.

## 7 DISCUSSION

### 7.1 Personal Reflexion

From the first moment, I was clear that the data collection method had to be empirical due to the precious information provided. These months of research have been of great value for developing this thesis, but also from a personal perspective. As described, the data collection journey has been a path of joy and plenty of learning. Each of the interviews carried out has a significant unique value, as it is unmistakable each worker gives of themselves when accomplishing their job.

Upon finishing this master's thesis, the direction towards Outreach youth work is evident, specifically toward the Outreach youth worker role, and the collaboration period. Realising that Health and Social Services Reform took a relatively passive role was not a disappointment at all, but rather a new way of understanding Outreach youth work from a more national but also independently.

During this process, it is possible to perceive that Outreach youth work and its implementation work, not only because of the annual data, but because of the message that is interpreted from the workers' point of view.

*“...This service is essential for many young people, it is essential that this legislation exists...” Outreach youth worker (2023=*

It is not a surprise that social work continuously seeks to adapt its theories, practices and services based on the times and changes in society. For instance, we cannot expect anything less from the youth work and will continue the same; after all, they have the same theoretical bases. (Johnston-Goodstar K. et al. 2014).

The implementation of both the respective legislation at the national and municipal level, but also in a practical and concrete way, such as the publication of guide material, such as the Outreach Youth Work Handbook by the Minister of Education and Culture (2022). This manual has been fundamental in terms of providing

concrete guidance on not only the bases of Outreach youth work, but also when establishing the profile of the worker.

In relation to the work profile, Mäkelä et al. (2021), Takkunen (2014), and Merta-  
nen et al. (2022) definitions are adequate and applicable. Outreach youth workers  
are detectives, investigators, facilitators, and companions; they work with affec-  
tion and passion, and the relationship goes from being "professional" to "per-  
sonal.". As the quote describes, having the ability to listen to and understand the  
client is the real job.

*"...Much of the work is to find and search for those in need. Even  
when we get the client's information, the job is to try and establish the  
relationship. Sometimes it is easier, sometimes it gets harder. Some-  
times it does not happen at all, yet we are always here ..."* Out-  
reach youth worker (2023)

This professional perspective says a lot about the professional profile, but also  
the humanistic idea of each interviewee. In each of the interviews, the profession-  
alism of each employee was evident almost immediately; the work is done from  
the sincerest perspective. That is, workers put into practice different social skills,  
based in respect, acceptance, empathy, and active listening.

*"...Respect and empathy are the base at this job; to provide help, it  
is necessary to see the other person as it is..."* Outreach youth  
worker (2023)

As a worker in the public sphere myself, obtaining these impressions was a  
pleasant surprise, and the good job performance was reflected not only in the  
data, but also in the long term. In one of the interviews, I would say, more like a  
conversation, this youth worker remarked that the most satisfactory part regard-  
ing the job is seeing and being present to see how a young person evolves.

*"... Love may sound a bit cliché, but it is the basis for working with people. You must understand the person, and what they have to say..." Outreach youth worker (2023)*

*"...To support others, you must listen. Many young people are ignored or silenced. Many of them only have people scolding them all the time..." Outreach youth worker (2023)*

These words, to this day, resonate in my head as a form of motivation to develop my work. Public and social structures must take young people into account for who they are and try to make every effort to listen to them authentically. To understand their need, their problem. It is undoubtedly true that a young person can only be helped if he/she wishes, but once things get going and everything flows, you can see the effort has been worth it. And taking the first step is the responsibility of public services, in this case, of the worker.

During these months of learning, one of the most meaningful impressions that I have been able to take away without a doubt is that working with young people is a field of extreme need.

*"...Sometimes, a young person simply needs to hear they can do it. Some other have none to talk to, and many are just left alone at home due their mental issues ..."* Outreach youth worker (2023)

Young people, I believe, are not the future but rather the present, and it is now that they require assistance, for instance, services. All at-risk young people, or hidden as Takkunen (2014) calls them, possess endless qualities that could be very useful at a civic-participative level. Although, at a participatory level, Outreach youth work is aimed at promoting the labour insertion of these young people, the work carried out with them has a much more significant impact. In some of these cases, the impact is at a vital level.

*"...Many young people have no to ask how they are feeling today. even if they live at their parents, or have friends, they are lonely.*

*Sometimes work is simply asking -How is it going?-..." Outreach youth worker (2023)*

Outreach youth work is much more than a public service; it is for many a family, a home, a friend, and a safe place.

## **7.2. Ethics and Reliability Reflection**

This master thesis is based on three fundamental aspects: the legislative bases, the theoretical bases, and the empirical data. Considering all the processes necessary for developing this research, it is necessary to highlight that it is thanks to the Outreach youth workers and their willingness to share their perspectives.

That said, obtaining the research permit has been relatively straightforward, starting with the bureaucratic permissions. Not like this; get six interviewers. In the master thesis plan, it was considered that the number of interviewees to obtain relevant empirical data would be a minimum of six interviews and that, being complicated, Ohjaamo would be used. Once the corresponding permits were obtained, it was learned that Ohjaamo corresponds to the employment service, so interviews in that service required a different permit. Getting six interviews at Outreach Youth Service in Vantaa had complications mainly related to the proximity to summer, the busiest season for workers. On the other hand, an interview with the person responsible for the service was not possible. This master thesis collects empirical data from interviews, which I like to call "conversation."

The empirical data collected has been interpreted based on the theoretical bases, the regulations stipulated by the Ministry of Education and Culture, and in a certain way, in comparison with each of the different interviews. Although opinions and personal experiences in relation to client stories are unique and personal data, the data in relation to the implementation of services, economic funds, activities and methodologies, and cooperation with municipal services and the Vantaa and Kerava county are equitable as stipulated with government regulations.

This fact has facilitated the writing of the thesis, being relatively comparable and applicable.

### **7.3. Further Research Topics**

As a point of interest, it would be very useful to carry out research in relation to Outreach youth work services and their possible cooperation with services that offer support to young people in the same age range, for example Child Protection, and how Outreach youth work can be an aftercare service.

From another perspective, what would be the possibilities that, in cooperation with child protection services, Outreach youth work could be a "bridge" service when minors reach or will reach the age of majority.

## 8 CONCLUSION

This thesis aims to discover Outreach youth work and its implementation in Vantaa. Outreach youth work is a field of interest and outstanding representation in the municipality of Vantaa. We have witnessed these facts when detailing, throughout this research period, how this somewhat new service is implemented and developed, regardless of the new Health and Social Service Reform.

Although Outreach youth work was conceived as a solution to the "youth problem" concerning unemployment, today, we can affirm that it has a highly valuable relevance. (Mertanen et al. 2020). The statistics for the 2022 year, in Picture 6, show that the Outreach youth work service in Vantaa received up to 8340 contact requests from different sources (military service, high schools and vocational schools, family, and social services). This means, 8340 young people whom Mäkelä et al. (2021) and Mertanen et al. (2020) define "at-risk" were suggested to the service.

As observed throughout this thesis, between contacting the young person to get into the collaboration state. (Ministry of Education and Culture 2022), there is the will to be helped (Youth Act, 2017). Based on the statistics of the year 2022 in Picture 6, 4421 of 8340 young people in Vantaa received assistance from Outreach youth workers. That is, almost 60% of young people accept collaboration voluntarily. These data can give us clear and precise information that not only does the service work, but also that the Youth Act (2017) has clear results in promoting young people's social inclusion and opportunities. But above all, there are at-risk young people, willing to receive guidance and support voluntarily.

In relation to the results described in Picture 5, there is no doubt that Outreach youth services are essential for the development of youth work. Likewise, in Picture 6, it is possible to verify that Outreach youth work has a direct impact on other services that depend on Vantaa and Kerava county. In this sense, the multi-professional development described in the Youth Act (2017) seeks to promote the well-being, mainly in promoting growth of young people.



Considering the second purpose of this thesis, that of investigating those changes in Outreach services after the reform. Although the relationship between Outreach youth work and Vantaa and Kerava is less closely approximated in this thesis, this does not mean that the relationship is non-existent, but so far, without significant influence. Thus, it is possible to observe by analysing the corresponding service referrals that Outreach youth workers offer to their clients. In Picture 7, 1.3% are referred to social services, and 0.9% to mental health services. It is not surprising that workers do not perceive a significant change after the Health and Social Services Reform, considering the low direct collaboration in 2022.

The surprise in these results and the low impact of the Health and Social Service Reform have been considerable. It should be noted that the Outreach youth work service belongs to the youth service; therefore, its relevance is at the municipal level. The biggest surprise was finding very low data regarding collaboration within the county. That is, Vantaa Kaupunki and the Vantaa and Kerava County carry out their assignments so independently that it suggests a gigantic lack of information and communication among each other.

The professional role of Outreach youth workers is invaluable, and their professional impact goes beyond municipal services; it affects the personal lives of every at-risk young person they encounter. Their work can range from answering messages, accompanying medical appointments, chatting, arranging leisure plans, looking for a home, providing employment information, intervention with child protection services, and searching for housing. Their work is global. The impact of their work is global and has a direct relationship with the future of an at-risk young person.

Based on Picture 7, we can see that Outreach youth workers carry out their work at different levels and in collaboration with different municipal and county services. The role of outreach youth work goes far beyond providing information; there are long-term relationships with young people to ensure closer and more intimate connections, thus promoting mutual connection. (Mäkelä et al., 2021). Considering Picture 8, during 2022, most collaborations in the Outreach youth work in Vantaa last around 1.5 years. These data are of great value since it is

easy to understand that at-risk young people not only accept support and guidance but are open to establishing a much closer relationship with the worker.

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## APPENDICES

Appendix 1. [Vantaa Kaupunki Permission](#)

Appendix 2. [Guide to open interview questions](#)



### Appendix 3. Written Notes and Audio Notes

1. [Written Notes](#)
2. [Audio Note 1](#)
3. [Audio Note 2](#)
4. [Audio Note 6](#)

## Appendix 4. Consent Forms

1. [Consent Form 1.](#)
2. [Consent Form 2.](#)
3. [Consent Form 3.](#)
4. [Consent Form 4.](#)
5. [Consent Form 5.](#)
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