

Experience, working, and learning

A hands on approach with at risk youth

Dustin Ehalt
Thesis, Spring 2016
Diaconia University of Applied Sciences
Degree Programme in Social Services
Bachelor of Social Services (UAS)

ABSTRACT

Ehalt, Dustin. Experiencing, working, and learning – A hands on approach with at risk youth. 37 pages. Language: English. Spring 2016. Diaconia University of Applied Sciences. Degree Programme in Social Services. Degree: Bachelor of Social Services.

Diakonie Würzburg is a German organization that runs a youth program called “Erleben, Arbeiten, und Lernen” (Experience, Working, and Learning) which has been in existence since 1995. It is a one year long intensive program, which is catered for dissocial children, and young people that are living in problematic environments and have not succeed with other social services offered. The aim of the thesis is to analyze my own experiences from youth worker’s point of view of the programs intensive phase and to find the valuable developments of the youth that can be accomplished by this program. With the help of the analysis, the purpose is to discuss the key elements found which enabled the positive and successful outcomes of this program.

The program’s intensive phase is a six months long period in which the two youth and two councillors live in a rural home in a Finland in a low stimulus environment. The idea is to separate the youth from all other temptations they have in their lives in Germany and allow them to focus on learning the very basic life skills through a simple and structured daily plan.

The study utilises the action based research approach and qualitative methods. The data was collected by observation, personal written diary and unstructured interviews with the youth. The data analyzing process included writing a timeline that revealed the main developments of the youth and the results are written in narrative form to give the reader the best understanding of the situations.

The valuable developments the youth accomplished by the program were trust, sense of belonging, and responsibility. These concepts all develop off of each other and it is very hard to have one without the other. The programs strict but simple routine and doing everything together on the same level is what allows the concepts to develop. In order for a programme like this to work you need the right kind of adult to work as councillors who is willing to detach from their own life and be committed to the year with the youth.

In conclusion the programme is time consuming and expensive due to the one on one working method but that is the key element in order to accomplish positive outcomes. This program showed significant improvements in the youths development, thought process, and outlook on life during the program, which shows there is a need for these types of programs.

Key words: at risk youth, youth work, international youth program

CONTENTS

1 INTRODUCTION.....	4
2 BACKGROUND OF PROJECT.....	6
2.1 Wurzburg Diakonie	6
2.2 Erleben, Arbeiten, und Lernen (Experience, Working, and Learning)	6
2.3 Participants of the program	9
2.4 Daily routine of the program	9
2.4.1 Leisure time	14
3 METHODOLOGY	16
3.1 Data collection	17
3.2 Data analyzing process	18
4 OUTCOMES OF MY EXPERIENCES	20
4.1 Building trust between youth and councillors	23
4.2 Sense of belonging to group or team	25
4.2.1 Community development.....	27
4.3 Having responsibility in youth work	28
4.4 Considerations for a positive outcome	30
5 CONCLUSION	33
5.1 Summary of the results.....	33
5.2 Ethics and validity.....	34
5.3 Professional development	34
REFERENCES.....	36

1 INTRODUCTION

In this paper I will discuss my experiences I have had while working with a program with at risk youth on a rural farm in Finland. These youth have been in the social care system in Germany for many years and have tried many different types of living arrangements and programs. They are no longer attending school and beginning to get involved in some minor crimes. They were put into this program because it gives the youth an opportunity to live somewhere far from their home and familiar area which separates them from anything distracting them from improving their current situation.

The environment they will be living in for a large portion of the program is a low stimulus environment in which troublesome activities, which were a part of the youth's lives before beginning the program, no longer surround them. In this environment the luxuries of a common home are taken away. There is no access to a cell phone, computer, or TV, In order to communicate with friends and family they must write letters, which they are able to send by post. In their free time they are able to read, play board games, go for walks around the surrounding area which also has a lake in close proximity in which they can go canoeing or fishing on. They also have access to a woodworking workshop.

In the low stimulus environment they are able to develop a very basic daily routine, which involves waking up, school, chores, a couple hours of free time, preparing meals and sleeping. This enables the youth to break bad habits and re-evaluate their lives without other distractions. They are then able to continually work on these new skills and prepare themselves for future goals they may have.

The aim of the thesis is to analyze my own experiences from youth worker's point of view of the programs intensive phase and to find the valuable developments of the youth that can be accomplished by this program. With the help of the analysis, the purpose is to discuss the key elements found which enabled the positive and successful outcomes of this program.

I have chosen this subject because I have spent time working for this organization and feel that it has a positive and effective outcome for the participants involved in it. This type of program offers a more tailored approach to the participants than what has been previously offered to them in other organizations, group homes, or other inpatient forms. These types of alternative arrangements are necessary in the field of youth development, and preventative social work as without these types of programs the youth will become further marginalized and not be able to find their place within society.

2 BACKGROUND OF PROJECT

2.1 Würzburg Diakonie

Diakonie Würzburg is a profitable registered and recognized association in Germany, which has been providing support and social services for over 160 years. Diakonie Würzburg has done this on the behalf of its member church's and in partnership with the Evangelical church in Germany.

Diakonie Würzburg works in many different social work fields alongside many different associations, non-profit organizations and other foundations. The protestant church, the state, the district of lower Franconia, cities and municipalities and also health, nursing care and pension funds fund their work.

Diakonie Würzburg motto is "concentrating on people", and the concept of their work is to help people in need, in a life of dignity and freedom. They understand a person for whom they are, with their current issues, in their immediate environment. Diakonie Würzburg wants to not change a person but rather support them when they are in need, feels weak, disadvantaged or marginalized or does not know how to continue. They always try to see someone's strengths and allow those strengths to help the person help him or herself. They will help anyone regardless of their religious, political and ideological beliefs. (Diakonie Würzburg.)

2.2 Erleben, Arbeiten, und Lernen (Experience, Working, and Learning)

Diakonie Würzburg runs a youth program called Erleben, Arbeiten, und Lernen (Experience, Working, and Learning). This project has been in existence since 1995 and the organization is continually building upon its structure to improve it for the following participants. It is a one yearlong intensive program, which is catered for dissocial children, and young people that are living in problematic environments. Environments that are filled with many options such as crime,

drugs, and other role models keeping them out of school and focused on the things that are important in their lives. (Erleben, Arbeiten und Lernen.)

The young people involved in this project are suffering from mental instabilities, attention, hyperactivity and impulse control disorders, conduct disorders, learning and performance disorders and attachment disorders, emotional disorders, eating and tic disorders. Many of the youth have experiences with violence, self-injury, exposure to peer groups and sexual abnormalities. They are often involved in delinquent and criminal behaviour as well as consuming tobacco, alcohol and other drugs. (Erleben, Arbeiten und Lernen.)

The program is a cooperation between the city of Würzburg and the Diakonie Würzburg and is conducted by the social service agency, and is integrated into the work of protestant children, youth, and family welfare Würzburg. The applicants for this project may be between the ages of 12 to 18 whom have previously failed within other group homes and other in patient care forms. (Diakonie Würzburg.)

The program consists of three different phases. First, which is preparatory within Germany, secondly the intensive phase, which is held on a small rural farm in the countryside of Finland, and thirdly the reintegration phase again held within Germany.

The preparatory phase is just a short period of time roughly two weeks in which the youth are introduced to their councillors they will be living with for the entirety of the program. They discuss in what kind of life situation they are in at the moment and come up with a rough plan for their future. They also discuss topics such as where they are going, how they will get there, rules of their new living accommodation and a brief overview of the steps after their time in Finland.

The intensive phase is a six month long period in which the youth go to a different country to live in a rural home in Finland, This home is a low stimulus environment which does not have central heating, or running water. The heat for the

home comes from two fire places within the home which need to be supplied with wood which is cut to length to fit and then carried into the house daily. The water supply comes from a well outside which also needs to be carried in by buckets for use within the house for consumption, cooking and cleaning. Showering and washing of clothing takes place in a secondary building which houses the sauna and a large fire fuelled water boiler, which is used to heat water for a hot shower and cleaning of clothing. This too needs to be supplied with wood and water.

The youth and their councillors do chores on a daily basis. Once a week the house needs to be supplied with food for the following week. This food is purchased from the grocery store in the nearest town called Virtasalmi. Virtasalmi is a small town in central Finland with around 1,000 people. The town is located 11 km from the project home. The youth and their councillors walk to the town once a week to get groceries to supply them for one week. Groceries are put into bags and carried on their backs. Fresh milk comes from a nearby milk farm located about 1,5 km from the project home which, normally one youth and one councillor will walk to purchase milk from. (Erleben, Arbeiten und Lernen.)

While living in this low stimulus environment the youth get accustomed to a very simple strict daily routine. Also within this simple environment it is easier to address the specific issues of each youth and allows the youth to concentrate on them-selves rather than be seduced by situations, which they have faced in their lives earlier. (Erleben, Arbeiten und Lernen.)

The re-integration phase is the remaining 6 months of the program in Germany after the intensive six months in Finland. In this time the youth and their councillors will find a flat in or around the city of Wurzburg. Once situated, they will start going to school again and try to manage their studies as normally as possible. The councillors will help the youth find constructive hobbies they can do in their free time and continue to help them adjust and live a normal life without falling back into their old ways.

2.3 Participants of the program

In the program I was part of there were two youth aged fifteen (turning 16 during the project), which lived with two councillors. Of these councillors one was male and the other was female, both were in their early thirties. I joined the program for a schoolwork placement but eventually replaced one of the councillors after he needed to part from the program.

The youth were both very troubled boys who could be quite unpredictable. One had been struggling with some mental instability and had begun self-medicating by using various drugs to control himself. This had led to dropping out of school, being removed from his families home and starting to get into trouble with the law for petty crimes. The other boy has had a very long history in the social system (10 years). This boy had severe anger management issues whose violent behaviour was very dangerous and damaging to himself, family and others around him. This boy struggled with having trust, empathy, and taking responsibility for his actions.

The councillors and youth lived in the house in Finland full time with each other. The councillors had one day off per week. The location of the house was in a rural countryside and not having any means of transportation other than walking meant the councillors were not really able to spend much time away from the house. Days off for the councillors were spent mostly outside the house exploring the surrounding area or in the privacy of their own bedrooms.

2.4 Daily routine of the program

The daily routine at the farmhouse is a very basic structure in which is very important in the youth's lives, structure is something they were lacking in their previous day-to-day lives. The daily routine structure consisted of school, preparing meals, chores, and free time.

The youth's day would start by getting up in the morning by 7:30 am and preparing themselves for the day by washing up and then going to the kitchen to prepare themselves breakfast. This proved to be difficult for the youth in the beginning but eventually they got accustomed to their newly formed sleeping and waking times and then were able to follow these times quite regularly.

At 8:00 am school began. The schooling took place until 11:45. These hours of school were mostly done on a one to one basis with their councillors and themselves at different ends of the house. It was done this way because each youth was at a different level in school and it was easier to work like this without getting distracted by one another. A teacher in Germany, who would supply the lessons and material, and check how the youths progressed, monitored this schooling they received in the home. The objective of the schooling was to evaluate what level they were at and where to be placed in the regular schools once returning back to Germany. The qualified teacher would also come and visit the youth a couple times while they were in Finland to help devise a proper study plan for them.

From 11:45 to 12:00 was a short break for the youth to tidy up their studies and then begin to prepare a cold lunch. The youth and the councillors would prepare lunch and dinner in pairs, again one councillor and one youth together. These pairs remained the same throughout the entire project. This was seen as a one to one time in which the youth and the councillor could talk to one another and feel as they were working on something together. This eventually builds some sort of trust or relationship between the youth and the councillor. These small and subtle one to one periods of time are really important to the trust building process, which happens in the program.

When lunch was finished the entire household would prepare to go outside to do their daily chores. These chores were vital in order for the house to run smoothly. The chores were comprised of fetching water from a well for drinking water as well as any water needed for the washing of dishes and other cleaning. Water also needed to be fetched to fill the boiler in the sauna/laundry room

for doing washing our clothing by hand and other cleaning jobs which needed larger amounts of hot water for cleaning. Water was fetched from a well that had clean ground water. It was fetched in a small bucket, which was lowered by hand and then raised and dumped, into larger buckets, which then are carried to different locations in the farmhouse and sauna building and stored for use later on.

When fetching water was complete there was also the task of sawing wood to fit the various sizes of fireplaces, and cooking ovens. The farmhouse had two main fireplaces for heating the house. One very large stone fireplace located in the center to heat the majority of the house and secondly there was a smaller fireplace in the back of the home. This rear part of the house was an addition, which the organization made after running the project for a couple years. This addition had a small sitting room, which was used mainly for schoolwork, and it also had four bedrooms, one for each person in the house. Two of the bedrooms also had their own small fireplaces for the really cold nights. The wood was purchased from local people who have already cut the logs and split them into sizes that are manageable by hand. This was done as a safety precaution as the organization only wanted the youth to use hand tools for the processing of the firewood. These manageable sized pieces then needed to be cut to length for the various fireplace sizes and then split by an axe so they would burn properly.

This processed wood was then carried to the various storage places within the house and out buildings. Throughout the winter the stockpile of wood needed to be replenished. This meant that a local person would bring a few trailer loads of wood and dump it on a large pile. This wood then needed to be carried and stacked properly in a covered dry area. At the beginning of spring there was also a very large shipment of wood that would have to be stacked and stored in a dry area for the group that was coming there the following year. This was also a chore that the entire team would work on for an hour each day to get it all stacked and stored properly. This chore was also used as a way for the youth to “pay back” some damages they had done to the house in moments of rage.

Besides the extra chores, which were done to “pay back” damages, these chores were done together as a team and were also used as a bonding tool between the youth and the councillors as well as a bonding tool between the youths themselves. The chores were something that needed to be done and if they were not completed, the entire household would feel the effects. It was during these chore periods of the day when the youth would talk about their old daily life and begin to open up about their lives to one another. It also gave them an opportunity to self reflect on the happenings in their lives and discuss them with the councillors as well as with one another. It was interesting as a councillor to see how these conversations developed over the length of the project.

In the beginning of the project the youth really seemed to brag to one another and the councillors how “bad” or “cool” some of the choices that they had made in their lives were. Over time these stories began to disappear from our conversations and eventually were non-existent. Rather the youth began to discuss about the choices they have made in a different tone, questioning themselves about the reasons why they chose to handle specific situations or problems in a certain way and began to realize how these choices could be effecting themselves negatively as well as the other people around them and involved in their lives. When these discussions had ended we began to focus our conversations on the future. The youth eventually began to focus less on their past and start thinking about what was next for them in the near future. We would discuss how things were going on a daily level at the house as well as starting to discuss what will happen when we went back to Germany.

Besides these daily chores there was a general cleaning day, which occurred every Sunday. On this day each person was responsible for his or her own rooms and laundry. Laundry was done in the sauna, which had a big boiler that heated water by lighting a fire in it. The clothes were washed by hand using a washboard and various other hand tools. After the clothes had been washed they were rinsed and rung out with clean water and put on a clothesline to dry outside. In the winter they were brought into the house and hung on various

lines and racks. Sweeping and mopping of the house, cleaning of the laundry room and sauna and the cleaning of the outdoor toilet were then divided up amongst everyone. These tasks were rotated every week. These chores normally took an hour and a half to two hours to complete. The youth also took turns going to fetch fresh milk from a nearby dairy farm from whom we would purchase the milk. This was normally done in a pair of two, being a councillor and a youth. However, this was also a task that the councillors could use to gain trust and give responsibility to the youth by eventually sending the youth with a small amount of money to fetch the milk by them selves.

Once their daily chores were complete they had some time to work on personal projects. The yard that we were living on also had a workshop that was filled with various types of wood working tools. Myself, having a background in construction, albeit being more rough construction such as stick framing residential properties, I was able to work with the youth and teach them how to safely use many of the different tools in the workshop, both hand and power tools. We also were able to work on small woodworking projects for themselves and for in the house. Such projects were as simple as small stools for being used in the house to restoring an old desk, which was already being used in the house, and one youth decided he would like to build a desk/drawing table for his room, which he could also take back to Germany with him.

Everyday the youth also prepared dinner for the entire home as well as the tidying of the dishes afterwards. The youth were paired with a councillor for this task and these pairs stayed consistent throughout the entire time in Finland. The reason why we kept these pairs consistent throughout the entire project was it gave a small point in the day in which one youth and one councillor had some one to one time together while at the same time accomplishing a small task as a team. These one to one times enabled the youth or councillor to discuss things with one another, which may be bothering them or something they are excited about. It was not always a time when the councillor and youth would have breakthrough moments but it would be a series of small moments, which sometimes led to larger breakthroughs or findings about the youth. In keeping

this pairing consistent it was another time of day that the youth could count on and plan ahead for to discuss something special if need be and they would always know they would have that moment.

On Wednesday's the entire group would eat breakfast at a regular time and then prepare themselves for a walk to the nearest town, Virtasalmi for groceries. We needed to collect enough groceries to last for the next entire week. Most times the meal preparing pairs would get together and decide what they were going to make to eat each night for the next week and decide what they needed to purchase. The task of walking to Virtasalmi for groceries normally took a large portion of the day considering it was a 24 km round trip. 12 km of that being walked with the groceries packed in bags on our backs. This was again another group task, which gave the councillors an opportunity to discuss many different subjects with the youth, and was a powerful tool in their development. The total length of the trip would normally take around five hours including the shopping at the super market as well as a stop at the local library where we would have a bit of a lunch and break before continuing on our way home. In most cases we would all walk together in a group however sometimes the youth would walk together ahead or behind my colleague and myself.

2.4.1 Leisure time

There was quite a bit of free time in the duration of this project for the youth. However, this did not mean they were able to watch television or movies, surf the Internet or even be in contact with family and friends via phone. While being in such a rural area, there were still many things for the youth to do. In the autumn before the lakes froze over it was possible for the youth to use a canoe, which we had two of, to go either fishing or just exploring the nearby lakes, which were connected, to one another by smaller channels. We used the canoes quite often on the weekends in a group when we would go fishing. The youth could also walk around the surrounding area and explore the region with or without supervision once they had gained some trust from us. They could

also work on projects in the workshop as well as many books to read as well as board games, which were played almost on a daily basis. During the winter there were even more activities for the youth. Of course they could still go ice fishing and do all the things they could in the autumn however now they could also go cross country skiing as well as sliding down hills on sleighs. Although the winter seemed to require more effort from us to maintain the house and chores there was still plenty of free time and in some ways the winter seemed to go by even faster than in autumn.

3 METHODOLOGY

In this chapter I am describing the research methods and approach used for the analysis of the program I was part of. I have been using the qualitative research methods because one of the distinctive features of qualitative research is that it allows you to identify issues from the perspective of your study participants, and understand the meanings and interpretations that they give to behaviour, events or objects (Hennink, Hutter & Bailey 2010, 9). Also Silverman (2005, 9-10) explains qualitative research has a tendency to work with a small quantity of matters and can offer a detailed insight of social appearances.

In order to get answers to my research questions I am using the action based research approach. Action based research is not about doing research on or about people and trying to find something wrong with them but to rather gather knowledge about a certain topic and finding ways in which to improve on this subject (Ferrance 2000). Winter and Munn-Giddings (2001, 8) are defining action research to be a study of a social situation carried out by those involved in that situation in order to improve both their practice and the quality of their understanding.

Stringer (2007, 1) is describing the action research to be a systematic approach to investigation that enables people to find effective solutions to problems they confront in their everyday lives. According to Corey (1953) action research is a process by which practitioners attempt to study their problems scientifically in order to guide, correct, and evaluate their decisions and actions. While participating in the daily life with the youth, a strong combination of both Corey's (1953) and Stringer's (2007) definitions of action research were shown. Throughout the daily life the youth would discuss about their current and past lives. In these discussions the youth were able discuss how they handled or dealt with these situations that had happened in the past or how they were dealing with current situations they were in at that moment. After discussing these

findings I was able to communicate with the youth on how they felt about these situations and what they were feeling.

3.1 Data collection

In this research the data was collected over a seven-month period while working in a troubled youth program for six months in Finland as well as a one-month period time in Germany.

The data collected over this time period was through unstructured interviews, and observation of daily life and experiences of the youth and my own whilst living with them in the same home. The reasoning behind this is we were going through the same experiences while living there at the same time and both parties felt how it affected us. I can use my own experience and observations to analyse the findings of the data collected.

I had written a journal and timeline of observations, times, and feelings I was having while I was a part of this program to use for my thesis. This was stored on my computer, however while travelling to Germany from Finland our vehicle was broken into along the way in Prague. My laptop and notes as well as photos I had taken of the area and its surroundings were stolen in this incident and I was only left with my own experiences and memories of the time I have spent in the program. I re-created the timeline and made notes of important events and happenings that had taken place in order to keep my memories as accurate as possible. This thesis is written about my own experiences and feelings. I have a good grasp of the events I was going through while working with this program.

Originally the data was collected by observing and interviewing both of the youth participating in the program. In the end, only the data collected from one of the youth was used and analyzed. The reasoning for this was that I was working more closely with one of the boys during the entire program and also

because I lost my original data material, I felt the reliability would suffer too much if I tried to recreate a timeline for both youth.

3.2 Data analyzing process

After the completing my time with the program as a councillor I looked back at the experiences I had by producing a timeline of the program and the goals the youth had achieved. With the combination of the timeline and my experiences I was able to find significant breakthroughs in youths actions. Looking more closely into the breakthroughs I was able to conclude the three main theoretical concepts that are valuable to this program.

I have chosen to report my findings in a narrative form to paint a picture for the reader of this place I have worked for six months. It is very different from a normal living situation and by telling my experiences in a story form I am able to describe this place and experiences to the reader.

Lawn (2006) describes a narrative inquiry as the story of life is based on the pre-understanding of life and the stories told about life change it into a more fully developed understanding of life (cited in Lai, 2010). By telling the stories of my experiences in this program I am able to tell the reader how I was feeling and thinking while being in this program. While having open discussions with the youth they were telling me stories about there own lives. The clearest way for me to describe what I felt or thought or experienced about those stories is to tell it in a narrative form. My findings will be a dialogue with the theoretical framework. I have done this in order to keep an easy flow and understanding between the story telling and the theory.

Using a narrative form of writing gives an understanding of the events taking place rather than seeking the absolute truth. When you are involved in a program like this you are going through a series of experiences which are very dynamic and complex combining this with the interaction between people going

through the same experiences. By using a narrative approach to understanding necessarily contextualizes lived experience in the social, cultural, and historical systems in which it is situated. (Schweitzer & Knudson, 2014.)

4 OUTCOMES OF MY EXPERIENCES

During the time I spent in this project there were a number of breakthroughs in which the youth went through. These breakthroughs seemed to happen in different stages throughout the program and seemed to be an almost natural progression to the improvement of the youth's current life situation.

The first breakthrough found in the youth I am concentrating on was the progression of the view the youth was having of his own life. This change was a process that progressed slowly over time. In the beginning of the program he would tell us about his life in Germany and was proud of the very elements that had put him in the situation he was in then. I believe this was not necessarily actually being proud of the things he was doing but rather it was more of a defense mechanism to make himself feel tough and that he did not need or want help. This was especially noticeable when he was around the other youth. Eventually he started talking about these things in a way of wondering how we or other people might have seen his situation and the reasons of these choices in his life were affecting the people around him. After these discussions he began to express how bad some of the choices were that he made and how he wished he could go back in time and change the choices he had made. He also was able to laugh at himself and be embarrassed about the decisions he had made. He then was also able to start planning for things in the future and to think about how he could try to avoid some of the situations he was finding himself in that he was making the bad decisions.

The second breakthrough, which I had noticed, was the wanting of more responsibility around the house. This had taken place about a month and a half into the program. By this time he was used to his daily schedule and started to take a higher interest in his hobbies such as drawing and the workshop. The workshop was quite disorganized, dirty, and looked like it had been neglected for quite some time. This youth then decided with his own free will that he would start to clean up the workshop and get all the wood and tools organized. This

was not a small task. He would work on it every day for a couple hours and after about two weeks it seemed to be looking quite good. After it was finally cleaned and organized he then decided it would be good if the workshop had some sort of guidelines of use or rules that he and others would have to follow in order to work in the workshop. He wrote these rules on a poster and posted it in the workshop. He did his best to follow the rules while making sure others were as well. This showed to us that he was starting to look for some extra responsibility around the house and that he could appreciate the work he had put in to gain this responsibility. It also showed he cared about what was happening around him by trying to not allow anyone to ruin his newly organized workshop.

This need for responsibility then began to grow even larger. Through the following months he would be allowed to fetch the mail from our post box, which was about 1 km, away by himself. After this with no incidences he was given small amounts of money and was able to fetch the milk from the neighbouring farm by himself. Eventually we were able to trust him with enough money to go buy some groceries from the supermarket in town, which was 12 km away. He would leave in the morning and arrive back at the home sometime in the early afternoon.

The next breakthrough I witnessed was a breaking down of the barrier between himself and his councillors. In the beginning of the project there was a very strong sense that the youth were on one team and the councillors were on another. Eventually these teams changed or disappeared all together. At some time during the winter we were offered to use one of our neighbours summer cottages at a nearby lake. Of course, for a change of scenery and something else other than our normal duties and tasks at home we decided to take advantage of the generous offer. The weekend went fine without any problems. We ate some nice food, enjoyed sauna and played board games in the cottage.

About two weeks after we had returned home from our weekend at the summer cottage I was working in the workshop with the youth during his free time. We were talking about all kinds of things when he began to talk about the summer

cottage. He proceeded to tell me that while he was in the sauna without anyone else he found a can of beer. He drank the beer in the sauna and returned to the cottage for the remainder of the evening. Although drinking this one beer was not really anything serious the youth still knew this was against the rules and that he should have not drank the beer. This admission of doing something against the rules under his own free will was a good thing to see. It showed that he had some sense of guilt for breaking the rules and felt as though he could reconcile it by talking with us. This also showed he trusted us and did not feel as though we would treat him unfairly. There was a definite clear line that we were able to see as to when he understood that he was not only in the program to help himself, but that we as councillors were also there to help him through the process. We were doing the things we were doing in order to help him. From this time on we were able to work even better as a team and to really start looking towards the future for the youth.

With the progression of these breakthroughs it was easy for his support group around him to see that the process was working and that he was taking the necessary steps to move back to Germany and get his life back on track. He was learning about his past, the mistakes he had made, and possible reasons why he had made those decisions. He was then able to acknowledge those choices and accept that he had made some choices that were not good. After doing this he was able to start looking ahead to the future with a plan and goals and ways to avoid making some of the choices he was making.

With the analyses of these breakthroughs I was able to find three main subjects that occurred during the process of development in the youth throughout the program. The subjects were trust, sense of belonging, and responsibility. The concepts will be discussed further in the next chapters. I am also introducing the key elements that are important factors in order to achieve positive outcomes.

4.1 Building trust between youth and councillors

Di Luzio (2006, 553) says the gap between the client's incompetence and need for help, and the impossibility to control professional work is bridged by the trust they have in working with a professional. Even when the client does not necessarily know if the judgement of the professional is correct, whether they are going to be treated competently, and whether or not the information given to the professional will be treated confidentially. On the basis of this interpretation trust is a social mechanism as it allows social interactions based on the future expectations even when there is uncertainty to what the outcome will be. (Di Luzio 2006, 553).

Meltzer, Muir, and Craig (2016) found that young people in a part of their study reported trusted adults talked with them rather than telling them what to do. The trusted adults that the youth chose treated them like people and talked to them without judgement. They went on to describe their relationship with a trusted adult as a non-hierarchical even if the adult was older or in a position of authority over them. The youth also went on to say that trusted adults offered them support, encouragement, and role modeling. They would do this by agreeing with some thoughts the youth was having about a situation or describing their own experiences to the youth that they both shared or were similar. The trusted adults were also direct and honest in the advice they would give to the youth. (Meltzer et al. 2016.)

Building trust between the councillors and the youth starts from the very beginning of the program I was part of. The moment the start there travels to Finland from Germany they will be with their councillors every day. Fortunately when I started my placement with the program they had just arrived in Finland two days prior. Everything was still fresh and new to them. This enabled me to begin building a bond with them from the beginning. Throughout my time with the project my role changed. I started as an intern doing a placement for my studies but after two months, one of the German councillors left from the project. This opened a position and because I was already there and the youth knew me

quite well the organizers in Germany thought I would be suitable for the position and offered me a contract to work with them until they went back to Germany. I discussed this with my supervisors at school and took some time off from my studies to work for them.

My role starting out was as a student who was participating in the daily chores and activities with the youth and collecting data that I could use for my thesis. This was a more relaxed position in which I wasn't really responsible for anyone other than myself. After accepting the position to work for the organization my role changed in that, I was now an official councillor for the youth and had more responsibility. In the beginning it felt somehow difficult to maintain the relationship I had with the youth. Before I was working for the project the youth saw me more as a peer in which they could talk to easier. This may have been because they felt I didn't have an obligation to talk to their councillors or the supervisors in Germany about their situation or that I was in a position that didn't have any authority over them. This difficult time did not last more than two weeks and it seemed that both the youth and I adjusted to the new situation and things moved forward like normal again.

The building of trust was a slow process that happens after sharing thoughts and feelings that each of us are having as well as experiencing the hardships, effort, fun times, we had while living in this environment. It is important to not judge the youth for anything they want to share. Through these non-judgemental discussions I was able to discuss the topics in a way that made the youth reflect on the choices they had made or the choices they could make in order to have more positive outcomes. Spending time together every day and having discussions about our lives and various other topics slowly led to breaking down the walls of distrust. Week by week the youth would begin to tell me more about themselves and even show a more realistic representation of themselves that they had previously hidden.

4.2 Sense of belonging to group or team

What is a sense of belonging? It has been described as the experience of personal involvement in a system or environment such that one feels as an integral part of that system or environment (Hagerty, Hoyle, Lynch-Sauer, Sargent & Williams 2002, 123).

Bradley, Deighton and Selby (2004) say capacity building in community development for youth builds a sense of belongingness and provides an environment in which youth were able to speak more freely with their group. When this happens the growth of belongingness, or we-feeling and in-group values are produced and aims and goals are then switched from I's to we (Bradley et al. 2004).

In order for this program to work properly the group in the household need to feel as one unit or a team, especially the youth, which are involved in the program. The entire team is going through the experience of living this way together. In the case that I have experienced while being a part of, is that both the youth were coming from situations where they felt they were on their own and that nothing has been working. They both had been put into other types of youth group homes or other living arrangements and all had failed. The reason why they were part of this program is for that reason as well. Both the youth were feeling as though everything and themselves had failed. In some ways even the councillors responsible for the youth in Germany did not even know what to do with these youths if this program failed. In a sense, they were on their last leg. The rebuilding process from these feelings requires a team mentality to bring them back up to having confidence in themselves again. Throughout the program the youth and councillors do nearly everything together so that nobody feels as though they are going through this process alone. Everyone is putting in the time and effort to complete all the tasks, which need to be done in order to live this way.

There were few privileges the councillors had that the youth did not. One of these privileges was to have access to electronic devices. Both myself and the other councillor had our phones as well as a laptop, which could be connected to the Internet through our phones. Although we did not use these devices in the presence of the youth, they knew we had access to them and that in our free time or while in our room away from them we could use them. Of course these devices were needed by both of us in to manage or lives happening outside of this program as well as cooperating with our supervisors in Wurzburg. From my experience this was not a giant issue for the youth to understand, but in the days when they were having more difficulties than usual this was an extra annoyance they had to face which made them feel as they were doing something different from us. By us having access to these devices they felt as though it was much easier for us to be there.

We also had our own money, which we could spend freely. Sometimes we would buy ourselves something like candies, for example, which the youth may not have been able to afford. The youth did get an allowance per week, so they were often able to buy something small for themselves as well. Sometimes the youth would cause damage in the home and their allowance needed be used for paying for the damages.

Myself and the other councillor also had "time off" once per week in which we were free to do in that day whatever we pleased. We lived in a very rural area so this meant we were normally still in or around the house but we did not have to be involved in the daily chores or planned activities. These small yet influential differences we had in comparison to the freedoms of youth had an impact on our group. In some ways they tore us apart because the youth felt like we "had it easy" however it was also beneficial for the youth to see that this program they were in was meant for the development of themselves and not the councillors and while we may have had a few other freedoms in comparison to them it was something they needed to work their way through it and get past it.

4.2.1 Community development

The reason for including a short chapter on community development is that the program involves the development of a small community. We had developed a small community, which was not formed in the usual way. In some ways it was a forced community as the youth were put into the program and of course the councillors were hired to work in this position. In whichever way the community was developed is irrelevant, it was still created. It was through this community that the youth were able to build a sense of belonging, gain trust in their councillors, and accept responsibility.

What is community development? A community can be defined as a group of people living within the same geographical area whose resources they require to subsist and progress, and the process in which these individuals use to distribute and exchange these resources are the same. However, in this day and age with modern technology and transportation more emphasis has been put on whether community is locality or place based. This being said community is based on people's networking through solidarity, identity, and norms. (Green 2016.)

Goodsell, Flaherty, and Brown (2014) define community as "a form of social organization wherein the social interactions necessary for the reproduction of daily life occur within the boundaries of moral proximity" (cited in Green 2016). In the case of this program I found this definition suited it very well. Especially, in terms we were living such a basic lifestyle. We were removed from the outside world and such things as modern communication and transportation thus our community was formed based on our interactions with one another.

The impacts community development and being part of an organized group can have on youth development are many. Three of which are psychological empowerment, leadership development, and sociopolitical development, by gaining these three developments youth are able make a plan of what they are wanting to achieve. After having this plan they are able to develop their leadership skills

and experience to make changes in their life. They can build a greater understanding of the world around them and use this knowledge to adapt and change their life goals to suit their new understanding. By being part of these communities youth are able to build their self-confidence and organizing skills, which allows them to change their lives drastically. (Christens & Dolan, 2011.)

These remarks also correlate to the youth I worked with. The youth both seemed to have great self-confidence during first impressions of meeting them however, after getting to know them better it was visible that this was just a facade. The youth were really lacking confidence in them selves. After being in this program and discussing many different topics with each other and their councilors it was evident that they began to start thinking differently and making better choices. Through these better choices and thought process their self-confidence began to build. With this new gained self-confidence the youth were able to express themselves better and also share more valuable reasoning of their choices in life with their councilors. This enabled them to expand their horizon of future goals and gave them the tools to begin reaching those goals.

4.3 Having responsibility in youth work

Responsibility is developed not by following through with tasks and obligations but rather by successfully and repeatedly carrying out responsibilities. To become a responsible adult a person is required to experience progressively larger and harder responsibilities. These responsibilities are normally carried out from a young age and progressively get harder and more difficult through out their life to prepare them for adulthood. (Salusky, Larson, Griffith, Wu, Raffaelli, Sugimura, Guzman, 2014.) Salusky et al. (2014) found in their research analysis a four-step cycle in developing responsibility. These four steps are taking on a new role or obligation, ongoing experience of the obligations, fulfilling obligations, changes in self and behaviour. This process is normally carried out by first accepting an obligation. This is normally in the form of a structured role. Secondly the person who accepts the responsibility will feel some sort of strain

or stress caused by this responsibility. Thirdly, having these stresses and challenges a person will persist to carry out the obligation and fulfill the task due to the expectations and support of their peers. Lastly after doing these first three steps, a person is left with the feelings of satisfaction in themselves and feels more responsible. Having these feelings allows the person to accept more responsibilities. (Salusky et al. 2014.)

Morrison (2004) describes a project in which giving and having responsibility caused positive results in youth's behaviour. In this study the teachers of a drama program have chosen two girls in year eight or nine of their studies to become tutors for others in their sixth year of school. These year nine girls were not meant to be good role models for the purpose of showing a good example for the sixth year students but rather it was meant for them to become more self-confident and gain a better self esteem in themselves through constructive challenges and take a more active role in their studies. (Morrison 2004.)

The way in which they would build these traits was through giving the year nine girls the responsibility of being involved in the planning of a play and then teaching their younger siblings about drama and eventually putting on a performance, which they have directed. (Morrison 2004.)

Drama was a subject that both girls were good at in their own studies. Other than drama they had poor marks in other areas and poor attendance records as well. Most notable by other teachers was their bad behaviour and little respect for their teachers in class. The reason they were chosen to lead in a drama group was so they could share their thoughts and feelings comfortably with the group and feel as though they have value as individuals and add value to group situations. (Morrison 2004.)

In the end of the drama program the combined positive experiences they gained, and the feeling of being needed, both girls were improving in their participation in their studies and a remarkable improvement in their self worth and behaviour in class (Morrison 2004).

In order for the youth to progress through this program I was a part of it is necessary for the youth to start earning some responsibly and to see that they are capable having responsibility for there actions. There are many ways in which the youth were able to earn responsibility throughout this program. This responsibility is both earned by the youth as well as given by the councillors. There were cases in which the youth had taken on some sorts of responsibility themselves by doing both positive and negative actions and taking responsibility for those actions.

Through out the program the levels of responsibility changed. It could range from walking a short distance to retrieve the mail or helping prepare dinner for everyone in the home to walking alone with small amounts of money to the nearest town to purchase an item we needed in the home. This meant they were unsupervised for many hours with the potential to break some of the rules set in place for them.

Some of these responsibilities were taken on by themselves. One youth took an interest in the wood working workshop more than the other and decided to take on the responsibility of tiding the workshop up and re-organizing it. After doing this he then made a set of rules and posted them on the door so that anyone who used the workshop could see what needed to be done in the workshop and how to keep it organized so that it was better for everyone. By having these responsibilities the youth were then able to see that they had some control over their own lives and that the decisions they made from this point on could affect them negatively or positively. It was important to see that the youth learned to depend on themselves for the outcome of their future and that if things did not go as planned they could not just blame others.

4.4 Considerations for a positive outcome

To ensure that the key elements found in this paper are met it would be beneficial for the program to find councillors who don't mind being disassociated with

there life in Germany or at least people who are disciplined in following the criteria of the program as much as possible and try to go through the experiences the same as the youth as much as possible. Being a part of this program needs to be appreciated as a new experience for the youth and the workers rather than a sort of punishment for the youth and a job for the workers. This program is nothing like regular youth work and if a person goes into it with that mind set it will most likely not work.

It seemed to have been really difficult for the organization to find people who are able to commit an entire year away from their family and normal lives. I to found it difficult as I still needed to report to my school supervisors and also had personal things happening in my life, therefore I was only able to be a part of the program for the six months in Finland and one month in Germany. I started officially working for the program two months after one of the German colleagues parted ways. I saw that it was important for the youth that I remained with them as I had shared the same experiences with them as well as developed at least some sort of relationship or bond with them during that short period of time.

The way the program is structured, especially in the intensive phase provides a very good platform for the youth to develop themselves in the most positive form. The very basic daily structure without distractions provides them the time needed to develop the very basic day to day life skills someone needs to have to just function in a normal society.

The findings found in this program really worked hand in hand and it would not be possible to have one without the other. Everyone in the house needed to go through the same experiences and share the workload of the tasks required living in this type of environment. By doing this, a sense of belonging was created and the house was able to work more like a team. Once the team mentality was developed the youth and councillors could start working on trust. After spending so much time together and sharing thoughts and feelings of one another's lives with each other both the youth and councillors can start to depend

on each other and see that they are both there to help each other. The youth were able to discuss problems they were facing, have faced, or fears they were having about the future. With the gaining of this trust the real development in the youth can begin.

The gaining of trust is when the real positive developments start happening in the youth. Once the youth know they can trust you and you are on their side they begin to listen to things you say to them and look at it more as positive advice for them rather than someone just telling them what they are doing wrong or what to do. With this advice they are able to study their own choices they have made in the past or will need to make in the future and trust that they can follow your advice, as they know you are there to help them improve their life situation.

When the youth are able to accept the choices they have made and have a better look at their future is when they are able to start accepting responsibility for their own lives and actions. With this acceptance they are able to take on other responsibilities without feeling overwhelmed with the possibility of failure or disappointment. The youth are able to own up to their own decisions and if they make a bad choice they at least know there is someone they can talk to and trust that this person will listen to them in confidentiality and try their best to help them find a positive outcome to the situation.

5 CONCLUSION

In this chapter I am summarizing the results I found during the program and discussing the ethical considerations put into place during the process of the thesis. Furthermore, I am talking about my professional development I gained while being a part of this program and the thesis process.

5.1 Summary of the results

The purpose of the study was to find the valuable developments of the youth during the intensive phase while participating in the program. The valuable developments the youth gained were trust, sense of belonging, and responsibility. These concepts all developed off of each other and it is very hard to have one without the other. The programs strict but simple routine and doing everything together on the same level is what allows the concepts to develop.

The second purpose of the study was to discuss the key elements, which enabled the positive and successful outcomes of this program. In order for a program like this to work you need the right kind of adult to work as councillors who is willing to detach from their own life and be committed to the year with the youth. It is also important the councillors are consistent and are ready to follow the routine. It is a difficult and demanding program for both the youth and the workers but this effort and hardship definitely plays an important role in youth's development.

In conclusion the program is time consuming and expensive due to the one on one working method. However the youth are at a point in their lives that they need this kind of support, and the one on one method is the key element in order to accomplish positive outcomes. This program showed significant improvements in the youth's development, thought process, and outlook on life, which shows there is a need for these types of programs.

5.2 Ethics and validity

It is important to take ethical issues into consideration right from the beginning of the research process when human beings are part of it. When the data is collected from people, it requires that everyone is treated with standards and values which confirm their essential humanity. (Oliver 2003, 3-13.) Stringer (2007, 54-55) describes the ethics in action research as following. It is necessary to ensure that participants come to no harm as a result of their participation. The participants also need to be informed that they have a right not to participate, withdraw from the study at any time, and no information that identifies them will be public or revealed to others without explicit and written consent. These points of views were taken into consideration before the study started.

Before starting the process of the thesis I contacted the lead supervisor in Germany and asked permission for my thesis project. Also the youth participating the program were asked and told what it means to be part of this study, and all different parties agreed. I have taken care during my writing process that no one can be identified.

The fact my laptop was stolen put me in a difficult position when it comes to my thesis process. I lost all the data collected which first made me think I should change my topic, which would have been very unfortunate. After talking to my supervisor I was encouraged to re-create the data by writing a timeline. With the help of the timeline I was able to relate my experiences and memories with the details listed in the timeline and produce detailed information. Of course, when it comes to the validity of my study, this is important point of view to bring up

5.3 Professional development

My research and thesis process has been long and demanding yet rewarding. The actual practical side of the process was enjoyable and moved along quite smoothly. However, due to the circumstances of having my data stolen, I had

lost some motivation to keep going with this subject. After discussing with my supervisors, we felt that my experiences were too valuable to just let it go to waste. With that in mind I decided that I needed to push forward with the original plan. During this process I have learned the importance of self-initiative and determination.

This thesis process has been a big learning process and my first touch on how to conduct a study and how to academically write it. I have gained exceptional knowledge on working with at risk youth by studying the theory and relating it with my experiences working with them.

After finalising my thesis process I have realised how much I have gained by working for the program. That is why I am also reflecting my professional development from this point of view. By working for this program I got first hand experience of how a program directed for at risk youth can operate. I was shown how many people could be involved in the organizing and implementing of a plan and making it into a reality. This program was a cooperation between two countries and I got to see how a program like this could affect the people in it and the surrounding community.

During the program I developed new skills and methods in working with at risk youth. I learned to somehow take a step back and let the youth teach me on how they needed to be listened and talked to. I learned that they needed to be felt valued no matter on how small or big an issue arose. I was pushed to learn how to handle my emotions as well as how to react to situations, which became turbulent very quickly. I feel that this program is a very good approach for these kinds of individuals but saw that it is a very difficult position to fill. The work for the councillors is for a long term in which they are committed to spend time away from their "normal" life. The hours are long and in a sense never end. You are living with your colleagues and youth in a small space and even when you are "off the clock" you are still surrounded by everyone like a family.

REFERENCES

- Bradley, Benjamin Sylvester; Deighton, Judith and Selby, Jane 2004. The 'Voices' project: capacity-building in community development for youth at risk. *Journal of Health Psychology* 9 (2), 197-212.
- Christens, Brian D. and Dolan, Tom 2011. Interweaving Youth Development, Community Development, and Social Change Through Youth Organizing. *Youth & Society* 43 (2), 528-548.
- Corey, S.M. 1953. *Action research to improve school practices*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Di Luzio, Gaia 2006. A sociological concept of client trust. *Current Sociology* 54 (4), 549-564.
- Diakonie Würzburg. Accessed 18th of January 2016. <http://www.diakonie-wuerzburg.de>
- Erleben, Arbeiten und Lernen. Accessed 18th of January 2016. <http://www.ealev.de/finnland>
- Ferrance, Eileen. 2000. *Themes in Education: Action Research*. The Education Alliance: Brown University, Providence, Rhode Island.
- Green, John J. 2016. Community Development and Social Development: Informing Concepts of Place and Intentional Social Change in a Globalizing World. *Research on Social Work Practice* 1–4.
- Hagerty, Bonnie; Hoyle, Kenneth; Lynch-Sauer, Judith; Sargent, Judy and Williams, Reg Arthur 2002. *Journal of the American Psychiatric Nurses Association* 8 (4), 120-129.

- Hennink, Monique; Hutter, Inge and Bailey, Ajay 2011. *Qualitative research methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Lai, Claudia K.Y. 2010. Narrative and narrative enquiry in health and social sciences. *Nurse researcher* 17 (3), 72-84.
- Meltzer, Ariella; Muir, Kristy and and Craig, Lyn. 2016. The role of trusted adults in young people's social and economic lives. *Youth & Society*.
- Morrison, Morag 2004. Risk and responsibility: the potential of peer teaching to address negative leadership. *Improving Schools* 7 (3), 217-226.
- Salusky, Ida; Larson, Reed W.; Griffith, Aisha; Wu, Joanna; Raffaelli, Marcela; Sugimura, Niwako and Guzman, Maria 2014. How adolescents develop responsibility: what can be learned from youth programs. *Journal of Research on Adolescents* 24 (3), 417-430.
- Schweitzer, Jeffrey and Knudson, Roger. 2014. Dialogues with presence: A narrative inquiry into calling and dreams. *Pastoral Psychology* 63 (2), 133-146.
- Silverman, David 2005. *Doing qualitative research: a practical handbook*. Sage. London.
- Stringer, Ernest. 2007. *Action Research*. 3rd edition. London: Sage Publications.
- Winter, Richard and Munn-Giddings, Carol 2001. *A Handbook for Action Research in Health and Social Care*. London & New York: Routledge.