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**WHAT IS  
GOOD**

**PROFESSIONAL**

**OPEN**

**YOUTH WORK**



# WHAT DOES AN IDEAL OFFER OF PROFESSIONAL OPEN YOUTH WORK LOOK LIKE?

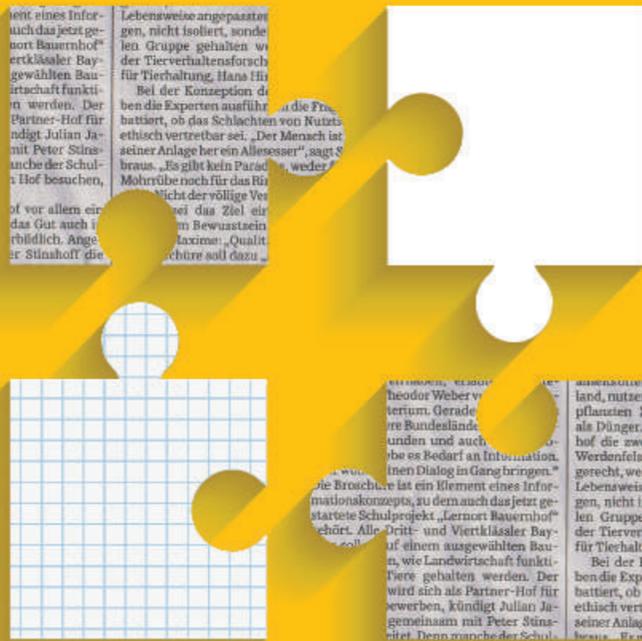


## **Good question.**

As a professional youth worker, you first might think of an appropriate setting, where all parties can cooperate effectively. For young people, fun and action might be essential, or perhaps there is a topic of special interest, that they want to talk about with the youth workers. From the point of view of the funding authorities, open youth work might be more successful, if a high number of young people is appealed. Residents just don't want to be bothered by any kind of noise and don't want to find garbage in their yards.

Thus, is the quality of open youth work in the eye of the beholder and is therefore everything relative? It could almost look like that, and the answer to the question would then be: it depends on who you ask. !

# QUALITY: DOING THE RIGHT THING



## **But, it isn't that easy either!**

As we take a closer look, we can immediately tell that there are certain "general" characteristics that determine the quality of our service. Using a very simple quality concept, we can verify that we are actually "Doing the right thing" – or from a different standing point – we can check if our working strategies are really leading us to achieve our stated goals. In this sense we actually have to consider 3 questions in order to address this aspect, namely:

**1** WHAT ARE WE DOING?

**2** HOW ARE WE DOING THIS?

**3** WHAT GOALS ARE WE ACHIEVING THROUGH THESE ACTIONS?

As the basis to answer these questions in the **Handbook of Quality in Open Youth Work in Austria** (boJA 2016) the following was defined: what open youth work provides (offers, services), how open youth work acts (work principles, methods), what goals are we achieving through these actions (goals, effectivity). If you want to determine, how the quality of your work is, you can first have a look at the descriptions in the handbook and check to what extent does your work correspond with the state of the art, explained therein.

# EVALUATION

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If you want to get a deeper insight and for example want to include the opinion of young people and benefactors in your assessment, you can also use the methodical "tools" contained in the manual to evaluate what you're offering.

In its original meaning, evaluating means to rate or to estimate something. The subject of an evaluation can be individual activities, projects, programmes or an entire organization.

Thus, by asking ourselves how we do what and what goals are we achieving, we evaluate our services and can therefore tell something about their quality.

In order to simplify the evaluation of the services offered in individual facilities or the teams of open youth work respectively, the **Handbook of Quality in Open Youth Work in Austria** (bOJA 2016) describes common methods for the evaluation, while also suggesting some documents and "tools" that can be helpful for the concrete implementation of evaluations.

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# METHODS OF EVALUATION

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## PERSONAL INTERVIEWS

as well as phone interviews imply a conversation between both acting parts. Some of the advantages of personal interviews are the possibility of eliciting open questions and answers, as well as a high degree of flexibility. It is the respondent who defines the priorities in the conversation and the relevance of the topics. During the conversation, the interviewers in general have the opportunity to inquire and can therefore identify unexpected aspects as well as finding out more information related to the background.

Both implementation and evaluation of interviews can be very time consuming and require therefore generally relevant sociological expertise.

## WRITTEN SURVEYS

(questionnaire) are used especially when a large group of persons should be interviewed. This type of interview is by far less expensive and time consuming than the personal interview.

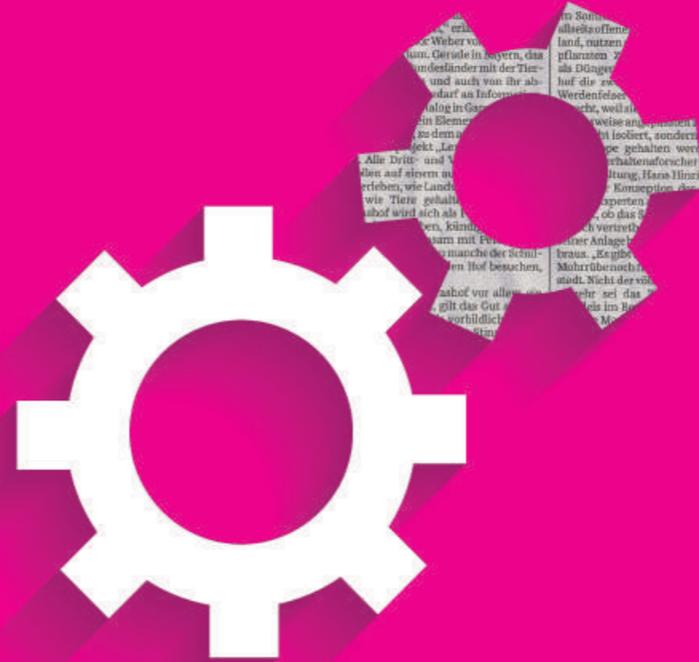
Furthermore, some of the advantages of written surveys are: participants can overthink the questions, the interviewers cannot influence the respondent and even geographically distant people can be surveyed easily (e.g. online surveys). Survey software tools also assume a (simple) data analysis, so that non-qualified persons can perform questionnaire-based surveys too.

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## GROUP DISCUSSIONS

constitute a special type of survey, in which several persons (e.g. young people, staff) are interviewed to a certain topic at the same time. In this case the focus is rather on the group itself and not on the participants. Group discussions are therefore often used to study opinion formation processes and group dynamics.

To make any statements about what was done in the course of a year, it is essential to be able to rely on so-called process-generated data (visitor statistics, history documentaries, photos, texts, etc.). Documentation is necessary not only to allocate the work done, but as a key requirement to enable the evaluation of services and interventions.



# TOOLS FOR EVALUATION

In order to help you with quality review tasks, there are some specific “tools” that have been developed within the framework of the project **Participatory Quality Development in Open Youth Work**, and designed for open youth work professionals. Such tools can be used either individually or jointly, and with or without external assistance.

- **Open youth work-documentation-software** (OJA-Doku-Datenbank)
- **Questionnaires** for young people and stakeholders (people whose opinion is important for your work, e.g. politicians, schools, associations, etc.)
- **Worksheets** on self-evaluation in the team

1. OPEN YOUTH WORK-  
DOCUMENTATION-  
SOFTWARE

3. QUESTIONNAIRES  
FOR YOUNG PEOPLE  
AND STAKEHOLDERS

2. WORKSHEETS  
ON SELF-EVALUATION  
IN THE TEAM

External monitoring is useful for those without previous experience in the field of evaluation when using any of these tools for the first time. Furthermore, a quality dialogue with key stakeholders can be performed whilst using the tools. More on that later.

## OPEN YOUTH WORK DOCUMENTATION DATABASE

In the practice of professional open youth work, different methods are used for documentation. These include the well-known line count lists, used in order to record the visit frequency, as well as daily logs, hours, lists, photo - or video documentation, among others. In addition, people and case-related documentation methods are used for the work in the context of individual advice.

Some organisations of professional open youth work are already running databases that enable documenting information in electronic form and reading statistical data in form of graphics and tables by just pushing a button. Other youth work professionals still rely on analogue methods in their documentation. Since 2015, bOJA has been implementing its own documentation software for professional open youth work, available free of charge for all youth workers in Austria and South Tyrol.

With this software, structural data (such as number, age, sex, qualifications of the facility or employees, service data of nature and scope of the respective services, visitor statistics) can be collected online.

Data collection is done at institution level and completely anonymously, which means that no personal information of young people or employees (such as names or dates of birth) is being collected.

Regarding the frequency, you can choose whether the data collection is made weekly or yearly and you can also decide what features you want to document (e.g. gender and age groups of young people, exact number of persons or just estimates, etc.).

The simplest version of data entry with this software could be recording once a year the data related to all contacts computed over the past year, how many employees were working in the corresponding facility during that period - and you're done.

The entered data is automatically processed into tables and graphics, which in turn can be exported in various programs (Excel, PDF), that means annoying fiddling Excel graphics to create an annual report are therefore unnecessary - and anyone who's ever done that, knows how much time you can save using this method.



The introduction video on [www.boja.at/qualitaet](http://www.boja.at/qualitaet) or on [www.netz.bz.it](http://www.netz.bz.it) respectively, provides an overview of input possibilities and the exact design of the database. You own the rights for your input into the database, therefore no one can take an insight, unless you have expressly allowed it to someone (e.g. to your sponsor organization).

Once a year, an anonymous evaluation of overall data from Austria or South Tyrol takes place, from which no conclusions on individual sites can be drawn. This report aims to strengthen the self-confident appearance and the visibility of the action field of open youth work as a whole. The more facilities using the database, the clearer the impact in the visibility of open youth work in a stronger and more sustainable way.

If you still have no access to the database but care for one, please contact the bOJA- or the n.e.t.z.-office.



## QUESTIONNAIRES

If you want to know the opinion of the young people you reach with your services, as well as the opinion of your awarding authority and other relevant stakeholders about your services, what they especially like about them and what changes they would propose, then it is best to conduct a survey among these groups. Questionnaire surveys have the advantage that they cause relatively little effort and that you can run them with little social science expertise.

In the course of the project **Participatory Quality Development in Open Youth Work**, bOJA has commissioned experts to develop questionnaires that all employees of professional open youth work can utilise without much effort.

You can find the questionnaires at [www.boja.at/qualitaet](http://www.boja.at/qualitaet) to download; there is a version for young people and for stakeholders, as well as for site specific and mobile forms respectively. You can either export the entered data to an Excel file and evaluate it there or edit it with an according evaluation program - if you are familiar with it or at least know someone who is.

As an alternative, these questionnaires are available as online survey software. As a matter of fact, you only have to send the link to the people you want to survey. The survey software will automatically generate a simple data mining. Furthermore, you can create more detailed evaluations yourself or even have them created for you.

In terms of content, questionnaires are structured so that they represent the five core areas of open youth work, as described in the **Handbook of Quality in Open Youth Work** (bOJA 2016) in Austria.



Participation



Expansion of competences



Identity development



Coping with everyday life



Lobby

To decide what stakeholders to include in your survey, it is helpful first to create a list of stakeholders. If you need assistance, please contact the bOJA- or n.e.t.z.- office or your umbrella organisation. If you want to conduct an online survey, please also contact the bOJA- or n.e.t.z.-office, to clarify who accompanies such processes for open youth work professionally in your region.

In practice, it will be advisable not to query all five areas together, but to focus on a core area, because the respondents might feel otherwise overwhelmed.

**Example:** Survey of adolescent clients of a facility of open youth work

Topic: Advocacy in the municipality

Please select how much do you agree with following statements (scale: 3 = strongly agree; 0 = strongly disagree):



Data interpretation: Young people see their concerns rather represented in their municipality (v20: MW 2.3). They clearly see the impact of the employees of the institution XY in relation to the representation of their concerns in their municipality (v21: MW 2.6). They see a clear link between this input and the actual consideration of their concerns in their municipality (v22: MW 2.6). One can say, youth work acts in the sense that the concerns of young people in the municipality are successfully represented, even if there is still potential for improvement from the perspective of young people (v 20: MW 2.3).

## SELF ASSESSMENT WORKSHEETS

We have developed worksheets that serve as a basis for moderated group discussions, so that the views of the individual team members can be included in the assessment of your work.

These worksheets are structured – as in the questionnaires – so that they adhere to the five basic dimensions of professional open youth work (identity development, development of expertise, coping with everyday life, advocacy and participation), whereby it is up to you and your team of course, defining what aspects of your work you'd like to look at.

If you conduct a questionnaire survey among young people and/or stakeholders at the same time, it is advisable to discuss at least some of the areas that are addressed in the questionnaires within the team, to be able to compare the opinion of the team members with the opinion of young people or of the stakeholders.

The worksheets are meant as a tool. They are the basis on that you can dedicate yourself to your work calmly and systematically in a comfortable setting (e.g. during a team meeting). If you tried that once, you will notice that you often agree on specific topics, while on other issues, different views are represented. This is completely normal. The only question is how you deal with the differences.

So, the purpose of this workshop format developed by us is dealing productively with the different assessments of the individual team members, rather than trying to convince each other of the accuracy of their own opinion or even as the team leader "to put his foot down".

Instead, you shall have opportunity during this workshop to equally present your respective views on a particular topic and to explain each other the reasoning behind your thoughts.

The following for example then can happen: Colleague A to colleague B: "After you have reasoned your point view, I can now tell, that I did not take this into consideration. And if I take your aspect into consideration, I can rather agree with you. I will rethink that again". Or: Colleague C to colleague E: "I can now comprehend your point of view on this topic, but that still doesn't change my view, I still disagree and stay with my opinion". It is important that both points and any further outcomes are ok. You should only work on topics that need be discussed further and you jointly agreed on. Perhaps you might want to organise further trainings or discuss them with colleagues from a different facility. To make a long story short, if you agree on a need for action on a specific topic, you should start planning, what you are going to do and the time you will dedicate to that activity.

### Structures of the worksheets

All worksheets are created equally, namely divided according to topics, aspects and indicators. There are worksheets covering various aspects related to each topic, which are backed on indicators, meaning in this case specific claims, for example:

**1. EXPANSION OF COMPETENCES** 

**1. INFORMAL EDUCATION**

>> Scale: 4 = fully applies, 0 = does not apply at all

	4	3	2	1	0
"We perceive open youth work as informal education work."					
"We have a common definition of informal education work."					
"We are conscious of our impact as role models and apply this in our team (e.g. to broach the issue of gender stereotypes)."					
"We pay attention arranging our settings to promote informal education."					
"We regularly check our settings, if they are promoting informal education."					

**2. SOCIO-PEDAGOGICAL EDUCATION**

>> Scale: 4 = fully applies, 0 = does not apply at all

	4	3	2	1	0
"We perceive open youth work as socio-pedagogical education work."					
"We have a common definition of socio-pedagogical education work."					
"We pay attention with young people, we regularly define our education goals."					
"We regularly check our settings, if they are promoting informal education."					

### Before you get started

Choose the topic(s) and the aspects that you want to work on together in the team.

- It is NOT the goal, to work on every single topic and aspect. Certain topics might be more interesting to all of you than others. Some might not apply to your team at all.
- Choose only the topics that are relevant for all of you, that you are discussing anyway, that are relevant for your organisation, etc.
- The staff members taking part in this workshop are only those involved with the chosen topics.
- All staff members involved in the workshop will get copies of the topics/aspects that will be discussed.
- Use an external moderator to conduct your workshops.

### Implementation

All staff members first work on their own on the particular indicators of the chosen topic:

- Now everyone asks *himself/herself*, to what extent the statements expressed in the indicator apply to your facility from *his/her* subjective point of view. Then choose the corresponding rating.
- The evaluation takes place uniformly on a scale of 0 to 4, i.e. "does not at all apply (0)" to "applies fully (4)".
- After all colleagues have finished the individual work, the reviews are presented and recorded in writing by the moderation (e.g. on a flipchart).
- Then the reviews are discussed one after another. The views and reviews of all contributors are being discussed. The aim is not to agree on a joint evaluation, but to separately justify the assessment comprehensible for the colleagues.
- It is not the aim to be the best or first, in the meaning of reaching the most points, but to define the optimal level of quality for this specific context. (i.e. "We should all be able to at least choose level 2 [partially applies] for this indicator.")

### Securing the results and further work

At the end of the activity, you should write down what aspects of the discussed topics went well in the past, and can still be treated the same way.

- Finally it will be agreed on implementation measures: “We will, for example, organise training, clarify processes, designate someone responsible, keep up with the carrier management, etc. for topic X/aspect Y/indicator Z”.
- Agreed in writing, what measures are to be implemented by what date, and who is responsible.
- Make sure to have all the resources available for implementing the measures (i.e. working hours, training budget, etc.).
- Check on the agreed date of transposition, whether or to what extent the implementation of the respective action is done and what is possibly still left to do.
- Keep the documents (worksheets, flipchart sheets, notes, etc.) to have them available any time and can thus serve as a basis for assessing the implementation of the measures.

- Unless previously agreed else (i.e. with your sponsoring organisation), keep these documents with the team. It is possible and might also be useful to coordinate the planned activities with your sponsoring organization, but outside the team nobody will know, who gave what assessment.



Experience has shown that it is helpful to use external moderators in such self-assessment workshops, so that all team members, including the supervisor, can actually and fully focus on the group discussion, without being “distracted” by the moderation task. If you want to make use of such external moderation, please contact bOJA or n.e.t.z. or your umbrella organisation respectively.

## QUALITY DIALOGUE

Each of the tools presented here can also be used individually: data evaluation, questionnaire surveys among young people and/or stakeholders, as well as self-assessment workshops with staff members are valuable items to have your work evaluated. The application of all elements together with final result presentation to stakeholders and young people form a so-called quality dialogue, therefore a systematic and externally assisted evaluation process.

Quality dialogues are prevalent in many work fields. The word itself simply means to have a mutual conversation about the quality of your own work. To be able to have the conversation wisely, data, facts, analyses and opinions are required – you can get these fundamentals using the “tools” described here. The aim of a quality dialogue is to have look at your own work and its results from different angles and to discuss the results of this analysis with the contributors (young people, stake-holders, staff members) – thus, to have a dialogue.

We name the framework within the results are discussed with stakeholders, round table as a symbol for everybody can equally take part in this dialogue and thus the (actually existing) power gap is hidden (i.e. between employer and employees). A dialogue can only take place on an equal footing.

At the “round table” the external process support presents the results and analyses of the data received through surveys and self-evaluation workshops and furthermore, elucidates the proposed measures derived thereof.

Together with the stakeholders, it is then decided what measures, in what form and in what time frame are to be implemented.

In this context, it is important to ensure that the resources needed for the implementation of the measures are available or can be organized (i.e. working hours, training budget, etc.).

Only if this is guaranteed, it makes sense to make decisions about the implementation of measures at all. In other words: Only those measures will have a chance to be implemented for which the necessary resources are available. In case of doubt, it is always better not to implement certain measures from lack of resources, as to awaken false expectations that cannot be satisfied in the end.

For those measures on which you agreed with the stakeholders, you should specify up to when they are to be implemented, what resources you will use for this, who is responsible for the implementation and when and in what form you will check the successful implementation (i.e. "at a follow-up meeting after one year").



The quality dialogue is flexible and is used for analysis and control of quality. The "round table" represents its centrepiece. In other words, different stakeholders discuss present results on equal terms and therefore exchange their views on goals, requirements, effects and standards based on facts.

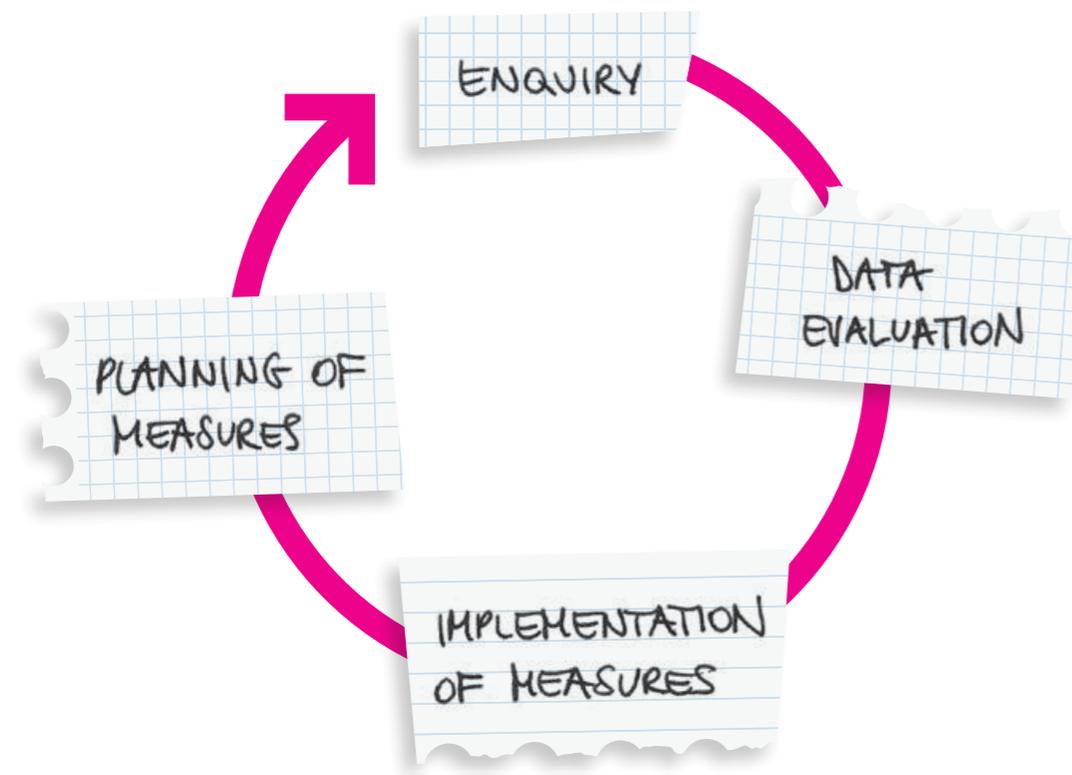
A prerequisite for a successful quality dialogue is to gain the willingness of the key stakeholders already at the beginning, which means that engaging in a quality dialogue without the participation of the contracting authority (municipality, provincial youth departments, etc.), as well as the representatives of your organization does not make sense in any case!

The quality dialogue is carried out together with external process support. If you are interested and are looking for a process support, please contact bOJA, n.e.t.z., your network or the umbrella organisation of open youth work in your province.

The process support moderates the round table. You are responsible for the presentation of results to the young people. It is important that the young people get to know the outcome of the survey they participated in and which of their proposals should be included, what is not feasible and why, this should be informed in a way that suits them. There are many options available for this presentation; you can for example make an exhibition together with the young people, organize a panel discussion with municipality representatives, use the regular house meetings, etc.



## SUSTAINABILITY



A quality dialogue should not be seen as a unique event in the history of a facility of open youth work, but a continuous process of quality evaluation and improvement should be triggered. Often the focus lays on the effort of the professionals of open youth work, the understanding of stakeholders for the structures, improvement of processes and aims in open youth work, or to motivate them to rethink certain aspects respectively – these are aims that cannot be achieved in a discussion group. These are rather changes and processes that need to be addressed in the long term.

Following advantages arise from this circuit model of quality dialogue:

- In a dialogue the further course of action is reflected and determined jointly (facilities, sponsoring organisation, contracting body).
- As a result, the quality and efficiency of networking is improved, which in turn increases the acceptance of decisions.
- The control of services is realistic and coordinated, a rapid implementation is possible, and the implementation of the project will jointly be reviewed.
- At the same time, it is checked whether there are new changes pending, or what appropriate measures are to be set, etc.

# FREQUENTLY USED TERMS



Finally, we want to mention some terms that are frequently used in the context of quality or evaluation respectively.

## **Goals**

Initially the objectives of certain services are specified in the planning phase. It means that future desirable conditions should be described (i.e. “Young people have the opportunity to actively participate in municipal decision-making processes”)

## **Input/Resources**

Afterwards, the resources are used within predetermined frameworks and organisational structures (i.e. staff members, financial means, premises, etc.).

## **Actions/Performance**

Using these resources, activities are set in motion, in order to provide certain services (i.e. “organise leisure activities for young people”)

## **Output/Results**

The measurable, countable, or recordable results of these services form the output (i.e. the sum of service hours, the number of persons reached, performance-related photos, movies, texts, etc.).

## **Outcome/Effects**

The effects achieved in the target groups through the services, will be referred to as the outcome (i.e. “the self-organization abilities of the young people were visible expanded, they clearly show more self-responsibility.”).

## **Evaluation**

Before an effective review, the performance of the services, incl. the resulting output need to be considered. Only then can be checked, whether by this performance the desired effects could be achieved. This process of checking the results on the basis of specified target agreements is referred to as evaluation.

# CONTACTS

We hope you received some useful ideas and inspiration for your practical work.

Good luck with the implementation!

For questions and feedback, please contact:



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# NOTES





**Impressum:** bOJA  
Bundesweites Netzwerk Offene Jugendarbeit  
Lilienbrunnngasse 18/2/47, 1020 Wien  
ZVR-Nr.: 78 54 32 196  
boja@boja.at | [www.boja.at](http://www.boja.at)

**Design:** [www.feschegrafik.at](http://www.feschegrafik.at)

First Edition, August 2016



This project is funded by the European Commission. The information and views set out in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the official opinion of the European Commission. Neither the European Commission institutions and bodies nor any person acting on their behalf may be held responsible for the use which may be made of the information contained therein.

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