

YouthLab

2.2 NEEDS ASSESSMENT REPORT

Young in Prison,
Netherlands



YouthLab

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Needs assessment professionals – Youthlab

Introduction

This report is the result of the needs assessment survey carried out in preparation of the YouthLab Europe project, coordinated by Young in Prison, with the participation of the University of Leiden, Defence for Children International – Italy and Defence for Children International – Belgium.

The questionnaire for the assessment of professionals' training needs was developed by the University of Leiden and subsequently translated to Dutch. The questionnaire aimed to assess the training needs of justice professionals (judges, lawyers, probation officers) to work with children and youth in the system.

In total, six professionals have responded to the questionnaire - which is not representative of the extensive reach of professionals that Young in Prison has built in the Netherlands. However, ensuring professionals' contribution to the survey was a challenge and the numbers remained low. Nevertheless, their responses helped draw a picture of their needs and expectations regarding training on working with youth.

Results

In this session we will present and analyse the results of the questionnaire:

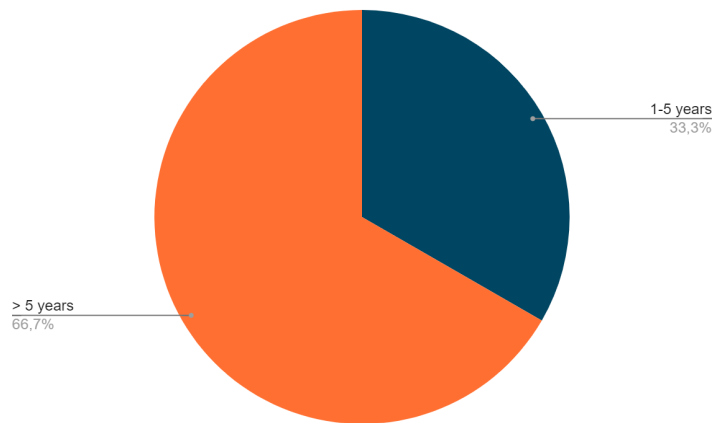
1. What is your profession?

Profession	Respondents
Judge	1
Lawyer	2
Probation officer	2
Public Prosecutor	1
Total	6

2. For how long have you been working in the juvenile justice system?

Options: Less than one year, One to five years, More than five years

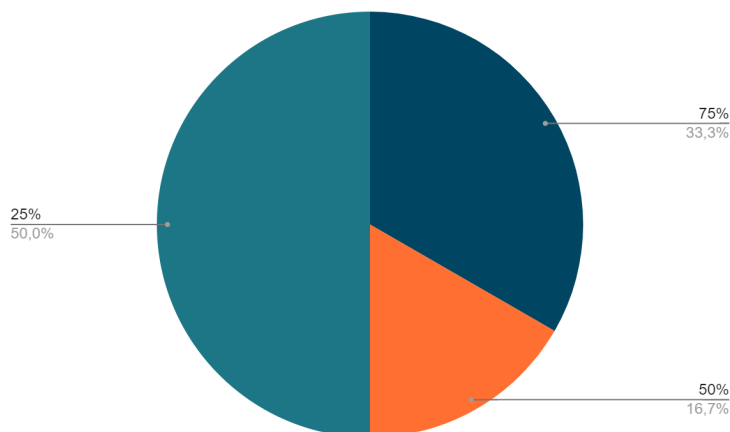
When asked how long they have been working in the juvenile justice system, none of the respondents replied less than one year, while 2 responded between 1-5 years and four, more than 5 years - which means they are all experienced professionals with considerable experience in the field. While training young professionals and even students has an invaluable impact, the fact that respondents are more experienced indicates that they understand better the current gaps in their capacity and the competences they should ideally strengthen.



3. Which part of your work is devoted to youth (minors below the age of 18 and young adults until 24)?

Options: 100%, 75%, 50%, 25%, Other, please specify.

When asked how much of their work involved youth, half of respondents said 25% of their work involves youth, while the other half was spread around 50% and 75% - making the pool of respondents a relevant target audience for the Youthlab training. The answers were not spread evenly among professions.



4. How often do you attend training related to working in the juvenile justice system?

Options: Less than once a year, Yearly, Every 6 months, Every month

Regarding training received, the responses were evenly spread around 'less than once a year', 'once a year' and 'every six months' (2 respondents each). None of the respondents reported receiving training once a month.

5. Which of the following elements is part of the training curriculum that already exists for your profession?

More than one box can be ticked.

Training elements	Frequency
a. National juvenile justice legislation and jurisprudence (current developments)	6
b. International and European children's rights law and standards	3
c. Child and adolescent development and psychology (theory)	5
d. Pedagogical and communication skills (theory)	5
e. Practical skills in communicating and engaging with youth (skills training)	3

When asked to specify the 'other' option, respondents shared:

"Here there is not a specific obligatory curriculum for all youth lawyers in the Netherlands, but many (also commercial) providers offer a lot of different courses to follow. A youth lawyer is only obliged to follow a minimum number of courses and also with the juridical current affairs, not (yet) with practical skills and not in depth about the development and psychology and pedagogical and communication skills. This should be more implemented in my opinion."

"We can sign in for a practical course about changing your communication with people that are having an intellectual disability."

"Courses at the Public Prosecution Service are mainly theoretical. In a number of youth courses (if you want to do youth affairs at a hearing, you must take that course), attention is paid to development, pedagogy and communication. But that is only a small part. So, that is an important nuance. The answer to 3, 4 and 5 could also have been no. The practical training of Youthlab is so different from the normal course formats that it stands out - with practice, but still in a very fresh, accessible and safe way."

Both the provide responses and the extra information shared by respondents show that the training received is mostly theoretical and does not provide the practical skills needed in their daily work.

6. How would you rate your knowledge and expertise on the following items:

Scale of 1 to 5: Excellent, Good, Fair, Poor, Very Poor

Number of answers per question:

Items	Very Poor	Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent
National juvenile justice legislation and jurisprudence	0	2	0	2	2
International and European children's rights law and standards	0	2	1	0	3
Child and adolescent development and psychology	1	1	3	1	0
Pedagogical and communication skills	1	1	1	3	0
Practical skills in communicating and engaging with youth	1	2	1	2	0
Understanding the life worlds of youth in conflict with the law	1	2	1	2	0

Building on the previous question, the results show that professionals report a good level of understanding of the juridical aspects of their work (legislation, legal standards, etc), while feeling less confident about their practical skills, including communication skills and youth development. That is relevant considering that creating a space for communication and exchange between young people and professionals is at the core of the Youthlab, with a strong emphasis on how the youngsters experienced past exchanges and how those could be more child-friendly.

7. Can you identify three gaps in your knowledge and/or skills in relation to applying child-friendly communication and attitudes?

The answers to this open question also review how professionals lack the confidence to carry out the procedures in the most effective way considering the human challenges it involves, including communicating in a way that is clear to the youngsters, engaging in a way that shows care but still commands respect, etc. The professionals and youngsters often come from different backgrounds, including etarian, racial and/or economical, so relating to one another is not easy, but it can have a strong impact in the proceedings.

The full answers are available below:

“During training we are trained in communication with young people, but this aspect nevertheless only takes up a small part of the time. A training of, for example, half a day per year, is still quite little. I think knowledge is sufficient, but skills could/should be trained much better and more.”

"Juvenile vocabulary, juvenile way of processing information and tension arc of an adolescent."

"I followed the Youthlab training from the beginning and the most valuable was training the theory in practice: *Why do people (children and young adults) behave and react as they do? How do you respond? How can you respond to improve your assistance to your youth client so they will be able to participate more/better in their procedure?*"

"Communicating and applying the help of the important people, like family, to help the youth by motivating and helping them."

"Sometimes it's hard to use examples which are easy to understand for the children/juveniles because of their mental state... not always we have accurate info about narrative and development."

"The use of the right language and attitude. Language that is accepted by the person I am speaking to, which makes me credible. Should I use slang or just stick to my legal language? Because, that can be sweet and gentle, but also tough and legal. Or an intermediate form. And the assessment of which tone hits the right tone, in the choice of which words, is a challenge in every case. Being strict or moving along in communication and attitude. Giving another warning or being strict following the rules. What works? And when does it work? When do you push the boundaries and when is it done? Also touches on that credibility. This is a huge hurdle for people who start working with youth. When does someone feel heard? And, is that really necessary if someone has already spoken to 30 people? As a white man aged 40+, with supportive parents, a law degree and a (small) owner-occupied home, how can I still make contact with someone with a completely different background? So, how do I get over cultural and social background differences, again without losing credibility. To show and share my sincere interest (which is there) to someone whom, because of those differences, I will never fully understand."

8. Can you identify three needs you have in relation to training, in relation to child-friendly communication and attitudes?

In this follow-up open question, respondents referred a lot to the previous questions, emphasizing the need to develop practical communication skills so they can engage with young people more effectively.

"Very concretely I would indicate: Connecting with the young person, dealing with cultural differences in communication with young people (Then you are only 2-0 behind, you have to connect with a young person who also communicates in a different way than the Dutch young person) and conduct motivational conversations in a manner appropriate to the young person."

"Need to understand in order to be a better legal representative. Make an adolescent actually listen and act."

"See above. Knowledge about the child and adolescent development and psychology and pedagogical and communication skills AND how to use this knowledge in your daily work."

"Communication with the family and applying their help, creating a balance of a first conversation between the rules they have to deal with and making personal contact with them. Keep practising with youth that have experience with the help of a social worker."

"New insights from different levels. Training together with Judge, Honorary judge, Prosecutor, Lawyer, Social worker, Staff of juvenile justice institution, Penitentiary police officer, etc."

"See previous question"

9. Do you believe that it would be of added value to involve youth as experienced experts in training professionals?

Options: Definitely, Probably, Possibly, Probably Not, Definitely Not

All six respondents reported that there's definitely an added value to involving youth as experience experts, which shows appreciation and approval for the model adopted by the Youhlab.

10. Do you believe that it would be of added value to organise multidisciplinary training (involving different professions such as lawyers, judges and social workers)?

Options: Definitely, Probably, Possibly, Probably Not, Definitely Not

Once again, all respondents responded that multidisciplinary training definitely have an added value, according to their belief.

11. Do you have any other comments or suggestions regarding the issues raised in this survey?

In this final open question, two respondents took the opportunity to further empathise the importance of training opportunities that are multi-disciplinary and that involve youngsters themselves as a tool to bridge the competences gap of justice professionals.

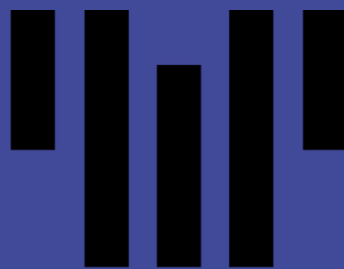
“See also under 5. In my opinion, it is very needed that all professionals who work with children in conflict with the law, will follow multi-disciplinary trainings with each other and also with the youth, to be trained in both theory and practical knowledge on all aspects (juridical - national and international, development and psychology, pedagogical, skills) regarding working in the youth field. Working and training in a multidisciplinary setting is very valuable, because in the youth field both the juridical and the pedagogical aspects work together. The training organised by Youthlab is a very good example of this.”

“You can read all the books you can, but talking/working with people who experienced things, that you will remember.”

ANNEX1 : Questionnaire - Needs assessment professionals

- 1.** What is your profession?
 - a. Judge
 - b. Prosecutor
 - c. Lawyer
 - d. Social worker
 - e. Staff of juvenile justice institution
 - f. Other, please specify:
- 2.** For how long have you been working in the juvenile justice system?
 - a. Less than one year
 - b. One to five years
 - c. More than five years
- 3.** Which part of your work is devoted to youth (minors below the age of 18 and young adults until 24)?
 - a. 100%
 - b. 75%
 - c. 50%
 - d. 25%
 - e. Other, please specify:
- 4.** How often do you attend trainings related to working in the juvenile justice system?
 - a. Less than once a year
 - b. Yearly
 - c. Every 6 months
 - d. Every month
- 5.** Which of the following elements is part of the training curriculum that already exists for your profession? (more than one box can be ticked)
 - a. National juvenile justice legislation and jurisprudence (current developments)
 - b. International and European children's rights law and standards
 - c. Child and adolescent development and psychology (theory)
 - d. Pedagogical and communication skills (theory)
 - e. Practical skills in communicating and engaging with youth (skills training)
 - f. Other, please specify:
- 6.** How would you rate your knowledge and expertise on the following items: (scale of 1 to 5; Excellent, Good, Fair, Poor, Very Poor)
 - a. National juvenile justice legislation and jurisprudence
 - b. International and European children's rights law and standards
 - c. Child and adolescent development and psychology
 - d. Pedagogical and communication skills
 - e. Practical skills in communicating and engaging with youth
 - f. Understanding the life worlds of youth in conflict with the law

7. Can you identify three gaps in your knowledge and/or skills?
8. Can you identify three needs you have in relation to training?
9. Do you believe that it would be of added value to involve youth as experienced experts in training professionals?
 - a. Definitely
 - b. Probably
 - c. Possibly
 - d. Probably Not
 - e. Definitely Not
10. Do you believe that it would be of added value to organise multidisciplinary trainings (involving different professions such as lawyers, judges and social workers)?
 - a. Definitely
 - b. Probably
 - c. Possibly
 - d. Probably Not
 - e. Definitely Not
11. Do you have any other comments or suggestions regarding the issues raised in this survey?



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