

1. Name of organisation, city, country

Jeugdendienst Geraardsbergen, Geraardsbergen, Belgium.

3. How many interested staff? (if possible names, function)

3 persons are interested. All three are youth consultants, working for the city.

4. What is the staff interested in seeing /learning? (Themes/methods/activities)

First of all we would like to see how other cities are **working in an integral way**. We believe integral working is (or will be) very important in the ever changing world we live in today. To us, integral working has different levels: first of all we would like to **hear the voice of the children/young people**. We're constantly looking for methods to do this and are very interested in how other cities are dealing with this challenge, because it's never easy to reach all children/young people, especially the ones who are not used to speak up, the ones that are rarely listened to. Integral working also means **working together on a (city-)service level**. It is a challenge to gather all relevant services around the table to discuss specific themes. But every service brings its own expertise and can be valuable. We are interested in how other cities implement this way of working. What challenges do they deal with? What opportunities do they see? How can we improve what we do? Who takes the lead? ... We also recognize the role of children/youngsters in this process. Bringing the bureaucratic way of working, with lots of rules, procedures, long waiting in touch with the young way of being in the world, unbiased, short term thinking and full of dreams is an additional difficulty, but probably also a big opportunity. Here, we are still in an early stage, with a lot of potential for growth.

Second, we are looking for some **inspiring ideas about city marketing**. Not to lure more tourists to Geraardsbergen, but to open the eyes of our own children/youngsters, to make them look to Geraardsbergen in a way they didn't before. **In children's minds Geraardsbergen isn't always a nice place to live**. There is an image of a grey, boring, small town with a lot of problems (poverty, drugs,...). This results in indifference, they don't feel connected with Geraardsbergen. If we have this conversation with the children and youngsters themselves, and ask them why they feel this way, they indicate that it is especially a mindset. There is an element of truth in it, but actually it is not so bad, everybody says it so I say it. We think that it is **important to improve the image of our city to increase wellbeing for our young people**, to create a place where they feel safe and welcome. Where they feel invited to participate. We are looking for ideas to do so.

Besides these two big themes there are **other challenges** that are also interesting to us:

- Youth culture develops very fast. How can we keep up? How can we respond?

- How can we integrate children's rights into our policy? How can we engage other city services to follow our lead in this?
- How can we challenge our government to invest in the young people of Geraardsbergen, make them priority next elections?
- ...

These are just a few of the tremendous amount of questions we have.

5. What type of activity is relevant? (Job shadowing/Study visit)

We are very curious and eager to learn. We would like to experience different types of exchange. First of all we would like a **global image** of how the youth service is working in the other city. How are they organized, who is the team, what do they do? How do they organize participation? We want to hear them out, be able to ask questions and get to know each other.

Second we want to **explore the city**, what makes it a great place to be for the children/youngsters? What are their favorite places? What are places of conflicts? How do they work with this?

We also would like to **visit specific organizations** of the youth service, meet children and youngsters.

Generally we would like to be inspired, hear and see the success stories and get to know about the failures and what they learned from it.

6. How long should the activity last?

Optimally the activity would last three days.

7. When would be a good time for your organisation to send youth workers?

May or October fits us best.

8. What can your organisation offer in terms of interesting examples of youth activities/methods etc?

Geraardsbergen has an **expanded youth work**:

- There is a playground specialized in playing with and caring for disabled children. The disabled have also monthly activities. During the animated playgrounds, we use the principle of an open system to play. It's very intense for volunteers, but children love this method.

- There is a youth club with a lot of members and over 100 volunteers. They organize a lot of activities for young people in their leisure time. They try to give the young people a place where they can be who they want to be, where they can try things out and where they can learn to live/work/organize together.
- There are a lot of youth movements in the city, which we try to support in different manners. Practical, but also financially and pedagogically.
- We, jeugdienst Geraardsbergen, organise a lot of activities for all the children and young people in town. All of these activities are low-threshold organized. We want to reach everyone. Most activities aren't organised exclusively by us but we try to involve young people in the elaboration of the project so they can learn from it.

We have a **lot of contact with other (city-)services**. We try to achieve that others know who we are and we are willing to get to know the others. We are convinced that co-operation is necessary so we're investing in it, this investing started a couple of years ago and this accelerated the past year resulting in a lot of projects, questions for advice, presentations of our working and more familiarity with our youth service and our staff.

We achieved the label 'Child Friendly City' after 2 years of extended research and study of the perception of children and youngsters in Geraardsbergen. We established a plan of action to work on 4 major focusses for the next years: promote and defend children's rights, participation of children en youngsters, perception, experience and development of the city and discovering and helping developing talents.

Our **participation channel 'Giesbaargse Jeugd'** is something we're proud of too. Through social media we try to get to the young people. It's kind of a connection that wasn't there a year ago, before the start of 'Giesbaargse Jeugd' and is getting stronger by the day.

Last but not least, **we invest in youth community work**. The youth community worker works in the leisure time of social vulnerable youth, on the streets and in the parks of Geraardsbergen. Together with the kids and youngsters, he develops projects who meet their needs (eg. Bike repair, youthwork in vulnerable neighbourhoods, cooking together, youthclub, ...). The youngsters actually take responsibility in these projects. Along this "streetwork", he also does a lot of policy work, bringing the voice of vulnerable youngsters to policylevel. He is famous in Geraardsbergen for his knowhow and consulted regularly bij city services, police, social services,...

9. When would be a good time for your organisation to host?

In the Easter Holidays, because then there is a lot going on.

10. Other relevant information

We're very enthusiast and curious about this exchange and are ready to discover, pass on and learn a lot.