



International webinar for Detached, Outreach and Street-based youth workers

*Working with young people in the context of COVID\_19*

Organised by the UK Federation for Detached Youth Work

Supported by Dynamo International

Wednesday 17th June 2020

UK Federation for Detached Youth Work

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Webinar hashtag: #streetYWwebinar

A recording of the webinar can be accessed at:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=6450&v=NGN7z--MQ60&feature=emb\\_title](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=6450&v=NGN7z--MQ60&feature=emb_title)

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Presenter biographies

#### **BELGIUM & INTERNATIONAL NETWORK**

**Edwin de Boevé** is the Director of Dynamo International the world-wide network of Social Street Workers. The international network grew out of the Belgian Street Workers Network that Edwin helped establish in 1984. More than 50 countries are now involved from both the North and the South. Edwin has worked as an international trainer in many countries, including Haiti, Tunisia and, from 2017 – 2018, the Democratic Republic of Congo.

## AUSTRALIA

**Selim Ucar** is Street Youth Services Manager with a Non-Government Organisation (NGO) called Humanity Matters, based in Sydney. With over 20 years experience in the youth sector, Selim sees advocacy as an essential element of youth work. For Humanity Matters, this means advocating on behalf of marginalised, disconnected and vulnerable young people, in order to bring their needs and issues to the forefront of government policy and service delivery.

## GHANA

**Joyce Kulevo** is a Street Social Worker from Accra. Joyce is the national coordinator of the Street Social Workers of Ghana network and advocates for professional street work practice and the recognition of street work as a profession in Ghana.

## ISRAEL

**Roy Homri** is head of street work at Elem, which has been the leading NGO for teenagers and young adults in distress in Israel for the last 36 years. Elem has been able to help over 3000 young people and young adults across Israel during this time.

## NORWAY

**Børge Erdal** was an outreach social worker from 1997. He became leader of the City Centre Outreach Service [Uteseksjonen] in Oslo, Norway in 2009. Børge trained as a social worker and group therapist and has since studied Public Leadership & Innovation.

## CZECH REPUBLIC

**Jan Serik (aka Johnny)** works as outreach worker from Vrtule, a Low-threshold centre in Prague. Jan has been at Vrtule for four years and works with young people aged 13-22.

**Tomáš Klumpar** has been a street worker and manager of outreach services since 2008. He works for Beztíže, a specialized department of the ULITA Youth programme across three boroughs of Prague.

## AUSTRIA

**Helmut Steinkellner's** has almost twenty years experience in the field of detached youth work. Helmut proactively lobbies for the rights of the child and is a long-standing member of Dynamo International. Helmut is currently completing a Masters in Political Education at Danube University.

## UNITED KINGDOM

**Graeme Tiffany** worked as a detached worker for many years, and now works on a freelance basis, as a trainer, researcher, and lecturer. Graeme's academic work includes the philosophy and practice of street work. He is the author of 'Reconnecting Detached Youth Work' and numerous chapters, articles and papers about detached work. Graeme has been involved with the UK Federation for Detached Youth Work for more than 20 years and Dynamo International since 2008, presenting at conferences, running workshops and training, and is a member of its Expert Group.

## Abridged commentary

### **Edwin de Boevé – Belgique and International Network**

Dynamo International is an international network of social street workers variously referred to as 'street educators', 'detached', 'outreach' and 'street-based workers'. Dynamo has been working in the field for more than 35 years. It aims to increase the effectiveness and quality of practices through training, exchange of experiences and practices, and the implementation of pedagogical tools.

Across the world the repression, and especially the stigmatization, of people in street situations has worsened. In some countries street work has been banned by the authorities. However, this has not stopped social street workers from continuing their missions. Unfortunately, many street teams now find it difficult to continue their actions due to this pressure but also because of the cessation of financial support, especially if this support comes from private companies.

More than ever, we must continue our fight and advocacy work, so that everywhere in the world the authorities put in place a real and solid social protection system. It's also important to maintain and continue all the positives steps many authorities have taken during the Covid period.

We talk a lot about a new world following the pandemic, but we must above all give ourselves the tools that allow us to reflect and build a new model for the development of our societies. Street social workers are well placed to contribute to this reflection.

As a response to the crisis, the Dynamo technical team have set up a participatory IT tool called Padlet. This tool serves as a library and source of information for all the members of the network, to share relevant documents about the Covid crisis and the consequences of the pandemic across the world.

The padlet can be accessed [here](#) or at:

<https://padlet.com/dynamointernational/vubvbecoh86buvi>

If you need more information please write to: [a.broudic@travailderue.org](mailto:a.broudic@travailderue.org)

Dynamo International has organized many different events and conferences since its inception.

Please note the following dates:

- On the 28<sup>th</sup> of October 2020, Dynamo will host a videoconference about Covid issues.
- The international forum “Words from the street” is planned for 18<sup>th</sup> to 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2021, in Brussels.

### **Selim Ucar – Australia**

The Covid situation happened very quickly in Australia. A lot of young people were surprised by it, but street workers continued to be work with them in the streets. Many young people became invisible and unreachable. So home visits from social workers were increased in order to maintain contact with them. Home visits were essential to preventing potential domestic violence. In addition, social media interventions were increased considerably in order not to lose contact with young people. Now that there is a partial return to the ‘new normal’, it will be a challenge for educators to facilitate young people’s return to school. Efforts are being made to ensure this happens in the best way.

For young people under the age of 17 years of age Humanity Matters works to re-engage them back into mainstream schools; street workers play a pivotal role in advocating for this return, particularly as they are aware that many young people fall through the gaps of the education system and are more likely to become marginalised in the community.

Selim remarked that “being given the status of an essential service has made a big difference to the work. Also, streetwork needs to be recognised as a professional, evidence-based component of any

human services system. The international network needs to include collective efforts to contribute to building this evidence and knowledge base of and for streetwork.”

Humanity Matter website: <https://www.humanitymatters.org.au>

#### **Joyce Kulevo – Ghana**

Street youth in Ghana have been badly affected by Covid, especially in economic terms and through a lack of access to food. Street workers have continued to go out to the street and have helped distribute food, although many workers were fearful they might contract the virus during their work. They have had support from the authorities including the police.

The network organization undertook mapping of all the organisations available to help and the services they provide. Even though there was an increase in the number of volunteers helping to engage young people in these circumstances, access to water and food remains a problem. Many organisations in the sector have economic problems.

#### **Roy Homri – Israel**

The Covid crisis in Israel has had a significant impact. For example, people in the street experiencing addiction have had problems accessing drugs; those involved in prostitution have found it hard to find clients. Young people and other street people became very hard to reach, and it was difficult to engage them in discussion about the crisis. At all times, the workers have had to be resourceful, especially in staying connected to those they work with, and maintaining their presence (staying visible) as support workers. One of the most efficient solutions was to provide street people with accommodation in hotels in order that they are safe and have shelter during the crisis. Webinars were organized about what it is like to live in street situations in the context of Covid as well as in normal times.

Elem website: <https://www.elem.org.il>

#### **Børge Erdal – Norway**

Covid has made it much more difficult to maintain contact with young people in street situations, particularly those with drug problems. Covid 19 will be one of the many focuses of our work in the foreseeable future. Supporting vulnerable young people into employment will be a main strategic aim in our work in Oslo.

Børge's slide presentation can be accessed at <https://www.fdyw.org.uk/dynamo-international>

### **Jan Serik & Tomáš Klumpar – Czech Republic**

One of the difficulties during the Covid crisis has been that online social work is not officially recognised by the authorities. So, the support work has been harder to establish and maintain, and the crisis has exacerbated existing problems. Despite this non-recognition of digital work, virtual tools were used during lockdown to keep contact with young people. These included engagement through various social media, virtual chats, quizzes, and videos. With the relaxation of lockdown there has been a strong recognition of the importance of human presence and contact.

Ulita website: <https://ulita.cz>; and <https://beztize.ulita.cz/about-us>

See also: <https://strediskokobylysy.cz> for information on the organization.

Contact details: [jan.serik@strediskokobylysy.cz](mailto:jan.serik@strediskokobylysy.cz)

### **Helmut Steinkellner – Austria**

The Austrian platform has done important work to disseminate information and research the experience of street workers working in the context of Covid across Austria as well as wider issues about the crisis. A particular concern was to intervene to stop the spread of fake news and conspiracy theories. A growing level of violence was present during the crisis, including anti-Semitism.

Young people have been left without sufficient support or access to relevant support structures. Many were invisible during the crisis and felt abandoned. Many lacked the tools to support themselves including those to access information through virtual platforms. The opposite has also occurred; many young people have been overloaded with online communication, with the risk of them becoming further detached from the real world. The emergency numbers put in place by the government have proved important, but the need to create a stronger network is very much present.

### **Graeme Tiffany – UK**

The key point about our experience in the UK is to recognise that although many youth centres and other building-based youth services have had to close many detached youth workers have continued their work. This work has continued throughout lockdown and will continue to do so as

we come out of lockdown. To do this, many workers have been given **essential worker status** by local councils and the police; this has given them permission to work and documentation to prove this if challenged by the police for being on the street.

It is important to note that workers' status at a local level is very different from that at a national level; the government has not included youth workers in its list of **key workers\***. My own view about this is that if youth workers were regarded as essential our long campaign to make youth provision a statutory (legal) responsibility would be over – we would have won the argument. Statutory status would of course force the government to fund youth work properly. And this means not only re-investing in youth work after a decade of severe austerity but also funding it permanently. We think though that the work youth workers, and especially detached youth workers, have done in recent months provides even more evidence of why this work is needed and valuable. Certainly, detached work has come to the fore; and never again can it be regarded as a poor relation to other forms of youth work.

So what have we experienced in the last three months? A priority has been to encourage young people to stay safe. But this has not been a simple case of telling young people to 'go home'. In practice – on the street – we have observed a wide range of responses to the government's guidance on COVID19. As one of our members, Chris MacIntosh, and his detached youth work team at YPAC in Manchester have observed a wide range of young peoples' responses:

- **Fear:** we found people were very concerned about the effect the virus could have on them. There was a fear of death and illness. These young people generally stayed at home. Family perspective had a significant influence on this.
- **Ignorance:** some young people were not aware of the impact the virus could have. They knew something was going on, but through other people's information. These tended to be young people who had egocentric thinking / were not engaged outside their friendship groups and local community.
- **Ambivalence:** Young people, who didn't really see the concern, were out, knew a bit about the risks but weren't actively considering the consequences (this was more of a passive response).
- **Distanced:** young people who were concerned about the virus, but it was happening elsewhere - they experienced no immediate impact from it - it was on TV, or 'over there'. The classic quote was: 'I am worried about it, but don't know anyone whose got it, so I'll be ok'.
- **Invincibility:** young people who knew the risks and understood it was resulting in death, but thought it would not have that impact on them, and they would be ok even if they caught it. They had a view that they didn't need to adhere to anything because it wouldn't affect them.

The point here is that workers have had to respond to this diversity of young people's responses to COVID19 with diverse practices, interventions and language. This is a hallmark of detached youth work: it is flexible, adaptable, needs-led and 'context-appreciative'. But we also need diverse responses because young people's broader experience of COVID19 is itself very diverse. We know, for example, that the disadvantages many young people have been experiencing are not new, indeed for many they have existed throughout their lives, and with COVID19 they have been exacerbated and amplified. Those who before COVID 19 were experiencing poverty, who were experiencing domestic and familial abuse (for some young people home is not a safe space), who were experiencing anxiety, depression and wider mental health problems all now experience these things to an even greater degree. And we know that Black and Global Majority Ethnic communities have been disproportionately affected by the virus, with more contracting the disease, more becoming ill, and more losing their lives. Because of inequalities we can say this is a discriminatory disease. Contrast this with what our government has said; that COVID19 is 'a great leveller' – the idea that it is affecting us all, regardless of background, equally. What we know now is that this is simply untrue.

Detached workers have had to learn quickly; to be aware of welfare issues; to provide support in a manner that is effective and tailored to individuals; to challenge the unsavoury side of the pandemic (such as increased prejudice against members of the Chinese community) and to challenge fake news and misinformation; to support wider community volunteering initiatives, and support young people in doing the same; to engage diplomatically but assertively with the police who have been keen that we tell young people to 'go home' rather than them (they have said they prefer a 'softer approach' to the more authoritarian interventions many young people associate them with). We have recognised that shifting youth work on-line, as many other services have done, was never going to be able to reach all young people – there are limits to what we can do digitally. Above all we have been able to speak up for the fact that young people in general are desperate for social interaction, social interaction based on physical proximity, what Ridian Brook calls the 'miracle of human presence'. And we have been able to provide at least some opportunities for what youth work is famous for, bringing joy and conviviality and a sense of community into the lives of young people.

\*During the webinar a government announcement was made stating there were no restrictions to doing detached youth work and it was now permissible across the UK. See <https://www.nya.org.uk>

## Questions and Commentary

Key points:

- There was much discussion about the status of street workers; there had been diverse responses from governments, with some giving workers essential / key worker status at a national level. This had made a great difference and been supportive. Other governments had denied workers this status although local government had done this (in the UK, workers had had some success in linking at a local level through local government 'Covid hubs' whilst appreciating it would make a massive difference if the government recognised the important and essential value of detached work in reconnecting and supporting young people through the transition out of lockdown). Detached workers report young people becoming invisible again and detached teams being their only point of contact. Yet other governments had simply not allowed street workers to work. The webinar found that regardless of these circumstances street workers had continued to work.
- There were reflections on young people not going to school, with exams cancelled, and the need for new learning routines to be developed. Comments included the view that many young people see not returning to school as a very real option; they have lost faith and no longer value their formal education. Detached and street-based work was seen to have a role in encouraging young people to value learning. Many workers though had experienced a tension (and some conflict) between – on the one hand, their desire to meet the needs of young people and engage with them in a positive way, and, on the other, encouraging them not to disengage with formal education. The tension is best described in the question: “is the ‘purpose’ of the work to get them to return to formal education, or to move beyond that?”
- Participants expressed concern that young people’s homes are not always safe spaces. For others the street is their home. In all circumstances we must maintain our relationships and support young people. It was important to meet and engage young people where they were.
- Staff safety was discussed, although none of the webinar participants knew of any examples of volunteers or staff having contracted the coronavirus whilst working. Efforts though have had to be made to support them in keeping safe; measures have been put in place such as social distancing when conversing with young people, and many street workers have had access to hand sanitisers, face-coverings / masks etc especially during the peak of the pandemic.
- There was diversity in the experience of doing online work. Many workers had used digital and virtual platforms to maintain contact with young people. In contrast, in the Czech Republic online social services are regulated by the law – the law sets out the form of services that can

be provided. Workers in CZ can do streetwork, and work in youth clubs etc., but online work is not one of the approved forms.

- Participants were concerned that we were in the midst of global health and economic crises and discussed how to avoid a mental health crisis among young people, and one that can affect workers. It was important to document their stories and share them as a potential protective factor for mental health.
- Information gathering and sharing (with other agencies) was discussed; and the practice of 'targeted' work. Concerns were expressed about the challenges to maintaining a commitment to young people's autonomy.
- A discussion took place about the relationship between street-based work and centre-based work and how they might work together. It was important to think about these relationships when planning the future. It was noted that the pandemic had accelerated street-based work – with many previously building-based workers moving their practice outside. These workers were concerned to do so, and worried about the management of these two different roles, particularly in terms of the different forms of power, authority and control implicit in working in these different environments (and implicitly then different relationships). Comments were made about the value of reviewing 'purpose and intent' to help make decisions about the focus of the work. It was important to think critically about relationships, what young people claim are their needs, and the challenges of workers transitioning to street-based practice. Professional support was essential. Czech colleagues, experienced in combining outreach programmes with centre-based services were happy to share their experiences and provided their contact details for those who wanted to get in touch about these issues.
- Participants commented on the importance of the street work ethic, to make visible the invisible. There were concerns though that some government departments and services tended to only respond to those they see and fail to consider those out of mainstream visibility (the gap in mainstream human service systems). This said, it was important to remember that homeless people had been presented on the streets for a very long time – homelessness is not a new phenomenon catalysed by Covid. The actions of governments to open emergency shelters during the pandemic, saying it was unacceptable that these people should be outside, were to be applauded. However, there were deep concerns that these emergency measures would end with the end of lockdown, with a return to street homelessness. It was essential to point out that change had happened and that this proved change was and is possible. We should hold authorities to account to ensure these services are not removed.

- For the future, there is a big need to support and increase the participation of children and young people. A post-Covid world should be informed and led by youth voices. A happy and joyful approach must be maintained.
- There is general need to continue to gather testimonies and make visible what is invisible. These testimonies from the street have an important role in making the lives of invisible populations visible and in ensuring they get access to food, shelter and basic needs.
- Reference was made to the 17 Sustainable Development Global Goals:  
<https://www.globalgoals.org>

### **Final comments**

“Great inspiration from all of you! Great moderation! Great line up! Great resources! Thanks!”

“Thanks Graeme for having us. Thanks to the panellists for getting together and sharing. Thanks to all attendees for their curiosity and time.”

“Well done to the UK Federation; that’s something I miss sometimes, a strong living network.”

“It is really interesting to hear of the resourcefulness, passion and effectiveness of the street-based youth worker. It is clear this is happening across the world even though governmental responses to inequality and poverty have been very different. Our advocacy should be on a spectrum of the personal and the structural. Brilliant discussion today, thank-you!!”

“Thank-you to everyone. I feel we need more time and more space to explore and respond to the changing environment we are working in; maybe focus on future thinking. Regards.”

“Thank-you everyone for sharing with us all your experiences and insights and thank-you to the organisers for providing this valuable opportunity to come together.”

“Thanks all of you for the inspiration and the energy you give to youthwork! Special thanks to Graeme for moderating!”

“Thanks very much for all of your experiences from different countries. We truly learn from you all!”

“Fantastic representation of the resourcefulness of the street-based worker, and for insights into the really positive ways of staying connected, staying visible, and supporting young people. Thank-you, Roy.”

“Thank you so much Joyce. Important presentation and sharing of knowledge.”

### A message from Dynamo International

DYNAMO INTERNATIONAL  
STREET WORKERS NETWORK

EDWIN DE BOEVE — Director



Hello everyone.

A huge thank-you to you Graeme and to the whole of the UK Federation for organizing this webinar. It is above all always a great pleasure to join the most famous street philosopher in the world.

Just to complete your presentation of the network, Dynamo International is an international network of social street workers which include terms like street educators, detached, outreach and street-based workers who don't all work only with young people, I must say. By working in the field, Dynamo International aims to increase the effectiveness and quality of practices by means of training, exchange of experiences and practices and the implementation of pedagogical tools. It also strives to generate international mobilization and to build structural and sustainable responses to the problems experienced by people living in the street throughout the world.

Dynamo International has organized different events and conferences. And the next event will be a video conference on 28 October 2020 about Covid-19 issues, and last but not least don't forget the international forum «[Words From the Street](#)» on 18 to 22 October 2021 in Brussels.

At the start of the pandemic, in a short support message that I sent to members of Dynamo international - a few month ago, I mentioned that:

*In this particular context we also have important missions. The first mission is to remain vigilant that fundamental rights are respected and are not sacrificed in the name of the fight against the*

*pandemic. The second mission is due to the nature of our profession; the social street worker always seeks to highlight the positive side in the worst situations. Let's stay with this positive vision and bring around us this hope for a better world.*

Following this message, many members reacted and Graeme released a policy statement that you can find on our [website](#).

What we can take away from the testimony of our colleagues is that all over the world, inequalities and poverty have been accentuated. Everywhere the repression, and especially the stigmatization, of people in street situations has been felt more strongly. In some countries, street work has been banned by the authorities, which has not stopped social street workers in continuing their missions. However, many street teams find it difficult to continue their actions due to this pressure but also due to the cessation of financial support, especially if this support comes from private companies.

Most of our colleagues, especially in African and Asian countries, have increased the reception of children into shelters and the distribution of food, given young people's difficulties in finding means of subsistence on the streets. There are of course special situations that are even more problematic, such as migrant children stranded in refugee centres on the Greek islands, for example. But we also receive positive testimonies like in Nepal where the number of arrests of children in street situations has decreased because the police are afraid of being infected. There are other positive situations, such as in several European countries where young people have organized themselves to help isolated and older people who can no longer move.

More than ever we must continue our fight, and advocacy, so that everywhere in the world the authorities put in place a real and solid social protection system (national insurance). It's also important to maintain all the positive decisions taken by certain authorities after this Covid-19 period. We talk a lot about a new world following the pandemic, but we must above all give ourselves the tools that allow us to reflect and build a new model for the development of our societies. Street social workers are well placed to contribute to this reflection.

As a response to the crisis, the Dynamo technical team has set up a participatory IT tool called Padlet. This tool serves as a library and source of information for all the network's members to share relevant documents about the Covid-19 crisis and its consequences in the different countries of the world.

To access the Padlet click [here](#). Or <https://padlet.com/dynamointernational/vubvbecoh86buvvj>.

If you need more information about it, please contact Aurelio Broudic: [a.broudic@travailderue.org](mailto:a.broudic@travailderue.org)

Most Dynamo resources are in four languages FR, ENG, ESP, and POR.

Dynamo International website <http://travailderue.org>, including: <https://wordsfromthestreet.com/>

## The UK Federation for Detached Youth Work

Find out more about the UK Federation for Detached Youth Work: <https://www.fdyw.org.uk>

Detached Youth Work Guidance is available at: <https://www.fdyw.org.uk/post/detached-youth-work-guidance-june-2020>

For our most current guidance for Detached Youth Workers produced in partnership with the National Youth Agency, and for UK Government guidance, follow the link to the National Youth Agency website: <https://nya.org.uk>

Books, guides and resources are available from via this link: <https://www.fdyw.org.uk/books>

Links to Fed videos can be accessed via this link: <https://www.fdyw.org.uk/videos>

The Fed also provides training: <https://www.fdyw.org.uk>

You can also get access to the Dynamo International website via the Fed website:

<https://www.fdyw.org.uk>

The Fed is a completely volunteer organisation; no-one takes payment from the Fed to provide these services, support sessions or run the organisation. If you'd like to donate please visit [www.fdyw.org.uk](http://www.fdyw.org.uk) and click on the donate link in the top left corner. We rely on these donations to survive! Thank-you.