

Break out session: Youth mental health and schools

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As you all know The Netherlands did not participate in this Working Package on youth mental health of the Joint Action. This was not because of a lack of interest as we were already active in two other Work packages on work and e-mental health. The main reason was that many experts, institutions and organisations in the Netherlands, including my ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport, were occupied by an enormous operation of decentralisation of the whole youth care system to local levels. We had already many organisations and services functioning at that level. However, the whole system of planning and financing was still a central government task.

One of the reasons for this whole operation was to bring the planning and decision-making to the level where it belongs. Only there networks could be built between social teams, schools, youth work and care to make the care and support tailor made to the need of the young people, their peers and family.

Nowadays, the central government is more focused on the monitoring the whole implementation of the decentralisation and of course innovation.

One of the topics which is part of this monitoring and innovation is the cooperation between schools and supporting and care services. Necessary already for some time, since the number of special schools for mentally retarded and handicapped young people has been reduced and many more students with mental retardation and mental and physical health problems are part of the general education system.

But on top of that there is the growing recognition that schools, amongst other institutions, can play an important preventive role regarding mental health problems and promote a healthy life style. 'Whole Schools', where different social, educational and supporting functions have been brought together, are common now in many neighborhoods, but also other schools, which are quite autonomous in the

Netherlands, have integrated different supporting service and teachers are trained to recognize and react on problems and signals of their pupils and students.

And finally there is also the angle or perspective of the school. They are confronted with early school leavers and sometimes even violence at the schoolyards.

It goes too far to highlight all these different aspects now and to mention all sort of programs and projects which were successfully launched the previous decade. But the new system of youth care in the Netherlands still have it is own challenges as well.

One of the topics is the support and care for adolescents and young adults. We all know they are going through all kinds of transitions which are not running smoothly all the time. As a result, these young people risk having problems with their studies, losing the direct pathways to work, losing contact with their friends and family and suffer from unstable moods and getting mental health problems.

The age period between 15 and 25 years is a vulnerable period that calls for an integrated approach of support and care where necessary.

But what we see is that young people in this age group do not often contact or look for support with the existing care and support services and organizations. They prefer either to keep it for themselves or look for solutions through the social media. This could be seen as a positive signal as they are probably solving their own temporary problems with their peers or on their own, but it raises also concerns and questions about the accessibility and appropriateness of the support and care offered, in particular with young people with mental health problems which could have a long term impact.

According to the results of different studies and conferences the match between the demands of the young people and the services offered, is at least not optimal.

With these developments in mind and a vision that young people with mental health issues should be empowered and fully participate in education and work where possible, the Netherlands EU presidency will organize a conference on Wednesday 17 February 2016 in Maastricht to highlight the different policy challenges we still face regarding the mental health problems of young people in the age group of 15 – 25 years old. The conference aims at:

- Presenting and discuss new approaches, highlighting low threshold support and cross sectoral cooperation.
- Finding ways to bridge the gap for adolescents and young adults between different services, care and supporting systems
- Discussing early detection and prevention of mental health problems of youth in high risky environments through cross-sectoral cooperation including youth work, teachers and supporting services at school
- Including the opinion of young people themselves in mental health and focus services on what they want and need.

The invitation for the conference was sent to participants of youth mental health conference in Venice in 2014, the ADOCARE conferences and workshops in 2015 and EU expert group members, thus offering a setting to bring further the discussion and implementation of several EU and international initiatives which were presented before. If you feel interested to attend we can still accommodate some more experts like you. If so please register at www.ecymh.nl I repeat: www.ecymh.nl. Further information is also available at this website
I think you for your attention.