



# WHAT YOUTH WELFARE OFFICES DO

questions & answers



**bundesarbeitsgemeinschaft**  
landesjugendämter

**JUGENDAMT - THE YOUTH  
WELFARE OFFICE.**

Support where it counts.

## **About us**

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## Introduction

### Dear Reader,

- Making children strong and ensuring that they can develop their skills and talents and grow up in good health,
- supporting young people in continuing on their way with self-assurance and independence,
- giving support and advice to families to ensure a happy family life,
- making the environment more family-friendly,

this is what the dedicated staff members of Germany's approximately 600 youth welfare offices do every day. In this way, they make a major contribution to the success and future viability of our society.

A youth welfare office thus covers many aspects. This brochure will provide you with information about the services offered to citizens by the youth welfare offices. If you should have any questions or wish to make use of our services, do not hesitate to contact your local youth welfare office.

## Basics

### **What does the youth welfare office do?**

The youth welfare office supports parents and legal guardians in the education, care and upbringing of children and young people. It provides preventative, family-supporting services that help to create positive living conditions for families. Its tasks range from organising high-quality child care to providing educational counselling and ensuring the child's welfare, promoting youth services and creating a child- and family-friendly environment. Any person can turn to the youth welfare office for help, especially children and young people facing problems or finding themselves in an emergency situation.

### **How is the youth welfare office structured?**

The youth welfare office supports citizens in all rural districts and in many cities. Sometimes it functions under another name, such as „Youth Department“ or „Family Department“. The structure and responsibilities of these district or city youth welfare offices are regulated nation-wide by the Children and Youth Welfare Act (SGB VIII). The youth welfare office consists of two parts – the youth welfare committee and the administrative office.

## **The youth welfare committee**



has the task of responding to the problems of young people and families, exploring suggestions and recommendations for further development and promoting and planning local youth welfare services. It includes members of the county council and municipal council, citizens experienced in youth welfare, and persons recommended by accredited providers of independent youth welfare organisations and youth associations.

## **The administrative branch of the youth welfare office**

implements the decisions of the youth welfare committee and carries out the tasks described on the following pages. It offers assistance in accordance with the Children and Youth Welfare Act (SGB VIII) or procures such assistance. This branch mainly employs social educators, social workers and administrative staff. The heads of the youth welfare offices are qualified experts, mostly with many years' professional experience.

## How does the youth welfare office support children, young people and families?

The youth welfare office offers families, children and young people appropriate support where it counts. This includes the following:

### **Early assistance**

To ensure a good start to family life, the staff of the youth welfare office informs families about the care and counselling provided by the office, so that young families will know from the very beginning where they can turn for assistance. In addition, the youth welfare office has connections to midwives and paediatric nurses. This means that it can offer the right kind of support at an early stage when it appears that young parents are not coping with a new baby. Family stress factors can be detected at an early stage, with families getting the support they require. In this way the youth welfare office contributes towards protecting the child's welfare from the very beginning.



## **Child care**

The youth welfare office supports parents to ensure good child care for the very young. It provides consulting services about child care and finds places for children in nursery schools, day-care centres and with day mothers. Parents looking for a place for their child near their residence can contact their local youth welfare office.

Children not only have to be well looked after to feel good, they are also eager to acquire new knowledge. They need education to develop and to master the transition to school successfully. This is why the youth welfare office ensures good quality standards in child care. Early child development and language skills play an increasing role in this context.



## **Playgrounds and play areas**

More space for children! To ensure that communities and cities are attractive places for children and young people, the youth welfare office is involved in planning play areas.

Wherever possible, children

and young people will be involved in the planning and design process.

## **Youth work**

Promoting self-assurance, independence and good social interaction and motivating young people to engage with society are the main aims of youth work. The youth welfare office organises or arranges leisure time programmes, youth cultural activities and extra-mural educational activities. In youth institutions, young people are able to develop their talents, try out new things and solve personal problems with the help of professional contact persons.

## **Youth social work**

The first step is always the hardest. This is why our staff coach young people to balance out social

disadvantages at the transition point from school to career life. Apart from mentoring young people in their first jobs, there are also suitable social educational placements and work programmes. This helps to prevent young people from dropping out of school and creates structures to help them embark on a career.



## **Youth protection**

Young people are exposed to many risks which they cannot as yet assess appropriately. One of the tasks of the youth welfare office is occupational safety, dealing with alcohol and other drugs, and youth media protection, which deals with the risks of computer games and internet services. The youth welfare office provides preventative services and in some case mans emergency hotlines for children and young people.

## **Help for young people in criminal proceedings**

When children and young people turn criminal, the youth welfare office supports them during the criminal proceedings. They act as intermediaries between the youth courts and the young person in question. Both parties profit from this. When it comes to criminal proceedings, the youth welfare office attempts to find a settlement between the perpetrator and the victim, and arranges social training courses to ensure that young people do not reoffend.



## **The district social services**

Sometimes parents experiencing worries and problems with children only need some advice. At other times, the family situation is so complex that they no longer know what to do. In such situations, families, children and young people can turn to the district social services, also known as the General Social Services or Community Social Services in some youth welfare offices.

Experts will act as arbitrators in conflict situations, give professional advice on educational problems and assist with family-related legal conflicts. They provide information about additional, appropriate educational help and psychological support facilities, and procure suitable services. Building up a relationship of trust and taking the needs of all parties involved into account are important requirements in this line of work.

## **Child-rearing support**

Some parents require more intensive child-rearing support for some time. The work of the district social services is aimed at supporting parents so that they can handle their children and family life in the long term. This is why suitable assistance is rendered in individual cases, such as an educational consultation, a parenting course, the support of a social educator, or direct assistance for the child or young person. Unfortunately living within the family is not always possible. In such cases the youth welfare office will involve the family in finding a suitable foster home for the child or place it in a good institution. Depending on the family situation and in consultation with the parents and children, such a placement may be either temporary or permanent.

## **Family consulting, separation and divorce consulting**

When there are tensions within the family or in the case of separation or divorce, the district social services offer consulting in matters of family life, handling family conflicts and the responsible exercise of parental care; they are also involved in family court proceedings. Both parents and – depending on their age – also the children are consulted in the search for a solution centred around the children's wellbeing. Separated or single parents whose former partners do not pay child maintenance may receive benefits in terms of the Maintenance Advance Act (UVG) under certain circumstances.



## **Adoption placements**

When parents find that they are unable to live permanently with their children or when children cannot grow up in their original families for other reasons, the adoption placement workers find the most suitable parents for such children. The child's welfare is always the main consideration. Adoptions of unrelated and related children as well as stepchildren living within the country or abroad are considered.



## **Guardianships / Custodianships**

When parents can or may no longer defend their children's interests, a legal guardian is appointed for the children. Where no suitable individual guardian is available, the youth welfare office will be appointed as the legal guardian by the family court and will act in the interests of the child. In addition, the youth welfare office must offer unmarried mothers advice and support in determining paternity and instituting a claim for child maintenance. Where the mother agrees to this, the youth welfare office will handle the legal proceedings or seek a settlement by mutual agreement.

## **Youth welfare planning**

To ensure that youth support services also meet the needs of the children, young people and families, the youth welfare planning office develops a coordinated system of youth welfare services. It retains an overview of the institutions, services and quality required and takes into account the wishes and interests of their users, for example when planning the demand for child day-care centres. Accredited independent youth welfare services are involved at an early stage.

## **Child protection**

Children have a right to grow up in a safe and healthy environment. It is the task of the youth welfare office to protect the welfare of children and young people. The staff of the youth welfare office follows up all leads when it looks as though a child might be at risk. They establish contact with the relevant family to find a possible solution in consultation with them. They also cooperate closely with other institutions such as day-care centres, schools, doctors, and the police. The focal point is the question: What has to change to ensure that the child or



young person's welfare is once again ensured? In extreme cases, the youth welfare office has to take children into care and accommodate them for a short period to ensure their well-being. The children are returned to their families if, in such a difficult and stressful situation, the parents are prepared to accept help, thus once again ensuring the child's welfare. If the parents are not prepared to accept help or if the child's welfare is at risk in the long term, the family court will take a decision about custody of the children and where they will live.

## **Protecting children properly – a fine balance**

Families enjoy the special protection of the state. The care and education of children is mainly the responsibility of their parents. On the other hand, children should not be put at risk, especially in their parental home. The youth welfare office is obliged to follow up any indication that a child might be at risk. Child protection is a matter of balance between parental rights and a child's well-being: to what extent must a child's welfare be at risk before the state may interfere in the parents' constitutional rights. These risk assessments must be made each and every day by members of staff dealing with what are frequently complex and obscure family situations. This poses a special challenge, especially when parents refuse to cooperate. To ensure that staff members respond correctly and appropriately to the requirements, the quality of their work must be constantly checked and improved.

## Quality development in youth welfare offices

As living circumstances and problems can change very quickly, especially for young people, the various concepts and services offered by the youth welfare office must be constantly reconsidered and updated. This is why increasing the quality of professional care at all levels is part of the day-to-day task of the youth welfare office. Many youth welfare offices have systematic quality development procedures. This especially applies to child protection services.



## **Examples of quality assurance measures:**

- advice from colleagues on a case-by-case basis,
- templates, procedural plans and other documentation to help with risk assessment,
- systematic self-assessment and effect analysis,
- regular job-related training courses,
- complaints management.

# JUGENDAMT – THE YOUTH WELFARE OFFICE.

Support where it counts.

This brochure will provide you with all the information you need about the wide range of services offered by youth welfare offices. Youth welfare offices provide children, young people and families with support where it counts.

Stamp of the local youth welfare office: