



INFORMATION AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ESPORTS ACTI- VITIES IN MUNICIPAL YOUTH WORK

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FOREWORD

Esports is a global phenomenon. It has also become one of the most popular leisure time activities among young people. The phenomenon is also active here in Finland, and it has contributed in shaping the youth culture of Finland in the 2000s. As a significant phenomenon of youth culture, esports should be interesting to parties involved with youth work. Esports is a relatively new sport and hobby, and its definition is still slightly vague. In the context of youth work, esports as a tool and a form of an activity is a new way of doing things that are already familiar from more traditional forms and methods of youth work.

In this information package, **Kanuuna and Verke** hope to open the concept of esports and its significance in municipal youth work. Interviews with youth work professionals from various organisations involved with esports have been conducted for this publication. A big thank you to them!

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WHAT IS ESPORTS?

Electronic sports, competitive or professional video gaming and esports all refer to the same phenomenon. Simply put, esports means playing video games in a competitive manner. A competitive setting alone does not mean playing video games is considered to be electronic sports. Instead, an ambition and a structural framework are also required.

Young people may consider esports to be playing games with their friends competitively or honing their skills in their favourite game after doing their homework. In order to call these activities esports, however, a long-term ambition is required. The ambition can also be seen in the team's or individual's overall development, not just in the form of rankings or results. In the big picture, esports is about carefully planned efforts to be among the best in the world, all the way to a professional level.

Just like traditional sports, there are many very different forms of esports. Esports can be about playing alone or as a team or playing online or in the same room with other players. In these games, players compete against other players by winning matches, getting a higher score or beating each other's times.

As in traditional sports, there are fan cultures, merchandise and communities built around players or teams in esports as well. This culture is made accessible by other familiar video-game-related phenomena, such as gaming videos and live streams. Streaming can be an important way for an esports professional to keep in contact with their fans outside competitions. The attractiveness of esports is apparent in the fact that there are already larger audiences in some events than in traditional sports. Consequently, esports is not just about playing games at the professional level—or elsewhere. A lot of support services and helping hands are required. Esports is a multidisciplinary phenomenon. Most young people play some type of video game at least occasionally.

- **Esports is about playing video games in a competitive and goal-oriented manner.**

- **Players can play online or locally, either alone or as a team, depending on the game.**

- **Competitive gaming for fun, for the sake of competition or as a profession.**

- **Social and communal activities.**

- **Esports is comparable to traditional sports.**

- **A popular way of spending time for many young people, either by taking part or spectating matches and following teams and players.**

- **Esports needs a wide variety of involved parties.**

- **Fan culture is an important part of esports.**

WHY IS ESPORTS RELEVANT TO YOUTH WORK?

The trends of the gaming world are relevant for youth work. Games and gaming can be utilised in youth work when working with individuals and groups.

Gaming is a naturally social and communal activity. Gaming is a perfect way to make friends and develop one's social skills. Reflecting on the moments of success and failure that occur in digital games helps young people develop their emotional skills. In a guided environment supported by a youth worker, young people can develop their relationships with other young people, safe adults, their local area and the services available.

Esports activities typically start with open gaming activities. As the players develop their skills, the youth worker can begin to incorporate goals in the gaming activities. By setting a goal for the activities, it is possible to begin to process life management skills, co-operation and the significance of well-being in succeeding in the games. Through esports activities, it is possible to add a framework of goal-oriented and organised activities to gaming that the young person can also take advantage of in their daily life.



Youth services allow young people to arrange their own activities by supporting their teams and providing a practice space, equipment and someone to play with. Young people may also need assistance in practical arrangements. They may have unrealistic ideas about professional esports, and they may not have access to a party that could provide reliable information. This provides youth services with the possibility of acting as an additional supportive resource for the young person.

From a cultural standpoint, esports is relevant to youth work through events, people and activities. Young people can be involved in esports in a wide variety of ways. For example, they can be involved in arranging events or display their creativity by commentating on the events or making videos.

- **Youth work reacts to changes in youth culture.**

- **Knowledge about games and the gaming culture is social capital for young people as well as youth workers.**

- **Gaming as a team develops emotional, co-operative and social skills.**

- **Gaming in a community offers young people a chance to strengthen their relationships with other young people, safe adults, their local area and the surrounding society.**

- **Open gaming activities can lead to more goal-oriented esports activities.**

- **Esports offers a setting for the independent activities and responsible roles of young people.**

- **Esports activities in youth work can also include setting up a place to watch a competition, streaming or arranging events.**

HOW TO GET YOUNG PEOPLE INVOLVED?

Esports is suitable for all young people interested in it, and the activities can be adjusted according to existing youth work practice. Esports activities can be used in open activities, group activities and work with individuals. Goal-oriented gaming has a lot to offer to youth services even if the goal is not to become one of the best in the world.

Online esports activities allow for anonymous encounters where gender or ethnic background play no role. The activities can also reach the young people who are unwilling or unable to participate in face-to-face activities. In a best case scenario, supervised online activities have encouraged young people to visit a youth centre by allowing a young person to get to know the youth worker, and possibly other young people, in advance.

The needs of teams set up by young people vary greatly. For some teams, it may be very difficult to find space to practise in together. If an organisation has a designated space for gaming, it can be offered to young people outside the organisation's activities, if possible. This also increases the capacity utilisation rate of the space.

As a form of youth participation, young people can organize events for each other. They can be involved in planning, implementing and developing gaming and esports activities from the beginning. Young people may have different interests related to esports, which allows for a natural flow of co-operation, division of responsibility and peer support.

Young people may discover esports activities through other youth services. For example, a young person with gaming background in outreach youth work may be interested in esports. They can be motivated to participate in a small group arranging an esports event, for example. Similarly, young people can be engaged and involved in peer support activities, practical work placements in gaming spaces or coaching activities.

- **Esports is a form of gaming.**

- **Esports can be used in different forms of youth services.**

- **An online setting allows for young people to easily participate regardless of their background.**

- **Support for young people's independent activity groups.**

- **Various possibilities for inclusion and youth participation.**

- **Participation in esports activities through other forms of youth services.**

- **Peer support and guidance should be used.**

WHAT ELSE SHOULD BE CONSIDERED?

Just like in other goal-oriented activities, work in esports activities must be performed patiently and with adequate resources. It takes time for the players and teams to develop, and this process must be supported in a systematic manner. Esports in youth work is about meeting the goals of youth work, not competitive goals. The role of a youth worker is to guide and support young people.

Before launching esports activities in youth work, it is a good idea to find out who are the local and nation-wide parties involved in esports in order to determine the next steps of the gamer path. Esports in municipal youth work is about the first steps of the path, and the activities are primarily delivered in order to support the goals of youth work. It is advantageous for an youth worker involved in esports activities to have some knowledge of the professional side of esports. However, it is more important to know how to distinguish between professional esports and esports in youth work.

In order to become a highly skilled esports player, the player must train extensively. The recommendations related to life management, exercise, nutrition and rest are largely the same as in traditional sports. It is a good idea to pay attention to other things than just gaming and equipment while planning esports activities. The diverse expertise provided by partners and the organisation should be taken advantage of from



the beginning. For example, developing the technical skills of players may be a ranged by a partner, allowing the youth worker to focus on tasks related to youth work expertise (such as supporting group dynamics).

Establishing a team poses its own challenges, especially if the skill levels of players vary greatly. It is a good idea to survey the skill levels of players and what roles they prefer to play in the games in advance. This also helps establish a profile of the young person, what kind of support they possibly need and how they will act as a member of a group (the team). A young person may indicate that they want to play in a team, but their actual need and interest is to discuss esports and learn the mechanics of gaming. In esports activities, it is important to remember that there may not be room for everyone interested. Because of this, it is a good idea to think about how teams are formed in advance. The goal is to establish balanced teams where everyone has a comfortable environment in which to play and develop their skills. This also makes the activities more meaningful to young people and easier for them to commit to the activities.

- **Esports in youth work is implemented in line with youth work goals.**

- **Knowledge of the professional side of esports is advantageous.**

- **Esports activities in municipal youth work are at the beginning of the gamer path, it is not about professional-level activities.**

- **It is important for youth workers to understand gamer paths in order to guide young people forward in their hobby.**

- **Remember to use your collaborators as a resource.**

- **Focus on the functionality of teams.**

WHAT IS REQUIRED TO ARRANGE THESE ACTIVITIES?

The nature of esports activities can vary greatly between organisations. The resources required are always determined according to the activities, and in a best case scenario, they can be scaled up as the activities become more advanced.

Esports activities require equipment suitable for gaming, functional data connections and a shared understanding with supervisors and IT management that the devices being used must be suitable for gaming and arranging esports activities. Traditional administrative network connections of organisations are rarely suitable for gaming without changing the settings. It is often necessary to arrange a separate network connection dedicated to gaming.

In addition to connections and equipment, it is important to measure and, if necessary, divide the physical space appropriately. The number of gaming stations, the form of activities and participants determine the type of a suitable space. Particular attention should be paid to ventilation, as the players and devices generate a lot of heat. A space for casual interaction separate from the gaming room and a small place to hold discussions between members of a team should be made available.

In addition to the space and equipment, youth workers are an important resource. In addition to their expertise, an important resource for the worker is the support and understanding of esports activities on behalf of the supervisor. In these circumstances, the worker has sufficient time to plan the activities as well. This also guarantees that the needs of the worker and the activities are understood throughout the organisation. Proportionate resources allow for young people to participate in meaningful and attractive activities that also support the organisation's goals for youth work.

- **Adequate equipment, connections and spaces for the activities.**
- **Proportionate instructor resources.**
- **Support from supervisors is important in the relatively new gaming and esports activities.**
- **Activities can be adjusted according to the organisation.**
- **Well-planned and executed activities attract and engage young people and make the activities more meaningful to youth workers as well.**

Learn more about the subject on the Finnish Esports Federation (SEUL) website:
<https://seul.fi/in-english/>

The federation's website includes a lot of information about e.g. training, recreational opportunities, games and events.

Ministry of Education and Culture

VERKE



**Centre of Expertise
for Municipal Youth Work**