INTRODUCTION

Working with young people means relating to a social space of transformation, transgression and variation. Change and adaptability have always been integral parts of youth work (Jeffs 2015: 75). At the same time, a structured and sustained approach to young people’s lives and troubles forms experiences and creates patterns of interventions that function as a basis for youth work methodology. Approaches do not need to be constantly reinvented; there is a working tradition.

In Sweden, detached youth work constitutes such a tradition. Inspired by outreach approaches and gang work in American cities (Calissendorff et al. 1986: 16), the first detached youth workers were engaged in the larger cities during the late 1950s. This approach spread throughout the country and the number of detached youth workers increased during the subsequent decades. In the early 1980s there were about 400 detached youth workers employed in the public sector (Calissendorff et al. 1986: 39) and today it is estimated that there are 500 positions as detached youth workers available nationwide (RiF 2010: 3). Though there have been tremendous changes since the early days, both when it comes to the social conditions of young people and the way youth work is organized and provided, detached youth workers have managed to keep their efforts alive within contemporary Swedish practice.

The aim of this chapter is to present the tradition of detached youth work in Sweden, but also to investigate how detached youth workers have managed to navigate their occupational role in order to achieve both continuity and change. As Eraut has pointed out, this is a dimension of professional learning that on the one side concerns the tackling of ‘well-defined problems’ and on the other side requires a problem-solving approach to deal with the ‘occurrence of novel and complex situations’ (Eraut 2008: 4). Obviously, to generate a living tradition of practice the methodology must not be simply reproduced;
learning the job cannot be a plain process of taking over and doing the same. The work has to be reformulated to meet new conditions, face different problems and relate to new generations of young people (cf. Willis 1977: 2), and this is the focus of this chapter.

It will be argued here that crucial in this context are some of the distinct characteristics of how detached youth work is organized and carried out. Within an outreach approach youth workers are engaged in a constant process to construct meaning in and via their interventions. They also engage in a practice in which they are challenged to move into new areas in order to initiate new and different interventions. This will be discussed in relation to the concept of “fringe work”. Furthermore, Swedish detached youth workers, through their national association, form what can be understood as a ‘moral occupational community’ (Evetts 2006), which, together with a relatively stable position inside the public welfare system, helps to accomplish professional continuity.

To contextualize this exploration, the chapter outlines the emergence of detached youth work in Sweden, and two examples of detached youth work in Gothenburg (in the West of Sweden) constitute the empirical basis for the discussion.

**DETACHED AND OUTREACH YOUTH WORK**

The distinction between ‘outreach’ and ‘detached’ youth work is often unclear, both among youth workers themselves and in literature (cf. Crimmens et al. 2004: 14). In Sweden, youth workers tend to use them interchangeably. In general, detached youth work is understood as the most comprehensive effort. It includes working with an outreach approach, but also organizing and being responsible for follow-up work. Outreach work represents a more limited approach, focused on contact-making and signposting to other services and support systems.

The National Association for Detached Youth Work in Sweden provided the following definition of outreach work in their guidance from 2014 (quoted from Andersson 2013: 184):

> Outreach work is a contact-making and resource-mediating social activity, performed in surroundings and situations that the outreach worker does not control or organise, and targeted at individuals and groups who otherwise are hard to reach and who need easy accessible linkage to support.

The aim of the outreach effort is to contact young people, mainly outdoors and in groups, who otherwise are difficult to engage, and to provide them with, and link them to, relevant social support. This includes different forms of assistance, such as arranging counselling concerning personal difficulties at a youth reception or organizing a meeting with a school social worker to sort out issues about school attendance. Often the most important support is to accompany the young person to the meeting. The spatial aspect of this practice is also important. Outreach work is carried out in places not set up by the youth workers, but instead where young people informally gather, or in institutionalized spaces such as the school or the youth club.

In addition, most outreach youth workers also engage in broader efforts for social change and action within the wider community, such as individual support, group work and community organizing. These efforts are often labelled ‘follow-up work’ and, ideally, there should be a generative coupling between the outreach contact-making with individuals and groups of young people and the signposting and provision of social support arrangements. That is, when meeting and talking to young people while doing outreach work, the youth workers should pick up interests and needs expressed by the young people and transform these into themes that form the basis of the further interventions (cf. Freire 1979: 98–99).
It is this combination of an outreach approach and follow-up work that constitutes detached youth work in the Swedish context. A literal translation of the expression used in Sweden is ‘fieldwork’. The youth workers call themselves ‘fieldworkers’ and they combine an outreach approach with help and support efforts targeted at individuals, groups and the local community.

THE EMERGENCE OF DETACHED YOUTH WORK IN SWEDEN

Detached youth work was introduced in Sweden in the mid-1950s and must be seen as part of the post-war development of welfare policy and services. The work built on experiences from the youth clubs, which at that time had been running for a couple of decades, but inspiration also came from US, Chicago based, gang-work.

When it comes to implementation, organizational affiliation and the understanding of young people and their situation, detached youth work has always been characterized by a certain duality. One side is that in the beginning the work was partly grounded in an interest in the new youth cultures that emerged during the fifties. This was about young people’s ways of inhabiting a new world and the new cultural expressions and the patterns of social interaction that this development brought. In this context detached youth work has been working from the start to support young people’s participation in society and to engage in projects that aim to create meeting places for young people where they can find ways to express themselves both as individuals and as a collective.

The other side of this duality is that this early detached youth work was influenced by being established within the municipal welfare sector. At the time this was very much governed by an authoritarian tradition and based in a control-oriented organizational culture with a focus on young people as the source of social problems. One consequence of this was, for example, that youth workers were expected to cooperate with the police in order to detect and report young people who were on the run from juvenile detention.

This historical and contemporary duality of detached youth continues to be an area of much debate. Organizationally, detached youth work is still part of the municipal welfare services. There are examples of organizations and associations within the voluntary sector that run outreach efforts, but these form a very small part of the overall total.

Since 1982, the Social Services Act (re-worked in 2001) has regulated detached youth work in Sweden. This framework law has an opening paragraph which emphasizes a need for social services to be based on democracy and solidarity and to support equality and security among the people to whom it is directed. No doubt this regulation backs a youth work that takes young people’s needs and interests as its starting point. However, the social service also retains legal support for compulsory enactment and functions in an authoritarian way in relation to its clients.

Many detached youth workers experience divergent demands within their own organization. They are expected to work as supporters of young people’s potential to express themselves, and to be participative and to execute control in relation to what is understood as the social problems of youth. A consequence of this is that outreach workers often have to negotiate their professional position in relation to the management levels within the organization.

One very important occurrence was the formation of the National Association of Detached Youth Work in 1975. This organization functions as a forum to support the professional development of detached youth work and is maintained by voluntary efforts from youth workers. The organization holds annual conferences and arranges regional activities. It has been at the forefront of the
issue of defining how detached youth work should be understood and what efforts youth workers should engage. According to the National Association guidelines the key words to describe detached youth work are ‘voluntariness, trust and respectful meetings’ (RiF 2014: 3). Further, knowledge about the actual social situation and the needs of young people is emphasized, as well as the importance of building relations with young people on the basis of their voluntary engagement with the workers.

The position inside the public sector lends stability to detached youth work. The youth workers are employed on long-term professional contracts and therefore they seldom need to seek continuous funding in order to fund their future project-based work. Although at the national level the number of detached youth workers is relatively stable, locally, changes do occur: some outreach teams are closed down and others are established. Political boards govern each district of the municipality, and although detached youth work is supported by the Social Services Act, it is not a part of its statutory commitments. In times of diminishing resources detached youth work sometimes becomes a target for cuts. This puts a pressure on the youth workers to continuously document and evidence their activities.

**STREET-LEVEL DIVERGENCE: FRINGE WORK**

Working inside the public sector means belonging to a human service organization, which are generally characterized by a high degree of openness when it comes to the implementation of meetings between the employees of the organization and their clients (Hasenfeld 1983). There are difficulties in steering and controlling the ‘street-level bureaucrats’, as they operate with a certain level of discretion (Lipsky 1980). The effect is that there is often a divergence between the formal policy of the organization and what is actually happening in the field (Gofen 2013: 473). How street-level employees make use of their discretion has been generally discussed in terms of ‘guerrilla government’ (O’Leary 2010: 8) and, in connection to social services, as ‘deviant social work’ (Carey & Foster 2011: 578). This possibility of divergence is important in relation to the earlier mentioned two-sided situation of Swedish detached youth workers. It points at an organizational space where the youth workers can handle the contradictions of their professional role in a self-directed way.

Carmen de la Cuesta has described one example of how street-level divergence can be carried into effect in her study of health visiting in the north west of England (1993). De la Cuesta observed that the health visitors put a great deal of time and effort into adjusting their services in relation to what they interpreted as the needs of their clients. By doing so, they set aside policies and professional principles that regulated the work and these activities were fulfilled hidden from the examining eyes of their bosses (p. 669). De la Cuesta called this ‘fringe work’ and what was considered as fringe work varied between different settings. However, in general it could be divided into two major types: ‘relief work’ and ‘novel work’ (p. 670). Relief work was about meeting basic needs, such as obtaining material resources for poor families. Novel work included setting up new activities, such as starting group work, and was more directed towards mobilizing human competences.

One effect of fringe work was that it developed the professional role of the health visitors, and especially fringe work of the novel type could later be introduced and incorporated as part of the accepted work procedures (p. 672). It also influenced and strengthened the relationship between the health visitors and their clients. In many ways fringe work helped the visitors to feel that they actually accomplished something; that they could contribute to the well-being of people in need. However, de la Cuesta points out that
fringe work has ‘a double edge’ (p. 680). On the one side it helps to improve the quality of the effort and develops the profession. On the other side, it functions ‘as an instrument of social control’ (p. 680) since it is not directed at everybody, but is targeted at those understood as being the most deserving. It may also result in strain and overwork on the side of the health visitor. Fringe work often involves personal, sometimes even private, commitments that are time-consuming and quite exhausting to fulfil.

There are significant similarities between the occupational roles of health visitors and detached youth workers. Both use an outreach approach to make contact with their target group and they both organize support efforts in close connection to the everyday life of the people they work with.

I will return to the question of how the concept of fringe work can be understood in the context of detached youth work. However, first details of the research approach will be presented.

**RESEARCH APPROACH**

The empirical basis for this chapter consists primarily of interviews with two different teams of detached youth workers in Gothenburg. The two teams were selected in part because they represent districts in Gothenburg where there has been for several years a stable tradition of detached youth work, and partly because at the time of the interview they worked in a social context that challenged their usual way of working. The idea was that this tension between tradition and innovation would be productive to empirically describe how contradictions in the professional role are dealt with.

From a methodological point of view, my vantage point is descriptive and analytic as well as ‘theory-evaluating’ (Vennesson 2008: 227–228). The ambition has been to gain empirical material that can both clarify the tradition of detached youth work in Sweden and at the same time illustrate how the method can be utilized under extraordinary conditions. Thus, both cases represent something general and, at the same time, provide specific ‘opportunities to learn’ (Stake, 2005: 450–451). It should be mentioned that as a social work academic, I have been in regular contact with the various teams of detached youth workers in Gothenburg and that we have worked together in a research context previously (see Andersson 2014).

I interviewed respective teams on two different occasions. The first interview was documented through detailed notes, and on the basis of these a first draft of the chapter was written. The draft was then sent to and commented on by the teams. Each team was then interviewed a second time and these interviews were taped and transcribed. Then the text was reworked and the new material integrated. In addition to this, one interview was conducted with the manager of one of the teams and a seminar with 25 outreach workers in the Gothenburg area was arranged. During the seminar the concept of fringe work was explored and the youth workers provided examples of how the concept could be applied to their work.

Data analysis was conducted using two complementary approaches. On the one hand I worked with an open thematic analysis where I looked for common themes and patterns, but also for complexity and contradictions (Rapley 2011: 273–278). On the other hand I carried out a theory-driven analysis (Macfarlane & O’Reilly-de Brün, 2012), which has been centred on concepts like ‘fringe work’ and ‘street-level divergence’. I have systematically sought for narratives about how the youth workers deal with methodological issues concerning their professional role and how they handle contradicting demands coming from inside their organization and from the young people they work with.

In agreement with the youth workers interviewed, participants are represented by
their real names where quoted. Considering the public positions they uphold and the small number of detached youth workers in Gothenburg, anonymity would not be possible. They have also been interviewed in local media concerning similar issues as discussed here, so their views and experiences have already been made public.

**TWO DETACHED YOUTH WORK TEAMS**

The two teams selected for this study work in districts that represent typical urban settings where detached youth work is carried out: the city centre and a local neighbourhood. In general, there is a difference between the core groups of young people that the youth workers approach and work with. The young people in the city centre tend to be a little older and do not live in the area where they meet. In contrast, the young people in the neighbourhood tend to have a local orientation, often identifying with the residential area where they live. The age difference is somewhat mirrored in the target group of each team. The city works with young people in the age range 13–21 years, while the neighbourhood team’s main focus is on those aged 12–20 years old.

The city unit consists of six outreach workers and to large extent they work in a huge indoor shopping centre – which fulfils an important role as a meeting place for young people in Gothenburg. The shopping centre is located very close to transport links where bus and tram services intersect, so it is easy to reach from different parts of the city. This is a main reason many young people meet there. However, the shopping mall also functions as a hang-out, especially for young people with little connection to their local residential areas. For various reasons many do not feel at home where they live and have few social relations in their neighbourhood. Instead of meeting friends in the local area, these young people meet with peers in the city centre. The shopping mall is perceived in broader local understandings – particularly in the media – as a risky place to visit, especially after the shops have closed in the evening, since it is considered that it is a site for criminal activities such as drug-dealing.

The neighbourhood team have four full-time members and work in one of Gothenburg’s suburban areas. This area was mainly built during the years 1955–65 and has today (2016) a population of about 25,000 people. Gothenburg as a city is heavily segregated and the label ‘suburb’ normally signifies an area with social and economic conditions below average. Differences in living conditions and health inequalities were recently investigated in Gothenburg (Göteborgs Stad 2014) and the area where the neighbourhood team works was identified as one of the areas with the most pressing inequalities in relation to factors such as education, work, life expectancy and health. In addition, for a number of years, Gothenburg has experienced a very high level of gun crime linked to criminal networks and gangs. The area where the detached team works is one of the neighbourhoods that has been most affected.

**DETACHED YOUTH WORK IN THE CITY DISTRICT**

During the spring of 2015, the youth workers noticed groups of young people in the centre who they had not met there before, as described by Jenny:

It was young people with new needs and different experiences. Many of them were unaccompanied children coming as refugees. There were also a group that we understood actually lived on the streets. Most often they had come from North Africa, for example from Morocco, and we realized that some of them had been living as street-children in different European cities. They were very competent young persons who, however, were carrying huge, personal traumas.
The local policy states that the youth workers should direct their work to young people who are residents of Gothenburg, but they felt that they could not ignore the obvious needs of this new group. They especially tried to help the ‘street-children’, which to a large extent meant engaging in individual help and support efforts. The stories told by the young people were often quite heart-breaking and full of personal tragedies. Annie tells about what they heard:

They have been on the run for quite a long time and express a pervading feeling of being unwanted. Their families have abandoned them. In their hometowns they have been forced to live on the street and treated really badly. They go to Europe because, in comparison, here is better. However, no one wants them here either. Some are very tired of the life on the street and turn to alcohol and drugs to cope with bad feelings and everyday troubles. Some earn money through criminal activities and probably also prostitution.

What the youth workers found out when they began to engage in the individual situation of these young people, and noted their background and their needs, did not fit into the general model of ‘youth in need of assistance’ that guides much of the work by welfare institutions and professionals. Many young people had placements and temporary support, but when they had not met the standards or disappeared, they had been written off and forgotten. When the youth workers tried to return young people into the system, the effort was met with significant reluctance from people working in emergency centres and within residential care. The social services did not want these young people back, so the youth workers had to spend considerable time on persuasion and finding creative solutions to locate support. As Annie recalls, it was not always a lucky story:

We had contact with a 15-year-old boy that had been living on the street for six months. He drank alcohol and used drugs. He expressed suicidal thoughts. We tried to find him a place to stay, but had no success. We had to leave him on the street right in the middle of the night. Could you imagine that happen to a Swedish boy of the same age?

Another approach the youth workers attempted was to map and document the situation of the group. After some time, media attention began to focus on the existence of ‘street-children’ in Gothenburg and a political decision was taken to undertake a thorough investigation. Extra resources were allocated and additional staff recruited to the detached team to carry out the study. Via the resulting study, the young refugees’ situation was investigated and also better recognized. It was also possible to provide a realistic picture of the situation, which was important since reports in local media had exaggerated the number of young people living on the streets, and, by this, contributed to a local hysteria concerning a growing threat to people in central Gothenburg.

The outreach workers also engaged in challenging stereotyping of the young people as sources of danger and risk. One worker wrote a number of posts on a blog run by the National Association for Outreach Workers. One post was called ‘Dear child, don’t lose your faith in Sweden’, and took the form of a letter to all unaccompanied young refugees and newly arrived young people in Sweden. In the blog the youth worker, Annie, described how sad she was about such negative attitudes towards refugees in Sweden and how much she appreciated the meetings with young refugees in the centre of Gothenburg.

This blog post received a great deal of attention and Annie was interviewed by two of the largest newspapers in Sweden. The team was also invited to take part in a conference about unaccompanied refugee children. Through this interest, the team managed to publicize their experiences and views on the current situation for young refugees.

This new interest in the issue of young people living on the streets of Gothenburg had the effect that the youth workers had much less time to spend with the groups of young people they would otherwise interact with. Some young people commented upon this reduction in contact hours; however, it has been possible for the outreach workers to
explain their priorities. When they write on the Internet or when they appear in the newspapers, they always receive racist comments. This has also happened in the street when youth workers have been talking to young refugees, but it is rare.

The outreach workers describe one central aim for their work as ‘making the unseen visible’. They have managed to do that in relation to the young newcomers they have met in central Gothenburg. However, it has required a great deal of extra time and effort, as well as decisiveness to take on issues that are not really part of the existing prescribed professional agenda.

DETACHED YOUTH WORK IN THE RESIDENTIAL AREA

We spend a lot of time outside in the district, especially during periods like when the shootings occurred. It is important that we are everywhere; that we know many and have relationships with a lot of young people in different parts of the residential area.

Here, Jalil reflects on the approach used by the detached youth work team to which he belongs. Detached youth workers have been based in the area for a long time. However, developments in recent years have led to a decision by the team to work in a partly new way. Central to this new approach is a high degree of presence in the area and having a network of contacts through which they are well known in different parts of the district. The events of recent years have in many ways been a shocking experience for the people who live in the neighbourhood. Although shootings have been mainly directed towards members of various criminal networks, and often are labelled as ‘internal affairs’, on several occasions, people who are outside these networks have also been injured or killed.

To a large extent, young men dominate the local public environments and the youth workers believe that difficulties regarding school and employment are central to their lives. It is hard for them to find a job when they leave school, partly because the local labour market is very limited. Jalil explains:

We have been very focused on school and work. Many of these guys have great self-confidence when they are in the local area, but they are very insecure beyond the borders. This means that they do not seek to study or look for job opportunities in other parts of the city.

In order to help with contacts outside the neighbourhood and to provide advice about existing education and employment opportunities, youth workers arranged for a number of young people to have an individual meeting with a centrally located unit of counsellors and career officers. However, none of the young people attended. Instead, the youth workers persuaded the counsellors to meet with young people as a group accompanied by the workers. This meeting worked well and resulted in some of the young people engaging with educational opportunities.

The youth workers describe this kind of arrangement as typical. There are facilities that the young people in the area can make use of, but social and personal barriers often prevent them from doing so. In such situations the youth workers must function as mediators and use their relationships with the young people in order to help them overcome such obstacles. The youth workers’ presence enabled young people to feel more secure in order to be able to take advantage of services located outside their neighbourhood. This approach works well and the youth workers receive much appreciation for their assistance from the young people. However, at the same time it requires a high degree of personal investment and dedication on behalf of the youth workers.

Another central issue the outreach team has needed to explore is the safety and security of the local district. The goal is to have a high degree of presence; the workers try to cover
almost every day of the week. They have worked to initiate activities outdoors in the settings where young people congregate, and many of the young can participate. Often it is physical and contact sport activities such as rugby, basketball and a special form of wrestling.

In spite of these efforts, there are still situations where young people feel unsafe in the area. Therefore, the outreach workers initiated and developed two different projects with what are called ‘safety hosts’ in schools and ‘neighbourhood hosts’ working outdoors, mainly during summertime. Both efforts focused on creating relations with young people, initiating activities and support in attempt to mediate conflict situations and local tensions. Many staff recruited to the projects have low levels of formal education, however they have significant local expertise and are well-known in the area. Thus, this has created opportunities for older adolescents and/or adults to be able to gain temporary local employment.

A recent evaluation reports that many working in the area appreciate the two projects with local hosts. The understanding is that they have significantly helped to increase feelings of safety in the area and to enable young people to meet and do things together (Sennemark 2016). For the hosts themselves it has been a both rewarding and stressful experience. During incidents of local unrest, it has been an exhausting mission, and thus emphasizes the importance of the continuous support and counselling they have received from the outreach workers.

Criminal networks have existed and been active in the district for several years, but recent changes in their formation have affected the social life of the whole area. The newest groups involved in crime have been formed on the basis of ethnic affiliation, which previously has not been so pronounced. Since the residential area has a high degree of internal segregation, partly connected to the ethnic background of its inhabitants, gang conflicts have escalated into a geographical contraposition between the northern and the southern parts of the district.

There are forces that work destructively in the district and we have chosen to appear on the same arena as they do. It becomes a bit of a tug of war when it comes to having influence over young people. We cannot offer cash, but a just life.

In order to discourage and overcome local conflicts between young people, youth workers recruit participants for group activities from both the northern and southern parts of the residential area. The endeavour is to establish youth work on several levels. When needed, they support single individuals, they work with parental contacts, they start groups, and they seek to develop local structures such as the ‘neighbourhood hosts’ project. To engage with local adults, the youth workers formed local contacts with both the church and the mosque in the area. These institutions also represent important services in many young people’s lives, and through this work many new links have been established. In general, the detached team attempts to forge links with businesses and organizations that are active in the area.

The youth workers aspire to build rapport and relate personally with the young people they encounter. They try to remember things they have talked about so they can refer back to these the next time they speak. It is crucial to constantly keep the attention on the local youth they meet, but these relationships are established slowly over time. Indeed many young people need time to change, as Malik says:

We work with relationships and support; we are not police officers or therapists. We constantly try to think outside the box, but fringe work can’t be just anything. Detached youth work can only extend in certain directions; otherwise it becomes a different method.

It is clear that the work the youth workers have carried out during the last few years has been very challenging to them – both at a
professional and a personal level. The team consists of young men with no families, and they reflect that being young without a family has probably been a prerequisite in order to meet the high demands that have been asked of them, and that they have made of themselves, during the last years. For example, the sheer volume of work in late evenings has drained their powers.

One key reason why workers have managed to continue, is that they, as a team, have been in total agreement about how to implement and develop the work. They have a very open climate for discussions in the group and are able to both criticize and support one another. The team believe it is vital to think in one’s own way and stand up for this, both within the group and externally in relation to other professional and local actors.

**BOTH TEAMS: ORGANIZATIONAL POLICY AND MANAGEMENT**

One important tension arises between the policy principles embedded within organizational control and the personal and professional values held by the workers themselves. There are policies and job descriptions that regulate the work for each team — and these are agreed by politicians in the district council and at managerial level. However, both teams experience the regulations as vague — using catchwords like ‘preventive’ and ‘confidence building’. It is therefore very much up to the teams themselves to implement and decide the practical consequences and implementation of the policy, and most important in this context is the outreach approach. As Jalil from the neighbourhood team notes:

> We work among the young people in the neighbourhood and talk to them about their situation. We start out from their needs and function as mediators between the local district and the youth. We move around where young people gather and listen a lot.

Kim from the city unit says:

> We have always focused on the young people that we meet in the city area. The ones who gather in the places where we work and who have some sort of problematic social situation.

A recurrent theme in the interviews is that the youth workers underline the fundamental role of the relationship to the young people with whom they work. They see themselves as spokespersons and advocates for young people and the neighbourhood team also emphasize their commitment to the local area. In this context, the fact that the youth workers are employed by the social services may cause difficulties. Many young people have previous poor experiences from encounters with other representatives of the public services and feel ambivalent about being contacted by youth workers from the local authorities. This is an effect of the earlier mentioned duality of how detached youth work is positioned in Sweden. For example, Joakim of the neighbourhood team says:

> It is a balancing act. We are very open with who we are and whom we work for. We always wear clothes that are marked with our occupational belonging and we underline that we work for the local authorities. It is important to show that the municipality actually is doing things in the area.

The city team have the same experience. The only way to handle their position in relation to young people is to be fully open and honest. In most cases young people understand the complex position of the youth workers. In addition, being employed by the social services is connected to certain advantages. It enables access to many resources, such as office space and funding for activities, and it may sometimes give youth workers authority and recognition in relation to other public services.

During the interviews we discussed the concept of fringe work. This was completely new to the youth workers, but they could immediately apply the idea to their own activities. Obviously, the concept covers an
important aspect of how the youth workers understand their occupational role and how they consider detached youth work methodology should be implemented. Though they as teams were dependent upon policy decisions from managers and local politicians, they saw it as central that it was their contacts and interpretations of young people’s needs that should govern and direct their efforts. Both teams described how they had started up activities and support work, though it was not clear if this was always congruent with the regulations. One example of this was when the city team started to work with the group mentioned earlier living on the streets of Gothenburg. Jenny recalls:

There was a discussion, started by the management, concerning if we should work with this group or not. It was questioned whether they would have the right to stay in Sweden and was it then the youth we should be working with? But we argued that this is the young people we actually meet during our outreach sessions. If no one else is working with them, who will then do it? We can’t just leave them to their fate. This kind of discussion took place. So we had to vindicate the role of the detached youth worker against the system.

The youth workers expressed a strong support for their method based on an outreach approach, and being a detached youth worker was very much a professional identity. They referred to the national organization and the guidelines as important in developing their work. Their identity as a detached youth worker motivated them to engage in their work and the young people they meet, and also to engage in fringe work. This involvement is based upon an understanding of the complexity of what the professional position as a detached youth worker requires. It is both about making personal decisions concerning how to shape your occupational role and about following the standards of a professional community. In this way the professional identity bridges individuality and collective practice (cf. Wenger 1998: 145–146).

However, personal experiences and feelings also functioned as important motivational factors. The neighbourhood team mentioned their own personal histories as important for how they understand and engage in the local situation. They have all been raised in areas similar to the one they are working in; one of them has actually been living in the same neighbourhood. Three of the outreach workers have an immigrant background and through this they recognize a lot of the difficulties and obstacles that young people in the area face.

Similarly, for the city team, emotional engagement was important. Several of the young people they worked with lived in misery and it was an exhausting experience to feel that they really could not help them.

**DISCUSSION**

In their professional practice detached youth workers meet young people who face many troubles in their everyday lives, and, in response to this, they develop efforts to help the young people to live a better life. For the street-children, a ‘better life’ is about really fundamental matters: somewhere to sleep and having something to eat. For the young people in the residential area, it is about accessing support to engage with school or having something meaningful to do together with their peers. To a large extent this is precisely what they are employed to do. However, sometimes the youth workers extend their undertakings beyond the limits of their job descriptions and, in debate with their superiors, they defend their right to do so. This kind of divergence in relation to job regulations is not uncommon among officials at the street level of organizations and Gofen sees three analytic dimensions as important in this context: motivation, transparency and collectivity (2013: 482).

The youth workers’ ‘divergence’ is both transparent and collective in character.
They do not try to conceal what they are doing, though, of course, it is difficult for superiors to follow day-to-day what is actually happening in the street. The managerial level is dependent on reports from the youth workers, who often adapt their accounts to serve their purpose and readership. But, none the less, the youth workers do not try to conceal their actions. Here, behaving as a collective is crucial; both teams strongly emphasize the decisiveness of unified action. In this respect they meet several of the indicators that Wenger has listed as formative for a ‘community of practice’ (Wenger 1998: 125–126).

There are several motivating factors here. One has to do with the relation to young people and the deeply felt need to provide them with immediate support for their needs. This is something that Carey and Foster recognize as a component of deviant social work (2011: 590). The vulnerability and needs of some young people engaged by the youth workers are overwhelming since no other support structures are often available. Important in this context is the proximity and informality of the relation-building process between young people and youth workers. There is an analogy to the health visitors in this respect (de la Cuesta 1993). Both health visitors and youth workers come very close to the everyday lives and the troublesome conditions of the groups they work with. Not being able to contribute with something useful during these circumstances creates a feeling of total powerlessness (Carey & Foster 2011: 679).

This links to another motivating factor: a strong identification with an occupational role with both professional and ideological components (cf. Gofen 2013: 476). The youth workers frequently ground their professional decisions on the fact that they are detached youth workers and that this position both privileges and requires them to act in certain ways. In this context they refer to the national interest organization and to the published guidelines. There is a sense of belonging to something overarching, which can be described by Evetts’s concept of ‘moral occupational community’ (2006: 136). The community is based on shared occupational positions, but is also built on moral commitments and engagement in social issues concerning young people. This demonstrates the moral character of work in human service organizations (Hasenfeld 1983).

This has both internal and external effects. Internally it keeps the detached youth workers together; there is a ‘we’ to refer to. In addition, the community via, for example, guidelines, produces images of ‘good’ detached youth work that individuals and teams have to live up to. Externally, the designation ‘detached youth work’ is used in relation to young people as well as to managers and politicians to signal who they are and what can be expected from them as professionals.

Finally, there is a personal side to workers’ motivation. The young people in various ways personally and emotionally move the youth workers they meet, and this leads to both a deep professional and personal engagement (cf. Carey & Foster 2011: 586). The youth workers in the residential area find it easy to identify with the young people they meet, because they have themselves experienced similar conditions. For the city team, it is rather the opposite. The contrast between their own lives and what can be considered as a ‘normal Swedish teenager’, and the situation that the ‘street children’ face, is so upsetting that it functions as a motive to engage. Key here is the wish to understand the young people’s standpoint and the need to foster a personal engagement with the community – these are central characteristics of how detached youth workers understand their professional role and has been labelled a ‘romantic ethic’ (Henningsen 2010: 7).

In her study of ‘guerrilla employees’, O’Leary raised the question of how managers should act in relation to street-level deviance (2010: 8). Should they try to stop it, or rather does it help develop the organization? What we have seen from the two cases presented here indicates that the latter position...
seems most reasonable. The initiatives taken by the detached youth workers have had a positive impact on young people’s situations, and the initial criticism from managers and politicians has been transformed into support. It seems that the fringe work that youth workers engage in is a product of an avant-garde position that is helped and maintained by the outreach approach.

CONCLUSION

The Swedish tradition of detached youth work is part of broader state welfare services. This provides youth workers a reasonably stable occupational position and resources. However, the means and policies of the public services sometimes are insufficient to meet the needs of young people on the ground, and so youth workers engage in new ways to adapt to new circumstances, here understood as fringe work. This is motivated by young people’s immediate need for help, by occupational commitments and by personal engagement. One important outcome of these efforts is that the methodology of detached youth work is kept in motion and flexibly develops to match new and emerging social conditions.

REFERENCES


