

4TH EUROPEAN CONFERENCE FOR SOCIAL WORK RESEARCH

Bozen/Bolzano 15 - 16 - 17 April 2014

Abstract Special Interest Group: police social work

1) Your name(s)

- Tijs Van Steenberghe
- Didier Reynaert
- Rudi Roose
- Marleen Easton (part of the research group but will not be attending)

2) Title of the SIG

Police social work: balancing welfare vs. Justice

3) Brief description of scope and aims of the group

Scope of the group is the research and support of local police social work practices and the Bachelor Social Work at the University College (Ghent) in Flanders, Belgium.

The aim of the group is to share knowledge on the ambiguous nature of police social work practices. We state in the debate on welfare vs. justice that care and control are both part of interventions undertaken by police social work and by social work. Welfare and justice should be considered as two sides of a coin shaping youth justice practices in an often very blurred and ambiguous way. We observe a strong relational view on (social) problems. Police social work focuses on the individual and his or her family on the level of the problem definition, intervention and professional attitude. This indicates the importance of discretionary space for police social work work. But also reveals the denial of the complexity of social problems. The goal of this group is to deepen the question of how to embrace the ambiguous nature of police social work in relation to the complexity of social problems and the socio-political nature of social work practice.

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4) Any further relevant information you would wish to include

This special interest group is based on an ongoing research project (at the Department Social work at the University College Ghent) on police social work towards youth in relation to the welfare vs. justice debate. Until today, the debate on welfare vs. justice colours the youth care debate, both in Belgium and abroad. However, it is too simplistic to argue that by separating welfare from justice, welfare interventions are by definition emancipating and justice interventions – such as for instance the work of the police - are de facto controlling. We want to internationally share, discuss and deepen the gathered empirical research that focusses on the concrete realities of justice and welfare interventions, embracing the question how emancipation and control are put into concrete practices.