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# **Gesellschaftliches Engagement von Benachteiligten fördern – Band 1**

**Konzeptionelle Grundlagen für die  
Offene Kinder- und Jugendarbeit**

**Unter Mitarbeit von Moritz Schwerthelm**

# Abstract

Does it make sense to involve socially disadvantaged kids in public child and youth work? Do they want to be involved? Can they?

Child and youth work professionals are well aware of the need to involve young people in the design and makeup of activities in order to ensure that their interests are taken up. In youth work facilities, participatory processes of co-determination represent a form of social engagement that provides kids important experience in developing autonomy and a sense of shared responsibility. Beginning with youth centers, youth workers should provide opportunities for democratic community building in urban districts, municipalities and society more broadly. This is the task of youth work laid out by German law under § 11 SGB VIII. Youth work professionals also know how difficult it is to not only identify kids' interests but to work with them in developing activities. Indeed, they often ask themselves: "Do these kids even have interests? Do these interests have anything to do with society? Don't they simply want to hang out and avoid any form of social commitment?"

This publication demonstrates that promoting social engagement among socially disadvantaged children and youth is both possible and necessary. It offers youth work professionals a conceptual framework and guidance on how to manage the challenges they face daily in building a sense of community and commitment to society among youth – a novelty in the public youth work field.

Volume 1 focuses on the conceptual framework. It is concerned with the context in which the four proposed approaches were developed and tested: "Promoting Social Engagement among Socially Disadvantaged Kids in German Public Youth Work – GEBe," which is an initiative of the "Young and Involved – Your Contribution Counts" project run by the Bertelsmann Stiftung.

Drawing on Germany's legal mandate and current theoretical debates, this volume shows why promoting social engagement is a key task for public youth workers. In order to clarify what social engagement means, the authors emphasize the relationship between the individual as a subject and society itself. Human activity is always already social – a fact that is true for kids as well. This volume also describes how public youth work facilities, as a microcosm of society more generally, can provide opportunities for democratic community building within youth centers, in communities and throughout society.

**Volume 1** also includes two chapters that discuss the scientific evidence and conceptual frameworks derived from other projects. The first includes a look at important research findings showing that socially disadvantaged children and youth want to participate in social engagement when the issues and goals relevant to their context are addressed. The second chapter looks at social engagement within the context of the larger goal of building democracy in public youth work.

**Volume 2** outlines methods and practical examples. It describes in detail directions for professional youth workers in promoting social engagement among socially disadvantaged youth. The conceptual framework presented here derives from practical experiences gained through the Bertelsmann Stiftung's "Young and Involved – Your Contribution Counts" project, which demonstrated that this approach works. Portraits of participants give insight into their experiences and the processes involved while illustrating the approaches applied in their activities. Much of this volume focuses on the principles and methods underpinning the work of promoting social engagement.

It describes in concrete terms the methods applied which can help public youth workers render social engagement in practice a feasible reality for socially disadvantaged youth. This begins with observing the behavior and interaction of children and youth in everyday youth work. Issues can be identified here that contain the seeds of social engagement and which are important to the kids. This volume shows what to do with this potential and how to develop small, realistic projects for the youth center and neighborhood.

This volume also shows youth workers how they might go about introducing their own ideas and projects. Concrete, real-life examples from other projects are always provided to illustrate these methods. In addition, two chapters offer practical ideas derived from other projects that document similar approaches that have proven successful.