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# COUNSELING YOUTH ONLINE

Guidelines for workers

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<p>Abstract</p> <p>Online counseling is becoming more pervasive; this type of guidance method is occurring, and it will likely increase within youth work. Studying the phenomena can give relevant resources to the field of digital youth work. The main purpose of this thesis is to research how to provide quality online counseling for youth and to write guidelines for professionals and volunteer workers.</p> <p>As a facilitator the author researches the themes related to online counseling and enhances discussion through four online group discussions organized for youth workers working in online chats. The aims of the thesis are to find out with qualitative methods how professionals deliver efficiently and effectively online counseling sessions. On a wider perspective, the thesis tries to trace guidelines for counseling young people online, providing empowerment, direction, guidance and support.</p> <p>Online counseling has been recently widely studied due to the spread of these kind of services. Due to the uniqueness of digital youth work in Finland, its context and its principles within online counseling and guidance, it is relevant to gain more knowledge about practices and professionals' perspectives</p>			
<p>Keywords Counseling, Empowerment, Mental health, Online counseling, Online Youth Work, Session Impact</p>			

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

*“Mitä mielessä liikkuu? Tule kertomaan se Nuortelämä.fi:n chatissa!” (Transl. “What’s going on in your mind? Come to tell it in the chat of Nuortelämä.fi!”)*  
(Nuortelämä 12.02.2017)

The author’s relationship with youngsters, being herself in her thirties, is based mostly on meaningful interaction with youth through her profession within the social field. The author got inspired to do this final work while working with adolescents at the City of Espoo within child protection. When thinking about mental health, young people’s resources shall be strengthened, to minimize potential risks and to safeguard the future of the entire society we live in. The author’s personal interest when it comes to this thesis was to understand and gain a deeper knowledge about online counseling for young people, as a potential bridge to reach throughout the all country in a uniform and equal manner young people and guide them in reaching effectively and on time available services.

There is still a gap in the youngsters who manage to look for help on time and from the right place (Aaltonen et al. 2015; Haasjoki et al. 2009; Suvisaari 2017). When talking about youth’s well-being, a group at risk consists in the people facing social exclusion, who have an increased risk of not being able to access to services (Aaltonen et. al. 2015:9; Kaori 2017). Especially this vulnerable group need to be reached, and hopefully social policy will tackle this challenge in effective and concrete ways.

The thesis is the result of the fruitful collaboration with Koordinaatti, an organization of expertise related to youth and online preventative services that informs and educates professionals in Finland. Koordinaatti as a partner is essential in providing a case, a network, expertise and guidance for the thesis process. The choice of the partner is also dictated by the relevance of this national innovative organization that has enhanced digital youth work all over Finland.

Online counseling is becoming more pervasive; this type of guidance method is occurring, and it will likely increase within youth work (Baker et al. 2010; Dowling et al. 2013). Studying the phenomena can give relevant resources to the field of digital youth work. The main purpose of this thesis is to research how to provide quality online counseling for youth and to write guidelines for workers, to gain uniformity throughout the country between different services. As a facilitator the author researches the themes related to online counseling and to enhance discussion through four group discussions organized for youth workers working in online chats. The aims of the thesis are to find out with qualitative methods how professionals deliver efficiently and effectively online counseling sessions. On a wider perspective, the thesis tries to trace guidelines for counseling young people online, providing empowerment, direction, guidance and support. On a larger scale, the impact of online counseling for youth can improve equally in all the areas of Finland the well-being of the overall population, having an impact on a long-term perspective with limited costs and benefiting the all society.

The theoretical basis for this thesis arises from subjects such as youth development and well-being, preventative youth work, counseling youth and online counseling will help to analyze the gained qualitative data, giving to the guidelines a solid and objective foundation.

Regarding the thesis content, in the beginning the relevance of the topic is demonstrated, introducing relevant theoretical material regarding well-being of youth, mental health challenges in youth and theoretical frameworks for youth work. Afterwards, the aims of the final work, as well as relevant theories about digital youth work, dialogue with youth, counseling youth and relevant online counseling knowledge are presented. The final part presents the qualitative research methods utilized for gaining relevant data and this thesis' process, as well as the results of the study and its evaluation. The thesis' focus the work is online counseling and guidance for young people, as the topic is rather new and more researches in this field are needed due to the spread of technology in youth work. Since the scope of this thesis is broad, the different related topics are presented with limited depth and insight.

## 2 YOUTH WORK

*"It is all a marvelous new birth, and those who believe that nothing is so worthy of love, reverence, and service as the body and soul of youth, and who hold that the best test of every human institution is how much it contributes to luring youth to the ever-fullest possible development, may well review themselves and the civilization in which we live to see how far it satisfies this supreme test!"*  
 Stanley Hall (1904 cited in Gesell et al. 1956: X)

Youth is defined as the transitional phase of growth and development between childhood and adulthood. Juridically young people are defined as any person between ages 12 and 22 (Aalberg et al. 2007; Marttunen et al. 2013; Nuorisolaki 1285/2016). This age range falls within WHO's definition of *young people*, which refers to individuals between ages 10 and 24 (Unesco n.d.). Anyhow, despite the parameters and definitions differ within different contexts, still when speaking about youngsters, psychological development is still ongoing.

From childhood we do not make a jump into adulthood, but there is a progressive development that happens during youth. Youth is a new opportunity to process issues that have arisen during the first years of life of a child. It is the second step in defining identity and becoming independent (Aalberg et al. 2007; Blos 1962) and the second possibility of building own personality (Impiö 2005).

Being young offers the opportunity to rediscover conflicts and controversies that a small child failed to shape in childhood, and during these important years it is possible to again elaborate those fundamental issues before stepping into adulthood (Impiö 2005) and influencing overall the quality of life (Aalberg et al. 2007:15). In fact, during youth people have more skills available to resolve conflict that could not be handled and faced during childhood (Aalberg et al. 2007: 68).

According to Erikson psychosocial development theory (1950) people's life course is divided into distinct stages of development of the personality, from being a newborn to elderly age. People develop through stages, changing through the life course. The central developmental conflict of each stage shall be resolved to functionally grow. The fifth psychosocial development was named by Erikson as identity versus confusion, and it occurs between the ages of approximately 12 and 18. The function of the stage is to explore independence, developing a sense of self. Whether this phase's crisis is resolved, the young person can develop a quite stable identity that she will have during her life. While looking for their own identity young people can feel worried or insecure about themselves and about their ways to conform to society. In looking for their own identity, young people can try different hobbies, roles or behaviors. This exploration makes young people's behavior feel impulsive and not planned, but according to Erikson's theory this is an essential aspect of this phase of life, as youth can find their specific direction in life and develops own identity. Family and parents, as well as peers, school and societal trends or culture affect youth's development (Christ 2017). (Erikson 1968; McLean et al. 2016: 2). Even though Erikson theory from 1950 provides just a framework that has been widely explored in the light of the new knowledge and new researches, his perspective can give important perspectives about the challenges that youth face (McLean et al. 2016: 2). The psychological development of youngsters is still ongoing, from childhood individuals do not progressively develop into adults. Often it is forgotten, that inside a young person there is still a not

fully mature individual. A healthy young person is not fully mature, and absence of maturity during youth is still completely normal. At the same time as young people develop, they present also regressive aspects. They oscillate between becoming independent and needing full dependence from others. (Aalberg et al. 2007: 125).

Youth needs to be lived, it is a time of possibilities in which it is possible to make right and wrong decisions. Through empirical trials it is possible to find one's own ways of living. Youngsters' healthy development cannot be faster or slower, it must happen at its own right speed. When a young person has the time and the space to grow and develop, she can take also responsibility of herself and her environment. In contrast with real maturation and development there is also the maturation and development in which growth has been affected negatively and a young person took too early or too late adults' roles. (Aalberg et al. 2007)

Youth Development efforts consist in disengaging from early childhood, taking own body and sexuality, getting security from helping peers and creating one's own future. The physical change happening is straightly visible in youth's thoughts, moods and mood swings (Aalberg et al. 2007: 12). These challenges naturally imply that youth is a delicate phase in people's life, that can trigger mental health disorders, that are common during youth (Arnett 2007).

The growth development happening during youth and for instance Erikson's theory are important in understanding the function of the development happening. Young people who receive enough support and are empowered in looking for their identity, get a healthy self-esteem and can feel independent, as well as they trust the result of their development and the shaping of their identity (Marshall 2015). Often during this phase people make also professional choices and decide for a course of studies. Relationships with friends become deeper and more stable, and the body image is more defined. A portion of young people unluckily anyhow does not overcome the developmental crisis in a positive way and they are unsecure about themselves and about the future, therefore they do not know who they are or what they want in the future. They can switch between jobs or have unstable relationships with peers and they cannot commit to life choices, as well as they can be socially excluded (McLean et al. 2016: 2).

Even though youth is a unique phase in life, because of the overall development happening, youth's diseases and symptoms have not been circumscribed to an own area of focus within the social sciences, health and medical field (Aalberg et al. 2007:22). Youngsters are interesting people, as they are on the biggest psychological, social and emotional learning curve of their lives. There is research showing that they are served poorly in the general practice as our systems are not always attuned at them and there might be unconscious attitudes that discourage them (Lowth 2013). Anyhow the knowledge of youth and youngster's worries and fears can help adults in taking young people seriously and support them in their development (Aalberg et al. 2007: 12).

Youth can be in terms of age defined in three phases: preadolescence, adolescence and emerging adulthood, in which the challenges that youth face is different, as explained in detail in the paragraphs 3.1.1, 3.1.2 and 3.1.3. Even though, as reported in the table below, according to the Finnish



academic articles' preadolescence takes place from 12 to 14 years old, according to other sources its onset can happen also earlier, with preadolescence collocating itself between 9 to 14 years old (Cor-saro 2005: 191). There is no exact agreement as to when preadolescence starts and ends, as youth development is rather a dynamic process, in which external and internal factor have influences in its course (Aalberg et al. 2007; Impiö 2005). As chronological time is by no means identical with developmental time or with physiological time, by critically looking at the age spans it is possible to assume that they are just references, as development and growth happen in everyone at various times (Aalberg et al. 2007). Every individual is a unique person, with a unique personality, temperament, learning style and family background. There will always be variations in development. Even though Piaget's constructivist theory provides valid points when approaching development and its study, as Neo-Piagetian theories of cognitive development point out, individuals' passage through the stages occurs at different rates in different domains (Blakely-McClure 2016). As Gesell mentions "developmental events do not always fall at a convenient spot on the calendar. Besides the failure of growth events to coincide with calendar anniversaries in typical time of occurrence, there is the failure of human beings to be typical." (1956: 22). To understand youth, it would have been also relevant also to analyze the concept of mental age (Binet, cited in Smith et al. 2014) in youngsters and adults, perhaps also across cultures. This approach could have given also elements on how much social pressures, society, relationships and peers influence the transition into adulthood. Anyhow when it comes to youth the thesis presents information related just to the Finnish context, mostly supported with Finnish literature.

TABLE 1. Phases of youth and reference ages (Marttunen et al 2013:8)

PHASES OF YOUTH	REFERENCE AGE SPAN	DEVELOPMENTAL TASKS
Preadolescence	12-14	Changing relationship with the changing body
Adolescence	15-17	Changing relationship with the parents
Emerging adulthood	18-21	Final integration of the personality in adulthood

According to UNESCO "for activities at the national level, for example when implementing a local community youth program, "youth" may be understood in flexible manners" (UNESCO n.d.). The available online chats in Finland addressed to youth allow in some cases also younger children and adults to get support. The topic of the thesis focuses on counseling sessions with youth and its implication, therefore this work presents mostly the challenges that young people face without explaining more specifically demographical age whether not necessary.

## 2.1 Youth and well-being challenges

During her work experience in the past few years, while networking with other professionals and gaining knowledge, the author became aware of the well-being situation amongst youngsters.

Traditionally mental health has been perceived in a negative light, and it has been strongly related to stigma. Mental health has been related as a disease of the mind or as a non-existing disease

(Haasjoki et al. 2009:12). The perception of mental health has negatively affected the history of psychiatry, that has been increasing the fear of being psychiatrically diagnosed. Just during the past decades mental health has been intended also as a resource that every human being can strengthen through their life. (Lönnqvist et. al. 2017). Mental health shall be removed of its stigma and be more connected to essential skills that people can develop and improve throughout their life, as an integral part of well-being (Wahlbeck 2014; Haasjoki et al. 2009; THL 2006). From this perspective it would be important that youth's development progresses smoothly. The emotional life's development happening during youth is essential, because it affects to the psychiatric health of everyone throughout the lifespan (Haasjoki et al. 2009). The major changes happening during youth contribute both to opportunities for healthy growth and the risk of negative outcomes (Calkins 2010). According to recorded data, even though in the Nordic countries children and young people are having a general good health, mental health disorders (common during youth) are overall rising. (THL 2017b)

Well-being related issues area is a changing and challenging field when it comes to young people (Aalberg et al. 2007: 67). Every preadolescent deserves the opportunity to have a safe and healthy transition into adulthood (United Nations 2014). Although most individuals step into adulthood in good health, some do not. (Blakely-McClure 2016). Mental health issues increase the risks of social exclusion (Kaori 2017) and they are the first reason for youth to get a pension for being unable to work (työkyvyttömyyseläke) (Notkola et al. 2013: 99, 246).

Articles, researches and publications have been written about the situation in Finland, where the rising awareness related to mental health has seen also the increase of young people trying to get support in overcoming mental health challenges, with a sensitive increased number of psychiatric referrals. Mental health has been a topic of discussion also within politics and recently the committee for the improvement of mental health within the Sote reform has taken concrete steps in improving the well-being of young people (Sosiaali- ja terveystieteiden ministeriö 2017; Sosiaali- ja terveystieteiden ministeriö. Kuntoutuksen uudistamiskomitea 2017: 54, 66 & 87). Moreover, annual school health surveys (kouluterveyskyselyt) have been identified as a tool of prevention and screening of potential risks (Sosiaali- ja terveystieteiden ministeriö 2017). According to the Helsinki University professor of youth psychiatry Mauri Marttunen, nowadays youth look easily for help and the help could be also easily provided whether each school would have a nurse specialized in psychiatric issues (Poranen 2018). Also, Aaltonen (2016:11) has been providing some guidelines that could strengthen the well-being of youth such as providing a professional responsible for coordinating the network and who is informed about all client relationships whether young people are clients of different services such as the unemployment office and the psychiatric unit.

Many mental health issues present themselves for the first time during youth. Mental health disorders are for instance present as much as double in comparison to children. In a wide study related to mental health issues it has emerged, that half of the mental health diseased has started before a person turned 14 and around three out of four before a person turns 24. According to different studies around 20-25 percent of young people struggle with some mental health diagnosis. The

most common mental health issues amongst youngsters are mood-related disorders, anxiety disorders, behavioral disorder and substance-related disorders. (Marttunen et al. 2013: 10). Even if youth is particularly affected by mental health issues and symptoms, they are not willing to speak about the symptoms, whether not directly asked to do so (Aalberg et al. 2007: 12).

Anna-Dorte Hestbæk reported at the Nordic Public Health conference held in 2017 about the results of a long-time research made amongst people born in 1995 in Denmark, that followed the health of 6000 children from the beginning of their life until their adulthood. 27 percent of them recognized symptoms of depression, but just four percent of them presented those symptoms at the follow-ups when they were 15 and 18 years old. And this four percent is the amount of young people who has higher risk of being depressed throughout their lifespan. (THL 2017b) An essential question that need to be answered on a societal level is how exactly this 4 percent can reach the available mental health services.

The reasons why mental health diagnosis is more common during youth is yet not fully understood. Reasons can be found for instance in the role of the central nervous system that is strongly developing, as well as in the fragility and detachment from parents, schools and professional choices, shaping of intimate relationship with a partner. Also, biologic and genetic aspects have an influence in the presentation of different disorders. (Laajasalo et al. 2012: 46; Lonqvist et al. 2017).

TABLE 2. Mental health issues prevalence amongst 13-22 years old people (Lonqvist et al. 2017)

MENTAL HEALTH DIAGNOSIS	PRESENCE IN THE POPULATION	DIFFERENCES AMONGST SEXES
Mental health disorders	10-15%	F > M
Anxiety disorders	5-15%	F > M
Substances-related disorders	5-10%	M > F
Behavioral disorders	5-10%	M > F
Attention disorders	2-5%	M > F
Eating disorders	3-6%	M > F
Psychosis	1-2%	M = F

Even though mental health issues during youth are quite common, there are resources (external and internal) and threats (internal and external) that can influence to the mental well-being of youth. Supporting the well-being of youth should be a priority in our society; only when the young person is well, young people can be participate in education, or employment. Improving well-being necessary for participating in employment or education requires enough low-threshold mental health services. (Aaltonen 2016:11)

In the table below the author tried to summarize what kind of resources and threats can influence youth's mental health. The lists are based on literature (Lonnqvist et al. 2017; Haasjoki et al. 2019: 18-19; Smith et al. 2014; Soisalo 2012: 121; United Nations 2014). The internal resources improve the mental health of youth and improve capacities to be resilient, to face crises and increase safety and life management. Life management skills are strictly related to coherence (koherenssi). It means, that individuals recognize and use their own resources for their own benefit, as well as they trust that resources are good enough to successfully face life's challenges. A good coherence feeling reduces anxiety, stress, hopelessness and depression. People with an appropriate level of coherence manage well when facing challenges, crises and hardship (Haasjoki et al. 2010:18). Online counseling for youth, topic of this research is an example of an external resource aiming at empowering youth within the context of services to support the well-being.

TABLE 3. Resources and threats influence youth's well-being (Lonnqvist et al. 2017; Haasjoki et al. 2019: 18-19; Smith et al. 2014; Soisalo 2012: 121; United Nations 2014).

INTERNAL RESOURCES	INTERNAL THREATS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good self-esteem and self-control, good self-compassion</li> <li>• Positive approach to life</li> <li>• Good health</li> <li>• Emotional and social skills, capacity to form interpersonal relationships</li> <li>• Healthy exploration of sexual issues</li> <li>• Possibility to fulfill own potential</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low self-esteem and low-impulse control</li> <li>• Negative view about the future</li> <li>• Health/ mental health issues</li> <li>• Alienation and loneliness, difficulties in communicating with others</li> <li>• Sexual problems</li> <li>• Impossibility to fulfill own potential</li> </ul>
EXTERNAL RESOURCES	EXTERNAL THREATS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Basic needs are met</li> <li>• Positive affective relationships during childhood</li> <li>• Supportive and positively influencing interpersonal relationships: family, school, peers, extended families, professionals / positive role-models</li> <li>• Love and empathy</li> <li>• School possibilities</li> <li>• Work or possibility to sustainment</li> <li>• Possibility to express own opinions</li> <li>• Safe environment</li> <li>• Community support and community belonging</li> <li>• Social values and norms, as well as policies that promote well-being, as well as preventive measures for youth</li> <li>• Services to support the well-being</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Basic needs are not met</li> <li>• Difficulties during childhood</li> <li>• Poor interpersonal relationships and negative role-models during childhood</li> <li>• Hostility and low levels of compassion</li> <li>• Poor school possibilities</li> <li>• Unemployment and no possibility for sustainment</li> <li>• No freedom of personal expression</li> <li>• Unsafe environment</li> <li>• Social exclusion and bullying</li> <li>• Policies and social value and norms do not support youngsters' well-being</li> <li>• Unavailability of services</li> </ul>

## 2.2 Phases of youth and challenges

During each phase of youth there are unique characteristics (Aalberg et al. 2007). To understand how to support youngsters it is necessary to gain a deeper understanding of the uniqueness of each phase part of youth: preadolescence, adolescence and emerging adulthood. Even though some challenges and important threats are presented, it is important to see youth development just as a non-linear transition. In the following paragraphs the author will try to explain challenges and potential risks that youth might encounter. The literature review is not systematic and by any terms complete because of the wideness of the topics, anyhow the author tries to present some critical aspects related to each phase. Often academic texts related to preadolescence and adolescence present the two stages as one single topic, sometimes under the definition of adolescence. Compared to adolescence, currently there is a smaller amount of literature available about emerging adulthood, anyhow Arnett's views and deep perspectives about the topic have been presented widely in the related paragraph.

### 2.2.1 Preadolescence

The point at which a child enters preadolescence is defined by the onset of puberty (Aalberg et al. 2007; Blakely-McClure 2016). The increasing of hormonal activity and the physical changes happening cause restlessness and distress in preadolescents (Aalberg et al. 2007). The primary hormones begin to differ by gender at about age 11, with the most dramatic biological changes occurring during preadolescence, with females maturing earlier than males (Aalberg et al. 2007). The physical changes and therefore its psychological consequences require that boys and girls again redefine themselves, gaining psychological growth (Aalberg et al. 2007; Impiö 2005). Needs for independence grow and preadolescents relate to their parents in an unstable manner, trying to get support from peers and other adults outside the family (Aalberg et al. 2007). Adults may sometimes treat preadolescents as a child and sometimes as an adult and because of their inconsistent treatment, their response is likely to be inconsistent too (Lowth 2013).

School is perhaps the only institution in which is possible to affect to any preadolescent (Haasjoki et al. 2010:13; United Nations 2014). The feeling of belonging to the school community as well as the absence of school anxiety have been related to an increase of well-being in preadolescents (Kiefer et al 2015; United Nations 2014). Anyhow, bullying and alienation are existing phenomena within many school settings (Haasjoki et al. 2010).

Preadolescents' emotion regulation can be related to depressive symptoms and anxiety. Alternatively, difficulties with the regulation of emotions in childhood may predict the emergence of anxiety and depression. Addressing cognitive distortions and teaching preadolescents constructive coping strategies, as well as ways to be attuned to and aware of their emotions may also help ameliorate effects of mood changes. (Siener 2012).

The cognitive level has consequences on preadolescents' behavior. Preadolescents are concrete thinkers, and abstract concepts such as "health" are hard to understand, and at the same time is impossible to predict the outcomes of their behavior into the future (Aalberg et al. 2007; Arnett 2012; Lowth 2013). Adolescents' learning process of abstract thinking occurs through experimentation, error, and trial. Healthy behaviors notions that rely on long-term consequences therefore fail to provide concrete examples, having little impact to adolescents. Therefore adolescents perceive wrongly others' preoccupation, generating confusion of own thoughts and others' thoughts (Arnett 2012). This generates feelings of invulnerability and participation in risky reckless behavior (Arnett 2012; Curtois 2007). Daily risky behaviors impact mental health of preadolescents, the use of tobacco and alcohol should be regarded as preoccupying signs for tension in the life of the adolescent, as well as signs of established problems (Curtois 2007).

When the preadolescent is entering adolescence, many developmental tasks have happened, and many conflicts and crisis are already resolved, therefore the young person can partially give up her black and white vision of the world, continuing her developmental task (Aalberg et al. 2007; Arnett 2012).

### 2.2.2 Adolescence

The major physical, biological and psychological change as well as changes in social interactions and relationships started during preadolescence continue during adolescence (Aalberg et al 2007; Blakely-McClure 2016; Calkins 2010; Salmela-Aro et al. 2009; Smith et al. 2014). Adolescents have unique social and emotional characteristics and undergo continuous and fast development, as well as low self-esteem (Aalberg et al. 2007; Blos 1962; Marshall 2015).

Adolescence, the continuation of preadolescence, is the experimentation's phase, but some behaviors may put health at risk. A five years (2015-2020) United Nations program aims at supporting growth during the stage of adolescence. In Europe the World Health Organization has underlined how supporting adolescents into their transition into adulthood is a central focus in their strategy. (United Nations 2014).

Adolescent health and determinant facts are in this moment well understood. Youngsters manage with little or no problems with support, facing the challenges and developmental functions, becoming in most of cases well functioning adults. On the other hand, vulnerability of young people faces great risks related to their individual, family and environmental resources. Potentially adverse consequences of risk-taking can negatively impact youth's well-being (Salmela-Aro et al. 2009; Dick 2010). The family with its values and norms, peer groups and school environments can protect adolescents from risks. (Blakely-McClure 2016; Dick 2010; United Nations 2014, Salmela-Aro et al. 2009). Health literacy must be promoted in the minors' life, so the future citizens of Europe have the capacities, possibility and skills to make informed decisions. Balancing between risks and protection is a responsibility also of institutions and political choices (United Nations 2014).

The school setting and the health services provided shall play a role in supporting growth throughout the passage of adolescence (Haasjoki et al. 2010:12-13 United Nations 2014; Salmela-Aro et al. 2009). Health-promotion, preventative measures and intervention shall be spread throughout schools and curricula shall be planned in this direction (Haasjoki et al 2010: 14-15; United Nations 2014). Affordable, confidential, age-appropriate, gender-neutral services needs to be studied and analyzed on a deeper level to understand their impact on youth. (United Nations 2014)

Adolescents are not likely to ask for help. It is important to promote mental health well-being, preventing challenges (Haasjoki et al. 2010:14). Young people approach known and trusted adults for help and it has been demonstrated how caring adults protect youth from risky behaviors (Laursen 2003).

According to the World Organization of Health (United Nations 2014) children and adolescents are exposed to many risks in Europe. Aggression, rule breaking, inattention, as well as anxiety and depression problems, feelings of worthlessness, thoughts of self-harm are common during adolescence. (Calkins 2010; Christ 2017; Kaori et al. 2017; Sandberg-Thoma 2014).

### 2.2.3 Emerging adulthood

Developments in brain structure from adolescence to emerging adulthood result in the implication that emerging adults are considered more mature than adolescents. Emerging adults rely on planning rather than improvisation and can evaluate situations, as well as their outcomes (Aalberg et al. 2007; Arnett 2000; Smith et al. 2014).

The brains develop into their adult forms, with connections within the brain strengthening (Beck 2012). Greater processing of emotions and social information can take place because of biological changes. Areas of the brain used for processing risk and rewards develop during this stage (Beck 2012; Blakely-McClure 2016).

As Arnett points out: "Emerging adulthood is a critical stage for the emergence of complex forms of thinking required in complex societies." The sense of self, cognitive capacities, as well as the capacity for self-reflection develop. (Arnett 2006)

In the article Emerging adulthood Arnett (2000) proposed the concept of emerging adulthood, a phase of the life span between adolescence and full-fledged adulthood. It applies to young adults in the developed world in their early to late 20s. Emerging adulthood is a new demographic, it is the phase in which love, work, and worldviews are explored. (Arnett 2012).

The parent-child relationship is reevaluated, when coming to autonomy. The young person switches from being dependent to becoming an adult, affecting changes in the affective relationships. (Arnett 2000; Arnett 2006; Blakely-McClure 2016). There is a conflict related to the need of autonomy and support from parents. Especially emotional support is relevant. (Arnett 2000; Arnett 2006; Christ

2017). Consistently with the theory of emerging adulthood, sensation-seeking and depression rates decline with growth and age (Sandberg-Thoma 2014).

### 2.3 Socially excluded youth and health risks

*“It's true that those people or, like, the decision makers, they don't really know what they're talking about. They mostly just call adolescents lazy and it's not like somebody decides to be excluded, nobody wants that. So mainly it's, like, I wouldn't say that they're socially excluded, I'd say that they're excluded by society.” (Young person cited in Aaltonen et al. 2016: 7)*

The reference to an uniform group of socially excluded youngsters can result in stigmatizing, even though the discussion on youth disadvantage and growing inequality is relevant (Aaltonen et al 2016: 8). Social exclusion is manifested when a person is outside the societal standards, institutions and relationships, with an effect of life choices limitations. On the other hand young people relate social exclusion and loneliness (Törrönen et al. 2002).

According to a research by the institute of health and well-being of Finland (Terveyden ja Hyvinvoinnin Laitos) and the Finnish Youth Research Society (Nuorisotutkimusseura) youngsters that are trapped outside the networks of schools and working places get more often sick and use more health services and medicines than other youngsters. Mental health issues are for this group especially common (even 60 percent of long-term socially excluded youngsters used medication for mental health diagnosis during the time the research was made during spring 2015). The amount of resources spent for this group in health services were seven time bigger compared to the rest of the population. The length of a young person's social isolation influences the amount of resources as well spent. Moreover, the relationship between social isolation and health issues is possible in both directions: youngsters who face health challenges can be at risk of isolation or socially isolated youngsters face health issues more often. (Aaltonen et al. 2015)

NEETS (Not in Education, Employment, or Training) is an extremely heterogeneous group of people, and this group especially needs support. Social exclusion can be prevented with interaction and negotiation between institutional authorities and youth. Some young people are at risk of social exclusion, and a focus to tackle shall be how welfare services, as well as street-level bureaucracy bring young people as participants into the society (Aaltonen et al. 2016:14).

### 2.4 Theoretical framework for youth work: youth work as defined in social pedagogy

According to the Youth Act definition (72/2006) youth work consist in the promotion of active citizenship during young people's leisure time, as well as the social empowerment of youth. The objective of youth work is to enhance young people's growth and independence, as well as interaction between generations. The presence of effective preventative services supporting youth is in line with the challenges and risks related to the delicate development phase of youth. Preventative available services are not necessarily cures or solution-focused, but rather a support for young people growing up (Aaltonen et al. 2016; Sandberg-Thoma 2014).



In the research of the functions of youth work in Finnish society, Nieminen (2007b, 21–27) has discovered specific functions: socialization (helping young people become members of society and culture), support (in the identity formation of young people and for any inadequacies encountered in the socialization and identity formation of young people), influence (and affect the allocation of public resources). The professor of Social Work and Social Pedagogy Juha Hämäläinen (2007, 173) sees the framework, theories and traditions of social pedagogy as a solid theoretical foundation for youth work. Educational activities, basic pillars in the socio-pedagogical methodology, shall support individuals, communality, self-reflection and the principles of experiential learning (Hämäläinen 1999, 77). Non-formal education happening in youth work can be solution-oriented, providing support for the upbringing within the family setting and the formal education within the school system. The aim is to provide youth with life management skills, supporting them in the management of their own life, taking responsibility in their actions (Hämäläinen 1999).

#### 2.4.1 Dialogue in youth work

*"Dialogisuus tarkoittaa ihmisten tasavertaiseen osallistumiseen perustuvaa yhdessä ajattelemista ja perehtymistä johonkin asiaan tai toimintaan. Dialogissa kaikki osallistujat ovat subjekteja. Tavallisessa keskustelussa osa osallistujista on subjekteja ja osa objekteja. Dialogissa jokainen kantaa kortensa yhteiseen kekkoon. Syntyy yhteinen ymmärrys ja jotain jokaiselle osallistujalle ennestään tuntematonta". (Aarnio et al. 2001: 14–15)*

*"Dialoguing means equal participation in thinking and understanding a thing or an activity. In dialogue all the participants are subjects. In common conversation part of the participants are subjects and part objects. In dialogue everyone commits her time for a common goal. A common understating of something comes to life, something previously unknown for the participants." (transl.)*

Dialogue as an important pillar of youth work has been widely recognized in literature and researches as a democratic and empowering practice (Hakoluoto 2016).

Dialogue presupposes equality amongst participants: each one must trust the other. Mutual respect, care and commitment are prerequisites. Each one shall question what she knows, realizing that through dialogue existing thoughts will change and new knowledge will be created. (Freire 1972: 146-150.) On the contrary, when the relationships between professionals and clients in the social field are oppressive, knowledge is "a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing" (Freire 1972: 58). If workers skills are employed through a dialogue process (Freire 1972: 45-59) potentially they have the skills to promote the gaining of power and, concurrently, within the process, to transform the nature of power relationship.

Dialogue is based on the definition of equality, subject and new creation. These three are prerequisites for a successful dialogue. Dialogue is also closely related to inclusion and to the idea of involvement of one's own life, the subject. The young person has the right to their own solutions to their own lives. The principle of self-determination is also emphasized in the European principles of youth information services. (Hakoluoto 2018)

Falk's discussion method points out that transmitting emotions between the parties is an important part of the dialogue and meeting in an atmosphere of acceptance. When an adult encountering a

young person is speechless, being truthful about it is important. This creates the co-existence of emotional elements and the existing textual information helps to bring the interaction forward. It is only through taking pleasure in wonder and feeling, that is possible to move to the next step. Within the context of counseling and guidance work the next step consists in searching for information and solutions as well as weighing alternatives with different possibilities. (Hakoluoto 2016)

Dialogue has also emotional elements (Falk 2001; Hakoluoto 2018: 16).

TABLE 4. Emotional elements of dialogue (Falk 2001; Hakoluoto 2018: 16).

<b>CONCERN</b>	Dialogue always involves commitment and taking others into account.
<b>TRUST</b>	Trust is related to commitment. The engagement of the participant improves trust in others.
<b>RESPECT</b>	Listening to other's perspectives requires respect for another and presenting own perspectives requires self-respect.
<b>APPRECIATION</b>	The ability of the participants to appreciate unique features in another people, will help them to respect others despite the differences.
<b>AFFECTION</b>	Dialogue creates a sense of closeness between participants.
<b>HOPE</b>	Dialogue can encounter problems but hope and the general will encouraged participants to give to dialogue the time and possibility to succeed.

Dialogue is not just a way to achieve better results; it is a part of human nature. As human beings are essentially communicative, are constructed through dialogue. There is no human progress without dialogue. (Freire 1972.) The moment of the dialogue is the moment when men meet to transform reality and progress (Freire 1972: 60-96). As discovery is a social process, dialogue is the cement of this process and we need each other to create. Pedagogy of transformative change, or liberation education, is rooted in praxis and dialogue, located in community work, youth work, social work, education and schools (Gadotti 1994: 68-70). Hakoluoto (2018: 17) in a guide for dialoguing with youth underlines the importance of few techniques, such as the dialogue flow and activating questions. These techniques can be used in the interactions, and address to the young person the listening skills of the professional. Youngster notices their own words expressed or paraphrased in professional's speech, ensuring and addressing that young people are heard.

#### 2.4.2 Empowering in youth work

Empowerment for a young person means, in the context of counseling and guidance, being listened and feeling part of the society as an equal member, therefore being able of expressing herself. (Hakoluoto 2016). Despite empowerment is an individual process; other individuals, relationships and social structures have an influence on it (Siitonen 1999: 117-118). Dis-empowering professionals forget or ignoring the clients' own challenges, by imposing rules or limitations. Workers shall not lecture about their own viewpoints, trying to persuade others to gain the same perspectives, but to dialogue with youth about their views. The intrinsic need for empowerment is acute when empowerment is denied (Siitonen 1999:7); denying mutual understanding is a dis-empowering practice.

It is possible to learn about the skills needed in interaction with youth. They are skills that can be practiced and developed. In addition to the skills, the encounter with youth is about attitudes, insights, and the self-knowledge of the professional who plays a significant role in the interaction (Isokorpi 2014: 4). The ability to meet the needs of young people in information and counseling is part of the profession and core competence of the profession. Experiencing practitioners see education and work experience as the most important help in developing professional skills supporting empowerment through dialogue (Isokorpi 2014: 21-22).

### 3 DIGITAL YOUTH WORK

The services supporting client and counsellors relationships are transferring online (Gretschel et al. 2014). Available services online shall be improved, but they cannot replace existing face-to-face valuable and required services (Aaltonen et al. 2016:11). From a institutional and policy perspective this may signify efficiency also on an economical level, guaranteeing regional equality. When it comes to accessibility and youth-orientation of services, this implies developing mobile services in areas with great geographical spread (Aaltonen et al. 2016:11).

Before getting deeper into the concept of online counseling, it is important to define the continuously changing digital youth work, as this area of expertise has been developing rapidly in the last few years (Hoikkala et al. 2017:218; Tuominen 2018). Digital youth work means proactively using digital media and technology in youth work, it can be included in any youth work setting and it has the same goals as youth work in general. Using digital media and technology in youth work should always support these goals. Digital youth work is based on the same ethics, values and principles as youth work (Hoikkala et al. 2017:218-228). The substantial changes happening have required also the creation of a new lexicon such as digital youth work, that includes the use of digital media and technology in youth work (Verke 2015a). Youth workers in this context refer to both paid and volunteer youth workers (Tuominen 2018).

The developments happened in the recent years especially in mobile technology impacted youth work, as new tools and social media have become more popular. Now internet is portable and is a continuous and integrated part of experiencing life, therefore activities happening online cannot be separated from activities happening online; being connected is a part of youth's life (Lauha 2015). As the impact of technology has changed the way youth uses internet, the use of internet in youth work is facing a shift (Hoikkala et al. 2017: 218-228; Tuominen 2018). Technology is not simply a tool that is used, and not even a space that brings together youngsters. The digital aspect needs to be understood also a cultural phenomenon and activity, which has a significant role in youth's life.

#### 3.1 History of digital youth work

Networks (videotext, internet) have been used for almost forty years (Timonen et al. 1996), in principle for sharing information and later also for meeting and interacting (Huttunen cited in Merikivi et al. 2011).

Already from 1988 the Youth Information Database (Nuorisotietopankki) was a national program of messages and information based on videotext, that worked through the phone's network (Heikkinen, 2010; Timonen et al. 1996). When internet became more popular in the nineties many municipalities started to make their own internet pages. Helppimesta and Tukinet have been pioneers in providing services to youth on their websites from around the year 2000. (Hoikkala et al. 2017: 218-228)

Later, technology developed to the point that real-time chats became more common. The association Elämä on parasta huumetta ry (currently Ehkäisevä päihdetyö EHYT ry), as well as Hotelli Kultakala (currently Habbo) became common (Hoikkala et al. 2017: 218-228). In 2004 Habbo Hotel created the online youth club (nuorisotalo Netari). One important service was to provide a space, where youth could spend time and voluntarily have a confidential discussion (in the same way it could happen in a physical youth club) (Pelastakaa Lapset ry 2016). Important aspects of the interaction were anonymity and counseling with independence from location. As the focus of the encounter focused on social media services, the web pages for youth focused on information and raising young people's voice in the 21st century. For example, Mannerheim's Welfare Association (MLL) had Nuortennetti, and municipalities found also internet's potential for sharing youngster's thoughts. Participation of youth has been always of crucial importance. Early in the first decade of the 21st century, the face-to-face and online activities were developed with Netar's, Ehytin Varikkotiimi and MLL's support, with young people playing a leading role in designing and implementing networking activities. The basic idea was to implement youngsters' ideas with the facilitation and supervision of adults. behind the activity is that the adult supervisor is to act as a facilitator for ideas and activities for young people. Later, also church started to implement online youth work and gave the chance to workers to get education about digital youth work. (Hoikkala et al. 2017: 218-228).

Also, other groups of workers that were in close relationship with youth entered the social media: health care professionals, social workers and student counselors. In other words, digital youth work became a multidisciplinary environment. At the same time, in the context of networking, the focus began to shift towards problem-centeredness. The Youth Network Forum (Nusuvefo) was created in 2007 and its activities continue to be active. (Hoikkala et al. 2017: 218-228).

Principles have been helpful, for example, as the social networking on Facebook started to be used exponentially in 2008-2009. For the youth worker, Facebook was an effortless way to reach out to young people and to engage in thematic discussions. Since users on Facebook used their own names, it made it easier for services to combine face-to-face and online work. Between 2013 and 2014, young people began to use less Facebook because they wanted more private spaces for their communication (Pönkä 2014). Although Facebook is still popular, young people use more social media services and applications such as YouTube, WhatsApp, Instagram, and Snapchat. On the one hand, the popularity of such services among young people has increased because of the use of friends and other young people, and on the other hand, because the services are easy to use and can be used on a smartphone (ebrand 2015). Almost every child and young person owns a smartphone and mobiles have become the most common devices to access to internet (Merikivi et al. 2016).

### 3.2 Digital youth work nowadays

Online-based youth work has gained a strong position in the professional vocabulary of youth work. Compared to many other countries, Finnish digital youth work is a pioneer example of working online, especially in social media and by utilizing various chats. (Verke 2015a.) Over the past two

years, the concept of digital youth work has begun to consolidate its place in the professional discussion about youth work (Hoikkala et al. 2017: 218-228).

For the development of digital youth work, it is important to understand how the key, multifaceted and ever-present role of digitality is in young people's everyday life and life. By understanding this and young people's digital culture phenomena, it's easier to go self to integrate digitality into their own work. This is also reflected in the Verkos report, which states that the most principal factor in promoting youth work on the internet is the knowledge that internet is a key element in young people's lives. More than 90% of youth workers share this view (Linkosalo 2015).

One of the major challenges facing digital media and technology in youth work has been the lack of goals. However, developing and improving the quality of service also requires the establishment of concrete and declared goals for the use of digital media and technology in youth work. Setting goals can also be used to evaluate the success of digital youth work. The objectives and the evaluation can better serve the impact and impact of digital youth work and, more broadly, the social status and importance of youth work. (Verke 2015b.)

It is important to perceive that merely encouraging and encouraging young people to become interested in digital media-related phenomena or digital technology is a valuable youth work goal.

### 3.3 Activity, interconnection and innovation - directions for workers

Professionals working with youth do not have to be a computer science guru to implement digital youth work. Not all applications and devices need to be controlled, but it is important to understand the meanings of digital cultures in young people's lives. In the future, however, the role of the youth work professional requires extensive knowledge and deep understanding of digital media and technology and their impact on youth cultures. Moreover, technological development generates additional requirements for youth workers at the level of knowledge and skills.

The concept of network expands in the future society, the physical and virtual world as well as the network and the added reality blend together as closely as possible. (Verke 2015b.) Knowledge of technology trends also contributes to the innovation of a new kind of digital youth work. As technology pierces our everyday life more and more, we need more understanding of technology operating mechanisms. (Karakainen, Kivinen & Tervahartiala 2013). The overwhelming amount of leisure media use by a youth worker does not automatically mean that he or she would be able to utilize digital media in a targeted and expedient manner in their work. It requires a worker understanding of linking digitality with the goals of youth work and adapting methods of youth work to the digital world. Training will also be needed in the future on how digital media can be used in face-to-face youth work, as well as on the kind of digital services that youth work is to build. (Verke 2015b.)

### 3.4 Counseling young people online

*Without faith in people, dialogue degenerates into paternalistic manipulation (Freire, 1972: 64).*

Over the past several decades counseling programs for youth have become increasingly widespread. The presence of a caring adult has long been recognized as a valuable resource in the lives of at-risk-youth. Within a multi-component intervention package study, dialoguing with young people has been widely recognized as one of the most effective strategies (Lerum et al. 2009). According to studies the use of other people is an employed and useful method for youngsters to receive information. A range of type of needs is addressed: for instance advice, spontaneous life situation, self-development, personal information, affective support, empathetic understanding, or verification (Aaltonen et al. 2016). Egan (2011 cited in Zeren 2015) argues that the primary goals of counseling are "to help people to manage their problems in living more effectively; to develop unused or not sufficiently used opportunities more fully and to contribute them to become better at helping themselves in their everyday lives."

According to a study of Hughes-Hassell and Agosto (2007: 53) there are seven areas in which youth need information and counseling:

1. Social self;
2. Emotional self;
3. Reflective self;
4. Physical self;
5. Creative self;
6. Cognitive self;
7. Sexual self.

The bounds between them are rather flexible and partly overlapping. Finding information on a topic can support development in many ways. The model proposed brings up the central challenges of youth as well as the topics that youth asks for information, support and counseling (Koordinatti 2014).

Online counseling is defined as the online delivery of therapeutic interventions where communication between a trained counselor and clients is "facilitated using computer-mediated communication technologies" (Zeren 2015).

Providing advice and guidance online has gained a positive reaction (Gretschel et al. 2014; Kauer et al. 2016). Even compared to telephone counseling conversations, chat counseling appears to be of high quality and to have comparably positive effects (Kauer et al. 2016). Especially, as not every young person requires or wants intensive support, "light clients" able to move forward with little guidance, can especially benefit from online counseling (Aaltonen et al. 2016: 120). Changes in the patterns beyond the traditional family, the physical and social environments of youth and less cohesive communities, have dramatically reduced youth's access to caring adults. At the same time, internet, that has become an accepted and common means of communication, has opened a new opportunity for counseling youth. (DuBois et al. 2014: 259; Kauer et al. 2016).

Internet counseling is an area of growth; as it includes a variety of activities: psychoeducation, individual therapy, and automated self-help interventions delivered through internet (Rummel et al. 2010). One of the main advantages of online counseling is to reach people living in remote areas, or if people cannot for some reason leave their home (Zeren 2015). Online counseling has also the advantage of extend access to specialized services that would otherwise be beyond the reach of clients (Richards et al. 2013). Moreover, people can disclose themselves more comfortable than in a face-to-face interaction (Zeren 2015).

Even if the functions of counseling are the same within the physical and the online world, less is known about the dynamics and the implications of online counseling (DuBois et al. 2014; Rummel et al. 2010). Many online counseling services have been based on asynchronous communication, which is communication that is not dependent on the physical presence of the users. Each user can send messages or reply to others in separate times. As technologies have progressed, online counseling has been more and more including synchronous communication. Anyhow, according to Heinlen and colleagues (2003:112 cited in Rummel et al. 2010: 483), "Because new therapy sites are added frequently, and others disappear just as quickly, an accurate count of the number of operational sites is nearly impossible to obtain". In table number 4 there is a list of online available counseling services in Finland (the list is created in March 2018), that are available for young people. From the list are missing services that are intended for the overall population, such as chats not intended just specifically for youth.

TABLE 4. Online chats for youth

<b>Programs available and descriptions (Nuortelämä n.d.)</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Keijun varjo</b> A project run by Maria Akatemia ry. It offers help and support to girls between 15 and 28 years old in recognizing difficult feelings and situations.</li> <li>• <b>Peluuri</b> The service offers also chat for people facing troubles with game and gambling addictions.</li> <li>• <b>Nuortelämä</b> A chat for getting information and guidance for youngsters between 13 and 25 years old.</li> <li>• <b>Sekasin-chat</b> A chat for youth for discussing any topic that feels critical run by the National Institute for Mental Health.</li> <li>• <b>Etsivä nettityö</b> A platform for discussing and reflecting with an adult about problems and issues.</li> <li>• <b>Kysy rahasta -chat</b> A chat for discussing about money-related issues.</li> </ul>



- **Muruset nettimummola** A chat for discussing with online-grannies.
- **Nuorten Exitin** chat A chat to get information and support related to sexual harassment or situation related to the sexual sphere.
- **Help.some** A platform for chatting about bullying and related issues with a professional.
- **e-Talo** A virtual Tyttöjen and Poikien Talo. The service includes also the possibility to chat with an adult.
- **Suunta-palvelu** A chat for youngsters between 15 and 25 years old looking for a school place, a training, a work-place and a direction in life.
- **Netari-chat** A chat for discussing with an adult.
- **MLL's children and youth chat** An anonymous chat for discussing with an adult (that can be a worker or a volunteer).
- **Nyyti ry's group chats** Group chats about different topics, arranged at least once every second week.

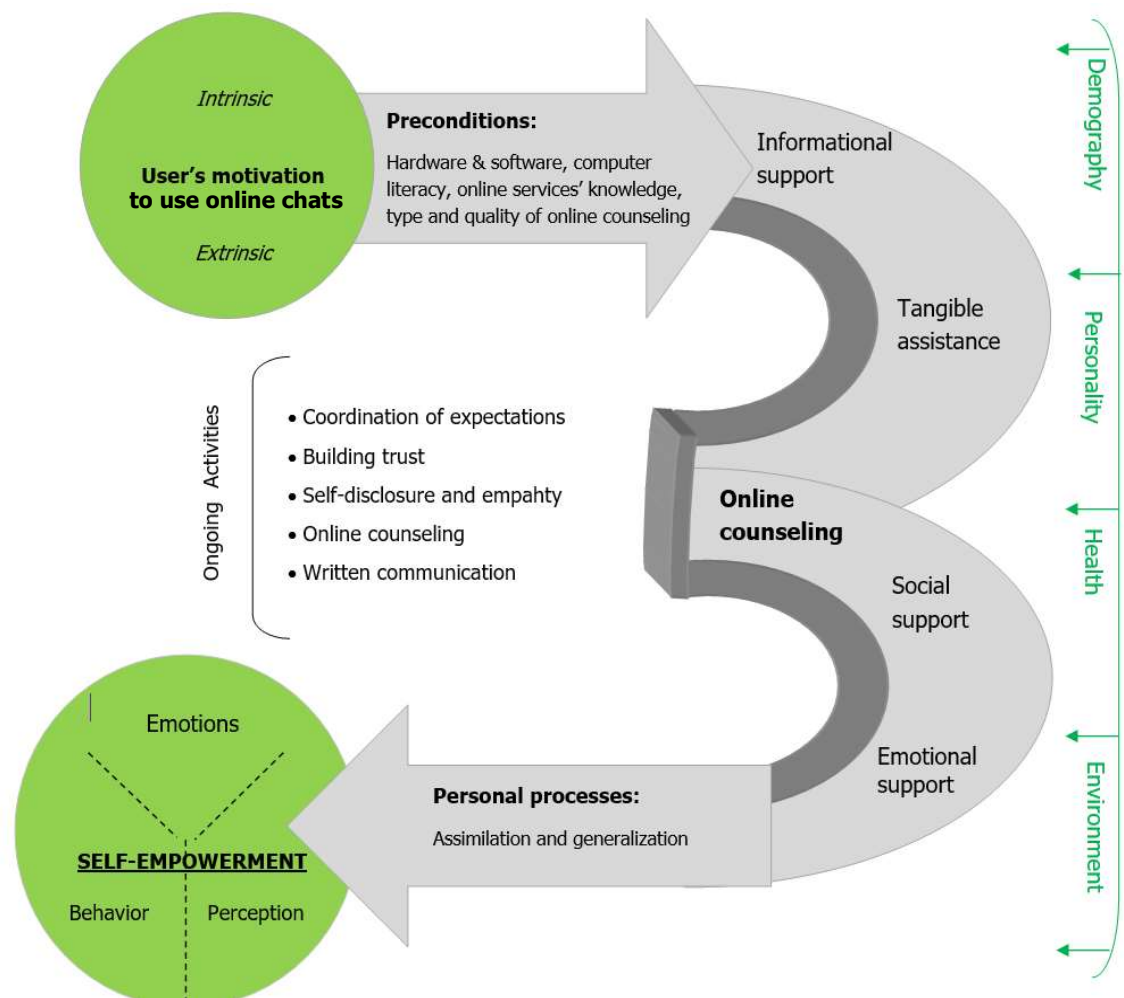
### 3.5 Online chat counseling

Based on a review of the literature, the author developed a conceptual framework that characterizes a successful online counseling process for youth aimed at providing primary support. The electronic socio-emotional support conceptual framework presents a model of essential elements in operating an online counseling program with youth. Although it was originally developed to explain online mentoring (Reiter et. al. 2009 cited in DuBois et al. 2014: 263), it has implications for provide online counseling.

The electronic socio-emotional support lists the interpersonal and programmatic preconditions required for effective online counseling, the forms of support that serve as mediators through which online counseling relationships develop, and the personalization's processes that allow the online counseling relationships to foster youth's self-development. The user's drive for entering in an online counseling chat may emanate from intrinsic and /or extrinsic sources. Intrinsic sources of motivation are internal to the user, whereas the extrinsic drive to participate is propelled by factors outside the counselor. Many at-risk-youth might not be exposed to (and therefore be unaware) of the potential benefits of e-mentoring for their development (Gretschel et al. 2014; Kauer et al. 2016). In such cases they may best be motivated by extrinsic sources such as peers, family members, caregivers, or teachers. These sources may be necessary to encourage potential mentees and to expose them to the opportunities offered by e-mentoring (Gretschel et al. 2014; Kauer et al. 2016, Reiter et al.

2009). According to the online counseling process framework also preconditions related to technological resources affect the outcomes, as they enable and facilitate the process. Whether the preconditions are fulfilled, the online counseling process can happen in different ways providing, according to the needs, informational support, tangible assistance, social or emotional support. The author underlines how certain traits of the counselor can affect the interaction, specifically demography, personality, health and environment have direct influences. Through the interaction then a personal process of assimilation and generalization takes place. This aims at ideally enhancing empowerment defined as self-empowerment in the user (meaning improvements in emotions, behaviors and perceptions). In other words, the young person acquires or strengthens the necessary resources, such as self-efficacy, self-esteem, identity, and interpersonal skills that will enable goal achievement (Gretschel et al. 2014).

IMAGE 1 The online counseling process framework



### 3.5.1 Process of online counseling

There is a wide amount of literature analyzing the processes of online chat counseling (Dowling et al. 2013; Mallen et al. 2011; Richards et al. 2013). The counselor in the early stage of the counseling session has the possibility to evaluate whether the session shall aim at information giving or problem discussion. According to a study done in the Netherlands about online counseling, problem-focused formulations can help to develop a deeper understanding of the problem, offering to the possibility to discuss the problem and opening up an emotional dimension hidden behind the question (especially if the client is rather vague about her issue). (Kauer et al. 2016).

According to its definition, the "counseling process is a planned, structured dialogue between a counsellor and a client. It is a cooperative process in which a trained professional helps the client to identify sources of difficulties or concerns that he or she is experiencing" (American Counseling Association 2009, Chardon et al. 2011). According to theories, the counseling process can be structured in five stages: orientation, problem clarification, goal exploration, action planning and termination (as illustrated in table below).

TABLE 5. Online counseling process (Egan 2002, Chardon et al 2009).

Stage	Steps	Summary of the stage
<b>1.Orientation</b>	Introduction	Introduction to service and counselor role.
<b>2.Problem clarification</b>	Narrative	The client is invited to talk and spell out problem situation in detail. Emotions and feelings are explored.
	Exploration and challenging	The counselor assists clients to become aware of their challenges, or blind spots in their mind-sets, thinking or behavior.
	Leverage	Issues are chosen to work on.
<b>3.Goal exploration</b>	Possibilities	Possibilities are explored to develop a sense of direction.
	Crafting goals	Goals are discussed, and specific goals are formulated, refined and reviewed.
<b>4.Action Planning</b>	Strategies	Counselor helps clients identify possible strategies to accomplish goals. Emotions are explored.
	Plan	Specific activities or actions needed are reviewed.
<b>5.Termination</b>	Termination	Counseling session is summarized, future contact discussed.

As represented above, steps are summarized and only represented in brief. Stages and steps (2-4) were constructed from Egan's (2002) helping process model in combination with information gained

from the American Counseling Association (American Counseling Association 2009) and research (Chardon et al 2009).

Online chat counselors more frequently give approval and reassurance, as well as ask open and confronting questions (Mallen et al. 2011). Rapport-building and information-gathering techniques compensate for the lack of non-verbal cues (Dowling et al. 2013). During counseling sessions, counselors use summaries and restatements (also call formulations) of client's words. Research has found that formulations are not only used in spoken counseling, but also in web-based chat counseling (Mallen et al. 2011). Nevertheless, studies conclude the majority of counseling interventions used during physical interaction can be transferred to online chat (Dowling et al. 2013; Mallen et al. 2011).

Chat conversations that reveal and unwind personally significant information are perceived as helpful. Some studies found that clients appreciated the lack of personal contact, as they thought the lower emotional intensity implied a lower investment (Stommel 2016).

Using chat communication can provide immediate clarification of what is being discussed between the counselor and the client. However, a time delay is built into the counseling process. This can facilitate a zone of reflection where counselors and clients can take the time to reflect upon and respond to the messages. (Richards et al. 2013; Suler 2004).

### 3.5.2 Ethical implications and risks of online counseling

A frequent criticism of online chat counseling is the difficult of forming a working alliance which is perceived, that may negatively impact on quality of communication and the strength of the intervention (Dowling et al. 2013). The rationale behind each client's decision to seek help from an online chat service, the worker's own computer-mediated interaction skills, as well as technical hurdles affect establishing a therapeutic alliance online (Downling et al 2013; Hanley 2011; Mallen et al. 2011). Anyhow this difficulty is related to the disinhibition effect: the clients' greater willingness to self-disclose (Suller 2004).

Moreover, anonymity has been addressed as reducing the social stigma and anxiety that people might experience in seeking professional help (Suler 2004). In a supportive relationship built upon written communication it has been proven that clients disclose at an accelerated rate (Zeren 2015). Anyhow, counselor providing single-session online counseling services to youth reported that the absence of non-verbal cues made it difficult to determine the degree of young people's problem (Chardon et al. 2011). Apparently, clients are more likely to get right to the point rather than gradually ease into their statement of the problem (Zeren 2015). Additionally, implicitly requiring the client to articulate their concerns verbally in written form may create a more reflective stance on the part of the client (Rummel et al. 2010).

Several studies have also indicated limitations in counselor-client interaction during time-limited online counseling session because of the time it takes to compose, type and send messages (Suller 2004, Richards et al. 2013, Zeren 2015).

Additional ethical concerns include the lack of adequate processes for crisis assessment (e.g. suicidal risk, diagnostic indicators, need for child protection intervention, client honesty regarding, for example, their age, etc.). While counselors avoid leaving the conversations, technological difficulties (e.g. internet connection) may force for instance the termination of the counseling session altogether. (Zeren 2015)

### 3.5.3 Concluding remarks regarding online counseling

It is quite interesting to note that the literature on the field of online counseling include few studies concerning client satisfaction and effectiveness (Zeren 2015). Although there are unique ethical concerns involved with online counseling, in practicality many can be dealt in an appropriate manner. Just as face-to-face practitioners have guidelines and procedures in place to ensure effective interventions, perform appropriate risk management, online counseling is no different. The online counseling procedures need to be formulated beforehand and discussed and might look different than what workers have been routinely doing with their clients within youth work. As treatments shall be evidence-based, service providers shall be confident that interventions will improve outcomes for their clients. Frank and educated discussion ethics concerns can be faced and tackled. This thesis aims also at opening and keeping the discussion ongoing.

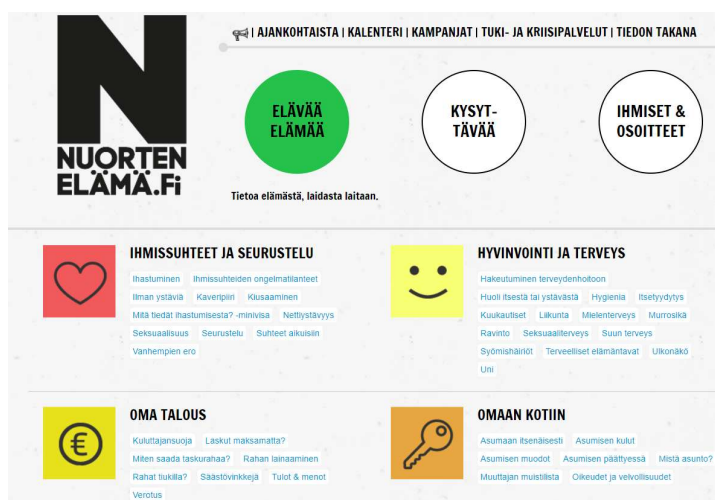
## 4 KOORDINAATTI

Koordinaatti is a center of expertise founded in 2006 in Oulu with the contribution of the Minister of Education and Culture with the primary aim of educating professionals about services for youth and to have an impact on practices on a national level. Koordinaatti's work is in line with the current goals of youth policies of Finland. The existing network that cooperate with Koordinaatti in providing online counseling and guidance is quite wide and it includes many different organizations, as well as services all over Finland, reaching an existing wide network of professionals. Therefore, the impact of the thesis can contribute to distribute the results and to influence practices on a larger scale. Koordinaatti has developed two national projects: Nuortenideat.fi and Nuortelämä.fi. (Koordinaatti n.d.).

Nuortenideat is a national project to encourage youth to democratically participate, making youth's opinions visible in the ideation of policies, services. The aim of the project is to support dialogue and collaboration between youth, municipalities, organizations and other stakeholders (Nuortenideat n.d.).

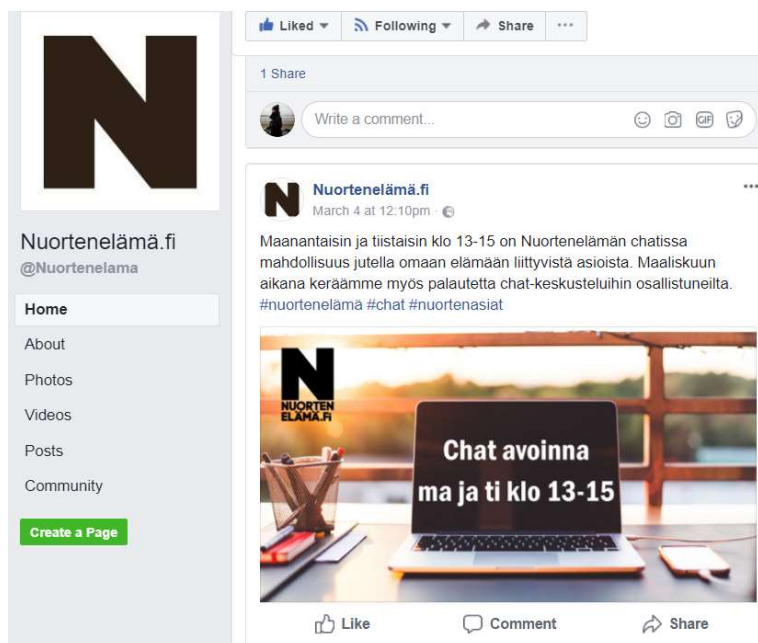
Nuortelämä is at the center of youngsters' needs through the country and aims at providing the information that youth needs. The service is an example of preventative youth work supporting young people's growth, independence and well-being (Koordinaatti n.d.). Nuortelämä.fi is an online website that helps youngsters in finding the appropriate information or service at the right time (Nuortelämä n.d.). The service is directed at young people themselves, but also at young people's parents and others who are professionally or otherwise involved with young people (Koordinaatti n.d.). The purpose is to support youth in finding answers independently, by asking information and getting access to local services. The website is also a platform for youth in finding mentorship from other young people.

IMAGE 2. Nuortelämä.fi website (Nuortelämä n.d.)



The chat section provides counseling that helps youngsters in overcoming life issues or problems, getting guidance, information and advices about existing services. Youngsters can ask any kind of questions anonymously. The chat is primarily intended for young people between 13 and 25 years old. All the discussions are conducted on a one-to-one basis. Whether the chat is closed, the website [nuortenelema.fi](http://nuortenelema.fi) provides other resources: a poll where youngsters can leave questions and information about online available chats. The aim of the chat is to bring hope to any young person and to help in finding a solution to problems, taking seriously the experiences of young people and giving them the opportunity of not being alone with their issues. The service is extensively available and accessible for two hours a day on Mondays and Tuesdays from 1 to 3 pm. (Nuortenelema n.d.).

IMAGE 3. An advertisement of the online chat (Nuortenelema 04.03.2018)



## 5 THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Even if qualitative research contributes to an understanding of some concepts relevant in online counseling and guidance, there is no perfectly designed study, and unexpected events will always appear (Patton 2002 cited in Bengtsson 2016).

It is relevant to reflect on the resources available and to conduct the study in the most efficient and objective way (Bengtsson 2016). The author focused on the existing limitations (professionals working physically in various locations, varying working times, lack of sponsorship) and decided to design and conduct one online interview and two discussions online. As the respondents have experience in interacting with youth through a chat, the author believed that the collection of written information could have provided quality content from professionals with specific experience in text composition and verbal expression.

As the author did not have a wide pre-understanding of the topic, any bias of her influence can be minimal. Anyhow being familiar with the context could have been an advantage if it would have not influenced the interpretation of the results.

The thesis is based on qualitative researches amongst workers employed in online counseling and guidance chats addressed to youth. The thesis is the result of an online qualitative questionnaire (see Appendix 1) done in February 2018 and two online discussions done in April and May 2018 (see Appendixes 2 and 3).

Even though to gain results the author designed an online questionnaire for workers and four online discussions, the focus of the analysis in this thesis are the four online discussions (for the depth and insight to the topic, as well as for the selected sample). The online discussions have been planned based of the result received through the online questionnaire.

Using online platforms for focus groups has been trialed over the last two decades with studies using asynchronous platforms in their research (Abrams et al. 2015, Collard et al. 2016).

Online chats for topics' exploration have been researched and it is an effective way of conducting researches within the social and health sector (Collard et al. 2016; Woodyatt et al. 2016).

Chat based technology are used in qualitative research as online written focus groups, giving the possibility to the participants to discuss a certain topic. They are cost-effective, confidential, anonymous, and offer the possibility to discuss specific topics over time (Woodyatt et al. 2016). The participants have nicknames to protect identity and discuss the mutual topic. Using a chat room approach, this internet-based focus group generates a real-time written record of the conversation, providing a transcript for qualitative analysis. Summarized responses of the participants, rather than the off-topic or extremely long responses that can result as part of a face-to-face focus groups are gained (Collard et al. 2016; Woodyatt et al. 2016).



Inductive content analysis is used to interpret the data and draw conclusions. As defined by Krippendorff (2004: 18) content analysis is “a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts to the contexts of their use”. In this research the goal is link the results to the overall context. Content analysis is a systematic method, that provides objectivity to make inferences from data, aiming at describing a phenomena (Downe-Wamboldt 1992: 314) underlines how. The purpose of the thesis is to formulate theories about effective, ethical and efficient online counseling for youth through inducting reasoning.

It has been relevant for the author to define the aims of the research not too broadly, to not precluding depth in the study (Silverman in Bengtsson 2016). During the first phase (the questionnaire) the author aims at finding out relevant themes, topics, issues and challenges related to online counseling for youth. During the second research phase (the two online discussions) the author aims at gaining a deeper insight into the themes and topics emerged in the first phase.

The sample and units of analysis have been determined in relation to the saturation of data. Therefore, when the author observed that the answer could be addressed with enough confidence, during the first phase of the data collection the online questionnaire was closed and during the second phase of the data collection the author presented a new question to be discussed for the online chat.

As illustrated in the table, the plan consists of two phases.

TABLE 5. The phases of the research

### **PHASE 1 ONLINE QUESTIONNAIRE**

#### **PLANNING**

AIM: find out relevant themes, topics, issues and challenges related to online counseling for youth

SAMPLE AND UNIT OF ANALYSIS: Professionals interacting with youth recruited online through Facebook

METHOD OF DATA COLLECTION: Qualitative online questionnaire

METHOD OF ANALYSIS: Inductive content analysis

PRACTICAL IMPLICATION: No need for approvals

#### **DATA COLLECTION**

Through Google questionnaires textual information is collected

#### **DATA ANALYSING** (latent analysis)

STAGE 1 Decontextualization (Meaning units identified)

STAGE 2 Recontextualization (Include “content”-exclude “dross”)

STAGE 3 Categorization (Identify homogenous groups)

STAGE 4 Compilation (Draw realistic conclusions)

#### **INCLUSION OF THE DATA IN THIS REPORT**

### **PHASE 2 ONLINE GROUP DISCUSSIONS**

#### **PLANNING**

AIM: gain deep knowledge about relevant themes, topics, issues and challenges related to online counseling for youth

SAMPLE AND UNIT OF ANALYSIS: Professionals interacting with youth recruited through Koordinaatti's network

METHOD OF DATA COLLECTION: Qualitative online discussion group

METHOD OF ANALYSIS: Inductive content analysis

PRACTICAL IMPLICATION: Need to verify the suitability of questions and themes with Koordinaatti

#### **DATA COLLECTION**

Through an online platform provided by Koordinaatti textual information is collected

**DATA ANALYSING** (latent analysis)

STAGE 1 Decontextualization (Meaning units identified)

STAGE 2 Recontextualization (Include "content"-exclude "dross")

STAGE 3 Categorization (Identify homogenous groups)

STAGE 4 Compilation (Draw realistic conclusions)

#### **INCLUSION OF THE DATA IN THIS REPORT**

Data are presented verbally in themes, which makes it possible to gain some interpretations of the results. The researcher utilized latent analysis, to include an interpretative dimension in the analysis, to find the underlying deep meaning of the text: "what the text is talking about" (Berg 2001; Downe-Wambolds 1992).

When considering practical implications, the researcher aimed at anonymity. Anonymous participation simplifies the process and give to the participants the possibility to express freely their opinions. Confidentiality throughout the process was guaranteed and participation was voluntary.

A wider explanation of the ethical implications is presented in the paragraph 7.7.

## 6 EMPIRICAL DATA

### 6.1 Empirical data collected: the online questionnaire

The first part of the research, aiming at framing the issues and potential problems related to online counseling, consists of an online questionnaire that can be read in Appendix 1.

#### 6.1.1 Sample and procedure

The data consists of 13 answers recorded through few Facebook groups of professionals:

- Sosionomien uraverkosto (around 1500 members);
- Yhteisöpedagogit kartalla (around 160 members);
- Yhdenvertainen nuorisotyö - Jämställdt ungdomsarbete (around 170 members);
- Yhteisöpedagogi- liike 2012 (around 800 members).

The groups were chosen to gain data from heterogeneous sources and from people with a different educational background in Finland. The questionnaire was open for six days, as the author noticed that the received information reached the desired saturation level.

The respondents were informed about the anonymity of their answers and the researcher also provided own contact information whether the respondents would have wanted to add relevant information.

Because the research through the questionnaire was set up to collect relevant themes connected to online counseling, there was no need to acknowledge in which organizations the professionals are working. The information relative to the amount of experience in online counseling was recorded to analyze whether there are significant changes in perceptions whether professionals have a longer experience in delivering online counseling. The open questions gave the possibility to the respondents to express themselves freely and to necessarily deepen some content. Anyhow, each respondent answered shortly (for instance without giving examples from working life or analyzing on a deeper level the themes researched). The purpose of the data collection was anyhow to highlight themes present in online counseling and guidance, and the 13 answers obtained have been providing the necessary data. The author constantly followed the answers received to limit the amount of data collected as soon as the result was satisfying. The obtained qualitative data is analyzed with inductive content analysis.

#### 6.1.2 Analyses

Inductive content analysis is a qualitative method of content analysis used to develop theory and identify themes by studying. It relies on inductive reasoning, in which themes emerge from the raw data through repeated examination and comparison. (Bengtsson 2015)

In this research inductive content analysis was done by reading the obtained material and dividing the content in categories, to simplify the identification of themes for the online chat discussion. The chosen original quotes have been synthesized and simplified. On their based the author tried to categorize the information. In the following table it is possible to visualize the themes that the author has found in most of the interviews. Some aspects that have emerged in the online questionnaires have also been included in the guide.

TABLE 5. Themes, content and meaning units from the questionnaire.

<b>THEMES / CATEGORIES</b>	<b>CONTENT</b>	<b>MEANING UNITS</b>
<b>PRINCIPLES OF CLIENT-CENTERED COUNSELING</b>	<b>Genuineness and interest, congruence</b>	The worker is genuinely interested in what the young person's issue is. The worker dedicates time, without hurrying and has a duty to focus on the youth's identified issues.
	<b>Empathy</b>	The worker makes a connection with the young person's problem and addresses empathy, as well as she delineates youth's own responsibilities and others' responsibilities (e.g. parents). The professional uses questions, paraphrasing, summaries and emoticons to fully understand the young person. The chat gives a possibility to think together with the young person.
	<b>Non-judgmental attitude, unconditional positive regard</b>	The professional does not underestimate the young person's feelings or problems
<b>BENEFITS OF ONLINE COUNSELING</b>	<b>Time</b>	The worker has time to reflect on what she will communicate to the young person.
	<b>Anonymity</b>	The young person has the possibility to express herself freely.
	<b>Prompt and efficient intervention</b>	An online chat is an easy, independent and accessible way to ask for help.
<b>RISKS OF ONLINE COUNSELING</b>	<b>Variety of issues</b>	For professionals it is hard to know the answer to all the possible themes that youth wants to solve. It would be good to follow a structure within each session to simplify the professional's role.
	<b>Technical problems</b>	Sometimes a young person is suddenly not anymore in the chat and the professional cannot affect to the issue.
	<b>Anonymity</b>	Being anonymous increases the presence of trolls within online counseling.
	<b>Ethical issues</b>	Difficulty to follow-up whether the situation is delicate (e.g. there is the need to follow up with child protection, police or psychiatric referral).

<b>IMPACT'S MEASUREMENT OF THE ONLINE COUNSELING SESSION</b>	<b>Feedback received</b>	Straight feedback from the young person helps in understanding the effective impact of the session. Sometimes young people communicate feelings textually.
	<b>Statistical data collected by the organization</b>	Data collected and recording of interactions done by workers helps in giving directions and in quantifying the impact of online counseling. Unluckily anyhow not all organizations are recording data about their counseling services.
	<b>Quality of the service</b>	Whether well-trained workers provide the service, there is a guarantee that the counseling session provided has high quality (even though there are no existing tools to measure the impact).
	<b>Self-reflection</b>	Professionals can develop their skills through self-reflection, discussions with peers and critical thinking about the way they have been providing the service. Self-evaluation's skills shall be developed to support the workers.
	<b>Questionnaires and researches organized by providers</b>	Impact measurement through surveys for youth give important directions to professionals.

As the table illustrates, the author has been able to individuate four themes from the questionnaire:

- Principles of client-centered counseling;
- Benefits of online counseling;
- Risks of online counseling;
- Impact measurement of the online counseling session.

### **Principles of client-centered counseling**

In line with general principles of client-centered counseling theorized by Roger, also workers counseling online have individuated the principles and values that are basic to an effective interaction and dialogue with youth. Most of the workers underlined the principles of congruence (meaning that the counsellor must be completely genuine), unconditional positive regard (meaning that the counsellor must be non-judgmental and valuing of the client) and empathy (the counsellor must strive to understand the client's experience). Empathy is a skill that can be learned, as one answerer reports: *"Empatian ilmaisuuden tekstin kautta voi oppia"* (*"The expression of empathy through textual expression can be learned"* transl.). Moreover, textual interaction is also a source of expressive interaction: *"Nuorten kanssa voi käyttää hymiötä esimerkiksi tai ihan kannustavaa palautetta."* (*"With the young person it is possible to use emoticons for example or empowering feedback"* transl.). Generally, person-centered counselling can help individuals with a range of personal issues. The client-centered approach allows people to keep control over the content and pace of sessions, being

subjects in the session. As one professional mentions in the questionnaire young people shall be respected during the interaction: *“hyväksymällä ja kunnioittamalla, vahvistamalla itsemääräämisoikeutta ja itsetuntoa”* (“validating and respecting, reinforcing the principle of self-determination and the self-esteem.”). One professional underlines that the validation for the young person can be addresses also through textual interaction: *“Työntekijän aito kiinnostus ja keskittyminen kyllä välittyy”* (“The worker’s genuine interest and focus for sure is addressed” transl.). In line with the developmental task happening during youth, the non-directive style of person-centered counselling benefits individuals facing a need to explore their feelings and their personality.

It is essential to be fully focused on the young person. As one worker underlines: *“Tilanteessa tulee olla oikeasti läsnä, vaikka kohtaaminen tapahtuu oikeasti verkossa.”* (“In the situation there is a need to be present, even though the encounter happens online” transl.).

### **Benefits of online counseling**

Coherently with the literature review, also workers noticed how anonymity gives freedom of expression and makes the process of asking for help easy. Moreover, the flexibility of internet makes the interaction easy to be started and the intervention prompt. As one professional mentions: *“Erityisesti anonyymiteetti auttaa ja se, että ohjaaja on helposti tavoitettavissa”* (“Especially anonymous interaction helps and that, the counselor is easily approachable” transl.). Some other professional expressed the fact that young people can feel safer in an anonymous interaction: *“Anonyymiyys tuo keskustelijoille turvaa, joten joistain asioista on helpompi puhua netissä”* (“Anonymity brings to the person discussing safety, therefore in internet it is easier to chat about certain things”). Moreover, the fact that through internet it is easy to access to help, has been noticed to be a positive thing: *“Monelle verkko on ensimmäinen askel avun hakemiseen”* (“For many accessing to the internet is the first step in looking for help”. transl.).

The lack of physical cues in the interaction make the work for professional challenging. As one respondent notices: *“ei pysty näkemään asiakkaan ruumiinkieltä ja tekstin välityksellä voidaan tulkita asioita helposti väärin”* (“it is not possible to see the body language of the client and communicating through text implies the risk of interpreting things in a wrong way” transl.). Online textual interaction, even though does not present facial expression and other communication cues, has be found to be useful for the professionals in term of reflection. In fact, workers have enough time to focus in finding a solution and has the possibility to communicate with colleagues or to research the information during the online counseling session.

### **Risks of online counseling**

Online counseling includes a various amount of risks, such as the possibility of interactions’ interruptions, the presence of trolls because of the anonymity of the interaction, data leakage. Moreover, the issues that the workers might encounter are various (and no professional is able to know all the available services, possibilities and answers).

The professionals expressed major concern about ethical issues (for instance related to the involvement of child protection, police investigation, or psychiatric care). As one professional reports: *”Anonyymissä verkkotyössä huoli voi nousta useastikin, mutta asiakkaan iästä ja paikkakunnasta ei useinkaan ole tietoa. Lastensuojelu ilmoitus tehdään silti aina, mutta apu harvoin löytää perille ilman tietoja”. (”In the context of anonymous interaction online the concern about the young person can rise often, but there is not knowledge about the young person age and municipality. A child welfare’s notification is always done, but the help cannot be addressed without specific knowledge” transl.)*

### **Impact’s measurement of the online counseling session**

All the professionals answering to the questionnaire underlined the challenges related to measuring the effectiveness of online counseling. Anyhow professional skills such as self-reflection can support the workers in analyzing independently their impact, as mentioned by one professional: *”Arviointi perustuu pitkälti myös vaikuttavuuden itsearviointiin” (”Evaluation is based also on the self-evaluation of the impact” transl.)*. Moreover, quality within each interaction has been individuated as a guiding principle in delivering online counseling.

Statistical data collected by the organization as well as questionnaires and researches organized by providers can provide guidelines related to the issues faced by workers and organize the measurement of sessions’ impact. Anyhow few workers underlined how sometimes online interaction has not been even recorded by the service provider.

Young people have also been providing feedback about the support received and workers agree on the fact that straight feedback is rewarding and gives directions. As one worker reports in the questionnaire: *”Jos nuori kiittää keskustelun päätteeksi tai antaa palautetta, se on aina hyvä merkki” (”If the young person thanks at the end of the discussion, it is always a good sign” transl.)*.

## **6.2 Empirical data collected: the online chat**

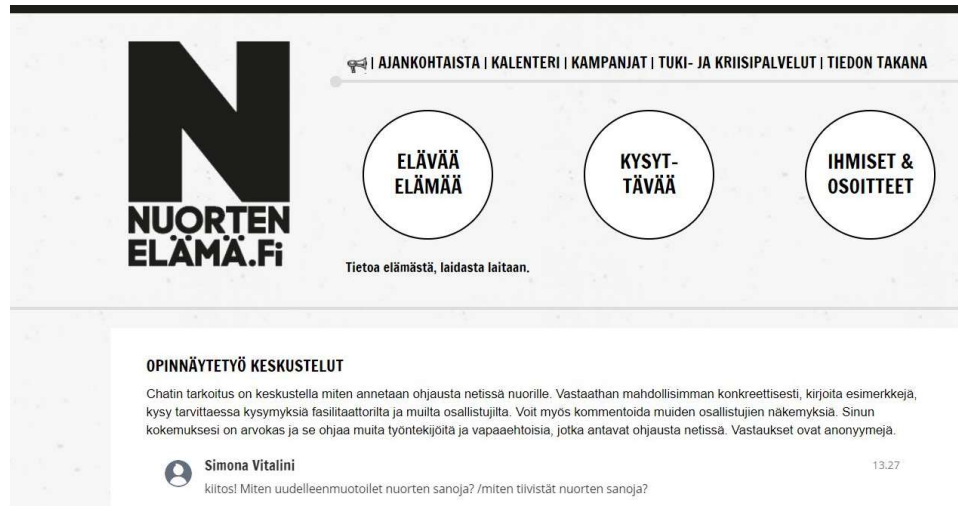
The second part of the research was done collecting information from professionals working in the field. In Appendix 2 it is possible to view the invitation to the research and in Appendix 3 it is possible to view the presented questions.

### **6.2.1 Sample and procedure**

The data consists of four online chats organized during the month of May 2018 through the platform provided by Koordinaatti. There were in total six participants from different organizations recruited through the network *nusuvefo* (nuorille suunnatun verkkotyön foorumi - forum for online work focusing on young people). During each discussion the number of participants varied, anyhow the quality and quantity of data has been satisfying. The author gained good results, and this can be also related to the fact that most of participants have a rather extensive experience in online counseling and youth work.

Koordinaatti implemented the chat used for the research and a representative of Koordinaatti also participated during the four online chat sessions.

IMAGE 4. Screenshot of the online chat platform used for the research



In the role as a facilitator the author gently invited the participants to comment others' answers, clarified questions (whether there was room for misunderstanding). In welcoming the participants and at the end of each session the researcher mentioned the theme of the current and following session, clarifying logistic aspects of the research through email when necessary. The author kept track of the time, going through the plan within the time limit of one hour. After the first chat it was noticed that the time available was just enough. In planning the second chat discussion, the author tried to also have the option to leave out some questions whether the time would have not been enough. One challenge that the facilitator noticed was that in the chat it was not possible to visualize whether a participant was answering or not. The time management was successful in gaining rich information and in obtaining answers to each question, and having the questions planned beforehand made the facilitation process smooth.

The amount of data collected is satisfactory, even though some sessions were more content rich than others (because the number of participants varied in each session).

The minimum number of participants was four and the maximum amount was six (including the facilitator and the work partner representative from Koordinaatti).

There is a need to formally research chat-based researches and online discussions within the framework of qualitative research. The benefits of this kind of methodology can be traced in the efficacy, efficient and economical way of conducting the study involving people that physically are in different places. Moreover, having a textual track of the result can give to the researcher to gain immediately data to be analyzed in textual form. Limitations that this kind of research sets are related to the lack of direct interaction and the inability to engage more directly and spontaneously in a conversation with the respondents, without the ability to interact promptly. Result verification has been carried out by a supervision of the Koordinaatti's responsible and by testing the guide with professionals.



Moreover, having planned the research in two phases (with the questionnaire online and the chats) it has been possible to gain a wide range of data for analysis. Literature regarding online counseling (mostly in English) has been also used to verify the respondents' contribution and in formulating effective guidelines for offering online counseling.

Although there are many positive aspects in written focus groups, there are negative aspects. (Abrams et al. 2015; Woodyatt et al. 2016). The participants connection lacks emotions and can create a neutral atmosphere compared to in-person and even video focus groups. Additionally, the participant's interaction lacks voice connotations, expressions and body language cannot be observed. As the table below shows, chat based qualitative researches have many strengths, making it appropriate, at least in this study.

TABLE 6. Strengths and limitations of online chats as a research method (based on Abrams et al. 2015; Woodyatt et al. 2016 and the author's observations).

Strengths	Limitations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Complement and refine qualitative data.</li> <li>• Provide more detailed information to explain complex issues.</li> <li>• Data collection in textual form has been cost efficient.</li> <li>• Chat is accessible for all participants in any location, with a minimum investment of resources.</li> <li>• Facilitator can send updates to keep participants interested and active in the process.</li> <li>• Facilitator can do analysis during the process as transcript is generated as online chat continues and then formulate questions.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Difficulty in analyzing; cannot fit neatly in standard categories.</li> <li>• Impossibility to assess non-verbal communication cues from participants.</li> <li>• Typing is slower than talking.</li> <li>• Text can limit freedom of expression, as it is cognitively more demanding than speaking one's mind.</li> </ul>

### 6.2.2 Analyses

Online interaction with the participants can have affect the engagement of respondents and prevent the facilitator from promptly interacting and guiding the exchange of information. Moreover, the lack of physical cues during the discussions online could have limited the results gained.

The analysis relies on inductive reasoning, in which themes emerge from the raw data through examination and comparison. (Bengtsson 2015). Inductive content analysis was done by reading the obtained material and dividing the content in categories, to simplify the identification of themes in online chat discussion, categorizing them for the guide's content (and in this perspective including mostly concrete information that can benefit professionals offering online counseling and guidance). The chosen original quotes have been synthesized and simplified. On their based the author tried to categorize the information. In the following table it is possible to visualize the themes that the author has found, that later have been formally textualized within the guide that has been written.

TABLE 7. Themes, content and meaning units from the online chat research to be included in the guide.

<b>THEMES / CATEGORIES</b>	<b>CONTENT</b>	<b>MEANING UNITS</b>
<b>PRINCIPLES OF CLIENT-CENTERED COUNSELING</b>	<b>Genuineness and interest, congruence; empathy; non-judgmental attitude, unconditional positive regard</b>	Principles of client-centered counseling in practice. Genuine interaction, focusing, being present in the moment, non-judgmental attitude towards the young person, acceptance and equality between the worker and the young person (establishing of a partnership with the other person).
<b>BENEFITS OF ONLINE COUNSELING</b>	<b>Time</b>	The worker has time to reflect on what she will communicate to the young person. The online chats aimed at defining specifically how time management is done in online counseling, to define a clear structure for the workers. Online chat structure: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Orientation.</li> <li>2. Problem clarification.</li> <li>3. Goal exploration.</li> <li>4. Action planning.</li> <li>5. Termination.</li> </ol>
	<b>Anonymity</b>	The young person has the possibility to express herself freely also whether she might experience incongruencies with her body.
	<b>Prompt and efficient intervention</b>	An online chat is an easy, independent and accessible way to ask for help throughout Finland and even from remote areas or small municipalities, where professionals might be too familiar to the young people looking for help.
<b>RISKS OF ONLINE COUNSELING</b>	<b>Variety of issues</b>	For professionals it is hard to know the answer to all the possible themes that youth wants to solve. Honesty whether the worker is not fully aware of each rising issue is essential.
	<b>Technical problems</b>	Technical issues affect the interaction and the professional cannot affect to the issue.
	<b>Anonymity</b>	Being anonymous increases the presence of online harassment especially

		within online group counseling. In each organization there are different ways of defining and tolerating a person who starts quarrels or upsets people and sow discord by posting inflammatory and digressive comments.
	<b>Ethical issues</b>	Preventive strategies and safe plans that in each work place can be implemented to give tools to the workers.
<b>IMPACT'S MEASUREMENT OF THE ONLINE COUNSELING SESSION</b>	<b>Feedback received and quality of the service</b>	Straight feedback from the young person helps in understanding the effective impact of the session. Received feed-back can give to the workers elements to self-reflect on their work.
	<b>Professionals' well-being</b>	Professionals can develop their skills through self-reflection, discussions with peers and critical thinking about the way they have been providing the service. Ethical issues' analysis, discussion and evaluation is central in the workers' well-being. Self-evaluation's skills shall be developed to support the workers.
	<b>Questionnaires and researches organized by providers</b>	Impact measurement through surveys for youth can give important directions to professionals (measurement shall be implemented in the same way within different organizations).

As the table illustrates, the author has been analyzing the same themes individuated from the questionnaire:

- Principles of client-centered counseling;
- Benefits of online counseling;
- Risks of online counseling;
- Impact measurement of the online counseling session.

The chat interaction aimed at establishing concrete guidelines for workers. Therefore, abstract themes such as genuineness, congruence and empathy have been mentioned without gaining too much depth. Other themes, such as time-management have been explored more in detail, as the information gained can guide any worker approaching online chat and guidance with young people. All in all, the research themes were already thought in detail in the light of the information gained from theories, the questionnaires and the aims of the guide.

### **Principles of client-centered counseling**

Workers counseling online have individuated the principles and values that are basic to an effective interaction and dialogue with youth, underlining how online interaction follows the same principles of physical interaction.

Coherently with the results gained from the questionnaires, most of the workers underlined the principles of congruence. Principles of client-centered counseling in practice are also relevant in online counseling and guidance.

The client-centered approach, already arisen from the questionnaire, has been underlined also during the chats. The worker and the young person shall establish an equal partnership in the interaction, with a non-judgmental attitude and a non-directive style.

As one professional mentions in the chat: *"Roolini on olla siellä auttamassa eikä pätemässä. Nuoren kuunteleminen ja se ettei liikaa ohjaa [...]. Nuori voin aina googlettaa jos on suoraa faktaa etsimässä".* ("My role is to be there to help and not to judge. Listening to the young person and that we do not just give directions [...]. The young person can always use google if she is looking just for facts". transl.). Another worker continues: *"jokaiselle löytyisi joku, joka kuuntelee, on tukena, ei tuomiste vaan auttaa rakentamaan selkeämpää kuvaa tilanteista, joihin itse on joutunut."* ("for everyone it would be found someone that listens, is supportive, does not judge but helps to build a clear image of the situation". transl.).

### **Benefits of online counseling**

The theme of the benefits of online counseling has been approached from a very concrete perspective. Coherently with the literature review, also workers noticed similarity of themes in which young people need support: friendships, bullying and loneliness, exclusion, well-being, sexuality, self-harm, depression, violence, sexual harassment, physical health diseases, difficulties in sleeping, drug abuse, eating disorders, dating, breaking up, self-knowledge, difficulty in controlling emotions.

Anonymity is a feature that can support both the professionals, as well as the young people gaining counseling. As one worker points out: *"Yksilöchateissä se on tosi tärkeä. On helpompi kysyä, kertoa ja puhua. Nuoren ei tarvitse olla arvioitavana esim. ulkoisesti. Se auttaa myös työntekijää, ei tarvitse tehdä oletuksia kun voi ottaa nuoren juuri sellaisena kuin hän on."* ("in the individual chats it is very important. It is easier to ask, say and speak. The young person does not need to be evaluated for instance on the way she looks. It helps also the worker, there is no need to make pre-assumptions as the young person can be taken exactly as she is." transl.). The accessibility to chat also gives a chance to take the first step, that can lead to further improvements and actions. As one respondent points out: *"monella saatta chat olla se avunhakemisen ensiaskel josta hakee rohkeutta jatkotoimenpiteisiin chatenkilön avustuksella"* ("for many the chat is the first step that encourages to take further actions with the support of the chat worker" transl.).

According to the workers a clear structure in the chat can support the work. During the online chats professionals have been mentioning examples of questions used during each phase.

A structure in the online counseling sessions gives also the possibility to make the work solution-focused. According to respondents capacity to gain solutions through interaction is a skill that experience and professionalism can improve. As one respondent points out: *"Ratkaisukeskeisyys tulenee varmasti usein työntekijän ammattitaidon kautta. Jos asia on ratkaistavissa. Eli tuodaan näkyväksi erilaisia vaihtoehtoja, ohjataan suoraan, linkataan nettisäiteillä, konkretisoidaan nuoren ajatuksia ja toiveita."*

Realism is an important aspect of counseling online. As it emerged from the discussion: *"kerrotaan myös, jos chat on sellainen paikka, jossa asia ei ratkea"* ("We also say if the chat is the kind of place in which the issue can not be resolved" transl.)

Asking straight away direct questions can also improve the outcome of the sessions. As one professional answered: *"Kysytään myös suoraan: kuinka haluaisit /toivoisit asian ratkeavan? Kysytään myös, millaista apua nuori toivoo tai tarvitsee."* ("We ask also straightly: how would you like/wish the issue to be resolved? We ask also what kind of help the youngster wishes or needs" transl.).

Finding out whether the young person wishes to discuss or to find a solution is also relevant. As one respondent answered: *"Yleensä aloitan kysymällä haluaako nuori jutella vai etsiikö apua tai tietoa jostakin. Tämä helpottaa hieman sitä kuinka itse lähteä keskustelua rakentamaan."* ("Usually I start asking whether the young person wants to discuss or is she looking for information. This makes partially easier how we start building the discussion." transl.).

As one respondents points out, words have a relevant importance: *"Sanansa pitää valita aika tarkkaan jotta saa ilmaistua mitä haluaa ja varsinkin myötätunnon osoittaminen kirjoittamalla on väliin haastavaa"* ("Words need to be chosed quite specifically so that one can express what she wants and especially in addressing empathy though writing is sometimes challenging" transl.). Another worker continues: *"Sanoille tulee enemmän merkitystä ja läsnäoloa rakennetaan toisenlaisella tavalla"* ("Words gain more significance and being there in the moment is built on a different level" transl.).

In some cases, as the workers expressed in the discussion, feedback is essential: *"Keskustelun loppuun jotain positiivista, kannustavaa ja tietty koittaa varmistaa se että nuori on pysynyt kärryillä ja hyötyi chatista jotenkin."* ("At the end of the discussion something positive, encouraging and of course try to make sure that the young person has kept up with the discussion and can gain benefits from chatting." transl.).

At the end of the sessions, a summary is relevant both for the workers and the young person: *"Eräänlainen summaus saattaa olla hyvä jos on paljon ohjausta keskustelussa"* ("Some kind of summary can be good if there is a lot of guidance in the discussion". transl.).

### **Risks of online counseling**

As literature and answers gained from the questionnaire imply, online counseling has some risks.

One relevant problem that workers encounter are young people engaging in disturbing behaviors. Different organizations, as reported in the chats, have different definitions and limits when it comes to online disturbance and bullying. According to the discussion, the respondents tried to point out feature that can help the professionals in understanding whether a person is trying to provoke or disturb: *"Toistuva toisten kirjoittajien mollaaminen, ärsyttäminen tahallisesti, kiroilu on merkkejä mutta joskus kirjoittajilla on myös kyvyttömyyttä ilmaista esim tunteita"* ("Continuous bullying of others writings,

annoyance, swearing are signs but sometimes the person writing is having difficulties in expressing for instance emotions.” transl.). Workers agree on the fact that behind the behavior there might need the need to look for help: *“Joskus häiriköltä tuntuva voi olla hakemassa oikeasti ja aktiivisesti apua ja se vaikuttaa tahalliselta häirikköinniltä.”* (“Sometimes the person that feels disturbing might really and actively look for help even though she seems like disturbing on purpose” transl.).

As professionals point out, ethical issues rising from online counseling can be relate whether the professional decides to have a listening attitude versus a guiding forward attitude, as it is not always clear right away what can benefit the young person.

Moreover, in risk analysis with underaged young people it is important to realized whether certain cases need to be reported: *“onko tilanne niin paha että pitäisi tehdä lastenluojeluilmoitus vai luottaako siihen, että nuori ottaa itse yhteyttä auttajatahoon, esim. Koulupsykologiin jos nuori lupaa tehdä itse jotain”.* (“is the situation so bad that there needs to be done the child protection notification or do I trust that the young person will herself get in touch with sources of further support, for instance the school psychologist if the young person promises herself to do something.” transl.). Even though different organizations and settings have different guideline concerning this issue, the worker needs to assess in a prompt manner and act according to it. As one respondent points out: *“jos vähän on epäröintiä havaittavissa niin vien asian itse yleensä loppuun, esim soittamalla koululle, psykologille tai tekemällä laastensuojeluilmoituksen”* (“if there is a little bit of doubting about safety then I take the issue usually forward, for instance calling to the school psychologist or making the child protection notification”. transl.).

### **Impact’s measurement of the online counseling session**

The professionals participating in the online chats underlined the challenges related to measuring the effectiveness of online counseling. As one worker underlines: *“Vaikuttavuus on tosi vaikea asia, ja siihen olisi tärkeää saada yhteneväiset mittarit chatistä jotta vaikuttavuutta ja laatua voidaan arvioida laajemmin.”* (“Efficacy of the intervention is a very complex thing, and related to that it would be important to gain similar measurements from different chats so that efficacy and quality could be widely measured.” transl.). Moreover, in line with the answers gained from the questionnaires, quality within each interaction has been individuated as a guiding principle in delivering the service.

Moreover, young people participation and inclusion in quality evaluation and planning the services could be a good principle guiding the directions that online counseling takes. As a professional points out: *“Nuorten ajatuksia siitä, että millaiset keskustelut heitä auttavat.”* (“Young people’s thoughts about what kind of discussions are supportive.” transl.).

Innovation in delivering the service has been underlined as a relevant aspect. As, an example, one worker underlined that short videos customized for chat environments for instance about self-harm could support the interaction and the delivery of psychoeducation.

Rarely young people have also been providing feedback about the support received and workers agree on the fact that straight feedback gives directions. As one worker reports: *”Me saadaan loppujen lopuksi hyvin vähän palautetta. Silloin kuin kiittävät tuntuu hyvältä, merkitykselliseltä. Jos tulee negatiivista palautetta yritetään kysellä, mitä muuta olisivat toivoneet, mutta harvoin tulee konkreettisia ehdotuksia. Mutta siitä huolimatta se pistää miettimään.”* (*”We get in the end very little feedback. When they are thankful it feels good, valuable. If we get negative feedback we try to ask questions, what else they would have wished, but rarely we get concrete proposals. But despite that it makes us to think about it.”* transl.).

Related to quality the facilitator decided to ask also questions related to the professionals’ well-being and development. According to the respondents self-reflection, work guidance (työnohjaus) and discussions with colleagues right after the chat has ended and during the chat can support the development of the workers.

### 6.3 Concluding remarks regarding the empirical data

The data collection method affects the depth of analysis (Bengtsson 2016). The author pondered whether interviews could have provided major depth (as the researcher would have had the opportunity to deepen the discussion with the informants). Anyhow, based on the results, there has been enough and high quality and deep information to write guidelines for workers in a satisfactory way. The results obtained from the literature review, the online questionnaire and the online chats are coherent, therefore there is no need to verify the information gained further.

In a perspective review, based on the result gained, some aspects of the interviews could have gained more focus (especially when it comes to techniques or specific approaches) and other, more abstract principles (such as ethical issues and principles of online counseling) could have been researched with less depth.

## 7 DISCUSSION AND OUTCOME

The project, coherently with its aims and purpose, improved the knowledge about the delivery of online counseling and guidance for young people creating different possibilities for dialoguing about it and producing a booklet in Finnish with guidelines for professionals. The process has been lasting many months, but it has been rather smooth and the presence of Koordinaatti gave visibility, purpose and continuous relevant feedback relating to the outcome.

The aim of this project was to provide to Koordinaatti guidelines for online counseling. Anyhow this process aimed to be relevant also for all the participants and to serve online counseling providers on a larger scale. The aim of this thesis has been described as concrete and clear as possible, to answer to Koordinaatti's needs.

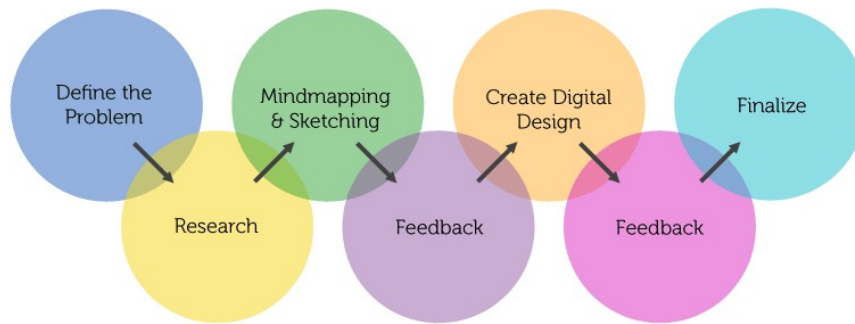
Anyhow, despite the participation and support of Koordinaatti, it was challenging to find motivated participants for the online discussion sessions and afterwards the author has been considering whether a different plan could have affected the number of people involved. Committing to four chat sessions within the same month has been challenging for professionals. Anyhow the data obtained has been relevant, satisfying and of high quality. According to the participants, the online chat focus group have proven to be an effective platform for professional development, sharing of information, reflection and dialogue. Even though the project was a rather wide research planned in many different phases and stressful due to the many stakeholders involved, it was tangible that the phases of interaction were the moment when people meet to transform reality and progress.

### 7.1 The process

The idea was generated during an initial brainstorming and a discussion with some coordinators at Koordinaatti during March 2018, in which the objective was defined (the thesis answers to the question: "How to online counsel young people facing mental health and well-being challenges?"). With time, the themes of the project, the methodology and the outputs got defined more clearly and realistic final outcomes were settled. The research material was collected by May 2018, through a questionnaire for youth workers providing counseling online and through two online discussions to which professionals participated. The collected information was analyzed during summer 2018. Lately in summer the material was sketched, created and finalized in a concrete guide for professionals and volunteers providing online counseling, the conclusions to the research have been written and the results have been tested. Continuous feedback from Koordinaatti was received throughout the process, improving the quality of the outcome.



IMAGE 5. The process



## 7.2 Research

The research process has been based on two phases: an online questionnaire and four online chats. The possibility to gain data through different methods, in addition to data gained from literature and researches provided relevant, deep and useful information. Doing research with Finnish professionals is essential as the concrete guidelines for providing online counseling and guidance include textual information in Finnish language and example that professionals can utilize in a straightforward way.

The way the researcher has handled self-reflection plays a key role in this research, as Bengtsson underlines (2015). While doing content analysis, the researcher knew the context of online counseling and used the theoretical framework as a guideline. Anyhow the knowledge did not affect the process nor the outcome. Verbal interaction between professionals and the researcher shape the data collected (Bengtsson 2015). In this study it has been important that the written questions were appropriately formulated.

Based on the satisfying level of discussion within the chats and the quality of the data obtained, the author evaluates the online chats' outcomes like what she would have gained in face-to-face groups. Chats shall be considered when doing qualitative researches, especially when dealing with people in different geographical locations. However, some issues remain, particularly in relation to managing technical issues experienced by participants, coherently with some researches (Abrams et al. 2015). By using online chat interaction to gain data the researcher avoided the process of transcription. Transcriptions sometimes need to be very detailed to capture speed, tone of voice, emphasis, timing and pauses (Bengtsson 2015). These elements can be difficult to capture and analyze (Bailey 2008). Using online written interaction has reduced in this sense misinterpretations.

## 7.3 Production

The production of the final product has been done with the support of a graphic designer at Koordinaatti. A visual style, coherent with Koordinaatti communication guidelines, is used. The written content and the material has been reviewed with Koordinaatti and professionals few times, gaining feedback and improving the written language, as well as the supporting the clarity of the outcome.

In writing the guide the author has tried to keep the information as relevant as possible, simplifying and summarizing as much as possible, but at the same time giving comprehensible guidelines, examples and clear outlines for workers or volunteer workers approaching for instance online guidance and counseling for the first time. Writing in Finnish has not been a simple task, but the support of the supervisor at Koordinaatti, as well as the collaboration of people whose mother tongue is Finnish has helped the author. A translator reviewed the Finnish language. The information material consists of a booklet of six pages.

### 7.3.1 Content of the booklet

The booklet is the result of the empirical data combined with the available theoretical framework that the author analyzed for this report. The questions in the online questionnaire and in the chat are the result of the attentive analysis of the literature review. The process cannot be defined as linear, as the information gained from literature and empirical data has been used and combined in a dynamic way to verify the data obtained, gain depth and provide reliable results. Literature has been useful particularly in defining the time management of the chat and in defining the issues arising in online counseling. While writing the booklet, also sources from literature (presented in this report in chapter 3 and 5) were utilized to verify the data obtained and to integrate information, as shown in the table below.

TABLE 8. Use of literature to integrate the knowledge gained from the online chat discussions.

THEMES / CATEGORIES	CONTENT	SOURCES FROM LITERATURE USED IN FORMULATING AND VERIFYING THE CONTENT
<b>PRINCIPLES OF CLIENT-CENTERED COUNSELING</b>	<b>Genuineness and interest, congruence; empathy; non-judgmental attitude, unconditional positive regard</b>	Principles of empowerment (Aarnio et al. 2001; Hakoluoto 2018; Isokorpi 2014) Interaction establishing of a partnership or alliance with the other person (Dowling et al. 2013; Richards et al. 2013; Rummel et al. 2010; Zeren 2015).
<b>BENEFITS OF ONLINE COUNSELING</b>	<b>Time</b>	Time delay (Richards et al. 2013) clear structure for the workers. Online chat structure is defined according to the helping process that is similar across theories (American Counseling Association 2015, Chardon et al. 2011): <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Orientation (Chardon et al. 2011).</li> <li>2. Problem clarification (Egan 2002, Stommel 2016)</li> <li>3. Goal exploration (Egan 2002, Mallen et al. 2011; Stommel 2016)</li> <li>4. Action planning (Egan 2002, Chardon et al. 2011)</li> </ol>

		5. Termination (American Counseling association 2009, Chardon et al. 2011)
	<b>Anonymity</b>	Clients' willingness to self-disclose (disinhibition effect). Social stigma in seeking professional help is reduced. (Suler 2004).
	<b>Prompt and efficient intervention</b>	Facility to access (Stommel 2016; Zeren 2015) Formulating (Stommel 2016)
<b>RISKS OF ONLINE COUNSELING</b>	<b>Variety of issues</b>	Possible themes that youth wants to solve (Aaltonen et al. 2016; Agosto 2007)
	<b>Technical problems</b>	Technical difficulties (Downling et al. 2013, Hanley 2011)
	<b>Anonymity</b>	Online harassment (Richards et al. 2013)
	<b>Ethical issues</b>	Risks involved, preventative strategies. (Dowling et al. 2013; Mallen et al. 2011; Stommel 2016)
<b>IMPACT'S MEASUREMENT OF THE ONLINE COUNSELING SESSION</b>	<b>Feedback received and quality of the service</b>	Feedback received (Chardon et al. 2011)
	<b>Professionals' well-being</b>	Professional development (Zeren 2015)
	<b>Questionnaires and researches organized by providers</b>	Impact measurement (Chardon et al. 2011)

Coherently with the booklet aims, the structure of the information is presented in order to give clear directions to the professionals interacting on online chats with youth. Therefore, the themes individuated in the analysis are in a different order, as illustrated below.

TABLE 9. The content of the produced booklet

Työntekijän opas nuorten verkko-ohjaukseen ja neuvontaan	Guide for professionals offering online counseling and guidance
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sisältö</li> <li>• Verkko-ohjaus nuorille</li> <li>• Ajanhallinta</li> <li>• Chatin vaiheet</li> <li>• Nuoren kannustaminen ja rohkaiseminen</li> <li>• Empatian osoittaminen, läsnäolon välittäminen ja tunteiden sanoittaminen</li> <li>• Anonymiteetti: haasteet ja mahdollisuudet</li> <li>• Tekniset haasteet</li> <li>• Teemat</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduction</li> <li>• Online counseling for youth</li> <li>• Time management</li> <li>• Phases of the interaction</li> <li>• Youth encouragement and empowerment</li> <li>• Addressing empathy, being present and making emotions explicit</li> <li>• Anonymity: challenges and possibilities</li> <li>• Technical challenges</li> <li>• Themes</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Työntekijän hyvinvointi</li> <li>• Summaus</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Professionals' well-being</li> <li>• Summary</li> </ul>
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The booklet, that is the outcome and aim of this thesis, can be viewed in Appendix 4.

#### 7.4 Distribution

The material produced is to be distributed to all the organizations involved in the process through the Koordinaatti's contact in nusuvefo (nuorille suunnatun verkkonuorisotyön foorumi). Koordinaatti publishes the information material on their website. The guideline booklet will continue its life course and develop further within the social field, even though this functional thesis process ends. A version of the guidelines will be forwarded to all the participants involved and the booklet will be tested.

#### 7.5 Evaluation of the process

Evaluation of project is relevant, as it gives the possibility to evaluate how past projects have an impact, advocating for initiatives in the future, articulating and sharing successful approaches. Since this thesis has been a process, already at the beginning the progress has been analyzed and evaluated. It is hard to evaluate in absolute terms, anyhow in the long run the knowledge about delivering online counseling and guidance has improved.

The focus of this final thesis is a co-production and facilitation project with professionals, therefore it would not be effective to evaluate the sole booklet, rather than the process itself leading to the written outcome produced. The committed behavior of the participants has been a pre-condition for the success of the project. Every questionnaire and online chat was well planned, but the researcher could not predict beforehand what kind of outcome and information she could have gained.

The project generated internal outcomes, such as more knowledge and a platform of self-reflection for the participants of the online chats. Tacit knowledge within organizations has been widely researched (Angioni 2011). This research formalized the tacit knowledge related to young people's online counseling with an explicit output (the booklet). The approach used is critical because it has allowed people to cooperate within different organizations. External outcomes are for instance the space and time to discuss about the topic within the youth work field.

In general, the goal is to gain mutual understanding, integrate people's ideas, enhance cooperation between professionals within the field of youth work. The methods and ways of working were tailor-designed.

### 7.5.1 Influences on the individual, organization and society level

Outcomes of this project can be individuated at different levels, even though the effectiveness in the long run could be measured just by verifying in the future whether the guide is used in different work settings and by analyzing how the guide support the workers providing online counseling to young people.

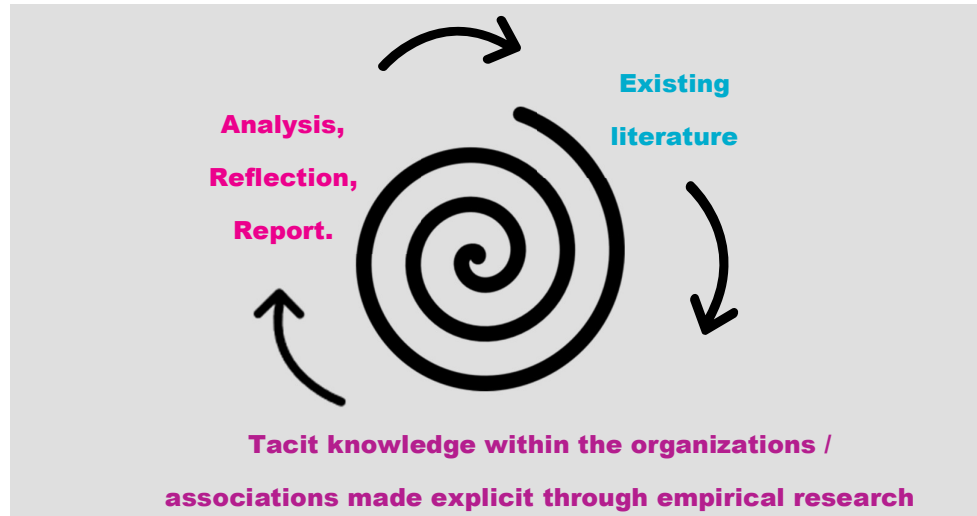
TABLE 10. Levels of influence of the guide on an individual, organization and society level

Levels	Influence of the guide
<b>Individual</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Uniform and coherent way in providing online counseling and guidance for youth</li> <li>• Recognition of specific needs of youth in online counseling</li> <li>• Concrete formalization of knowledge about online counseling</li> <li>• Possibility to utilize the guide also whether volunteers shall be prepared to provide online counseling</li> </ul>
<b>Organization</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organizations' access to a concrete and formalized tool in providing the service</li> <li>• Highly quality intervention to youth</li> <li>• Improvements in the well-being of workers</li> <li>• Increase of self-reflection and professional development of workers</li> <li>• More organizations related to youth work shall consider providing online counseling</li> </ul>
<b>Society</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Influence on social values and norms, as well as policies that promote well-being, as well as preventive measures for youth within the delivery of online services</li> <li>• Improvement of youth mental and physical well-being</li> <li>• Increase of access to services and long-term influences in society</li> <li>• Delivery of efficient and high-quality online services to youth</li> </ul>

### 7.6 Learning outcomes for the author

The process used by the author can be represented by a spiral. As illustrated in the table below, the information collected from different sources (empirical research or existing literature) have been continuously integrated within this research through continuous analysis, reflection and reporting. The nature of this work is non-linear, as the depth gained is a reiteration of the large amount of content gained. Whether there would have been more time available, the author could have presented the information in more detail and gain more knowledge from literature and articles. Anyhow there has been a need to limit the amount of time and resources allocated to this project within the time and resources limits.

IMAGE 6. The increase of knowledge throughout the thesis' process



The author has used a research diary as a tool for reflective practice. The diary kept a history of the unfolding research process, to track the development of online counseling understanding. The diary has been useful especially in writing this final report, as it supported the author in presenting the information.

### 7.7 Ethical considerations and trustworthiness

In the social and health field there is a need of more interdisciplinary and collaborative research processes in different settings, institutions, organizations and ngos. This project aimed at boosting collaborative and partnership research, as well as learning structures. One objective was to improve ways to develop practices in online counseling. During the process confidentiality was maintained. Any information that the participants would disclose could have not be reported in manner that would identify them. Coherently with the principle of autonomy, participants were free to participate or not in the research study, and if necessary, to withdraw (Berg 2001). The recorded material is destroyed as soon as the material is gathered, analyzed and finalized.

As the facilitator understands inside reactions, it is sensitive to analyze them, and the improvements in the context increase. Individuals feel appreciative when they are "simply understood – not evaluated, not judged, simply understood from their own point of view". (Rogers 1967: 304-311.) This is the underpinning principle, hope and vision that guided the process.

### 7.8 Limitations

The thesis topic of the thesis is somehow an innovative and up-to-date rising field of research in youth work. Finding for instance cases, pilot projects and relevant theory has been challenging at times. Regarding the online chat focus groups, the number of them could be bigger and the amount

of data gathered could be deeper and wider. For instance in-depth interviews could have been conducted or insight could have been gained from young users of the chats. The process attempted to be as accurate as possible, but there are several important limitations to address. First, these findings may not generalize to all the professionals providing online counseling and guidance, as it considers the data gained from a total of nineteen participants. Even though the lack of data was partly compensated with knowledge gained from literature, the reliability of the outcomes could have been improved by involving more participants. Second, as the reliability and validity of the method used have not been verified within social services yet, the evaluation parameters were defined during the research project.

There are some ethical concerns related to online counseling that have not been included in the guide for workers. Some professionals have asserted that online counseling is not appropriate for certain clinical populations. For example, according to some sources, clients with more severe psychiatric or personality disorders shall not engage in online counseling (Sanchez-Page 2005 in Rummel et al. 2010). Yet other theorists believe that internet counseling can be useful to all presenting concerns (Caspar et al 2005 in Rummel et al. 2010). As these assertions need to be verified with further research (Rummel et al. 2010) the author has not included this topic in her research. The author agrees that "at this time, there is not enough research to make firm and specific conclusions or suggestions regarding which clients and interventions are the most successful" (Mallen et al. 2005: 849).

The early inclusion of all the stakeholders is a fundamental factor in the survival and use of the material produced for its outcome. A more familiar work setting known by the author, or a consolidated professionals' network might have facilitated the work and improved the outcomes gaining for instance depth of contents.

## 8 CONCLUSIONS

The main purpose of this thesis, to research how to provide quality online counseling for youth and to write guidelines for professionals and volunteer workers, is fulfilled. The aims of the thesis, to find out with qualitative methods how professionals deliver efficiently, and effectively online counseling sessions are also satisfied within this work.

From the author's personal viewpoint, this final thesis has been a vivid experience in trying to answer to questions related to the improvement of young people's mental well-being. The author believes that her critical understanding of different topics, concepts and issues, has been strongly influenced by her professional role. By reading literature and becoming more aware of risks of youth's well-being the author concluded that online counseling services such as chats shall be maintained in the future and that preventive measures to improve youngsters' well-being are in the long term more effective and cheaper.

Results in line with Aaltonen and others' direction for youth work, concluding that the views of professionals working with clients should be more widely considered in assessing the implementation and effectiveness of political decisions (2016:11).

Digitalization should be seen in youth work as a much wider phenomenon than just a new kind of technology or tool. Still there is the need of strengthening employees' skills and the creation of a culture of work that encourages employees to take advantage of digital media and technology in youth work, such as contents and operating environments. Aaltonen and others have found out also some necessary changes to the welfare system that could modify the landscape of services available for youth: "clients require a flexible service system: it is unreasonable to assume that young people are able to directly conform to the rules of a complicated system" (2016:11). Online counselling is in line with Aaltonen and others' view because of its flexibility and cost-saving nature.

This research could have also benefited from the inclusion and participation of young people.

### 8.1 Suggestions for further research

Different types of interactions delivered online shall be investigated due to the rapid implementation of these services. Especially solid evidence base researches are advisable in the field of youth work, due to the large amount of services implemented, that are aimed at supporting young people growing into adulthood. Control over disclosure that ordinarily in face-to-face interactions would be obvious and visible (such as expressing emotions), as well as unique features of online interaction (anonymity, time-delay, disinhibition, strictly verbal communication) shall be explored further.

Professionals shall gain awareness in highlighting the nature of online counseling, its dynamics, features and issues. The agenda of the future shall include also online counseling as a topic. A possibil-



ity would be including training in online counseling in health and social courses within the universities and universities of applied sciences. Moreover, there is a growing need for formal training programs to be offered to professionals offering online counseling as well as part of continuous professional development. Topics to be included would be a variety of theoretical and experiential modules, such as the ethics of practice, how it is possible to establish a relationship online, and how to communicate effectively. The guidebook produced for this thesis is a first step in providing valuable resources to professionals.

In addition to training and education for youth workers, it would be important for youth workers to strengthen and develop their skills in doing work: by experimenting with and doing together with young people. This at the same time supports functional and inclusive digital youth work and offers young people the experience of success and empowerment (Verke 2015a). In line with this assumption, this thesis tries to answer to the need in the field to gain concrete tools for providing high quality and efficient counseling and guidance for youth. Despite professionals' skepticism, there is a tacit acknowledgement that online counseling is a development taking place of the field, reflecting larger societal changes in the way individuals interact and access services.

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## APPENDIX 1

## KYSELY

## TYÖNTEKIJÖIDEN KOKEMUKSET VERKKO-OHJAUksesta JA NEUVONTATYÖSTÄ NETISSÄ NUORTEN PARISSA

Hei! Olen tekemässä Sosionomi YAMK lopputyötä. **Aiheena on nuorten henkisen hyvinvoinnin kohentaminen ja ohjaus netissä.**

Löytyykö täältä ihmisiä, jotka työskentelevät näiden asioiden parissa ja voisivat vastata muutamiin kysymyksiin? Kyselyn vastaukset tallennetaan anonymisti, ja niitä käytetään vain tämän lopputyön tutkimukseen.

Kiitos!

1. **Kuinka pitkä** kokemus sinulla on mielenterveyden ja hyvinvoinnin ohjauksesta netissä?

- 0-1 vuotta
- 1-2 vuotta
- 2-3 vuotta
- yli 3 vuotta

2. Millaisia **etuja** verkko-ohjauksessa ja neuvontatyössä netissä on sinulle?

3. Millaisia **haasteita** ohjaus- ja neuvontatyö verkossa asettaa sinulle?

4. Miten tekstipohjaisessa verkkovuorovaikutuksessa on mahdollista **viestittää nuorille, että hän tulee kuul-luksi?** Kuinka osoitat **empatiaa** nuorille netin kautta?

5. **Miten** mielestäsi tulisi kohdata oireilevia nuoria netissä?

6. Miten sinulle on mahdollista **arvioida työn vaikuttavuutta ja laatua?**



## APPENDIX 2

Hyvä vastaanottaja,

Olet nusuvefon (nuorille suunnatun verkkonuorisotyön foorumi) postituslistalla ja tekemisissä verkkonuorisotyön kanssa. Tämä viesti on kohdistettu sinulle juuri siksi. Mikäli koet, että organisaatiossasi on jokin toinen henkilö, jolle tämä kohden- tuu paremmin, ole hyvä, ja välitä viesti hänelle.

Savonia amk:ssa sosiaali- ja terveysalan ylempää ammattikorkeakoulututkintoa opiskeleva Simona Vitalini etsii opinnäy- tetyönsä tutkimusosioon henkilöitä, joilla on kokemusta vastaamisesta internetissä nuorten erilaisiin kysymyksiin. Välitän teille ohessa Simonan kutsun. Ilmoittautumiset tutkimusosioon Simonalle 16.4.2018 mennessä.

Hei!

Opiskelen Savonia-ammattikorkeakoulussa sosiaali- ja terveysalan ylempää ammattikorkeakoulututkintoa. Olen teke- mässä tutkintoon liittyvää opinnäytetyötä nuorten henkisen hyvinvoinnin edistämisestä ja ohjauksesta internetissä. Ta- voitteena on suunnitella ja toteuttaa verkko-ohjauksen opas työntekijöille ja vapaaehtoisille, jotka antavat internetissä oh- jausta ja neuvontaa nuorille. Oppaasta tulee konkreettinen työväline ammattilaisille ja vapaaehtoistyöntekijöille. Opas antaa vinkkejä ja käytännön ohjeita neuvontatyöhön.

Osallistumalla opinnäytetyön tutkimusosioon autat oppaan sisällöntuottamisessa ja tuet muita nuorten tieto- ja neuvonta- työtä internetissä tekeviä toimijoita. Voit osallistua, jos sinulla on kokemusta nuorten tieto- ja neuvontatyöstä ja vastaat internetin nuorten chateissa kaikenlaisiin nuorten kysymyksiin.

Opinnäytetyön tutkimusosio toteutetaan neljän erillisen ryhmächat-keskustelun avulla. Osallistuminen vie aikaa korkein- taan 60 minuuttia per kerta. Osallistuminen ryhmächat-keskusteluun tapahtuu anonyymisti. Keskustelut tallennetaan, mutta tietoja käytetään vain tämän opinnäytetyön yhteydessä ja ne poistetaan järjestelmän lokitiedoista 01.12.2018.

Ryhmächat-keskustelujen ajankohdat:

1. Ryhmächat 03.05.2018 klo 13-14\_ Aihe: asiakaskeskeisyys
2. Ryhmächat 10.05.2018 klo 13-14\_ Aiheet: ajanhallinta ja anonyymiteetti
3. Ryhmächat 15.05.2018 klo 13-14\_ Aiheet: riskejä ja etiikka
4. Ryhmächat 22.05.2018 klo 13-14\_ Aiheet: työn laatu ja vaikuttavuus

Olisi suotavaa, että pystyt osallistumaan kaikkiin chatteihin. Tarvittaessa voin avata Doodlen uusien aikojen löytämiseksi. Ilmoittaudu osallistumisestasi 16.04.2018 mennessä osoitteeseen [simona.vitalini@gmail.com](mailto:simona.vitalini@gmail.com). Saat tarkemmat osallistu- misohjeet sähköpostiisi ilmoittautumisen jälkeen.

Kiitoksena osallistumisesta osallistujat saavat pienen nuorten tieto- ja neuvontatyön tuotepaketin ja oppaan sen valmis- tuttua (vuoden 2018 lopussa). Opinnäytetyö ja opas toteutetaan yhteistyössä valtakunnallisen nuorisolan osaamiskes- kus Koordinaatin kanssa. Mikäli sinulla on kysyttävää, ota yhteyttä allekirjoittaneeseen.

Simona Vitalini  
sosionomi amk

## APPENDIX 3

THEMES / CATEGORIES	CONTENT	EXAMPLE OF QUESTIONS
<b>PRINCIPLES OF CLIENT-CENTERED COUNSELING</b>	<b>Genuineness and interest, congruence</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Miten osoitat, että olet aidosti kiinnostunut nuoresta ja hänen haasteistaan? Miten on mahdollista viestittää nuorelle, että hän tulee kuulluksi?</li> <li>• Miten näytät, että sinulla on aikaa ja tilaa keskittyä nuoren ongelmaan?</li> </ul>
	<b>Empathy</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Miten osoitat nuorelle asiakkaalle empatiaa? TAI Kuinka osoitat empatiaa nuorille netin kautta? Voisitko antaa esimerkkejä?</li> <li>• Miten autat nuorta erottamaan aikuisten /opettajien/ perheiden vastuun ja nuorelle kuuluvan vastuun?</li> <li>• Miten validointi verkkovuorovaikutuksessa mielestäsi tapahtuu?</li> <li>• Miten uudelleen muotoilet nuorten sanoja? /miten tiivistät nuorten sanoja?</li> <li>• Miten kysyt lisätietoa nuorelta?</li> <li>• Tiedätkö muita keinoja olla vuorovaikutuksessa nuorten kanssa, ja käytätkö niitä? Miten osoitat nuorelle, että on mahdollista miettiä asioita ja löytää ratkaisuja yhdessä? Miten mielestäsi hymiöitä tulisi käyttää?</li> <li>• Miten osoitat nuorelle, että keskustelussa olette tasavertaisia?</li> </ul>
	<b>Non-judgmental attitude, unconditional positive regard</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Miten tuet ja kannustat nuorta? Onko sinulla tiettyjä lauseita, joita olet usein käyttänyt?</li> <li>• Miten validoit eli vahvistat nuoren kokemuksen?</li> <li>• Miten ilmaiset kunnioitusta nuoren kokemuksiin liittyviä tunteita kohtaan?</li> </ul>
<b>BENEFITS OF ONLINE COUNSELING</b>	<b>Time</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Miten työntekijänä hoidat reflektion chatin aikana?</li> <li>• Millainen raami tai struktuuri sinulle on</li> </ul>

		<p>chatille? Oletko seurannut kelloa ja osaatko arvioida millä tavalla keskustelu etenee ajallisesti?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Miten työskentelystä voi tehdä ratkaisukeskeistä?</li> <li>• Miten keskustelu mielestäsi olisi hyvä aloittaa?</li> <li>• Millaisia syventäviä kysymyksiä olet tehnyt nuorelle asiakkaalle?</li> <li>• Miten keskustelu olisi hyvä lopettaa?</li> <li>• Onko sinulla muita tiettyjä kysymyksiä tai metodeja, joita käytät nettikeskusteluissa?</li> </ul>
	<b>Anonymity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Miten anonymiteetti mielestäsi vaikuttaa vuorovaikutukseen?</li> <li>• Miten viestität asiakkaallesi, että dialogi on anonyymi?</li> <li>• Miten toimit jos anonymiteetti on ristiriidassa turvallisuuden kanssa?</li> </ul>
	<b>Prompt and efficient intervention</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Millaisia nuoria on mielestäsi mahdollista tavoittaa chatin kautta, mutta ei tavanomaisten kasvokkain tai puhelimitse toteutettavien palveluiden kautta?</li> </ul>
<b>RISKS OF ONLINE COUNSELING</b>	<b>Variety of issues</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Millaisiin ongelmateemoihin työntekijöiden kannattaisi perehtyä erityisesti vastatakseen nuorten yleisimpiin tarpeisiin?</li> <li>• Miten työntekijä voi vastata nuorelle, jos aihepiiri ei ole hänelle tuttu?</li> </ul>
	<b>Technical problems</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Miten työntekijä voitoimia, jos esim. nuoren yhteyslaitteella on teknisiä ongelmia ja yhteys katkeaa?</li> <li>• Miten työntekijän tulee toimia, jos nuori lähtee chatistä sanomatta mitään ja sessio jää kesken?</li> <li>• Millaisia muita teknisiä haasteita chatissä on?</li> </ul>
	<b>Anonymity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Miten työntekijän tulisi toimia, jos hän tunnistaa linjalla olevan häirikön tai trollin?</li> <li>• Miten työntekijä voi tunnistaa häirikön?</li> </ul>

	<b>Ethical issues</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Millaisia eettisiä haasteita ja ristiriitoja olet kohdannut?</li> <li>• Miten varmistat, että noudatat eettisiä periaatteita?</li> <li>• Mistä olet saanut tukea eettisiin ristiriitoihin?</li> <li>• Millä tavalla työntekijä voi valmistautua ja toimia eettisissä ristiriidoissa, esim. lastensuojelun ja poliisin kanssa?</li> <li>• Mistä työntekijä saa resursseja eettisten ristiriitojen käsittelyyn?</li> <li>• Miten mielestäsi tulisi kohdata oireilevia nuoria netissä?</li> </ul>
<b>IMPACT'S MEASUREMENT OF THE ONLINE COUNSELING SESSION</b>	<b>Feedback received</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Onko nuorten asiakkaiden antama palaute tukenut sinua työssäsi?</li> <li>• Miten sinulle on mahdollista arvioida työn vaikuttavuutta ja laatua?</li> <li>• Oletko pyytänyt suoraa palautetta nuorilta?</li> </ul>
	<b>Statistical data collected by the organization</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Miten tilastollista dataa mielestäsi pitäisi kerätä, jonka perusteella olisi mahdollista kehittää palvelun laatua?</li> </ul>
	<b>Quality of the service</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Miten työkokemuksen myötä osaamisesi on kehittynyt chat-neuvonnassa?</li> <li>• Onko chat-neuvontaa tukevia koulutuksia, tai osaamisalueita, joissa voisit kehittyä chat-neuvonnassa?</li> </ul>
	<b>Self-reflection</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Miten itsereflektointi, purku ja työnohjaus on tukenut sinua työssä?</li> <li>• Onko sinulla tiedossa työmenetelmiä, jotka voisivat hyödyntää myös muita työntekijöitä?</li> </ul>
	<b>Questionnaires and researches organized by providers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Miten palvelun järjestäjän nuorille suuntaamat kyselyt ovat vaikuttaneet työhösi, ja ovatko ne antaneet työhön suuntaa?</li> </ul>