



Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union



SUCCESS STORIES

Belgium

The Department of Social Work of the University College Ghent has been conducting research on the topic of “Social Work and Policing” the past years. In particular, two research domains can be considered as success stories to build the grounds for the project SWaPOL: The first is on balancing welfare and justice in the collaboration between social work and the police. The second is on the prevention of alcohol and drug abuse.

Balancing Welfare and Justice

The **first project** ran from **2010 till 2014** and was a research project in collaboration with the police zone of Ghent (a city in Flanders, the northern part of Belgium, consisting of more than 250.000 inhabitants). The main question of the project was: how do social workers and police officers collaborate in issue with minors, making use of their professional discretion? The outcomes of this research project were focused on the bachelor’s degree social work of the HOGENT, the training of police officers and the police zone Ghent.

With this project, the HOGENT tried to give an answer to a question the bachelor’s degree had to deal with already for some years, i.e. the fact that there were **students social work who did their work placement in social teams of the police**, without any frame of reference offered by the HOGENT concerning the work of social workers within a police system. It was felt that such an environment (the police) was not an evident organization for social workers to work in. If the HOGENT wanted to continue to offer work placements for social workers within the police, then we needed a frame of reference for both lecturers and students to prepare them for this work placement. Because the close collaboration with the police zone Ghent, they were very willing to participate in this project.

The project was initiated by the HOGENT (financed with means of the HOGENT Research Council, that allowed a part time research collaborator (80%) for 4 years).

More information: Van Steenberhe, T., Roose, R., Reynaert, D., & Easton, M. (2015). Policing minors: balancing welfare and justice. In It's for your own good: researching youth justice practices (pp. 15-30). VUB Press.

Training for Police Assistants

The **second project** builds upon this first project and consisted of a **training in 2015 for 'police assistants' at the Police Academy** of the province of East-Flanders. 'Police assistants' have a particular background and function within the police organization. They have both a degree in social work and policing and deal in their daily work with issues of welfare and justice. They are expected to have a broad knowledge of social problems, social policy, the social field of practice, youth care, etc. Because the expertise that was developed in project 1 (the research project), the Police Academy asked the HOGENT to be a partner in the training for police assistants.

The training consisted of 4 parts:

1. General module (38 hours of interactive teaching). Parts in which the HOGENT was involved: system-based approach in dealing with families; professional secrecy; deontology; the relation between social work and the police; welfare vs. justice.
2. Specific procedures and processes in the work of the police assistant (52 hours of interactive teaching). Parts in which the HOGENT was involved: the system of youth care; the legal position of minors in youth care
3. Particular missions of the police assistant (60 hours of interactive teaching). Parts in which the HOGENT was involved: drug-abuse, poverty, the organization of a 'world cafe' where future police assistants could meet organizations from the civil society
4. Work placement (160 hours), including compulsory work visits to 8 social organizations. The HOGENT was responsible for 2 intervisions consisting of 4 hours each.

At the end of the training, the students had a written and oral exam and had to write a portfolio of their work placement. 20 students participated in the training that ran from September till December 2015.

Didactics:

- Interactive teaching
- Workshops
- Discussion
- World café
- Work placement
- Field visits

Positive things:

- the possibility to exchange experiences, both with teachers as with other students, who have already a lot of work experience

Challenges:

- the different level of functioning and ability to reflect within the group of students;
- the combination of doing a training while working
- the complexity of working on the crossroad of welfare and justice (i.e. working in a compulsory framework)

Themes and settings:

- youth care
- poverty

- alcohol and drug prevention; evidence based prevention
- alcohol and drug prevention; motivational dialogue
- alcohol and drug prevention; police as the community worker
- drug abuse
- children's and human rights
- welfare vs. justice approach (professional discretion)
- issues of ethics and deontology (professional secrecy)