

Involving volunteers

in



**DON BOSCO
YOUTH-NET**

Introduction

The document that is now in front of you is a preparatory document for what should be a logical next step in the evolution of our international network Don Bosco Youth-Net. This document was created because of some problems that have risen at the international office and it suggests a solution for these problems. From the problem analysis on pages 5 and 6, you will learn that this solution also offers an answer to the possible threats that are approaching Don Bosco Youth-Net. This text is –of course- open to discuss in Bollington. We send it to you on beforehand so that you can think about your point of view before the weekend and not to surprise you too much in Bollington. To avoid further misunderstandings, it is good to know that with ‘new structure’ we mean the inclusion of local volunteers in the formal structure of Don Bosco Youth-Net. This means we don’t throw away the current structure, but that we add some elements to this structure. That is the ‘new’ structure we will talk about in what follows.

So, this document is about involving young volunteers in the formal structure of Don Bosco Youth-Net. Some of you will probably ask why we have to take this step. In fact it is quite simple: not only could the active involvement of young volunteers bring us a solution to some problems we are faced with, it also brings a more democratic and participative influence in our network. Both elements – and even more advantages of this new structure – will be dealt with in this document.

On the pages 5 and 6 we will start of with a kind of problem analysis. Which are the problems we are faced with at this moment? This is the first important step in the improvement process of an organisation: to see what and where the problems or the weaknesses of the organisation are. As a very young organisation, we can’t possibly expect things to be perfect from the very beginning. In October 2003, Don Bosco Youth-Net will officially exist for two years. This is a perfect time for some looking back on the things we already realised and looking forward to the things we still want to do and the way we want to do them.

In March we already made a master plan for the actions we plan to do until 2005. In Bollington, this master plan should be approved by the General Assembly. **The document that is now in front of you is not another master plan. It is the suggestion of a tool to help us realise the actions we have put forward in the master plan.**

After the problem analysis, we continue with the concrete solutions we see for the problems we are faced with. We designed a new structure for our network, with new task descriptions for each level of this structure. The new structure is presented schematically on page 7.

To end this document, we made a concrete time scheme for the realisation of this new structure, we make a suggestion for a possible training course for the volunteers we want to involve and we offer a profile for the volunteers we search.

Please do not consider this document as some kind of “coup d’état” from I don’t know who. It is a document we have to discuss about and as such the starting point for what I hope will be a fruitful discussion. Please read it through before judging it. After all, it’s you who will have to approve the changed structure or not.

We hope this document will help us in the continuous development of Don Bosco Youth-Net.

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Problem analysis

As announced in the introduction, we start of with a problem analysis. At the time we will be meeting in Bollington, Don Bosco Youth-Net will exist exactly two years. In these two years a lot has happened and a lot has changed. We decided to employ a full time staff member and we pushed things to a higher level with the making (and publication) of an ambitious Master Plan. Since we are a young organisation though, we cannot expect everything to go smoothly and perfectly from the beginning. Some of us are faced with some problems concerning the daily functioning of our network and we may not be blind for possible threats approaching Don Bosco Youth-Net.

The biggest problem we are faced with concerning the daily functioning is the hard communication between the different member organisations and the international office. The main task of the international office is to coordinate this network, to make sure everything is going as we planned and to give new impulses to the member organisations. This is only possible with the cooperation of the member organisations (in casu: the contact persons). The website cannot be up to date if the different member organisations do not announce their international activities on it, the newsletter will never be a real ‘news’ letter if the partners do not inform the international office about the things happening in their countries or their organisations, Don Bosco Youth-Net cannot represent the voice of the Don Bosco Youth on an international level if we don’t reach these young people directly and involve them in our policy and decision making.,... Of course there are a lot of causes for this problem. Many of the contact persons simply don’t have the time to do things for or even think about Don Bosco Youth-Net, which is perfectly understandable. The fact that we lay bare this problem is not to judge people, but to try to find a solution. That’s what this document is all about.

The daily functioning is one thing, another important thing are the threats that are approaching us, if we continue to work the way we do now, with the structure we now have. One of these threats is that we won’t be able to reach one or some of our goals – and goals are what organisations like Don Bosco Youth-Net are all about. With the current structure, it is almost impossible to be a good representative for the voice of the Don Bosco Youth. First of all because we were – up till now – unable to detect what is living with the young people and we

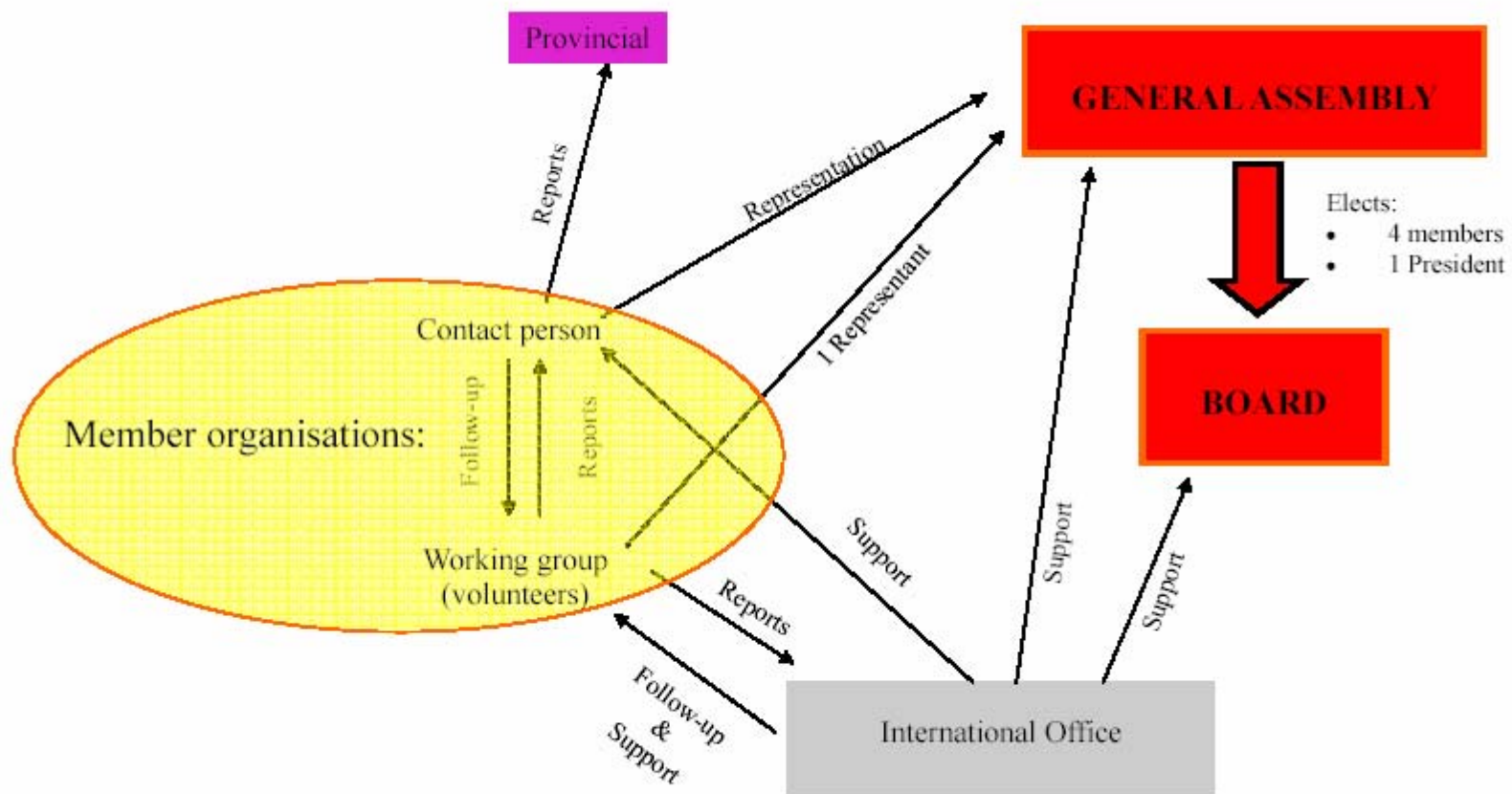
didn't really give much attention to this goal. Secondly, if we want to join formal structures like the European Youth Forum, we'll have to involve more young volunteers in our own formal structure. We are in the first place a youth organisation. This doesn't mean we can only have young people in our decision making organs, but it does mean they have to be represented in them. Not only will this be a requirement to join the European Youth Forum, but – and that's the most important – it is also a more democratic and participative way of working.

The reality of Don Bosco Youth-Net today is that some organisations are already being represented by young volunteers, other than the contact person from their organisation. Other organisations are represented by the contact persons, who are professionally working for that organisation and who are no longer considered 'youth' in the eyes of most European institutions (the age limit for 'youth' varies between these institutions and is situated between 25 and 35). This in no case means that we don't consider these people to be youthful, but the best way to know what young people want and think, is to get them to participate themselves in our formal structure and decision making organs.

All this also has some financial sides. If we want to be eligible for subsidies, we must show we really are a youth organisations, which in most cases means that 75% of the participants to our activities are aged under 30 or under 35 (depending on the kind of activity and the institution where you are applying). At this moment the only activities Don Bosco Youth-Net organises are network weekends or meetings. If the situation stays the same, these weekends will no longer be entitled to any kind of financial support. Neither would we qualify for some administrative grant, taking into account the current structure of Don Bosco Youth-Net.

Taking all these problems and possible threats into consideration, we suggest a new structure for Don Bosco Youth-Net. The main idea for this new structure is to create working groups of volunteers in each organisation member of Don Bosco Youth-Net. The tasks of these volunteers and their place in the new structure are presented on the following pages.

The new structure schematically



Who is who ?

1. The General Assembly

The main decision making organ of Don Bosco Youth-Net

Is composed of:

- 1 President (elected)
- 1 Secretary (staff member of the international office)
- 11 Contact persons
- 11 working group representatives
- 1 Co-opted from Don Bosco international (*we have to decide on this at the General Assembly*)
- X observers

⇒ 25 + X members

⇒ 12 votes (1 per country (=11) + co-opted (1), *also on the voting right for this co-opted member we have to decide at the GA*)

⇒ Secretary and observers have no voting rights, President confers with his country

2. The Board

Prepares the general Assembly and makes ad-hoc decisions (if possible)

Is composed of:

- 1 President (elected by the General Assembly)
- 4 Members (elected by the General Assembly)

3. The international office

Daily functioning of Don Bosco Youth-Net

Is composed of:

- 1 Full time staff member

4. Working groups

Follow-up of Don Bosco Youth-Net in local organisations

Are composed of:

- X volunteers per country (X can be decided in the local organisation, we think 2 to 3 should be enough, but organisations are free to decide on the number of volunteers)

Task descriptions:

1. Contact persons
 - Representation of the organisation in the General Assembly
 - Reporting to the provincial(s)
 - Follow-up and co-ordination of the working group (guarantee the quality of the work)
 - Motivating the volunteers

2. Working groups
 - plan and hold a meeting with the other volunteer(s) from their organisation once every two months
 - Representation of the young people in the General Assembly
 - Answer the questions of the international office
 - Reporting to the contact person and the international office
 - Follow-up of the website
 - Promotion of Don Bosco Youth-Net
 - Fundraising
 - Monitoring of international activities
 - Participation in international activities

3. International office
 - Training and support for working groups and contact persons
 - Support for the Board and the General Assembly
 - Fundraising
 - Project management
 - Master the website
 - Promotion of Don Bosco Youth-Net
 - Follow-up of European Youth policy
 - Administration
 - Edit the publications

4. President
 - Co-ordination and follow-up of the international office
 - Representation of Don Bosco Youth-Net at international level
 - Ad-hoc decision making
 - Preparation of the meeting of the Board and the General Assembly

The president can delegate some of his/her tasks to other persons. (for example representation of DBYN at the European Youth Forum).

Advantages of the new structure

As you could probably get out of the problem analysis, this new structure offers a lot of advantages for Don Bosco Youth-Net and the things we (want to) do.

- The volunteers in their working group can do a lot of the practical tasks that come along with the participation in this network. As such, the contact persons who are professionally active in their organisations should have less work to do for the network and can focus on the coordination of the working groups and the contacts with the provincial.
- With the instalment of the working groups, we can create a web of young people actively involved in Don Bosco Youth-Net. This brings along more, easier and continuous contacts between the organisations.
- There will be more continuity in the work of Don Bosco Youth-Net through the two-monthly meetings in each working group.
- It will be easier for Don Bosco Youth-Net to locate the 'needs' in every country and to plan our activities according to those needs.
- We will be able to hear the voice of the young people and especially the young volunteers themselves. This is important because we are a youth organisation who wants to make a difference for this target group. In other words: through this new structure, we are in direct contact with our target group.
- This new structure is more democratic and more participative. Not only are these two concepts very popular with European policy makers, it are also key values which every youth organisation should promote. By implementing this new structure, we go further than only talking and dreaming about the participation of young people in decision making.

How can we train our volunteers ?

We suggest to organise an international training course for the volunteers active in the local working groups. This training course should focus on following elements:

- What is Don Bosco Youth-Net?
- Intercultural learning
- Project management (for international projects)
- European Youth policy
- Fundraising
- P.R.

We will try to make an international training team, composed of 5 to 6 trainers.

Requirements for the trainers:

- Don Bosco background
- Experience in one of the fields indicated above
- International experience
- Active English knowledge
- Intercultural skills

(Of course this is a kind request to all the participants of this seminar to join the training team, or to look for people who could join this team)

- ⇒ The first prep meeting for this course could be held in Rome during the next Network weekend
- ⇒ The basic principle could be ‘learning by doing’ (simulation exercises, own experiences and knowledge of the participants as the basis for the training...)
- ⇒ The number of participants should be between 25 and 35.
- ⇒ The whole idea of the training course should never be to prescribe what the volunteers should do in their country or organisation. We don’t want to be very directive. We give them the context in which they will work and offer them some tools to help them in making things concrete. How they will organise things in their home country or organisation is completely up to the volunteers themselves.

Time Scheme

- October 2003- March 2004 : Recruitment of volunteer(s)
- 4 - 7 March 2004: Network weekend in Rome (1 volunteer per organisation present)
- April 2004 or October 2004: Training for volunteers

After the training, the working groups can start their activities. With the training we hope to increase the motivation by offering the volunteers some basic knowledge about Don Bosco Youth-Net and personal contacts with the staff member and the volunteers from the other countries.

We hope to create a continuity in these contacts by inviting one of the volunteers from each member organisation to every General Assembly and by organising a **yearly come-back meeting** for the volunteers. This come-back meeting should enable the volunteers from the different countries to exchange experiences, to talk about the problems they had faced and the solutions they had found for them. Above all, these come-back meetings should be the start of thinking, talking and making agreements about possible new international activities.

- March 2005: evaluation of the new structure from the point of view of the volunteers

Profile

Name of the organisation is looking for:

VOLUNTEERS

For the follow-up of our international network

Don Bosco Youth-Net

Profile:

- 18 - 25 years old
- Active English knowledge
- Strong international interest
- Familiar with the Don Bosco movement
- Experience in Youth work is recommended

Tasks:

- Follow-up of the questions from the international office
- Reporting to the international office
- Follow-up of the website www.donboscoyouth.net
- Reporting to the contact person from *name of the organisation + (name of the contact person, contact details, function in the organisation)*
- Promotion of Don Bosco Youth-Net in *name of the country*
- Look for possible participants for international projects in *name of the country*
- Monitoring of international youth activities
- Participation in international youth activities
- Participate in the decision making process of Don Bosco Youth-Net

We expect

- A commitment of at least two years
- Willingness to plan and hold a meeting with the other volunteer(s) from *name of the organisation* once every two months
- Participation in an international training course of Don Bosco Youth-Net

We offer

- A challenging commitment
- A lot of international contacts
- Many new and enriching experiences
- Cheap participation in international training courses, meetings or encounters (at least once a year)
- The opportunity to offer other young people chances to enrich their lives through international activities and contacts
- The opportunity to be at the basis of a very promising new international youth project and to help in its continuous development

We start:

- April or October 2004