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Aquí t'escoltem (ATE - We listen to you here)

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An “Aqui t'escoltem” (ATE - We listen to you here) point is an opportunity to provide adolescents with a space and with the resources to develop their personal and social skills, training and teamwork, making them the protagonists of the processes and activities proposed there. The work undertaken at ATE points is based on recognising that adolescents have their own resources for responding to their concerns or needs. Likewise, it is geared towards helping them improve their self-knowledge and making them aware of their strengths, opportunities and resources. It facilitates a process of support for their personal growth and the development of their own individual and social skills. The ATE points, launched by the Youth Department in 2013, are a municipal service for adolescents aged 12 to 20 located in adolescent or youth centres outside school hours. Together with the Centre for Families with Adolescents, the ATEs make up the Service for Adolescents and Families (SAIF).

Introduction

In many cases, the transition from childhood to adolescence generates uncertainty and insecurity in both adolescents themselves and the families who share in the experience. Entering adolescence is a unique and stimulating time but also a complex one that has to be experienced as an important part of people's lives. It is when they start to become independent, develop their own values and principles, and when, at the same time, they suffer feelings of abandonment and insecurity over making their own decisions, their appearance and their relationship with others.

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Most adolescents and their families experience this time with an attitude of curiosity, discovery and adaptation, though not without a certain resignation, while some families are faced with rather complex and disconcerting situations. Others, fortunately a minority, find themselves immersed in worrying attitudes, conduct and behaviour, even crises, that can eventually have a negative effect on the development of an adolescent's personal, social and academic progression.

When talking about adolescence, we have to make reference to the mental health as well as the emotional and psychological well-being of the adolescent population, because this has become one of the most worrying aspects for professionals and services that work with teenage children in different fields (social, education, leisure and so on).

Evidence tells us that problems associated with mental health and emotional dissatisfaction grow among people in this age group. According to the latest Survey of Risk Factors among Secondary school Students (FRESC), conducted by the Barcelona Public Health Agency in 2016⁴, and comparing it with the 2012 survey, the mental health of compulsory and post-compulsory secondary education students has deteriorated in recent years. If we look at the survey, we can see girls have a higher risk of suffering a mental health problem than boys, and that this gradually becomes worse with age. Some 35% of girls doing a baccalaureate or intermediate vocational training course are vulnerable to suffering a mental health problem.

This situation shows the importance of highlighting and increasing existing resources, as well as the need for a specific service for adolescents and families with adolescent children that can carry out prevention and support work, adopting a comprehensive approach. In other words, viewing adolescence as a life stage with its own idiosyncrasies and characteristics, where childhood is left behind and the future young person and adult begins to take shape.

In this sense, the Service for Adolescents and Families (SAIF), formed by the Centre for Families with Adolescents and the "Aqui t'escoltem" (ATE) points, aims to provide support for people going through the adolescence. This means offering both adolescents and their families tools and skills for preventing problems and promoting emotional health, introducing them to existing services and resources in the public and private sector that are available to them⁵.

1. The ATE points

The ATE points occupy a place in the primary prevention and promotion sphere, offering training, tools and resources to this target group (adolescent boys and girls) so they can experience this time for themselves, taking advantage of every opportunity for growth and support. On the other hand, the service also has to detect, guide, motivate and refer adolescents to specialist services when necessary.

This municipal service takes a comprehensive view of adolescent support, treating the different aspects of a person: intrapsychic, relational, group and social, as well as the complex relationship between these.

4. The survey is available at: <https://www.aspb.cat/arees/la-salut-en-xifres/enquesta-fresc/>

5. Government measure to set up a service for adolescents and families with adolescent children. Barcelona City Council. Barcelona, November 2013

Its activity is geared towards fostering self-knowledge and raising self-awareness, improving communication, assertiveness and the capacity to set limits, as well as providing experiences in a group context that can encourage diversity and conflict as a learning process.

To do this, the service is based on two types of support:

- Group work, which offers adolescents workshops, activities and spaces for reflection.
- Individual work, which offers a space for personal and confidential advice, providing adolescents with support when they are disoriented, have doubts or are suffering.

So, each ATE has a social education professional who joins the activity and group reflection spaces, as well as a psychology professional who is responsible for the individual listening and support space.

The approach of these professionals is based on the premise that these young people already have their own resources and a large part of the answers they are looking for they can find, and must look for, in themselves.

With this hypothesis, professional action seeks to foster a process of support that is basically geared towards helping adolescents gain confidence from their own experiences, with their strengths and opportunities, and from their own resources for dealing with them, as well as towards developing their own individual and social skills,

1.1. Background

The origin of the ATE points lies in the Pròpolis project, which gave rise to a youth centre, the Espai Jove Garcilaso, in the Sant Andreu District, in January 2013.

Prior to this, the youth centre team launched a participatory research-action process in which professionals from different sectors (education, employment, psychological and social work, among others) were interviewed, while surveys were carried out and discussion groups were held with adolescents to diagnose the real needs, difficulties and demands of adolescents as a whole, as well as find out which aspects were not being covered due to a lack of services.

This diagnosis revealed the need for services and professionals who could support teenagers through their adolescence, tackling their fears, anxieties and unease.

The project, initially called Pròpolis, grew out of this conception, with the intention of metaphorically reproducing in the lives of adolescents the construction of their own propolis, imitating what bees do in their hive⁶. with the aim of offering adolescents and young people the tools for improving their personal and social skills and stimulating personal growth. At the same time, this project had the idea of creating an intervention model that would enable the different sides of a person to be treated in a comprehensive way. These skills were worked on with a social education professional who offered workshops, group work and also by supporting other activities and campaigns at the Espai Jove Garcilaso, where it was located.

6. Bees produce propolis and use it as insulation and protection to prevent their enemies, air currents and cold from entering the hive, as well as a disinfectant-bactericide that helps keep it aseptic.

The project was expanded in May 2013, adapting it to the various needs and demands of adolescents and offering an individual listening and support space by incorporating a psychology professional. Thus the city's first ATE point began as a pilot programme. In November 2013, the City Council approved the government measure for creating a service for adolescents and families with adolescent children.

This measure recognised adolescence as a stimulating, unique and complex time; a time of curiosity, discovery and adaptation and, at the same time, feelings of helplessness, insecurity or confusion in both adolescents and their families. It also proposed setting up the ATE point at the Espai Jove Garcilaso and five other centres by the end of 2017, as well as creating a centre for families with adolescents to provide training, information, guidance and advice to families with adolescent children.

And so the Service for Adolescents and Families (SAIF) came into being, formed by the ATE points and the Centre for Families with Adolescents, which work together and complement each other to meet the needs of adolescence.

2. Objectives

The main objective of the ATE points is to offer adolescents a listening and support space to work on personal and social skills as well as personal growth. This can be spelt out in the following specific objectives:

- Foster their self-knowledge and raise their awareness.
- Improve their communication and self-expression.
- Improve their assertiveness and capacity for setting limits.

To achieve these objectives, the ATE points provide tools and resources for boosting their personal and social skills, and stimulating personal growth. How? On the one hand, by offering a quarterly programme of workshops, group activities and spaces for reflection, based on their interests and needs. And on the other, an individual and confidential listening and support space.

3. Methodology

This is based on a perspective of participation and working closely with adolescents, where they are the protagonist in their process of personal growth and, therefore, the centre of the service itself. This means the methodology has to be flexible and adapted at all times to the reality, needs and diversities of adolescents.

Proximity is a key element for reaching adolescents and involving them. To facilitate this, the ATEs are spread around the city districts in places frequented by adolescents, basically youth centres, seeking proximity, contact with and the involvement of the adolescent population.

Likewise, the staff foster links with other professionals and services that work with the adolescent population, participating in local boards and joint activities so they are familiar with, and close to, the specific reality of the adolescent population in the area of action at all times.

With this perspective in mind, ATE point social educators not only organise and carry out activities in the centre where they are based, they also find out the needs and situation of adolescents in the area and move around on the basis of these. So they can be found in the various youth animation spaces or centres for adolescents but also doing joint activities with animators, youth informers, street educators, and so on.

This activity always takes into account the specific characteristics of adolescents, their interests and how they interact with others. The premise for both group and individual work is that the adolescent is the protagonist and the one responsible for their process, so their interests and demands are reflected in the way the professionals plan, programme and carry out their work

Group action offers a quarterly programme of activities in various formats that cover the adolescents' own tastes and interests and which support their development with work on personal growth and emotional support objectives. More specifically, they offer the possibility of learning a technique (hip-hop, theatre, dance, etc.) that the adolescent likes and is interested in, bring them to the service and encourage them to take part, while helping them to think about and question their feelings, emotions, attitudes to others, as well as the way they act and handle conflicts, among other things.

Individual action offers a support space that is easy to access. Adolescents can contact the service via WhatsApp on their mobile, to book an appointment. They can also go to the youth information services (JIP Service, "Jove informa't i participa – get informed and involved – and the PIJs, youth information points). This is a confidential space to help establish a link and to connect with the adolescent concerned. At the same time, it works on their commitment to receiving support in the space and identifying the aspects they want to work on.

4. Resources

There are currently five psychology professionals at the ATE points and nine social educators who provide a service at the city's nine points. They are organised by district and the psychology service, which offers 8 individual support sessions, dedicates 12 hours to each one, while there are 25 hours of social education in each district.

5. How ATEs operate and public service hours

5.1 Group support:

Group support is available Monday to Friday, from 5 pm to 8 pm, and is primarily for young people aged 12 to 20 who live, study or work in Barcelona. They can access it by signing up in advance. The ATE point social educator is responsible for planning, publicising, programming, holding and evaluating the workshops and activities. Specialised workshop organisers may be used to carry out workshops or activities (Diagram 1).

Diagram 1. Location of ATE points in Barcelona

Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Detect the needs and interests of adolescents in the area.• Define objectives and the types of activities based on the information gathered.• Draw up a draft activities programme.
Publicity and registration	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Publicise the activities in the area.• Open the registration period.• Programme the different sessions (if other professionals are taking part in them, this is done jointly).
Group intervention	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Hold the sessions.• Follow-up and evaluation of each session.• Adapt the sessions to the needs of all the young people.
Evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Evaluate the activity (evaluation questionnaire)

Some basic premises are established⁷ that the professionals have to take into account when planning and running activities so the ATE points fulfil their role of providing emotional education and supporting adolescents in the processes of personal growth.

- Create safe spaces for expressing emotions and diversity, and for combating prejudices and stereotypes.
- Create activities that facilitate both experience and reflection.
- Dedicate a space in the activities for becoming aware of oneself, and of group relationships and dynamics.
- Approach conflicts as a learning opportunity.
- Put the emphasis on adolescents' own responsibility and autonomy.

These activities can be done in municipal facilities or public spaces.

Although the ATE points are based in a municipal facility where most of the group activity takes place, the professional team adapts to the characteristics of the area and the needs of its adolescent population. Thus, it is envisaged as a mobile service that moves around the area in response to the needs and requests that the different agents or services working with adolescents might receive.

7. "Specific Technical Specifications" for hiring the Service for Adolescents and Families (SAIF). Youth Department. Children, Youth and Elderly Services Directorate. Social Rights. Barcelona City Council. Barcelona, 2017.

The ATE goes where the young people are and works with professionals, services and other organisations. This strategy and function of the points, the purpose of which is to incorporate the service's emotional perspective into activities, is called ATEMobil.

5.2 Individual support

Each ATE point currently offers a confidential listening and support space for eight hours a week, organised on two afternoons/evenings a week, from 4 pm to 8 pm. Individual support sessions of one hour, run by a psychologist, are offered in this period. Generally, there are between 3 and 6 sessions, depending on the needs of each adolescent and the possibilities for referral when necessary. The adolescent can access the service by getting in contact and asking for an appointment. Even if professionals or other services refer them, the adolescent still has to contact the ATE to ask for an appointment. That can be done in person, by phone, via WhatsApp or through the youth information services. The individual support service at ATE points is intended to offer support to young people, at times when they might be confused, have doubts or be suffering, with an inquisitive, thoughtful, close, rigorous and empowering vision. This requires a link and connection to be established with the adolescent and, above all, their commitment and central role in the process.

It is therefore important to establish a framework at the first session which defines the following:

- The adolescent's commitment to this space. (They have to sign a sheet where they commit to attending the sessions agreed and notify in advance if they are unable to attend.)
- The confidentiality of this space. (The adolescent is informed that it is a confidential support space between them and the professional but, if a situation is detected in relation to the adolescent or third parties that requires protection measures, the professional will have to take any action they consider appropriate).
- The plan for future sessions. (The adolescent, with the support of the professional, has to identify the reason for their consultation and the needs they want to work on through individual support.)

Diagram 2. Individual support stages

Access to the service	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Direct contact by the adolescent to request an appointment.• Referral by a professional / service to the ATE point and contact by the adolescent to request an appointment.• Scheduling the appointment.
First appointment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Define the adolescent's requests and the objectives that need to be worked on.• Fill in a commitment sheet with the adolescent.
Follow-up and referral	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Advice sessions between the psychologist and the young person.• Referral to other services or group support if need detected.• Contact with the family when necessary, with prior agreement reached with the young person. Referral to the Families Centre if requested or a need is detected.
Closure and evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Final advice session, evaluation with the young person and closure.

5.3 Other services

Following the previous line, ATE dialogues were born for training, reflection, debate and exchange of experiences for professionals working with adolescents in municipal facilities and youth services⁸. This takes the form of a quarterly space in the morning in which a topic related to working with adolescents is addressed, emphasizing the emotional dimension. The organization and conduct of the session is carried out between two or three educators from different ATE points and depending on the subject, expert professionals can be hired to participate. Finally, it should be mentioned that both individual and group care, as well as what we set out in the previous paragraphs, is not possible without networking with different professionals and services. ATEs are currently part of the youth service boards and mental health boards that exist in the different districts of the city, becoming a reference service in the emotional support of adolescents.

6. Evaluation

ATE point evaluation takes various aspects into account which can give us an overall view of their work in the area where they are based and on a city level. The evaluation is ongoing, both in terms of the process and the end results. Different types of support are taken into account (group, individual and that offered by other youth facilities and services) and have been outlined above.

The evaluation is both quantitative and qualitative. The quantitative analysis gives us data on the different types of requests and needs attended to, the number of adolescents that have come to and taken part in the ATE support, as well as data on the types of activities offered, the referrals made and teamwork. The quantitative indicators that feature in the Specific Technical Specifications of the Service for Adolescents and Families (SAIF) are

8. According to the "Youth Facilities and Services Plan 2018-2028" of Barcelona City Council, available for download at: <https://ajuntament.barcelona.cat/joves/ca/canal/pla-dequipaments-i-serveis-juvenils-2018-2028>.

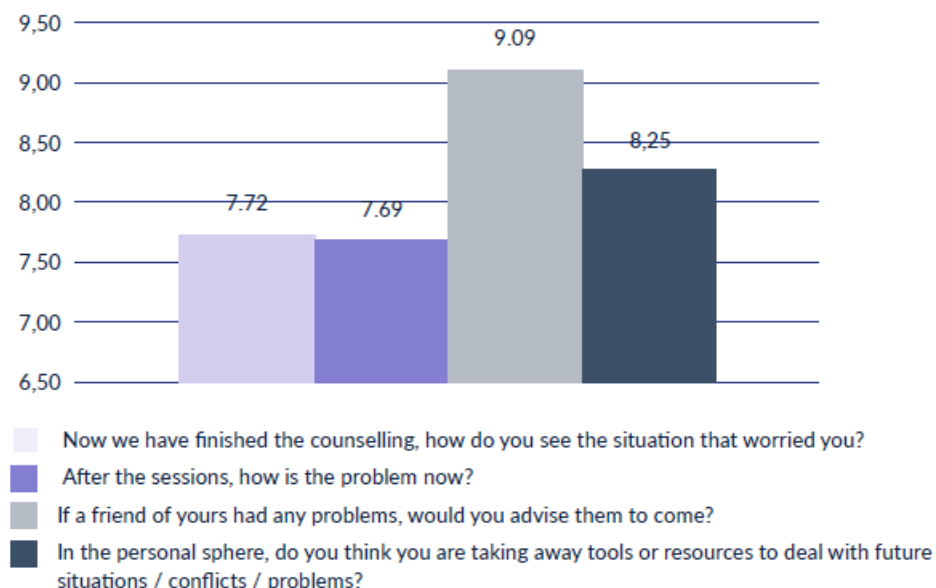
collected monthly by the various ATE points and included in the annual report. The qualitative evaluation takes into account the views of adolescents, by means of feedback with the ATE professionals throughout the process and the final evaluation questionnaires, which are completed at the end of the individual or group support. The data analysis appears in the quarterly and annual reports of the ATE points.

7. Results

In 2018, the ATE points offered individual listening and support to 348 young people. Of these, 68.1% were girls and 31.9% were boys, with an average age of 16. The requests for individual support show 33.89% of adolescents said they were uneasy in the family environment, 11.11% expressed difficulty in establishing relationships and 9.07% showed general emotional unease. Of the 88.5% of cases attended to, we can distinguish between those closed satisfactorily due to an improvement in the cause of the consultation (31%), drop-outs, where the adolescents stopped attending the scheduled sessions (19.5%) and referrals to other services (5.2%). The rest are cases that are still open or have temporarily been stopped (32.8%).

As regards the adolescents' evaluation of the service in an online questionnaire, sent via WhatsApp, in the 43 responses received in 2018, the most highly rated aspect is the recommendation of the service (9.09 out of 10) followed by the tools and resources taken away for dealing with future situations (8.25 out of 10). And finally, with scores over 7, we find the perceived improvement in the situation (7.72) and the state of the initial problem (7.69). As regards the evaluation of their own process, the data show an improvement in the situation that led them to attend the services, and a positive evaluation of the tools acquired.

Graph 1. Evaluation of the individual support service process. Barcelona, 2018



Below we have put together some of the comments the adolescents made regarding how useful the individual support had been for them:

- “To calm down before acting and not attach any importance to things that don’t need it.”
- “I’m more aware of myself and better prepared to know and let others know what I need. It’s also helped me to see what is and what I would like my position in life to be and, therefore, to know myself better.”
- “Above all, confidence in myself and not thinking about things that haven’t happened yet.”
- “To give myself time and understand what I want. To talk about problems with my partner.”

As regards the group activity offered by the eight ATE points there were at that time, 661 young people took part in 2018. Of those, 68.1% were girls, 30.9% were boys and 1.1% did not identify themselves as either of those genders. The average age was 16.2.

From the adolescents’ evaluation of the service once the group activity had finished, we can draw the following data, based on 235 replies:

- They like the activities proposed (4.8 out of 5).
- What is worked on in the activities can be useful to them (4.5 out of 5).
- They feel comfortable with the team of professionals who gave the workshop (4.8 out of 5).
- The workshop has helped them improve some personal aspect (3 out of 5).

Below are some of the adolescents’ comments taken from the questionnaires regarding what participating in the group activity at the ATE points has given them:

- “The professionals give me confidence and when I’m with them I feel good and safe.”
- “It helps me control and express my anger.”
- “It’s a place where I can feel free.”
- “It’s helped me accept myself as I am and feel better.”
- “It helps me lose my embarrassment and foster creativity.”
- “It’s helped me to be more sure of myself and know myself better.”
- “I’ve improved my flexibility, learned to love myself and know my body better.”
- “I’ve been able to develop my personality without feeling judged.”
- “I’ve learned to face situations and how to react.”

8. Conclusions and future challenges

The ATE points are an accessible service close to adolescents, that do not require a prior referral or adults to use it. This means the adolescents feel more comfortable and confident about expressing what they want and saying what their problems are. It conceptualises what they want to work on as emotional unease, marking the difference between mental health and what is emotional unease with the time of their life: problems of school bullying, their partner, doubts about sexuality and gender, and relationships with friends, among other things. These characteristics explain why young people say the service makes them feel comfortable and they do not feel stigmatised. They value its proximity, immediacy, the right to be informed about what surrounds them. An important aspect of the ATE points is their holistic perspective, the fact that they work on different aspects of adolescence, as the reasons for consulting the service are linked to issues relating to family, gender, affective relationships, education, sexuality, emotional unease, and so on.

The ATE points were launched in 2013. Now there are nine of them and there are plans to set up a tenth in 2020. They incorporate the opportunities and strengths of their environment by being located in functioning youth centres, and seek to intervene through the professionals of services in the area. The work of the ATE points is now firmly established and recognised by various services and professionals. The service has impacts on and direct benefits for adolescents both in terms of the individual or group support they receive and the detection of cases where they need to be referred to specialist services. It also has impacts on the area where it operates. Moreover, the request for support has increased exponentially from the beginning to the present day. Thus, the ATE points have now become a benchmark service as regards promoting emotional health and adolescence and they have continued to grow. So this is a good time to set ourselves challenges and think more about the intervention model and its limits as well as improving the evaluation, to develop the indicators and data that might help us analyse the impact of the ATE points in Barcelona.

One of the most important challenges facing ATE is constantly adapting to the needs and concerns of young people, which vary and change. For that reason, we have also started a process of redefining the service with adolescents as the protagonists, where they decide how the service has to operate, useful channels of communication, new concerns and existing fears. Our intention is for them to be active players in the service, as spokespersons and promoters who are ever more prepared and able to support their peers through processes and thus contribute to creating between all of us, as a community, a propolis that enables them to face their difficulties and frustrations, and become increasingly empowered and ready for adult life.

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