

## **VALDEKU YOUTH CENTER**

Enabling young people make sense of themselves and the world so that they could find the things that truly inspire them and fill them with passion and joy

### **Introduction**

Valdeku youth center is a suborganization of Nõmme Leisure Center. Besides Valdeku youth center the leisure center also includes a second youth center in Pääsküla, two centers for the elderly, a day center for kids with learning and/or behavioral difficulties, a center for kids and youngsters with special needs and a playroom for preschool children with their parents. All those centers are located across different areas of Nõmme.

Our youth center is located in Nõmme Maja, which is the administrative building of the beautifully green district of Nõmme in Tallinn. The youth center has two small rooms in one corner of the first floor. We are opened for youngsters from Monday to Friday from 13:00 to 19:00. On average we have about 15-20 youngsters per day. Some of them stay from start to finish and others come only for a quick board game. We are ready to offer activities to youngsters aged between 7 to 26 but our most frequent visitors are aged between 10 to 14 with a few exceptions.

Valdeku youth center is special because it has a rather personal approach to the people who are connected to it. Our youth center's rooms are pretty small which helps to actually meet each and every one who step into our space but our hearts have room for way more joy and fun than our rooms, so we are also available on our Discord server and when it gets warmer, in fun places of Nõmme.

This means the youth work we do isn't limited by the walls of our center. It's more about the people who do it and what kind of joy they are willing to share.

### **What we do**

Our daily tasks are focused around building trustworthy relationships with the youngsters who are in the center. We try to help them become the best version of themselves the way they see it. To do that we: spend time and play with them (we like board games a lot!); keep up our virtual presence for the youngsters who can't make it to the center or just like to be updated about our daily activities; notice if something troubles a certain youngster and help in the ways we can or cheer with them if something is going great. We really want young people to try new things and be inspired, so we offer free hobby classes and events that they are interested in and also encourage youngsters to create their own events in the youth center. Actually, as youth work is supposed to be done following what youngsters want and need, we do our best to include them as much as possible. Whether it's a decision of what we plan to do the next week or what color our logo should be, we always include youngsters by asking them and encouraging them to bring new ideas to the table.

Because we aren't alone, a considerable part of our job is cooperation with other organizations of

our leisure center and other youth centers of Tallinn. During home-office times we had weekly Gaming Day Wednesdays with other youth centers of Tallinn and for two years we have been organizing a big gaming tournament called GitGud in autumn with them. As far as Nõmme Leisure Center goes, we mostly just offer a helping hand when we can. Over the years some traditions have developed. For example, we celebrate Christmas together, we go cleaning around Nõmme for World Cleanup Day, every summer we have a half-a-year get together and do other fun things together. For example, we have tried to make active Wednesday mornings a thing but so far it has just been the Valdeku's team, but we'll get there one day!

## **The volunteer**

Because our center has 3 full-time workers, a volunteer is a very valued team member. So far, our center has had 4 volunteers before. Each of them has been a breath of fresh air and without them knowing, they have given our youth center a little something that we keep with us years after they have been here. As mentioned, a volunteer is basically an equal team member. That means that we expect the volunteer to also create trustworthy relationships with youngsters, be interested in what kids would like and carry out volunteer's own ideas for events and/or hobby classes. Generally, just be a helping hand but with a twist of a volunteer's own nature. We really appreciate a good culture day/week, where we learn about our volunteers' favorite games, foods and life all in all. Our most frequent visitors are rather young. Although they are usually pretty good with English, it's more fun for the volunteer to learn a little bit of Estonian, to connect more. That goes also for the team. We are good with talking in English but when it comes to connecting with other members of Nõmme Leisure Center, knowing Estonian really helps. Because we play a lot of board games and like to be outside in the summertime, it's good if the volunteer has a playful and sporty character. You definitely don't need to know how to play basketball or "Betrayal at house on the hill" but it's helpful if you are willing to learn. Global pandemic has changed our job and the Internet/social media is not only for advertising us. We created an online youth center in a Discord server. We use it to play and communicate with youngsters. It is a part of our daily job whether we are isolating or not. To help our volunteer catch up, we offer a work laptop for it.

If you want to find more information about us, we are available on several social media platforms and we have a website.

Website <https://www.nomme.ee/valdeku-noortekeskus/>

Discord server [bit.ly/nommenortsid](https://bit.ly/nommenortsid)

Instagram @valdekunoortekeskus

Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/valdekunoortekeskus>

## **Marta Valera Garcia**

Our current volunteer from Spain

“Even though I have only been working at Valdeku for 4 months now, I feel that I have learned a lot. Not only about myself but also about youth work and how to work with youngsters.

For me, the fact that Valdeku is a small place has been an advantage because that has allowed me to get to know more about the children who often come to the center. I have taught them things about my country and myself, but I have also learned a lot from them. They are energetic, funny and they are always willing to try new things, so you will be able to develop any kind of idea that you have. Moreover, you will learn a lot about Estonian culture and language thanks to them. If you are thinking about working with kids in the future and want to gain experience in the field or you want to discover if working with youngsters is something for you, it would be the perfect place to find out.



In case your goal is not realizing this, it will definitely be an opportunity to know more about yourself. Deciding to do a volunteering project for a year is a big decision and will bring changes to your life, but if you are surrounded by the right people, everything is easier. Working with my coworkers in Valdeku has helped me to be more self-confident, more communicative and to know my worth. You will be working in a safe place with people that are going to be there for you in case you need help. So whatever your goals are during the project, I am sure Valdeku will be the right place to achieve them.”