

## 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 three 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 steps 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 the Covid pandemic home-office times, we had weekly Gaming Day Wednesdays with other youth centers of Tallinn and for three 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 5 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. 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 Valdeku Noortekeskus (page)

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## Estelle Lafitte

Our current volunteer from France (year 2022/23)



“Almost at the end of my ESC project, it’s time for me to find a successor. During these past eight months, I have learned about youth work, Estonian culture and about myself as well.

Youth work was a new domain for me, I didn’t study it, but I still find myself useful in Valdeku noortekeskus. A bit after my arrival, I started to help my coworkers with the cooking class, and after a bit, the cooking class was a way for me to connect with the youngsters. I have helped plan the recipes during this year. Then, because Valdeku specializes in board games, I instantly bonded with youngsters. I have introduced them to my favorite board games and attend the board game club regularly. The youngsters coming to the youth center are usually the same every day, so it’s really easy to connect with them. They are independent and like to be around foreigners to know more about their culture.

Valdeku is a small place to work, but as a volunteer I feel like I have learned so many things like organizing events, designing posters, posting on social media, helping the community of Nõmme and visiting other youth centers in Tallinn. Valdeku is a trustworthy, joyful, and environment-friendly place thanks to the workers and the youngsters. Being a volunteer here allows me not to feel far away from my home country and leaving them soon is a heartbreaker. If you are interested in board games, gaming, crafting, organizing events and challenging yourself, Valdeku is the right place to be.

The ESC project is a life changer, it allows you to grow and understand yourself. Being away from your people and living on your own is a big challenge, but that experience gives you so much in return whatever your goals are.”