Hi, my name is Marco Haas. I'm a youth worker at Stichting Dock in Amsterdam. I work at the talent factory here, talent factory De Valk. It's a location where we primarily focus on the talents of youth. I'm also a youth worker in school, so nearby I work at the Metro Museum, where I engaged a lot with the youth of the age of, well, let's say 12 to till 15, 16.

Um, and I notice a lot of, I focus a lot on co-creation. To define a little bit about digital, youth work, um, I learned today that's more focused on a broader term of everything you do that has to do something to do with digital skill sets. So it could be editing a podcast and you're already working on digital youth work.

Um, I'm also a project lead at, um, stichting Dock to focus on online youth work. It's a little bit different to the terminology being based on. Um, you have different domains. So, school, house, the neighborhood, but also online. And as we all know, online is very big, has a big influence on everybody, especially the youth.

Um, so therefore we primarily focus on online, youth work. And what does it mean? What do we do? What does it look like? Um, and this is something we're still in discovery of, something we already had a lot of, a lot of work to do on the other domain areas. Um, so therefore we had a project lead function that came on and to say things like, what is there, what to do research, what are the needs? What are the investments? What new policies need to be written? How do we co-create in this manner? And it's not just about youth workers. So everybody has an opinion about what youth workers should do. Um, but most of the time they forget about what we need to be: More sufficient in doing online youth work. so there's a little bit of difference in terminology and who I am and what I'm focusing on. And I'd like to tell you more about City Games. It's one of the cocreation platforms that we are building with you. So, yeah, like I said, we started, I love co-creation with the youth.

Um, that is something that appealed to me by just co-creating with the youth. I'm always amazed by the creative ideas and out of the box mentality that they have. Um, but also that I learned a lot from them. I used to be the most technical person I know, but due to time and, and focus they already showed me that I'm already a boomer almost.

No, but it's really fun to really co-create with the youth. Um, so you can learn from them, but you can also guide them in their process. And especially with co-creation, there is a process that is really, really helpful to guide yourself and your crew towards an end goal and be as sufficient and efficient as possible.

Uh, so yeah, how we started with City Games, how it all came to be. Um, I was at school and I saw everybody at school hanging on in, on their phones playing. And I thought, well, they're really antisocial. What happened to you? They should play soccer and stuff like that. And then I approached them and I saw them playing a game called Brawl Stars, probably. You've probably heard of it. And they were playing against each other and it was really fun and engaging and

they were like the crew and then hanging out and it was like less commutative about talking about all kinds of stuff, but really playing a game in, in, in, in, in the break time.

So getting to know these youth better, ask them a question. If you could organize something, what would it be? And they screamed at the same time, Fortnite, Fortnite, we wanna organize a Fortnite tournament. So the enthusiasm was really there. And I always love to search for the intrinsic motivation of, of youth, because otherwise it would be.

Really, in Dutch you say 'draak van een project'. So it's like really a real hassle to really get them going to the end result. So therefore, I was searching for the intrinsic, um, motivation to give them the fuel to keep going and stuff. So what we said, like, okay, you wanna do Fortnite?

Um, there is an opportunity that came up to invest a call it MDT, community service. And in it you, the youth have to come up with an idea to help their neighborhood, do something of value for the community and they will get. 1200 Euro budget to organize anything they would like to do could be cooking for elders or doing artwork for the kids.

Now, they came up with City Games. Well, Fortnite City it was called, it was called first, and then they said like, okay, well what are we gonna do? Yeah, we wanna battle loneliness because gaming is an ultimate tool to really combat lonelyness. And I already met friends all over the world, so let's focus on that now.

From there on, we created a tournament starting with an online tournament qualifier and then building up to a physical and mini festival. And we attracted 180 youth for the qualifier, and more than 100 youth came to the physical location. And it was a really, beautiful experience where the youth invested more than 80 hours to really build everything that came up to the whole process, but especially the end tournament was amazing because the youth had to learn how to do design thinking, event management, project planning. They used Trello as an app to really get the task that needed to do, to remember it. They learned how to be, to host meetings.

Um, and it was really helpful for them to really get the overview because they can, as you know, these were 12-year-old kids. They were in the first grade and they went all over the place, left, right, up, down, and they also wanted to have a lot of fun. So we adjusted the process based on their needs and also their capabilities.

That's something co-creation should always value. In the beginning especially to really, find the process that is needed for them to really create something. So it could be that you can, bring in something that we did as well as be efficient as possible, and from there end, we can also have fun at the end game, play, play hide and seek.

In this building, it was all kinds of stuff that motivated them as well. Um, yeah, and therefore we ended up with a mini festival. But during the process we, we, we focused on just two schools in Amsterdam, but Word got around and other, other youth from other, other places that started calling us like, no, we want to participate as well, why can't we join in? And so we said that we

only have this kind of budget, so we have to limit the, the, the, applications. And therefore we said, okay, next year we are gonna, ask for more budget, try to seek more partners, and hopefully we'll be able to really scale the project for more youth. so stay tuned.

So I'll tell you more about it later. So you guys have been waiting for the end result. What do we do this year? Well, we gathered a lot more budget, based also on the results we made visual the first time. So I think that's also important to know that, um, try to make it as visually as possible because the people who need to invest more in these kinds of initiatives or in the ideas that you guys have, um, the more visual it is, the more tangible the impact's gonna be. And that helped us a lot in getting more, the more budget, and also aligning our interest from the youth with the interests from all those who would be able to give. Any funding or anything else. So those two elements were really crucial in getting more budget for scaling this project as well.

So I think that is something I would like to share with you. Um, and where we are now is like we are, we have scaled from 100 people to 600 people who will be able to join us. Yeah, City Games Festival because for first it was called Fortnite City, but then the youth game, yeah, we want to play other games and stuff like that.

So it grew into a bigger platform and more on the focus of playing games online and offline, like playing cards physically, but also Rock, paper, scissors and making it that a digital way or form of, but also all the popular games online, of course. And the whole concept is co-creation, build, have fun together, explore, co-create, build, and really claim your own space, your own community.

Um, there's also a focus this year, so every year we would like to focus on several teams, and this year we decided to focus on building a digital safe space. We noticed a lot about the online world, that everybody had an opinion about it. Everybody sees the urgency, the risks, um, but a lot. In the end, a lot of, a lot of feedback came like, well, yeah, we try to change as much, as much as possible, but it's slow because we have regulations we cannot overhaul, big tech and all those things.

What we focused on is like, okay, but what if there's an alternative? What if we build something with the youth? It's not about them building the best, most privately secured and perfect community, but it's the process that counts the most. So what we focus on is building a process that aligns their vision of building a safe space for themselves and also other youth in other processing programs told us about, like we just miss a place where we can be ourselves. Most of the youth are afraid to even post their pictures because of the nude pictures that they make from it. The deep fakes and the deep nudes. So. It's crucial in the physical environment that everybody has the right to play.

That same human right is also in the online world as a necessity as it is in the physical world. And because of all the interest of big tech criminals or anything else, you see a lot of youth being targeted for their attention and also for other purposes. And therefore, we'd like to guide youth to an alternative where they can either always ask questions if they don't know if

something happened. They can always ask in an anonymous way, but they're always there for the youth workers that they have in the physical world. They also have them online. Um, and that's what we're gonna focus on. So we're gonna use Discord as one of our platforms too. Build this community.

Uh, we have a template fixed for the youth to really get started. it's gonna go live today. Um, and from there on we go in co-creation. So we are gonna ask the youth what one, what going to do polls or anything else with different roles so they can join the promotion team, the crew, they can join the content crew, the influencer crew.

So we have all kinds of lanes in which they can connect with other youth. But also youth workers that guide them in their profession, in their talent, skills and development of what it is they need to really help build this platform. Um, and they will always be assisted by professionals who are already 10, 20 years ahead with a lot more experience and just ask them the right questions at the right time and give them the tools and tips and tricks needed for them to excel and um, yeah, to excel in that process.

So that's something we're working on right now, and the focus is that we will be hosting a festival on Tuesday, the 1st of October. Um, and there we will be, organizing a festival with the youth for 600 youth from Amsterdam. And we will be, yeah, having all kinds of fun games, prizes, and workshops also on digital skills, ai, prom, Beta. Think about game design, content creation, it could be anything. And we are working on that right now. So really, everybody who went to this festival really upgraded their skills, but also had a lot of fun and entertainment. And then we end the festival with all the finals of eSports.

So like we have. Fortnite, FIFA or say FC25. And, um, let me see, chess. So we also do chess. And besides this we have the, um, the finals also for Roblox, Samsung, and Minecraft, where youth can always, can build their ultimate online safe space and they can build their, they can use their favorite platform and we only ask them one question, on which they also will be judged and that is: How will you keep your community safe online? What would you take as measurements or what would your, if you were the program director, what would you change based on your experiences online? And this is just a creative way to learn about how youth would, tech youth would tackle. These kind of problems we all face.

Uh, so this City Games, we work with a lot of partners. So the municipality of Amsterdam, Samen voor jongeren van Amsterdam, that's an alliance from all youth workers, youth work organizations in Amsterdam. So it's not just one organization, it's a collective. Of organizations, um, but also, Youngsterdam who provided the first budget and opportunity for them to really scale this project.

Uh, but also fun partners like JBL, the for the music part, and, and AJAX, as a sports sponsor, um, and also others that are interested in helping building this safe space. So, um, yeah, there's a little bit more about City Games. So, yeah, in all kinds of projects with youth, you have

challenges and one of the big challenges always is with the youth, is to get them, um, to get them on board and keep them on board.

But I already explained that we focus on intrinsic motivation. That helps a lot, but also makes it more fun and gives them more sometimes that they could. Think they could handle and stress test it and adjust accordingly when needed. Um, because sometimes they're under-stimulated and you can, through stress testing, sometimes in the beginning you can really see, okay, who handles this?

Who, who, who could go faster? Who needs more time? Who needs more guidance? And based on that analysis, you could really. break up the group a little bit and, like going to an amusement park, you have the fast lane and you have the longer lane where you can just take your time and do anything that you need.

So, that's something we focus on and that's also a challenge because you have to continuously see which way they are going. And then you also have the challenges of being youth, having a life and going through stuff and finding out ups and downs and those are always challenges you need to take in consideration.

But that's also our work and that is something that I notice a lot when doing, um, bigger projects. You can always see. You see more often, things that would remain on the surface level, beneath the surface level. They come up due to the stressful environment or the process of building something, of creating something or working together.

You can see more of the signals as a youth worker that you can start your project, your project on guiding them and coaching and stuff like that. So that's something we all focus on in the process. Um. I would advise always to work in, um, with multiple youth workers because sometimes one is more focused on execution and others are more able to observe and really see the challenges the youth are working, going through.

Um, but based on, besides the, the challenges from the youth and the youth workers, there is also challenges and expectations of organizations that expect you to do something in a, in a similar, in a particular way. and mostly what we notice is that based on the policy that's been written and the expectation of policy makers about the urgency of online youth work and the youth workers should be more online because they are the key figure figures in all the, problems that are arising at the moment with social media, the, loneliness and, um, cyber criminality and all those other topics that are really urgent at the moment.

But what I do notice as, as a youth worker, is that most of the time we notice that management, not of always the companies, but mostly the policy makers are searching for, they understand the urgency, but they sometimes lack the vision or knowledge of an expertise of our, of, of us as youth workers 'cause we really know how to handle certain situations.

And if it's practical, something like, okay, be more online. But how should I do that? Should I let the Youth in the neighborhood go to be more online. What does it take to be online? Because if you wanna do it well, you have to invest time. But those time capacities are not always there. So how will you manage?

And the communication between policymakers and youth workers is not direct, it is always indirect. So those bring a lot of challenges of understanding each other, and that's why I believe in co-creation. Because based on that co-creation, you are forced to meet each other, understand each other's expectations, and at the beginning, the start line, you can already tackle a lot of the issues that might come up when you don't communicate directly.

So. That's something that I would urge you guys to do as well. Make it visual, but also stand up for your own expertise as a youth worker. Um, and I think that's something, there is an image of youth workers and how they are perceived by policy makers and others. They see the value, but I also see the challenges based on the past, rightfully so but it's not gonna help us grow further into the youth workers we need to be in the future, which is essential and urgent for all development of all youth. Um, so what my message would be in that challenge is, um, take your expertise, showcase it to the world, and stand up for the youth workers and for yourself as an expert, like a fireman, as an expert. Nobody's gonna tell 'em how to take out the fire. Nobody should. Tell you exactly how you should do it without guidance and understanding of the practical job at hand. Um, and I think we also as youth workers should also unite a little bit more and share more. So I love this interview as well, so we can share information across borders, but also unite more in a sense of the urgency of the problems and , the opportunities are far greater than the individual needs and interest of companies, municipalities, or anything else? We, our, our first, um, our first, how do you say in English, the employer is the youth, we work for the youth and that's the first priority. Um, so those are a lot of challenges.

Also getting all the interest, the bigger your project, the more people see the impact, believe in the impact, but also want to have a position with the impact. So it's always, um, helpful too. Make it clear what's the priority and what everybody's place is gonna be before the project's gonna start.

Otherwise, you could get a lot of people who like to see different positions, but you have to balance it out as honestly as possible. and everybody wants to grow. Everybody's searching for the visibility of having an impact. Um, but in co-creation you always have to divide by honestly and equally, um, that's the most sustainable way.

And the more clear you are about your objectives and how you cut the pie and that explains like this is the whole pie and these people need to be a part of it, makes it more clear for them to understand. Okay, thank you. And also let them know how willing you are to showcase their involvement in your project.

So if their interests, interests are covered and their, um, focus is covered, then, then everything can happen. Um, and based on the impact we already discussed, I think making it visual is

really important. So, try to document, especially with larger projects, try to document it through content. collect quotes, write stuff down.

Let the youth write their own quotes or their own learnings along the way. Um, 'cause it will help you to document everything and also measure the impact. So at the beginning of each project, we have a questionnaire, and at the end of the project we have another questionary. So you can, you can track the whole impact, how, what do you feel about the project?

What would you like to accomplish? And at the end, do you feel satisfied with everything that happened, that you really created what you wanted to create? I think those are things that are pretty basic, but they help a lot in to see the measurement of what it is based on the expectations from the youth themselves, because we see growth as well, and we can, define it.

But it's also great to see that the conscious awareness of youth themselves about their own progress and their own growth, in that way they will learn more because they're more aware of what they're going through. And we also work with researchers. So we integrate research into the whole process of finding the right methodology to really be as efficient and, um, impactful as possible. And that is also learning about our flaws, the things we could do better, being open to it, and to learn really from other areas, such as design thinking. How can you be more, um, efficient in project management? So it also takes skills that are not normal to, um, youth working, youth work, but also areas outside event management could be, is really helpful in our, in our project as well. So we try to search for experts, professionals that already have that skill for like 20 years so they can guide us in a far more efficient way. So we don't have to take it, I don't know how to say it in English, but, discover the wheel again.

So make the inventions not again on your own. Um, so that's a little bit more about impact and measuring that, make it visual again. Um, and the other side, my vision, yeah, my vision for the future of digital youth work. Um, I think it would be more focused on co-creation in a sense. In a sense that we are not, there's something beautiful about Ubuntu is a philosophy.

Uh, Ubuntu means I am because we are, and I see that as the first cornerstone of any civilization or any community, that you first recognize each other, you meet each other, and you learn about each other. You are really meeting each other. And from there you have all the information you need to really build something that is sustainable and also inclusive enough. In a sense that we don't build something and then we forget a lot of people and the society is not inclusive and we have to do patchwork to make it more inclusive and diverse and anything else. So the more we connect and vibrate in a sense as one community, it allows us to build more sufficient, efficient and also more inclusive and diverse communities.

So it is less of a diversity problem, more of a are we one community or are we not? I like to see more integration of the Ubuntu philosophy in youth work as well to see how we as youth workers co-create in one community, but in digital youth work, especially the way we build with big tech, that is not something big tech develops.

And later on we like, yeah, maybe we should change this because people are feeling arrested or mentally depressed or anything else. I think we should start with everybody at the, with the seat at the table and co-create. And I think that's something we're trying to aim for in a small way, building our own community and our own digital safe space and learning from that process actually we can also guide big tech. So we are also searching partnerships with platforms such as Discord or anything else to really build something and learn from them and see if we can develop something based on youth work. So for instance, an example is like. We had a WhatsApp group and within five minutes there was already toxicity and threats and arguments and fights within five minutes.

So we noticed a lot that you cannot just put youth together because we don't do that in a physical area. We don't let 50 youth in one room and just let them be. And online you see that a lot of freedom data they experience and on distance that allows them to really have different behaviors as well.

And it escalates really quickly. In Discord, you can have all kinds of rules and stuff, like you cannot, call each other names and stuff like that, because we have a bot that uses certain words you would, might, might well use, they will be blocked.

You cannot do that. So there's already prevention, um, measurement, rules that we applied. But we also have something like you cannot close a Discord. It's almost open 24/7. So we'd like to shut it down. And so we're talking with Discord about, okay, how could. could you develop something, a tool, or anything else that would allow us to do our youth work more, more efficiently and that it's more tailor made to what we need as youth workers to really help build that digital safe space. And it will help them as well, because this feature could also be, um, promoted in other communities, which allows other communities also to grow more towards the digital safe space.

Um, so yeah, this is a sample, what I see, like the co-creation between big tech, municipalities, youth, youth workers. We should more be sitting at one table and applying the design thinking process and really building something based on an Ubuntu philosophy and really focused on being one community and really tackling the problems we have had in co-creation.

So that would be my, uh, my final statement. Good luck guys. Hope to see you soon one day.