

## Definition

**Outreach work** refers to low-threshold forms of work in which social professionals work outside the organisation. In this way, they step into the world of people in socially vulnerable positions in order to **proactively tackle and prevent under-protection**.

*“Outreach work is a way of working which assumes an active approach and which aims at the improvement of well-being. The workers start from a participatory basic attitude and focus on vulnerable target groups that are not or insufficiently reached by the currently available offer of services, assistance and care. They achieve this by entering their environment and recognising the values and norms that apply there. Outreach work aims to achieve mutual harmony between the target group, their network, the social offer and the wider society” (Dewaele, De Maeyer & Beelen, 2012).*

## Characteristics

Outreach work includes many practices with different objectives and starting points. Despite the differences, there are also a number of similarities:

- ⊕ Outreach work starts by making contact with people in their own environments. **‘Actively seeking contact’** instead of ‘waiting’ is the basis of every outreach practice.
- ⊕ Outreach focuses on specific, usually **vulnerable, target groups**. It is about connecting with people who, despite supposed needs, have no (positive) contact (anymore) with social services and who do not ‘ask’ for help either.
- ⊕ Outreach work is an **active, unsuspecting and often unsolicited approach in people’s own environments**. Outreach work not only meets people’s potential needs, but also aims to stimulate positive connections with social services and with their own network as well.
- ⊕ Entering into a **working relationship** with people is a priority in outreach work.
- ⊕ At an institutional level, outreach practices also play a role in the search for **more comprehensive and coordinated aid and care**. More integrated support can be achieved through cooperation between different sectors. The role of the outreach worker is often that of mediator, advisor or case manager, and always that of an intermediary.



This fact sheet was written in collaboration with **Reach Out! the centre of expertise for outreach work**



Beelen, De Maeyer, Dewaele, Grymonprez, & Matthijssen. (2014). Reach out! Praktijkboek voor outreachend werken