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## THE ROLE OF YOUTH FIREFIGHTING TEAMS IN SHAPING SOCIAL COMPETENCE

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### Abstract

The article analyzes the role of Youth Firefighter Teams (YFT) in shaping the social competencies of young people, emphasizing the importance of their activities for the development of civic attitudes. As an integral part of Volunteer Fire Brigades, YFT provides youth with the opportunity to acquire not only technical skills but also to cultivate values such as responsibility, cooperation, empathy, and social engagement. Based on qualitative research, the authors indicate that participation in YFT strengthens interpersonal skills and prosocial attitudes, which positively impacts the civic awareness of young people.

**Keywords:** civic attitudes, cooperation, fire brigade, social competencies, social education, social responsibility, Youth Firefighter Teams, youth.

*ROLA MŁODZIEŻOWYCH DRUŻYN POŻARNICZYCH  
W KSZTAŁTOWANIU KOMPETENCJI SPOŁECZNYCH*

**Streszczenie**

Młodzieżowe Drużyny Pożarnicze jako integralna część Ochotniczych Straży Pożarnych oferują młodzieży możliwość zdobywania nie tylko umiejętności technicznych, ale także rozwijanie takich wartości jak odpowiedzialność, współpraca, empatia i zaangażowanie społeczne. Głównym założeniem podjętym przez autorów artykułu jest ukazanie roli Młodzieżowych Drużyn Pożarniczych w kształtowaniu kompetencji społecznych młodzieży. Dużą uwagę zwrócono na ich znaczenie dla rozwoju postaw obywatelskich. Na podstawie badań jakościowych wskazano, że udział w Młodzieżowych Drużynach Pożarniczych wzmacnia umiejętności interpersonalne oraz postawy prospołeczne, co z kolei pozytywnie wpływa na świadomość obywatelską młodych ludzi.

**Słowa kluczowe:** kompetencje społeczne, młodzież, Młodzieżowe Drużyny Pożarnicze, postawy obywatelskie, straż pożarna, współpraca, wychowanie społeczne.

*(...) To God's glory, for the benefit of people;  
To honor God – to bring help to others.  
Author unknown<sup>1</sup>*

The above firefighter motto has, for centuries, encapsulated the essence of firefighters' mission, intertwining service to God with dedication to others<sup>2</sup>. The

<sup>1</sup> This motto emphasizes the altruistic and self-sacrificing approach firefighters bring to their work, which forms the foundation of their public service. Most available sources describe this motto as widely used among firefighters in Poland. Some sources suggest that this phrase may have a long history, dating back to the formation of firefighting organizations in Poland in the early 19th century, though there is no specific information about the author of these words or the exact beginning of its use. For more on this topic, see M. Zalewski, *W jedności siła. Bogu na chwałę, ludziom na pożytek: w 100-lecie odzyskania przez Polskę Niepodległości*, Warszawa 2018; J. Gmitruk, *Dzieje Związku Floriańskiego*, „Niepodległość i Pamięć” 2018, nr 25/3 (63), s. 123–138.

<sup>2</sup> Por. A. Zellma, R. Buchta, W. Cichosz, *The (Non)Transgressive Character of Religious Education for Children and Young People in Polish Schools*, “British Journal of Religious Education” 2022,

modern Youth Firefighter Teams (YFT), an integral part of the Volunteer Fire Brigades (VFB), continue this tradition by not only teaching young people the principles of fire safety but, more importantly, by shaping their social competencies. Membership in YFT offers young people not only the chance to acquire technical skills but also a platform for developing values such as responsibility, cooperation, empathy, and commitment to the community. This aspect is particularly significant from the perspective of broad-based education<sup>3</sup>.

In the face of contemporary social challenges, the role of Youth Firefighter Teams (YFT) in shaping conscious and responsible citizens deserves particular attention<sup>4</sup>. This article aims to examine how participation in YFT contributes to the development of young people's social competencies and the significance of their activities in the context of fostering civic attitudes.

### 1. YOUTH FIREFIGHTER TEAMS – THEORETICAL APPLICATIONS

Few professions today are referred to as a calling. Undoubtedly, the work – or rather, the service – of a firefighter is one of them<sup>5</sup>. Firefighters remain trusted leaders among high-risk professions; according to an April 2022 survey by SW Research, it was the most highly regarded profession in Poland, with 81% of respondents considering it the most respected. Addressing the future of the firefighting profession is therefore important for several reasons. First, there remains a need for available and well-trained volunteer firefighters to complement the professional firefighting system (State Fire Service) and other rescue services. Second, there is a need for an active civil society<sup>6</sup> at every level of local communities, working in various areas, such as engaging with children and youth to

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v. 44, no. 3, p. 223–237, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/01416200.2021.1887082>, (30.10.2024).

<sup>3</sup> Por. W. Cichosz, *Anthropological Determinants of Religious Education*, w: *Religious Pedagogy*, red. Z. Marek, A. Walulik, Kraków 2020, s. 345–365.

<sup>4</sup> Por. W. Cichosz, *Idee ruchu PILGRIM w kształceniu i wychowaniu dzieci i młodzieży w: PILGRIM w służbie Stworzenia: Edukacja – Duchowość – Rozwój. Kompendium PILGRIM*, red. J. Hisch. P. Kubiak, Ch. Wogowitsch, Wiedeń 2023, s. 96–99.

<sup>5</sup> Por. J. Lisica, *Wpływ służby zawodowej na jakość życia rodzinnego strażaków Państwowej Straży Pożarnej na podstawie badań własnych*, „*Studia Humanistica Gedanensia*” 2022, t. 7, s. 152; S. Dziekoński, *Formacja chrześcijańska dziecka w rodzinie w nauczaniu Kościoła: od Leona XIII do Jana Pawła II*, Warszawa 2006.

<sup>6</sup> Zob. J. Szulist, *W kierunku pełniejszego społeczeństwa: dobro wspólne jako wzorzec dla personalistycznych odniesień w rzeczywistości społeczno-politycznej*, Pelplin 2009.

develop their social competencies<sup>7</sup>. In this context, youth fire brigades play a crucial role.

Youth Firefighter Teams (YFT) – the focus here – are an important part of Volunteer Fire Brigades (VFB), established based on the VFB's statute<sup>8</sup> by the organization's board, which passes an appropriate resolution for this purpose. Their role is to prepare young people for future firefighting service, but also to instill in them a sense of patriotism and a desire to improve their skills and pursue their passions. YFT members learn the principles of fire protection, the operation of firefighting equipment, and the appropriate responses to unusual and stressful situations<sup>9</sup>. Members of YFT can be both girls and boys up to the age of 18, with the lower age limit determined by the statute of each VFB.

The primary tasks of Youth Firefighter Teams (YFT) encompass a variety of activities aimed at educating and developing young people within the context of firefighting activities. Among the most important tasks of YFT are:

I) *Fire Protection Education* – YFT members gain knowledge about fire prevention, the handling of firefighting equipment, and fire safety principles. They learn procedures related to firefighting and first aid.

II) *Preparation for Participation in Rescue and Firefighting Actions* – although the youth do not directly participate in operations, they learn basic rescue techniques that may be useful in a future firefighting career. YFT prepares young people for the role of full-fledged firefighters in their adult lives.

III) *Participation in Firefighting Competitions* – the youth regularly take part in sports and firefighting competitions, where they compete in various events, such as hose deployment and equipment handling. These competitions foster a spirit of competition, teamwork, and physical fitness.

IV) *Promoting Fire Safety and Preventive Measures in the Community* – YFT members engage in informational and educational campaigns aimed at local communities. They assist in organizing training sessions on fire safety and first aid.

V) *Community Engagement* – YFT frequently participates in community activities, such as helping organize local events, supporting charity initiatives, or assisting the elderly and those in need. Through these efforts, the youth develop empathy and a sense of responsibility for others.

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<sup>7</sup> Por. M. Chrzczonowicz, B. Robak, *Młodzi w ochotniczych strażach pożarnych*, „Kwartalnik Trzeci Sektor” 2023, nr 61-62 (1-2/2023), s. 18.

<sup>8</sup> *VFB Statute* – This legal document outlines the principles governing the operation and organization of a Volunteer Fire Brigade unit. It is an internal regulation addressing key issues of the brigade's activities, including the goals and tasks of VFB, organizational structure, membership, funding principles, the formation of Youth Firefighter Teams (YFT), and decision-making procedures of the VFB board. The statute ensures that VFB's operations comply with applicable laws and fire protection regulations at local and national levels.

<sup>9</sup> Por. D. Trzaskowski, *Historia ochotniczej straży pożarnej w Starych Babicach*, „Zeszyty Naukowe Pro Publico Bono” 2020, nr 1(1), s. 275.

VI) *Patriotic and Civic Education* – one of YFT's goals is to foster patriotic attitudes and civic responsibility. The youth learn respect for national symbols and participate in national and local celebrations, which strengthens their national identity and sense of community<sup>10</sup>.

The broad range of these tasks undoubtedly prepares YFT members for a potential firefighting career, but does it also shape well-rounded citizens who can actively contribute to the community? If so, how does it develop social competencies such as responsibility, discipline, cooperation, and engagement in social life? And finally, does it enhance their interpersonal and civic skills?

To seek answers to the above questions, research has been conducted, and the obtained results will serve as a basis for attempting to interpret the role of youth firefighting teams in shaping these social competencies. However, before proceeding, it is worth highlighting the concept of social competencies themselves.

## 2. SOCIAL COMPETENCIES AND YFT

Social competencies are a term that has recently gained significant importance. The goal of developing these competencies is to prepare children and young people to function in constantly changing social conditions<sup>11</sup>. Unfortunately, they have not been clearly defined in the literature. From the perspective of evaluating the effectiveness of children and youth in the firefighting environment (YFT), the definition by Anna Matczak seems most useful. She defines social competencies as complex skills that determine the effectiveness of dealing with specific types of social situations<sup>12</sup>. This definition implies that we cannot speak of a single general social competency but rather of many types (e.g., skills related to social perception, social sensitivity, empathy, knowledge of social rules, the ability to solve interpersonal problems, skills for handling conflict situations, communication skills, etc.)<sup>13</sup>.

Regardless of the differences in understanding social competencies, researchers recognize them as a set of skills that enable an individual to function effectively in relationships with others and in various social situations. These include the ability to communicate, cooperate, resolve conflicts, empathize, as well as under-

<sup>10</sup> For more on this topic, see D. Pardecka, *Praca z dziećmi i młodzieżą*, „Strażak” 2023, nr 12(1137), s. 12–13; R. Buchta, *Wychowanie młodzieży do patriotyzmu w kontekście procesu europejskiej integracji i globalizacji*, w: *Wychowanie młodzieży na poziomie szkół ponadgimnazjalnych*, Część I: *Wychowanie ogólne*, red. J. Stala, Tarnów 2007, s. 177–183.

<sup>11</sup> Por. K. Koszewska, *Co to są kompetencje społeczne?*, „Meritum” 2014, nr 2(33), s. 2.

<sup>12</sup> Por. A. Matczak, *Kwestionariusz kompetencji społecznych (KKS)*, Warszawa 2007, s. 7.

<sup>13</sup> Por. K. Knopp, *Kompetencje społeczne – pomiar i aplikacja praktyczna*, <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/313877703>, (23.10.2024).

stand and adhere to social norms. Individuals with well-developed social competencies can build positive interpersonal relationships, work in a group, take responsibility for their actions, and handle situations requiring cooperation or negotiation. These competencies are crucial both in professional and personal life, facilitating effective communication and collaboration with others.

Social competencies in the context of youth firefighting teams (YFT) appear crucial for effective functioning at both team and individual levels. In YFT, the development of these competencies occurs in unique conditions, where young people have the opportunity to collaborate in groups, participate in rescue exercises, and engage in simulations of real rescue operations. This sets the objective of this study: to interpret and understand the role of YFT in shaping these competencies among youth. Therefore, after outlining the specifics of YFT in theoretical terms and revisiting the concept of social competencies, it is now necessary to move on to the substantive and methodological guidelines that have directly influenced the content and structure of the research undertaken.

### 3. METHODOLOGY OF OWN RESEARCH

The rapid advancement of technology and the swift development of technopolis<sup>14</sup> have made online surveys one of the most widely used methods for gathering information in modern information society<sup>15</sup>. They are among the most popular empirical methods in social research, using a questionnaire as a tool to collect data from respondents. The survey results can serve as an attempt to solve a specific research problem and can also be the basis for confirming or rejecting a research hypothesis, i.e., the anticipated answer to the question posed in the research problem<sup>16</sup>.

<sup>14</sup> The term “technopoly”, an inevitable consequence of the development of the information society, describes a complex cognitive phenomenon. This concept was introduced into the literature by Neil Postman (1931–2003), an American social communication theorist, and denotes a specific type of “technopolized” person, uncritically fascinated with technology and its development. See W. Cichosz, J. Lisica, *Edukacja prozdrowotna w technopolu*, w: *Sozologia systemowa*, vol. 9: *Zdrowie. Człowiek i jego środowisko w aspekcie przyrodniczym, filozoficznym i teologicznym*, red. D. del Mastro, W. Dyk, Szczecin-Fasano 2016, s. 27–28; W. Cichosz, *Implikacje pedagogiczne antropologii Jacquesa Maritaina*, „*Studia Gdańskie*” 2000, t. XIII, s. 159–173.

<sup>15</sup> Por. E. Krok, *Budowa kwestionariusza ankietowego a wyniki badań*, „*Studia Informatica*” 2015, nr 37/874, s. 55.

<sup>16</sup> Por. Z. Skorny, *Prace magisterskie z psychologii i pedagogiki*, Warszawa 1984, s. 26–48; R. Buchta, *Organizacja pedagogicznych badań empirycznych dla potrzeb katechezy*, „*Studia Pastoralne*” 2006, nr 2, s. 298–314; W. Cichosz, *Metodologia. Elementarz Studenta*, Gdańsk 2000, s. 93–97.

The starting point is a set of 10 questions concerning the phenomenon under study. Based on this, hypotheses will be formulated in the next phase assumptions of potential relationships that may exist between selected variables. In the following stage of the research process, it is necessary to define the scope of the study and the general population, i.e., to identify the units that will be the subject of the research. In this case, the research units will be randomly selected members of youth firefighting teams from the Pomeranian Voivodeship.

Using a well-constructed survey, qualitative research will be conducted. This approach stems from the aim to interpret the role of youth firefighting teams in shaping social competencies and to gain a comprehensive understanding of YFT's impact on these competencies in young people. The research will focus on understanding the subjective experiences of youth, their individual interpretations, and the meanings they assign to their activities within YFT in the context of developing social competencies – factors that are not quantifiable (if they are measurable at all) in terms of quantity or size. For example, this could represent a cycle of social competency development within YFT, showing how various aspects (e.g., cooperation, responsibility, leadership) are continuously and iteratively developed and reinforced through participation in the team. After analysis, the collected information will be presented descriptively.

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### 3.1. Research Method

In studying the role of youth firefighting teams (YFT) in shaping social competencies, an anonymous online survey was used, providing a convenient and

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<sup>17</sup> Por. N. Denzin, Y. Lincoln, *Wprowadzenie. Dziedzina i praktyka badań jakościowych*, w: *Metody badań jakościowych*, red. N. Denzin, Y. Lincoln, Warszawa 2009, vol. 1, s. 19–21.

<sup>18</sup> Por. J. Lisica, *Wpływ służby zawodowej na jakość życia rodzinnego strażaków Państwowej Straży Pożarnej na podstawie badań własnych*, s. 158.

effective research tool<sup>19</sup>. Due to its format, it allows for rapid data collection from a large number of respondents without requiring direct contact between the researcher and participants<sup>20</sup>. The anonymity of the online survey is crucial in such research, as it enables respondents to answer honestly, without concerns about disclosing their identities<sup>21</sup>. This format encourages greater openness among participants, especially regarding self-assessment of social competencies such as cooperation, empathy, or responsibility<sup>22</sup>. The survey was designed as an online questionnaire, which facilitated easy access for participants from various randomly selected regions of the Pomeranian Voivodeship, allowing them to complete the survey at their convenience. The survey link was shared via social media, providing easy access to the questionnaire. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, the anonymity of their responses, and that the results would be used solely for scientific purposes. The survey remained active for a specified period, during which participants could complete it. Data were automatically collected on an online platform, allowing researchers ongoing insight into the sample size and preliminary analysis<sup>23</sup>.

### 3.2. Characteristics of the Questions

The survey consists of 10 closed-ended, single-choice questions. This type of question allows for standardized responses, facilitating data analysis and enabling comparison of results among respondents. Closed-ended questions also have the advantage of minimizing respondent interpretation, which enhances precision and reliability. Many questions in the survey use ordinal scales (e.g., “Strongly agree”, “Somewhat agree”, “Unsure”, “Somewhat disagree”, “Strongly disagree”). Such scales allow respondents to indicate their level of agreement, enabling a more detailed analysis of attitudes and feelings. Ordinal scales are often used in social research to assess respondents’ subjective perceptions and opinions. The survey questions focus on key social competencies, such as group cooperation (question 2), communication skills (question 3), decision-making confidence (question 4), social responsibility (question 5), working under pressure (question 6), leadership skills (question 7), and empathy (question 10). This approach allows for a detailed analysis of different aspects of social competencies, providing a comprehensive

<sup>19</sup> Por. T. Pilch, T. Bauman, *Zasady badań pedagogicznych: Strategie ilościowe i jakościowe*, Warszawa 2001, s. 120–125.

<sup>20</sup> Por. E. Babbie, *Badania społeczne w praktyce*, Warszawa 2007, s. 250–255.

<sup>21</sup> Por. K. Mazurek-Łopacińska, *Badania marketingowe. Teoria i praktyka*, Warszawa 2003, s. 300–305.

<sup>22</sup> Por. J. Sztumski, *Wstęp do metod i technik badań społecznych*, Katowice 2005, s. 200–205.

<sup>23</sup> Although the online survey has many advantages, it is important to note certain limitations. Not all YFT members may have had equal access to the Internet, which could have impacted the diversity of the sample. Additionally, the anonymity and lack of direct contact with the surveyor may have led some respondents to take the survey less seriously.



understanding of YFT's impact on their development. Each question addresses a different dimension of competence, supporting a multidimensional approach to the research problem.

The questions are clearly formulated, which minimizes the risk of ambiguous responses. For example, the question "Has participation in YFT helped you develop communication skills?" is straightforward and directly targets a specific competency. Difficult or abstract terms were avoided, increasing the likelihood of obtaining reliable answers.

The questions in the survey aim to examine how different aspects of YFT activities impact the development of social competencies in youth. The structure of the questions reflects the main research hypothesis: "Participation in YFT significantly influences the development of social competencies in youth". Each question pertains to a different social competency, allowing the researcher to determine which competencies are most strongly developed as a result of YFT involvement.

The first question of the survey ("How long have you been a member of YFT?") serves as a demographic question, allowing for the classification of respondents based on the length of their participation in YFT. This is important because it enables the analysis of differences in perceptions of YFT's impact depending on membership duration.

### **3.3. Organization and Course of the Study**

The organization and course of the study on the role of youth firefighting teams (YFT) in shaping social competencies were conducted through an anonymous online survey, comprising several key stages. The main objective was to understand how participation in YFT activities influences the development of social competencies in youth, such as cooperation, responsibility, communication, decision-making, and teamwork. The study aimed to test the hypothesis that active participation in YFT significantly impacts the development of these competencies.

The study was conducted in October 2024 among randomly selected YFT members from the Pomeranian Voivodeship. Random sampling provided representative results for this group, enhancing the reliability and generalizability of the conclusions to the entire YFT population in the region. Random selection also minimized the risk of systematic errors due to sample bias. Ultimately, 30 individuals participated in the study.

After data collection, responses were processed and subjected to statistical analysis. Due to the standardized format of closed-ended questions, the analysis could be conducted quickly using tools such as specialized survey analysis software. A quantitative analysis of the results was performed, allowing for the identification of trends regarding YFT's impact on the development of social competencies in youth.

#### 4. ANALYSIS OF RESEARCH RESULTS

The empirical indicators included in the survey enable the verification of research problems. Their content relates to the overall assessment of the role of youth firefighting teams in shaping social competencies<sup>24</sup>. Respondents shared their experiences and opinions on the impact of the YFT program on their skills in cooperation, communication, leadership, and sense of social responsibility. The study also covered aspects such as the ability to work under pressure, confidence in making group decisions, empathy development, and influence on peer relationships. The survey results were presented in the form of charts, allowing for a clear analysis of YFT's impact on youth development in these key areas.

The survey begins with the question: "How long have you been a member of the youth firefighting team (YFT)?" The collected research results are presented in Figure 1.

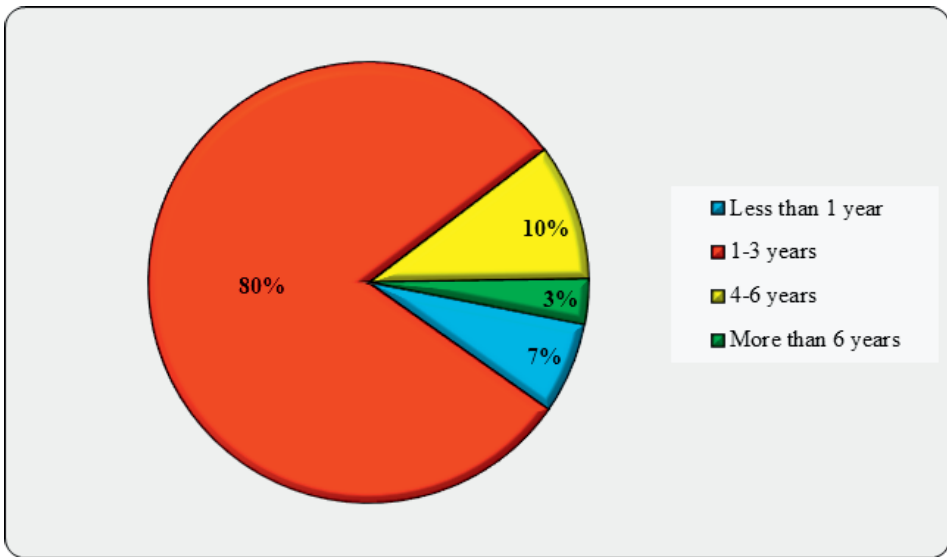


Figure 1. How long have you been a member of the youth firefighting team (YFT)?

Source: Own research.

The above pie chart shows how long respondents have been members of the youth firefighting team (YFT). Out of 30 responses, a full 80% of participants indicated that they have been members of the YFT for 1 to 3 years, making this by far the largest group. In contrast, 7% of respondents stated that they have been

<sup>24</sup> Por. J. Lisica, *Wpływ służby zawodowej na jakość życia rodzinnego strażaków Państwowej Straży Pożarnej na podstawie badań własnych*, s. 160.

with the YFT for less than a year. Another group, representing 10% of respondents, reported that their membership in the YFT has lasted from 4 to 6 years, which is the second largest category. The smallest group, comprising 3% of respondents, has been members of the YFT for over 6 years, making this the smallest segment on the chart. The distribution of responses indicates a predominance of individuals with shorter tenures in the YFT, particularly those who have been members for 1 to 3 years.

The next question asked respondents how they evaluate the impact of participation in the YFT on their group cooperation skills. The results are presented in Figure 2.

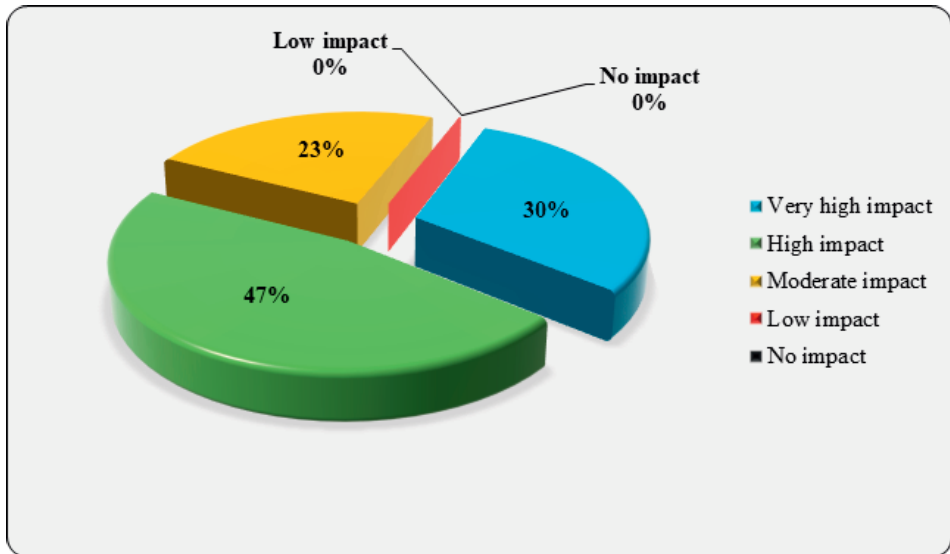


Figure 2. How do you evaluate the impact of YFT participation on your group cooperation skills?  
 Source: Own research.

The above pie chart presents the results on the evaluation of the impact of participation in the youth firefighting team (YFT) on group cooperation skills, based on 30 responses. The largest portion of respondents, 47%, rated this impact as high. Another 30% of participants stated that YFT participation had a very high impact on their group cooperation skills. The next group, comprising 23% of respondents, indicated that the impact was moderate. Notably, none of the respondents felt that YFT participation had little or no impact on their cooperation skills. The categories “low impact” and “no impact” did not appear in the responses.

The next question asked respondents whether participation in YFT helped them develop communication skills (e.g., clearly expressing their thoughts, listening to others). The results are presented in Figure 3.

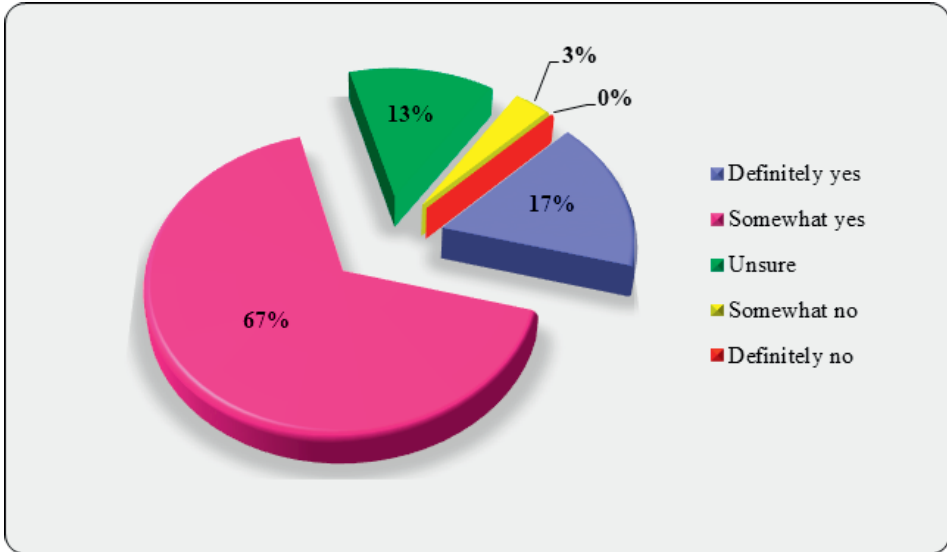


Figure 3. Has participation in YFT helped you develop communication skills (e.g., clearly expressing your thoughts, listening to others)?

*Source: Own research.*

The above chart presents responses to the question regarding the impact of participation in the youth firefighting team (YFT) on the development of communication skills, such as expressing thoughts and listening to others. The majority of respondents, 67%, answered “somewhat yes”, indicating they felt a positive impact in this area. The next group consists of those who strongly believed that YFT helped them develop these skills – 17% of respondents. Meanwhile, 13% indicated that they found it difficult to assess whether YFT participation influenced their communication skills. Finally, 3% of respondents answered “somewhat no”, suggesting they did not perceive such an impact. None of the participants selected “definitely not”, indicating that no respondents strongly dismissed the possibility of such an impact.

The next question asked respondents whether YFT has made them feel more confident in making decisions within a group. The results are presented in Figure 4.

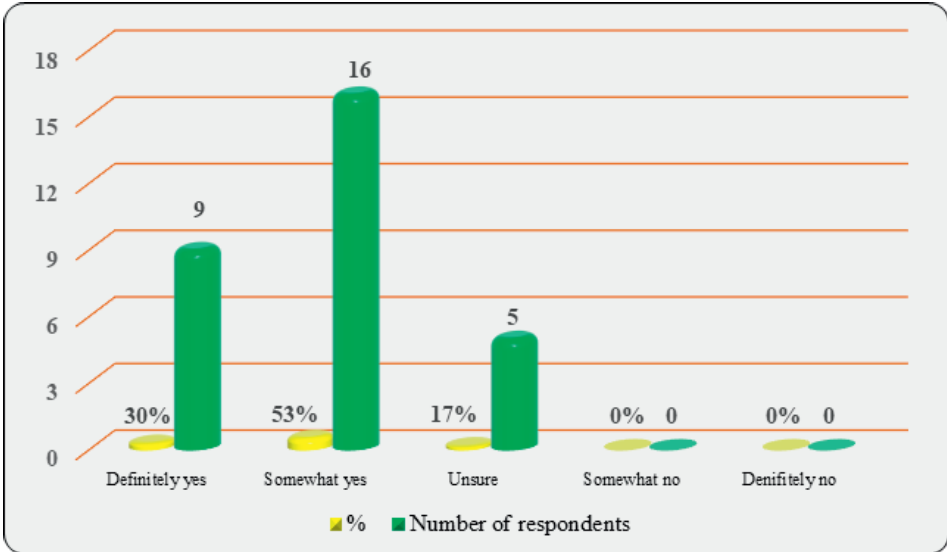
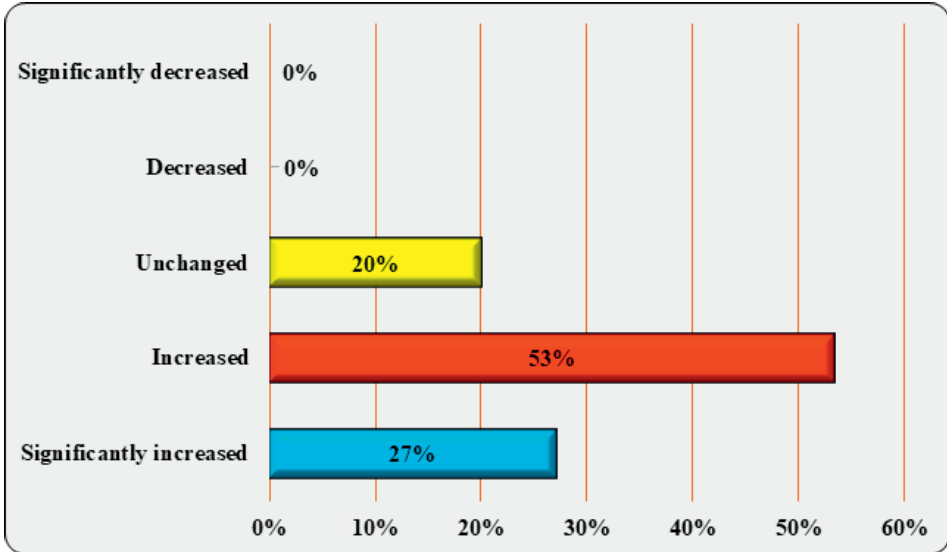


Figure 4. Has YFT made you feel more confident in making decisions within a group?  
 Source: Own research.

The above chart shows that 30% of respondents, corresponding to 9 individuals, selected the option “Definitely yes”. This indicates that they feel a significant increase in confidence when making group decisions due to their participation in YFT. The largest group, 53% of respondents, or 16 individuals, chose “Somewhat yes”, suggesting that they also feel a positive impact from YFT, though it does not amount to full confidence. The option “Unsure” was selected by 17% of respondents, or 5 individuals, meaning they are unable to definitively assess YFT’s impact on their confidence in this context. None of the respondents chose “Somewhat no” or “Definitely no”, suggesting that no one believes that participating in YFT has negatively affected their confidence in group decision-making. These results indicate that the majority of YFT participants perceive a positive impact of the program on their confidence within teamwork.

Next, respondents were asked how they assess their level of social responsibility after joining YFT. The results are presented in Figure 5.

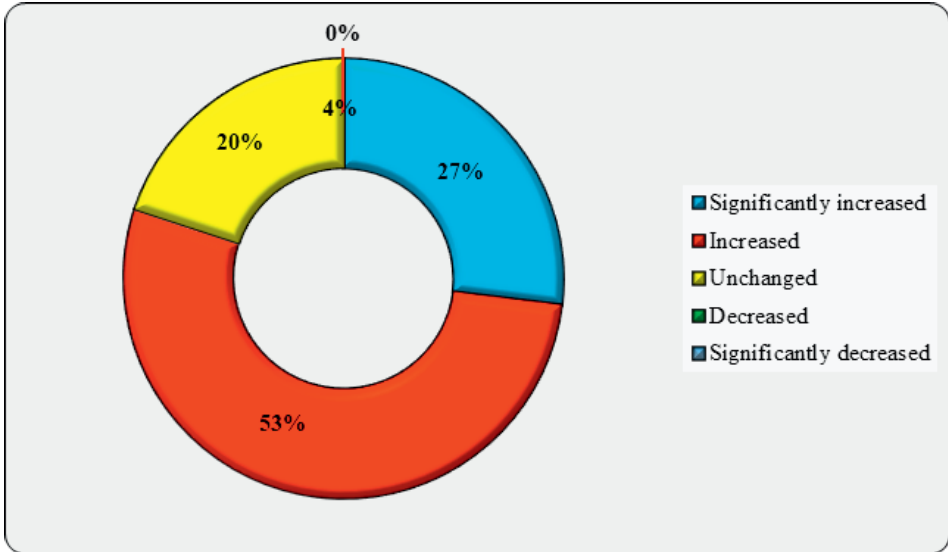


**Figure 5. How do you assess your level of social responsibility after joining YFT?**

*Source: Own research.*

The data presented in Figure 5 show that 53% of respondents believe their level of social responsibility has increased, making this the largest group in the study. Another group, comprising 27% of participants, responded that their social responsibility has “Significantly increased”, indicating an even stronger sense of improvement in this area. Approximately 20% of respondents stated that their level of responsibility has not changed after joining YFT, suggesting that the program has had no impact on their perception of social responsibility. None of the respondents selected options indicating a decrease in responsibility, either “Decreased” or “Significantly decreased”. Therefore, it can be concluded that the majority of participants feel an increase in social responsibility after joining YFT, which may suggest a positive impact of the program on the development of this trait among youth.

In the study, the youth were asked whether participation in YFT has improved their ability to work under pressure (e.g., in stressful situations). Figure 6 presents the results.

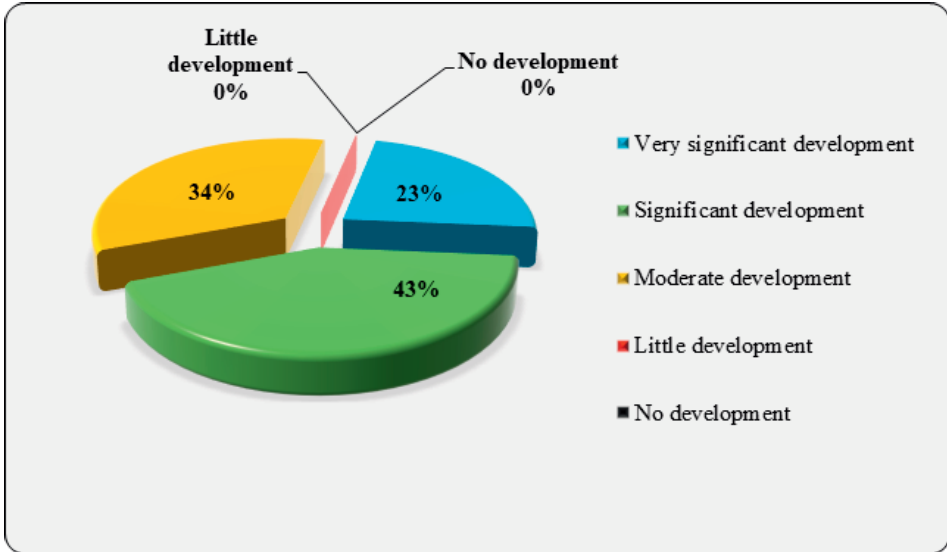


**Figure 6. Has participation in YFT improved your ability to work under pressure (e.g., in stressful situations)?**

*Source: Own research.*

The results shown in Figure 6 indicate that 50% of respondents felt that participation in YFT has somewhat increased their ability to work under pressure. Another group, comprising 33% of participants, reported that their ability to handle stressful situations has definitely improved. Thirteen percent found it difficult to clearly assess the impact of YFT on their ability to work under pressure. Only 4% of respondents answered that they had not noticed much improvement. This suggests that the majority of respondents (83%) believe that participation in YFT has positively influenced their ability to work under pressure, with half rating this impact as “somewhat yes”. Only a small percentage (4%) did not observe significant improvement, and the lack of “definitely no” responses suggests that the YFT program generally supports the development of skills for working in stressful conditions.

In the next part of the study, respondents were asked how they evaluate the development of their leadership skills thanks to YFT. The results are presented in Figure 7.



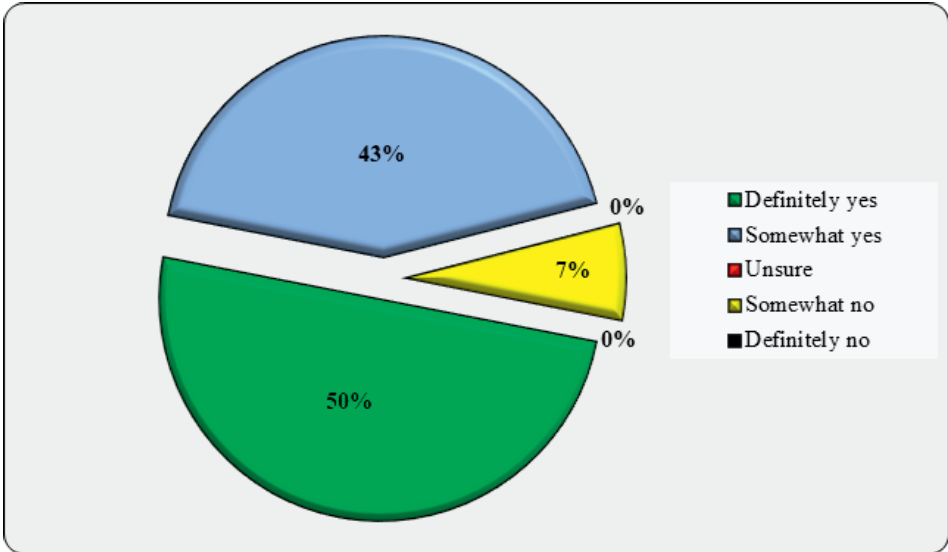
**Figure 7. How do you evaluate the development of your leadership skills thanks to YFT?**

*Source: Own research.*

The data visible in Figure 7 show that the majority of respondents, 43%, rate the development of their leadership skills as “significant growth”. This is the highest value, suggesting that participants feel their leadership abilities have greatly improved due to their involvement in YFT. Another large group consists of those who rate their development as “moderate” – 34% of respondents chose this option. This indicates that a considerable portion of participants perceives progress, though to a lesser degree than those rating their development as significant. Meanwhile, 23% of respondents felt they achieved “very significant growth”, indicating that, for this group, the YFT program had an exceptionally positive impact on their leadership skills. Notably, none of the respondents rated their development as “little growth” or “no growth”. This implies that all participants recognize some level of progress in their leadership skills, suggesting the overall effectiveness of the YFT program.

In the next question, respondents were asked whether participation in YFT helped them better understand the principles of social responsibility (e.g., helping others, serving the community). The results are presented in Figure 8.



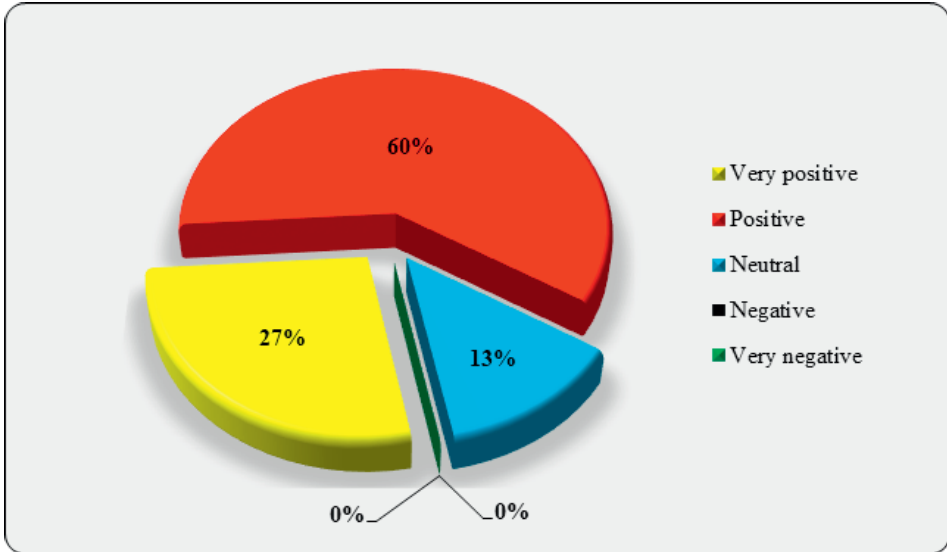


**Figure 8.** In your opinion, has participation in YFT helped you better understand the principles of social responsibility (e.g., helping others, serving the community)?

*Source: Own research.*

Figure 8 shows that the largest portion of respondents, a full 50%, selected “definitely yes”, indicating that participation in YFT clearly contributed to a better understanding of social responsibility principles. This response suggests that half of the participants experienced a significant deepening of their awareness regarding social values and the need to act for the benefit of others. Another large group, 43% of respondents, answered “somewhat yes”, indicating that most participants, though not fully convinced, noticed certain benefits in understanding social responsibility thanks to their involvement in YFT. Combined with the “definitely yes” group, this result shows that a total of 93% of respondents perceive a positive impact of the program on their understanding of social responsibility principles. Only 7% of respondents stated “somewhat no” regarding YFT’s impact on their awareness of social responsibility. It is worth noting that no respondents selected “unsure” or “definitely no”, suggesting a strong belief among participants in the positive influence of the program on their understanding of these principles.

In the second-to-last question of the survey, respondents were asked how they evaluate the impact of YFT on their relationships with peers. The collected research results are presented in Figure 9.

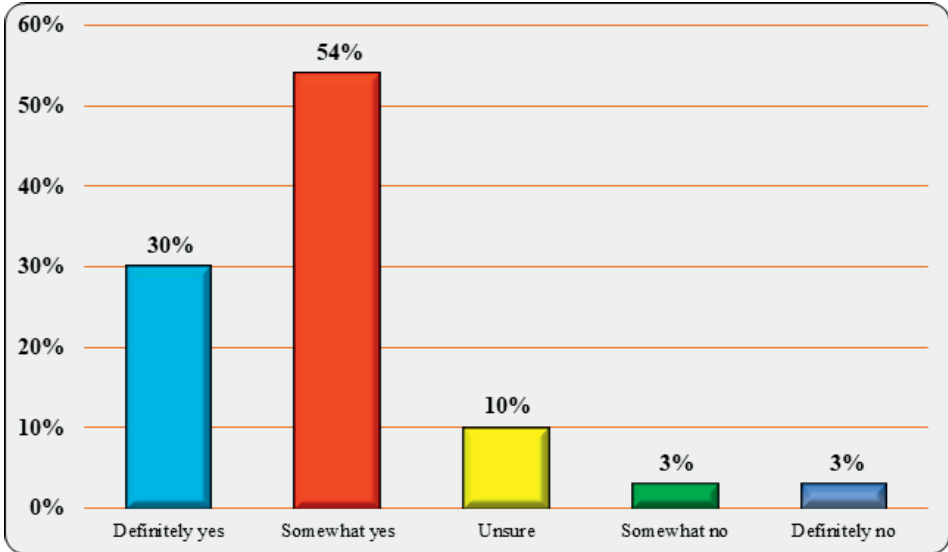


**Figure 9. How do you evaluate the impact of YFT on your relationships with peers?**

*Source: Own research.*

Figure 9 shows that the largest group of respondents, 60%, rated the impact of YFT on their relationships with peers as “positive”. This indicates that the majority of program participants perceive an improvement in their relationships with others of similar age, suggesting that participation in YFT fosters stronger social bonds and peer group cooperation. Meanwhile, 27% of respondents considered the impact of YFT on their peer relationships as “very positive”. This result confirms that for a significant portion of respondents, the YFT program had an exceptionally beneficial effect on their interactions with peers, suggesting that the program may promote stronger bonds and more intensive collaboration among young people. Thirteen percent rated the impact of YFT on their relationships as “neutral”, meaning that for this group, the program did not have a noticeable effect on their peer relationships. However, it is worth noting that no one selected “negative” or “very negative”, indicating that the YFT program did not adversely affect participants’ social relationships.

In the final survey question, respondents were asked whether they believe that participation in YFT has influenced the development of their empathy toward others. The results are presented in Figure 10.



**Figure 10. Do you believe that participation in YFT has influenced the development of your empathy toward others?**

*Source: Own research.*

The largest portion of respondents, 54%, rated the impact of YFT on the development of their empathy as “somewhat yes”. This means that most participants feel a certain positive influence of the program on their ability to understand and empathize with others, though not necessarily in a very pronounced way. Thirty percent of respondents answered “definitely yes”, suggesting that for a significant portion of participants, the YFT program had a clear and strong impact on the development of their empathy. This indicates a high effectiveness of YFT in fostering emotional skills related to sensitivity to the needs of others. Ten percent of respondents said “unsure” regarding whether the program influenced their empathy development, which may suggest that for this group, the program’s impact was not clear or easily assessed.

Only 3% of respondents answered “somewhat no”, and another 3% “definitely no”, indicating a very small group of participants who did not feel the impact of YFT on empathy development. In summary, the majority of YFT participants (84% combined for “somewhat yes” and “definitely yes” responses) observe a positive impact of the program on their empathy toward others. Only a small percentage did not feel this impact, suggesting that the YFT program effectively fosters empathetic attitudes among youth.

In conclusion, the study included individuals with diverse socio-demographic characteristics<sup>25</sup>.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the analysis of the results presented above, it can be concluded that youth firefighting teams (YFT) play a key role in shaping social competencies in young people. In the study, most participants indicated that belonging to YFT had a clear impact on the development of group cooperation skills. As many as 77% of respondents stated that their teamwork abilities significantly improved thanks to participation in the team. YFT provides young people with opportunities to systematically practice interpersonal skills in an environment that promotes collective action and responsibility.

The results also indicate that participation in YFT has a positive effect on the development of communication skills. Most respondents (84%) confirmed that this program helped them develop the ability to express their thoughts clearly and listen actively to others. Such interactions foster not only communication competencies but also trust-building and mutual understanding among peers.

YFT also supports young people's confidence in making group decisions. As many as 83% of respondents declared that participation in the team made them feel more confident in such situations. This is important because making decisions in a collaborative setting requires both courage and situational assessment, contributing to more responsible and mature attitudes.

Furthermore, belonging to YFT clearly contributes to an increase in participants' social responsibility. Eighty percent of respondents feel a heightened sense of social responsibility after joining the team, supporting the view that YFT promotes the formation of responsible civic attitudes. Participants learn the importance of supporting others and acting for the community, which translates into a more active approach to social obligations.

Another significant finding is that YFT fosters the ability to work under pressure. Most participants (83%) reported that their ability to handle stressful situations improved significantly. Youth who regularly engage in activities requiring quick decision-making and collaboration in challenging conditions gain valuable experience that can contribute to their further development in adulthood.

Moreover, YFT promotes the development of leadership skills. The study shows that 43% of respondents observed substantial growth in this area, and 23% reported very significant progress. This is especially important, as developing leadership

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<sup>25</sup> Por. J. Lisica, *Wpływ służby zawodowej na jakość życia rodzinnego strażaków Państwowej Straży Pożarnej na podstawie badań własnych*, s. 167.

competencies at a young age can greatly impact future professional careers and social roles.

The role of YFT in fostering empathy is also invaluable. More than half of respondents (54%) stated that the program contributed to the development of their empathy toward others. Through shared rescue actions and helping others, YFT teaches youth sensitivity to others' needs and an understanding of social values, such as solidarity and support.

Finally, the analysis indicates a clearly positive impact of YFT on peer relationships. Most respondents (60%) reported that their relationships with peers improved due to participation in the team. The shared challenges that youth face in YFT help build strong bonds and teach cooperation and mutual trust, which is invaluable in the development of social competencies.

Based on these conclusions, it can be recommended that youth firefighting teams be more widely promoted as an effective form of social and civic education for youth. Programs like YFT, which combine elements of teamwork, social responsibility, and leadership development, should be expanded and supported by local and educational authorities. Consideration should also be given to integrating YFT activities with school programs to allow more young people access to such initiatives. It would also be important to provide training for mentors and team leaders to ensure that youth receive the best possible support in developing their social competencies.

## CONCLUSIONS

The outline of issues presented in this study does not claim to provide definitive or irrefutable answers but rather contributes to the exploration of socio-firefighting and pedagogical perspectives<sup>26</sup>. The research conducted has shown that youth firefighting teams play a significant role in shaping the social competencies of young people. Participation in YFT not only prepares young people for future service in firefighting but also enhances their skills in teamwork, communication, decision-making, and working under pressure. Membership in YFT also fosters the development of social responsibility, empathy, and leadership skills, which are particularly important in building an aware and engaged civic society<sup>27</sup>.

The key findings indicate that youth involved in YFT activities achieve significant development in competencies such as group cooperation, handling stressful situations, and social responsibility. The impact of YFT on fostering empathy and

<sup>26</sup> Por. W. Cichosz, *Biblijne wychowanie parenetyczne. Od pedagogiki do pedagogii*, „Studia Katechetyczne” 2012, nr 8, s. 243–253.

<sup>27</sup> Zob. J. Szulist, *W kierunku pełniejszego społeczeństwa: dobro wspólne jako wzorzec dla personalistycznych odniesień w rzeczywistości społeczno-politycznej*, Pelplin 2009.

solidarity is especially pronounced, which constitutes a vital component of social and civic engagement. YFT participants learn to make group decisions and lead teams, promoting the growth of leadership skills.

In summary, YFT serves as an effective way to support youth social development, positively influencing their civic attitudes and interpersonal skills. The research results confirm that YFT not only prepare young people for future fire-fighting roles but also for active and responsible participation in social life. It is essential to support and expand such activities, particularly in promoting civic engagement and developing social competencies among young people, who represent the nation's future. The shape and growth of society in future generations largely depend on them.

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## Annex 1. Survey Questionnaire – Research Study

### Research on the Role of Youth Firefighting Teams in Shaping Social Competencies

Dear Members,

we invite you to participate in a survey on the role of youth firefighting teams (YFT) in shaping social competencies. The purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of how involvement in YFT activities influences the development of skills such as teamwork, communication, responsibility, decision-making, and working within a team.

The survey is anonymous, and the results will be used solely for research purposes. It consists of several single-choice questions regarding your experiences and opinions related to participation in YFT. We kindly ask for your honest responses, which will help us gain an accurate view of YFT's impact on the social development of young people.

Thank you for your time and participation in the study!

**Main Hypothesis:** Participation in youth firefighting teams (YFT) significantly influences the development of social competencies in young people, including skills in cooperation, responsibility, and working under pressure.

#### Questions:

1. How long have you been a member of the youth firefighting team (YFT)?
  - a) Less than 1 year
  - b) 1–3 years
  - c) 4–6 years
  - d) More than 6 years
  
2. How do you evaluate the impact of YFT participation on your group cooperation skills?
  - a) Very high impact
  - b) High impact
  - c) Moderate impact
  - d) Low impact
  - e) No impact
  
3. Has participation in YFT helped you develop communication skills (e.g., clearly expressing your thoughts, listening to others)?
  - a) Definitely yes
  - b) Somewhat yes



- c) Unsure
- d) Somewhat no
- e) Definitely no

4. Has YFT made you feel more confident in making decisions within a group?

- a) Definitely yes
- b) Somewhat yes
- c) Unsure
- d) Somewhat no
- e) Definitely no

5. How do you assess your level of social responsibility after joining YFT?

- a) Significantly increased
- b) Increased
- c) Unchanged
- d) Decreased
- e) Significantly decreased

6. Has participation in YFT increased your ability to work under pressure (e.g., in stressful situations)?

- a) Definitely yes
- b) Somewhat yes
- c) Unsure
- d) Somewhat no
- e) Definitely no

7. How do you evaluate the development of your leadership skills thanks to YFT?

- a) Very significant development
- b) Significant development
- c) Moderate development
- d) Little development
- e) No development

8. In your opinion, has participation in YFT helped you better understand the principles of social responsibility (e.g., helping others, serving the community)?

- a) Definitely yes
- b) Somewhat yes
- c) Unsure
- d) Somewhat no
- e) Definitely no

9. How do you evaluate the impact of YFT on your relationships with peers?

- a) Very positive
- b) Positive
- c) Neutral
- d) Negative
- e) Very negative

10. Do you believe that participation in YFT has influenced the development of your empathy toward others?

- a) Definitely yes
- b) Somewhat yes
- c) Unsure
- d) Somewhat no
- e) Definitely no