

Austria: “Providing Chances – Living Chances!”

Organization implementing the project

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Context

The economic background to the Austrian case study is the fact that an inadequate school education and the increase of the phenomenon of drug addiction together with inherited poverty patterns constitute main factors for young people’s instability and behavioural problems. This combination of issues has resulted in young people developing serious social and medical problems instead of entering professions. On the other hand the plans of corporate social responsibility of trade and industry companies together with an increase of job security and guaranteed gender equality are priorities when implementing the social agenda. The project “Providing Chances – Living Chances” was designed in order to meet these challenges and in order to contribute to an increase in social justice. 2010 was the European year of fighting poverty and social exclusion and provided a suitable and welcome impetus for the implementation of this project. The purpose of the Austrian case study is to provide a very innovative example of IGL processes between two groups of people who have very different social backgrounds: managers in companies and young people in trouble. The project was carried out as a pilot project in two Austrian provinces in 2010 and in 2011. This case study also shows how companies can increase their corporate social responsibility.

A number of young people - for various reasons as indicated above - run into serious problems. Although different institutions and support systems offer different kinds of advice and help, the problems still exist for a considerable number of young people, who need further help and support in order to be able to develop a pattern which enables them to lead a trouble-free life. One manifestation of the problem for this category of people is that whenever they apply for a job, they either are not shortlisted for the job interview or only very few are actually invited for the job interview. The role of companies in such situations is of paramount importance.

Action

The project has a two main aims: it aims at diversifying the opportunities for in-service training of managers in order to enhance their general management competences and particularly their social competence skills within their companies and to offer young people who face serious problems a new chance by helping them develop new skills and competences which enable them to find a job. In other words the main aim of this project is to strengthen the social skills of managers and by doing so to improve the chances of young people who face serious problems to get a job.

To achieve this goal a closer connection is to be reached between companies and non-profit institutions which specialize in voluntary social work and their target groups. The project contributes to an enhancement of the social dialogue, improves social justice and increases the understanding of solidarity in the society of European countries.

Project No. 510890-LLP-1-2010-1-FR-GRUNDTVIG-GNW

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The project has two main target groups: managers of companies in Upper Austria and in Carinthia, two Austrian provinces, and young people, aged between 15 and 25 who have developed serious problems because of theft and other criminal acts.

The project in Upper Austria was carried out in 2010 and the project in Carinthia started in March 2011 and will end in September 2011. Certificates are awarded.

The project developed a handbook with the title: “*Successful managers as mentors for young people facing crisis*”. Within a six month period the managers participate in five workshops which focus on visions for life, mediation, conflict management, body language and rhetoric and facilitation techniques. Furthermore, the managers arrange ten meetings and sessions with carefully selected young people. These sessions follow guidelines which facilitate the identification of individual steps and the development of strategies which contribute to solutions of the encountered problems. At the same time a new basis for communication is established between people of completely different social backgrounds. The company managers who act as mentors are recruited by the project coordinator and apply their theoretical knowledge about social skills which they acquired in the workshops in practical situations and have to explore the difficult circumstances of young people in order to develop solutions together with their mentees. The managers in many cases use their comprehensive networks in order to offer new job perspectives. The mentees establish a direct connection to the world of work and are supported in the implementation of the jointly developed objectives. Apart from the fact that experienced experts lead five workshops, non-profit making institutions send supervisors which offer additional support to the managers when dealing with young people whom they have never met before. This project is not to be considered to be a donation from companies to young people in need of support, but it was developed in order to “revolutionize” training programs for managers.

Outcomes and impact

The training program for managers lasting over a period of six months offers sustainable effects in comparison to short programmes which last only a few days. The enhanced social skills of the managers contribute to a better atmosphere at the workplace and to an increase in the motivation of the employees. Apart from that it also improves the public relations of the companies. The project received wide publicity on the radio and in newspapers. The companies involved also benefitted and gained publicity which increased their competitiveness. The project can also be integrated into the CSR strategy of the companies.

Quotes

Daniel Hendling, Telekom International: “*My motivation is not feeling of duty or compassion, but the feeling of responsibility and humanity*”

Monika Hirschmugl-Fuchs, Micraconsult: “*In the life of every person there are moments when advice can be very helpful. Also I received support from my parents in difficult situations and helping only one young person is better than not doing anything. I hope my social competence, my professional experience and my personal enthusiasm will support my mentee so that the way of no return can be avoided. Everyone deserves a second chance and this is particularly true for young people.*”

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