

Germany: “Meeting of the generations”

Organization implementing the project

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Context :

The ageing of the population in Germany is one of the most stringent issues of the country's society. Statistical data such as that published in the report ‘The German population until 2050’ by the Federal Statistical Office Germany shows, in short, that the ratio between the non-working population (juveniles and senior citizens together) and the working population will grow from 65 in 2005 to 89 in 2050.

Within the wide array of IGL activities in Germany, there are many that tackle the perceived lack of contact between young and old. The case study described below tackles a situation repeating itself throughout the country: many old people live in care homes and most of them feel lonely and lack attention from their nearest relatives, many of whom live far away from them. This initiative is transferable thus in other contexts, both within the country itself but also in other European communities.

The cooperation between the manager of the Red Cross care home and a high school teacher in Erlenbach brought about the idea for a project called “Meeting of the Generations”.

Action

The project involved 70 pupils of the Hermann-Staudinger-Gymnasium in Erlenbach am Main aged between 9 and 13 and some 16 partners, including 3 care homes, one counseling center for the old people and an Office for Senior Citizens.

Within the project called “Meeting of the Generations” there were 25 various activities that were planned and carried out, e.g. visits to the care home, mobile phone and Internet courses for the old persons, intergenerational theater groups, gymnastic classes, movie visits and discussions afterwards. The pupils renovated rooms in the care homes, helped out with the laying-out of a garden for people affected by Alzheimer disease, and they painted pictures during their art classes that depicted scenes from the life stories of the old people they had met and talked to. The seniors sang in the school choir, gave the pupils cooking classes and taught them how to cook traditional dishes.

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The planning of the activities took on a spontaneous nature, with new ideas and initiatives coming from the participants themselves. Each participated in ways that matched their own interests and personal abilities.

Outcomes:

The pupils of the school experienced first-hand the life stories of the elderly and, on the other hand, the older people were slowly introduced to the modern world of communication technologies. In this way, both groups developed interest and understanding for the concerns of the other generation and got to know about traditions and values of the others. For the young participants, there was a general recognition on their side of the life efforts and achievements of the senior participants. The project resulted in the opening of the school to the outside world and enabled an interdisciplinary approach to learning, involving a wide range of subjects, including Art, Music, Sport, German, Religion/Ethics, and ICT. The younger participants also learned to be reliable and to keep appointments that were made.

Quotes

"...the school does not only teach knowledge and skills, but also heart and character." – State Minister for Education, Eberhard Sinner (CSU)

"They are maybe slower, but it can be fun just the same." – Florian Wöber (he delivered Internet and mobile phone courses for the senior participants)

"60, 70 pupils are in and still we have no motivation problems." – Hans Jürgen Fahn, Project coordinator

"The project is almost the only contact to the world outside the old people's home for many of the senior participants, which is why it is even more important for the pupils to be reliable and to come on time for their appointments." - Hans Jürgen Fahn



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