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Adolescents receive training, they pass their knowledge and their experiences along to other young people, and they counsel them peer-to-peer. The term “peer” denotes equality among people in contact with each other. In their description of a long-term peer sport project to prevent sexualized violence, Chris Ott and Marcel Drayer provide other definitions (see p. 10). In the project “Mit Sicherheit Verliebt” (Safely in Love), medical students talk with pupils about sexuality education using their own personal knowledge – the classical form of peer education. Maike Friebe reports.

It makes particular sense to work with a peer approach in cases where adolescents already possess special skills. For example, as “media scouts,” they use their existing media competence (“digital natives”) to encourage responsible, self-determined, critical use of media. The Media Scouts NRW are uniquely well situated to counsel others concerning problems and even work directly in school development. A similar project, JUUUPPORT, goes even further and offers live chats (see the project sketches).

Ricarda Kluge reports on women’s affairs representatives in residential institutions and workshops for the disabled who are themselves residents or employees with disabilities and can thus well understand the needs of their colleagues.

In & Out in Berlin counsels adolescent peers concerning sexual orientation, gender identity, and coming out. The InTeam in Basel, Switzerland, trains adolescents who have yet to find a vocational training program to become peer educators for sexual health and media competence. Our interview partner, Eldem Kurnaz, introduces us to the HEROES Project, where young men with a migration background train for a year to counsel others on themes such as gender equality, the patriarchy, and family issues.

All these peer counselors have advanced enormously and profited from working on these projects. They have accumulated much knowledge, gotten to know behavioral options, and experience their own efficacy, a central component to all peer approaches.

Adolescents are now even participating in research projects and working on recommendations for youth-appropriate preventive concepts. Anja Henningsen and Veronika Winter present the project SchutzNorm. The ReWiKs Project (see the project sketches) integrates persons with disabilities in ongoing research and conception.

“Adolescents talk about their experiences of sexualized violence particularly with their peers.” The consequence of this fact and how adolescents confronted with these confessions can be better prepared to use their potential, also in terms of a possible bridge to professional assistance systems – that is the theme of the contribution by Rebecca Gulowski and Christina Krüger from the DJI.

We invite you to consider the peer approach and to allow it to inspire you in your professional work. It is worth the while!

The Editors

Safely in Love: A Preventive Project by Students for Pupils

Maike Frießen

The “Mit Sicherheit Verliebt” (Safely in Love) project consists of university students from all over Germany teaching needs-based sexuality education to adolescents still at school. Not only are these students well qualified for this task, they also engage the adolescents as equals from (more or less) the same generation. Above all, they share their common experiences of sexuality in modern society.

Who We Are: The Project

The “Safely in Love” project is sustained and headed by volunteer students who have been previously trained. Presently, there are 38 locations throughout Germany where some 850 members dispense comprehensive sexuality education. They are largely recruited from medical faculties, though the program is open to students of all other faculties, which presently comprise about one-fifth of all participants.

The key work in this project consists of the students visiting schools and applying age-appropriate educational methods based on state-of-the-art scientific knowledge on issues of sexuality, providing the pupils with a safe space to engage in an open dialogue (“peer education”). The thrust of this project is the need to deal with matters of sexuality and their both medical and social ramifications. The project reaches a yearly total of about 18,000 pupils.

In addition to their visits to the schools, the participants of the project regularly initiate campaigns on special occasions, such as on World AIDS Day, and become active at the local and national levels by organizing events and cooperations to strengthen awareness about sexual health.

Safely in Love is a project of the “Bundesvertretung der Medizinstudierenden in Deutschland e.V.” (bvmd; Federal Association of Medical Students in Germany) and is attached to its Working Group on Sexuality and Prevention.

School Visits: Insights

No two visits to schools by Safely in Love representatives are alike; each is adapted to the respective needs of the class and age group, regarding both content and methods. The local groups also coordinate their school visits according to their own guidelines.

However, the basic idea is that the respective class is visited by a group of about four project members who remain in the class for an entire morning session. The teachers are available but not necessarily present during this time, to ensure confidentiality and to protect the pupils’ privacy.

Games are employed to introduce the pupils to medically relevant themes, such as sexually transmitted diseases and

their prevention. The thrust of the project is to inform as well as to treat the theme of sexuality from a holistic vantage point and to emphasize the positive aspects thereof.

For example, the pupils learn interactively that there are many different sexual orientations and sexual identities. The Safely in Love project and its members continually work to confront stigmatization and discrimination. Thus, the pupils receive the opportunity to speak with other young people who have clearly taken up positions of acceptance and tolerance toward sexual and gender concerns.

Through self-reflection the pupils can also address their own personal boundaries. When is it okay for me to be touched? Where and by whom? They also learn to discover and respect the boundaries of others and to maintain their own boundaries.

A further theme discussed with the pupils in school classes is sexuality on the internet. Modern technological developments have catapulted our members in their personal development at a similar pace as the pupils they are counseling. What is sexting? How do I best deal with situations in which pictures of my naked body are being distributed? What to do when I receive pictures that in fact were not meant for me? The pupils are given methods to determine how many people are involved in the development of pornographic materials and to see the reality behind it.

Such themes (and many more) form the basis for pupils and the students during school visits. The underlying principle is that young people themselves are experts regarding their own body and their sexual and emotional well-being.

For the concrete application of this principle, the project members and local groups receive basic training as well as all necessary guidelines and databases required concerning the theoretical background and methods, which are continually being updated.

Trust-Building: Through Personal Conversations

“Hey, do girls masturbate too?” Our members are committed to providing an open and discrimination-free atmosphere

to discuss matters of sexuality during every school visit. Yet, both the theme of sexuality and the role of the members as peers make for very special challenges during such discussions. The difficulty lies in providing anonymity and a trustful atmosphere while professionally presenting one's own experiences as peer.

The most important thing is that the pupils have the feeling of being taken seriously. They must be able to freely express their questions, worries, and wishes. The student counselors in turn are dedicated to ensuring that any statements made during the class discussion remain within that group. The pupils may also pose their questions anonymously, if desired, and discussions can be held in a more intimate atmosphere.

The peer-to-peer relationship permits discussion of personal questions as well, though it is also acceptable for some questions to go unanswered. Both sides can, at their discretion, decide what they want to reveal and what not. The pupils always have the option of not revealing their sexual orientation during the school visits, if they deem that appropriate. Even participation itself in a school visit of Safely in Love is voluntary and never mandatory.

A Universal Right: Special Offers

Having access to comprehensive sexuality education stems from the universal human right to sexual self-determination in children, adolescents, and adults. In order to ensure this right to persons in all life settings, experienced members of the project recently developed concepts to deal with the sometimes special demands made of sexuality education.

For example, the Safely in Love project also provides proper sexuality education according to its guiding principle in special education schools: How do I explain the use of a condom in Easy Language? How much anatomy deepens understanding and how much causes confusion? Even more complex matters, such as interventions in the reproductive freedom of persons with disabilities or their self-assertion to prevent sexual abuse are contained in this process.

A further offer at some locations are visits to the school classroom in language courses. Wherever German is being taught as a second language, forms of communication take on a special meaning. The pupils' cultural background, where sexuality may play a very different role than in Western European culture, must be taken into account.

Peer Expertise: The Training

When someone wants to disperse information on sexuality education under the aegis of "Safely in Love," they must first receive basic training as well as sit in on two school visits led by experienced members. Key focal points of the training are sexually transmitted diseases, contraception, and anatomy. Further, the training comprises educational and legal aspects, positive sexual education, and themes such as gender and sexual orientation.

The training concept is mandatory to ensure the professional and educational qualifications necessary to visit school classrooms. Regular seminars for continuing education are made available at the local, national, and international levels.

Safely in Love: International Networking

The origin of the Safely in Love project lies in Scandinavia. In the 1990s, Sweden started a prevention project for students to provide pupils with sexuality education as peers. In 2001, the German version was founded according to the

Swedish model, sponsored by the German Ministry of Health under the provisional title "Aktion Sprechstunde" (Action Consultation). From the very beginning, the project has shared common goals with other student projects in other countries committed to the same principles.

The project is well embedded in the local and regional infrastructure. Particularly close cooperations exist in the German-speaking countries with the partner projects "achtung"liebe" (watch out^olove) from Austria and "Achtung Liebe" (Watch Out Love) from Switzerland. Further, the International Federation of Medical Students' Associations (IFMSA) supports it as a so-called Comprehensive Sexuality Education Project. These international cooperations regularly offer training and exchange programs like that of the Northern European Conference on Sexuality Education (NECSE), where delegations from now 14 countries of Northern Europe meet yearly to discuss new methods in sexuality education.

Our Role in Germany: Supplementary Offer

We consider peer education to be one method among many that can ensure the establishment of comprehensive sexuality education of adolescents and young adults in our society. The Safely in Love project is a supplementary offer that complements the curricular sexuality education in the secondary school system. Parents play a key role in this endeavor, as do physicians, professional educators, and counseling services. With their fundamental decision to support sexuality education in Germany, the national representatives of the medical students in Germany have shown their weight behind the increased cooperation¹ with these groups. We cooperate with many of these stakeholders to install a sexuality education that helps young people to develop life skills that in turn enable them to experience sexuality as an important and integral part of their health and well-being.



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¹ 2018-05_Grundsatzentscheidung_Sexualaufklärung_junger_Menschen_in_Deutschland-3.pdf

The Project “Medienscouts NRW”

Sven Hulvershorn

The project “Medienscouts NRW” (Media Scouts North Rhein-Westphalia) is sponsored by the State Institute for Media of North Rhein-Westphalia. It serves to support schools in their efforts to address and prevent problems such as cybermobbing, hate speech, data abuse, and excessive media use in the schools.

A Flagship Project

One major reason for the success of this project lies in the role adolescents play as media scouts to advise pupils concerning their media use and to answer their questions concerning all matters pertaining to the themes of smartphone use, social networks, and the internet in general. In this project, pupils learn and disseminate the competences needed to ensure a safe, fair, and autonomous approach to digital media. The project has made major contributions to preparing a successful strategy of digitalizing education. At the same time, work on this project is always carried out on a level playing field between the pupils and their teachers. This makes for a new approach to learning and teaching, an age-appropriate conveyance of media competence, and educational offers oriented toward the respective problems and needs of adolescents.

Since its inception in 2011, this project, sponsored by the State Institute for Media of North Rhein-Westphalia, has qualified some 3,900 pupils and more than 1,700 teacher counselors in ca. 870 schools. This success of this venture was made possible by many important partners in the municipalities, such as media centers, competence teams, regional educational offices, school boards, youth welfare offices as well as police and addiction prevention services.

The project “Medienscouts NRW” has become a flagship project for all of Germany, the largest scout project of its type in the German-speaking countries. The positive resonance since its beginning in 2011 confirms the concept of this project. Since the beginning of school year 2019/2020, the State Ministry for Schools and Education in the State of North Rhein-Westphalia has introduced the project broadly in all its schools.

The Role of the Media Scout

The training of a media scout has the goal of enhancing the media competence of the pupils and providing them with the necessary knowledge to obtain an overview of behavioral alternatives as well as means of reflection, and to ensure a safe, creative, responsible, and autonomous use of media. Imparting these skills to peers also serves to enhance the media competence of the media scouts themselves.

One task of the media scouts lies in preparing a suitable counseling and information system for their peers, orienting these offers toward the target groups, and reacting adequately to their needs.

An important aspect of the work of media scouts lies in their having the proper knowledge for dealing with media, passing this knowledge along to others, and developing the ability to recognize their own limitations – and knowing when to get outside help. To this end, up to four pupils per school are trained to become media scouts, with two teachers receiving training as teacher counselors, over a total of 5 days of workshops. The trained media scouts and their teacher counselors are then tasked with training new generations of media scouts at their respective schools.

Thematic focal points of the training include the following:

- Internet and safety
- Social networks
- Smartphone
- Digital gaming
- Counseling competence
- Communication training
- Social learning

If the teacher counselors are unable to help with certain questions, they can turn to a special team of media experts at the State Institute for Media of North Rhein-Westphalia, whose competence includes the basic themes of the workshops (internet and safety, social networks, smartphone,

digital gaming) as well as matters concerning consumer protection and aspects of school psychology.

The Purpose of Media Scouts and Their Role in Peer Education

An important principle found throughout the entire training is that the adolescents and the adults always work together; this suspends the classical distribution of roles between teachers and pupils. It gives the teachers the opportunity to gather valuable experience by providing them with authentic and direct insights into the media world of adolescents as well as witnessing – and hopefully understanding – the potentials and relevance of digital media in the everyday life of adolescents, going far beyond anything they might learn during normal classroom instruction. The adolescents, on the other hand, are taken seriously as experts within their own world since they possess an advantage over adults regarding digital media and have good reason not only to deal with the problems and risks encountered with digital media, but also to introduce their insights into the general discussion. For this reason, this project is dedicated to the approach of "peer education."

Peer education is generally defined as an approach dedicated to learning through and with persons of the same age group. It comes from the concept of a "peer group" as a group of same-aged persons and is today often found in work with children and adolescents. The method of peer education was devised so that adolescents can impart their skills and abilities to others in their age group or to slightly older/younger adolescents. Proven concepts of peer education may be found in the field of addiction prevention, other health-related themes (e.g., nutrition), or road-safety education. From the vantage point of the teachers and educationists, the major advantage of peer education lies in children and adolescents being empowered to impart their knowledge on equal footing with others and in empathizing with other children and adolescents. This enables them to communicate their message in a clear and meaningful way. Further, it lowers the threshold for children and adolescents when approaching peers with their questions. It is also assumed that more or less same-aged peers represent an important reference population and a decisive socialization factor for the healthy development of children and adolescents. The (young) disseminators – the adolescents who pass along their knowledge – thus function as role models and provide behavioral templates for dealing with difficult themes and situations.

Yet, despite the many advantages, the peer-education approach does have its limitations. Some areas cannot, and indeed should not, be left to children and adolescents to tackle on their own. For example, matters relating to confrontations with psychological or physical violence or other criminal offences should clearly lie in the hands of adults. Other highly problematic areas include threats of suicide, addiction problems, or severe mental disorders, where the expertise of professionals is necessary. For this reason, it is important that the media scouts have trained adults at their disposal.

The trained media scouts assume the following roles in the schools:

1) Prevention

The information distributed by the media scouts supports learning the fair and autonomous use of digital media while at the same time respecting the rights and the privacy rights of others.

2) Advice on problems

Wherever problems crop up, for example, with copyright, with the dissemination of personal data, or in cases of defamation and slander in social networks, the media scouts can provide support in directly dealing with such situations. The important thing is that they have properly learned to know and respect their own limitations. In each individual case, they must consider whether a criminal act has been committed or whether a case of "simple" insult in fact represents cybermobbing, in which case they are obligated to call on their teacher counselors to help out or know where the adolescents can turn and get assistance.

3) School development

The work of the media scouts and their teacher counselors in the field of media competence is not an isolated action but part of an overall school strategy to face the challenges of the digital age. Media scouts form an integral part of the overall goal of the respective school to prepare pupils for dealing with everyday life and learning the proper approach to digital media.

Implementing the Project

The training of the Media Scouts North Rhein-Westphalia is directed at 8th-grade pupils in secondary schools. As mentioned, each individual school has up to four trained media scouts and two trained teacher counselors. Each training course includes representatives from ten schools from the same district or municipality in the state of North Rhein-Westphalia. In order to establish this offer and to keep the training up to date in a rapidly changing media environment, the State Institute for Media of North Rhein-Westphalia also offers one-day advanced workshops and network meetings for which the districts or municipalities can apply after consulting with the respective schools. These advanced workshops are directed toward all participating media scouts and teacher counselors in a district or municipality and generally take place in the schools. They presently include themes such as "fake news," "influencers," and "recruiting trainees." For the most part, the network meetings are attended by the teacher counselors and serve to create a moderated and direct exchange of information among the schools.

The trained and highly motivated media scouts then expand their activities to include all other school types. They are active in the training of new media scouts and in designing offers for adolescents and adults alike. This includes counseling efforts directed toward other pupils as well as information events held as part of the normal school activities. The remarkable thing is that, in almost all cases, the pupils themselves both develop and conduct the offers. It is helpful, however, if they have previously been exposed to the themes during their own training in a cooperative, participative, and equitable manner.

For the media scouts, however, it is of utmost importance that the school administration be fully committed to the project and actively support its implementation in the school.

For the teacher counselors, their participation in the project means an increase in time and effort.

Outlook

As part of the first “Convention of Media Scouts in North Rhein-Westphalia” on 7 October 2019 in Düsseldorf, the State Ministry for Schools and Education in North Rhein-Westphalia officially announced that the project “Media Scouts North Rhein-Westphalia” would continue to be funded for the school year 2019/2020 by the state government. This means providing for new trainings, advanced workshops, and network meetings throughout the state. This new and extensive level of cooperation is only the first step toward establishing the program at all secondary schools of North Rhein-Westphalia in the future. Further, schools that now have media scouts are set to receive the backing they need to continue the project. Of course, such structural projects are not “self-starters”: If the project Media Scouts in North Rhein-Westphalia is to be implemented throughout the state, everyone must work to sustain the engagement of all participants.



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Sport Respects Your Rights

Christopher Ott, Marcel Drayer

In 2013, the Badische Sportjugend (bsj; Baden Youth Sports Organization in southern Germany), a member of the Badischer Sportbund Freiburg e.V. (Baden Sports Confederation Freiburg), launched its project “Sport Respects Your Rights” to emphasize prevention and intervention in matters of sexualized violence, protecting the well-being of children and adolescents, as well as teaching moral values in and through sport. A special feature of this project lies in training adolescents and young adults to become peer educators.

The Scope and the Themes

The bsj is the umbrella organization of youth sport in South Baden. Presently, some 350,000 young people are organized in 3,200 sport clubs and 53 sport associations in this area. The bsj is also an officially recognized sponsor of independent youth services and extramural educational activities. As one of the largest youth organizations in all South Baden, it is dedicated to many different areas of youth work, including nonsport activities. Present projects range from health prevention and health promotion, to the protection of children and adolescents, to inclusion in sport activities, to enabling the participation and commitment of young people in all areas.

The Role of bsj in Prevention of and Intervention in Sexualized Violence

(Sexualized) abuse of power in sport represents a particularly acute danger to children and adolescents (cf. the results of the 3-year-long research project “Safe Sport”¹). One main thrust of child and adolescent sport in South Baden lies in protecting children and adolescents and offering them safe spaces where they can participate in active and healthy activities. The goal is to support sport clubs in the public arena, as a place where children and adolescents can develop safely and healthily. By signing the “Schutz vor sexualisierter Gewalt im Sport – Vorbeugen und Aufklären, Hinsehen und Handeln!” (Declaration of Protection Against Sexualized Violence in Sport – Prevention, Education, Observation, Action; cf. LAMBY 2016, p. 77) as part of the General Assembly of Members of the German Olympic Sport Confederation (DOSB) on 4 December 2010 in Munich, the DOSB and all of its member organizations pledged to support actions for the prevention of and intervention in cases of sexualized violence in sport. The goal of that declaration was to create a culture of awareness and action among those responsible, and to protect children,

adolescents, and young adults from all forms of sexualized violence in sport.

The bsj orients all of its efforts to the most important instrument of human rights protecting children and adolescents, namely, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC²), which explicitly affords children the right to physical and mental health. For this reason, the bsj has undertaken efforts to install prevention and intervention regarding sexualized violence in the context of child and adolescent sport.

Sport is a very physical activity with several peculiarities: Before engaging in sport, one must first get dressed in a dressing room and after completion take a shower. The relationship between (generally volunteer) club trainers, parents, children, and adolescents is based less on professional contracts than on trust. In most cases, such trust-based relationships are characterized by great respect and regard for the personal rights of others. Yet, sometimes, there have been cases in which the entrusted persons wrongly exercised their position. The past years have witnessed cases where, for example, a trainer has (sexually) abused those commended to their care.³

The goal of this project is to strengthen relationships of trust and at the same time to establish a culture of observation and action in all areas of club sport activities. To that end, the bsj sees its most important task in protecting children and adolescents to support educational efforts, in particular through the project “Sport Respects Your Rights – Practicing Values in Sport.” The goal is to reinforce the self-confidence and autonomy of young people. The various measures serve to motivate and support children and adolescents to actively participate and become involved in shaping their own life environment.

1 www.dsj.de/kinderschutz/forschungsprojekt-safe-sport/

2 The complete text of this declaration may be found at <https://www.unicef.org/child-rights-convention/convention-text>

3 No comprehensive scientific data presently exist for mass sports.

Those directly addressed by this project are athletes and trainers between the age of 16 and 26, whereby the focus lies on sport clubs, those active in sport clubs, and of course the parents. The goal is to train all of these actors to recognize possible dangers to children and adolescents, for example (sexualized) violence, at an early timepoint, to uncover the abuse of power, and to counter it whenever possible.

The Project

The project “Sport Respects Your Rights – Practicing Values in Sport” kicked off in 2013 in cooperation with the German Sport Federation (dsj) within the DOSB. It received financial support for initially two years from the “DAPHNE-III” program 2011/2012 of the European Union. Although this project funding has now run out, the bsj has continued to support the program on its own since 2015 and has since concentrated its efforts on the following components:

1) Workshops for adolescents and young adults

Young athletes and trainers are given the opportunity to participate in free one-day workshops about prevention of and intervention in sexualized violence, the protection of children and adolescents, and the teaching of values through sport. This serves to train them to become peer disseminators in their respective sport clubs. The participants are trained to become actively involved in protecting children and adolescents, in particular to actively shape what goes on in their respective sport clubs. What they learn in these workshops, for example, about the various manifestations of sexualized violence, the strategies perpetrators use, existing risk factors, as well as strategies for prevention and intervention, they can apply and facilitate directly in their club work. To this end, they also receive informational materials. Over time, earlier participants of these workshops who have qualified themselves as peer educators then support the bsj staff in planning and executing the workshops as well as other actions and campaigns. 130 adolescents and young adults from different sport clubs in South Baden have attended the workshops since 2013.

2) Actions and campaigns

Based on the knowledge and skills acquired in the workshops, the peer educators work to sensitize the sport-interested public about the theme of child protection. In accordance with the premise of youth participation, the peers completely control which themes are treated and how the actions and campaigns are organized – of course with the support of the project staff of the bsj as well as adolescents and young adults from previous project runs. One example of such a campaign is the completely independently organized advertising spot presented during the Bundesliga soccer game between SC Freiburg and VfB Stuttgart in 2014.⁴ Another example is the flashmob staged during the dsj Youth Event and the International German Gymnastics Festival in 2017.

3) Network meetings

So-called network meetings take place as accompanied exchanges between different sport clubs to develop the prevention and intervention structures. Each sport club appoints representatives to participate every other month in network

meetings organized by the bsj, where they can discuss the situation in their sport club and report on their experiences in prevention and intervention. These representatives are generally persons who hold responsible positions within the respective sport club and persons who have already trained in the workshops. In order to adapt the contents of the meetings to the needs of the clubs, questionnaires are distributed in advance. Following the meetings, the representatives report back the results and recommendations to their club and continue to develop prevention and intervention structures on location.

The Role of the Peer Approach in This Project

The term “peer” stems from the Latin “par,” which means both sameness and someone of the same rank (status). A peer is thus someone who is part of or resembles a group of people (the “peer group”) in one or more ways. Today, peer group is often used as a synonym to designate a “group of same-aged persons,” which is technically incorrect since peer does not refer solely to age. Rather, peers have the same attitude, status, social role, proximity, interests, and experiences (cf. ROHR et al., 2016, p. 7). Peer groups generally arise voluntarily, for example, in educational surroundings – in social groups that offer protection and orientation. The core of these small groups consists of group-specific moral concepts that are strengthened through a sense of community in the context of their direct relationships. Peer groups represent an informal socialization context said to be responsible for exerting a positive influence on developmental tasks, social interactions in general, and the separation from the parental home (cf. ECARIUS et al., 2011, p. 113).

Peer Education (sometimes also called Peer Involvement) is a pedagogical concept denoting a common learning process and exchange between a specially trained peer educator and their peers concerning some specific theme. This direct communication framework among same-aged persons, that is, the confidential exchange among equals, and the ensuing direct relationships have proven to be superior to the classical educational setting. This approach serves to impart certain study points, largely by passing along one’s knowledge, and is above all based on voluntarism. The adolescents thus become experts for the themes and problems of their peers, “producing a pool of mutual support and counseling” (SCHRENK, 2009, p. 87). The peer group as resource has thus become a popular and increasingly important approach to prevention work (cf. KERN-SCHEFFELDT, 2005).

Experiences with the Peer Approach in This Project

The project “Sport Respects Your Rights – Practicing Values in Sport” directly applies the peer approach. The adolescents and young adults involved have volunteered to participate in the project and thus are interested in transferring their knowledge to others.

The project qualifies the participants to deal with the structure of the club and to directly influence the reigning social culture within the club. Because they interact with other adolescent and young-adult athletes, they assume the role of experts for the themes and problems of their peers.

⁴ Can be viewed at <https://youtu.be/omOAIYUgo4>

The independent campaign work helps to maintain their participation in the further development and expansion of the most important themes. Their involvement in the workshops guarantees the continuation of the collaboration and motivates other peers to become involved in the campaigns. One decisive characteristic lies in their taking up the causes of their peers in the network meetings, where they learn to interact with the representatives of other sport clubs, to formulate their interests, and to become concerned with other, different vantage points.

Over the past 6 years, however, there were a number of difficulties to be mastered: The peer approach created special challenges, pertaining mostly to the long-term commitment of the participants: Most of those participating in the project are on the cusp of commencing vocational training or university study, generally necessitating their moving to a new location, making the continued transferral of their knowledge impossible.

Nevertheless, the positive experiences from the past 6 years have outweighed the negative ones by far. Because the participants meet as equals, they tend to develop a reliable and open communication culture. The young athletes are well aware of the lifeworld and problems of their fellow athletes, which creates a social proximity that promotes learning processes. Based on these trustful relationships, the authors presume that more young people are encouraged to speak about their experiences with (sexualized) power abuse, though presently no concrete numbers are available to back up this impression. However, the sensitization emerging from the peer trainings has been very useful to the clubs in the further development of their sport structure and in allowing other young people to be educated about these matters. A further advantage of peer education lies in the way it strengthens the self-esteem of the young participants, who turn the trustful encounters into resources for themselves and their clubs in their sporting activities.

Current Status and Further Goals

Today, the project has been independently active for 6 years. Over the past year, the English title of the project was expanded to include an official German title. The project contents are presently also being extended to teaching values in and through sport. In the future, several cooperations with other projects are planned, for example, with the bsj's "Active Day," the goal being to have even more children and adolescents become involved with what the bsj has to offer. "Active Day" is a cooperative event held between schools and local sport clubs, where children and adolescents can become acquainted with existing sport programs, generally have fun, and, if possible, take up a new type of sport. In the future, the information elements of the project "Sport Respects Your Rights – Practicing Values in Sport" will become part of these presentations, to enable children and adolescents from the local schools to participate in the project, too. In addition, the data gathered from an internet-based survey on child and adolescent protection (and protection concepts) will be analyzed and assessed, strengthening the interaction with the sport clubs. This survey serves to determine those areas within the sport clubs which are in need of further support on the part of the bsj.



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Women's Affairs Representatives in Institutions for the Disabled: Peer Counseling and Support for Women in Sheltered Workshops for the Disabled and Residential Facilities

Ricarda Kluge

Since the reform of the *Werkstätten-Mitwirkungsverordnung (WMVO; Regulation Concerning Participation in Sheltered Workshops)* took effect in January 2017, women's affairs representatives are foreseen for all *Werkstätten für behinderte Menschen (WfbM; Sheltered Workshops for the Disabled)* throughout Germany.¹ They protect the interests of all female staff members in these workshops; they encourage and strengthen women in the respective organization; and they are contact persons on an equal footing regarding any and all problems and concerns of their colleagues.

Because of their own experiences as women with disabilities, these women's affairs representatives assume the role as confidantes who also resemble those they represent. That is the major difference to other educational and professional services offered in such facilities, such as support services: Women's affairs representatives can directly address their colleagues and can help women in need of counseling to solve their problems from a different perspective than, say, social workers or group leaders in sheltered workshops for the disabled.

These women also function as role models for their colleagues in the workshops by interceding on their behalf and protecting their rights. Further, they become active in ensuring that matters concerning violence against women with disabilities remain on the agenda of such workshops. This represents an important contribution to the prevention of violence in institutions dedicated to the disabled.

Women's Affairs Representatives: Experts on Equal Footing

In sheltered workshops for the disabled, women's affairs representatives are recruited from the pool of female staff and in residential facilities for the disabled from the residents. The concept is based on the idea of having impacted persons counsel other impacted persons ("peer support" or "peer counseling"). Women's affairs representatives share the experiences and concerns of their colleagues who work in the workshops. For example, they are well acquainted with not being taken seriously, with being victims of violence in various shapes and forms; they know how difficult it can be for disabled women to discuss these issues and to obtain adequate help and assistance. Thus, they become confidantes

on equal footing and the persons of first resort to listen to the concerns and problems of the female employees. They also offer easy access to the professional services available in such institutions.

Decisive to their work are the confidentiality of their counseling and their professional discretion. For many women, approaching a women's affairs representative is an easier step since, different from the other services offered in these institutions, the emphasis does not lie on creating an educational intervention, but rather on strengthening and supporting the demands of the women in need.

Concretely, that means that women's affairs representatives offer consultation hours and counseling. They listen to the women who approach them and give them the feeling that they are being taken seriously. Then, together with the women seeking assistance, they try to determine how best to find solutions and support possibilities, both within the institution and by contacting outside counseling and support organizations for women who have become victims of violence.

Furthermore, they inform their colleagues in internal events in groups or the entire workshop about their role and other relevant matters. They establish offers such as women's cafés or courses. They represent the interests of the women in their organization in internal councils such as workgroups concerning internal regulations (violence-prevention concepts, pay schemes). Above all, however, they stand in direct contact with the workshop management and governing board.

All of the above are challenging and responsible tasks that a women's affairs representative can carry out only with the complete support of the entire organization and under the proper conditions.

First and foremost, such representatives need to be well educated to fulfill their duties. The content of such a qualification comprises the knowledge and the skills necessary to carry out their tasks (counseling, knowledge of the situation and rights of women with disabilities, of available support mechanisms, of workers' organizations, etc.) and

¹ In Bremen, Thuringia, and Rheinland-Palatinate, the presence of women's affairs representatives is legally binding, whereas in the other federal states only some residential facilities have such representatives on a volunteer basis.

strengthening and encouraging the women's representatives themselves.

Offers of further and continuing education as well as the opportunity to regularly partake of supervision are also requisite parts of their work.

Of paramount importance is ensuring the proper and tailored support for the women's affairs representatives. Every women's affairs representative has the right to engage with a supporter of their own choosing (so-called "trusted third party"). This person helps the women's affairs representative to complete her daily tasks, which can vary widely depending on the need. For example, it may consist of writing the minutes of meetings, assisting in completing computer tasks, researching support sources and contacts, preparing and evaluating discussions, and providing impulses for counseling with difficult themes. Finally, the designated supporter may function as a close ally in all matters concerning the Office of Women's Affairs. And, of course, she may provide encouragement and impetus especially at the beginning of a women's affairs representative's tenure.

In addition to these two basic prerequisites for the successful execution of the role as women's affairs representative, the institution itself must provide a reliable and supportive infrastructure. This means arranging for suitable equipment in the Office of the Women's Affairs, the support of the management and the other employees, the means to network with counseling and support sources outside the workshop as well as with other women's affairs representatives in other institutions to exchange experiences and provide support.

History and Background

As early as 2003, women with learning difficulties² demanded that women's affairs representatives be installed in workshops and residential facilities for the disabled as contact persons and representatives on equal footing with the other employees/residents. The national self-help group of people with learning disabilities "Mensch zuerst – Netzwerk People First Deutschland e.V." (Network People First Germany) initiated a campaign to collect signatures supporting this call.

In the 1980s, organizations of women with disabilities such as "Weibernetz e.V." pointed out the discrimination and heteronomy being suffered by women with disabilities, particularly among women living and working in facilities geared toward the disabled. In the 1990s, studies showed that women with disabilities were increasingly becoming victims of (sexualized) violence, but that such violence was (and still is) being ignored or denied especially in these facilities.

In 2012, the results of the study "Lebenssituationen und Belastungen von Frauen mit Beeinträchtigungen und Behinderungen in Deutschland" (The Living Conditions and Burdens of Women with Impairments and Disabilities in Germany) created quite a stir. This study revealed that women with disabilities were being exposed to high levels of many forms of violence. Especially women with learning disabilities who were living or working in facilities for the disabled were becoming victims of structural violence. Furthermore, the study showed that 25% of women with learning disabilities had experienced sexualized violence – not including the high estimates of unreported cases. Also, the study discovered that woman and girls with disabilities were not being adequately protected from violence and

called for the establishment of easy-access offers targeted specifically toward this group (cf. BUNDESMINISTERIUM FÜR FAMILIE, SENIOREN, FRAUEN UND JUGEND 2012).

From 2008 to 2011, Weibernetz, in cooperation with Network People First Germany launched the first project dedicated to the installation of women's affairs representatives in institutions for the disabled. The German Federal Ministry for Family, Seniors, Woman and Youth (BMFSFJ) sponsored this model project to test a concept for introducing women's affairs representatives in such facilities. As part of this project, Weibernetz conceived an educational concept for training such women's affairs representatives in the workshops and residential facilities for the disabled. They then trained a total of 16 women and their supporters and accompanied them during their introduction in their respective facilities. This project was scientifically documented by the Gesellschaft für Sozialwissenschaftliche Frauen- und Genderforschung (GSF e.V.; Society for Social Scientific Women's and Gender Research).

The results of this study were clear: The institution of women's affairs representatives proved to be an effective means of strengthening the status of women with disabilities and of preventing violence in such facilities. A follow-up project ("Frauen-Beauftragte in Einrichtungen: Eine Idee macht Schule" [Women's Affairs Representatives in Institutions: An Idea Catches On]), carried out from 2013 to 2016 and also financed by the BMFSFJ and 10 of the 16 German states, was dedicated to educating disseminators to further train women's affairs representatives and thus to snowball both the concept and the training of women's affairs representatives throughout the entire country. Weibernetz subsequently educated trainer-dyads from the states participating in this project, who in turn organized trainings for women's affairs representatives in the facilities of their respective states.

Since the reform of the Regulation on Participation in Sheltered Workshops in 2017, women's affairs representatives have been established in sheltered workshops for the disabled throughout Germany. Clearly, these women and their facilities had embarked on a new and unknown process. In order to support this work, Weibernetz started a third project, entitled "Ein Bundesnetzwerk für Frauen-Beauftragte in Einrichtungen" (A National Network for Women's Affairs Representatives in Institutions for the Disabled), from 2016 bis 2019, also financed by the BMFSFJ. This project proposed establishing a network for the exchange of information and experiences among the women's affairs representatives. In September 2019, following completion of this project, the organization "Starke.Frauen.Machen – Bundesnetzwerk der Frauen-Beauftragten in Einrichtungen" (Strong.Women.Act – National Network of Women's Affairs Representatives in Institutions for the Disabled) was founded as an advocacy group to politically lobby for women's affairs representatives in workshops and residential facilities.

The latter national network is presently involved in a new project, "Das Bundes-Netzwerk der Frauen-Beauftragten stark machen!" (Strengthening the National Network of Women's Affairs Representatives!), planned for 2019 to 2022, also with the support of the BMFSFJ and the sponsorship

2 Weibernetz prefers the term "learning difficulties," in accordance with the demand of the self-help organization "Network People First Germany," which considers the terms "mental handicap" and "mental disability" to be stigmatizing.

of Weibernetz, the goal being to create working structures and to train women's affairs representatives to become lobbyists for their peers. At the end of this project, the National Network should be able to stand on its own and assume the national political lobbying work for the women's affairs representatives in the workshops and residential facilities for the disabled.

Experiences with the Peer Approach

The idea of installing women's affairs representatives in facilities for the disabled is unthinkable without the peer approach, primarily because such women's affairs representatives are in fact peer counselors. Women with disabilities who work in workshops or reside in living facilities for the disabled advise other women with disabilities in the same situation. That is what has made this concept so successful. The equal standing found in this counseling situation creates great confidence and affinity, something professional counselors in such facilities cannot attain because of their role in the institutional hierarchy. Furthermore, the employees in workshops are emboldened by the women's affairs representatives as role models. By becoming representatives for the interests of the female employees, they play a central role within the institution and exemplify how strong and assertive women with disabilities can truly be.

The peer approach, however, is also a key element in the training of women's affairs representatives. The concept devised by Weibernetz, and proven in subsequent practice, foresees tandem trainer teams with equitable advisors both with and without learning disabilities. Women with learning disabilities were involved early on in the development of the training concept in order to ensure that the true needs of the target group were fulfilled. As advisors, the peer experts guarantee that the exchange of information takes place on equal footing. They are empowering role models for the prospective women's affairs representatives by showing them how women with disabilities can hold lectures and lead workgroups as well as give advice to and counsel others.

Aspiring women's affairs representatives experience themselves as experts: During their training, they always have the opportunity to devise solutions and to provide advice to each other in the training group (cf. WEIBERNETZ 2016).

In addition to the practical work in the workshops and during the training courses, the nationwide network and lobbying work of the women's affairs representatives is increasing in importance. The main factor driving this effort is the support they provide and receive from each other. The national network of women's affairs representatives "Strong.Women.Act" was formed during a series of national meetings for women's affairs representatives in institutions. During these meetings, those involved from all over Germany experienced that they are not alone in their efforts but rather part of a large group of women who have made a major impact on their respective facilities and have been successful in overcoming many hurdles on the way. At these meetings, the women encourage each other, voice their ideas, and exchange proven solution strategies – or simply let off some steam. During the very intensive 3-year period, the women's affairs representatives, with the support and moderation of the staff of Weibernetz, developed the basis for establishing their autonomous national network and founded an advocacy group to lobby for women with disabilities.

The concept of the women's affairs representatives in institutions is pure peer support. The peer approach is not just part of the concept, it is its very core. Without the experiences, the motivation, and the ideas of the women involved from the workshops and residential facilities, the concept of women's affairs representatives would not have been as successful as it turned out to be – and that in a relatively short period of time of 15 years from the original idea to nationwide implementation of the approach to strengthen women with disabilities.

The work of the women's affairs representatives reveals the competences and the potential of women employed in workshops for the disabled or in other institutions for the disabled. They support each other, they encourage each other, they share their energy and their creativity. But their work is also witness to the many places where self-determination among women with disabilities is still lacking or being violated.



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In & Out: Counseling Project and Learning Location

In & Out Counselors

In & Out is a peer-to-peer counseling project run by the Bundesverband Jugendnetzwerk Lambda e.V. (Federal Association of Youth Network Lambda). For over 20 years now, they have counseled their peers – adolescents and young adults – throughout Germany on matters concerning sexual orientation, sexual identity, (multiple) discrimination, and coming-out.

Counseling is generally done by email or online chat, which allows the organization to reach people in need beyond the big cities. The all-volunteer staff see themselves along the queer spectrum, whether regarding gender or sexual orientation. They receive the support of two full-time professionals, who accompany their work and train them as well. The goal of the project is to improve the psychosocial situation of those in need, to disseminate knowledge, and to counsel others in a person-centered, resource- and solution-oriented manner.

Many people are unaware that the subject of queer lifestyle (and everything it precipitates) is still an important matter in need of a broader base. A study by the Deutsches Jugendinstitut (DJI; German Youth Institute) shows that 63.5% of all adolescents who have outed themselves are still not being taken seriously by their own family; 47.1% of them even report their identity being ignored altogether; and more than 50% experience discrimination in their educational or vocational settings. This need is perceptible in the work done at In & Out. For example, Lo (25 years old), a member of the team, reports that the number of contacts because of gender identity is on the rise, and that those who approach In & Out are getting younger. A. (19 years old), also on the staff, notices many changes: “We are being contacted more and more by people from outside Germany who want to come to Germany. Their fear of coming out to their parents is often larger than coming out to their peers.” This is why it is so important to provide counseling, empowerment, and safe locations for those in need.

For this reason, in its work with adolescents, In & Out always promotes the principles of empowerment and peer-counseling. But what exactly do we mean by that term??

We understand the term “peer” to mean a “person of the same standing.” Thus, peer-counseling also means providing options on equal footing. The counselors themselves are lesbian, homosexual, bisexual, transsexual, and/or queer, and generally speaking are the same age or only slightly older than those seeking help. This ensures that the exchange of similar experiences can take place in a very special way.

With In & Out, we purposefully do not address identity categories during the counseling process; if fitting, of course, the counselor can also share their own experiences with the person seeking help.

Oftentimes, queer adolescents have no means of communicating with peers within their group of family and friends. Lo. says it quite accurately: “Especially queer people, and more so queer young people, have no competent counseling offers at their disposal.”

Our offers of counseling enable adolescents who feel left out or insecure because of their identity problems to find support and relief. In 2017, one person seeking help from In & Out said the following as part of an online survey: “It is such a good feeling to experience that someone understands my problems, and that they likely grappled with similar questions in the past.”

The inner coming-out process is experienced by many young people as stress, especially because of their fear of the consequences. More than half of the adolescents are worried about coming out because they fear being rejected by friends and family or discriminated against at school or at work. But when our counselors take their questions and concerns seriously, they not only get the information they so dearly need, they are also able to get support in clearing their head and heart. They learn to reflect on their own wishes, attitudes, and behaviors. Furthermore, these self-reflective processes help them to overcome their insecurities, to break through stereotypes, and to develop a positive self-image. We put particular emphasis on discovering and using the innate resources of those seeking our help by positively reinforcing them, asking resource-oriented questions, pointing them toward local contact persons, and devising alternative behavioral options to deal with difficult situations. The goal is to strengthen the queer adolescents to the point that they can develop a self-determined lifestyle.

In addition to those seeking our help, In & Out reaches out to volunteer peer counselors, many of whom end up joining our project in order to create their own counseling offer like the one they profited from. In & Out stresses that

“volunteer” or “peer” counseling does not mean that they lack training in what they do – In & Out is where they learn and get the training they need.

The new volunteer peer counselors first enter a preparatory phase where they are accompanied by an experienced tutor and continuously receive valuable feedback from the tutor and the entire team. This eases the new counselors safely into the teamwork. Further, regularly held communication and counseling seminars and training units disseminate theoretical knowledge (e.g., new counseling techniques and methods, new means of input) and apply it to practical situations. These courses also cover themes such as the basics of counseling, determining boundaries, dealing with stressful situations, getting to know one’s own privileges, etc. Weekly team meetings are held to discuss ongoing organizational matters and to work through counseling requests, in addition to discussion rounds and supervision sessions.

One of the wonderful things about the seminar outings, team days, and team meetings lies in the fact that these activities do not just address the counseling role, but also serve to strengthen the feeling of team membership. This can be seen in the inviting, respectful, and equitable atmosphere in these meetings, which furthers the exchange of personal

experiences among the counselors who feel appreciated. It is easy to get to know others and to make friends at In & Out.

In addition, everyone involved is given the space to introduce themselves and their own ideas and themes as well as to become actively engaged in shaping the future of the project. Both critique and suggestions on how to expand the project are welcome and can be discussed openly. Yet, the counselors can show their engagement not just in the scope of the project: Because of their role as counselors and the interactions they have with the other team members, the counselors gather important experiences, skills, and knowledge that prove useful beyond the project. For example, they gain the ability to work in a team, to solve conflicts, to show tolerance for others, to experience what self-efficacy feels like, among other things. A., a 19-year-old counselor with In & Out, writes: “The exchange I had with other volunteers and my activity as a counselor have increased my knowledge and my sensitivity toward other themes enormously.”

Thus, there is more behind the term peer-counseling than first meets the eye. Those seeking help receive the assistance and encouragement they need to work toward self-help, they obtain needed and pertinent information, and they get the feeling that they are not alone in the world; the

Dos and Don’ts in Counseling Transgender Children and Adolescents

Using the Proper Pronouns and Names

Many transgender individuals have had the painful experience of not being respected or being improperly categorized in their sexuality and gender identity. When counseling transgender people, it is thus essential to first inquire about how the clients prefer to be addressed, what pronouns and what names to use, to ensure they feel confident and open toward the counselor.

Especially at the beginning of a transition process, names and pronouns can reflect intimacy – or the transgender persons are not yet comfortable with their choice. Counseling provides the unique space for them to try out different options or, if desired, to dispense with names and pronouns altogether.

Self-Designations and Self-Narratives

There are many different self-designations and self-narratives available to describe one’s sexuality, some of which may not necessarily agree with prevailing opinions of medicine, psychology, or the media. Some may even be rejected outright. The best approach is to inquire about preferred terms during counseling.

Using Trans-sensible Terms

Using trans-sensible terms means refraining from pathologizing someone’s state. The important thing is that the counselor comprehends the sexual identity of the client as the actual and true gender, not as a physical condition.

Don’t

Sexual identity disorder

Sex change

So, you were born as a boy but feel like a girl.

Physically you are actually a boy.

Do

Avoid terms denoting “disorder”; rather use “transgender” or “transsexuality”

Sex reassignment or sex adjustment

So, you were classified as a boy at birth but are in fact a girl.

Because of your body, you were classified as a boy at birth.

Questioning One’s Own Gender Categories

This can include questions such as: *What does a girl look like? Why should a transgender girl not have short hair or wear Metallica t-shirts? Why should a transgender boy not enjoy talking a lot about their feelings and being “soft”?*

counselors obtain their first taste of what it means to help others within a safe and protected environment, they are encouraged by the positive feedback they receive from the callers, and they get valuable experiences working in a team. “For me personally,” L. (25 years old) writes, “working at In & Out has been important because, on the one hand, with my advice I can support queer adolescents like I myself once was. On the other hand, In & Out is a place where queer people like me can be and feel safe while also learning a tremendous amount.”

In the future, the team has the wish that especially those people in influential positions become more aware of this theme. That includes politicians, educators, doctors, teachers, therapists as well as persons who are in the business of counseling and advising others. L., for example, has the wish that they take adolescents in the struggle for identity seriously, that they listen to them, that they show an interest in their needs and wishes. A., in turn, calls on teachers everywhere to include queer themes in the school context, above and beyond “sexuality education.” We are grateful to every individual who embraces the concerns of the queer youths.

This article represents the collective effort of the counselors themselves. Thanks go out to Q., Lo., and L. from the team.

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*Mein Name Mein Pronomen,
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Regenbogenportal des BMFSFJ:
www.regenbogenportal.de*

Workshops:

*Initiative Intersektionale Pädagogik,
www.i-paed-berlin.de*

Materials and further education:

www.queer-leben.de

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A Critical Approach to Rigid Gender Roles: The HEROES® Project

An Interview with Eldem Kurnaz

This is an interview held with Eldem Kurnaz concerning the HEROES® Project, which since 2007 has trained young men with a migration background to counsel their peers in workshops on matters such as equality, honor, culture, and human rights.v

Ms. Kurnaz, what is so special about the HEROES® Project?

We have had great success with the peer-education model since we are dealing with sensitive subject matters that our clients do not necessarily want to discuss with just anyone. The special thing about this project is that it allows young men to discuss the theme of equality with other young men and women. Furthermore, the project provides a safe space for these young men. The general public still has not developed a true understanding of what men suffer because of strict patriarchal structures, and that they, too, can have the strong desire to emancipate themselves, with and among each other.

What are the goals of the project?

The primary goal is to raise awareness about patriarchy. How self-determined, how trapped, are we in this mindset? What do we like about it and what do we reject? What do we do about it and what do we neglect to do? What are our behavioral options? What are our perspectives? But the most important thing is: How do I feel about it? Am I happy? And how happy or unhappy do I make my family or friends with the way I feel? What is my responsibility for the continued existence of the patriarchy, for rigid gender roles, for the “honor” of my family?

The desired effect would be that more and more adolescents lean against traditional and social practices that, on the one hand, serve to suppress girls and women but, on the other hand, also are oriented toward inhibiting other genders and sexual orientations. Hopefully, the adolescents in this program can obtain a new and healthy access to their own true selves, without reverting to stereotypes and external ascriptions. They should learn to reduce the pressure put on them that they can become part of a collective identity only by adhering to the old rules.

Who participates and how do they find their way to the program?

The young men who participate in the Berlin program often discover us through word-of-mouth recommendations – the snowball principle. But we also have attentive colleagues in schools who recommend boys to the program. Some of the boys have read about or heard contributions about us and actively want to join. Those who actually begin the program are generally between 16 and 22 years of age and stay with us for several years. Most do not come because they have great needs or are looking for help, but rather because they are in search of peers, of friends with whom they can socially interact and discuss socially critical concerns. They enjoy debating those matters that secretly preoccupy them but cannot be addressed in “male” circles. These positive experiences strengthen their commitment to the project. They learn to appreciate and protect the space provided them and to maintain the friendships made there. Only then do they sometimes come to realize how starkly affected they in fact are and how powerful the pressure put on them truly is. They then begin to challenge the image of masculinity they inherited. At some point then they become disseminators for others, experiencing how much change they can bring about, how much they can help other boys and girls who have yet to become as aware as they are.

The concept behind this project presumes that the young men themselves stem from so-called “honor cultures”; they should approach the themes from within their culture and be unconditionally accepted by adolescents of a similar socialization. A single workshop is too short to establish a relationship, which makes the common background an important factor in establishing trust from the very beginning.

The participants first go through a training period and receive a certificate at the end. How does that work?

The young men in this program come once a week to the trainings, which for them takes place in a sheltered space. They are part of a group of 6–8 boys and two group leaders. The group leaders define the themes, corresponding to the

overall goals of the project, and then open the discussion for project-specific themes, though there is also time and space for just having fun, for activities, and for personal matters the boys want or need to talk about. These weekly meetings go on for an entire year. If they have sufficiently participated in this process, they become part of a certification ceremony to which their friends, family members, political stakeholders, other professionals, and the media are invited. This ceremony oftentimes sharpens the awareness for what these boys have been doing in their free time and the credit due them for their efforts. Following certification, they are allowed to carry out their own workshops in classrooms and youth facilities.

What are the themes of these meetings and who decides which themes to treat?

The themes vary from experiences of discrimination, racism, identity, sexism, honor, masculinity, gender roles, patriarchal structures, repressive mechanisms, human rights, sexual self-determination, virginity, feminism, forced marriage, homophobia, transphobia, traditions, religions, values, love, relationships, family – and many more!

The themes are generally chosen and introduced into the training meetings by the group leaders. However, they are all themes the adolescents often have already formed an opinion on or have at least thought about – but rarely discussed with their peers about their stance. Oftentimes they can contribute much to the discussion because they are experiencing a relevant event in their lives or have been exposed to something in the media.

Part 2 of the HEROES® Project is based on the peer-to-peer approach. What is the background?

We want to offer space for the discussion of controversial themes. Many of the participants have never spoken openly about these matters or expressed their opinions in a larger circle. And, what is very important, every opinion is welcome: The goal is to have an honest debate. The HEROES and the group leaders only assume the role of asking questions but do not judge the answers. For many participants, this represents a radical experience – seeing how others in the group think, showing solidarity, contradicting someone else, taking a firm position. These actions pave the way for a multitude of perspectives, which offer adolescents the chance to back their way out of a dead-end: Having one's say on matters of "culture" and "tradition" is often sacrosanct and constrained, without the proper space to doubt and challenge. Especially teenagers always try to "fit in" to their peer group, generally without weighing the personal meaning or value of such an approach. The most beautiful thing to observe is when adolescents who have tended toward difficult and disparaging statements concerning human rights change their position over the course of the training upon hearing the right questions but not expectations, and are confronted with their contradictions. That produces the most lasting changes.

How are the school-based workshops of part 2 of the project organized? What means do the HEROES use in their work?

Generally speaking, they use no accessories at all, besides the chair circle. The setting of the workshop is usually somewhere familiar, for example, in a classroom. Depending on how the discussion goes, the group leaders may also use some role-playing games (we presently have a total of

eight role-playing scenarios), which lead to further open discussions.

What, in your opinion, are the most prominent successes and challenges?

As to successes, the project has been well accepted since it concerns real social themes drawn from the everyday life of the adolescents. In such a group atmosphere, many of the adolescents and young adults feel understood and themselves come to understand that they have been lugging around a collective problem – not a personal one – and that there is nothing "weak" or "bad" about their not having fulfilled the "honor concept" of their culture. That can be enormously liberating. Suddenly they feel able to control their own happiness and be part of that of their fellow human beings; they get a shot of confidence; they become empowered to actively change a situation, even if that is sometimes limited to individual situations regarding opinions and not behavior.

A major challenge lies in bridging the gap between culturalization and relativization. We are inherently a self-critical project; we deal with taboo themes within the community, and many participants come to enjoy a better insight into their identity. Yet, we are not an assimilation project, especially not one that wants to be instrumentalized by racist or right-leaning groups because of our critical approach to traditions. That does not mean that we strive to convince people that one religion or the other, or one culture or the other, is "bad." Quite the opposite: Every culture and every religion contains patriarchal elements and structures that discriminate against women or allow only a certain male image.

What role do sexuality and the prevention of violence play in this project?

Sexuality and violence play central roles. Especially if we look at the core idea of "honor culture," again and again we come across the dictum of gender roles. The value or the reputation of a collective (such as the family) depends on the individual members fulfilling their respective roles. I would go so far as to claim that the ultimate principles in a strictly patriarchal society are the premarital abstinence of the woman and the propensity toward violence of the man to protect his family and his honor. This makes it imperative to speak with the adolescents about the so-called "honor system" they so strongly defend, and to help them to recognize the systematic social coexistence it is based on.

It's normal that adolescents and young adults are primarily concerned with their own well-being, their personality development, and particularly with their sexual identity. Their goal is to finally grow up and be accepted as "adult" men or women. For many, this means adhering to the typical stereotypes. In the process, however, they fail to notice that they have become prey to an entire gender-specific social system, and that they play the role of both the "oppressor" and the "oppressed" by unquestioningly clinging to such stereotypes. They simply go along and have no cognizance of being abettors to this system of self-made rules. When we ask the adolescents about their personal values, they mention "freedom" as an important value, while at the same time adhering to the oppressive norms, controlling each other's behavior, and effectively accomplishing exactly the opposite, namely, allowing their sexual self-determination to be controlled by others. Violence becomes the most respected form of "(self-) defense," which puts enormous pressure on them.

An important factor in the creation of the HEROES® Project by our sponsor Strohhalm e.V. was the existence of many taboos surrounding sexuality in strictly patriarchal and “honor-cultural” settings. Strohhalm e.V. is an organization that is dedicated to preventing sexualized violence against both boys and girls. Especially such taboos mean that victims of sexualized violence tend to suffer in silence, full of feelings of guilt and shame. In the worst-case scenario, abuse is covered up by a quick marriage, a forced marriage (whether with the perpetrator or some other person), or abduction to another city or village, sometimes even back to the home country of the parents. This means the victim is condemned to keeping everything a secret to protect the reputation or “honor” of the family. The victim is forced to live the lie that the abuse never happened. Today, we know that there are still many such cases out there, and that it is extremely difficult to reach people in societies with taboos based on honor, religion, and culture.

How do you publicize your concepts and experiences?

The HEROES® Project is a registered concept. To date, we have helped a total of ten locations in Europe to create and apply their own HEROES® Projects, in addition to helping to train their teams and accompanying them long term. Our network stretches throughout Germany and Austria, with offices in Salzburg, Graz, Duisburg, Offenbach, Leipzig, Augsburg, Nuremberg, Munich, and Schweinfurt.



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inTeam – Apprenticeship Search and Prevention Work under One Roof

Simone Bringold

The inTeam project based in Basel, Switzerland, combines the desire of adolescents to find an available apprenticeship with the themes of sexuality education and the promotion of sexual health. It has successfully employed the peer-to-peer approach for many years now.

In Switzerland, adolescents who have failed to find an apprenticeship in a company get the opportunity to spend a so-called “motivational semester” (SEMO), during which they receive support and coaching. inTeam is one of 78 authorized organizations. It was founded in 1996 and is sponsored by the Office for Commerce and Work of Basel-City. Its primary goal is to enable adolescents between 15 and 23 years of age to enter the job market. A motivational semester in Switzerland is obligated to offer adolescents coaching in applying for jobs, remedial training, and work training, though the exact content varies from program to program. During their participation in the program, the adolescents receive a stipend from the Unemployment Office.

Concept

inTeam offers the only motivational semester in Switzerland that also combines job search with prevention work. The participating adolescents are first trained to become peer educators and then have the task of informing other adolescents in schools on the themes of sexual health and media competence during self-organized special events.

During this process, they are accompanied and supported by three social workers, a learning coach, and a social worker in training. The social workers are responsible for the prevention part and are experts in their field of sexual prevention.

The adolescents who come to inTeam for their motivational semester often have experienced a difficult time at school, are experiencing a personal crisis, are apprehensive and insecure. The relationship- and resource-oriented approach at inTeam serves to strengthen the self-efficacy and performance skills of these adolescents.

Program Structure

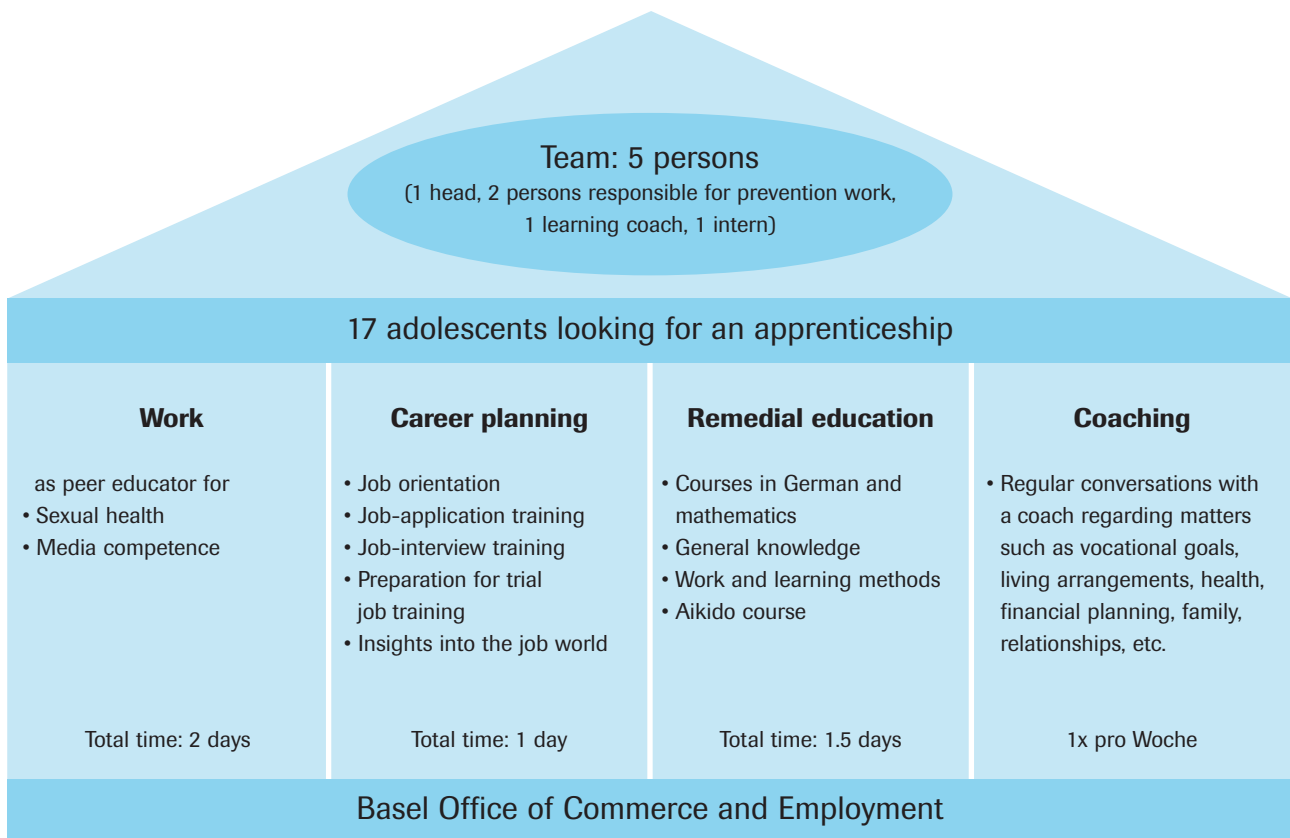
inTeam provides the adolescents with a regular weekly structure, from Monday through Friday, consisting of job application training, remedial education, prevention work, and aikido training. All program items are meant to contribute to helping the adolescents come closer to reaching their primary goal of getting an apprentice position. inTeam employs the peer-education method throughout, not just for the prevention events; the other program items as well all include situations in which individual adolescents have the opportunity to demonstrate and convey their skills to the other participants.

Training Adolescents to Become Peer Educators

Until the adolescents can stand up in front of a school class and present their informative lectures (not alone, but with four or five at a time), they must first complete an intensive training to prepare them for this moment and to enable them to slowly grow into the role of peer educator.

Training Phase

A new training group of 17 adolescents enrolled with inTeam begins every August. The initial task is to work through at length what it means to become a peer educator. From the very beginning, the adolescents are asked to prepare short lectures. To that end, they must first determine their own interests and strengths; they are asked to ponder which of their skills they could imagine passing along to others. This serves, on the one hand, to strengthen their awareness of their own resources and, on the other hand, to prepare them tactfully for their later task of sharing with their peers. The second week is dedicated to presenting the theme of “sexual health,” which is planned and carried out by the prevention experts. The adolescents attend a total of 25 half-day training workshops on matters of sexuality



and language, role models, sexually transmitted diseases (in particular HIV/AIDS), pregnancy, contraception, pornography, and sexualized violence. These training workshops are largely directly the responsibility of the prevention experts, whereas some special themes such as pornography, pregnancy, and sexual diversity are taught by external experts in sexual health. The workshops present to the adolescents a broad range of various methods they can resort to when planning an event.

The training of the adolescents is not limited just to imparting knowledge, but also educates them on performance and social competence. Another important element in the training – and throughout the entire program – consists of discussions held on all sorts of themes, which prepare the participants to lead discussions themselves: inTeam considers it an invaluable asset to be able to enter into and moderate discussions with their peers during the planned events. This skill is imperative to peer education while at the same time also being one of the most challenging tasks of the adolescent participants.

Event Structure

The thematic basic training lasts about 2 ½ months. This leads to the second phase, where the adolescents spend 2 weeks in intensive training to organize events. They work in pairs to prepare the individual theme modules. This phase commences with the joint discussion of possible themes regarded by the adolescents as important for passing along to their peers and thus should be included in the prevention events.

This phase differs greatly from the previous one in that it is concerned mainly with accumulating knowledge, processing that knowledge, and self-reflection. Now, the emphasis lies on what one has mastered, how motivated one is to confer this knowledge to others, and how best to express this knowledge so as to reach one’s peers with the messages.

Which messages are important and how they can best be conveyed to peers remains a topic throughout the training phase, even if there is sometimes no consensus on these matters. This, too, becomes a topic during the section labeled “experiences.”

Event Operations

After 2 ½ weeks, the first school class is invited, at the request of their teacher. During the course of training, a total of about 40 school classes and youth groups visit the inTeam localities to engage in a prevention event. During these events, neither teaching personnel nor inTeam staff are present, though each event does have one supervisor present to accompany the adolescent educators. The supervisor arranges together with the group who should organize the event, who presents what themes, and who takes a supporting role in the preparations. At the end of the event, the pupils have the opportunity to give written and anonymous feedback and to express praise or criticism of the event. Once the school class has gone home, the supervisor assesses the event together with the adolescents and reviews the feedback forms. This step represents an important instrument of quality control, and in most cases the adolescents receive a confirmation and acknowledgment of their work.

inTeam Experiences with Peer Education: Conflicts and Successes

The peer-education method, particularly in connection with the theme of sexuality education, has produced some conflicts – and some impressive successes.

Instrumentalization: How does inTeam deal with participation and structure?

Instrumentalization is a subject of great concern in the

secondary literature on peer education. inTeam is well aware that adolescents are not supposed to assume the role of adults. The prevention events are presented as complementary offers for school classes but are not intended to replace the educational work teachers do with their students. inTeam communicates this to the teachers well in advance when they sign up their classes.

inTeam also takes special care that everyone can experience maximum participation within the existing framework, and that the adolescents enjoy many creative opportunities in preparing the messages to be delivered to their peers.

The training in “sexuality education” does not concentrate solely on conveying knowledge to others but also promotes the intensive examination of moral concepts.¹ This process has the explicit goal of determining which prevention messages are to be included in the events, something the adolescent peer educators do not always agree on. The adolescents know, of course, which prevention messages are important, but they also discover that some of them do not correspond to their lived reality, for example, the statement that is important to always wear a condom when engaging in sexual penetration. Some adolescents are very clear about preferring to have sex without a condom. The question is how authentically they can approach their peers with a message they do not completely condone. inTeam openly addresses this and other conflicts, and experience has shown that the adolescents are very well able to differentiate between their task to convey certain stances during an event and their own opinion or behavior that may not correspond to these ideals.

Voluntarism: How high is the degree of voluntarism in the inTeam prevention work?

The main goal of the adolescents who contact inTeam is to get support in their search for an apprentice position. To this end, they “must” be willing to join the program to become a peer educator and to participate in the prevention activities. For some of the adolescents, the prevention work is the main criterion for getting involved with inTeam, whereas for others it is something they simply accept. So, the question does arise as to how voluntary this prevention work really is. Participation is voluntary in the sense that the adolescents have no obligation to enter such a work-integration program. Nevertheless, that is a prerequisite if they want to receive financial aid from the government. They can leave the program at any time without even having to give notice. Yet, some adolescents do develop the feeling of being obliged to stay, which can affect their motivation. And, in fact, a decreasing level of motivation is a well-known problem at inTeam, something that is also related to the frequent repetition of the program’s contents. The educators in the staff of inTeam try to confront this tendency by repeatedly discussing with the participants what they can personally take away from the program, and that they always have the ability to make changes to the contents or to apply themselves to other, previously uncharted areas.

Overload: Are the adolescents in the inTeam program suited to their task of educating their peers on sexual themes? Or is that overtaxing them?

The everyday activities in inTeam reveal that one must answer this question with a resounding “yes and no.” The staff and adolescents at inTeam, in any case, clearly come down on the positive side about the suitability of the peer educators.

“It is important that adolescents experience these events, since, in my opinion, pupils then have the opportunity to speak more freely than they would with adults. There is a good atmosphere there, everyone is on an equal basis, and I think they just find it cool!”

“I first got involved with inTeam when I was 18 years old, and at that point I knew almost nothing about sexual health. That’s why I find it important that even younger people learn about sexually transmitted diseases and how they should behave.”

Quotes from audio messages left behind by adolescents in the inTeam homepage.

Overloading does occur because of many different circumstances. The clients of inTeam all stem from a vulnerable group of young people: They are adolescents from complicated families, broken homes, often unstable psychological backgrounds, problematic school histories, who are now also burdened by having to deal with difficult constraints on their path to finding vocational training, a job, and living an independent life. Doing prevention work regarding sexual health under these conditions may initially seem to truly be overtaxing. But sometimes the adolescents very consciously choose to participate in inTeam precisely because they want to profit from vigorous training of their competence in public appearance and hope to embark on the development of more self-assertiveness.

In the end, the adolescent peer educators are the ones who profit most from training in matters regarding sexual health, seeing that as a rule they have received little if no orientation from their parents on such matters. And not to forget that these adolescents are closest to the world of the school pupils they are instructing, mainly the customers of inTeam. This is essentially the main effect of peer education.

A further circumstance that can lead to overload is the development psychological task of the adolescent participants to first determine and then reinforce their own sexual identity, which may allow any insecurities they may have toward their peers to become especially noticeable regarding sexual orientation. Many adolescents find it difficult to talk with peers about subjects such as homosexuality and bisexuality, presumably because they are not yet secure enough in their own sexual identity. Of course, they are not forced to discuss these themes during the events if it makes them uncomfortable. Nevertheless, the subject of sexual diversity is an integral part of the training program as well as during the event phase. However, because of the intensive care given the adolescents, particularly during individual coaching conversations, insecurities and conflicts can usually be attacked and solved in advance. It is always impressive to see the journey some of the adolescents take regarding tolerance and respect toward nonheteronormative people and how receptive they become over time.

1 The inTeam concept is based on the publication “Sexual Rights: An IPPF Declaration” of the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF), 2009 (<https://www.ippf.org/resource/sexual-rights-ippf-declaration>).

What Further Successes Does Peer Education Provide ...?

... for the adolescents

The adolescents reap many advantages from the prevention work done with inTeam. In addition to increasing their knowledge and creating more awareness about their own responsibility regarding sexual health, part of their intensive training to become peer educators is dedicated to observing their own values and norms as well as those of others. They practice self-reflection, team cooperation, communication, organization, group leadership, and public performance. Most of them thus engage in a process that leads to greater openness and tolerance toward sexual diversity.

Further, the adolescents assume a responsible task that provides them with social recognition. More importantly, they grasp the task as something meaningful and important. Most of them feel a huge increase in their self-confidence in speaking to others, which corresponds exactly to the conceptual goal of this program: to increase their chance of success during a personal job interview.

... for prevention

It is difficult to say how much the prevention work done by the adolescents of inTeam actually contributes to greater sexual health in the peer pupils. No study has been done on this, and based on the results of the feedback forms anonymously filled out at the end of the respective event by all pupils, we cannot say anything concrete about the effectiveness. Those responsible for prevention within inTeam collect the data gleaned from the feedback forms and assess them. For example, the form asks how the pupils felt during the event, how they experienced the adolescent speakers, which themes they especially enjoyed (or didn't enjoy), and whether they would recommend the event to others. The vast majority of the pupils marked the "yes" box that they would indeed recommend the event to others, which suggests that the event was a success. Often it is the first time the pupils have heard their peers speak so openly and concretely about sexual matters.

Every year inTeam reaches out to some 600 pupils concerning sexual health. That is a respectable number, especially since most participants end up passing along what they learned to their friends, in addition to the circle of friends of the peer educators themselves. So, the dissemination factor is very high.

In the 24 years since inTeam was founded in 1996, this institution has become a true competence center for sexuality

education among adolescents in the greater Basel area, as well as an important contact point for matters pertaining to peer education in general. inTeam is now well known in the schools and the surrounding social institutions of Basel; it maintains a large network of connections. Many teachers treasure the offers extended and regularly book inTeam to stage an event in their classes. One secondary school even hired inTeam to help in preparing a sexuality education curriculum, resulting in all classes of the second level being visited by inTeam as part of this concept.

Although it is presently not possible to accurately gauge the effectivity of peer education in prevention work, the response and the feedback of the participating adolescents, pupils, teachers, and professionals involved clearly point to one truth: Peer education has a positive effect on everyone!



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"It was easy-going, not so uptight, you could understand everything."

"You didn't have to be ashamed about anything."

"The team leaders made an exciting and enjoyable presentation. Everyone could speak openly and ask anything they wanted since they are young too and understand us."

Statements of pupils noted on the feedback forms.

The SchutzNorm Project: Participative Research as an Educational Process in the Context of Youth Protection

Anja Henningsen, Veronika Winter

The collaborative project “SchutzNorm” (literally “protection standard”) has the goal of enabling adolescents to engage with protection-relevant themes concerning sexuality and violence and, building on this, to develop recommendations on youth-appropriate protection concepts.

Starting Point: Acknowledgment of Power Differentials

Generally speaking, both adolescents and adults are victims of structural and personal inequality regarding their chances to shape and influence their world (SCHRÖER & WOLFF 2018, p. 33). Whether one is interested in protecting adolescents from violence as a research topic or as a personal concern, it seems logical to address such inequality by making it the focal point for reflecting on professional actions or research. Participation as the action goal is important for integrating adolescents in problem analyses and decision-making processes (PETERSEN 2002). How participative research in the context of youth work can be part of this effort is the theme of the following description of our previous work in the research project “SchutzNorm.”

Background and Goals

Within the social and educational sciences, we are presently experiencing a movement back to participative approaches. But in applied youth work as well, much effort is being invested in resurrecting participative methods (ROHR et al. 2016). At the same time, a debate is going on whether to emphasize protective concepts in welfare institutions and call for the development and implementation of participative concepts. The national RTKM (“Runder Tisch Kindesmissbrauch”; Round Table on Child Abuse), which was devoted to studying dependent and power relationships in both private and public institutions of domestic concern, also demanded that children and adolescents be protected everywhere and at all times – even in youth-welfare settings (cf. BMJ et al. 2011, p. 125).

The SchutzNorm project is sponsored by the German Federal Ministry for Education and Research (BMBF)¹ and consists of a consortium of the Universities of Kiel, Hildesheim, Kassel, and Landshut. It was founded in 2018 and received initial funding for 3 years. The goal is to

engage adolescents as well as to develop and assess their experiences, insights, and opinions concerning themes relevant to protective concepts such as sexuality and violence. This research is directed toward four fields of youth work: work done in youth organizations, voluntary youth work, international youth work, and youth social work regarding job training. This research specifically includes adolescents in order to better determine their special needs and demands in these areas. Protective concepts are studied based on the protective processes going on within the specific social context of an organization striving to secure and strengthen the rights and sexual autonomy of adolescents. Previous research on protective concepts pointed out the reigning tendency toward premature intervention and patronization (WOLFF & NORYS 2016). Analyses of practice examples also reveal that youths and their own special thought patterns and approaches are rarely included in the actual development of protective concepts (DOMANN et al. 2014; KAMPERT 2015; MANTEY 2015; STRAHL 2015). Yet, qualitative research results show that adolescents want to be addressed as self-determined persons, also regarding their sexual activities – without prejudices (PRO FAMILIA 2012; MANTEY 2015).

This project wants to discover the following: (a) the perspectives, insights, and behaviors active in the everyday life of adolescents regarding sexuality and violence; (b) the extent to which existing protective concepts in youth work affect the everyday life of adolescents; (c) the challenges and perspectives resulting from the implementation of protective concepts in youth work.

To this end, the program organized participative research teams together with adolescents, so-called peer researchers, for the respective fields of youth work. These peer researchers then explored their attitudes toward sexuality and

¹ The complete official name is „SchutzNorm: Schutzkonzepte in der Kinder- und Jugendarbeit. Normalitätskonstruktionen von Sexualität und Gewalt unter Jugendlichen” (SchutzNorm: Protective Concepts in Child- and Youth-Welfare Work. Normality Constructs of Sexuality and Violence Among Adolescents).

violence in research workshops. A nationwide online survey of adolescents served to consolidate the results. Presently, we are carrying out an analysis of existing protective concepts to confirm their relevance for adolescent perspectives. The teams will present and discuss their final results and insights at a youth conference in 2021.

Participative Research in the Context of This Project

The phase model of participation according to WRIGHT (2010)² forms a good starting point for critically reviewing how adolescents can participate in the research process. Often, when we are dealing with participation in research, proposals (cf. VON UNGER 2014) never get past the preliminary stages of participation: information, consultation, inclusion (in the sense of advising) (ibid.). Yet, participative research in a more narrow sense is characterized by allowing the partners to co-determine the way the project is conceived, to implement the various parts of the project autonomously (partial decision-making competence), and to largely make their own decisions regarding important areas of the project (decision power) (cf. ibid.).

Whereas participative child and adolescent research as well as research into youth welfare are fortunately increasingly being demanded by those responsible for public research funding, critical voices question whether the label of “participation” is truly being earned (STURZENHECKER 2018, p. 136). After all, the “well-intentioned” participation of adolescents remains half-hearted if adolescent researchers only have the role of delivering insights into their lifeworlds but remain excluded from interpreting the data. If we are to live up to the pretension of democratic-participative research, then we need to demand a joint, comprehensive research process that fully includes all involved (ibid.).

SchutzNorm invites adolescents to co-determine the course of action, to implement it autonomously, to make decisions. This claim proved to be very ambitious even during the application for funding phase of the project since it demands full transparency regarding preliminary, in part ambiguous topics and data-collection methods – which can only be determined jointly with the adolescents after their acquisition. Especially, it demands a high level of process transparency on the part of the researchers as well as their willingness to deviate from preplanned routes.

Heterogeneous Focal Points – Heterogeneous Peer Research Groups

Adolescents can become active in the four areas of youth work mentioned above according to their different interests as well as because of the different guidelines, as is the case with professional youth-welfare work.

Each of these four peer research groups attended to their respective field of interest, which was independent of those of the other groups. This created a heterogeneous patchwork

of identified research topics. The following topics and everyday challenges of the peer researchers demand flexibility regarding the basic conception:

- The situation of the subject of sexualized violence in youth self-help work
- Everyday (hetero-)sexism in youth social work
- Existing taboos regarding experiences of violence and sexuality, the conception of relationships, and negotiations in dyadic relationships in voluntary youth work
- Gray zones in – and institutionalized approaches to – sexualized violence in international youth work.

Because of the preponderance of group decision-making, the data-collection methods are also very heterogeneous:

- Face-to-face surveys by the peer researchers in youth organizations
- Specially developed short films to provide impulses for scripted interviews by peer researchers in youth organizations
- Workshops in voluntary youth work
- Interviews on case vignettes and participative observation by peer researchers in international youth work.

This brief description clearly shows the breadth of research methods available as well as the many educational challenges posed by participative research.

Surrendering Sovereignty over Interpretation: Seizing on, Recognizing, and Employing Joint Educational Potentials

A closer look back at the practical context of this project, namely, youth work, shows that one of the principal tasks – shaping educational options – is today once again garnering much attention. For example, youth work now has access to educational measures directed toward the interests of the adolescents, to international encounters, to self-organization, and to both political and social participation. Further, modern youth work is oriented toward themes that the adolescents themselves “bring along,” either because they explicitly want to know what others consider “normal” in a relationship, or because they clearly exhibit “a problematic family life” and want support. Subject-oriented education under such circumstances is based on a multitude of themes from everyday life, which then become the subject of debate between the professional staff members and the adolescents – and among the adolescents themselves.

Our participative research into adolescent perspectives in protective concepts reveals that it is only consistent to latch onto those themes the adolescents “bring along.” That means remaining transparent, respecting their interests in all their various adolescent forms, acknowledging the world they live in, and understanding them – and turning all of this into supportive strategies.

Both the selection of the research focus and the assessment of the results demand the use of methods adapted to adolescents and appropriate to the respective peer group. In the part of this project that takes place in Kiel, 6 to 15 peer researchers formed their own group during vocational training. Generally speaking, learning settings oriented toward gaining experience are preferred in order to remain in close contact with the lifeworlds of the adolescents. During the initial roundtable talks, the discussion centered around ideas

2 It is impossible to give a detailed account of this model in this short article. For a concise review in German, see www.leitbegriffe.bzga.de/alphabetisches-verzeichnis/partizipation-mitentscheidung-der-buergerinnen-und-buerger/ (retrieved on 29 January 2020).

of “sexuality and violence,” associations with objects in a “grab bag,” and spatial positions regarding statements. This triggered personally relevant matters to emerge.

Skills relevant to research, such as the ability to observe and describe (e.g., objects, nonverbal behavior) as well as interview techniques and interpretations (e.g., introduction rounds, training interviews), were trained using small competitive games and exercises regarding body language, expression, and speech.³

Thus, participative research comprises an educational process that allows the adolescents to become active and informed, and to autonomously participate in the research process. The researchers in turn were faced with two tasks: to maintain the established good standards of scientific research and to empower the peer researchers to develop action strategies and assessment competence. In terms of the philosophy of the concept of “understanding” lifeworld-oriented social work (GRUNWALD & THIERSCH 2016): The goal is to find a way to jointly respect and accept the everyday efforts of the adolescents in dealing with issues of sexuality and violence. At the same time, the goal is to seek adolescent-appropriate solutions in order to surmount limitations. That means relinquishing sovereignty over interpretation and empowering others. This in turn enables the researchers to learn how adolescents approach themes, interpretations, and critical conflicts. Because the researchers must negotiate the means of interpretation, their view of the adolescent lifeworld becomes greatly differentiated. On the one hand, they learn how the adolescents distance themselves from heteronormative ideas; on the other hand, they learn how the adolescents experience their insecurity in interactions with others. They reveal a sensibility for (sexual) transgressions while at the same time applying a (verbal) approach that many researchers might deem brutal. We speak about powerlessness, about fragile solutions in sexual situations, we listen to their competent means of solving such conflicts. In our experience in this project, this gives rise to educational processes among the peers in which the adolescents can use their special interests, themes, and problems to interact with other adolescents and to learn something about themselves and about others. The research questions, the discussions with the adolescents, the data recording and assessment all enable educational and developmental processes at the peer level.

Shaping this multifaceted educational process connects participative research and youth work oriented toward the needs and the real-world experiences of the adolescents. This understanding of research, addressed to the adolescents, does not intend to disguise the difference between (adult) researchers and (adolescent) peer researchers. Rather, the goal is to use the different perspectives when gathering and analyzing the data to create a mutual learning process. “Strictly speaking, under these circumstances, youth research becomes social education, in the sense that it applies its action principles of lifeworld and subject orientation within its institutional settings” (STURZENHECKER 2018, p. 138).

However, this participative discourse concerning the interpretation of sexuality and violence (in the sense of a mutually educational process) is relevant not just for researching youth-oriented concepts of safety; it is equally applicable in the practical design of offers and measures in youth work in general. This not only supports the potentially effective strengthening of the rights of adolescents, it also helps to surmount power imbalances and thus to promote the protection of youths in general.



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³ A more detailed depiction of the various methods available would go beyond the scope of this short overview. Further publications are planned.

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Adolescents Talk About Their Experiences of Sexualized Violence, Especially with their Peers: Preliminary Results of the BMBF Project “Peers as Recipients of Disclosure and Bridges to Help Systems”

Rebecca Gulowski, Christina Krüger

The goal is to develop practically applicable, educationally qualified concepts and prevention modules based on the insights gained in this project, to be applied by peers as important resources and as bridges to help systems.

The scientific initiative launched by the German Federal Ministry for Education and Research (BMBF) in 2010 to uncover and appraise sexualized violence had a major influence on the scientific landscape in the field of preventing sexualized violence and child abuse. Among other things, it revealed that to date little is known about the processes and courses in the verbalization of sexualized violence and abuse, the so-called disclosure. Any knowledge we have about the structural, social, and psychological effects of entrusting or disclosing experiences of abuse and violence with others can further our prevention efforts and professionalize our contacts with the victims. Yet, even today, this knowledge is still missing (KAVEMANN & ROTHKEGEL, 2014, pp. 202f.); particularly absent are “studies in Germany that query children and adolescents about their experiences with disclosure” (RAU et al. 2016, p. 639). The few studies that do exist on disclosure processes in Germany are primarily dedicated to the perspective of adults (but not of adolescents) who experienced sexualized violence during childhood or adolescence (RAU et al. 2016, p. 639; MOSSER 2009). One may assume that, in the end, the reason lies in the difficulty this field of research has in obtaining access to victims and in the strict ethical standards applied on this matter in research among children and adolescents.

The project “Peers as Recipients of Disclosure and Bridges to Help Systems” has the goal of closing these gaps and thus sees itself at the forefront of disclosure research in Germany. It has three main desiderata:

- 1) Who is being addressed, that is, who (if anyone) is being told about the violent episode? In the context of this project, this person is denoted as the recipient (of the disclosure). In their analysis of the state of German research from the past 10 years, DERR and KINDLER (2018) note that, following sexualized violence, children and adolescents only rarely speak with adults but rather tend to turn toward their peers.
- 2) Which factors and which conditions must be present to enable children and adolescents to talk about their experiences?

- 3) Could one “better prepare possible recipients of such requests for help to better engage in a dialogue with the affected children and adolescents and truly provide assistance?” (DERR & KINDLER 2018, p. 6).

Below, we first describe the research context and the methodological background and then reflect on the results of this project.

Disclosure – Speaking About Sexualized Violence with Others

Entrusting others with one’s experiences is especially important following incidents of sexualized violence. As RAU et al. (2016) showed in their literature analysis, sharing experiences of violence and abuse increases the probability of creating an attachment to a professional help system (PAINE & HANSEN 2002, quoted in RAU et al. 2016), of quickly stopping the violence and abuse being experienced (HERSHKOWITZ, LANES & LAMB 2007; KINDLER & SCHMIDT-NDASI 2011, quoted in RAU et al. 2016), and of preventing further victimization processes (MCELVANEY, GREENE & HOGAN 2014, quoted in RAU et al. 2016). Yet, defining disclosure solely as an isolated incident of speaking about or reporting experiences of violence and abuse is short-sighted; rather, disclosure represents a cognitive process that is both reflective and dialogical. In their definition, RIESKE, SCAMBOR, and WITTENZELLNER (2018, p. 700) include the inherent complexity of this process and the multitude of persons involved, describing disclosure as “processes of remembering, ordering, and revealing sexualized violence by the victims themselves, by their direct environment, and by professionally involved stakeholders.” Often the initial attempts at communication by the victims occur nonverbally.

1 The BMBF sponsors and supports this project in the scope of the “Förderlinie zur Prävention sexualisierter Gewalt in pädagogischen Kontexten” (Guide-line for the Prevention of Sexualized Violence in Educational Settings).

Reactions to Disclosure as a Subjective Factor of Psychological Stress

Both national and international studies show that the reactions shown by recipients of disclosure are crucial to how experiences of violence and abuse are coped with (RIESKE, SCAMBOR & WITTENZELLNER 2018; LEMAIGRE, TAYLOR & GITTOES 2017; REITSEMA & GRIETENS 2016). This harbors great potential for supporting victims. However, between 25% and 75% of all persons who disclose their experiences of sexualized violence receive a negative reaction from others (AHRENS 2006). Such negative reactions may be due to conscious defensive mechanisms, resulting in both non-verbal and verbal reactions. Presumed offers of support are sometimes not felt to be genuine and lead to negative reactions by the victims (ibid.). Therein lies the risk for victims. LANGE et al. (1999) note that negative reactions to disclosure belong to the subjective factors that may significantly trigger psychopathological sequelae such as depression, anxiety, and dissociative syndromes in victims. The reactions to disclosure also correlate closely with the assessment of the disclosure on the part of the victim: The more negative these factors are felt to be (reaction and/or evaluation), the greater the later psychological sequelae. People who have experienced both factors as positive, on the other hand, have fewer psychopathological symptoms (ibid.). A look at the Symptom Checklist 90 R (SCL 90-R Scores), which was developed especially to inquire about and assess a broad spectrum of mental problems and symptoms of psychopathology, shows that, in addition to the overall familial atmosphere of the victim, the reaction to disclosure is the most reliable factor of all (ibid.). Of note is also the fact that not just the actual reactions of the recipients of disclosure but also their expected reaction play a major role in the disclosure process (ULLMANN 2003, quoted in LEMAIGRE, TAYLOR & GITTOES 2018, p. 48).

The Recipients of Disclosure

Most recipients of the disclosure of adolescent victims are adolescents themselves (DERR et al. 2017; RAU et al. 2016) – “by far the most important contact persons for adolescents who have experienced sexualized violence” (DERR et al. 2017). Because of their age and the absence of own experience, this only serves to exacerbate the problem of dealing with the resulting stress.

Among these adolescent recipients, we find friends, other children, or adolescents living in the same institutional setting (e.g., residential home), relationship partners, and siblings. According to DERR et al. (2017), persons working in counseling centers for sexualized violence, staff members at institutional facilities, liaisons, or the staff of youth-welfare offices play little or no role in the lives of adolescents. For example, the “Speak” Study, a representative investigation of unrecorded cases on the “Incidence of Sexualized Violence in Institutions” in the State of Hesse (MASCHKE & STECHER 2018), examined 2,700 pupils and discovered that 85% of those experiencing sexualized violence had spoken about

their experience with a close friend, whereas 30% reported having spoken with their mother, and 15% with peers (multiple responses were possible). The results of a survey of pupils in four other German states confirmed these results (HOFHERR 2019): Of the 4,300 pupils surveyed, some 2,300 had experienced sexualized violence over the past 3 years.² Thereof, 58% reported having spoken with peers, 21% with peers and with adults, and 21% spoke with no one (ibid.). It is striking that most adolescents in fact did talk with their peers about their experiences of sexualized violence, but that the number of those who turned to the official help system established for just such cases remained low (PRIEBE & SVEDIN 2008; HOFHERR & KINDLER 2018).

Peers as Recipients

Against this background, the focus of research turns to so-called adolescent peers as recipients of disclosure of events of sexualized violence. The term peer denotes a specific relationship based on being of about the same age as well as living in similar social and/or institutional settings (KÖHLER, KRÜGER & PFAFF 2016).

This project is dedicated to researching how adolescents shape their interaction and relationships during the disclosure process. We surveyed victims between the age of 18 and 25 as well as recipients between 16 and 20 years of age. We did not attempt to match these groups (victim:recipient), that is, the two groups are completely independent and have no connection. Thus, the project concentrates equally on recipients and victims.

The recipients are often overtaxed when confronted with accounts of sexualized violence and abuse, which may be expressed in feeling the tremendous urge to “do something.” But they may also fail to have the necessary knowledge about who to turn to or feel bound by an oath of confidentiality imposed on them. Peers who become the recipients of disclosure and accounts of sexualized violence generally do not feel drawn to counseling offers. A telephone survey carried out by the prevention institute AMYNA on behalf of the DJI showed that, among the 42 counseling centers for sexualized violence as well as providers of self-assertion training they contacted, only very few offered specialized prevention programs addressing the needs of recipients. And those who do offer such programs cannot rely on sound knowledge concerning the special role played by the peer group in the disclosure process. For this reason, the project focused on the challenges and conflicts resulting from the disclosure of events of sexualized violence to peers or from a particularly stressful situation of the recipients. Based on the insights gained, educational concepts and practical prevention modules are to be developed that concentrate on peers as important resources and as bridges to existing help systems.

Research Design

The project is intended to last 3 years. The qualitative surveys, assessments, and evaluations run parallel to exchanges with practitioners in prevention work during workshops concerning the interaction of theory and practice. Furthermore, the project is being accompanied from beginning to end by an expert council consisting of persons who have experienced sexualized violence, expert researchers from the field, and

² The studies have in common, “that they no longer adhere to the older criminological research approaches on the prevalence of sexualized violence, which strongly depended on categories taken from criminal law and tended to define sexualized violence rather broadly” (HOFHERR & KINDLER 2018, p. 172).

professionals and staff members from prevention practice. This council ensures that the execution of the project occurs in accordance with research-ethical considerations; it is also actively involved in the discussion of the results and the resulting prevention modules. Once the project is completed, the plan is to issue a workbook for practitioners in the prevention of sexualized violence as well as new prevention modules based on the workbook.

The empirical phase begins with explorative interviews with staff members from counseling centers on their stance toward the phenomenon of “peer disclosure.” In particular, what is the role of recipient peers in helping the victims to contact professional help systems? Next, 22 interviews are held with young adult victims and recipient adolescents, to prepare so-called case vignettes. The latter term signifies a specific type of summary of individual cases (DUNKEL, GEHRINGER & HILLEBRECHT 2019), a technique developed to prepare sketches of fictional (or fictionalized) disclosure scenarios based on the empirical interviews. These case vignettes in turn are shown to adolescents during group discussions. The adolescents taking part in these discussions are between 15 and 16 years old and are participants of a prevention event at their schools or some youth vocational institution. They are invited to express how they would react in these scenarios, based on their previous experience. Then, they discuss how they would likely react if approached to be a recipient of disclosure and how they would see their role. The results of an analysis of the group discussions are then compared to the results of the individual interviews and analyzed for any discrepancies between actual behavior and hypothetical behavior, leading to concrete recommendations for prevention practice.

First Highlights from the Interviews with Victims and Adolescent Disclosure Recipients

As mentioned, decisive to the development of appropriate prevention, counseling, and intervention strategies is first understanding the processes and mechanisms active in disclosing sexual abuse (REITSEMA & GRIETENS 2016, p. 336). In fact, this may be the primary prerequisite for initiating proper protective processes for victims (KINDLER & SCHMIDT-NDASI in HOFHERR 2019). The goal is to enable adolescents to support their peers if they become recipients of disclosure and to get support themselves. Presently, the project has produced some first highlights from the interview results which can help us in structuring the further evaluation process.

Disclosure Is a Process

Similar to the studies by RIESKE et al. (2018) and REITSEMA and GRIETENS (2016), we discovered that speaking about one’s own experiences of abuse and sexualized violence with a peer is considered a step in a process rather than a turning point: Disclosure does not radically change the nature of the relationship of peers. Some recipients report that it took years after their friend’s disclosure for them to understand the tremendous role the experiences with sexualized violence must have played for the victim. This means that the role and relationship patterns that existed before disclosure are

continued after disclosure. This fact makes it easier to understand why they did not deem further direct intervention necessary, for example, by informing the parents or the school or contacting a help system.

A closer look at the peer relationship shows that one can differentiate whether disclosure on the part of the victim arises as a spontaneous reaction to a trigger or to unsustainable stress – or whether it reflects a more conscious approach with a (not always explicit) mandate to elicit help and assistance. If the latter is the case, then the interviews reveal that the victims very clearly choose the person to entrust with their disclosure. Their choice does not depend on having particularly close contact with the person or even being in the same class; rather, choosing a peer to confide in reflects a specific relationship quality, including, among other things, that this person had already been the recipient of other secrets, had had similar crisis experiences, or possessed a sort of relevant expertise based on their interests (e.g., for feminism or training in social vocations).

The peer recipients describe such openness on the part of the victim as a special attribute of their close relationship. This especially close peer relationship confirms to the victim that they made the right choice in picking that particular recipient, who can provide the space for exchange and the help needed and accompany them on their path to a formal helper system. From the interviews held with the counseling experts, we know that especially girls and young women tend to come to counseling centers together with a girlfriend. On the other hand, problems may occur when the recipients of the disclosure come to experience the originally strong and special relationship with the victim as one-sided. Sometimes, they too are deeply affected by the description entrusted to them, even though such overload is not explicitly discussed. The relationship may increasingly be felt to be too demanding and unilateral. The roles become switched, and the disclosure recipient assumes the role of a therapist rather than a friend. The disclosure recipient may then even break off contact or tend to their own anguish. This situation presents professional counseling services with an important opportunity to directly address the stress felt by adolescent peers who have become disclosure recipients and to work with them to help them understand the emotional and somatic overload they are experiencing.

A review of the initial findings helped us to structure the data for the remaining part of the project. The relationship and the communication between the victim and the disclosure recipient oscillate between dialogue and monologue, and during the relationship as well as at various key points in the disclosure process they can vary widely. Dialogical communication is considered the basis of all intimate relationships (Schneider 2010); how successful the communication process is between a victim and the disclosure recipient thus depends greatly on whether the disclosure process is based on dialogue. This interaction is “dependent on various components of social cognition and emotional self-regulation: My attention and my interests must be coordinated with those of my social partner; I must be able to observe and address the behaviors of the other person; I must be able to communicate my own wishes; I must acknowledge the social intentions of the other person and understand the interactions; I must be able to control my own action impulses and emotions even in critical situations” (ibid., p. 20).

We intend to analyze the interviews to discover at what points in the disclosure process, and in what ways, the prota-

gonists' communication can be oriented toward more dialogue – or where it should preferably be monodirectional. We hope that we can learn how best to support adolescents in developing the proper competencies for disclosure situ-

ations, enabling them to strengthen their relationships with their peers and to exchange information on what has happened to them, without overstepping their own boundaries and needs (SCHNEIDER 2010).



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JUUUPORT – Youth Counsel Youth Concerning Online Problems

Gesa Lindenau

Adolescents are confronted by many challenges in their everyday online behavior. That includes privacy concerns, mobbing in chatrooms, or questions related to personal physical permissiveness (“sexting”). Since 2010, the nonprofit organization JUUUPORT has been committed to furthering respectful online communication and supporting adolescents with their online problems.

The JUUUPORT Concept

The website www.juuuport.de is devoted to helping adolescents with their online problems, such as cybermobbing, WhatsApp stress, sexting, or identity theft. The adolescents can register via a contact form on the homepage, which is free and anonymous. Anyone seeking help gets the support of the JUUUPORT staff (“scouts”), consisting of volunteer adolescents between the age of 15 and 21 years who are trained by experts from the fields of law, internet, and psychology.

Some 80% of all inquiries concern the topic of cybermobbing, which in the modern world of adolescents often goes hand in hand with schoolground mobbing. JUUUPORT leaves no one in the rain. On the other hand, the counseling offered by JUUUPORT can only be the first point of contact and cannot replace in-depth psychological counseling. In more severe cases, the adolescents are referred to dedicated counseling services such as the respective hotlines or legal counseling centers.

The scouts are also active for the JUUUPORT organization outside of their counseling efforts and function as JUUUPORT ambassadors. Prevention work also forms a major part of their efforts. For example, at fairs, conferences, and school workshops, the JUUUPORT scouts inform educators, parents, and their own peers about the counseling options and disseminate further information about typical online problems. In creative social media actions, they speak directly to their

peers and give them tips about how to surf the internet safely and how to show fair behavior while online. Further, one scout, Kevin, composed rap songs about cybermobbing (“Kein Mobbing”), media addiction (“Ich bin [nicht] süchtig”), and privacy matters. These songs were then made available as music videos; Kevin also performs at events.

The Peer-to-Peer Approach

The online counseling at juuuport.de is done by adolescents for adolescents. The peer education approach has numerous advantages: The counseling occurs without any finger-wagging; adolescents often find it easier to seek help from other adolescents; many do not feel understood by adults trying to teach them about digital media. The JUUUPORT scouts are well acquainted with the topical online themes, challenges, and behavioral discussions of their generation and can authentically provide useful and relevant suggestions on equal footing with their peers.

All scouts first attend a two-day basic training where they learn the fundamentals of counseling work: the legal ramifications and principles of online communication, the mechanisms behind mobbing and cybermobbing, intervention strategies, and the peculiarities of giving advice online. Furthermore, they become acquainted with the counseling platform and together with experts can try out their skills at answering sample questions. Subsequently, the scouts work from home, though there are regular meetings to discuss ongoing matters and to review relevant counseling issues.

Online Counseling

In order to provide the adolescents with the best possible and timely help – and to limit the strain on the volunteer adolescent JUUUPORT scouts – every new counseling inquiry has a turnaround time of 48 hours. All inquiries flow into a common mailbox, from which each scout can “pick out” an inquiry by marking it with their personal label, so that all other scouts know someone is already taking care of that particular concern. Of course, it is equally possible to work together to solve an inquiry. To this end, every inquiry has its own commentary section where the scouts can exchange information. Especially new scouts find the commentary function helpful for receiving the assistance of more experienced scouts when answering the inquiries.

The system first directs the counseling inquiries to adult experts before releasing them to the adolescent scouts. This prevents the adolescents from being confronted by material that might be harmful to them; also, potentially psychologically stressful inquiries are filtered out.

Innovations to the Counseling Process

Since December 2019, JUUUPORT has offered a live chat on Thursdays from 6 to 8 pm, where adolescents can log in and directly offer comments and ask questions of the adolescent scouts. This live chat function is considered an extension of the normal counseling service and serves as a test for establishing messenger counseling. JUUUPORT wants to keep up to date and plans to offer messenger counseling from April 2020 on. The goal is to lower the threshold for adolescents and allow them to quickly get in touch with the JUUUPORT scouts.

In order to more actively disseminate options for dealing with online problems and to promote their activities in schools, JUUUPORT now offers a “school package,” consisting of a classroom exercise on (cyber)mobbing based on Kevin’s rap songs and webinars. The teaching unit can be downloaded from the website. Schools and youth groups can book webinars, which can be held anywhere desired. The webinars treat themes such as reducing stress in WhatsApp groups and displaying respectful behavior in chatrooms. Cybermobbing also has its own webinar where persons who have experienced cybermobbing can become active and where adolescents can assist their victimized peers.

Today, after 10 years of active prevention and counseling work, JUUUPORT is still working to improve its offers and to provide adolescents a safe haven when confronted with online problems.

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Research Project ReWiKs: Peer Monitoring as a Component of Participative Research

Sven Jennessen, Tim Krüger

The Peer Aspect and the Emancipation of People with Disabilities

Since the very beginning of the North American movement dedicated to ensuring that people with disabilities can live a self-determined life, the peer aspect has played a major role. The goal was to break free of the reigning paternalistic structures in institutions for the disabled and to ensure that discussions and decisions concerning people with impairments are no longer carried out without their direct involvement. Today, the peer aspect has also become an integral part of various areas of self-help. For a long time, efforts were directed toward basic matters of securing life, care, and participation, whereas now this type of counseling and support is dedicated to providing assistance on equal terms in specific fields.

“Freiraum: Sexualität + ICH” – Applied Peer Monitoring in the Research Project ReWiKs

The research project ReWiKs has the goal of strengthening the sexual self-determination of people with disabilities. Over the next few years, it intends to establish a peer accompaniment of people with disabilities in the form of the exchange format “Freiraum: Sexualität + ICH” (Free Space: Sexuality and ME). This format will be installed at four to six different locations throughout Germany and concerns itself with themes such as love, sexuality, and partnership, strictly oriented toward the needs and demands of the participants. The focal points of such “Free Spaces” are thus determined by the participants themselves, similarly how they are methodologically implemented. These Free Spaces are situated at, and affiliated with, Centers for Self-Determined Life and similar self-help institutions, and are accompanied by staff members from these organizations. This serves to provide eye-to-eye

encounters, free of institutional circumstances, hierarchies, and dependencies.

Since 2016, during the first funding phase of ReWiKs, we established two pilot Free Spaces where the residents of reintegration facilities as well as the visitors of local activities can address their questions concerning sexual self-determination. This work is supported by the project staff. In the scope of the Free Spaces, we were confronted with the fact that self-determined sexuality must always be seen – and experienced – along the continuum of self- and other-determination (cf. JENNESSEN, MARSH, SCHOWALTER & TRÜBE 2019). The very personal and intensive confrontation with intimate needs, sexual and gender questions, and structural barriers in the realization of their sexuality enabled the participants to stand up for their sexual rights and needs with great self-confidence and self-determination. The Free Spaces have thus made an important contribution to the sexual health of the participants. This program assumes a salutogenic understanding of sexual health, i.e., that people should have the opportunity to get to know their sexual options and to make decisions based on this knowledge about their lives and their sexuality (cf. JENNESSEN & ORTLAND 2018).

During the second funding phase of the project, the competences created in the participants are to be applied to new Free Spaces. To this end, the experienced participants assist their peers in the process, counseling them in matters concerning sexuality, love, and partnership and providing a valuable contribution to their own personal development. All processes will be evaluated as part of the project.

The ReWiKs Project: Overview of the Activities

The module “Free Space: Sexuality and ME” is one of the main three areas of the ReWiKs Project, the second phase of which is being financed by the BZgA (complete name: “ReWiKs: Sexual Self-Determination and Disability – Reflection, Knowledge, and Competence as Components for Change”). In a further module, continued education is being offered at six locations throughout Germany for staff members of residential facilities serving (re)integration assistance, so-called ReWiKs scouts. The third module is dedicated to maintaining and differentiating the

comprehensive project materials (“media packages”) emerging from the first funding phase.

These strategies have the overarching goal of disseminating the insights won during the first funding phase of the ReWiKs Project throughout Germany and ensuring the transfer of the research findings to the institutions and services offering (re)integration assistance.

Peer Monitoring and Participation in Research

One challenge facing the ReWiKs Project was – and still is – its self-set goal of having the target group participate in all research and decision-making processes. This was true even during the first funding phase, when the various ReWiKs materials were developed in close cooperation between theory and practice. The various formats of the concepts and media emerging from this phase were created using the feedback from staff members as well as from residents in residential facilities, guaranteeing continual evaluation and adaptation. Bringing all stakeholders into this process is a major prerequisite for its effectiveness and thus also for the acceptance and application of the insights and materials by the target groups. The latter, in turn, apply their newly won insights into matters surrounding sexual self-determination in their daily work setting and daily life, respectively. Of course, they must also find ways to integrate new approaches and their new knowledge in existing settings. That this does not always proceed without bumps is clearly evidenced by the experiences gathered in the scope of this project.

For research projects dedicated to studying concrete lifeworlds, it is of the essence that they plan and include in their research the (active) participation of those affected. This participation may take very different forms (e.g., from holding interviews to granting decision-making power) at very different points in the research process (e.g., from choosing and formulating research questions to discussing the findings). But, as with other such groups, there is also the danger that disabled persons will be marginalized or excluded. The motto “Nothing About Us – Without Us” of the self-determined life movement is justified as a motto to guide the action involved in research. There exists a great need for a constructive negotiation culture between

the concerned stakeholders and their respective interests.

The ReWiKs Project holds the peer aspect in the Free Spaces in high esteem. This serves to strengthen the self-determination of those involved and to enable direct participation in research efforts. The goals, processes, and results of such research then become relevant and transparent due to the cooperative shaping and implementation for persons with disabilities. And the resulting insights prove to be positive impulses for all academic researchers!

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