

Communiqué 'For change to succeed ...'

The Federal Association of Catholic Youth Social Work (BAG KJS) sees the present communiqué 'For change to succeed ...' as a contribution to the structured dialogue on the target group of disadvantaged young people in the framework of the implementation of the EU Youth Strategy. On this basis, we wish for a wide discussion - on national and international level - and we will continue to use this communiqué in Berlin, in our lobbying activities in favour of the target group after the European Symposium 'For change to succeed' which is organized by the BAG KJS and will take place from September, 29th to October, 1st 2010.

This communiqué 'For change to succeed ...' is based on life situations of young people who for very different reasons can use the competences they possess for developing their personality only in a limited way. They have only restricted access to the opportunities society offers for growing up healthily and unfolding one's personality. Thus, they count among the group of disadvantaged young people.

The BAG KJS is committed to ensuring that disadvantaged young people receive adequate social support during the transition from school to work. The goal of our efforts is to provide these young people with the necessary prerequisites so they can build up the resources on which life depends in a self-determined and independent way. This includes a holistic understanding of working with disadvantaged young people, the support for the development of an autonomous personality just like opening access to vocational training and helping with insertion into the labour market.

A broad discussion of this communiqué will offer the opportunity to exchange examples of good practice in our field of work as well as to organise solidarity among each other. We consider this solidarity a very important element in preventing globalization of economic markets from crowding out the weaker ones.

Therefore, we welcome any comment and consideration on this communiqué from all political areas. Through the values we stand for, we hope to exert a positive influence on the development of a coherent European Youth Strategy for our field of work which are young people in their transition from school to work.

'For change to succeed' - strengthening disadvantaged young people on the way to active participation

From the practice of youth social work, numerous stories can be told about young people who change, about the moments in which a switch is tilted, about young people outgrowing themselves and developing a new and independent personality.

These experiences allude to the fact that in our field of work we give impetus to the holistic development of a young person's personality, thus strengthening young people so they can change from a passive (and sometimes even destructive) participation towards an active participation. This is achieved through empowerment in many different steps. Support services in accompanied living allow young people to better organise their lives and to get a different view on themselves; success achieved during vocational training modules offered by labour orientation and qualification services not only reinforce their self-esteem, but also draws them away from their marginal position within society.

Youth social work offers young people corresponding learning areas that call for and promote active participation. Depending on the size of these learning areas and the flexibility in shaping them, young people are supported in experiencing themselves as citizens in society. In the same way, they are supported in their role as part of a group in society that shall contribute to deciding about collective life perspectives in a responsible way. Such active citizenship requires an independent personality.

However, how does this change happen? Which material and social conditions are needed, which are the values we have when meeting others, which types of access to education do we need and which support do we offer in meeting other people? We want to participate in the discussion with these questions in mind, while all these questions have to be seen from the perspective of our primordial concern, which is 'to foster change' towards an active citizenship. Strengthening active citizenship of disadvantaged young people and the question of how we can better shape our activities are the overarching elements that shall lead our discussion about the above questions. On this basis, we can later on define requirements for policy-making processes aiming at a coherent cooperation in youth policy.

I) Ensuring living and surviving

A healthy growing-up offering sufficient material and social support is not ensured for all young people in EU Member States. Such a situation in life is complicated further by the fact that part of these young people are also socially disadvantaged or individually challenged. These young people in need of support therefore are pushed to the margins of society. They fall through social support networks, often through no fault of their own. To put things right is a task for public social care. Examples from different European countries show that youth support services, and youth social work in particular, can prevent impoverishment and social exclusion of young people. Important characteristics of this work are the open access to support services as well as low-level access for young people. In Germany, these services are offered in the

framework of outreaching youth work, assisted living as well as individual social and pedagogical support. Advice as well as services relating to school and work further strengthen young people on their way towards a positive participation in society and help them to get away from the position at the margins of society which they are in.

II) Values we are committed to

According to the principles of Christian Social teaching, every human being is valuable and has an inalienable human dignity. Nevertheless, a number of young people are excluded from social participation. They do not experience any recognition or appreciation, because they lack certain skills necessary for (professional) inclusion into society and active participation. Working according to Christian values must also find its expression in the attitude of those who do the work. These Christian values are reflected in the way we approach each other. Having respect for each other means that we take young people's desires seriously, that we communicate with them on a par, that we allow them to make mistakes and that we forgive them. As co-workers in organisations based on Christian values, we are committed to maintaining rehabilitation offers even under difficult circumstances. Every offer of help that we don't deny opens up an opportunity for young people so they recover their own skills, which they may have lost through frustrating experiences. To learn how to share one's experiences with others or how to improve one's perseverance - these are just two examples of lost skills that can have a significant influence on a person's life and help the young people to get out of and release themselves from a difficult situation in life. All young people - regardless of their nationality, ethnic origin, gender or religion - must be addressed on the basis of this esteem.

III) Education and vocational training accessible for all young people

Education and vocational training are a prerequisite as well as an integral part of a successful life. Only through the development of talents one can achieve a broad social participation. The human being is a creature, which - being made to the image of God - is called to develop the talents that the Creator has given him. This shows that education is more than just the appropriation of skills that are profitable (on the labour market). Education is part of the development of one's personality and therefore education opportunities should not be determined by social origin. This broad understanding of education sees people not only as a human resource and doesn't restrict the provision of education to knowledge taught at school. Education happens in many places, and a knowledge-based society should recognize and foster this. Our understanding of education thus also includes non-formal and informal places of learning. What is important to us is what a person knows and can do; it is not important where he or she learnt this skill. This understanding of education opens up access to work especially to young people who do not possess any formal qualification. For these young people it is important that skills are described and recognized for their professional career; this includes skills they have learnt in informal contexts, e.g. when volunteering or doing social activities. The same applies to extracurricular education processes, i.e. activities organised by youth social work.

From the perspective of equal education opportunities, risks for young people from socially disadvantaged families are twofold: it has been established that they have lesser education opportunities and that they finish school with lower leaving certificates or none at all. Thus, they find themselves at the end of the chain, having lesser opportunities to access school or professional education offers or when defining their pay on entering the labour market. In order not to be excluded from the formal education system and thus from wages ensuring their existence during their lifetime, it must be possible for disadvantaged young people to get vocational training leaving certificates or further training through competences and skills learnt outside the formal system.

IV) Benefit from mobility for learning purposes

Globalisation makes it more and more difficult for young people to maintain the connection with the experiences of their peers. From this viewpoint, making experiences abroad is important not only in the field of leisure activities. More and more, these experiences are part of our everyday working life. European subsidising policy take up this social development. The EU relies on subsidies for mobility, for young people in particular, so they can continue to be ready for the future. Through the evaluation of their financing programs, the EU has discovered that only a certain well-educated part of the young people in Europe uses and can benefit from mobility in order to enrich their knowledge. To increase the participation of disadvantaged young people in European mobility and thus allowing them further and also new forms of learning, youth social work fosters stays abroad for disadvantaged young people and encourages its own workforce to make their own professional mobility experience for learning purposes.

In his commentary on the EU Green Paper mobility, the BAG KJS has already called for easier access to the au pair status, for new access conditions for the European Voluntary Service, for the enlargement of living services for young people including social and pedagogic support as well as for a European trainee status for young people in the transition system. If stays abroad are recognized as a learning experience for all young people, and this not only in the framework of university studies or vocational training, then we can introduce scholarships for unemployed young people with the aim of preventing further social exclusion.

Düsseldorf, August 18th, 2010