

ACTIVE AND HEALTHY – APPRENTICES IN LINZ

1. Organisations involved

ASKÖ Oberösterreich (Project leadership)
“Fonds gesundes Österreich” and “Fit für Österreich”
Arbeiterkammer Oberösterreich (AK OÖ),
Oberösterreichische Gebietskrankenkasse (OÖGKK),
Arbeitsmedizinischer Dienst (AMD),
Institut für Suchtprävention (Kooperationspartner)
Linz AG,
ÖBB,
Keba,
Seniorenzentren Linz

2. Description of the case

2.1. Introduction

Apprentices are a relevant target group with particular health risks. Generally speaking, they have rather limited health resources. The concept of health plays an important role as a factor of productivity and has a significant impact on life quality and work performance. Therefore, it is very important in a modern apprenticeship training to deal with the topic of health awareness, cooperation, accountability and efficiency, and lay out the foundation for workplace health promotion already in the training workshop.

The goal of the project "Active and Healthy - Apprentices in Linz," was to stimulate a fit and healthy lifestyle and provide systematic gender-specific resources for addressing relevant issues such as alcohol, drug use, smoking, conflict resolution, youth unemployment, isolation, stress, and physical inactivity. It aimed at developing new structures/groups to connect apprentices with existing sports clubs and various institutions.

The apprentices participated actively in the selection and design of the project content and developed an innovative self-management health culture in accord with the Ottawa Charter¹.

2.2. Aims

The aims of the project were:

- To create a structured network of cooperation partners (AK; OÖGKK; state government, various institutions, associations etc.) and companies who are interested in the health of apprentices.

¹ http://www.who.int/hpr/NPH/docs/ottawa_charter_hp.pdf

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- To offer apprentices a structured social network inside and outside the company and to include them actively in this network, so they can build relationships outside their homes and families. They should learn to accept responsibility, to practice conflict resolution and especially to develop self-confidence.
- To discuss related health issues with the apprentices and to work on selected themes at action programs (workshops, keynote speeches, health panels) in order to implement sustainable health promotion activities.
- To ensure universal availability of health measures/programs, primarily in Central Austria and later throughout Upper Austria.
- To include workplace health promotion in the training workshops. Apprentices are the workers of tomorrow, and through them, better health-related behaviour at workplaces can be achieved.
- To find and educate tutors specialized in youth sports. Thus, a wide range of after-work health programs could be offered to apprentices, in cooperation with established sports clubs.
- To keep and continuously update project documentation, which allows other organizations to pursue similar projects in order to make strategically important steps.
- To create a network, which will enable all of the partners/institutions to participate in the apprenticeship and therefore actively and sustainably contribute to the improvement of apprentices' health behaviour.

2.3. What was done, and how?

“Active and Healthy - Apprentices in Linz” was a relationship-, behavioural-, health- and fitness-oriented project that extended over a period of three years and dealt with the theme of bio-psycho-social health.

The main target group was composed of 275 apprentices from the selected organizations (senior centres Linz, ÖBB, Keba and Linz AG). In the first phase, about 95 apprentices from four companies are able to participate in the activities (workshops etc.). A special health questionnaire of OÖGKK for the target group of young workers was distributed to all apprentices, however.

The project was divided into 6 steps:

1. Establishment of infrastructure

The first step consisted of the creation of a network and a new structure, which would invest in the future and health of apprentices, therefore investing in the health culture of enterprises. A structured network, in which they can participate freely, was therefore offered to apprentices and enterprises. Before the project was launched, three reputable Austrian institutions that deal with workplace health promotion joined the project as partners. These institutions were: Arbeiterkammer Oberösterreich, Arbeitsmedizinische Dienst and OÖ Gebietskrankenkasse. In May 2008, Institut für Suchtprävention joined the project as a network partner.

2. OÖGKK questionnaire

As the project started, a survey about the workload, work environment and bio-psycho-social issues among all 275 apprentices was conducted. The OÖGKK developed a special health questionnaire for the target group of young workers. In addition to questions regarding health and health behaviour, it highlighted aspects of training for apprentices.

3. Health panels

The health panels were the heart of the project. During these health panels, apprentices determined health-damaging and dangerous work situations and processes. With the help of a moderator, they

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identified common health problems and proposed improvements, which were presented to the company's steering committee. Therefore an in-house steering committee consisting of work councils, occupational physicians, and apprentices' representatives was established for each enterprise. Their task was to coordinate and organize the project, particularly the examination, processing and implementation of the results from the survey and the health panels.

4. Workshops and keynote speeches on related topics

Three workshops took place in every company. They were partly linked to keynote speeches and planned regular meetings of the steering committee. Where it is envisaged, the steering committees will continue to have regular meetings even after the project ends.

The following priorities and contents of the workshops and keynote speeches enabled the target group to achieve a better personal and technical competence:

- Nutrition (Food and work/performance, "healthy snacks");
- Drug dependence (alcohol at the workplace, "Say NO to drugs");
- Bio-psycho-social health (the importance of the psyche for the well-being, conflict resolution, stress regulation, creating programs for break/relaxation for apprentices and for the whole company, job satisfaction, job stress, unemployment);
- Information about exercise programs (importance of muscles for correct posture, "to strengthen the back"; ergonomic work design (protection against risk/safety, prevention, fatigue and recovery); development of exercise programs.

5. Exercise programs

First, a dexterity test was performed. Such a competition could serve as a motivational factor for the apprentices and encourage them to participate in the project. In addition there were different exercise programmes provided (back fitness, motor skills, different games, etc.) that took place in the companies.

6. In-house health day

During the health days, the apprentices had an opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge about healthy lifestyle, to achieve recognition and to establish new contacts with co-workers. This was an attempt to establish an optimal combination of structural prevention and workplace enhancement (new approaches such as structural measures, in-house "laws" and agreements, etc.) and empowerment through self-interests and skills together with the existing environmental conditions to achieve long-term success in health promotion. In addition, the apprentices created folders, posters, etc., and then everything was revised by an external agency or by the apprentices themselves. Apprentices know best what appeals to apprentices and after several courses at the workplace, they were able to design complex and well-rounded information materials.

2.4. What was achieved?

The most relevant findings of the recent evaluation are described below.

Perspective of the apprentices:

- Physical education is OK, but too limited in duration (12 units) to show real effects or to be sustainable;
- Health panels are very useful and were very good;
- Sport is generally rated as good;
- When the project activities take place during working hours, it is well accepted;
- Some of the apprentices see a strong sense of health in the project;

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- Demonstration of correct lifting techniques was considered practical;
- "... The project was good, but too short ...";
- "... At the seminar we didn't learn anything ...";
- Partially they got inaccurate information about panels and seminars.

Perspective of the persons in charge:

- Project is considered to be very useful;
- Health is an important theme in all participating establishments;
- Communication about the project is considered good and sufficient;
- All participating companies feel well informed;
- Base goal is to promote health through sports;
- Project duration is considered to be acceptable;
- The in-house effort for the project has been limited;
- "... It is a supplement in training ...";
- No specific budget for the project is available so far;
- Sustainability is judged fairly low.

All findings will be presented in the final report of the evaluation process after project completion in December 2010.

2.5. Success factors

The duration of the project is three years and it is expected to end in December 2010, so in the publication year of this case study (2009) it is still ongoing. At this moment, it is clear that the duration of the project is planned adequately and that there will be enough time to carry it out.

An important achievement is certainly the reaction to the needs of individual companies. In the middle of the project, the first network meeting of all partners was held. This was the exchange of experience about how the various measures have been implemented, how the project should proceed and what phases of the project need special care.

It was confirmed that the health panels are the heart of this project. The staff are experts in their field of work and the apprentices take the health panels very seriously and are highly motivated, regardless of whether the panel is about health resources, or if it investigates their own working conditions. The apprentices work out troublesome situations or situations that appear burdensome together and then they propose solutions. The solutions of the apprentices are not far-fetched; they know exactly what is unrealistic or not affordable. That the health panels are taken seriously is also reflected in the fact that the participating apprentices ask other apprentices (who are outside the panel) about their trouble, too.

During the project, it was ascertained that it is very important to have a contact person in each company that manages and controls everything. The ongoing communication with the individual companies and network partners is essential. By keeping constantly in touch, the participants are constantly reminded of the project and its tasks, therefore increasing health awareness.

Each management group approved that apprentices may participate in the project during working hours. In Linz AG and ÖBB SZL all chosen apprentices have to participate in the project, and in Keba, apprentices were free to join the project.

So far, what has been achieved is that the apprentices are more concerned about their own health and are reconsidering their behaviour and actions.

2.6. Further information

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2.7. Transferability

The findings and the results of the project are at the disposal of Austrian as well as international institutions and organizations.

Other institutions that carry out similar projects are allowed to use all of the comprehensive project reports and updated documentation.

Individual modules from the project can be used separately in SME's.

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