

## Extra instructions of young superintendents in a swimming pool

### 1. Organisations involved

Sport- en Recreatiebad Groenoord, Schiedam, the Netherlands

*(Sports and recreation park Groenoord, Schiedam, The Netherlands)*

### 2. Description of the case

#### 2.1. Introduction

The company which is involved in the project is a recreation park with a swimming pool. The last years, the company was faced with an increase in problems with adolescents who are visiting the swimming pool. Superintendents were afraid to supervise and therefore refused to work in weekends or in summertime when most problems with adolescents occurred. Additionally, the superintendents didn't trust each other in their work with a lack of skills as the main reason. As a result, it was impossible for the manager to draw up a working schedule each week. Moreover, due to the problems, new young superintendents did not apply for a job in this recreation park. Since 2001, the company introduced new rules for the peer group as well as a programme for young superintendents. The new rules consist of adjusted opening hours for adolescents on weekdays and no entrance for adolescents on Sunday. Besides, there were some organisation adjustments: a coordinator of all supervisors was appointed to guide young superintendents. In addition, the young superintendents were trained in coping with difficult or threatening circumstances. This newly introduced training programme is described in this case study.



Figure 1: Work environment of the superintendents

## **2.2. Aims**

The company aimed at:

- reducing the unsafe feeling among young workers,
- improving the experience of the young workers at the work floor,
- improving their ability to cope with threatening situations,
- improving the safety and pleasure among visitors of the swimming pool.

The overall aim was to improve the way that the young superintendent acts in difficult or threatening circumstances.

## **2.3. What was done, and how?**

Most superintendents in swimming pools are not older than twenty years when they start their job. They sometimes experience an unsafe feeling their work. This is caused by a lack of authority and lack of experience in how to act in situations with disturbances. This is especially the case when a peer group causes these disturbances. Therefore a swimming pool with many new young superintendents started a project to teach workers how to cope with difficult or threatening circumstances.

Three simple initiatives have been developed to give the young workers more authority and thus an increased feeling of safety. This case shows us a mental health promotion programme which is rare among health promotion of young workers. These three initiatives are described below.

1) Young workers start their job with a training programme on 'Aggression at work'. A training centre provides an in-company training aimed at young workers on "Aggression at work".

The main objective of the training was a behavioural training for the superintendents. In this training they learn how they can be pro-active and how to react on situations of escalation. Additionally, they learn how to communicate with their colleagues in the swimming pool and with colleagues of the reception or catering. Moreover, they know how to communicate and evaluate with the police about the situations when problems with adolescents occur.

A role-play was chosen as strategy for changing the behaviour of the superintendents. The training and accompanying role play initially encountered some resistance of the superintendents for two reasons. First, they felt embarrassed during the role-play because this was performed in presence of their colleagues. Second, as a consequence of this role play, a discussion between superintendents, manager and trainer took place about the character or skills of the superintendent. These discussions were sometimes confronting. However, after a couple of trainings, the superintendents agreed that these trainings improved their self-confidence, awareness and attitude against the threatening situations. Finally, they experience an improved work pleasure.

This training is the most important part of the work health promotion program.

2) Young workers can consult a supervisor, who is fulltime available to help young workers with questions or problems. The supervisor acts like a mentor for the young workers. Moreover, the supervisor is also appointed to guide the process during a normal working day. When problems arise during the working day, the supervisor can be consulted by the young superintendents.

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3) A protocol with rules, responsibilities and agreements is handed out to young workers during their first week on the job. A separate chapter was added in the protocol about the rules for visitors and how to act when problems seemed to occur. Second, the responsibilities of the superintendents, their supervisor and manager were described. This resulted in an improved insight in the tasks of each job.

This protocol is made by the managers and the superintendents of the company. This protocol will be evaluated and adjusted - if necessary - each year.

## **2.4. What was achieved?**

Altogether 20 superintendents participated in the health promotion programme and therefore participated in the training, were linked to a supervisor and received instruction of the protocol. After one year, all new superintendents automatically received an invitation to participate in the health promotion programme.

First of all and the most important for this case study, the self-confidence among workers increased and their ability to cope with threatening situations improved accordingly during the program. Moreover, as a positive consequence of their change in behaviour in the swimming pool, aggression at the swimming pool declined. The number of incidents with disturbances declined and consequently the special opening hours for adolescents visiting the swimming pool were cancelled. This safer environment will give pleasure to the superintendents at work and to the visitors of the swimming pool

As one of the workers cited:

“I know now that I am not alone when an unpleasant event occurs in the swimming pool. A team of experts is supporting me. Therefore I know what I can do and what I am allowed to do during events. The training gave me confidence.”

No quantitative data are available on the effect of the programme.

## **2.5. Success factors**

The main success factor is the use of a multi-component approach: 1) rules for visitors, and 2) a programme for young workers. This last component consists of 1) a supervisor who is fulltime available to help young workers with problems during their working day, 2) a training 'aggression at work' for young superintendents, and 3) a protocol which is handed out during the first week of their job.

Moreover, incorporating the programme within the policy of the swimming pool is an overall result of the programme. The managers emphasized that improving mental health of their employees by creating awareness and improving self-confidence is not only an important issue for the employees but also for themselves.

## **2.6. Further information**

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## **2.7. Transferability**

The programme can easily be generalized to other companies in the recreation sector of other companies who are faced with visitors/clients who causes disturbances. After all, the topics for this health promotion programme do not focus specifically on the work of superintendents and the topics (aggression at work and training their own behaviour) can easily be generalized to other sectors, for instance among young workers in other recreation facilities or shop assistants.

Moreover, the training will be given by an independent training centre and protocols have been written down. The training centre as well as the protocol can easily be adopted by other sectors.

## **3. References, resources:**

- Interview with A. van Oostenbrugge, manager Sport- en recreatiebad Groenoord.
- <http://www.sectorrecreatie.nl/pag/PDF/Actua/Actua19.pdf>