Report
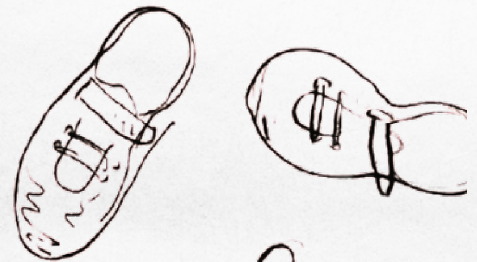
on the project
„International exchange
of professionals
about young people
in challenging care
constellations"

Was kann ich verändern?
- meine Motive regelmäßig
hinterfragen
- ~~~~~~~ Betriebsblindheit

Project participants

Teaching and research

- Prof. Werner Freigang, Neubrandenburg University of Applied Sciences
- Prof. Hubert Höllmüller, Carinthia University of Applied Sciences
- Prof. Milko Poštrak, University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Social Work
- Prof. Nicole Rosenbauer, ehs Dresden / FHE Erfurt

Cooperating youth welfare facilities and services

- B3-Netzwerk Kinder, Jugend und Familien gGmbH| https://www.b3-netzwerk.at/
- Contraste Kinder- und Jugendwohngemeinschaften gGmbH| https://contraste.at/
- JUNO – Jugendnotschlafstelle| https://www.junoklagenfurt.at/
- Strokovni center Mladinski dom Jarše| http://www.mdj.si/
- BSW Kinder- und Jugendhilfe gGmbH| https://www.bsw-muldental.de/
- Jugendhaus Storchennest e.V.| https://www.jugendhaus-storchennest.de/

Cooperating self-representation of young people

- MOMO – The Voice of disconnected Youth| https://www.momo-voice.de/

Duration of the project: 01.09.2021 to 30.09.2023

2025

Nicole Rosenbauer (ed.)

Report on the project "International exchange
of professionals about young people in
challenging care constellations"

Dresden

ehs
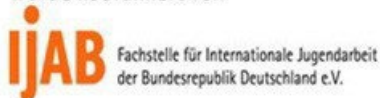zentrum
Forschung | Weiterbildung | Beratung

ehs Zentrum
Center for Research, Continuing Education and
Consulting at ehs Dresden gGmbH

Das Projekt war Teil der
Fachkräfteinitiative International

FK FACHKRÄFTE
INITIATIVE
INTERNATIONAL

Fachkräfteinitiative international
wurde koordiniert von

IJAB Fachstelle für Internationale Jugendarbeit
der Bundesrepublik Deutschland e.V.

Das Projekt wurde gefördert vom

Bundesministerium
für Familie, Senioren, Frauen
und Jugend

Contents

Project start: Profile of the project based on questions from FKI (2021)

Your project in one sentence:

The project initiates a transnational exchange between professionals from the field of educational support on sustainable inclusive approaches for young people in challenging care and help constellations.

What exactly should the project achieve? What results should be achieved?

The exchange project deals with young people in challenging care constellations who are at risk of exclusion. Exclusions usually result in negative and institutional labeling as "hard to reach" or "system crasher", much to the chagrin of the children and young people. As careleavers, they can "fall out" of all systems or turn away from them. In the project, local experiences and reflection processes from Germany, Austria and Slovenia are to productively combined in a working alliance of science and practice and used for transfer processes. As a result of the project, cornerstones for alternative successful, inclusive and sustainable approaches for young people will be developed and published.

Please complete the sentence:

"Our project is successful if ..." ...it succeeds in showing alternative ways to exclusion and repressive approaches towards children and young people and succeeds in contributing to greater awareness of the maxim of inclusion.

Target groups: Who benefits from your project and who is involved?

The project is based on a working alliance of academics and practitioners from Germany, Austria and Slovenia. The project offers the opportunity for professionals to benefit from the exchange among themselves, to be strengthened in their professional perspectives and to be inspired by stimulating knowledge and reflections – especially in the sense that science and practice benefit and learn from the mutual exchange. In the course of the project, possibilities for the direct involvement of young people and their perspectives will also be explored. The development, documentation and publication of cornerstones for successful inclusive approaches as a result of the project should also be of great interest to other providers and professionals.

Your project in concrete terms: What are your main activities?

The participants meet in digital meetings / exchange formats ("online forums") and plan and hold one meeting on site in each of the three participating countries ("country meetings").

1 Project "International exchange of professionals about young people in challenging care constellations"

Nicole Rosenbauer

The project "International exchange of professionals for young people in challenging care constellations – IPEP" (in German IFA) was one of twenty-six projects selected for funding in the "Fachkräfteinitiative international (FKI)" – "International professionals initiative: For internationalization and more Europe in child and youth welfare".[1] The initiative aimed to support child and youth welfare institutions and providers in anchoring Europeanization and internationalization in their own work. The "Fachkräfteinitiative international (FKI)" was supported and accompanied by "IJAB – Fachstelle für Internationale Jugendarbeit der Bundesrepublik Deutschland e.V.". The IPEP-project was carried out by the Zentrum für Forschung, Weiterbildung und Beratung an der ehs Dresden gGmbH (ehs Zentrum Dresden; „Center for Research, Continuing Education and Consulting at ehs Dresden"). Prof. Nicole Rosenbauer was responsible for the project coordination.

The aim of the project, which ran for two years from 01.09.2021 to 30.09.2023, was a transnational exchange of professionals from educational support services in Germany, Austria and Slovenia on sustainable inclusive approaches for young people in challenging care constellations. The membership of the International Association for Educational Assistance (IGfH) in IJAB, which has existed since 2021, encouraged us to participate in the "Fachkräfteinitiative international (FKI)" with a submission for the funding of a project on a topic related to socio-educational support services and settings. To date, specialist discourse on socio-educational support has largely been conducted on a national level. Even if international dynamics influence the life situations of young people and families, the support systems, their legal systems and the concrete practice on the ground are generally organized nationally and locally. Against this background, the aim of the project was to productively combine local experiences and reflection processes from Germany, Austria and Slovenia in a working alliance of science and practice and to use them for transfer processes.

The central thematic area of the initiative, in which we had placed our project, was "diversity and inclusion". In all three participating countries, processes of deinstitutionalization, regionalization and individualization of support settings have been described since the reform times of child and youth welfare in the 1970s and 1980s. They act as organizational principles that should also lead to a different culture in child and youth welfare institutions in the interests of children and young people. The more recent maxim of inclusion aims to open up social organizations and infrastructure in order to enable all young people to participate equally in their services. Different living conditions should no longer lead to institutionalized special treatment. Different living conditions and life situations should be taken into account in educational institutions and all institutions that shape the everyday lives of young people and support the processes of growing up and development are recognized and taken into account. The diversity of young people's living conditions is thus recognized.

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[1] https://ijab.de/projekte/fachkraefteinitiativeinternational

For the individual organizations and institutions, it is particularly and simultaneously about the quality of the social participation they enable (cf. Kronauer 2013[2]). A fundamental principle of "inclusive cultures" is the extensive participation of young people in structures that need to be democratized. This is linked to the fundamental goal of developing and providing a non-exclusionary, sustainable infrastructure for all children and young people in their diversity and heterogeneity on site.

However, in the practice of child and youth welfare services and facilities, processes of exclusion of children and young people can be observed across all federal states in the area of tension between inclusion and exclusion. For some young people who are confronted with precarious conditions in their family while growing up, the existing measures do not work as planned. In residential care there are repeated crises and terminations of placements. Children and adolescents move temporarily between youth welfare and child and adolescent psychiatry; revolving door effects occur. Children and adolescents can be passed on to further measures. This creates careers in the support systems, and young people can even be excluded from the youth welfare system. Failure or repeated failure of help arrangements at a professional and/or institutional level usually results in negatively charged, institutional labeling of children and adolescents as "hard to reach" or "difficult to reach", as "system crasher" as a result. Young people in challenging care and help constellations are at risk of finding themselves in escalation dynamics and spirals of ever more intensive, sometimes repressive measures in support systems. Negative labeling and "Demonization"[3] of the children and young people can lead to the legitimization of repressive, coercive approaches and even forms of deprivation of liberty in residential youth welfare facilities. As careleavers, young people can "drop out" of all systems or turn away from them. As "drop outs" or "disconnected youth", they then experience marginalization and exclusion: into environments that are destructive for them, into the unknown, into homelessness, into zones beyond a connection to institutional welfare and care structures as young people who are ultimately disconnected from systems (see Mögling et al. 2015[4]).

All project participants shared the motivation to explore alternatives to exclusion and to repressive, coercive approaches. Approaches that, in both Germany and Slovenia, can go as far as the deprivation of liberty for children and young people. The goal was to collaboratively define, document, and publish cornerstones in response. The concept pair inclusion/exclusion touches a particularly sensitive and critical point in professional policy debates: that exclusionary structures must be transformed (vgl. Kronauer 2013), and that the focus must move beyond simply interpreting the individual behavior of young people.

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[2] Kronauer, M. (2013): Soziologische Anmerkungen zu zwei Debatten über Inklusion und Exklusion, in: R. Burtscher, E. J. Ditschek, K.-E. Ackermann, M. Kil, & M. Kronauer (Hg.): Zugänge zu Inklusion: Erwachsenenbildung, Behindertenpädagogik und Soziologie im Dialog, Bielefeld, S. 17-25
[3] See on the "demonization corridor" model: Höllmüller, H. (2013): Der Begriff der „Handlungswissenschaft" in der Sozialen Arbeit – eine wissenschaftstheoretische und wissenschaftspraktische Kritik, in: Birgmeier, B./ Mührel, E. (Hg.): Handlung in Theorie und Wissenschaft Sozialer Arbeit, Wiesbaden, S 125-140
[4] Mögling, T./Tillmann, F./Reißig, B. (2015): Entkoppelt vom System. Jugendliche am Übergang ins junge Erwachsenenalter und Herausforderungen für Jugendhilfestrukturen, Düsseldorf.

In this context, the project took up the maxim of inclusion, which opposes the exclusion of children and young people from mainstream systems, the further development and expansion of special institutions and standardized procedures and methods that don't do justice to the particularities, diversity and respective burdens of children and young people. In its exchange, the working alliance of representatives from universities and practitioners accordingly focused on the question of an appropriate professional, inclusive approach to challenging care and support constellations.

The transnational exchange was to be initiated and used as a framework and resource for professional reflection and concept development processes. The aim was to share "tools that can be useful in our daily work". However, it was also necessary to look a t the reasons for the failure of conventional care settings: In order to realize inclusion, the reasons for exclusion must be understood. The aim was to learn from each other by discussing failures, successes, knowledge, alternatives and approaches. Would it be possible to establish an open and at the same time self-critical exchange and joint work between colleagues from the field of educational support who were largely unknown to each other before the project began? And would we be able to do this both across national borders and on an already "challenging" professional topic? And in particular: Would it be possible to include not only "experts from the professional field", but also young people who have gone through challenging care and support situations – as "experts by experience" – in the professional dialogue?[5]

In the application for the project, we had carefully formulated that possibilities for the direct involvement of young people in the exchange of professionals should be "sounded out". Even at this point: the "sounding out" was successful.
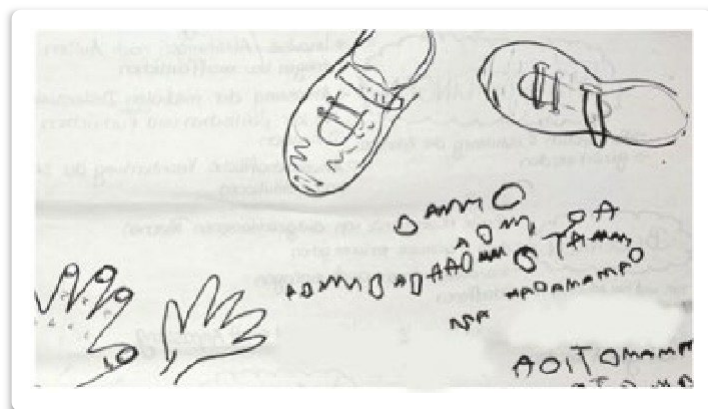

Fig. 1: Drawing Stralsund 2023

[5] Cf. on the term: Pösö, Tarja (2018): Experts by Experience Infusing Professional Practices in Child Protection, in: Falch-Eriksen, Asgeir/Backe-Hansen (Ed.): Human Rights in Child Protection, pp. 111-128; https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-94800-3

This project report focuses on the topics that were addressed. It illustrates these topics using various types of material such as flipcharts, blackboard pictures, excerpts from the minutes and protocols of the country meetings, scientific comments and additions. It presents the evaluation of the international exchange from the perspective of the participating professionals (chapter 8) and the young people (chapter 7) as well as the learning and work results. The project report thus contains different types of text, which we hope have been put into a meaningful and comprehensible context for the reader and give an impression of the liveliness of the project's progress.[6]

We looked at our language and the terms used for the young people, took a look at the youth welfare system in the three countries involved, problematized aspects that make youth welfare itself challenging and complex for the young people, summed up where we stand, worked with the young people on topics that move us and them. We looked at the viability of the participatory process of the family council – a family group conference – as a method that also involves the young people's wider environment. This involvement is largely lacking in practice and in the discourse on challenging care constellations and situations. The perspectives and lifeworlds of young people who were or are considered "challenging" by youth welfare services were incorporated into the project in a central way through the participation and collaboration of young people at our three country meetings in Austria, Slovenia and Germany. Their perspectives were also included through the participatory dialogical procedure of socio-educational diagnoses, which was tested by professionals who did interviews with young people in the three participating countries. The colleagues presented the results and their experiences at the final country meeting. Those working at universities contributed theoretical and empirical perspectives and formulated their main theses and points of criticism on the topic of challenging care constellations. It became clear that a perspective on the area of tension between exclusion and inclusion "in-house" requires criticism, particularly in the form of self-criticism.

All of this has been incorporated into the central "policy making" chapter (chapter 6). It presents the cornerstones for alternative and inclusive solutions developed in the project together with the young people. This chapter is also linked to the goal of reaching decision-makers in politics and administration with the recommendations and winning them for the design of sustainable local practices for young people.

Finally, the young people's feedback on their participation and the professionals' reflections on the international exchange are presented.

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[6] As this project report is based on different types of text, quotations from specialist literature as well as quotations from project protocols are marked with quotation marks ("") in accordance with the scientific citation style. They are also used in the text to clarify when terms are questioned or colloquial or metaphorical language is used. With regard to gender-sensitive or gender-neutral writing styles, the report retains the authors' different styles and does not standardize them. Feedback from the English-speaking colleagues is reproduced in the original in Chapter 8 and in the final chapter.

Thank you. Hvala vam.

It is thanks to those involved that the project was possible: the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth as the financial sponsor of the "Fachkräfteinitiative international", Kerstin Griebel and Christoph Bruners from IJAB for coordinating and supporting the implementation of the project. Silke Geithner, who made it possible for the project to be based at the ehs Center, and Grit Krause-Jüttler for continuing to support the project. The women in the administration of the ehs center, especially Sabine Wendelin and then Mrs. Hass, who found the right ways for everything; up to the settlement of the accommodation costs of the two dogs that had traveled to Slovenia with the MOMOs. Johannes Mann, Theo Sander and Greta Hess from Dresden and Erfurt supported the project coordination as student assistants for the duration of the project. We would like to thank Hartmut Mann, who, as the youth welfare officer of the Paritätischer Wohlfahrtsverband Sachsen helped to initiate the successful application for this project. We would have been very thankful if he had been able to read this project report.

The fact that all three country meetings were very special in their own different ways is thanks to our hosts: the B3 Network Children, Youth and Families in Austria, the University of Ljubljana and the colleagues from Mladinski dom Jarše in Slovenia and the Storchennest youth center in Germany.

There were also some challenges and aggravating conditions for the project itself. At the beginning, this was the coronavirus pandemic for a short time[7]. A consistent issue for international projects is the impossibility of linguistic communication. A lack of foreign language skills is and remains an obstacle to engaging with international contexts or being able to do so at all. During the online forums and the country meetings, project members were found to translate simultaneously as far as possible. There were also young people who were able to translate into English. We would like to thank all these translators once again.

Everything that has come about as part of this project has made the high coordination effort worthwhile: Working relationships have emerged, cross-connections between the countries, close working atmospheres among the professionals and with the young people digitally and at the country meetings on site. There were also conflicts, solidarity and enough time to spend and enjoy free time together. The fact that all fifteen young people who wanted to take part in the final country meeting were able to attend after all, despite the originally planned costs, is thanks to the commitment and financial solidarity of the participating colleagues and institutions. We would like to thank the adolescents and young people contributed their experiences with challenging care constellations to the exchange and the overall project. We thank them for being willing to share their experiences with youth welfare with us though some of them were very painful, to talk to us and to work with us in the project in a spirit of trust. Thank you very much. Hvala vam.

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[7] In Austria, there was still a very acute pandemic situation in fall/winter 2021. The first country meeting in Austria was postponed slightly and could therefore take place as planned.

Chronology of the project progress

The exchange of professionals started at the beginning of November 2021 with a first online forum as a kick-off with 25 participants from science and practice from the three countries Austria, Slovenia and Germany. The project was based on a combination of digital communication formats (online forums, digital meeting and consultation formats) and direct physical encounters at three country meetings. A total of ten online formats were carried out in the project up to June 2023. Three of these were international exchange forums, each with around 23 participants in trinational formations. Young people from the JUNO support and the B3 network took part in the first country meeting in Austria. In August 2022, the German organization "MOMO – The voice of disconnected youth" which is representing the interests of disconnected and homeless young people introduced itself in an online forum. Young people from "MOMO – The voice of disconnected youth" and young people from the JUNO took part in the country meetings in Ljubljana and Stralsund. An online format for participatory clearing processes and accompanying case counseling based on the methodology of socio-educational diagnoses was developed and tested in parallel. Interviews with young people for socio-educational diagnoses were prepared and accompanied in the three participating countries, as well as a socio-educational team diagnosis in Austria. The final country meeting in Stralsund was attended by a total of 37 participants, 22 professionals and 15 young people.

Overview of the "milestones" of the project

Date	Format
September 2021	Project steering group meeting in Austria & Slovenia
November 12, 2021	1st International Digital Exchange Forum
November 29, 2021	IJAB kick-off event in Cologne
November 12, 2021	Online forum for 3C model
December 03, 2021	Online forum on in-depth socio-educational diagnoses
March 24, 2022	2nd International Digital Exchange Forum
June 8 to 10, 2022	1st International Country Meeting
	Location: Central relief organization / B3, Klagenfurt, Austria
June 29, 2022	Online Forum Reflection
July 21, 2022	Online forum on socio-educational diagnoses
August 11, 2022	Online forum "MOMO – The voice of disconnected
youth" November 9 to 11, 2022	2nd International Country Meeting
	Location: University of Ljubljana, Ljubljana, Slovenia
March 27, 2023	3rd International Digital Exchange Forum
June 21 to 23, 2023	3rd International Country Meeting
	Location: Jugendhaus Storchennest e.V., Niepars, Germany
Oct. 25 to 26, 2023	FKI final conference "Time to reflect!" in Bonn

2 The topic of language and the topic of the professional perspective

The topic at the heart of the international exchange project is care and support situations and constellations involving young people in child and youth services that are perceived as complex, intensifying, or escalating; often referred to as "challenging". From the point of view of the support system and the professionals involved, it is about the neuralgic point that difficult support processes and support situations exist that can develop into a dynamic of escalation and failure.

For some years now, in German-speaking countries young people have referred to as "Systemsprenger", "system crashers". The movie of the same name in 2019 made the term known beyond national borders, including Slovenia. As a result, the international project could not avoid the term, which was most likely imported from the psychiatric context into child and youth welfare.[8] In Germany, the term "System crasher" are now already being used for young children in German kindergartens.[9]

All professionals involved were in clear agreement: they did not want to use this term; not even with the often-simultaneously mimed quotation marks in the air, and not even prefaced by the word "so-called". Not an easy undertaking, also because the term acts as a "buzzword" that guarantees attention for conferences, publications, etc. But on the one hand, we wanted to use "different" language for the children and young people, i.e. not negatively charged, stigmatizing language. On the other hand, there has been a good twenty years of relevant empirical research in Germany on the question how children and young people in difficulty become so-called "difficult cases".[10] The central finding is that a stressful and burdensome life situation of children and young people or families alone does not explain a difficult or challenging case, but that the support system itself is always involved, which has its own, self-produced share in the emergence of difficulties. So we also wanted to ask ourselves: what problems do young people have to deal with through the support system itself, i.e. through ourselves, what problems, what "challenges" do we produce ourselves, with our structures, rules, thought patterns... – with what we call "system", with what we call "attitude"?

In order to find a different language, perspective and therefore also attitude towards young people, we professionals created a collection of alternative terms on a flipchart during the first country meeting in Austria.

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[8] For example, the model project "Systemsprenger" from 2002 in Germany; see Freyberger, H. u.a. (2004): Woran scheitert die Integration in das psychiatrische Versorgungssystem? Qualitative Ergebnisse einer Untersuchung zur „Systemsprengerproblematik" in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, in: Sozialpsychiatrische Information/34, S. 16-21

[9] For example, MOZ (2021): Systemsprenger im Kindergarten; online: https://www.moz.de/lokales/schwedt/familie-und-bildung-systemsprenger-im-kindergarten-_-paedagogen-in-angermuende-schlagen-alarm-59393381.html

[10] Henkel, J./Schnapka, M./Schrapper, C. (2002) (eds.): Was tun mit schwierigen Kindern? Sozialpädagogisches Verstehen und Handeln in der Jugendhilfe, Münster.

We discussed the different terms. The collection on the flipchart was:

- *System surfers*
  (you can surf the wave, but you can also fall over on the edge of the wave)
- *Children and young people affected by exclusion; those affected by exclusion and those at risk of exclusion*
- *disconnected youngsters / disconnected children and adolescents*
- *system survivors*
- *Multi-System involved young people*
  (does not represent the view of young people)
- *Hyper-included*
  (young people who can no longer escape the system)
- *Young people with many challenges / multiple challenges / challenged young people*
- *System challenger*
- *Failed care adolescents / adolescents in a failing youth welfare system*
- *Young people with multiple challenges that cause youth welfare to fail*
- *fake care adolescents*
- *Seismographs*
- *Young people who show predetermined breaking point*
- *Young people at risk of being committed*
- *Children and young people seeking integration and relationships*
- *special care adolescents; flexible care young people*
- *Unheard children and young people; young people ignored and disregarded by the system*

Young people from the Austrian organizations JUNO and B3 Network took p a r t in this first country meeting in Klagenfurt. We asked them if they would be willing to give us feedback on our collection of terms. We presented them our flipchart. However, our obvious expectation of finding a "better" term that would also be legitimized by the young people was disappointed. In an effort to answer our question, Sebastian[11] got to the heart of the matter with his comment:

> *"I don't need an extra name, that makes me feel even more excluded. I'm Sebastian."*

[11] The names of the young people are pseudonymized throughout this report.

Terminology instead of quotation marks

Hubert Höllmüller

It was clear from the beginning that we won't use the term "system crasher". We have considered a number of alternatives and have not agreed on a good replacement. However, for a scientific context, it would be a better solution to use precise scientific terms. But one good thing is that we no longer use the pseudo term. A scientific discourse whose central term is usually placed in quotation marks, as is the case with "system crashers", has a somewhat strange framing. The author of this pseudo-concept, Menno Baumann, has not only used this word in a movie, but also argues that it would be easier for youth welfare offices to critically reflect on the processes in question if the perspective were reversed and the system not the perpetrator of any kind of failure in care processes, but rather the children and young people are the ones who break the support frameworks into which the youth welfare offices place them. My (very fragmentary) insights into the Austrian child and youth welfare system do not confirm that this term has triggered more critical reflection on the system.

In fact, the term is very suitable for causing a perpetrator-victim reversal and thus concealing the responsibility of the system. As a result, a structural phenomenon is individualized: the child and youth welfare system reacts inappropriately to the stresses and strains of a small group of children and young people and thus produces drop-outs and exclusions from help contexts – to use a technical term from systems theory: the system creates an exclusion drift. A current suggestion for an alternative term, based on the careleaver concept, would be the term "broken careleaver".

"Challenging care constellations" instead of "othering"

Nicole Rosenbauer

Special designations and categories for children and young people have a long tradition in German youth welfare system and residential care. They have a negatively charged, evaluative and stigmatizing effect on children and young people and lead to their exclusion. Sebastian's commentary on our collection of terms also expresses this precisely and to the point: His comment includes both the reference to the exclusionary nature of these categorizations: "that makes me feel even more excluded", as well as the disappearance and dethematization of young people's individuality through and in such categories, saying instead: "I am Sebastian".

As "progressive" and "different" the term "system crasher" is defended by some, because it draws attention to "the system" as the "problem" – such terms make use of the means of dramatization and remain in the pattern of constructing and designating a certain category of children and young people. We find designations such as "particularly conspicuous", "hopeless cases", "highly dissocial, highly aggressive or endangering themselves or others", "severely or highly disturbed", "(high-)risk clientele" etc. Such designations are and remain,

just like a current publication bears in its subtitle, a "deficient terminology". For this one then wants or has to find "resource-oriented approaches" as if squaring the circle (see Kieslinger/Dressel/Haar 2021[12]). From a social science perspective, such labels and categorizations of young people can be understood as processes of "othering".[13] These are powerful naming and demarcation mechanisms mediated by language that create a stereotyping construction of "the others" on the basis of selected characteristics. In this case young people are powerfully defined as belonging to a category as a "group of others"; their individuality disappears in this category (as Sebastian also thematizes) and exclusion dynamics can be promoted through it. The sociological labeling approach has already contributed a great portion to clarifying how such attribution processes are then incorporated by young people into their own self-image and how they (can) ultimately understand characteristics as features of their personality – right up to the phenomenon of "self-fulfilling prophecy", which has a manifest effect on reality. For an appropriate professional perspective that is oriented towards the maxim of inclusion and wants to achieve professionally approaches for young people in challenging care and support constellations, the language and terminology already indicate the path to be followed.

My suggestion to speak of "challenging care constellations" and to use this term as a heuristic concept is of course hardly suitable as a title for a movie, but the term gave this project and all its participants enough openness to incorporate into the project and the work what was important to them. On the other hand, I believe the term has analytical potential. As a heuristic, the term initially leaves open who perceives which challenges as such – important for care and support constellations in the context of youth welfare in which different sides are always necessarily involved. One can then also ask what the young people perceive as "challenging" about youth welfare, about the people and processes they are confronted with. The terminology avoids the tendency to ignore the "other" institutionally framed side, which goes hand in hand with the various designations for the young people themselves: the ignoring of the other side of the professionals involved, and thus the ignoring of the unavoidable relationship of interaction between the two sides.

The question of how to deal with challenging care constellations is not a secondary issue for youth welfare services – and it is certainly not a secondary issue for the children and young people concerned. This shows how those responsible and how a society deal with children and young people who, for reason, do not fit into the patterns of growing up and the

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[12] Kieslinger, D./Dressel, M./Haar (Hg.) (2021): Systemsprenger*innen. Ressourcenorientierte Ansätze zu einer defizitären Begrifflichkeit, Freiburg.
[13] Translated into German as "Beanderung, VerAnderung". Cf. e.g. ISTA/Fachstelle Kinderwelten (ed.) (2016): Inklusion in der Kitapraxis #1 - Die Zusammenarbeit mit Eltern vorurteilsbewusst gestalten. Praxisbücher der Fachstelle Kinderwelten: Inklusion in der Kitapraxis, Berlin.

institutional patterns that are considered as "normal" (cf. Krappmann 2020: 514), with children and young people that "disturb" and challenge institutions and professionals through their behavior. The construction of a category of children and adolescents "beyond the normal" proves to be particularly ominous for themselves, because it suggests that specific, particularly intervention-intensive, maximally invasive forms of treatment and settings such as placement in deprivation of liberty in residential care are needed for young people.

The language we use also guides our perspective. No child, no adolescent, no young person has the power to "blow up" the support system or individual institutions and "reduce them to rubble" – as the term "system crasher" suggests. On the contrary, the systems and their institutions present themselves as extremely stable and hardly irritable to the children and young people. Power and power resources are distributed unequally in practice and in reality. Institutions and the people working in them have sufficient and diverse means of power to take action against behaviors of children and adolescents that are perceived as "disruptive". It is all the more important to reflect on power relations, as dealing with child and adolescent behavior that challenges and "disturbs" adults is accompanied by the danger that this reaction itself becomes violent, aggressive or stigmatizing.[15]

On the project...

One of Baumann's reasons for using the term "system crasher" is that it would have certain advantages for communication with practising professionals: the "apparent 'assignment of blame'" to the young person would enable reflection processes that practitioners would presumably ward off "in the case of a system-critical formulation for reasons of self-protection" (Baumann 2024: 14[16]). This is linked to the thesis that parts of a professional group of adult professionals must protect themselves by implicitly blaming children and adolescents and will probably not allow themselves to be criticized – possibly a very apt thesis to describe the reality in which the "system crasher"-issue is embedded. However, the consequences for the children and young people are also a bitter reality. In the course of the project, we all certainly did not always succeed in completely suspending such "self-protection" for ourselves, but that is exactly what we wanted: to establish a discourse in the good academic tradition – critical and self-critical – with four universities, seven child and youth welfare organizations and in encounters with more than a good dozen young people.[17]

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[14] Krappmann, L. (2020): Geleitwort: Geschlossene Unterbringung und dressurartige Erziehung sind Unrecht, in: Degener, L. u.a. (Hg.): Dressur zur Mündigkeit? Über die Verletzung von Kinderrechten in der Heimerziehung, Weinheim und Basel, S. 5-8

[15] cf. Bange, D. (2005): Gewalt gegen Kinder in der Geschichte, in: Deegener, G./Körner, W. (Hg.): Kindesmisshandlung und Vernachlässigung. Göttingen Bern Toronto, S. 13–18

[16] Baumann, M. (2024): Kinder, die Systeme sprengen, Band 1, 5. unver. Aufl., Baltmannsweiler

[17] For example, the "come together" in breakout rooms in the first online forum in 2021, in which most of the participants were still largely unknown to each other, included the question: "What do I think makes me particularly challenging for young people? What do children and young people find difficult about me?"

And this also includes saying that there were controversies and conflicts within the project itself, for example, that there was no uniform opinion on the question of whether specific terms were needed for the young people or whether each term would only bring a new label, a "new label on the forehead". For example, terms such as "system surfers", "unheard" or "unheard of / outrageous", "system blow ups" or "broken careleavers" were used in the project, but these were intended to illustrate the active side of the youth welfare system in the impending or already completed exclusion processes and, in particular, the experiential dimension of the young people themselves.

Self-representation "MOMO – The voice of disconnected youth"

Nicole Rosenbauer

The idea and claim of participation fundamentally relate to every level of professional and institutional action in the context of youth welfare – in the sense of establishing a "culture of participation". So this exchange project was also about exploring opportunities for the participation of young people – even though it was conceived as an exchange of professionals. For our project context, we invited the German self-organization and interest group "MOMO – The voice of disconnected youth" to participate. In August 2022, "MOMO – The voice of disconnected youth" introduced itself to the project in a digital forum.[18] In addition to professionals from the three countries, young people from the Austrian organization JUNO also took part in this digital forum. After the presentation of the objectives and working methods of "MOMO – The voice of disconnected youth", a lively exchange between the young people from Germany and Austria about their respective youth welfare experiences took place behind two tablets. "MOMO – The voice of disconnected youth" became a cooperation partner for the project.

Since 2015, the initiative "MOMO – The voice of disconnected youth" has been working to improve the lives of young people who have fallen out of the system. These young people face a variety of hurdles and obstacles in the child and youth welfare system and in the transition to other support systems. There are many young people at MOMO who have had experiences with the youth welfare system. MOMO wants to take part in the debate about particularly challenging young people and clarify what makes successful help difficult and what makes it possible. Based on their own experiences, the MOMOs address the structural errors and hurdles that they perceive and experience in the youth welfare system and try to make their suggestions for improvement heard in politics.

MOMO provided information in the digital forum about the young people's voluntary engagement within their collective, their work on youth policy, the formats in which they exchange ideas, and the six nationwide "Street Children Conferences" that have now taken place. In 2013, a conference was held by Karuna e.V. in Germany, which took place with young people from the street, experts and politicians. As a result, many young people wanted to continue to be politically active and participate, which led to the formation of a group that began to meet regularly at the Jamlitz train station in Brandenburg – the Justus Delbrück Haus.[2] This group does not receive funding from the public youth welfare offices, but from foundations such as the Aktion Mensch foundation. Since 2013, it has been providing sanction-free and relationship-intensive work there with formerly homeless young people who have been excluded from social participation. Young people can stay overnight here without facing conditions – a unconditionally staying overnight.

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[18] Akademie für Mitbestimmung Bahnhof Jamlitz; https://www.demokratiebildung.info/

It is particularly painful and harsh when young people are "dropped" by the youth welfare system on their 18th birthday and left to fend for themselves. At the same time, there are also young people who don't even make it into the youth welfare system despite needing support, meaning they are denied access. As the young people report, most of them know the narrative of "bad children" and "good system". Nevertheless it is often the other way around: this narrative stands in contrast to the real experiences that some young people have to make with this system. This is one of the reasons why the young people at MOMO don't want to be called "system crashers". The self-organization is particularly committed to ensuring that young people are no longer subjected to psychological and physical violence in the German youth welfare system and that placements with deprivation of liberty are abolished.

The aims of MOMO are:

- Political lobbying
- Organization of the annual federal conference for street children
- Accompanying young people to stabilize their living conditions
- Influencing changes to the law
- National and international exchange of expertise
- Further development of own project ideas

"MOMO – The voice of disconnected youth" is a self-organization that deliberately does not have a formal organizational form (e.g. as a registered association). There are regional offices in three German cities – Berlin, Essen and Hamburg – which are contact points for young people and where young people themselves get involved. The regional offices are supported by youth welfare organizations. The self-organization of young people is maintained with very limited financial and human resources, which sometimes pushes the young people's capacities to the limit.

Fig. 2: Title page of a brochure from "MOMO – The voice of disconnected youth"

Self-organized associations of young people to represent themselves and their interests are based on the guiding principle "Nothing about us without us" and are a form and vessel for collective participation. The essence and basis of self-representation is founded on being equally affected, i.e. direct, personal experience and knowledge of life situations and difficulties in and with public institutions.

Their own experiences and knowledge are understood as the specific competence and expertise of "experts by experience".[19]

Unlike child and youth welfare agencies and professional organizations and their representatives, the commitment and activities of self-organized associations for the self-representation of young people can be particularly effective because they are based directly on the interests of those affected and are not influenced by outside interests. Self-representation does not mean that full-time or voluntary workers who are not or were not themselves recipients of benefits represent their addressees – rather, they represent themselves and their interests.

Since the 2021 legal reform, the German youth welfare system has been obliged to encourage self-organized associations of young people and parents and to promote their interests in self-representation (§ 4a SGB VIII). Associations such as "MOMO –The voice of disconnected youth" should benefit from this. However, local financial support is a matter of negotiation. Accordingly, it depends on the willingness of individual local decision-makers and their attention and goodwill (see also Neupert 2021[20]). But in principle the legal signal has been given to introduce a new participation and representation structure for young people into the youth welfare system in Germany. For the first time, a legal regulation includes the promotion of such forms of collective participation of young people with youth welfare experience and also the requirement for youth welfare professionals to proactively support self-organized associations of young people.

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[19] Cf. on the term: Pösö, Tarja (2018): Experts by Experience Infusing Professional Practices in Child Protection, in: Falch-Eriksen, Asgeir/Backe-Hansen (Ed.): Human Rights in Child Protection, pp. 111-128; https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-94800-3

[20] Neubert, A. (2021): Kein Platz für "Systemsprenger" im neuen Kinder- und Jugendstärkungsgesetz? Eine Bewertung mit Hinblick auf die Bedarfe von entkoppelten jungen Menschen, in: Unsere Jugend, 73/2, S. 80-86

The nationwide self-organization of careleavers is already more widely known in Germany "Careleaver e.V.": https://careleaver.de/

3   A look at three youth welfare systems

In order to classify the topic, we took a look at the youth welfare systems of the three countries at the first country meeting in order to be able to classify the professional perspectives and experiences of the project participants and to create a basis for international comparison and exchange. By embedding the project in the respective national frameworks, similarities and differences in the support systems became visible, which was the starting point for the cross-border dialog.

An insight into the German child and youth welfare system

Nicole Rosenbauer

Since 1990/1991, child and youth welfare in Germany has been based on federal law with the Child and Youth Welfare Act as Social Code No. 8 / SGB VIII. Every young person – children, adolescents and young adults – has the right to support in their personal development through counseling, encouragement, participation, support services and protection of the child's welfare. The sixteen German federal states provide supplementary and specific legislation where necessary, but no competing legislation. The individual tasks are implemented in local self-government by the youth welfare offices as public agencies in the cities and districts; as public agencies, they are responsible for providing and planning assistance, while the specific services and assistance are mainly provided by independent agencies.

Parents or guardians have a legal entitlement to child-raising assistance if the child or young person's welfare cannot be guaranteed and the assistance suitable and necessary for their development. The eight forms of educational assistance regulated by law (§§ 28-35 SGB VIII) are a kind of
"Help catalog", which is available in all youth welfare office districts. In 2024, there will be a total of 556 youth welfare offices in Germany. The forms of help range from educational counseling to outpatient help for young people (social group work and educational assistants) and outpatient socio-pedagogical family help, to day care groups, placement in foster care, supervised living arrangements/home education and intensive individual socio-pedagogical care. Giving minors their own legal entitlement has been discussed time and again, but was not implemented in the most recent legislative reform in 2021.

From the age of 18, young people in need of socio-educational support have their own legal entitlement to assistance for young adults (Section 41 SGB VIII) - both as continued assistance, e.g. in residential care, and as newly granted assistance. Child and youth welfare services are responsible for young people up to their 27th birthday.

If educational counseling is included, 1,127,869 children, adolescents and young adults nationwide received some kind of educational support in 2021.[21] Excluding educational counseling, the figure is 693,767 young people (§§ 29-35). With 215,019 young people, external placements in residential groups and foster families account for 31% of the assistance spectrum. The absolute number of young people in ongoing assistance and assistance terminated in the course of the year as at 31.12.2021 was 87,329 young people (41%) in full-time care/foster families and 122,659 young people (57%) in residential care and other forms of assisted living.

Expenditure on educational assistance and assistance for young adults amounted to EUR 11.59 billion in 2021; this is 19% of total youth welfare expenditure. In 2020, 115,308 people were employed in educational assistance (average increase of 6% compared to 2018; 4,475 more employees in the area of residential care in absolute figures). Since 2010, the age structure of staff has shifted in favor of younger employees. Despite the recent decline in case numbers in the residential care sector[22], staff resources have been further expanded. In 2022, the youth welfare offices in Germany carried out a total of 203,717 procedures to assess whether a child's welfare was at risk (in accordance with Section 8a (1) SGB VIII). In 2022, a total of 66,444 minors were taken into care in Germany, both in the context of regular and temporary custody of unaccompanied minor refugees[23].

The figures for utilization correspond to the poverty and burden rates in the respective municipalities. Every second family for which new child-raising assistance is granted receives transfer payments. Single parents are clearly overrepresented in the child-raising assistance; almost 70% of them are dependent on state financial support at the same time. In short, child-raising assistance also compensates to a large extent for structural deficits in family living conditions (poverty, social inequality) and inadequate social policy[24].

In Germany, as in Austria, there are so-called "regional disparities", i.e. very different local approval practices. For example, the proportion of assistance for young adults in accordance with Section 41 of Book VIII of the German Social Code (SGB VIII) in relation to all educational assistance in individual regions of a federal state such as Rhineland-Palatinate can be between 0% and 25%. The decisive factors here are, in particular, the intensity of the perceived cost pressure locally, but also different patterns of perception of the life crises of young people by the local professionals.

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[21] If this figure is set in relation to the population, 693 young people per 10,000 under 21-year-olds received educational support in 2021 - statistically speaking, that is 7% of young people in this age group.
[22] Also due declining demand among the group of unaccompanied minor refugees.
https://www.hzemonitor.akjstat.tu-dortmund.de/kapitel-1-ergebnisse-im-ueberblick
[23] See https://www.destatis.de/DE/Themen/Gesellschaft-Umwelt/Soziales/Kinderschutz/Tabellen/gefaehrdung-childeswohl.html and https://www.destatis.de/DE/Themen/Gesellschaft-Umwelt/Soziales/Kinderschutz/Tabellen/schutzmassnahmen.html
[24] Cf. on this and the following Daigler, C./Rosenbauer, N./Struck, N. (2019): *Hilfe zur Erziehung*, in: *socialnet Lexikon.* Bonn: socialnet, 03.06.2019 [Zugriff am: 15.12.2024]. Verfügbar unter: https://www.socialnet.de/lexikon/3978

In all service segments, boys and young men are slightly overrepresented overall (54%), particularly in day groups and socio-educational group work. The older the children or young people, the higher the proportion of girls. Girls and young women have to request help disproportionately often as self-reporters; they only come to the attention of youth welfare services later than boys.

An insight into the Austrian child and youth welfare system

Hubert Höllmüller

The Austrian child and youth welfare system has its legal basis in the Child and Youth Welfare Act, which formulates the requirement to ensure the welfare of all children from 0-18 (with the possibility of extension to 21) residing on Austrian territory. The federal states and the associated organizational units (specialist departments of the state, district administrative authorities responsible for enforcement) are entrusted with enforcement. Each of the nine Austrian federal states has its own state laws, which are only framed by federal law. The concrete dimensions of these laws vary considerably. Recently, the federal law has been "reduced" to one page, so to speak, and further legislation has been handed over exclusively to the federal states. The term "best interests of the child" is regulated in the ABGB (General Civil Code). The support services provided by child and youth welfare are divided into three groups: social services, educational support and full education. Here are some figures from 2022:

42,973 children and young people received educational support. A total of 12,888 children and young people were accommodated within the framework of full education. Full education was mainly provided in socio-educational facilities throughout Austria: 61.2% of the children and young people in care were accommodated here, the other 38.8% lived in foster families. 2022, 2,260 young adults (18 to under 21-year-olds) received residential care; 1,350 of the same age group received outpatient support.[25]

In order to be able to assess whether a child's welfare is at risk, the child and youth welfare services initiated a total of 46,995 risk assessments.

In 2022, child and youth welfare expenditure for educational support, full education and assistance for young adults totaled EUR 796.0 million; taking into account income from cost reimbursements (EUR 46.2 million), net expenditure totaled EUR 749.8 million (EUR +35.6 million or +5.0% compared to 2021). Three quarters of expenditure (excluding cost reimbursements) was spent on full education and one quarter on support for education (including assistance for young adults in both cases). For 70,285 children and young people

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[25] Source: Child and youth welfare statistics of the Austrian Federal Chancellery; online (last accessed 15.10.2024): https://www.statistik.at/fileadmin/user_upload/Kinder-und-Jugendhilfestatistik-2022.pdf

legal representation in accordance with the General Civil Code (custody, maintenance). 54,345 minors were represented by child and youth welfare services in the enforcement maintenance claims under the Maintenance Advance Act and 1,568 of the same age group in immigration law matters.

A few examples will show how differently the individual federal states operate: In Carinthia there are 1015 children and young people in full foster care in 2022, in Styria 1629. The absolute population in Carinthia is approx. 560,000, in Styria approx. 1.24 million, i.e. more than twice as high. In Carinthia 25% of them are in foster care, in Styria 48%. Carinthia has carried out around 4,430 risk assessments, Styria around 5,470. These figures alone would raise a lot of research questions, but even though we are talking about two neighboring federal states in the south of Austria, no research is advertised. The same applies to differences between individual districts that do not appear in the official statistics. And to include our southern neighbors, i.e. Slovenia, in the comparison of figures: According to Eurochild statistics from 2021, Slovenia has 483 children and young people residential care out of a population of 2.1 million, while Austria has 7,684 out of a population of 9.1 million, almost 16 times as many. 4.3 times the number of inhabitants, 16 times the number of children and young people in residential care.

TABLE 9. International glossary of five alternative care categories

Country/ Region	Alternative care	Formal family-based care	Foster care	Formal kinship care	Residential care
Definitions	Authorised care away from the child's parents, incl. all residential care	Authorised care away from the child's parents, in a family	Authorised care with person/family unknown to the child	Authorised care with family members/ friends	Collective non-family setting with children cared for by paid adults
Austria	Volle Erziehung		Pflege familie		Sozialpädagogische Einrichtungen
Germany	Stationäre Hilfe zur Erziehung Vollzeitpflege	Vollzeitpflege			Heimerziehung
Slovenia	Nadomestno varstvo; Ukrepi za varstvo koristi otroka		Rejništvo		Centri za usposabljanje, delo in varstvo; vzgojni zavodi; Stanovanjske skupine

Fig. 3a: Graphic taken from Eurochild and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) (2021): Better data for better child protection systems in Europe, Technical Report of the data care project[26]

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[26] Data for Austria is not available in the report. "The DataCare project was able to calculate these indicators for 27 of the 28 countries (with Austria the only exception, where stock data could not be found by the research team in the officially published statistics)." - "The DataCare project was able to calculate these indicators for 27 of the 28 countries (with Austria the only exception, where stock data could not be found by the research team in the officially published statistics)."

Total number of children in alternative care and its subcategories at a specific point in time for each country

Totals for specific point in time	Number of children in alternative care	Number of children in residential care	Number of children in formal family-based care	Number of children in 'other' forms of alternative care
Germany	147,700	77,984	69,716	-
Slovenia	1,167	483	684	-

Four indicators on children in alternative care calculated for 27 of the countries surveyed

Indicators for specific point in time[199]	Rate of children in alternative care (per 100,000)	Rate of children in residential care (per 100,000)	Rate of children in formal family-based care (per 100,000)	Percentage of children in residential care as a share of the total number of children in alternative care
Germany[215]	1,080	570	510	52.8%
Slovenia[239]	324[240]	135	188	41.8%

Fig. 3b: Graphic taken from Eurochild and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) (2021): Better data for better child protection systems in Europe, Technical Report of the data care project

Helpful examples	Room for improvement
In 2017, the Council of the Republic of Slovenia for Children and the Family was established. It is a permanent consultative body of the Government of the Republic of Slovenia, whose members are representatives of non-governmental Organisations and professional institutions in the field of children and families and representatives of the Government of the Republic of Slovenia. The Council discusses any issue about children's rights and family policy, including statistical results.	The Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia (Statistični urad Republike Slovenije, or SURS) collected and published data on children in institutional care until 2014. From then onwards, the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities has collected the data from administrative sources but the data are not publicly available.

Fig. 3c: Graphics taken from Eurochild and UNICEF (2021): Better data for better child protection systems in Europe, Technical Report of the data care project.

Online (last accessed 10/15/2024): https://eurochild.org/uploads/2022/02/UNICEF-DataCare-Technical-Report-Final-1.pdf

Slovenia

Fig. 3d: Graphics taken from Eurochild and UNICEF (2021): Better data for better child protection systems in Europe, Technical Report of the data care project.
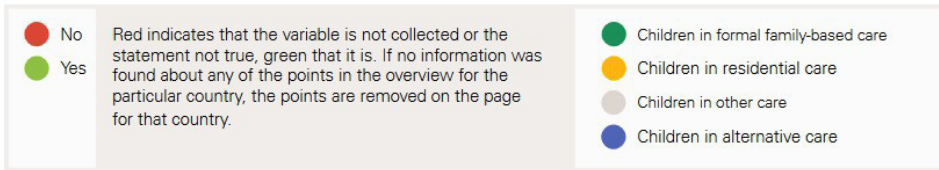
An insight into the Slovenian child and youth welfare system

Milko Poštrak

In December 2020, Slovenia passed the "Act on the Intervention for Children and Youth with Emotional and Behavioral Disorders in Education". Among other things, it provides for flexible support and systemic solutions for integrated support for disadvantaged children and pupils and the establishment of prevention centers (ZOOMTVI, 2020).[27] Support is to be provided in an expert center with smaller units as close as possible to the user's place of residence in order to follow and to the needs of the child/young person. The aim is to avoid a placement or to return to the home environment with guaranteed professional support after completing a placement in order to lead an independent life and enter the labor market. The Expert Center's role is to provide the full range of support to all children and young people, their families and other institutions that are important to them.

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[27] https://op.europa.eu/webpub/eac/education-and-training-monitor-2021/en/slovenia.html

One of the positive aspects of ZOOMTVI is that it professional support from pre-school age through adolescence up to the age of 26. The new law not only defines the form of institutional placement, but also complements it with preventative, mobile socio-educational support and care for young people after they have left. Help is provided on the basis of an individualized plan. It is based on professional socio-pedagogical work and an understanding of how the emotions and behavior of an individual child or young person work. The child or young person is also present during the planning, preparation and evaluation of the individualized plan.

In Slovenia, there is the peculiarity that residential child and youth welfare facilities are still assigned to the Ministry of Education. Every residential placement of a minor in Slovenia is reviewed and decided by a court. Residential placements are initiated by social work centers and juvenile courts.

The Act on the Orientation of Children with Special Needs in 2000 created a legal basis for two different organizational forms of education aimed at children and young people with behavioural and personality problems, namely

1. Educational programs with adapted implementation and additional professional support; and

2. educational (residential) facilities.

In Slovenia, there are a total of ten facilities for children and young people with emotional and behavioral issues and one after-education facility, which differ from one another:

- according to the age of the young people (some are intended only for school-age children, others for young people who have completed compulsory schooling, others accept both);
- by gender (some only boys, others boys and girls);
- the organization of schooling (some have internal lessons, other children and young people attend schools in the vicinity of the facility);
- according to the organization of life (some have educational groups, others residential groups, still others call a group of children and young people a family).

Admission to certain programs is agreed by the parents directly with the contractors within the framework of the legal procedures for the after-education of children and adolescents and with the knowledge and cooperation of the relevant social work centers. The role of educational institutions is educational, compensatory, corrective and preventive. The social task of educating and raising children and young people with emotional and behavioral issues is the responsibility of teachers, vocational educators and other professionals. They try to take responsibility for the overall personal development of children and young people and, above all, to compensate for developmental deficits and gaps.

Facilities for the upbringing and education of children and young people with special needs for children with speech and behavioral disorders:

Educational facilities: The educational institution admits children and adolescents with behavioral challenges. Only the Planina education center accepts young people with mild intellectual disabilities. Placement in such an institution can only be made by social work centers or a juvenile court. In the first case, this is an educational, protective and preventive measure. In the second case, it is a judicial measure to commit the child or young person to an educational institution. Educational institutions accept children from the age of 6 and can accommodate them up to the age of 17. Young people between the ages of 14 and 18 are admitted to institutions for young people, with the proviso that they can live there until they reach the age of 21.

Educational institutions have the longest tradition in the system of educating children and adolescents with emotional and behavioral issues. They are referred to the institution by the relevant social work centers in accordance with the Marriage and Family Act and in consultation with the relevant school administration. Juveniles who have been sentenced by a court are also placed in educational institutions, whereby the measure of placement in an educational institution is mandatory. The purpose of the children and young people's stay in the facility is to train them as soon as possible for a successful return/integration into their home/familiar environment and the successful completion of basic education or vocational training.

Some facilities have organized internal forms of basic or vocational training. This enables the admission of children and adolescents who, in addition to emotional and behavioral issues, also have significant learning issues and require specially adapted conditions and appropriately qualified staff to compensate for them. The aim of residential education to ensure conditions for safe and healthy personal development (holistic care), the compensation of developmental and cognitive , emotional and social development and, if necessary, medical care (general medical, pedopsychiatric, psychotherapeutic, etc.).

Educational institutions are organized in two different forms:

- in the form of remote, dislocated residential groups that are integrated into the urban environment and relatively autonomous,

- or in the form of traditional institutional education (everything under one roof, comprehensive centralized care, etc.). The latter usually also have a residential group located in a nearby suburb or in the city. These residential groups either serve the final phase of institutional care (smooth transition to real life) or offer the more motivated young people the opportunity to choose from a wider range of suitable vocational training courses.

Residential groups: Residential groups also have a much stronger connection to the education system or focus on school education than the other two participating countries, Germany and Austria. Residential groups are for children and young people who are exposed to an educational risk and attend primary and secondary schools.

All care, upbringing, education and training took place in the groups themselves. Children and young people are accommodated by social work centers and parent education facilities. Placement in residential groups or parenting facilities is a complementary form of institutional education that contributes to a transition from a more closed and structured institutional environment to independent living. Educational institutions choose to move when children and young people meet the requirements for independent and less controlled living. The residential groups are arranged according to the family concept.

The residential group as an organizational form of holistic care, upbringing and education, usually with six to eight children or adolescents, with three to five educators, in a single-family home or in a larger apartment in an urban environment, has developed on the basis of criticism of large educational institutions and from humanistic efforts to normalize the lives and work of children and adolescents with emotional and behavioral issues during their institutional care. Children and young people who have been deprived of a normal family life can meet virtually all their basic developmental needs in residential groups with the help of professional educators. The life and work of the children, adolescents and educators in the residential group is organized and structured along the lines of a larger family community.

Youth homes: They accept children or young people who are left without care and education in their own families, children at risk of educational difficulties and children with emotional and behavioral issues. Most of these children also have learning difficulties. The aim of residential care is to create the conditions for safe and healthy personal development and to strive for the successful completion of primary school or vocational training. Children or adolescents cannot return to their families after release must create the conditions for independent living with the help of a home and the relevant social work center. The educational program is mainly carried out in educational groups in the home or in residential groups at various locations.

Aftercare home: Young people of both sexes are referred to an educational measure ordered by the juvenile court. Young people between the ages of 14 and 21 are referred to this so that they can stay in the aftercare home until the age of 23. They work together with the Centre for Social Work, parents, the local municipality, the health service, the judiciary, the police, schools, associations and work organizations, etc.

Slovenia has a total of three youth homes, seven educational institutions and one after-school home. Depending on the age of the children and young people, these are facilities for compulsory school children of both sexes, for compulsory school children and young people who have already completed their compulsory education, and facilities for young men and women who have already completed their compulsory education.

Slovenia largely lacks professional foster families. In view of the practical and theoretical knowledge that early help is more successful than later/late help, it would be necessary for this form of care to introduced in our practice as well. A professional

family could be financed in different ways - be it as a subsidized educational institution or as a private institution with a concession or as a special project.

In Slovenia, the idea of separating "youth work" and "educational support" is not as prevalent as in the other two participating countries. This is why "youth centers" are also considered in the context of "youth at risk". Following the Danish example, there are youth centers in the major Slovenian cities. The youth center can be an independent institution with its own staff, its own financing or its activities are carried out by a nearby educational institution such as a youth home with its specialist staff and external employees or in a coordination of paraprofessional staff with the participation of, for example, non-governmental organizations.

4   What challenges does the youth welfare system face? Risk factors, system culture and wrong paths

In all three countries involved, reform processes have taken place in recent decades. The aim is to create good, inclusive support structures and cultures for children, young people and families in difficult and stressful life situations, for "youth and families at risk". Many young people and families benefit from these changes and rate support processes as helpful and successful. Over the last two decades, research into youth welfare has identified the key factors for successful support in an increasingly differentiated manner. This knowledge is available.

Nevertheless, there are still lines in practice that create exclusions for young people. Accordingly, the question of inclusion must, *vice versa,* also focus on the reasons for exclusion and marginalizing practices towards young people. Without claiming to be exhaustive, we take up four perspectives from our approaches: Firstly, along the thesis that not only the life situations and development processes of young people contain risk factors – as "youth at risk" – but also that the youth welfare system itself also contains its own risk factors – as "care at risk" – that lead to problems. This is followed by a discussion of the fallacy of expecting solutions from a further specialization of facilities and measures within the help system. It asks why scientific findings on child and youth welfare, supported by empirical research, are not widely accepted "in the system" and what the current "system culture" is like. Also in view of the fact that the issue of closed detention under deprivation of liberty is extremely important to the young people and they also wanted to talk about it in the project, it is made clear why this must also be regarded as an aberration.

Risk factors in the youth welfare system: "care at risk"

Nicole Rosenbauer

Around twenty years, child and youth welfare research has been established in Germany, which has worked out the factors for successful youth welfare in a variety of ways. These are

- High quality of assistance planning
- Suitability of the assistance arrangement
- High degree of participation of young people and parents in the support process and the decisions that are important to them; continuity of social relationships and support
- Good and sustainable quality of the socio-educational relationship; working alliance
- The duration of the assistance
- Presence of therapeutic-clinical professionalism
- Opening up the facilities to the social environment
- Inclusive orientation: networking beyond your own institution

- Respect for the previous life experiences and the strategies and patterns of interpretation of young people and families that have developed there
- Further development of the relationship between young people and parents
- Good quality of life in an institution[28]

Professionals have the task of understanding and implementing these impact factors in the triad of knowledge, skills and attitude as a guideline for their practice. Mirroring these impact factors of "successful youth welfare", there are risk factors for failure.[29] The sister of "successful youth welfare" is "failing care". A practical research project that is still relevant today has dealt with the question how "difficult" children become "difficult cases".[30] According to the key finding, a difficult and stressful life situation of children and adolescents or families alone never explains a difficult or challenging case, but always also involves the support system itself, which has its own, self-produced proportion in the emergence of difficulties.

A specific risk factor is the experience of "handover patterns" in the help system, often reported in our project context, in which young people are "delegated" to other places, measures or services. Responsibilities for them are passed on if difficulties arise with the young people and they do not seem to "fit" into the measures or services. The high rates of unplanned terminations of residential care and foster care – just over half of all residential care provided by German child and youth welfare services – is a problem long been known. Drop-out rates are rising as young people get older. In the age range of 12 to 18- year-olds, the proportion of unplanned terminations is almost 70%.[(31)]

When support options become more differentiated and specialized, there are always unintended side effects as well as positive effects. The focus on forms of help, a lack of coordination between providers, the relatively unconnected coexistence of different help services leads to a "pillarized" youth welfare landscape in which an "organized lack of responsibility" arises: institutions are able to declare themselves no longer responsible when children and young people have difficulties and refer them on. Help careers of young people are created in such processes of "transfer and deportation" (Freigang 1986[32]).

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[28] Gabriel, Th./Keller, S. (2019): Was wirkt in der Kinder- und Jugendhilfe? Metaanalysen von quantitativen Studien zu den Hilfen zur Erziehung, in: Begemann/Birkelbach (Hrsg.): Forschungsdaten für die Kinder- und Jugendhilfe, S. 425-445; Wolf, K. (2019): Wie können Wirkungen pädagogischer Interventionen gemessen werden? Zur Metaanalyse qualitativer Studien in den Hilfen zur Erziehung, in: Begemann/Birkelbach (Hrsg.), Forschungsdaten für die Kinder- und Jugendhilfe, S. 395-425

[29] Rosenbauer, N. (2020): Das Risiko des Scheiterns hat System - Strukturelle Barrieren und Schwellen der Inanspruchnahme von Hilfen zur Erziehung, in: Forum Erziehungshilfen, Heft 5, pp. 269- 274.

[30] Henkel, J./Schnapka, M./Schrapper, C. (2002) (Hrsg.): Was tun mit schwierigen Kindern? Sozialpädagogisches Verstehen und Handeln in der Jugendhilfe, Münster.

[31] Cf. Tabel, A. (2020): Empirische Standortbestimmung der Kinder- und Jugendhilfe, Frankfurt a.M.

[32] Freigang, W. (1986): Verlegen und Abschieben. Zur Erziehungspraxis im Heim. Weinheim/München.

There is also currently pressure in the support systems in Germany and Austria due to the acute shortage of professionals. The practitioners involved in the project experience *"capacities at the limit"*.[33] They experience a lack of control and an unmediated allocation practice in the youth welfare system: *"every free place you can get is used, regardless of whether it fits or not"*. Young people are taken in *"on demand"*.[34] Especially in challenging care and support constellations, the necessary cooperation between the public youth welfare office and independent providers often does not work – as confirmed by the studies. In short, the support system itself proves to be less crisis-proof in crisis situations. According to practitioners, good and innovative projects are occasionally developed, but then a *"castle mentality"* is perceived. The projects remain in local spheres, they do not become widespread. Accordingly, *"collapse situations"* arise, for example, in crisis facilities such as shelters and other facilities as a result of a lack of further conceptual development, staff shortages, staff turnover and overload.

"We're just reacting, and that's how institutions become reactionary."

Further risk factors for the occurrence of challenges that are inherent to the support system and not on the part of young people were filtered out from case analyses[(35)]: A paternalistic attitude towards young people – "this is how it works here and not otherwise", "you may want this, but I know best what is good for you"; the blanking out of one's own emotions and affects that professionals have towards young people; not seeing through entanglements in a case or family dynamic and, in particular, a symptom orientation in dealing with young people – "the young people are causing problems".

The young people who took part in our international project were willing to tell us about their personal, sometimes very painful and violent experiences with youth welfare services in small discussion groups. These shared and trusting spaces for talking and listening were of course not documented. Accordingly, in order to clarify further risk factors and the experiences of so-called "challenging young people", I will refer below to study results that were compiled and published as part of research projects.

Various studies have focused on the destructive experiences of young people with institutions such as youth welfare services, school etc. and their influence on escalating (case) processes. Recently, colleagues interviewed six young people who had experienced at least two dropouts in the support system and showed behavior, e.g. substance abuse,

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[33] As already described in FN 8, quotations from the practitioners and project participants were recorded verbatim in minutes and documentation of the course of the project and are inserted here with quotation marks ("") analogous to the scientific citation style; for reasons of readability and pragmatism, however, without further details.

[34] The quotations are taken from the minutes of the working and country meetings.

[35] Still relevant today: Ader, S. (2005): Was leitet den Blick? Wahrnehmung, Deutung und Intervention in der Jugendhilfe. Weinheim.

aggressiveness and escapes, that was perceived as difficult – these are the criteria for "system crashers".[36] Two short insights:

Sarius sees himself as "pretty jittery". Sport and being outside help him in difficult situations. However, Sarius is punished for breaking the rules in his residential group – with so called "Room time" as a sanction:

"Room time is just the consequence that still existed back then..... but in the end I had over seventy hours, because somehow I thought to myself, after thirty I thought - I'm not in the mood anymore. So then I left quite often." (Schmidt et al. 2023, p. 7)

Sarius now "escapes" from the residential group more often.

Before being placed in residential care, Nadja and her siblings lived their mother and her boyfriend for several years. After school, the children were locked in their rooms at home. There were no door handles on the inside. Nadja talks about her little sister, who was initially housed in the residential group with her:

"And um, ... yes, at some point my little sister -- well, she had been locked up so often and -- [.]. But she always panicked so much when you ... put her in locked rooms or something. And there was one caregiver, for example, who always closed her room door at night or something, even though she had left it open. Or who closed the bathroom door". (Schmidt et al. 2023, p. 8)

In view of her siblings' biographical experiences of being locked up, Nadja does not understand why the door to their room and bathroom is repeatedly closed. According to Nadja, her sister "always started crying all the time" (ibid.) and at some point became violent towards the caregiver. The sister had to leave the facility.

The young people react to the disregard and suppression of their existing self-help skills, as with Sarius, and the reproduction of stressful biographical experiences, as with Nadja's sister, with escalating behavior: Nadja refuses to help herself, eventually consumes drugs; Sarius "escapes", other adolescents become violent, come into conflict with the law (cf. Schmidt et al. 2023). The result: terminations. This makes it understandable that young people perceive some of the help and their falling outs as damage; they experience renewed injuries instead of support and a protective space (Sewing 2012: 132f.[(37)]). In the debate about young people, on the other hand, is often said that young people do not "engage" with help or "can no longer" do so. The question of whether the respective professionals can and want to engage with the young people at all is rarely asked. According to Nadine Sarfert (2023), one gets the impression that professionals and facilities are generally committed to their mission and want to keep all children and young people in their care as a matter of course.

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[36] Schmidt, S./Gietz, L./Prangenberg, N./Wen, S. (2023): „also war halt auch immer so ‚Hallo' und dann so bald ‚Tschüss'": Perspektiven jugendlicher „Systemsprenger*innen" auf die eigene Hilfegeschichte. In: Gesellschaft – Individuum – Sozialisation. Zeitschrift für Sozialisationsforschung, 4 (1). DOI: 10.26043/GISo.2023.1.4

[37] Sewing, J. (2012): „Das hatt' ich keinen Bock mehr drauf, weil…". Eigene Sichtweisen Jugendlicher auf Abbrüche in der Heimerziehung – Ergebnisse einer Interviewstudie, in: EREV Schriftenreihe, 53 (3), S. 120–164

On the one hand, this overlooks the rational considerations in practice of wanting to deal with the more adaptable children and adolescents (as they are more resource-efficient); there are also professionals who consciously or unconsciously keep young people at a distance and show emotional toughness (cf. Sarfert 2023, p. 3)[38].

If the potential for risk and conflict develops within youth welfare services, sometimes in conjunction with child and adolescent psychiatry, children and adolescents who have already experienced considerable hardship, injury and violence in their family biographies can find themselves in constellations of harmful care.[39] It is a largely taboo subject that young people (can) also experience violent behaviour in the institutions actually responsible for their protection and support, such as youth welfare services and child and adolescent psychiatry. Recognizing this would be an important step towards a more inclusive support system that does not itself contribute to escalation and crisis dynamics as much as possible.

In the currently largest data set on experiences of violence by young people in residential educational support facilities in Germany, for example, almost one in ten young people reported having been humiliated or exposed by caregivers in such a way that it had a lasting effect ("that I won't forget it so quickly"); about half experienced this several times (Derr 2023: 162).[40] From 17 out of 25 homes, young people reported violence by staff as the worst experience of violence during their life in the residential group (ibid. 229). A recent representative survey also asked about assaults specifically by care staff. The child and adolescent psychiatric context has an increased risk of assaults of all kinds among medical institutions; 23% of respondents reported emotional abuse in the child and adolescent psychiatric context (cf. Hoffmann et al. 2021: 69[41]).

It follows from these perspectives that it is more important to talk and negotiate about "good care" than about "system crashers". We need to learn something about our own part in the negative learning histories of young people and how "good places" can be created for and with young people instead (see the cornerstones in chapter "Policy making"). The good news

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[38] Sarfert, N. (2023): Das Sich-nicht-einlassen (in) der Jugendhilfe. Wie „Systemsprenger*innen und Abbrüche durch Institutionen (mit-)produziert werden. In: Gesellschaft – Individuum – Sozialisation (GISo). Zeitschrift für Sozialisationsforschung, 4 (1). DOI: 10.26043/GISo.2023.1.3
On the experiences of young people, see also: Höllmüller, H. (2015): „Geh dich ritzen, Elefant!" – Aktuelle Erfahrungswelten von als „besonders schwierig" etikettierten Jugendlichen in der Kinder- und Jugendhilfe, in: soziales_kapital, Nr. 14, S. 156–170
[39] See Gundrum, K./Oelerich, G. (2021): Beteiligung und Schädigung im Rahmen der Inanspruchnahme Sozialer Arbeit, in: Österreichisches Jahrbuch für Soziale Arbeit (ÖJS)/1, S. 155-180.
[40] Derr, R. (2023): Gewalt in Einrichtungen der Heimerziehung. Einflussfaktoren der Organisation auf Gewalt durch Mitarbeitende und unter Jugendlichen, Weinheim und Basel. I have singled out "psychological victimization"; for the characteristics of other forms of violence (physical, sexualized), see also Derr (2023) and Hoffmann et al. (2021).
[41] Hoffmann, U. u.a. (2021): Schutz vor Gewalt und Übergriffen in medizinischen Institutionen – Ursachen, Häufigkeiten und Implikationen für die Praxis, in: Praxis der Kinderpsychologie und Kinderpsychiatrie, 70/1, S. 64-83

is that the more young people perceive measures of involvement and participation – discussing changes to group rules, participating in decisions about the group's leisure activities – and the more they experience the protection of their privacy as well as their own opportunities to complain and express their concerns, the less often they report violence by staff and in the facility (Derr 2023: 230f.). Participation is therefore also linked to the protection of young people in institutions. In Germany, the expansion of complaints mechanisms in child and youth welfare is being increasingly promoted by law; among other things, there have been changes to the requirements for the operating license of facilities and the nationwide establishment of ombudsman offices as independent contact and complaints offices.[42] Nevertheless, there is still a lack of open reflection on questions of power and on the structural power relations in the support system between young people and the professionals and institutions.

There is now sufficient knowledge about how to help young people in challenging life situations and care constellations. It is not a knowledge problem, but a transfer problem. In practice, there is a lack of effective "control from below", i.e. from those for whom the help is (supposed to be) designed – the young people. It is the voices and feedback from young people that form the resonance chamber in which the viability and accuracy of professional considerations and designs must be proven.

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[42] Since 2021, the German federal states have had to establish and secure a needs-based structure of independent ombudsperson advice. For information, see the website of the Federal Network for Ombudsperson Services in Youth Welfare: https://www.ombudschaft-jugendhilfe.de/

A blind alley

Werner Freigang

Child and youth welfare services have, among other responsibilities, the task of protecting children and young people from harm and harmful experiences, and of ensuring appropriate conditions for their development. However, a fairly high percentage of children and young people are placed outside their parental home within the framework of youth welfare services cannot really be helped in the facilities. Young people often try to "test" the safety and resilience of institutions by behaving in a way that is described as "difficult". If the people or institutions involved do not stand up to this test, the provocation increases until they are dismissed from the facility. Of course, help in institutions can also fail for other reasons, and a succession of such failure processes is likely to reinforce the conviction on both sides that it difficult to help those affected or that accepting help is unlikely to be successful. This means that frequent changes of institution for children and young people do not improve their situation, but rather exacerbate the crisis.

Talking about "system crashers" can easily lead to a blind alley, as the term tempts us to talk about a certain category of young people who do not exist as such. There are many children who grow up in conditions that are not good for them, but from they learn what the world is like, how they must behave and what they can and must expect from other people. The aim of the exchange between professionals should therefore not be to reach an understanding about the specific description of young people that leads to attributions. Such discourses lead to children and young people continuing to be perceived as the cause of their problems and the problems of the system, instead of addressing the fact that this logic enables youth welfare institutions and authorities to shift the responsibility for not fulfilling their mandate onto the addressees.

"Good facilities" – but no special facilities. Why?

Werner Freigang

Like all children and young people, the children and young people in residential care that we are talking about and – fortunately – with whom we are talking in this project are special, unique people, but above all they have had special experiences that are very different from the life experiences of most other children and young people. For example

- they were inadequately as children;
- they were often alone;
- they have often experienced violence;
- they had changing and unreliable caregivers;
- they were accommodated in various facilities;
- they had no opportunity to form stable friendships due to the change of location;

- they had little chance of success at school as a result,
- they had, and usually have, friends who a similar experience,
- they have consumed alcohol or other drugs,
- have or had trouble with the school, the police, the youth welfare office, etc.
- they often have mistrust of adults, the youth welfare office, the police

Youth welfare had and still has the task of creating better living and development conditions for those affected than they previously, so that they have better experiences with institutions and people, especially with adults, put their previous bad experiences into perspective, gain trust and benefit from the help. Above all, they need better experiences with people responsible for them than they have had so far, with the highest possible degree of reliability.

Important reasons why residential care often does not meet these requirements can be described with the keywords specialization and hierarchization of assistance and facilities, e.g. with the practice of transferring children and young people if they do exactly what they came to the facility for – i.e. if they attract negative attention, or dismissing them because they have "improved" and help in its previous form no longer seems necessary. Specialization of a facility is often seen as an advantage because the facility has the knowledge and staff to deal with people with specific problems. However, this is based on a model in which the behavior of children and young people is not seen as a response to biographical experiences, but rather as an illness that needs to be treated in a certain way. If this is successful in the institution, the patient is to be discharged. Such an analogy is not very viable, because disorders turned into individual characteristics in isolation from their conditions of origin and perpetuation. Often the positive change is not due to the so-called treatment, but rather, for example, to good contacts with individual staff members or other young people.

For a long time now, there has been a demand to no longer adapt the young people to the facilities, but to enable facilities to adapt to the respective young people so that their relationships with their environment can be maintained and developed, and positive developments are not ended by drop-outs and constant changes of caregivers. **Individualization and diversity should also be possible and accepted in residential care groups so that relationships can be maintained and trust can develop.** Individualized help can mean, for example, that an additional staff member joins a group, not to take over the "difficult case", but to reduce the tension in the group and the stress of the staff. Or employing a temporary member of staff to deal with more specific issues. Nevertheless, individualization can also mean that a member of staff goes on a time-out with a young person and then returns the group with them, taking the pressure off the group during this time.

Regionalization, flexibilization and individualization of assistance can contribute to survive and overcome crises, without young people losing all their caregivers and points of reference and having to start from scratch.

A possible problem of de-specialized approaches is the fact that successes often only become visible after a longer period of time and that employees may feel overwhelmed and fear that other young people will be "infected" by "the difficult ones" is one of the approaches. On the other hand, it must be taken into account that less differentiation between the facilities can create individual scope for the facilities to devote themselves more intensively to individual young people than is possible with differentiation – including price differentiation – in the hierarchy of facilities.

The topic of youth welfare planning should be to pursue an admission policy in such a way that facilities agree not to refer young people to other measures. The necessary resources should be made available for so-called regular residential groups in order to be able to deal with crises and challenging times with the children and young people.

Fig. 4: A work phase; Stralsund 2023

"Out of the box solutions are also possible within the framework of regular institutions."

During the meeting of the three countries the working groups discussed that there must be more facilities that are not labelled as "behavioural, learning, addiction therapy" or other specializations and are therefore only accessible to a certain target group. The development of (highly) specialized facilities for educational assistance leads to further stigmatization of already stigmatized children and adolescents through justified or unjustified labeling as "difficult to raise", "learning-impaired", "addictive", etc. Specialized facilities also lead to a "trend-related" focus of the service structure.

This puts the referring public agency under pressure to act with regard to a differentiated "problematization" and thus perceived stigmatization of the young person to be referred. In our practical experience, this results in an increased number of failed placements.

"Generalism is lived inclusion and, conversely, the avoidance of exclusion."

From a practical point of view, there is a lack of low-threshold generalist services. Generalist youth welfare facilities have the advantage of being geared towards the main goal of providing educational support and constructing professional settings within the regular facility for acute crises or special challenges – if necessary, with the involvement of external experts. Age or gender-specific differentiation, which relates for example to gender specific disadvantages structures and not to problem specializations, does not rule out a generalist service. Being a generalist youth welfare service also does not exclude being a specialist in a certain sub-area, such as independence, i.e. having specific expertise. In our view, suitable support settings are therefore not a question of specialization, but rather a question of the professional competence of the staff.

"Down with the pillars. The only thing we give up are mails and letters."

Child and youth welfare as a system: a cultural analysis

Hubert Höllmüller

The concept of systems is been introduced to the discipline and profession of social work without much theoretical work. Niklas Luhmann and his systems theory were to a sociological theoretical strand, and the term was established via profession-related concepts of the systemic. It has become established to speak of family systems with which the profession has to deal. Silvia Staub-Bernasconi also established the concept of systems as central to social work with a different system-theoretical justification.

In addition to the general understanding of system, element, system boundary and environment, it is relevant that every social system has the ability to relate to itself and to differentiate between environmental relationships. It is the self-reference that enables a connection to cultural theory. This is where the concept of "attitude" has found its way into the discourse of social work. Without making this clear, it also communicates a difference to values: Attitudes are those inner positions that actually determine our behavior and actions, while values in the sense of system-theoretical self-reference are only supposed to do so. And often not. How many child and youth welfare institutions, whether public or private, postulate that the child is always at the center, while in fact they regularly put everything else at the center, except the child? Values can be violated. Attitudes can only be changed.

The clearly defined connection between discipline and profession in the scientific system should mean that scientific findings on child and youth welfare based on empirical research lead to comprehensive changes in the profession. An example of the opposite is the professional principle of participation. Although there is clear empirical and theoretical evidence that participation leads to better results in work with children, young people and families, corresponding concepts and methods have not become established in the system, but on the contrary are on the retreat again. My hypothesis on the system culture of Austrian child and youth services is based on three evaluation studies in the field of child and youth services and the draft needs and development plan drawn up for one federal state (which was rejected as too critical). Additional insights are provided by the now 20 years monitoring work placements, most of which are completed in child and youth welfare, as well as an expert opinion on issues relating to restrictions on freedom in residential child and youth welfare.

The hypothesis is that the culture of Austrian child and youth welfare is predominantly paternalistic, pathologizing and expertocratic. This wonderful and effective innovations. These do not lead to a change in the system for the following reasons:

1 {Naive} Belief in progress

There is a conviction that the system slowly but steadily improving; regression or deterioration is not possible according to this understanding. From this perspective, everything must continue to develop, but not change.

2 The power of interpretation is not handed over to the children/young people and parents

The attitude of not believing children and young people is still widespread. The concept of turning the pyramid of power of interpretation upside down and actually giving children, young people and parents the power of interpretation with regard to their issues and challenges is still not gaining acceptance. The general suspicion that children, young people and parents could be lying remains dominant. (This does not even include the question, posed from a systemic perspective, of why some people apparently feel the need to lie).

3 No feedback

There is hardly any feedback from the addressees, whether positive or negative. And the individual review of goal attainment takes place too rarely. The system creates little room for feedback from those affected, and goal attainment monitoring techniques such as the goal attainment scale are still the exception. While "smart" (specific* measurable*ambitious*realistic*terminated) goals have been discussed for generations, the professional discourse now shows that goals are better "fast" than "smart".

4 Hierarchical structures

Child and youth welfare is still organized hierarchically. The model of the public authority is usually mirrored by private organizations. Non-hierarchical concepts are not discussed. Concepts of self-management, which are obvious for small organizational units, have not yet arrived in the system. These hierarchical organizations transfer the mistrust towards children, young people and parents to their employees: they are also not to be believed if they speak openly about their organization and the processes there.

5 Authority logic contradicts error culture

The hub of child and youth welfare is the youth welfare agency, i.e. the provincial departments and their district administrative authorities (BVB). The word Jugendamt, because it is associated with too many negative connotations, has now been punctured as incorrect. Whether in the old style or in the guise of New Public Management, these authorities have a fundamentally negative attitude towards what professionals call a culture of error.

6 Turbo-capitalist market games

There is open talk of expansion and market share, and the awarding of contracts is often associated with lack of transparency and corruption. One question that is usually not asked and can hardly be asked is, for example, how private organizations obtain their contracts or how public bodies award contracts.

7 The issue of coercion by the child and youth welfare system is ignored

Although some of the children and young people and some of the families experience child and youth welfare measures as coercion, even if they have formally signed up to some of them, this is addressed far too little. The professional ethics of the Austrian professional association simply does not mention this coercion, as if it would then disappear.

With Bourdieu's critical perspective, we can ask: Who accumulates social capital and thus power in child and youth services? What habitus exists in child and youth welfare? Which actors bear this habitus? And what are the reasons why the most committed innovations do not lead to system changes?

Where is this systemic culture of paternalism and expertocracy reproduced?

It is the people at the management level of public authorities and private organizations who maintain the system. Not the employees who deal with the recipients and are sometimes exposed to high turnover in the teams. The people at management level accumulate social, symbolic and also economic capital {how transparent are the salaries of pedagogical directors, management and department heads?) and thus consolidate a habitus that allows and sometimes even demands innovation in the system, but not innovation of the system.

"I never believed that human freedom means doing whatever one wants, but rather never having to do what one does not want."[43]

Deprivation of liberty in residential care

Nicole Rosenbauer

The issue of coercion, as mentioned by Hubert Höllmüller in the previous chapter, is most exaggerated in the placement of children and adolescents in residential care under deprivation of liberty. Calls for the expansion or reintroduction of closed, i.e. custodial, placements for children and adolescents by youth welfare services can be heard in all three countries participating in the international exchange. In Austria, where no such facility currently exists, calls for its reintroduction are growing louder. In Slovenia, there is one facility, and plans to set up further regional facilities. In Germany, already children are placed in custodial care and a total of 291 places or 243 de facto occupiable places are counted in 28 facilities in 2023.[44]

The abolition of all forms of custodial placement and deprivation of liberty in residential care is a key demand of the organization representing the interests of former institutionalized children from the 1950s and 1960s in Germany and also of "MOMO – The voice of disconnected youth". At the country meeting in Ljubljana, the young people want to know why this "still threatens" children and young people and why there is still this urge for deprivation of liberty in the field of residential care. The young people record their criticism and questions in these key issues:

- *Lack of freedom of choice as re-traumatization of children and adolescents*
- *Stigmatization of children and young people*
- *"Closeness" as a supposed "protective" function*
- *Such frames of reference are harmful*
- *How can a strict framework of sanctions prepare people for an independent life?*
- *Is this even an educational context?*

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[43] The quote "Je n'ai jamais cru que la liberté de l'homme consistât à faire ce qu'il veut, mais bien à ne jamais faire ce qu'il ne veut pas" is attributed to Jean-Jacques Rousseau.Cf. Stamer, N. (2020): Die medizinische Zwangsbehandlung Minderjähriger im Spannungsfeld nationaler Grund- und internationaler Menschenrechte, Berlin, S. 17.

[44] Various places cannot be filled due to staff shortages and "conversion work"; one offer is "dormant". See the annual survey by the German Youth Institute DJI as at August 2023; online: https://www.dji.de/fileadmin/user_upload/jugendkriminalitaet/JH-Einrichtungen_1631b_BGB_Stand_August_2023.pdf

In the discourse surrounding today's places or residential groups of deprivation of liberty in Germany (abbreviated to "GU" in the following), it is sometimes claimed that today's deprivation of liberty is "more modern" and no longer as "bad" as it "used to be" in the dark historical chapters of care education. It has evolved conceptually, e.g. to only "optional" closed placements as limited temporal and spatial options for deprivation of liberty (buildings or parts of buildings can be closed for individual children and young people if necessary). The term "protected facilities" is now also used euphemistically, a term that has been adopted from the field of disability care – perhaps also much clearer in terms of language, as it may often be a matter of protecting the facilities and professionals from young people rather than protecting young people from something.

Empirically, there are a number of myths surrounding custodial placement. For example, it is very often by no means the "last pedagogical resort" or the end of long care careers: Half of the children and young people who are committed have had no or one previous stay in a residential home (see Hoops/Permien 2006). In 2015, one in three admissions in Germany involved a child under the age of 12. It is also not confirmed that any kind of "particularly difficult" group of children and adolescents would be accommodated and admitted here. The studies did not find any clearly specific reasons for placement; as Pankofer once succinctly summarized, placement in custodial care is "particularly dependent on coincidences and the attitudes of the referring authorities" (Pankofer 1997: 101[45]).

Regarding the question of the youngsters, whether this prepares for an independent life and is an educational context at all: It has also been investigated whether there is any kind of "positive" effect that justifies this intervention in one of the most important basic human rights; and then even with minors. The studies that have investigated this summarize the limited success and how rarely a reversal for the better succeeds. Even a brief look at German impact research is enough to see that open, individual socio-pedagogical approaches are superior to GU. There are various alternative projects, such as low-threshold services, as less to more intensive outpatient help, which are geared towards the individual needs of young people. Nevertheless, there is still pressure to expand or – if the federal states in Germany no longer have any – to rebuild custodial care. Appeasements that it is not a question of many places, but "only a few" places that need to be re-established, misjudge the explosive nature of this debate for children and young people. The existence of custodial placements has a pull effect when they are in place. Because: "The number of places determines the need and not vice versa" (Hoops/Permien 2006: 51).

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[45] Pankofer, S. (1997): Freiheit hinter Mauern. Mädchen in geschlossenen Heimen, Weinheim/München.

With regard to the frame of reference and also the thesis "You have to have them in order to be able to educate them" – here, deprivation of liberty becomes the means of choice for dealing with so-called "absconding" of children and young people from open residential groups – deprivation of liberty in youth welfare opens up a field of violence, exercise of power, coercion and degrading practices towards young people. No reduction in so-called "escape rates" can be observed. Stadler continues to state that 79% of girls escaped once or several times ("absconding") (cf. Sülzle-Temme 2007: 106[46]). In view of the high risk of children and adolescents escaping (most recently cf. zsh 2023), it is very difficult for facilities to "keep" children and adolescents at the place where they are deprived of their liberty, both in terms of staffing and construction. Such a framework cannot be maintained without coercion and the exercise of power. In other words, the physical presence of the children and young people must be "enforced"; a "transportation problem" already arises in the GU (zsh 2023: 286[47]). A 13-year-old girl, whose mother was accompanied by an ombudsperson because she wanted to have the decision for her daughter's placement in the GU revoked, swallowed broken glass in order to be able to escape from the GU via the hospital, which she succeeded in doing (cf. Rosenbauer 2021[48]).

From the perspective of the children and young people, placement decisions and deprivation of liberty have always had a dramatic impact on their biographies. Nina says in an interview in a study about the day on which the family court judge granted permission for custodial placement and on which she was immediately taken to the home: "I crossed out June 12 in my life. That was the year before last. Since then, I've only had June 11 and June 13 – June 12 is a deleted day" (Hoops/Permien 2006, 109[49]). Early on, the studies pointed to the dangers of re-traumatization through deprivation of liberty; also through witnessing coercion, restraints and violence among other children and adolescents. Finally, adolescents in secure care also report frightening everyday phenomena of violence among themselves (Menk/Schnorr/Schrapper 2013, p. 195[50]). Looking back on their placements, some young people – as Björn Redmann documents from a project with young people (2019, p. 41[51]) – "report consequences that they have suffered to this day, such as fears of certain situations

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[46] Sülzle-Temme, K. (2007): Geschlossen untergebrachte Jugendliche. Ausgangssituation, Ziele, Verläufe und Ergebnisse von Hilfeplanungen und deren Umsetzung, Hannover.
[47] Zentrum für Sozialforschung Halle e.V. (zsh) (2023): Evaluierung des Gesetzes zur Einführung eines familiengerichtlichen Genehmigungsvorbehalts für freiheitsentziehende Maßnahmen bei Kindern, Halle.
[48] Rosenbauer, N. (2021): "Das Kind können Sie vergessen. Nehmen Sie ihr die Schlüssel ab" – Eine professionstheoretische Einordnung von Empörung als Impuls für Widerspruch in der Sozialen Arbeit – Perspektiven aus der Ombudschaft, ehs Jahrbuch, Dresden, S. 32-38
[49] Hoops, S./Permien, H. (2006): Mildere Maßnahmen sind nicht möglich! Freiheitsentziehende Maßnahmen nach § 1631b BGB in Jugendhilfe und Jugendpsychiatrie. München.
[50] Menk, S./Schnorr, S./Schrapper, C. (2013): "Woher die Freiheit bei all dem Zwange?" Langzeitstudie zu (Aus-) Wirkungen geschlossener Unterbringung in der Jugendhilfe, Weinheim und Basel.
[51] Redmann, B. (2019): Was sagen junge Menschen zu ihren Erfahrungen mit Freiheitsentziehung Jugendhilfe und Psychiatrie?, in: FORUM für Kinder- und Jugendarbeit 3, S. 39-42

or noises, lost sense of time, one's own hardening in dealing with others or reduced aggression thresholds."

In 2015, the German Child Protection Association took a strong stance against deprivation of liberty in residential care.

"Deprivation of liberty in residential care is violence against children. Their dignity is damaged and their right to self-determination is curtailed. The execution of a custodial placement constitutes a gross abuse of power against the child. Custodial placement in child and youth welfare, even in its differentiated and committed form, is a form of violent upbringing and prevents young people from developing maturity and taking responsibility for their own actions." (Deutscher Kinderschutzbund 2015, quoted in BNO 2023)[52]

Fig. 5: Foto Hubert Höllmüller, Trieste 2024. Graffiti "*La Libertà è* terapeutica" – "*Freedom* is therapeutic" o. "Freedom heals"[53]

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[52] A more recent position paper by the "Bundesnetzwerk Ombudschaft in der Kinder- und Jugendhilfe" in Germany contains essential child and youth welfare law, professional, youth welfare policy and ethical lines of argumentation. See BNO (2023); available online: https://www.ombudschaft-jugendhilfe.de/en/article/6796.positionspapier-des-bno-zu-freiheitsentziehenden-ma%C3%9Fnahmen-und-geschlossener-unterbringung.html

[53] "La Libertà è terapeutica" is considered the leitmotif of the psychiatry movement around Franco Basaglia. Graffiti attributed to Ugo Guarino; on the outside wall of the former psychiatric clinic Opp di San Giovanni, Trieste. See https://glossary.mg-lj.si/related/Figure107/424

5 "Useful tools for our work": Approaches, methods and conceptual considerations

Nicole Rosenbauer

The question of participation to achieve inclusion was a central cross-cutting theme throughout the entire international exchange project. Specifically, the question of how real participation in practice and respect for the perspectives of young people and their lifeworlds can be achieved in institutional systems. In this context, Milko Poštrak presents an agreement-based approach that is based, in particular, on a "language of acceptance". The following chapters are the results of the transnational application of socio-pedagogical diagnosis with young people as a participatory and dialogical method. The focus is on the procedure developed by Klaus Mollenhauer and Uwe Uhlendorff for socio-educational diagnoses with children, adolescents and young adults, which was developed with young people in difficult life situations and provides practitioners with a self-interpretation-based, participative and structured methodological approach.[54].

Hubert Höllmüller presents the family council as a participatory process – the family group conference – that focuses on families, networks and social systems of young people. In Germany, statistical data on the spread and effects of family councils has been collected by coordinators since 2008.[55] The resulting "self-made help plans" of the family, coordinated with the youth welfare office, would neither be confronted with the acceptance problem of conventional help planning nor would they prolong the external determination of family members by professionals. In essence, the family council as a help planning procedure has a high potential for activating the lifeworld and is described as "we-help", as in addition to an instrumental effect – a problem is solved – there is also a social effect – a problem is solved together: "You get together, you stand and stick together. (...) In addition to solving the problem, inclusion arises precisely because the problem is solved collectively." (Früchtel/Diemer 2016: 12)

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[54] Mollenhauer, K./Uhlendorff, U. (1992): Sozialpädagogische Diagnosen I - Über Jugendliche in schwierigen Lebenslagen, Weinheim/München; and: Uhlendorff, . (1997): Sozialpädagogische Diagnosen III - Ein sozialpädagogisch-hermeneutisches Diagnoseverfahren für die Hilfeplanung, Weinheim/München.

[55] Cf. Früchtel, F./Diemer, S. (2016): Quantitative Evaluation der Familienräte in Deutschland, Bericht der Fachhochschule Potsdam für das 10. Netzwerktreffen vom 14.-16.09.16 in Berlin, Stand August 2016, 636 Datensätze, o.O. Weiterführend und generell siehe bspw. Früchtel, F./Roth, E. (2017): Familienrat und inklusive, versammelnde Methoden des Helfens, Heidelberg.

Once nuclear families have decided on a family council, 98% of family councils come up with a plan that both the participants from the living environment and the youth welfare office can agree to. The value is described by the evaluators as "astonishingly high" in view of the initial situation of the families: in 72% of cases, the family has been known to the youth welfare office for some time, in 73% of cases it is described as a "multi-problem constellation", and in a third (33%) the youth welfare office cites a risk to the child's welfare as the reason for the family council.

Finally, Hans Luka outlines conceptual considerations for a center for taking into custody that wants to embark on new, more sustainable conceptual paths as a crisis facility. One background to this is not only, but in particular, the increasing number of longer stays of children and young people in care facilities for taking into custody in Germany. In 2020, a good one in ten of those taken into care, although designed as a short-term crisis intervention, lasted three months or more (11%)[56]. In 2020, this amounted to almost 5,300 children and young people in Germany. The reasons for this are the long duration of proceedings to clarify responsibilities, a lack of social diagnostics, a lack of coordinated cooperation and a lack of sustainable follow-up support. In 2020, for example, 3,353 outpatient supports (15%) were provided following a placement in crisis facilities compared to 18,848 residential placements (85%).[57] In a survey, more than a third of children and young people (40%) stated that they did not feel that their wishes and needs were taken seriously and one in two stated that they were not seen in the context of placement in care. This also applied to the desire of half of the young people to return to their parents' home (Rücker/Büttner 2017[58]).

An agreement-based approach and the "language of acceptance"
Milko Poštrak

The world of a young person[59]

The lifeworld of a young person is the everyday world in which he or she lives. This is the world in which young people find their way around and develop their life strategies. They develop their life strategies on the basis of their perceptions of reality. These arise or are constructed through the young people's interpretations of symbolized content that is conveyed by others and that the young people have internalized. The symbolized contents of others are their own ideas of reality. A shared interpretation of reality by the actors in a

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[56] https://www.destatis.de/DE/Presse/Pressemitteilungen/2023/06/PD23_246_225.html

[57] In 2020, this included 15,210 residential educational or integration support settings as well as 2,028 other residential settings and 1,610 times a return of young people to their residential home or foster family. Cf. overall Federal Statistical Office; online: https://www-genesis.destatis.de/datenbank/online/statistic/22523/table/22523-0012

[58] Rücker, S./Büttner, P. (2017): Beteiligung von Kindern und Jugendlichen in der Inobhutnahme (§ 42 SGB VIII): Welche Rolle spielen partizipative Prozesse im Kinderschutz?, in: Blickpunkt Jugendhilfe 22, 5, S. 10–14

[59] Translation and abridgement Hubert Höllmüller - the translator chooses the traditional term "Social work" and not "social work" because the convergence theorem - social work and social pedagogy are converging more and more - has not yet become established in Slovenia. There are still separate studies for social work and social pedagogy at university level. There is also the peculiarity that residential child and youth welfare facilities in Slovenia are part of the Ministry of Education.

particular society is what Berger and Luckmann call the social construction of reality (Berger/Luckmann 1970[60]). The discourse of personal reality construction can be derived from the same basis (Tomc 1992[61]), i.e. how a specific young person or group of young people constructs the idea of themselves and how they develop certain life strategies on the basis of this idea and the social context in which they live.

We start from the classical assumption that a subject is a result of heredity, environment and self-activity. (...) G. H. Mead conceptualizes the person as a reciprocal interaction of social content and knowledge transmitted by othersinvested in the segment of a person the social self or ego, and an active or personal self or ego. The personal self, which is also the carrier of self-awareness and knowledge about oneself, defines oneself, others and the surrounding world through an internal dialog with one's social self. This internal dialog between personal and social self is thinking. So I believe that my active, personal self searches through the store of knowledge within my social self knowledge I've internalized through interactions with others throughout my life.

If a person – such as a vulnerable child or young person we work with – has internalized many things in their earlier life that were threatening to them (in their family, environment, peers, school, if they have internalized certain values – all of which commonly defined as factors of growing up), then they may develop other behaviours based on their own life experiences that are either productive or unproductive for them and others. All of this happens in a person's everyday life, which is full of meanings and is referred to as their lifeworld.

In recent decades, the concept of lifeworld and the related concept of "everyday life" have been applied in a variety of ways in the social sciences. In counseling disciplines and professional activities such as social work, education and psychology, the concept of lifeworld is used as a very productive concept: **if we want to understand young people, we need to understand their lifeworld.**

The agreement-based approach and the joint development of solutions

The professionals begin their cooperation with the young people with an important **introductory ritual, the "agreement on cooperation"** (Čačinovič Vogrinčič 2006[62]). It is important that all parties involved in this agreement. Within the framework of this agreement-based cooperation, professionals establish personal contact and build a working relationship to which they will introduce certain elements when necessary and when problems arise. The first element is the instrumental definition of the problem. This means that the social workers

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[60] Berger L. Peter, Luckmann Thomas (1970), Die gesellschaftliche Konstruktion der Wirklichkeit. 3rd ed., Frankfurt a. M.
[61] Tomc Gregor (1992), Osebna konstrukcija realnosti. Družboslovne razprave, letnik 13, str. 62 - 78.
[62] Čačinovič Vogrinčič Gabi (2006), Teaching concepts of help in social work: the working relationship: https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13691450500210707?scroll=top&needAccess=true

work together with the young people and identify the problem together, ensuring that everyone involved sees what is going on. All participants present their interpretations of what is happening as their own constructions of reality. The young people are experts on their everyday experiences (Čačinovič Vogrinčič 2006). They are best placed to say how they feel, what they think and what they intend to do. **Professionals who are "experts from the expert world" are their respectful and responsible allies** and will take their story seriously and counter it with their expert stories or interpretations of reality. This approach clearly reflects the phenomenological conceptual starting points and the constructivism derived from them.

We tie in with this the **concept of the ethics of participation** (Čačinovič Vogrinčič 2006), which arises from the findings of contemporary hermeneutics (Müller-Vollmer 1986[63]), which negates the absolute objectivity of the observer – even if it is a professional, the "expert". This makes it possible to open up the space for the next concept, namely the strengths perspective, in which the starting points are the young person's own resources and strengths.

During the instrumental definition of the problem, the personal constructions of the realities of all those involved – young people, parents, teachers, guidance professionals and others – are confronted with each other. Once they have reconciled their different perspectives as far as possible and created an appropriate starting point, all participants plan their joint work in a respectful dialog or conversation. This is followed by personal leadership by a social worker, which will be based on the consensual definition of the problem and the planned steps to achieve solutions. Personal leadership is also based on the agreement-based leadership style described above.

In our context**, this means that the parties involved talk about their joint actions and listen to and respect each other.** The parents and the child or young person, social worker, teacher and other relevant professionals are involved in the conversation. They discuss and agree on what needs to be done at a particular moment, in a particular case. **They plan activities together. They use the "Language of acceptance"** (Gordon 2003[64]).

William Glasser speaks of the "Seven Caring Habits" and the "Seven Deadly Habits" of communication. (Glasser 1998; 2019[65]):

The **seven deadly habits** are: Criticizing, blaming, complaining, nagging, threatening, punishing, bribing or rewarding in order to control.

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[63] Mueller-Vollmer Kurt (1986), The Hermeneutics Reader. English edition. Oxford: Blackwell.
[64] Gordon Thomas (2003) Teacher effectiveness training. First Revised Edition. New York: Three Rivers Press.
[65] Glasser William (2019), Little Book of content/uploads/2019/10/Little-Book-of-Choice-Theory-2019.pdfChoice Theory: https://wglasser.com/wp-

We will apply the **seven caring communication habits**, which are: Support, Encourage, Listen, Accept, Trust, Respect, Negotiate differences.

In social work, we would say that the social worker and the young person talk about what the young person's social problem or emergency is and define the subject of their work together. Together they plan and design the steps of the problem-solving process. Their roles are clearly defined, identified and mutually accepted. The parents, teachers or social workers must be respectful and responsible ally (Čačinovič Vogrinčič 2006) or empathetic and supportive intervener (Doddington and Hilton 2007: 110[66]). **The child or the adolescent is expert from experience.** Both are responsible for ensuring that what has been agreed is fulfilled. **The responsibility is mutual, but not equal.**
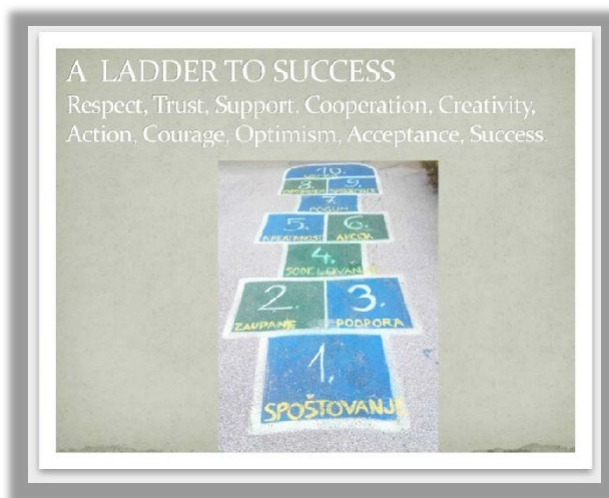

Fig. 6: Foto Milko Poštrak, Klagenfurt 2022

The responsibility of the parent or social worker is different from that of the child or young person. In the context of social work, the social 's responsibility is to carry out the procedure competently for professional reasons, and the child or young person's responsibility is to fulfill the agreed steps to solve the problem within the scope of their possibilities. Therefore, the social worker's responsibility is generally to apply all the basic principles and teachings of social work and the young person's responsibility is to actively participate in the agreed problem-solving process. **The authority is binding. It is based on competence and the force of argument.**

Conclusion

The aim of a social work relationship is to use appropriate communication to create an appropriate atmosphere in which a solution to the problem can be found through creative negotiation of differences and cooperation between all parties. **This is a specific professional approach that helps the social worker to reach an agreement with all participants. Responsibility is the second important component of the relationship between the professional and the child/young person. The responsibility is mutual, but not equal.** Young people are responsible in a different way. They are responsible for themselves and for their own lives. Parents, professionals and other stakeholders must give young people the opportunity to gain the competence to become responsible for themselves.

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[66] Doddington Christine, Hilton Mary (2007), Child-Centred Education: Reviving the Creative Tradition, Sage Publications.

This is our responsibility as professionals and must be done with respect. Young people must be respected. We must really listen to what they have to say about the world they live in. Their ideas about the world must be taken seriously. Professionals must rely on young people's personal constructions of reality. From this point of view, young people are the most competent authorities when it comes to talk about them, their feelings, actions, fears and hopes. They are experts on their everyday experiences. This does not mean that their actions are always appropriate for themselves and others. **Above all, it means that their interpretation of reality, their feelings, opinions, beliefs and points of view are taken seriously: that we take their interpretations and their needs into account in order to solve problems.** In the context of social work, they are therefore active participants in the problem-solving process. Social workers and other professionals work together with the young people to find solutions: each with their own responsibilities and skills. The social workers consistently apply the professional ethical principles of contemporary social work. In this type of working relationship, the young people can say what is important to them and what ideas they have about their lives. They are active participants in the process of solving the problems and difficulties they face. On this basis, the social workers and the young people plan together the appropriate working methods and procedures that will lead to the desired goals and outcomes.

The concept of a responsible, agreement-based approach is in line with contemporary social work teaching. Social workers respect the points of view of all parties involved. The concept offers a holistic, interdisciplinary and comprehensive approach. This type of approach requires the active participation of all parties, conversation, the authority of arguments, mutual responsibility based on clear participant roles and clear, agreement-based rules of relationship and action.

Three countries: Socio-educational diagnoses with young people

In the following, the transnational application of social pedagogical diagnosis with young people is presented as a participatory and dialogical method.[67] The focus is on the method of social pedagogical diagnosis with children, adolescents and young adults developed by Klaus Mollenhauer and Uwe Uhlendorff, which was developed with young people in difficult life situations.[68] The aim is to provide practitioners with a self-interpretation-based, participatory and structured methodological approach. In 2021, a digital online forum was held under the heading "From systemcrashers to systemcrashed youngsters. How to make systemcrashers and systemcrasher crashed professionals speak?" as input from Stefan Cinkl, Germany, and Werner Mayer, Austria. The approach presented is intended to enable an understanding attitude to be adopted towards the behavior of young people who are experienced as "difficult" and to help them to understand themselves; but also to understand themselves better as professionals and to find out their own part in the "difficulties" that arise.

The socio-educational diagnoses with children, adolescents and young adults are based on guided interviews, which are used to inquire about the living environment of the children and adolescents. The questions relate to the dimensions of family and kinship, extra-familial experiences and peers, experiences with educational institutions, experiences with youth welfare institutions, child and adolescent psychiatry, psychotherapy and other support institutions, physicality and interests, time patterns, normative orientations, self-image and self-concept. The interviews are recorded on audio media and analyzed by at least two professionals in the team of supervising professionals. Listening to the interview together as a team should ensure that the evaluation focuses on what is actually said and that hypotheses based on other people's interpretations are excluded as far as possible. It is about finding out "Life issues" of the children and adolescents, which are then presented in a feedback discussion as an offer of understanding. This then serves as the basis for the joint development of ideas and proposals for action. As part of the help planning process, the topics and ideas for action are presented by those affected themselves with the help of flipcharts. Based on the interviews, it is also possible to assess the young people with regard to their level of development. The model of educational stages (Uhlendorff 1997) is used for this purpose. In a subsequent in-depth forum, two case histories were presented as well as previous practical experiences with the approach. The colleagues appealed for the "pyramid of interpretative power to be turned upside " and for children, young people and parents to be given real interpretative power with regard to their issues and challenges and for this to be supported methodically.

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[67] This chapter is based on the protocols drawn up during the project and was supplemented for this report by the colleagues conducting the interviews.
[68] Mollenhauer, K./Uhlendorff, U. (1992): Sozialpädagogische Diagnosen I – Über Jugendliche in schwierigen Lebenslagen, Weinheim/München; and Uhlendorff, U. (1997): Sozialpädagogische Diagnosen III - Ein sozialpädagogisch-hermeneutisches Diagnoseverfahren für die Hilfeplanung, Weinheim/München.

Socio-educational diagnostics are distinct from psychological or psychiatric diagnostics. It has no basic idea of illness, deficit or disorder and is based on dialog. Following Hermann Nohl, the fundamental diagnostic question here is not "What problems do young people cause?" but rather "What problems do young people have?" This idea itself is already 100 years old. But the methods and procedures to find out what the causes are is not used enough. People, children and adults cause problems; these are symptoms (scratching, hitting, etc.). However, it is relevant to find out the causes of problems in children, adolescents and young adults, otherwise the symptoms cannot be treated. The presentation in the help plan discussion in the form of flipcharts by the young people themselves has proven to be particularly effective in terms of participation. On the one hand, the professionals take the young people's views, including the emotional aspects, and their suggestions for action more seriously. On the other hand, the young people are encouraged to engage in their own activities and emotional confrontation with their own living environment, so that an appropriate working alliance can develop. Previous experience with the method has shown that it is also possible to work with socio-educational diagnoses in difficult situations. Experience to date has shown that violence and sexual abuse are key issues for challenging young people. When it comes to working with difficult young people, the attitude of the professionals involved is also important, especially patience, because progress often takes time.

Young people often speak in crisis situations, but then find poor conditions in institutions; for example, when the professionals' fears prevent them from speaking or the young people are sent away or "given away" in crises. Against this backdrop, Stefan Cinkl voted for terms like "the unheard" or "the voiceless". In addition to the problems that young people make and have, there are also problems that are caused to children and young people by professionals and in institutions (e.g. deportation/transfer, violence, deprivation of liberty, psychotropic drugs/off-label use). Therefore, with regard to the topic of challenges, the effects of problematic care on work with young people must also be taken into account: What problems are children and young people made to face in addition to those they have?

As part of the international exchange of professionals, interviews were conducted with young people in all three participating countries: by Sonja Groinig and Patricia Gruber from B3 Network, Marc Hudy from Storchennest and Peter Steničnik from Mladinski dom Jarše. The colleagues presented the results and their experiences at the country meeting in Stralsund.

Sonja Groinig & Patricia Gruber, B3 Network Carinthia: Experiences with the socio-educational diagnoses and the socio-educational team diagnosis

The B3 Network has been working with socio-educational diagnoses since 2017. Sonja Groinig and Patricia Gruber describe the process for assisted living for young people

and young adults in challenging situations. Twenty-two employees currently work there, looking after around fifty adolescents and young adults. All employees in the assisted living facilities are trained in socio-pedagogical diagnostics (basic module). In addition, there are six professionals who have specialized in social-pedagogical diagnostics. These specialists form the team that carries out and further develops socio-educational diagnoses. The creation of suitable forms and structures is crucial for the implementation of the diagnoses in practice; good individual support can only be designed in line with needs.

The young people know from the outset that the facility works with socio-pedagogical diagnostics. The interview is conducted by a socio-pedagogical specialist who is certified in socio-pedagogical diagnostics. Guideline-based interviews are conducted with the adolescents and young adults. If necessary, interviews are also conducted with parents or other relevant caregivers (e.g. relatives, foster parents). The interviews last approximately one to one and a half hours. The interview is conducted by a professional who is not involved in the care; not by the specialist who has the role of caregiver. This is based on the clear experience of how quickly a bias develops among professionals towards young people.

At the country meeting in Stralsund, colleagues Sonja Groinig and Patricia Gruber present two socio-pedagogical diagnoses that they developed with two young women in their care.
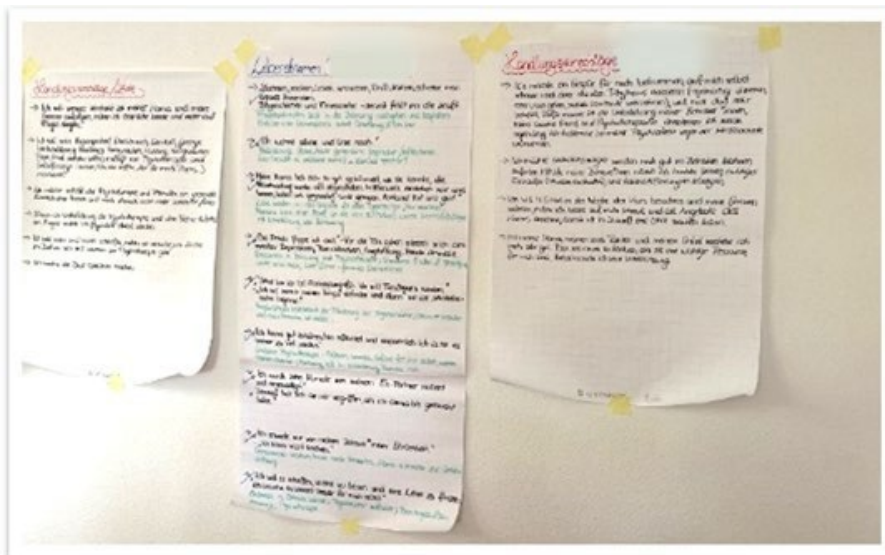

Fig.7: Flipcharts on life issues and suggestions for action for two young women (Groinig/Gruber), Stralsund 2023

During the process, the professionals create posters (flipcharts) on the young people's life topics. These are then discussed together with them (feedback discussion). The young people read the flipcharts and are allowed to "let off steam": The young person ticks everything off or crosses out, corrects or marks what has been written down. In a second step, the young person is asked what he or she needs: "How can we do this? What do we need to do?" A flipchart with suggestions for action is drawn up together with the young person.

The specialists then draw up a report. This is followed by the target agreement in the help plan discussion with the social workers[69]. Together with the young people, the social workers work out their goals, which are agreed for six months. The flipcharts then belong to the young people – which usually makes them very proud, according to their colleagues. After six months, an evaluation meeting is standard, in which the flipcharts are reflected on together again. The posters are put up again. Specific questions are asked about what worked and what didn't, what can still be achieved, what 't worked on and why, what goals have been achieved and what is no longer important.

According to Sonja Groinig and Patricia Gruber, practical experience shows that the causes of problems can be identified with the help of socio-educational diagnoses. Since the team has become stable and continuously established, the process of socio-pedagogical diagnostics can be constantly carried out in practice at the institution and the implementation of the procedure can be continuously improved and adapted. During the introduction of the procedure, the responsible social workers were initially irritated and often had little positive reaction when the adolescents and young adults brought their posters to the interviews. In the meantime, this has changed and "settled down". The social workers are increasingly accepting the procedure.

Socio-educational team diagnosis: As part of the international exchange of professionals, there was the opportunity to carry out a socio-educational team diagnosis in practice. Specifically, there was a team diagnosis of Masha's care team[70], as Masha's care was very demanding and challenging. According to Patricia Gruber, Masha initially seemed like a girl who was "in a great position". In the first two to four weeks, however, it turned out that this was not the case: Masha had a breakdown. A socio-pedagogical diagnosis was drawn up with Masha, along with suggestions for action and goals for three months. Nevertheless at a certain point, her caregivers experienced themselves as "stuck" in their action strategies and reached their limits.

In the social-pedagogical team diagnosis, an interview is conducted with the entire care team. The interview is based on guidelines; it comprises various work-related questions (is there supervision?, how does the team communicate?, what does a normal working day look like for the team? etc.). Stefan Cinkl conducted the interview and evaluated it with regard to "team topics". It became clear: The social welfare office approved many hours for Masha's care. However, this was too much, as Masha simply did not need them; it led to counterproductive work for the team as pressure arose to utilize the hours. A turnaround was achieved: Times were used differently, "*talking instead of driving out",* mistakes were admitted. It also became clear that Masha had assigned family roles to the team without the team being aware of it. The care system and family dynamics had become entangled. Through the team diagnosis, the team became aware of this, was able to perceive needs and find a new work setting.

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[69] In Austria, "social workers" refers to the employees of the youth welfare office.
[70] All names of adolescents and young people are anonymized or pseudonymized.

The support of the management is of central importance for the successful implementation of such an approach in order to adequately deal with challenges. Otherwise, such an approach will fail due to hurdles within the organization. The team also had supervision, but this was not really helpful. The colleagues experienced that the team diagnosis achieved a different quality for a change of direction in the actual work, also because their own "team issues" were clearly identified.

Firstly, social-pedagogical team diagnoses extend the claim of participation and orientation towards self-interpretation to the professionals in the team, as is the case here in assisted living: only when professionals are involved they do involve the young people.
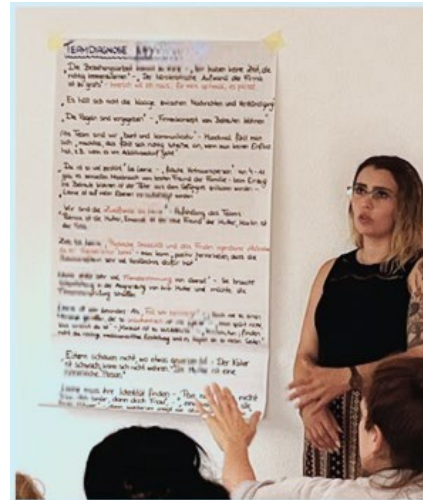

Fig.8: Presentation of team diagnosis "Masha", Patricia Gruber, Stralsund 2023

Secondly with the help of the team diagnoses to determine whether the team issues (the team's view of the young person, basic attitudes, concept) are compatible with the young person's life issues in order to reach a working alliance. The results of this working method were incorporated into the concept development at the provider by the management level.

Marc Hudy, Storchennest Niepars youth center: Socio-educational diagnosis with Louis, Parow youth residential community

Marc Hudy interviewed Louis. Louis was thrilled to be the first to perform the diagnosis. He had moved into the facility without any specific assignment. Louis comes from the region and is 17 years at the time of the interview. He moved into the Parow youth residential community after living with a foster family and receiving other outpatient help. He has been living there since summer 2018. Initially, it was about securing accommodation and care – there was no other specific assignment. There had been several changes of responsibility at the youth welfare office.

The interview was carefully prepared and recorded. It lasted about one and a half hours. Thematic headings from different areas of life were formed ("life themes"). The feedback interview took longer because Louis made some corrections on the flipcharts. Guiding question, according to Marc Hudy, is: "What we heard, is that what Louis meant?" The young people were asked: "Is what we heard and wrote on the flipchart what you meant?"

One life theme, for example, was "mobility" in order to – as Louis added in the feedback interview – "have fun". Initially, the care staff were rather confused that Louis on the move a lot. The socio-educational diagnosis made it clear that enjoys "being out and about", he likes mopeds, tractors, boats and cars. Louis now needs to draw up a financial plan for his own driving license.

As already mentioned, Louis had a "need for correction". So he made improvements the flipchart by "circling and crossing out". He added additions to the flipcharts and crossed out some points:
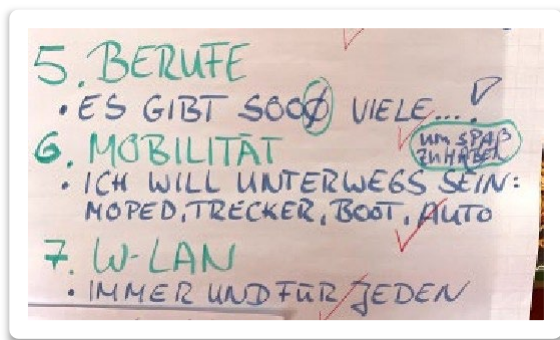

Fig. 9: "Circle" and "tick off": part of Louis' flipchart, Stralsund 2023

Another topic was that Louis wanted more harmony, community and activities and a better relationship with each other in the youth residential group. Remarkably, Louis used the next group meeting to present his flipcharts to the other young people and share this wish with them.
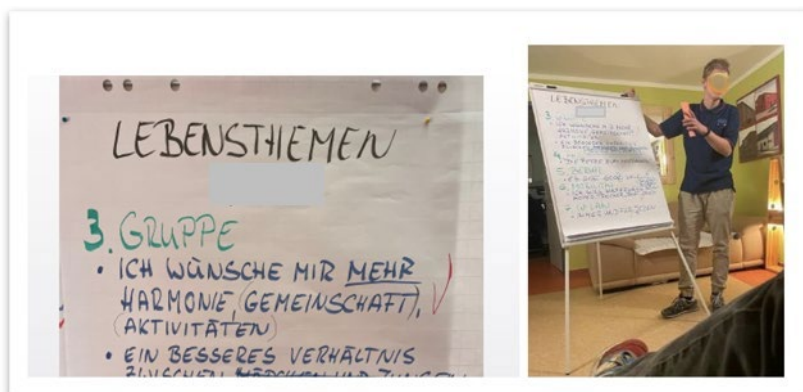

Fig. 10: Part of Louis' "Life topics" flipchart; Louis presents his flipcharts in the residential group; Stralsund 2023

The new employee from the youth welfare office was familiarized with his flipcharts by Louis himself. The fact that the life issues were also addressed in the help plan discussion initially led to "astonishment". Marc Hudy reports that the methodical approach and the diagnosis made it possible to set realistic goals that correspond to Louis' abilities and possibilities (e.g. career questions/choice; researching professions) – "We have to remain realistic." An evaluation took place for the next support plan meeting: Did anything come of it? What has helped? If goals have not yet been achieved, then, according to Marc Hudy, "back again." A "recall" was carried out: "What have I achieved?" – to see what has already been achieved, what still needs to be done and whether there are any new issues.

According to Marc Hudy, the first socio-pedagogical diagnosis proved to be a good way for the provider to create clarity and initiate change in a complex and very confusing situation. It is not a "panacea", but it is a very good way of looking at oneself as a professional and making changes.

According to Marc Hudy, the professionals at the sponsoring organization also reflected: "What have we learned?

- The unexpected often happens.
- There is only one specialist for a young person's life: himself.
- Good support requires understanding.
- Understanding needs feedback.
- No idea is so crazy that you shouldn't at least think about it.
- If you want to know how you work, ask the people you work with.

Peter Steničnik, Mladinski dom Jarše: Socio-pedagogical diagnosis

Peter Steničnik works in a residential group with five young people at the "Jarše Youth Home". The working atmosphere with the young people is familiar and personal. One of the young people is Saskia, with whom Peter the interview for the socio-pedagogical diagnosis. Saskia was very willing to get involved in the diagnostic process. During the process, Saskia wrote everything down on her flipcharts herself. According to Peter Steničnik, she was grateful for the writing and very proud to present her flipchart.

Saskia moved into their group home in the winter. Saskia wants to become a preschool teacher. Saskia experienced physical violence from her father in her family of origin. However, she does not talk about it in more detail. She refuses to return home and be in contact with anyone from her family. At times, Saskia has difficulty expressing her concerns precisely. In the feedback, Saskia also makes corrections and clarifications on the flipcharts – for example, from "I can't express myself" to "I can express my feelings, but I do it in the wrong way".

Fig. 11: Saskia writing her flipcharts; Ljubljana 2023

In the feedback, she shared her thoughts with Peter Steničnik, for example, on the question of expanding her social network. There were many people around her who wanted to help her, but they weren't necessarily "the right people". She was often disappointed. Saskia says to Peter that more people also meant more trouble ("more people: more problems"). At the same time, unresolved issues such as sexual abuse are very intimate and require a high level of trust in order to communicate about them. Here, the caregivers still have questions about how to deal with this in a socio-pedagogical way. Suggested actions were developed together with Saskia based on her "life themes".

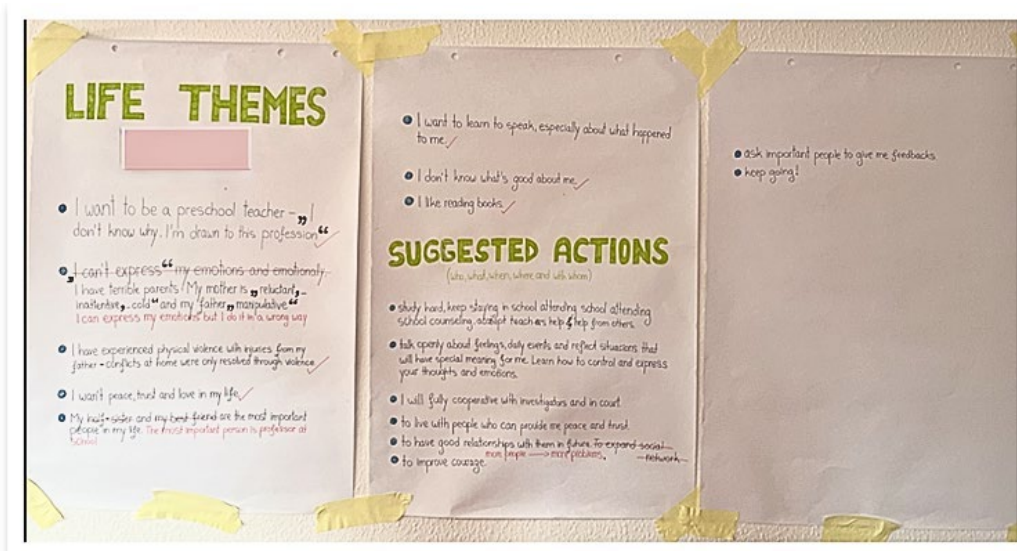Fig. 12: Saskia's flipcharts "Life Themes" and "Suggested actions" (Stralsund 2023)

According to Peter Steničnik, the diagnosis along the process steps showed those involved that, despite a long acquaintance with Saskia, there are still issues that need to be looked at and focused on. For Peter, the process also triggered "his own inner conversations" – "innertalks with myself". As a result, the focus shifted to supporting the young people from their perspective of reality – and not, according to Peter Steničnik, from "our" perspective. Saskia was the subject, not the object of the process. The socio-pedagogical diagnosis was correspondingly helpful for Saskia's care. The colleagues consider the application to be successful; the topics, goals and ideas that were identified continue to have an impact.

Peter Steničnik conducted the interview in Slovenian and translated the flipcharts into English. In an international context, native speakers are important and necessary for the preparation of the socio-educational diagnosis and the transfer into an exchange in order to be able to conduct an interview with the young people. A bilingual specialist (Slovenian/German) who is familiar with the procedure was able to join the online forum on the procedure. For the interview in Slovenia, the guidelines for the socio-educational diagnosis were translated into Slovenian and English as a test; the translated questions were checked for plausibility by the Slovenian participants. The testing of the procedure in an international context can only be described as successful.

The participatory family council process: family group conference

Hubert Höllmüller

During the project, it was repeatedly discussed that it is a reality in the support systems of the three countries that there is a lack of good settings and qualified professionals to provide good support for families as a whole. The work with family systems and the corresponding understanding of cases must therefore be qualified in youth welfare. After all, supporting young people without genuinely involving their family, parents or other adults relevant to them (even beyond the immediate family system!) can contribute to the failure of assistance. A participatory method for involving these systems that has already been positively evaluated many times is the family council.

This concept was presented in two languages with the distributed roles of a family council. Like socio-pedagogical family diagnoses in complex cases, the family council as a procedure and methodology would be a "game changer", i.e. a concept that would enable a system change in child and youth welfare. A single district in Germany, Fürstenfeldbruck, has introduced and evaluated it as a binding element of help planning.[71] In 2022, the Mahrzahn/Hellersdorf youth welfare office in Berlin issued a directive to the youth welfare office management stipulating that a family council must be held before every residential placement. Result: in 45% of cases, residential placement was no longer necessary.[72]

The family council is a process for supporting people in a problematic situation in a conference of as many trusted people as possible to find a solution using their own resources. As much decision-making power as possible remains with the people affected by the problem; the professionals involved hold back in the process and only provide support if this is explicitly requested. Despite being used in many countries and different fields of action, the family council follows a fairly standardized methodology:

The basic idea is always to ensure a high degree of freedom and participation and not to determine possible solutions over the heads of the people concerned. The family council is usually based on a written of care, which outlines the fundamental problems that the family council should address from a professional perspective.

A family council or a "family group conference" consists of four phases according to the standards defined by the 2010 nationwide network meeting[(73)]:

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[71] On this: Kirchner, A. (2023): "Jugendhilfe vor Ort. Sozialraumorientierung und Familienrat in der Jugendhilfe im Landkreis Fürstenfeldbruck", Katholische Stiftungshochschule München, Zentrum Forschung und Entwicklung (Z:F:E).

[72] For earlier evaluation results on the introduction of the family council, see, for example, the Berlin collective of authors: Früchtel, F. et al. (2009): Familienrat als konsequente Sozialraumorientierung, in: Forum Erziehungshilfen, H. 3, pp. 147-151.

[73] Published in: Forum Erziehungshilfen 17. Jg., 2011, Heft 1, p. 47 - 50; NDV 2/2011, p. 91-93 and Sozialmagazin 2/2011, p. 53-57.

Preparation phase: In a formulation of concern by a professional (depending on the field of action, social worker from the youth welfare office, caregiver, community nurse, etc.), a problem situation/issue is described and the professional concern is expressed that it could have negative consequences for the person concerned if the family system, including important others such as neighbors, friends, etc., does not take countermeasures. With the consent of the person concerned, an externally trained person is assigned to contact all relevant people in the family system in order to organize a family conference.

Information phase: Once all preparations have been made and all participants in the family council have been determined, a family council first meets with all invited participants. The care formulation is read out, everyone introduces themselves and has the opportunity to formulate their own position. In a resources/strengths round, the positive context of the extended family system is emphasized.

Main phase: For the actual conference or council meeting (family-only phase), all professional participants leave the room. The family and their familiar environment now search alone for suitable solutions and ideas to respond to the previously defined problem. The ideas are written down.

Decision phase: The professionals involved are again in the family council and clarify whether the family system plan meets the minimum requirements (best interests of the child, etc.). A follow-up meeting is in approx. 2-3 months to check whether the plan is working or needs to be adapted.

Guiding maxims of the family council

In specialist literature and practical implementations, the family council is shown to be a particularly participatory process with the following dimensions:

- The circle of people involved is widened: family and parenting problems are not limited an isolated nuclear family, but extended to include the social environment
- "Home game": time, place, participants and language are based on the family or circle of participants and their culture. The families are their own hosts.
- Solution abstinence: the professionals involved contribute their specialist knowledge, but are not responsible for developing a specific solution in the family council. They do not suggest or even prescribe any solutions.
- Neutrality: The organization and implementation is carried out by an external, independent, trained person who, as a moderator, guarantees the procedural standards.

The central personal responsibility of the extended family system also makes it possible to agree to measures and changes on an equal footing. Authorities are not perceived as patronizing, but as cooperative. The 2010 network meeting also formulated the following standards (excerpts) "The Family Council strengthens self-determination and self-help of people in social work, in the school system and in the legal system. **The Family Council insists on professional work "with" and not "for" the addressees.**

Independence is essential for the function of coordination, both from the assistance provided by independent providers and from the control tasks of the public provider as well as from the interests of the family. The coordination acts in a solution-neutral manner and independently of the control tasks of the public agency and complies with the procedural standards.

The **use of "private family time"** ("family-only time") is essential. This is where decisions are made, solutions are developed, relationships are clarified, strengthened or expanded and plans are made without professionals. Private family time ensures family autonomy from the support system and transparency within the family. The professionals support these plans in advance by providing clear information that is useful for the family members with regard to their concerns, the family's achievements and potential, and their professional knowledge of the problem, but are not involved in the decision-making process.

The **family has a right to consent** to the plan drawn up, provided that the previously formulated minimum standards are met and the plan is lawful.

The family council is held as a "home game" for the family (time, place, participants, family culture, food, language).

The **safety of all participants and the strengthening of weak interests** – in particular the appropriate participation and interests of the children – are worked out with the family during the preparation phase.

The plan drawn up must be recorded in writing and available to everyone. The plan includes working arrangements, an emergency plan and a review date. Families should be given opportunities to make contact with other families and family members who have themselves experienced a family council should be given the opportunity to participate in the strategic and practical further development of the "family council" process. Family councils should be systematically evaluated in order to document results, to enable methodological improvements and to identify structural problems that manifest themselves in individual problems.

Conceptual considerations for taking into custody

Hans Luka

Protecting the welfare of children has always been an integral part of child and youth welfare. In the development of crisis intervention, taking children into custody has established itself as a protective facility in the form of the Child and Youth Emergency Service (KJND), at the end of the interaction stages provided in German youth welfare law. It is important to understand the significance attributed to such a form of help and the idea behind it in order to understand the catalyzing effect of the misuse of this form of help by the escalating crisis within youth welfare. Crisis means a state of emergency. The Child and Youth Emergency Service therefore derives its formal task from averting a risk to a child's welfare on the one hand and developing a perspective for the person concerned on the other. The KJND can therefore only be understood as a kind of "overflow basin" in which short-termism is part of the conceptual approach and its success. In line with the principle "The faster the help, the more successful it is."

However, it is those cases that require our attention that cannot (re)integrated "quickly" youth welfare or a sustainable perspective, some of which

experience disruptive management processes because the institutions have exhausted their portfolio of services and ideas. "The lack of needs-based follow-up support, i.e. the youth welfare system itself, reinforces, worsens or manifests the crisis situation in which young people find themselves during a placement in care." (Source: Position paper of the International Association for Educational Support / IGfH 2022[74]).

In the area of child protection, the number of cases in which the behavior of children and young people challenges us the most for good reason has remained roughly the same in recent years, but the ability of our youth welfare system to respond appropriately has declined. The answer to the question of how to escape and counter this spiral applies equally to both public and independent providers: create the capacity to act.

Although taking a child into custody is (socio-educationally and normatively) designed as a provisional, temporary, generally short-term intervention, the law rightly does not an exact time limit for its duration. Crisis intervention must be aimed at the specific conflict and emergency situation in the individual case. In practice, we see stays of twelve months or more. This and many other points of criticism of the community of cooperation and responsibility with the youth welfare office will not be discussed further, as this is intended to be about our response as professionals, but it should not go unmentioned.

The conditions are proving increasingly difficult in the context of taking children into care cannot be viewed in isolation from the attempts to provide appropriate responses. Since the establishment of this institution and despite the challenges, the socio-pedagogical expertise of youth welfare in the field of crisis intervention has developed consistently and has grown with the task assigned to it. In order to successfully develop this special form of assistance further, it is necessary to establish a close-meshed management of quality development and assurance. The district-based development and implementation of a clearing office in the care facility is a necessary consequence of this quality development.

As a result of the exchange of professionals, the experiences and, above all, the successful factors of successful educational work were incorporated into the concept of a clearing center. What a concept can achieve depends on those who the concept into practice. This raises the question of how a team should be structured in order to handle crises and provide support in a sustainable form of help. The most important message for care facilities is to create the greatest possible certainty of action. In addition to concepts for protection, violence and conflict, this also means concepts for emotional protection for staff. The greater the clarity of action, the easier it will be to find the reason for the young person's refusal to integrate into the youth welfare system.

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[74] Internationale Gesellschaft für erzieherische Hilfen (IGfH), Fachgruppe Inobhutnahme (2022): Positionspapier „Mangel an Fachkräften in der Kinder- und Jugendhilfe wirkt sich dramatisch aus!", Frankfurt; online (letzter Zugriff 15.10.2024): https://jugendhilfeportal.de/fileadmin/user_upload/Positionspapier_Fachkraeftemangel_und_aktuelle_Auswirkungen_FG-Inobhutnahme_IGfH.pdf

A process that fosters the development of success factors can only take place through a seamless exchange and a well thought-out and individually adapted management of a good transition from start to finish.

The concept is intended to implement a development process for the team and the service with three non-static phases. This process is worked out together in several phases, and the results are recorded on a flipchart (see Fig. 13). The entire team, the employees, must be on board before a new offer can be made.

The differentiation and individualization as essential factors of the offer must be reflected throughout and be dynamic. The aim is to create an instrument that accompanies the reintegration of the recipients into a sustainable support system. Crisis management must be kept from clearing. Further goals are to create a crisis plan, to create responsiveness in teams, to enable non-violent work and: "the reason for admission should not be the reason for dismissal". In a sustainable concept, "rooms with calm" should be available in the facility. Only then does the actual clearing process begin, which sees itself as a coordination point for successful change processes involving all important network stakeholders.
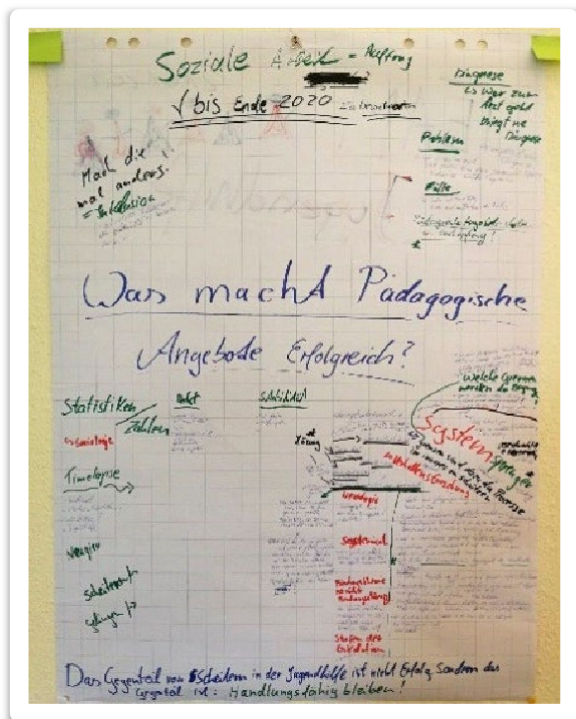

Fig. 13: Flipchart conception development process (Luka 2023)

"Thanks to the young people we have heard, we must try to understand what we need to change."

6   "Policy making": professional and political approaches to meet the needs of young people in challenging care constellations

Nicole Rosenbauer & Sonja Groinig

The aim of the trinational exchange project was to collect and bundle "cornerstones" for approaches to dealing with young people who have experienced exclusion or are at risk of exclusion in the youth welfare systems. Publishing the insights and results of the project was a concern of everyone involved in the project. The young people also made it very clear that they wanted to tell their stories and that they wanted something to change. Listening to young people is the heart of participation. Their participation only takes on an essential meaning when what they have heard is also used in the actual design of work processes and for further development; when it becomes effective and does not remain "unheard" again. One young person put it in a nutshell: "I've said this several times now – but nothing has changed so far." They share the desire for change and for "audibility" with the professionals involved in the project. In the international exchange project, we academics and practitioners have learned that the young people's perspective on youth welfare issues cannot be replaced. We have repeatedly realized how beneficial it to speak and meet with them in order to reflect on our own practice and the direction of our own work. The young people want "Letting young people talk straight". If you let them and they do exactly that, when they "talk straight", you hear positive things, but you also hear about their often very painful experiences, you hear their clear criticism. For professionals, participation means the decision to want to hear "that" too. And then, as one professional in the project put it, "trying to understand what we need to change."

It is the task of public welfare institutions to reduce the risks of exclusion and increase opportunities for inclusion for young people. Young people in stressful and difficult life situations need appropriate support and sustainable assistance that they can accept. In order to be able to organize access for young people and sustainable support processes, services must take into account the challenging realities of their lives. In all three countries, however, new forms of services are developing too slowly to meet young people's needs. Organizations that provide or want to provide such services on the base of concepts are not actively supported by the political management levels. The aim of the following policy paper is to formulate practice-oriented recommendations for political decision-makers and other interested parties on the topic of challenging care constellations based on relevant theses and project results.

"The support system must be sustainable for the children and young people – not the other way around."

Cornerstones for alternative, inclusive solutions for young people

The following theses and project results were developed in collaboration with professionals and young people over the course of the trinational exchange project. Their presentation as "cornerstones" is centered around the six overarching aspects "Young people and thus also the help need time", "Participation and dialogue: Careful understanding and help design processes", Enabling relationships", "Individualization of help", "Help must be offered for a sufficient length of time, beyond the age of majority and with the necessary intensity" and "Ending the overuse of resources".[75]

Young people – and also the help processes – need time

Children and young people must first be allowed to arrive at the respective place and in the respective measure – and experience it as a safe place. **The process of a young person and young adult arriving in a care setting can take time.** Good support processes take time.

Admission to socio-educational measures must be well prepared. Transitions in particular are vulnerable phases in which the potential for escalation is increased on all sides. The goals of the young people must take priority over the goals of the agency so that the reality of their lives and their needs are not ignored. Only through this experience can patterns of discontinuity be broken and functioning working alliances be formed. **Young people have a right to make mistakes, take detours and gain experience.** Too often, they experience that they are sanctioned, i.e. punished, for their mistakes, detours and experiences.

Young people have a right to make mistakes and gain experience

Children and young people must be allowed to make mistakes without being immediately sanctioned

The core element in working with challenging young people is holding on – enduring – being allowed to fail. Unfavorable conditions in systems must not be accepted without reflection. If rigid structures are not questioned, frustration arises and prevails among both staff and young people. In everyday socio-educational work, employees need support for themselves and as a team in order to avoid causing additional problems and difficulties for young people.

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[75] The quotations and statements in italics inserted between the text were recorded and documented by professionals and young people on moderation cards, flipcharts, in documentation and minutes during the three country meetings.

It can be the right thing to let young people calm down. To give them time. They are generally used to conditions and high demands being placed on them and that help may have already failed ("failed care"). **Initially, low-threshold working alliances must be made possible, which enable them to arrive in the respective care context and focus on relationship work** – which means "turning to them". Conceptually, hourly quotas must be made available flexibly in order to be able to respond to the individual life situations and needs of young people. The focus is on providing a framework for building relationships, basic care and establishing a safe place. This framework is developed together with the young people and must initially be decoupled from requirements such as professional integration.

The system needs to be changed so that you can let go and be caught

Unconditionality of aid for "Failed care" young people must be guaranteed

Unconditional devotion

Participation and dialogue: Engaged processes of understanding and supporting

There is a lot of talk about it, but it has not yet been implemented: there is still not enough practical implementation of participation by young people and families in the support systems. Participation must be structurally ensured through participation-oriented methodological procedures and support for providers who use or want to use such procedures. **Careful understanding and help design processes do not increase the workload, but rather reduces it.** Careful understanding and support design processes increase the effects on children and young people: **Inclusive policies and practices are worthwhile.**

Children and young people need dialog instead of pressure. The basic diagnostic questions are "What problems do young people have?" and "What problems are made for young people?". We need to enter into a dialog with young people about their experiences and the difficulties they themselves have.

Don't put pressure on young people and have less pressure yourself

So take the pressure off young people and take it off educators – so that they can do what is important to young people.

All too often, there is far too little knowledge, or none at all, about the stressful biographical experiences that may shape children and adolescents, sometimes even into the present day. Experiences of physical, psychological, or sexualized violence, for instance, can significantly contribute to the dynamics of crisis developments. Far too little professionally processing takes place. **The family is hardly ever taken into consideration.**

Participation and dialog-oriented methodological procedures such as socio-educational diagnoses or family group conferences must be used in practice in order to enable understanding and help-shaping processes together with the young people. Young people have to be listened to better and more, they have to be asked "Why?" and they need professionals to stay close to them without pressuring them. The point of entry into help is one of the most important times and requires a clear participatory structure. It is essential for teams to "pull together" in order to have the same attitude in the sense of partiality for the young person and his or her challenges.

Listen to us better and more. Listen, stay tuned but don't press us

We need authentic willingness to understand on the part of educators.

believe the young people

the question "why?" is the most important one for professionals

Understanding needs feedback. **Care processes should also be consistently evaluated by young people on a low-threshold basis.** In this way, young people are transformed from objects into subjects in the care processes. Leaders – according to the young people – should also talk more with the children, adolescents and young adults themselves instead of just with the caregivers.

"Really listen, get feedback from young people, take it seriously and then take steps in this regard."

Young people contribute their coping and survival strategies they have acquired in the course of their biography, their forms of communication, their knowledge and their possibilities of "'getting out of the situation', 'surviving', 'getting by', 'maintaining self-esteem', 'remaining capable of acting'" (Böhnisch 1993: 74[76]) into the youth welfare system. **If their coping and survival strategies are not understood as such on the basis of a socio-pedagogical perspective, then escalation dynamics are not only not resolved, they actually intensify.**

Feelings such as anger, aggression, tendencies to flee, withdrawal etc. are also "normal" reactions to "abnormal" life experiences that young people have had to go through. This is a central piece of knowledge in any trauma-informed practice. This also includes the fact that

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[76] Böhnisch, L. (1993): Sozialpädagogik des Kindes- und Jugendalters.Weinheim/München.

often the "quiet" young people are "forgotten", those who do not " the eye", who do not stand out or are "conspicuous"; for whom support may "quietly fail". **Young people must be given the time, space and support to understand themselves and to come to terms with and overcome their experiences.**

Have permission for all kinds of feelings

Anger is important, being sad, being childish, messing around is important. Even for three days

Ensuring the qualification and skills of professionals

Dealing with the challenges that arise when working with children, adolescents and young adults in stressful and difficult life situations should be a basic skill of any educational practice. We do not see it as a skill of specialized educators; at the same time, professionals must be given sufficient opportunities and resources to qualify themselves appropriately – and then also be supported and assisted by appropriate structures. In all three countries, Slovenia, Germany and Austria, the qualification of professionals for the special needs of young people and families is discussed as a major challenge and necessity.[77] This excerpt from an email following a country meeting is an example of the various levels of qualification discussed in the project:

- *As mentioned above, it is necessary that all levels within an organization decide to address these specific dynamics in order to create structures that provide a quality and developmental environment for young people.*

- *From my practical observations, it is a matter of great urgency that young people who have decided to work in the field of social work are also increasingly prepared for challenging working conditions – young people with increased care needs, night shifts, further training, etc. – by universities of applied sciences and universities. In retrospect this lack of preparation is one of the most frequently cited aspects of high staff turnover, as it very quickly leads to excessive demands and thus to a change of job.*

- *Within the teams, the exchange and reflection on processes and dynamics – between the individual employees as well as between clients and caregivers – is essential.*

A challenging reality that was unanimously perceived was the lack of settings in all three countries to support families well. Looking at young people in isolation, providing support without really involving their family and without the work with important emotional caregivers is an enormous challenge for young people and can contribute to the failure of help.

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[77] In Austria, there is now a decree on professionals which is intended to regulate qualifications in the field child and youth welfare. The specific regulations are left to the Austrian federal states.

Understanding processes must take the lifeworlds of children and young people seriously and be geared towards the realities of their lives. **The use of illegal addictive substances is a present topic in the work with young people.** Substance use is one of the aspects that leads to exclusion in the youth welfare system, especially from residential care groups. Although this is a reality in the work with young people, and although very few professionals are equipped with the relevant knowledge and expertise on this topic, the reservations and prejudices are so great that young people who use substances are more likely to be released into homelessness by youth welfare services than to consider this reality conceptually; for example, by thinking about working in a way that initially accepts drugs. This leads to even more risky situations for young people.

> *"Educators' responsibility also means that educators must be able to deal with challenges faced by young people"*

Exclusions from youth welfare measures due to consumer behavior seem almost absurd when you consider that the young people ultimately have considerable experience with "legal" substances in the form of medication. For one of the young people who shared his story with us at the international meeting, the administration of medication was the start of his problematic career. In his biographical review, he says: "My problems started with medication." Young people experience how they are given medication aimed at sedation and regimentation even for minor reasons. They call these "hospital drugs". They often experience these contexts as coercive contexts in which they cannot refuse medication. Sometimes it is not explained to them what they are being given; they experience the risk of getting addicted to legal medication. There is hardly any critical perspective on the administration of medication to children and adolescents, not even on "off-label use".

It can no longer be a question of denying children and young people access to measures on the basis of their consumer behavior, for example. Professionals must acquire the relevant expertise and also support young people in this area.[78].

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[78] During the course of the project, we experienced that colleagues with, among other things, precisely this expertise in the use of addictive substances by young people were no longer able to work with the target group because their sponsoring organization closed the small facility that had been built up with a lot of passion and commitment and that worked successfully with precisely the young people we were dealing with. Not for economic reasons, but for conceptual reasons: it didn't fit in with conventional ideas.

Young people want professionals to accompany and support them in their dealings with medical specialists; and also to assist them in their dealings with other institutions, such as schools, if they experience pressure and a lack of understanding.

Recognizing our life worlds. Enduring and accepting what is.

We need support from schools and other institutions. We want you as lawyers.

Personal attitude must be supported by professional expertise.

Get out of the context of compulsion with regard to medication.

Critical examination of medication.

Enabling relationships and alliances

Building relationships is the basis of qualitative work. In other words, the ability to build relationships and the ability of professionals to realize participation are the decisive professional skills. Research consistently attests that the working alliance between professionals and young people, i.e. the relationship level and the good quality of socio-pedagogical relationships, as well as participation, i.e. the opportunities for participation in the help process perceived by children and young people, have the greatest influence on success.

Based on our experience with young people in challenging life situations, we advocate that the professional discourse should focus more on enabling professional closeness to young people. The physical dimension in particular needs to be given more consideration.

We need serious relationship. Professional closeness, not professional distance.

Avoid staff changes. Continuity of care. Reliable personal contact.

In youth welfare services, young "system crashers" experience disinterest, dishonest behavior and emotional distance from professionals. The young people react to this – with escalating behavior: Refusal, escape, violence, conflict with the law and drug use.[79] The result is termination, drop-outs and renewed loss of relationships. In this way, the youth welfare system does not absorb young people's stressful biographical experiences, but rather reproduces them. A further problem of terminations, changes between measures etc. lies

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[79] Schmidt, S. et al. (2023): "so it was always like 'hello' and then soon 'goodbye'" – Perspectives of young "system offenders" on their own help history. In: Society - Individual - Socialization (GISo). Journal for Socialization Research, 4 (1). DOI: 10.26043/GISo.2023.1.4

"behind" this: Every transfer marks a break for the children and young people themselves – an end to emerging relationships and a farewell to a place that had briefly become part of their world. Their capacity to engage with new people and places is challenged and strained with every change; it becomes increasingly unlikely that they will "let themselves in". In some cases, and this is also the practical experience of the professionals, children and young people are trapped for a very long time in the spiral of suffering caused by experiences of exclusion and corresponding labeling.

"They never come home" – "they never arrive anywhere" – this is how the children and young people are experienced. In other words, **the young people must be allowed to "arrive", they need a leap of faith and professionals who "endure" and "accept" what it is.**

Individualization of support settings

It is positive and to be supported that the needs of young today are perceived much more individually in all three countries, beyond the traditional group constellations. Our offers must match to the realities of life of the young people. We are not dealing with a homogeneous group of young people, but a heterogeneous one. Individual case orientation offers the possibility of support also in complex life situations, this quite low-threshold or more intensive.
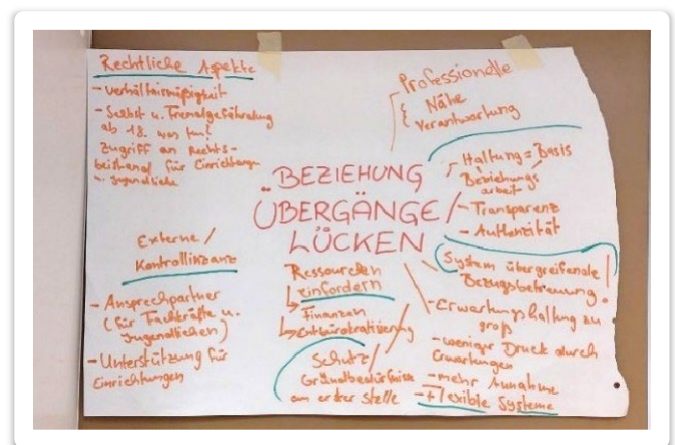

Fig. 14: Flipchart "Relationship – Transitions – Gaps"; Ljubljana 2022

Instead of asking which institution is the right one for young people in challenging situations, we should be asking about the right kind of thematic driven help. We need individualized support settings. Providers who address "challenging" young people, need a certain degree of flexibility and security.

However, traditions have simply continued in residential care for almost forty years. In Germany, almost 96% of children and young people are accommodated in residential group settings (Monitor HzE 2018[80]). Only 4.5% of young people were cared for in their own home in 2019. Although so many terminations take place, residential group settings are not seriously questioned and there is no professional discussion as to whether they are actually still up to date. The primacy of residential thinking leads to displacement and exclusion effects both for young people and for providers who want to develop or have developed other forms of support and provision.

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[80] Arbeitsstelle Kinder- und Jugendhilfestatistik (AKJStat) (2018): Monitor Hilfe zur Erziehung 2018, Dortmund.

In order to create a "fit", it is obvious that more individualized approaches and models of flexible, integrated assistance are predestined to create such a fit and also enable it organizationally – also and especially for challenging courses of assistance as well as their extensive avoidance.[81] **Individualized forms of accommodation and care must be supported and expanded by specialist policy in order to achieve better support for young people**. **Our programs must be geared towards young people and not the young people towards the expectations of the programs.** Our concepts must be correspondingly "flexible" in order to keep the young person at the center. Organizations that want to develop and implement such services must be given a privileged position in the youth welfare landscape and must be clearly supported by people with management responsibility at specialist policy levels and as professionals in institutions.

In focus: Residential group settings

Typical wishes and needs of adolescence get in conflict with the high demands that group settings place on young people. This causes many problems in addition to the problems they already have, because it is an unmanageable challenge for some of the young people to adhere to high-threshold rules that are set for all residents – which exist as a matter of course in the support system and which are expected to be observed. They are also expected to integrate into group contexts as a matter of course; this is also simply too much for some children and young people. Good or positive development processes and their socio-pedagogical support are something completely different then "Enforce and adhere to rules". Children and young people need a relationship- and needs-oriented pedagogical approach instead of a rule-based approach.

One of the young people's demands was accordingly: "Abolish shared accommodation! or make it smaller!" The young people demand that, in principle, options other than accommodation in shared flats should be considered for them.

Abolish residential groups. Create smaller groups (max. 3 young people). Adapt to the needs of young people.

It should be quieter in residential groups. Take in / downsize fewer children and young people. How it is good; "it depends"

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[81] cf. Rosenbauer, N. (2006): Flexibilisierung: Ein Weg zu Problemjugendlichen?, in: Witte, M. D./Sander, U. (Hg.): Erziehungsresistent? 'Problemjugendliche' als besondere Herausforderung für die Jugendhilfe, Baltmannsweiler, S. 37-51.

A look at current empirical data on the level of participation in Germany clearly shows high degree of heteronomy that children and young people in residential care have to cope with: Half of children and young people are unable to participate in decision-making with regard to food, television and pocket money; similarly, half – one in two – are unable to decide on their own personal outfits and room furnishings; 45% have no access to the internet; one in two young people (50%) are unable to withdraw undisturbed. Only around half (50%) feel that the rules that exist in shared accommodation are fair and comprehensible. One in three (33%) cannot lock up their private belongings, and one in five young people experience postal controls (20%).[82] According to findings by the German Youth Institute (DJI), up to two thirds of children and young people in residential care in Germany experience punishment and sanctions they disagreeable behavior or their own position differs from that of their caregivers. Punishments include, for example, exclusion from leisure activities, withdrawal of pocket money or smartphones, or removal of visiting contacts and trips home to their parents (cf. Marmier et al. 2002: 67, Gragert et al. 2005: 23f.[83]).

Only those expectations should be placed on the young people that are also be met by the professionals. In the other case, the young people feel a deep injustice in the way they are treated. "We have a ban on cell phones, and then the professionals go for a walk talking on the phone or with a cell phone in their hand". The harshness that can arise in everyday life at a youth welfare facility as a result of the rules for children and young people and sanctions became very tangible and clear in the young people's stories and their experiences. Young people experience that their rights are not respected and are taken away from them.

If rules apply, then they should apply to everyone; and according to the young people, the binding nature of rules should also apply to caregivers. Young people find rules that are discussed with them and that are "not artificial", i.e. that are based on socially important guidelines (e.g. on child protection), acceptable and fair.

The set of rules in care should at most be based on social guidelines.

Do not set up artificial rules. Few rules.

As almost all of them have had experience with this form of accommodation, the young people have formulated aspects that would make life in group accommodation fairer, more suitable for young people and more sustainable for them.

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[82] See: Macsenaere, M./Esser, K. (2015): Was wirkt in der Erziehungshilfe? 2. aktualisierte Auflage, München & Basel. Sierwald, W./Wolff, M. (2008): Beteiligung in der Heimerziehung. In: SPI (Hrsg.): Kinderschutz, Kinderrechte, Beteiligung. München, S.160-176;
[83] Mamier, J. u. a. (2002): Einrichtungsbefragung. DJI, München; Gragert u. a. (2005): Entwicklungen (teil)stationärer Hilfen zur Erziehung. DJI, München.

Profiling for a residential group: respect, giving space, WE-rules, adolescent lifeworlds, no punitive pedagogy and reparation

Respect: Young people should be able to decide for themselves when to talk about which topics. If they say "I want to eat now, not talk", this should be respected. Young people demand the same respect that applies to other people.

Do not specify when to talk about what

Respect: I want to eat now, not talk.

Giving young people and children their own space after conflicts in emotional situations, e.g. leave them alone.

Give them space: After emotional conflicts, it is important to give young people and children their own space and not immediately burden them further. The common practice of sending young people to psychiatric facilities or calling the police to the facility when conflicts arise is perceived by young people as escalation. What is called "consequences" are actually often punishments.

"WE rules": Community rules – "WE rules" – should be established, to which everyone must adhere and which treat all participants respectfully and equally. Supervision should not only be available for the professionals, but – according to the young people – also for themselves.

only rules that the professionals also adhere to. Caregivers must also (be able to) adhere to the rules. If they apply, then they apply to everyone.

Supervision for teams and also for young people.

Young people's lifeworlds: When asked about the positive aspects of all the years of accommodation, one of the young people recalled one excursion in particular. Celebrating parties was also very important for the young people. Focusing on leisure time, doing things like going out to eat together, doing something really nice for birthdays – that is also a way of life. The young people would like more resources for this. They also clearly perceive that they are treated differently from their peers, for example when the length of Christmas celebrations is based on the caregiver's closing time; that they are not granted free access to the Internet and Wi-Fi – a key issue for young people today and also an international right of children and young people (UN CRC).

Services: Organize fewer changes in residential groups – we need constant relationship persons.

More vacations and excursions, more joint activities.

Free W-Lan! = Children's right.

No punitive pedagogy: Children and young people do not want to be "trained", but rather treated as people with their own needs and rights. A humanistic approach should have priority in care. Children and young people are punished far too much in out-of-home care. Sometimes several punishments are imposed for one and the same offense. Professionals often talk about "consequences", but mean punishments. Young people experience the consequences of their own actions themselves and then have to deal with them themselves. Punishment should also be called punishment. Punishments are imposed by others who have the power to do so. Punishments evoke negative feelings, resistance and powerlessness. If young people are absent, alternative measures (e.g. forcing the police to bring them back) should be found and discussed with them.

no multiple application of consequences for one and the same thing.

Do not train children and young people, but treat them as human beings (humanistically).

distinguish between "consequence" and "punishment".

no punitive pedagogy. Reparation instead of punishment.

Apologize and reparation: If professionals have made a mistake or have hurt young people, young people want professionals to apologize to the young people. They say: "We experience this too rarely." Forms of reparation and compensation should be made and included in the rules of care.

Incorporate compensation into the rules.

Apologizing to young people.

In some cases, young people in stressful life situations are lost because housing in youth welfare services is tied to too many conditions. **The possibilities of housing as an existential issue for young people must be made available in a different way in youth welfare services; for example, as successfully tested internationally in the context of the housing-first principle.**
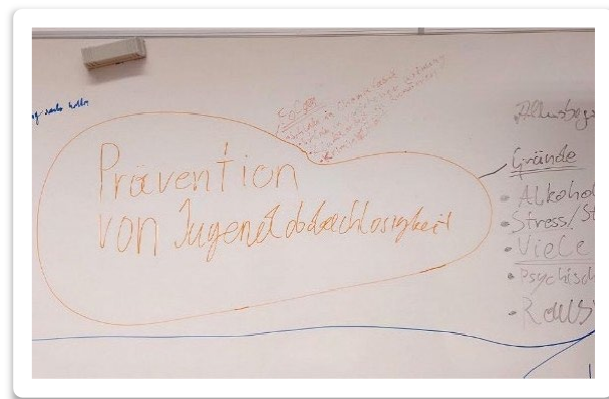

Fig. 15: Flipchart "Prevention of youth homelessness", Ljubljana 2022

Support settings need a sufficient length of time, need the required intensity and need to go beyond the age of majority

Young people are often comparatively old when they start receiving care and support. They often remain in escalated conflict constellations for a long time, including in violent domestic situations. If, for example, young people are admitted to the program shortly before they reach the age of 18, they are often expected to have a job when they turn 18 years. If the targets are not achieved, the measure is terminated even though the prerequisites were not in place to achieve such targets within the given time frame (e.g. finding an apprenticeship).

A controlling instrument in care planning is clarity about the remaining time within the measure in line with the realities of the young 's lives. **The authorities must provide clarity about the duration of the funding. Otherwise, assistance and thus the young people may be destabilized.** In Germany, is currently a debate about the illegitimate limitation of youth welfare measures, as the duration of support must be based on the needs of a young person for as long as they exist.

In all three participating countries, the difficulties of the authorities focusing on the age of majority as a "formal date" and providing help for young people beyond this date in line with their needs are evident. **In this respect, the young people experience a "double disadvantage" compared to their peers**. **In 2023, the average age at moving out in the EU will be 25.4 years for women and 27.2 years for men.**[84] In addition, young carereceivers and careleavers generally have less stable private networks, lower social and

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[84] In Germany, the average age at leaving home in 2023 was 23.1 years for women and 24.7 years for sons. In 2019, more than a quarter (28%) of 25-year-olds were still living with their parents. At the age of 25, just under 34% of sons were still living with their parents.

material resources than their peers who grew up in their parents' homes. They are at an increased risk of poverty and are more likely to become homeless. **Nevertheless it is expected that carereceivers and careleavers "hurry up" to be "independent" and "adult" as quickly as possible.**

Treat children and young people in residential care like their contemporaries.

For some young people, the uncertainty about the continuation of support on the threshold of adulthood causes a high level of psychological stress, including mental crises and fears of renewed destabilization and loneliness. All this happens despite the fact that the young adult phase of life considered a key phase of identity formation and social integration in almost all European countries today. It is therefore also a particularly critical phase of life for coping with life in the future. Legislation in all three countries involved has changed accordingly. **Assistance for young adults is essential to meet the needs of young people in an inclusive support system.**

End the overuse of resources

"a lot can be implemented with few resources, basically a lot of room for maneuver – setting aside expectations, questioning self-imposed rules and boundaries"

Transitions are particularly vulnerable phases for young people. This also applies to transitions from support to independent living; young people often still need guidance and support while transitions, for example through flexibly available care. If this support is not provided and the young people are destabilized again (in school or training, living in their own home, social integration, etc.), then the successes previously achieved with the young people and the sustainability of the resources used are jeopardized. **If milestones are reached in complex cases, it is often possible to provide less support for the case while at the same time increasing the demands.** This makes care processes vulnerable again, as situations of excessive demands arise. On the one hand, there is no "miracle cure", but on the other hand, resources are once again being misspent[85].

If support and care is not oriented towards empirically proven impact factors such as participation of young people, then resources in the youth welfare systems get lost.

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[85] Cf. Ataç, Ilker et al. (2024): Policy Brief "8 *Handlungsempfehlungen* zur Förderung junger geduldeter Menschen in Ausbildung und Arbeit", n.d., available online: https://migrant-integration.ec.europa.eu/index.php/library-document/policy-brief-8-handlungsempfehlungen-zur-foerderung-junger-geduldeter-menschen_en

We need a professional error culture on site that also enables learning at an institutional level and within the system. Management (facility management, youth welfare office management, specialist supervision) must support participatory processes, otherwise obstacles will arise in the system of professionals that have a negative impact on care processes. The fact that state and publicly funded institutions sometimes work against each other, that processes are becoming increasingly bureaucratized and that requirements are in conflict with each other, also to a misuse and avoidable expenditure of resources and work.

Confidently taking up the opportunities for young people to complain and evaluating what they see as hindering or preventing sustainable support processes makes it possible to identify potential hurdles and barriers for young people, both in public authorities and at independent providers. Complaints not only serve to protect young people, but can also be used productively as real-life feedback for professional development and training.

Establish reliable complaint structures.

Take complaints seriously.

Profiling: A youth-friendly youth welfare office for young people

The young people also formulated recommendations for change for a youth welfare office that is more youth-friendly, which would lead to improved support and care for young people. From their recommendations, a "profiling" can be made for the profile of a responsible specialist in the youth welfare office who wants to better address the needs and concerns of young people who are struggling with challenges.

The young people themselves asked for more time to speak alone with their responsible youth welfare office employee. For example, 10 minutes should be set aside for this in every help plan meeting. This should be established as a professional standard.

Shorter application processes, resourceful employees: Application procedures should be accelerated to ensure quick help and support. Young people want youth welfare office staff who have sufficient time and resources to deal intensively with individual cases. They demand that financial aspects should not take precedence over the emotional needs of young people. For the young people, better availability of staff should be guaranteed, especially in crises, and that they can react quickly if necessary.

Better accessibility.

*Accessibility in crises.
Hear cries for help.*

Expert, continuous and trustworthy contact persons: Young people demand that youth welfare office staff the expertise to deal adequately with their specific issues and problems and gain an in-depth understanding of the young people's life situations and needs. The employees should approach the young people in a neutral and unbiased manner in order to be able to provide support. Young people also want to have continuous contact persons who they do not lose when their responsibilities change. Young people want to be able to speak openly and honestly about their concerns and needs without being judged and without their trust being abused.

Treat me in exclusivity, time to talk to me.

Do not abuse trust.

Justice: Young people want their opinions to be treated equally and given weight in decision-making processes. Young people want to be fully informed and involved in decision-making processes. For them, justice also means that out-of-home placements are regularly monitored by their youth welfare office staff to ensure the quality of care.

Conversations with few people.

Getting to know young people and educators before the help is planned.

The start of help must be accompanied by more discussions than by a help plan talk.

Equal voice of young people in help plan discussions.

Transparency in the documentation.

Children and young people set themselves goals when receiving help. Take young people's wishes as serious goals. Take them seriously.

Profiling: Dealing with children and young people in challenging constellations

Based on the feedback from the professionals on their findings, a "profiling" was carried out. It is the creation of a profile for professionals who, in the face of challenges with young people, ask themselves: "What can I change?" and who find concrete starting points that they can take into account and change at any time in their everyday work.

"What's wrong?" #Instead of simply accepting problems and challenges or "giving up" on young people, I should actively address these problems and challenges with the young people, create a good discussion situation, ask them "why" and look for specific solutions. A passive attitude leads to stagnation and prevents improvements.

"Why do I do what I do?" #Reflection on my motives: I need to question my own motives and motivations. Are my actions in the best interests of the children and young people or are they influenced by personal interests or prejudices? What do I really know about the young person's interests and how he or she is currently doing?

"I can decide to decide more individually" #Avoid generalizations: Generalizations should be avoided; we should also avoid categorizing young people in our language. that generalize and exclude them. Rules should often apply to all young people and also to us. Every situation and every individual is unique and deserves a differentiated approach. I can decide to be more individual.

Fig.16: Moderation cards, Stralsund 2023

"Influence the design of my practice." #Investing in participation: Young people's needs and concerns are often ignored or not taken seriously, which leads to frustration and mistrust; we ourselves help to create these feelings among young people. Their opinions should not only be listened to, but should also play a significant role in decision-making and carry weight. Even if this causes me difficulties, I need courage or I have to invest something in it. Or even if I first have to test myself to see whether I can listen to them well. Only when young
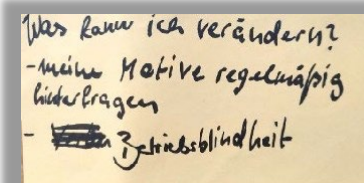
people are able to influence the design of my practice does real participation begin.

"Would I want to have a conversation like this?" #Awareness of time and place: It is important to know when and where certain topics should be discussed. The context and environment contribute significantly to the success of a conversation. Is it a place where I want to have a conversation myself? Is it an atmosphere in which I would also want to have a conversation myself?

"Is my idea great?" #Nothing about them without them: Young people are already well aware that decisions are made over their heads. Blanket solutions are often inadequate and do not meet the specific needs of young people. Decisions with and for people should always be made together on an individual and contextual basis. Every great idea for me doesn't have to be the same for others.

"Am I clear?" #Language and professionalism: It's not enough to do the right things; I also need to explain it in the right way in an understandable way. All actions and decisions should be clear and comprehensible in order to avoid misunderstandings with young people and build trust. Participation requires methodological skills that I can develop.

"We in youth welfare are too quiet. Employees in the system could achieve more by adopting a client-centered approach."

Fig. 17: Flipchart "Attitude – youth welfare too quiet?" Rights, code of responsibility, resources, perseverance, self-reflection, role models; Ljubljana 2022

7 Participation of young people and their feedback

Nicole Rosenbauer

The project was conceived as a trinational exchange of professionals. In a working alliance between science and practice, the exchange aimed to combine local experiences, methodological approaches and reflection processes from Germany, Austria and Slovenia in order to develop cornerstones for successful, inclusive, sustainable approaches for young people in challenging care and support constellations. Possibilities for the direct inclusion of young people who are or were considered to be "challenging young people" were to explored. In the course of the project, it was possible to include the perspectives of the young people themselves on three levels: through their participation in the various work and exchange formats of our three country meetings, through the format of the digital forum and via the interviews conducted by professionals in the three participating countries for a socio-pedagogical diagnosis. The feedback from the young people summarized below is based on feedback provided by them during the course of the project, e.g. through a flipchart sent from Carinthia and the participation of the young people in the evaluation round at the final country meeting in Stralsund, in particular on the question of how the young people experienced the involvement.

"Bridge persons" were decisive for the realization of the concrete involvement of the young people and their participation in the country meetings. In each case, they opened up viable approaches and paths into the project from a real-life perspective.[86] For the country meeting in Austria, these were two employees of the two Austrian organizations who, as supervisors, invited "their" young people and organized and accompanied the young people's participation in the country meeting. The project coordinator was a bridge person for the invitation of the self-organization "MOMO"; a personal acquaintance already existed from a previous joint symposium. To a certain extent, these bridge persons act as guarantors for answering potential questions from young people in the run-up to their willingness to participate regarding the meaningfulness (Why should I take part?), concrete ideas (What can I expect?) and security (Are there risks or problems, e.g. lack of financial resources?) (cf. Becker 2020: 6).[87]

Just by being invited to the project, the young people experienced an interest in them and in what they had to say and contribute. The young people found themselves to be well involved in the working formats, as well as in having a direct say on the design of the formats (smaller groups during the country meeting, selection of topics, joint online format, etc.). They appreciated the many opportunities to exchange ideas directly with the professionals and talk to them. The breaks and informal discussion opportunities during the country meetings were particularly valuable to the young people; they also would have liked even more time for such

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[86] Cf. Naddaf, Zijad (2019): Zugänge und Barrieren in der Internationalen Jugendarbeit – differenztheoretische Überlegungen, in: Becker, H./Thimmel, A. (Hg.): Die Zugangsstudie zum internationalen Jugendaustausch. Zugänge und Barrieren. Frankfurt a.M., S. 146-174

[87] Becker, Helle (2020): "Es braucht eventuell ganz neue Ideen und Formate." Einstiegsformate und -bedingungen für Internationale Jugendbegegnungen, Expertise, Köln.

discussions with the professionals. The young people would like to see more formats like this for exchanges "between the two worlds", the "world of professionals" and the "world of young people", where they can "talk openly". They rated themselves as intensively involved during the project: "Everyone focused on me and also asked questions."

The participation of young people changes the atmosphere in the working formats: In contrast to a discourse among professionals, the other perspective is now seated "at the table" and contributes their views. The young people very clearly perceive being taken seriously and the different role that this gives them: "I felt like a professional." The young people unanimously described their participation in the project as intensive, exciting, interesting, exhausting and enriching.
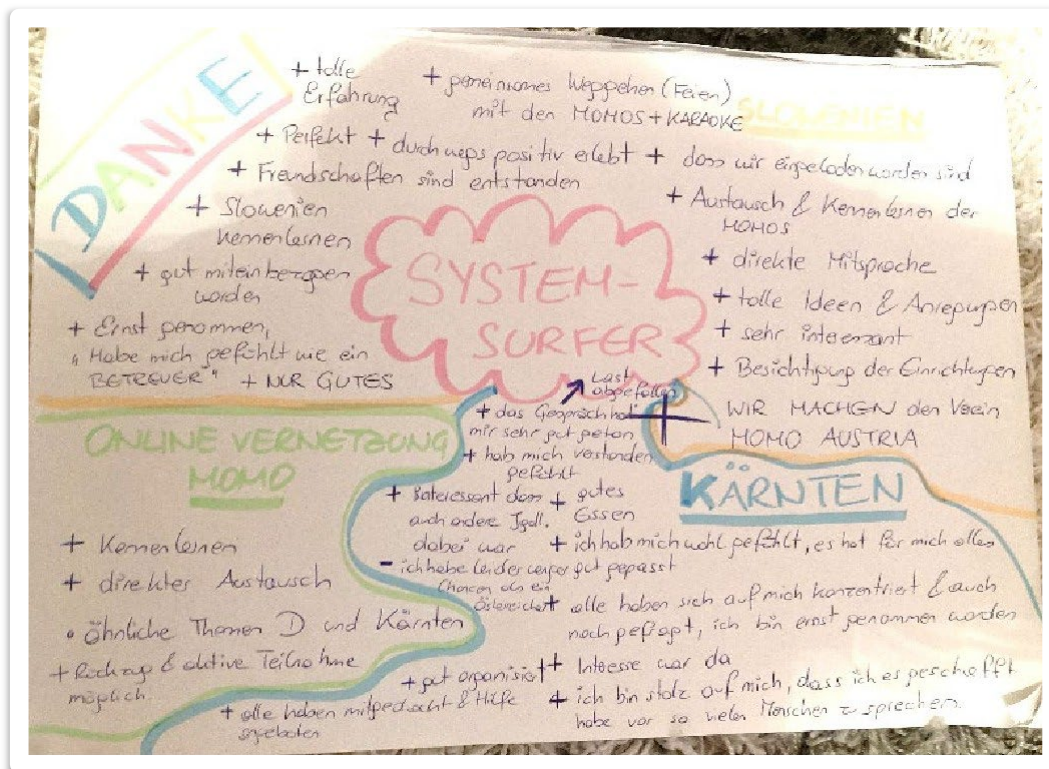

Fig.18: Flipchart sent by young people from Carinthia; Klagenfurt 2022

Getting to know other young people across the borders of Austria and Germany and exchanging experiences interested and inspired the young people. The young people found out that their peers in Carinthia and Germany are dealing with similar issues. Together with their educator, the Austrian young people were motivated to follow a similar path to "MOMO" and to found an association in which they can participate themselves. In the meantime, three professionals have founded an association together with a young person in order to advocate for the interests of young people in such a form.

We received different feedback and opinions from the young people regarding the organization and procedures of the country meetings. The main suggestions and thus also learning effects for the organizers were:

- ✓ more group work to better integrate the young people's contributions into the process and allow more time to adequately discuss all topics
- ✓ "The plan was nicely planned, but was very demanding for our rhythm, as it was too jagged"
- ✓ more time for leisure activities in the afternoons and after the "official" program

In this sense, "less formal program is more" applies to the involvement of young people, but also that the young people wanted to have enough time to spend free time in the places where the project took place. For the young people from Germany and Austria, it was a special experience to get to know Ljubljana and Slovenia, to visit facilities there, to listen to the explanations of the professionals, which were translated into German.[88] And to explore the city in the evening and go out together.

Fig. 19: On the road in Ljubljana 2022

And that was also the project: eating a seafood pizza in Slovenia for the first time in the live and spending time together by the sea in Stralsund.

Fig. 20: By the sea in Stralsund 2023

[88] The project was designed as an exchange of professionals and integrated participatory elements as far as possible within the given framework. The attempt to organize a low-threshold contact between Slovenian and Austrian and German young people in the course of the country meeting in Ljubljana simply failed due to pragmatic and time-related circumstances.

The young people clearly reported back how interesting it was for them to hear and understand the perspective of professionals. At the same time, there was a lot of input for them in the official program, which made it difficult to absorb everything. However, they rated it for themselves as "good that everyone came here and faced up to the challenges, everyone dared to talk to the professionals".

All young people took part in the project with "peers", i.e. no young person came alone, but was accompanied by at least one other young person who was known to him or her (e.g. from the residential groups). The young people from JUNO and MOMO took part in the project as existing peer groups. Such peer contexts create a habitual, emotional and social security for young people's access to participation processes. The participation of young people in teams or groups must therefore also be considered and shaped for access to participation – it has a facilitating effect for access. This is also relevant if and because young people are often outnumbered in participation formats, as was also the in this project. In other words, the young people are faced with a superior number of professionals. Professionals are also used to meeting in larger groups and discussing specialist topics with each other. It is therefore much more exciting, unfamiliar and also more stressful for young people to face such formats.

Due to the thematic focus of the international project, all of them had experienced the child and youth welfare system as so-called "challenging young people" often in ways that were painful and hurtful. They wanted to share these experiences, but doing so also required something of them personally and emotionally. One young person reported back: "The conversation did me a lot of good. I felt understood", and it was a "burden lifted." The young people rightly expressed their pride in the evaluation: "I am proud of myself that I managed to speak in front of so many people." For the young people, it was important that they had the opportunity to actively participate as well as to withdraw.[89] According to the young people, they perceived solidarity in somewhat stressful situations; everyone involved in the project thought along with them and offered support.

For access to participation, the relevance of the young people's lifeworlds must be considered and respected. Two dogs also traveled with the young people from "MOMO – The voice of disconnected youth" to the international meeting in Ljubljana. Finding suitable, animal-friendly accommodation proved to be just as unproblematic as using the room during the daytime program of the country meeting. Such life-world relevance can play a decisive role in the exclusion of young people. For example, Ronald Prieß, ambassador for street children in Hamburg, reports that he knows of several cases "in which young people preferred to stay on the street instead of going to a youth welfare facility. The reason: they would have had to give up their dogs." (Prieß 2020: 8).[90.]

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[90] Prieß, R. (2020): Stellungnahme: Öffentliche Anhörung zu den Anträgen zum Thema „Strategien gegen Wohnungslosigkeit bei Jugendlichen und jungen Erwachsenen" am 14. Dezember 2020 im Ausschuss für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend, Deutscher Bundestag, Berlin; online: https://www.bundestag.de/resource/blob/812702/8a288549fa2c31be52eab6df1f95b3ee/19-13-107e-data.pdf

[89] None of the young people took part in the project without a trusted mentor. The young people from "MOMO – The voice of disconnected youth" had close relationships and support with each other through peer-to-peer volunteering, among other things. There were no bureaucratic hurdles for cross-border mobility between the three countries, as all of the young people involved were already of legal age.

The young people hope that the knowledge and experience gained will be used and implemented in the youth welfare system: "not always just talking, but achieving something."

The question of the impact of their participation also occupied the two young people Micha and Sebastian who reported on their experiences in youth welfare facilities and with professionals at the country meeting in Austria. They asked colleagues from Austria what we as professionals do with their input and what effect it had: "What became of the young people's contributions?" The professionals recorded their feedback to them on two flipcharts.
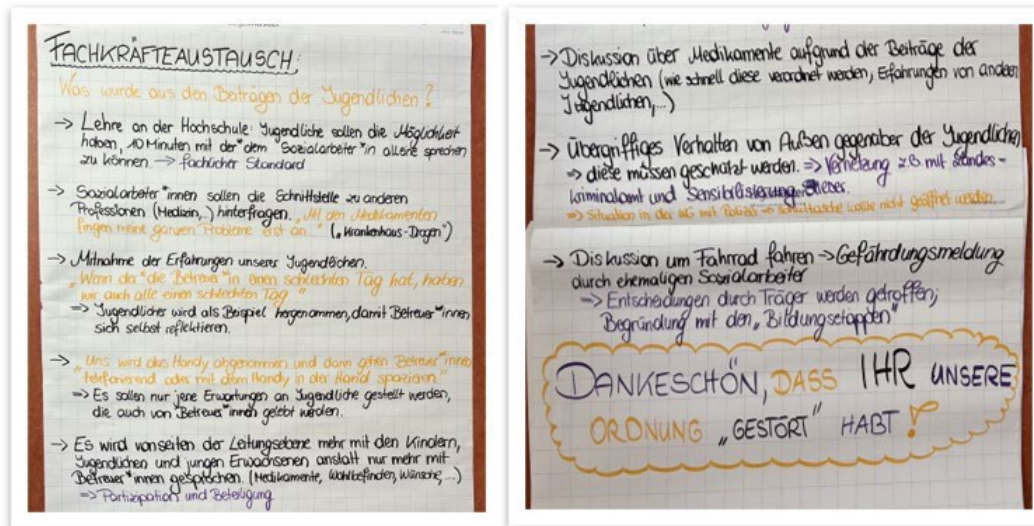

Fig. 21: Flipcharts for Micha and Sebastian, Stralsund 2023

We would like to thank the young people for the reflection and understanding they triggered. We also thank you for the time invested and the open exchange. A book from 1957 is called "Jugendliche stören die Ordnung"– "Young people disturb the order".[91].

"We thank you for having disturbed our order."

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91 Bondy, Curt (1957): Jugendliche stören die Ordnung, München.

The young people summarized their expectations beyond the end of the project:

- Youth welfare services must not look the other way; our experiences with the youth welfare system should be heard

- Our experiences should be heard in team meetings, at round tables ...

- We need help without coercion

- Employees need good training

- Young people affected must know where they can turn; we call for youth welfare services and institutions to take responsibility as advocates

- The media discussion must be turned towards a political and professional discussion; the often-heard narrative of "bad children" and "good system" is not true, but rather the other way around

- We want resistance instead of adaptation; the system must be renewed

- If young people are at risk of marginalization and exclusion from the youth welfare system, those affected must not be abandoned

- The conclusions drawn from the project should be communicated to the outside world and published

8   Reflection on the international exchange by the professionals

Nicole Rosenbauer

As far as we know, it was a novelty for academics and practitioners to exchange ideas on a specialist topic in the of educational support across federal states in such a composition and in a hybrid format – in a combination of digital exchange formats and country meetings on site – with the participation of young people. It was therefore interesting to gather and document the expectations, objectives and ideas about their own contribution, as well as the concerns and worries of all participating professionals at the start of the project and the related evaluative feedback at the end of the project. This documentation is summarized below.

The professionals were particularly interested in "new ideas, projects, possibilities", in the differences between countries, a good interplay between theory and practice and working together on topics. An overarching goal was to approach the topic of challenging care constellations from a "different perspective", based on a "further development of terms" and non-stigmatizing formulations. The strong interlocking of practice and science was rated as very positive and motivating. The international nature of the exchange made it possible "to look beyond one's own nose" and "not to stew so much in one's own juice" and to gain a better understanding of the structural causes of the phenomenon by comparing different national frameworks.

"Opportunity to sit at the table with three countries"

One effect of the international group and the cross-border exchange process was to gain more recognition for oneself and the pursuit of alternative approaches; to use the scientific underpinning and the project results to make one's own attitude and one's own approaches to young people in everyday practice concretely justifiable to others on the ground. The professionals would also like to see or gain "visibility" and attention to the fact that such an attitude for children and young people exists in practice and science.

The exchange dealt with various measures, dealing with institutional and structural boundaries, sharing theoretical concepts and participatory methodological approaches. Listening to good examples and experiences was not only enjoyable but also encouraged participants to seek, use and demand such opportunities. The professionals appreciated the "inputs" from other institutions, especially from neighboring countries – What works? Where are the problems? – and gaining an insight into different forms of organization and their effects. Approaches from other countries offered new perspectives and led to inspiration and new ideas.

The theory-practice transfer provided new ideas on how the knowledge gained could be put into practice and new input for the work. The professional exchange beyond the boundaries of their own institutions and across national borders with the involvement of young people and young adults was experienced as very valuable.

- The employees who are taking part in this project broadened their understanding, learned new things or perhaps remembered again the already heard
- We come to form new ideas about possible approach in practice
- It was very interesting to meet youngsters from Germany, who themselves had spent some time in care and form an NGO that speaks up in the name of youth who are in care

As part of the exchange project, links were established with the International Erasmus+ Congress "Contemporary Challenges of working with at-risk youth", hosted and organized by Mladinski dom Jarše in Radenci, Slovenia.

Fig. 22: Website© Mladinski dom Jarše, Ljubljana 2024 [92]

According to the feedback, the project has provided numerous "impulses". It has awakened even more interest in the "unheard" children and young people; in those whose voices are often ignored. The professionals involved describe the awareness of the importance of the respective stories of the young people and the realization that the quality of the encounters with them is crucial as an important insight. The project provided food for thought that led to a critical view of everyday life. The discussions with the young people also made it clear how much technical jargon can hinder understanding and talking to each other. The importance of participation became clear once again. How irreplaceable it is when young people speak for themselves and are listened to. Also how important it is to involve young people at all levels – including at a project level – where possible and feasible.

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[92] See: https://konferenca.mdj.si/en/home/

The practitioners suggest creative solutions for the future, such as exchange programs for young people across national borders through direct, concrete and low-threshold cooperation between youth welfare organizations.

The conversations with the young people were particularly memorable for the professionals. They often talked about the children's and young people's lost trust in youth welfare and adults, their disappointments and their injuries. Being controlled by others, the feeling of being "abnormal" and actions unexplained by adults put a strain on young people. This creates a feeling of "guilt" for them. The discussions made it clear how important respect and trust are in contact between educators and young people. At the same time, the young people made it clear that they also hoped their participation would have an impact "within the youth welfare system". Accordingly, we as professionals discussed the participation of young people after the first country meeting and consciously reflected on the risk of possibly producing disappointments and injuries again or making "promises" with involvement that are then not or cannot be kept. The inclusion of young people's points of view at least provokes the question of how these points of view and "voices" are or should be dealt with in a responsible manner. In any case, the participation of young people leads to complexity in the processing of topics and also to new and different questions regarding the organization and design of work contexts.

The fulfilled expectations of the professionals related in particular to the exchange attitudes that are necessary for successful care and support in challenging constellations. For the practitioners, this also included gaining new perspectives for the discourse and away from "system crashers" to a conceptual change, so that a reinterpretation in the debate is then also possible. The fact that professionals came together under this "clear direction" reinforced their own attitude and orientation – "having the feeling that you're not the only weirdo".

The project has provided motivation to "keep at it" and get involved again and again. Another result is the improvement of their own knowledge and openness to new things; this also aroused interest and motivation to engage more with participative methods such as socio-pedagogical diagnoses and family councils.

Last but not least

This report is intended as a documentation and appreciation of the project work. The international exchange proved to be extraordinarily fruitful and stimulating. It has led to many professional and personal encounters and connections; some have continued beyond the end of the project. The young people have contributed their expertise and experience. We hope that their voices and messages will be a common thread running through this report. The professionals involved see three "take home messages":

shut up and listen # nothing about you without you # no excuses

The interweaving of scientific knowledge and practical knowledge of the "experts from the professional world" and the perspectives and experiences of young people as "experts by experience" enabled all participants to gain insights and learning processes on how to find answers to challenges and avoid exclusion processes. Our experience in this project is that participation does not fail due to the willingness, interest and seriousness of young people. Thank you very much. Hvala vam. Baba. Adijo.

"Maybe we should not ask political leaders for change but start the change bottom up with the institutions – do it with your team and the youngsters you work with"

Internationaler Fachkräfteaustausch zu jungen Menschen in herausfordernden Hilfekonstellationen

Zentrum für Forschung, Weiterbildung und Beratung an der ehs Dresden gGmbH

Nachhaltigkeit

Unser Projekt wirkt nachhaltig auf unsere eigene Struktur, weil …

- Ideen praktisch umsetzbar sind und mit wenigen Ressourcen ermöglicht werden können.
- Haltungsänderung und Reflexion vieles bewegen können
- Jugendlichen mehr Gehör und Selbstwirksamkeit zukommt.
- Beziehungsabbrüche vermieden werden können was zu einer professionelleren und verlässlicheren Leistung führt.
- der Verein Momo Austria gegründet wurde - Motivation der Jugendlichen sich selbst stark zu machen ist sehr groß geworden und wurde klar durch das Projekt motiviert.
- Handlungsansätze, Zugänge und Erfahrungen über Organisationen und Landesgrenzen hinweg ausgetauscht werden – es entstehen dadurch neue Ansätze der Betreuung.
- durch den Austausch von Erfahrungen primäres Lernen stattfindet.

Transfer der Projektergebnisse

Unsere Projekt-Transferergebnisse sind …

- Erfahrungen mit der Sozialpädagogischen Diagnose.
- Ein Aspekt ist nicht nur das Erkennen von Möglichkeiten, sondern auch zu erkennen was es an Ressourcen, Fähigkeiten und Mittel braucht, um qualitativ hochwertig, insbesondere auch fachlich zu arbeiten.
- die deutliche Sicht von Unmöglichkeiten und Leistungsgrenzen.

Partizipation junger Menschen

Junge Menschen haben wir einbezogen über …

- das Format des Online-Forums.
- die Teilnahme junger Menschen an den beiden Ländertreffen in 2022.
- durch Erstellung sozialpädagogischer Diagnosen / Interviews mit Jugendlichen.

Internationalisierung

Unser Verständnis von Internationalisierung ist …

- Wenn sich eigene Angebote oder Abläufe innerhalb unseres Unternehmens auf andere nationale oder internationale Unternehmen übertragen lassen oder durch den internationalen FKA auch umgekehrt, dann wäre eine Form der Internationalisierung erreicht.
- Die Reflexion von Situationen anderer Träger und Länder zu verstehen und gleichzeitig zu verstehen, mit welchen Möglichkeiten und Schwierigkeiten zugleich die Situationen bewältigt werden, fördert bei jedem Treffen somit die Internationalisierung und stößt damit die ganz eigene Weiterentwicklung an.
- Enormer Wissensaustausch und Horizonterweiterung.
- Bewusstsein dafür, dass es bereits tolle Ideen und Projekte gibt.
- Ähnliche Problemfelder/ Herausforderungen.
- Neue Wege gehen.
- Mehr Vernetzung notwendig.
- Entbürokratisierung notwendig.
- Voneinander lernen und Miteinander wachsen.

Fig.23: Project profile; created by IJAB 2023