

reStart – Upcyclingworkshop for NEET youth

State of affairs

The issue of NEET-youth has attracted increased public and political attention in recent years. As was pointed out, the status of NEET brings about severe consequences for the young people's future well-being and also causes considerable economic effects (cf. Bacher et al. 2013: 9). In our everyday work with the young people, manifold social problems become evident: family problems, an environment which offers few support, changing demands of the labour market, and global economic and political crises which result in migration. An early withdrawal of this group from the status of non-occupation is therefore central to their future biographies. reStart therefore caters for a target group whose early and successful overcoming from the status of NEET has a significant and sustainable impact.

Goals

The primary goal of reStart is the exit of the young people from their status of NEET, i.e. their successful placement in schools, trainings, or jobs.

With our plan of measures we aim at:

- Emotional and mental stabilization of the participants, the increase of self-efficacy and agency, and a strengthening of their self-confidence.
- The training of soft skills like punctuality, reliability and politeness.

Main Foci of the project

Low-threshold access

reStart tries to engage its participants in a process of development by a creative approach. One of the most spirited aspects of reStart is maintaining a low-threshold access despite the ever increasing demand of its service and the increasing diversification of the target group. The fact that the team most often does not know in advance who is going to participate in a certain shift demands a lot of spontaneity on part the team. The only participation criteria are that the young people show up in time at the beginning of a shift. Due to the increased presence of youth who were not born in Austria due to the most recent violent expulsions in the Middle East, our group of participants is more diverse than before. This experience has also proven how flexible and quickly our project can react to a changing environment and new challenges. This flexibility is supported by the fact that multiple disciplines and competences are joined together in reStart: the professional entanglement of social work and art therapy as well as the training of relevant skills for the job market.

Promotion of individual potential

The promotion of individual potential of each participant is the core mission of reStart. The state of non-occupation affects their feeling of self-worth and of self-efficacy negatively. The longer this state persists, the more difficult it becomes to develop new perspectives and to escape the dynamics of social exclusion. Due to their desire for occupation, most of the participants show a great motivation to work. This motivation is being channeled in suitable solutions for each participant: these can range from basic preparatory work to complex sewing tasks. Every step in the workshop contributes to the final product and the young people experience the value of their work immediately by these little achievements. Activities in the workshop include the upcycling of various waste materials, such as tarpaulins, bicycle tubes, paper, and used bottles. This supposedly useless waste is transformed into everyday products which are of use and stylish design. The participants can themselves choose on which products and with what materials and tools they want to work on that day. Many of the young people possess experience in craftsmanship, an ability which receives recognition and appreciation in the context of reStart.

Participation

The project concept is designed for the young people to participate in certain processes. New ideas for products, work procedures or new materials are contributed by the participants on a regular basis. In the peer group there is further possibility for participation: the peers define their personal goals themselves and take responsibility for the organization of sales events, the presentation of the products and the development of new

product lines. On occasion of the International Women's Day, reStart organized a *Girls' Day* where young women were consulted on how the service of reStart can better be adapted to their requirements and ideas.

Networking and impact

reStart is well connected with the local community and across Vienna. It is in contact with other NPOs such as streetwork or youth centres as well as social welfare institutions. Several projects were realized in cooperation with partners such as the WAFF, FÖJ (Initiative Freiwilliges Ökologisches Jahr) and the New Design University St. Pölten. Even the former president of Austria, Dr. Heinz Fischer, and the district leader came to the workshop for a visit. Representatives of politics, economics, and the civil society are regularly invited to the workshop in order to connect with participants and to learn about the challenges of our target group.

Results

The development of reStart in the last couple of years has been a story of success. The service of reStart is highly appreciated by its participants. This becomes evident, among other things, because there are usually more young people who would like to participate than reStart is able to cater for. As we believe, this is partly due to the fact that the young people experience respect and appreciation for their skills, in contrast to many other situations in their everyday lives where their deficits are the focus of attention. Over the last years we could observe a positive development among the youth who has taken part in our project. Many of them were successfully placed in trainings, school-leaving qualifications or other qualification measures. Thus, the chance to overcome the difficult phase of non-occupation and low self-efficacy is enhanced.

The participants of our project receive a lot of attention and appreciation in contact with customers on sales events and directly experience the demand for their products. This way, the public is made aware of the challenges of NEET-youth. Examples of these sales events are the Bike Festival, the Baby Expo and the Maker Faire Vienna. At the Bike Festival, the stand of reStart was supervised by eight participants. This was a challenging situation for the young people with regard to communication and self-confidence, as our stand was attracting great interest. For the Baby Expo we had expanded our range of products for children: especially matching backpacks for parents and children turned out to be very popular. Our stand also received a lot of attention at the Maker Faire Vienna, a fair for DIY-products. Excursions to the UN or the BeSt (a career fair for young people) are planned so that participants can enhance their perspectives on training possibilities and career options.

From our experience we know that the service of reStart attracts youth who got into the status of NEET for very different reasons. We meet a great number of youth who legally have access to schooling, training and jobs but due to their biographies (little support from their surrounding, school drop-out, family problems and stressful experiences) belong to a risk group. The second group is youth who has only very restricted legal access to training and work even though they are in possession of remarkable skills and competences due to their experience of migration and flight. The project is able to react to this changing composition of its clientele because of its flexible structure. reStart is an open space for youth of all backgrounds where prejudices and resentments for each other can be overcome. The young people start to realise that despite different backgrounds, everybody has a similar need for recognition and social participation. The integrative concept of reStart – that youth with refugee background work together with Austrian youth – proves to be innovative and successful. By working in teams, the participants learn to better recognize their own competencies and to adopt new skills in exchange with others. The fact that such a heterogeneous target group participates in the same project and the atmosphere remains one of respect and does not change into hostility speaks of itself.

The success of reStart will be continued by the new project "preWork", which will launch in April 2018. Addressing the same target group, it offers regular employment at the extent of 10 hours per week in a woodworking- and design workshop for furniture. After participation for 6 months, various perspectives in the direction of education and work will be on offer.

Organization and funding

reStart is funded by the Ministry of Social Affairs until December 31, 2018. Donations of working materials for upcycling come from the cooperation with companies such as IKEA or music festivals. Organizationally, the project is embedded in the Caritas Vienna, specifically in the group Youth and Family of the thematic area Shelter and Habitation in the department of Emergency Aid. At the moment, reStart offers six shifts a week for four hours each. Participants can receive consultation by social workers on demand. At each shift two social workers are on duty who do the consulting and give work instructions.

References:

Bacher, Johann et al. 2013: „NEET“-Jugendliche in Österreich – Studienergebnisse. Linz: Institut für Sozial- und Wirtschaftswissenschaften, Web: http://www.isw-linz.at/themen/dbdocs/PPP_Bacher_Lankmayer.pdf