

SECOND NATIONAL REPORT

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Abeona

AN EFFECTIVE RESPONSE
TO CARE LEAVERS' PROFESSIONAL INTEGRATION



Erasmus+

GERMANY



La Plateforme Insertion



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Overview of the dissemination

1.1 Implementation of the tools

The IGfH (Internationale Gesellschaft für erzieherische Hilfen) in Frankfurt is an umbrella organization especially for topics of child and youth care; it is the German section of FICE (Fédération Internationale des Communautés Éducatives). In Germany, the organization has a wide range of schemes for professionals working in different fields of non-residential and residential child and youth care. The IGfH is also a lobby for the rights of young people who live outside their families. The philosophy of the organization is not oriented towards parties, politics, or religion. The foundation is the biggest in the area of extrafamilial child and youth care in Germany.

The Institute for Social Pedagogy and Organisation Studies at the University of Hildesheim is one of the most important research centres on the topic of leaving care, with excellent connections to the relevant academic field, professional associations and institutions practising in the field throughout Germany. Together with the IGfH, the University of Hildesheim has contributed to a rising awareness of care leavers' needs. The Abeona project is one component in this complex of researching, developing practice and lobbying.

On this basis, the IGfH and the University of Hildesheim have the opportunity to come into contact with a large number of institutions and individual professionals. For the Abeona project, we used these resources to promote the ideas behind the project and, especially, the implementation of the tools we collected during the youth worker training. We presented the tools at various workshops with professionals and care leavers – even going beyond the Abeona structure – and encouraged organizations to implement these tools. Against this background, we were able to bring the idea behind the Abeona project to a broader public. Working with two institutions which are members of IGfH (Grünbau gGmbH Dortmund and Kinder- und Jugendhilfekonzeppte Unna), we made concrete proposals for implementing the tools with young people in care.

In most cases the tools were not used in isolation, in the form of “implementing a new concept”, but were integrated into established models of good practice or were used to improve existing tools. For this reason, it was difficult to evaluate the tools' use by means of a questionnaire. The short period between the initial workshop and the data acquisition was too short to provide any serious feedback. As some professionals did not use the tools right from the beginning of the youth worker training, the period for evaluation was too short. Others experimented with them in individual cases, so they could not provide any feedback about a bigger cohort of care leavers.

The following conclusions from using the tools were collected in interviews or team meetings which were documented in memos by the project members (Carolin Ehlke and Severine Thomas). The following descriptions are a summary of these experiences and conclusions.

Jobtivity

Jobtivity was tested during the youth worker training in November 2016 in Dortmund. The participants were very interested in this method. It raised their awareness of the opportunity to reflect vocational orientation individually in a joyful way and making the preparation of vocational topics a subject of discussion early enough in residential care. From the point of view of the youth workers, the tool of Jobtivity offers a good means of facilitating this achievement.

All young people are under pressure to make a vocational choice early, ideally before finishing school. But they often cannot imagine their vocational career at that moment. In such circumstances, Jobtivity offers a method which could bring young people into contact with questions about jobs, school and vocational careers without the discussion becoming too serious. Additionally, it could be adapted to different topics and levels of information about jobs and career opportunities: it is flexible for different settings and target groups.

The professionals on the youth worker training learned that vocational orientation should be approached more intensively during residential care. Often, other topics related to care (mental stabilisation, biographical work, life skill training, group atmosphere etc.) rank higher than educational topics. The vocational education system is very complex in Germany. Youth workers in residential care are often unfamiliar with the different options: apprenticeships, training and supported vocational education, and types of training in vocational school. That could be one reason why there is not a strong focus on this subject while children are in care. For young people in care it is also difficult to deal with vocational perspectives, because they causes uncertainty and are ultimately an ongoing, intangible issue. At that moment there is not a strong connection to their actual living situation.

Later in this report we will discuss the needs of different target groups among care leavers. Visiting institutions for care leavers with special needs during the second youth worker exchange showed that different settings and tools are needed to work with care leavers on the topics of integration into vocational education and employment. For some of them, such as homeless young care leavers or those with mental health problems, Jobtivity was not seen as so useful, because many young people from these groups with special needs are even further from thinking about regular vocational options.

The difficulty which youth workers saw with using Jobtivity as a tool was that a trusting group situation is necessary. For older youths in care, it is not easy to arrange a setting to work with Jobtivity. Maybe this is also an indication of the attitude of youth workers in care:

individual case work dominates the relationship in care – especially with older youths. Thus, from the experience of using Jobtivity as a tool, one potential task could be to make group work with care leavers more attractive in Germany and to develop qualified concepts to emphasize its usefulness.

In Germany, all pupils aged 14–15 receive the vocational guidance offered by all job centres (located in nearly all towns). Thus, professionals from the federal job centres have good access to prepare all young people before they finish school. In the case of care leavers, however, job centre staff only become aware of their special situation in the care system if young people contact them. They can then give care home residents information on the special support that young people with special needs can get in the German vocational education system. However, care leavers are at high risk of leaving the school system before they got a qualification. The situation in care (drop outs and individual crises) means that the youth workers and other professionals around them first have to deal with the basic issue of keeping young people in school. Care leavers often make vocational decisions later than their peers. Perhaps Jobtivity thus needs to be adapted for those young people from specific professional profiles to personal skills and orientation.

How (not) to miss a job

“How (not) to miss a job” was evaluated as a good instrument to help young people reflect on their behaviour and to teach them the skills they need to apply for jobs and in work relationships. Additionally, making a video clip is something that young people are very familiar with nowadays. Nevertheless, the tool has to be used carefully: positive feedback has to be given at the end. And it is not predictable how young people will feel about the situation.

For a lot of different settings in Germany, the tool is very useful. It could be a good access route to working on personal skills even with older adolescents, and it also could be helpful for young people with special needs. During the training period, the participating institutions did not use the tool often, because it is not established in everyday practice. The child and youth care services, as mentioned before, often do not work very intensively on the specific topics of vocational integration. This is done by other special services. We have discussions in Germany about more networking between different social services for young adults. We also discussed this topic during the second youth worker exchange. These other special services beside residential child and youth care could thus perhaps profit much more from these methodological options. But the tool could also be used in residential care for training and reflecting on other areas of life.

Network maps

The network maps are already used in residential care work. It was new for the participants in the youth worker training course to also use this tool for vocational orientation and to identify resources for job applications, internships or other options. Using youth workers' private networks to gain access to the vocational labour market or employment market was identified as very helpful. But this source is also very limited. However, for young people, even visualizing their personal network with this tool is already very helpful, because as they draw their social relationships they are involved in developing ideas themselves about job options or just opportunities to learn more about different fields of work. The network maps could thus be a vehicle to communicate with young people about their social situation and the ideas they have about different topics in their life.

In Germany it seems that this tool could be used more easily than the others, because it could easily be integrated into individual casework. It is not only possible to apply the network maps to different topics; also, other people (friends, parents, trainers etc.) could be invited to add nodes to the network map. From this perspective, a network map could also feature social relationships and ideas about vocational integration.

1.2 Adaptation of the tools to the public and usefulness

The IGfH is a platform for professionals in the field, organizing workshops, conferences and educational trips, publishing books and a trade journal ("Forum Erziehungshilfen") with well-founded articles from researchers, specialists, practitioners and sometimes students. The organization also promotes political lobbying. Beside the youth worker training, we also presented the tools in the journal and in different workshops. The IGfH runs its own workshops about leaving care and is invited to conferences about child and youth care. These were good platforms to present models of good practice. Because the IGfH is a partner in different care leaver projects in Germany, these examples are a collection of various approaches. In these workshops, adaptations to national and international models and tools of good practice are often discussed.

The network maps allow social workers to adapt to the current demand in German social work with young adults for more connected care between different social services. The network maps are also used to describe care leavers' complicated position in social services, administrative topics and other issues during their transition. From this perspective, the network maps are a symbol of greater teamwork and systematic thinking. This also applies to the vocational integration of care leavers and other young people with special needs.

The "How to (not) miss a job" tool and Jobtivity (with other types of group work with care leavers as developed in Poland and France) offer an alternative approach to working with young people on their vocational interests and prospects. This is an interesting way to make

the individual analysis of potential and vocational interests more creative. This approach addresses the young people.

1.3 Vocational integration consciousness-raising

As we know already from other research on leaving care in Germany (see Köngeter, Mangold & Strahl 2015) the moderately infrequent use of vocational integration tools in child and youth care reveals a gap between child care and educational support. There needs to be more awareness and cooperation between different services. Thus, the activities of the Abeona project, training people how to use the tools and publishing their experiences help to emphasize the importance of focusing on educational topics in residential care. Experiences from other countries help to justify new methodological approaches and to motivate practitioners in Germany to try out other tools and settings. The focus on vocational integration is attached to the rising interest in local German communities to build up alliances for vocational education especially for disadvantaged young people. This includes not only social services for vocational integration and the public employment services, but also schools and child and youth care (for example). For this aim, the international perspective of the Abeona project offers helpful ideas and arguments.

1.4 Knock-on effects of Abeona activities on youngsters

The University of Hildesheim and the IGfH are working on an establishing of some tools in the professional community of child and youth care. Further workshops are planned for youth workers, stimulating the implementation of more group activities in child and youth care institutions, plus a proposal for a new transnational care leaver project to establish tools from other countries more deeply in the German landscape of child and youth care and when preparing for the transition from care.

1.5 Tools needed in structures

Some strategies to improve care leavers' vocational integration are mentioned above. In recent years, during the discussion about good practices during the transition from child and youth care, social aspects have been increasingly identified as key aspects of good support. Regarding vocational integration, it is also necessary for care leavers to be integrated into stable social networks – not only with peers, but also with supporting adults. These networks help them achieve greater success in education. Additionally, there is a realisation in the vocational integration system that employers also have to become more aware of the situation of young people with less familial support. To stop young people from dropping out of vocational education carried out at companies (a special practical model of training in Ger-

many), the teaching companies have to get more support to help young people to fulfil the expectations of their training workplaces. The different systems of vocational integration in Germany are starting to become more permeable for people with different needs. This is also an important sign of a good infrastructure developing for young people entering apprenticeships and employment.

Facts and figures about the structure

GrünBau gGmbH – “social vocational support company”

Grünbau took part in the training of youth workers and tested some of the Abeona tools for the vocational training of care leavers. GrünBau gGmbH has two main areas of operation:

- Labour market services: these consist of (non-profit) services in the following areas: employment opportunities for the unemployed, vocational qualification measures, preparation for employment and counselling, coaching and job placement.
- Child and youth services: as part of the vocational employment and qualification services, additional stabilising assistance in the residential and non-residential sectors (assisted living etc.) are available to young people in need of special support along with assistance for those who are tired of school. The economic and social corporate sections are integrated into a holistic operational concept:
 - vocational qualification of unemployed men and women
 - social stabilisation of participants
 - employment orientation and market activity through the provision of useful products and services.

Analysis of a European Youth Worker exchange

Three tools were selected to train 30 youth workers: “How to (not) miss a job”, Jobtivity and the Network map. This last tool was used later on individually with young people. This and Jobtivity were both deployed as group activities. “How to (not) miss a job” was analysed by the youth workers who were trained as somewhat complex to realize because of technical requirements (camera, knowledge of how to broadcast) and was thus eventually not applied.

The young people welcomed the two tools (Jobtivity, Network map) that were proposed as group activities positively. Their main comment was that they were concrete, and it was easy

to understand how they could be helpful for their situation. Neither tool was rejected in any of the different sessions.

Youth workers had very few recommendations for these tools. Regarding Jobtivity, they added the possibility to use this tool to help deal with other topics (e.g. the different types of insurance). Regarding the Network map, they thought about other resources to add (coaches at the young people's sport club) and also considered the other young people from the residential care institution as resources. The third tool (“How to (not) miss a job”) was rejected by the youth workers owing to the audience of non-accompanied foreign minors they work with. They believed that as these minor do not know the cultural codes of the hosting country or understand the humoristic aspect (do the opposite things to those that should be done to succeed in a job interview), this seemed confusing.

Youth workers noticed a change in the young people’s behaviour with regard to how they felt about their vocational integration. The Network map activity was perceived as a good starting point to make the young people change their positioning. They became progressively more active about their life project, and therefore more active about their vocational integration, taking more initiative on their own, without waiting for the youth workers, than they did previously. For example, young people found training or apprenticeship companies themselves as they identified the different people (e.g. their girlfriend's father) as resources to help them. Becoming more proactive, the young people now consider collaboration with the youth workers differently. They are more independent, but really do come to see the adults when they have tried and failed to find a solution or a resource for their problem by themselves.

3.1 Adaptation of the tools

In terms of adaptation, a first amendment was made. The jobs that were mentioned initially on the Austrian model (Jobtivity) were changed. The objective was to find different jobs which were all easier to access. The first change was adapting to the specifics of the labour market in the area where the activity was deployed. The second change was making the jobs more achievable, not only in terms of the young people's administrative situation but also considering the constraints of their school level. Replacing jobs such as “doctor”, “lawyer” with “electrician”, “plumber”, etc. was a way to avoid frustrating them.

The second amendment made consisted in using the Jobtivity tool to help inform the young people about other topics/themes that were relevant, addressing them from an educational point of view. Insurance was, for example, a theme around which Jobtivity was perceived as providing relevant support. Different situations/accidents from daily life were drawn on the cards (house fire, car accident, etc.). This was a tool around which young people and youth workers could exchange questions and information on the subject of insurance.

In terms of resources, no particular adaptation was necessary to use these tools efficiently: a group activity meeting between youth workers and young people was already scheduled once a month on a recurrent basis, during which these tools were brought into the institution. This group therefore already existed. The youth workers were looking for activities to use as educational content for these meetings.

In terms of adapting to the current steps forward in the young people's life plan, the Network map activity was highlighted by youth workers as a relevant way to help non-accompanied foreign minors to identify and differentiate between the resources represented by the adults working around their situations: policemen, social assistants, youth workers, teachers, etc.

3.2 Feedback of the youngsters

The young people accepted the feedback regarding Abeona tools, as also analysed by youth workers, very well. Regarding the Network map, even though young people might initially have said that they already know the resources they have in their network, they realised that they became more obvious to them and their awareness was raised after using the map. The activity they were the more enthusiastic about was Jobtivity. The main reason seems to consist in the playful aspect, which is perceived as a good educational vehicle.

3.3 Changes in practice

A strengthened awareness of vocational integration was also pointed out during the interview. Before Abeona activities were brought inside the institution, social workers worked separately on planning the pedagogical aspect of their activities. This has changed positively: it seems that Abeona activities have unlocked the team's ability to work as a real team on the content of the activities, mainly thanks to the advantages of playfulness which everyone identifies in the case of Jobtivity. Moreover, within the team, everybody receives the ideas coming from outside the institution more positively, which is a good thing. Regarding the Network map, all youth workers observe the change to young people as they used this Abeona tool not only to identify the resources in their network, but most of all to be more proactive and responsible for their project. The relationship between them and the youth workers has changed positively, in the sense that young people do not expect youth workers to do everything, as before. They become actors.

3.4 Other vocational integration activities discovered in the hosting country

During the different interviews I had in Germany, there are several aspects that I think are relevant to highlight in terms of relevancy.

Hildesheim Job Centre

Hildesheim Job Centre is an institution run jointly by the Federal Employment Agency and the district of Hildesheim. It helps people from the city and district of Hildesheim who cannot support themselves, or not fully, from their own income or assets despite being sufficiently fit for work. As well as matters related to statutory benefits, the Job Centre advises its clients, finds potential jobs and offers support, the aim being to enter employment and earn a living. In the entire district of Hildesheim, the Job Centre supports more than 20,000 people. The target groups are young people aged below 25, single parents, people in vocational rehabilitation, severely disabled people and people aged over 50. There is a special department where young adults aged between 18 and 25 receive support with starting vocational training, a job, vocational preparation or other training courses. In this context they may also receive social pedagogical support. The Job Centre funds vocational preparation measures for young adults run by education providers, finding places on measures of this kind for young clients. For 2017, there were plans for the following tasks, among others:

- Finding more in-company apprenticeships for disadvantaged young people; increasing cooperation with joint federal and regional employer service during campaign for children finishing Year 9/10 of school with and without a qualification.
- Assisted training: young people on VET courses at companies or in school who are in particular need of support
- Applicant-based job service for people who are easier to place on the VET market
- Coming into closer contact with children who are about to gain a school-leaving certificate
- Cooperating with vocational training schools and initiating school counselling services more frequently with the aim of encouraging schoolchildren to actively seek work at an early stage.

The Job Centre's work centres on ensuring people can support themselves and finding jobs or places on training schemes for a broad range of clients. These include care leavers, though they are not always specifically labelled as such. However, through a close cooperative venture with the University of Hildesheim, Hildesheim Job Centre is more aware of this aspect, and interested in helping care leavers find jobs or places on training schemes. To this end, a variety of measures aimed at integration and pedagogical support are provided. There is particular interest in challenges, needs-based mediation and personal support.

At Hildesheim Job Centre we participated in a session with young mothers with around 6-month-old babies. The objective of this session was to give them institutional, legal and practical information to help them return to work (the maternity leave period ends when the baby reaches its first birthday). They also offered the women very specific additional sessions based on their own situations. The Job Centre has developed a real marketing ap-

proach based on precisely identifying job searchers' needs thanks to their knowledge of each profile (migrants, young mothers, young people leaving the care system, etc.). I found this personalized approach really interesting.

Stiftung Bildung & Handwerk (Education and Trade Foundation, SBH Hildesheim)

Schemes for guidance, training and continuous education for young people

Careers guidance:

An exhaustive profile of individual interests, gifts, specialist knowledge and social skills is used to determine suitable occupations and professional fields.

Apprenticeships:

Inter-company vocational training scheme, advice about regulated professions, including modern and new professions, with relevant future prospects; monitoring work experience

Applying for an apprenticeship:

Helping young people make applications, providing information about the regional labour market and opportunities to find unfilled apprenticeships.

Support during education and training

During education and training, support can be provided with vocational school lessons and practical training elements; preparation for exams and tests, individual social pedagogical counselling.

The scheme is accessible to care leavers, but also open to all other disadvantaged young people. The measures aimed at integrating young people from residential care into the labour market do not usually explicitly take the particular living circumstances of these target groups into account. A greater awareness of the particular challenges facing care leavers would be desirable.

Pro Beruf GmbH

A second experimental programme in the Hannover area that caught my attention in terms of practice is Pro Beruf GmbH. This programme is a trial from the Job Centre of Hannover, the financer, for a 6-year period. This programme, for 15 young homeless young adults over the age of 18, proposes residential care through assisted flats. The second activity in this programme consists in educational support for these 15 adults. While the daily organisation is shared, the main activities are preparing the meals with the adults and also repairing the flats when needed. A high level of requirements in terms of rules, respect and engagement in the project is imposed by the institution. For example, if a resident misses 5 interviews

with a youth worker, they are excluded from the institution. Though this might be seen as forceful, as the rules seem strict, the young people present during the interview were satisfied with this high level of requirements.

Some other institutions, programmes and networks regarding vocational integration of care leavers were also discovered in the hosting country and will be described below.

The programme Wohnen und Arbeiten (WundA; “Living and Working”) under the roof of the Pro Beruf is described in detail as follows:

The project Wohnen und Arbeiten (WundA; “Living and Working”) is aimed at young adults aged between 18 and 25 who are among the long-term unemployed and live in precarious living situations.

These young adults are offered extensive help, ranging from dealing with difficult living situations to guiding them into the labour and VET markets. The project is also associated with an advice centre on housing emergencies.

WundA is made up of the following schemes:

- Accommodation, with places in temporary housing in the Hannover region, combined with schemes for personal and vocational stabilisation
- An employment and qualification campaign focusing on the trades and home economics
- Non-residential, in-person follow-up support (with housing, education and training and work)
- Help making plans for their immediate scholastic or occupational futures

The young homeless people include many people who have had experience with residential child and youth welfare services. In other words, WundA is a scheme aimed explicitly at care leavers. WundA can offer (sometimes for the first time) social and vocational prospects for those who would like or receive pedagogical mentoring after leaving the youth welfare services. This bridges a problematic gap between youth welfare and schemes for young adults in Hannover.

Bildung Begleitung Beruf (Education, mentoring, work) – Caritas youth social work (CJS), Hannover

“Launching into life” project

Education and training, housing, money issues – entering life as an adult involves a large number of new situations. The CJS’s programmes help young people in and around Hannover get over any initial growing pains. The target group is young people aged between 15 and 27. In its youth workshops, the CJS provides a sheltered space for courses and basic

schooling and training. There is also financial coaching for young people who cannot handle money well or are in debt. Assisted young person's housing supports young people who no longer want or are able to live with their parents, or who come from a youth welfare services organisation and now have to / want to live on their own.

The people cared for by CJS are often subject to particular psychological stresses and illnesses. In many cases, their psychological and cognitive abilities are severely impaired, meaning that there is little chance of helping this target group integrate into the mainstream labour market. For some of these young people, even the threshold to taking part in the training programme is too high.

EFES activating support for parents and young people

This is an innovative, independent youth support organisation focusing on semi-residential and non-residential youth welfare programmes.. The guiding principles of focusing on resources, systems, solutions and people's life-worlds form the a working basis for standards regulating quality and work.

One of its schemes for care leavers is MOB, a residential scheme (4 places) for young people in their own home. The scheme is aimed at young people aged 16 and over,

- who can no longer live in their family of origin because of family difficulties,
- for whom a pedagogical scheme in a group (residential group) is not suitable because it would overtax them, or for other reasons.
- who demand largely autonomous decision-making and room for manoeuvre, but still need a suitable safe place
- who are expected to become independent by the time they reach the age of majority
- who are mostly able to provide for themselves independently

During the Youth Worker Exchange, EFES also presented a scheme for young people with whom it is very difficult to make contact through residential and non-residential youth welfare services. Some live on the street or find a friend to put them up. Low-threshold contact schemes and financial management which sometimes involves money being paid on a daily basis provide a minimal level of support. These people, known as youth welfare system dropouts, are difficult to integrate into education, training and work. However, with its lack of constraints and openness, in cases so far the programme has created trust, and offers the chance of re-integration into mainstream living situations.

Johanniter Unfallhilfe Ahbergen (district of Hildesheim), facilities for unaccompanied refugee minors

Refugee minors living in Germany unaccompanied by an adult come under the Child and Youth Welfare Services Act and must be taken into residential care (care proceedings). In nearly all regional associations, the Johanniter supports children from refugee families with full-time and voluntary helpers. Since the arrival of numerous young refugees in 2015, the Johanniter have provided facilities for unaccompanied refugee minors in several federal states. The Johanniter run more than 20 residential groups for unaccompanied minors. The young people are accompanied by intensive social work. One of these facilities is located in the district of Hildesheim. Unaccompanied refugee minors then become care leavers. Many of them have only very limited opportunities for vocational integration due to trauma and uncertainty about whether they can remain, as well as a lack of language skills and educational prerequisites.

Forschungsnetzwerk Erziehungshilfen (Socio-educational Support Research Network)

At the University of Hildesheim's Institute of Social Work and Organisation Studies, there is a varied range of activities in the field of socio-educational support (Sections 27 ff. of the Child and Youth Welfare Services Act, German Social Security Code (SGB) VIII). The projects focus not only on different types of support, such as fostering or children's residential care, but also on overarching topics such as protective concepts in welfare settings or research into transitions.

Alongside this, another aim of the network is also to strengthen young people's participation, as the recipients of socio-educational support, as well as encouraging them to act in a self-organised manner. Participative research approaches are used above all in this context, and are being systematically improved.

Some of the research network's projects, including the Abeona project, investigate transitions by care leavers. Participation while support and transitions are being planned is also a key category in terms of considering and promoting educational / vocational interests.

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