

Volunteering@WU: Socially-minded and ready to make a difference?

Social background is one of the key factors in determining access to education. Growing up in poverty greatly reduces young people's chances of gaining a higher education later in life. The Volunteering@WU program works with kids from socially disadvantaged backgrounds, supporting them in their educational career and also benefiting student helpers by encouraging social responsibility and volunteering activities.

The volunteering initiative "Lernen macht Schule" was established in 2010, in cooperation with Caritas Vienna and REWE International AG. In this program, WU students can volunteer as learning or music buddies to help kids who have restricted access to educational opportunities due to poverty or social exclusion.

Building bridges between students and young people from completely different social worlds broadens the horizons of both sides and allows all concerned to learn from each other: The kids get help with their schoolwork from the students volunteering their time to support them and develop their individual interests and talents, and have the opportunity to learn from their positive example. The volunteers, on the other hand, benefit from getting to know people from different cultures and social backgrounds and are challenged to work on their teaching and interpersonal skills.

Learning Buddies

Learning buddies visit facilities run by Caritas Vienna (refugee homes, halfway houses for unaccompanied underage refugees, women's shelters, support centers, etc.) and the "Lernhaus" run by the Austrian Red Cross one afternoon a week to help kids with their schoolwork, study for tests, and participate in recreational activities.

In addition to the weekly visits, learning buddies have the opportunity to participate in field trips, tours, or workshops together with the kids. These activities help both sides learn new things, develop language and social skills, and strengthen the relationship between learning buddies and their partner kids.

Music Buddies

Music buddies participate in choir and dance groups together with kids from refugee homes sponsored by Caritas Vienna. Under the artistic direction of the musical education organization superar and the Caritas dance initiative "Tanz die Toleranz," music buddies meet with the kids once a week to rehearse, often working on several different performances each semester. Working in teams with other students, music buddies act as the choir or dance groups' managers, ensuring that the weekly rehearsals and performances run smoothly and supporting social cohesion within the groups.

Buddy Training

Preparatory courses spanning several days are held for both the learning buddy and the music buddy programs. Supervision and coaching during the program provide volunteers with additional support, and continuous training seminars are available on a regular basis.

As recognition for your work (including the preparatory training and your volunteer work), WU will award you a certificate, and participation can be counted as a free elective.

A Successful Program

Over 1000 students have participated in the Volunteering@WU – Lernen macht Schule program since 2010. Each year, approximately 160 students volunteer as learning or music buddies, offering active help and support to about 240 children and teens. Volunteers are not only making a valuable contribution to society, they are also learning to deal with and combat complex social issues – a key skill for tomorrow's leaders.

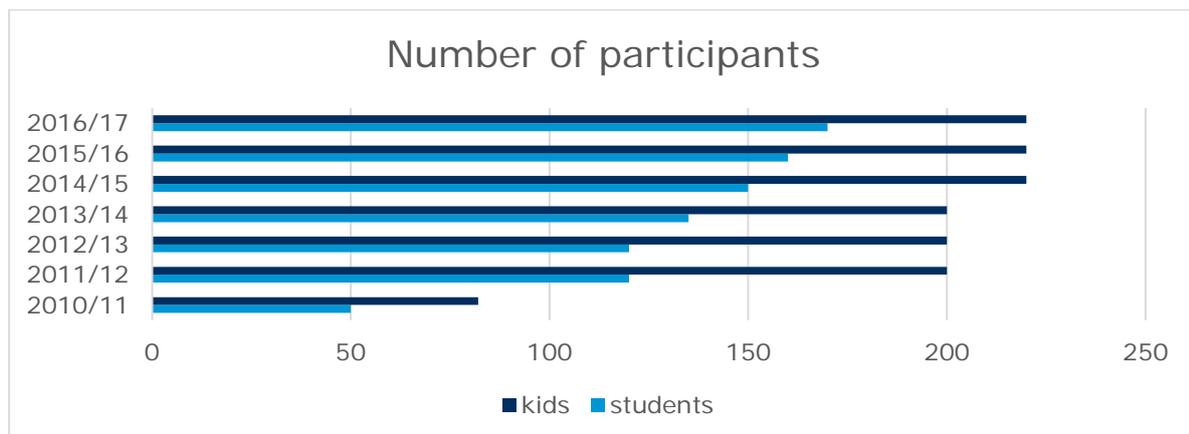
For more information, please see:

<http://www.wu.ac.at/students/volunteering>

Volunteering@WU – Lernen macht Schule: Key data and key facts

The Volunteering@WU program works with kids from socially disadvantaged backgrounds and student helpers by encouraging social responsibility and volunteering activities. The program follows the principles of **service learning**.

The volunteering initiative “**Lernen macht Schule**” was **established in 2010**, as a **cooperation** of **WU, Caritas Vienna** and **REWE International AG**. In this program, WU students can volunteer as **learning or music buddies** to help kids who have restricted access to educational opportunities due to poverty or social exclusion.



Over 1000 students have participated in the Volunteering@WU – Lernen macht Schule program **since 2010**. The volunteers meet kids in **facilities run by Caritas Vienna** (15 facilities are in the program) one afternoon a week to help them with their schoolwork and participate in recreational activities. The number of **volunteering hours** per student are about **30h/semester**.

Preparatory courses, training seminars, supervision and **coaching** provide volunteers with additional support. The total number of **seminar hours per participant** are about **20h/semester**. As recognition WU awards the volunteers a certificate and participation can be **counted as a free elective**.

Volunteering@WU offers also **German language courses for refugee students**, in this program WU employees and master students volunteer in conversation classes. Since 2015 about **200 refugees participated** in the courses and in 2017 **5 students** registered as regular students.

The program is **funded by REWE International AG** and several **partners and sponsors** such as currently Unilever Austria, Almdudler, Stadt Wien Marketing, Umdasch Foundation, Caverion Österreich, Sofidel, Ströck and Greenyard Fresh Spain.

The project partners of “Lernen macht Schule” are the team of **Volunteering@WU** (3 part time employees), the **fundraising department of Caritas Vienna** and the **corporate communication** and **sustainability departments** of **REWE International AG**.