

Volunteering@WU

What were the conditions and steps taken that have contributed most to the success of the measure?

Successful bridge-building between students and children from socially disadvantaged groups is much more complex than simply pooling together or connecting both sides. Learning from each other implies relationship building. Relationships in turn require time and an adequate framework in order to emerge and grow.

The implementation of the following conditions and quality assurance measures improved the relationships between students and kids significantly and enable the acquisition of competences as well as broaden the horizons for all participants:

- **Process of matching:** Every term, the process of matching the students with children and teens takes place at the WU in cooperation with the participating partner host organizations (Caritas / Austrian Red Cross facilities; as supervising body and a reference point for families). The criteria for building up tandems or teams include distance to the service destination and the available time of the students, gender specific aspects, sufficient level of maturity, as well as experience, interests and the language knowledge of the students. Students that actively volunteer for more than one term continue to work with the respective children or teens. A change of supervising students is avoided as far as possible.
- **Training:** Students are adequately prepared for the service in an unfamiliar working environment and protected from excessive demands. The first part is a two-day basic training course offered to students at the beginning of their voluntary activities. The second part consists of practical seminars that are provided as electives throughout the term and aim to support students with their ongoing workload. The basic training course and the practical seminars are both compulsory elements for participation in the program.
- **Facilitating relationship building:** Within the framework of “Volunteering@WU - Lernen macht Schule”, joint leisure-time opportunities are defined to intensify the relationships between students and children and teens. For this purpose, students receive a “buddy budget” of up to EUR 50 per person per term to finance leisure-time activities (for example, zoo or museum entrance fee) or to buy learning-supporting materials. Additionally, students and children are invited several times during the term to take part in joint excursions, guided tours and workshops at educational institutions to engage in learning by playing, to strengthen their social competence and to deepen their relationships. Moreover, REWE International AG and its partner firms offer leisure-time program activities, for example, joint attendance of various sports and cultural events.
- **Support at host organizations:** Another key resource that supports buddy relationships is the coordinators of Caritas Vienna and the Austrian Red Cross. The coordinators function as contact persons at each of the host organizations. They supervise students at the premises and serve as primary contact for the planning and organization of students’ activities as well as for questions or problems with children and teens. These contact persons, who have longer history of cooperation with the families and enjoy their trust, are able to create credibility and acceptance for students’ activities. On this way supervision supports relationship building on the one hand, and fortifies students through appreciation and positive reinforcement on the other.
- **Supervision and reflection:** Supervision provided as classroom component by the university is another central support element for the buddy-relationships: During the term, a group supervision session is held and serves supporting students where contact persons from the host organizations and other team members are present as necessary. A closing seminar held at the end of the semester provides chance for the evaluation of relationships, reflection of results, and for organizing farewell events. Students are required to participate in the program for at least one term and to hand over their reflective journals and reflection papers. The reflective journal is supposed to be completed on a regular basis, reporting and documenting the time students and children/teens spent together.

- Graduation and recognition: The program management team pays special attention to the planning of the completion of the buddy relationships and arranges farewell events with the children and teens. Students are supported in this final activity by their program supervisors at WU and at the host organization. The volunteer work of the students is recognized by the WU certificate, which is awarded at an annual ceremony. At this ceremony, the Rector or Vice-Rector of the WU, the managers of Caritas Vienna, as well as the board members of REWE International AG make statements expressing their appreciation to the students.

*For detailed information on quality assurance measures see: Mackerle-Bixa, Stefanie, Paul Rameder, and Anna-Maria Patzl. 2015. „Lernen macht Schule“: Soziale Verantwortung als Hochschulprogramm [‘Lernen macht Schule’: Social responsibility as university program].” In *Erfahrungen teilen - Vielfalt erleben [Sharing experiences - experiencing diversity]*, edited by Susanne Binder and Eva Kössner, 45-59. Wien: LIT Verlag.*

Which stakeholders were involved in identifying needs and in the planning and design of the measure? (text field)

"Lernen macht Schule" was initiated by Caritas Vienna and Vienna University of Economics and Business with support from REWE International AG.

Who was involved in implementing the measure?

Implementation of the measure involves students of Vienna University of Economics and Business and 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. 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.

Who has key responsibility for implementation?

Vienna University of Economics and Business and Caritas Vienna

How are the different people involved in implementation being supported (e.g. do they receive specific 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. The total number of seminar hours per participant are about 22h in the first and approx. 9h in the following semester. As recognition WU awards the volunteers a certificate and participation can be counted as a free elective.

What have been the obstacles to introducing the measure? How have they been addressed?

Unlike in the US, there are no enforced political agenda behind introduction of service-learning or community service programs at the Austrian universities. Rather, it happens as a result of institutional isomorphism in which best practices in the field of higher education are introduced in order to stay competitive on the global educational arena. This pressure is even more noticeable, given the triple accreditation (EQUIS, AACSB, AMBA) that WU achieved. Even though this program represents a pioneer service-learning experience in Austria, without sufficient support from other universities in the country and replication of best practices, it runs the risk of isolation. In order to spread the idea of the initiative, a scaling-up process took place in the last 5 years at higher education institutions of Lower Austria and Salzburg. In both cases, similar structures based on the “Lernen macht Schule” blueprint were introduced. Since 2013, around 20 students from the Applied Pedagogy University in Lower Austria in Baden engage

every year. Within the framework of their teaching education, they work as learning buddies at the host organizations of Caritas Lower Austria. In cooperation with the Salzburg Ethics Initiative students are engaged as learning buddies through the University of Salzburg since 2014.

Is there a monitoring/evaluation system in place?

Yes

Who monitors and how?

“Volunteering@WU - Lernen macht Schule” is supported by research at several levels. A university research project at the Institute for Non-profit Management explored the impact of learning buddy activities on students’ attitudes (generalized trust, attribution regarding poverty, etc.) and patterns of behavior (voluntary engagement) (Meyer et al. 2016). Moreover, two institutes at the Management Department (Non-profit Management and Business Education) offer WU students supervision of their theses on community service learning-related topics. Bachelor and master theses have completed so far focused on the participating children, students and host organizations from a non-profit organizational and pedagogical perspective (Faber 2014, Modelhart 2014, Kaufmann et al. 2015, Fiala et al. 2013).

Faber, Alexander. 2014. "Motive für Freiwilligenarbeit - Eine Untersuchung der Motivations schreiben der freiwilligen TeilnehmerInnen [Motives for volunteering - a study on motivation letters of volunteers]." Bachelorarbeit, Nonprofit Management Institute, Wirtschaftsuniversität.

Fiala, Markus, and Andreas Urabl. 2013. "Mentoring Programme: eine qualitative Untersuchung zur Wirksamkeit der Initiative „Lernen macht Schule“ aus der Perspektive teilnehmender SchülerInnen und MentorInnen [Mentoring programs: a qualitative study on the efficiency of the initiative 'Lernen macht Schule' from the perspective of school children and mentors]." Masterarbeit, Institut für Wirtschaftspädagogik, Wirtschaftsuniversität.

Kaufmann, Gerhard, and Julia Strohmayer. 2015. "Das Mentoringprogramm aus lernpädagogischer Sicht. Eine qualitative Befragung von Betreuerinnen und Lehrkräften [The mentoring program from the perspective of learn-pedagogy. A qualitative survey of advisers and teachers]." Masterarbeit, Institut für Wirtschaftspädagogik, Wirtschaftsuniversität.

Meyer, Michael, Michaela Neumayr, and Paul Rameder. 2016. "Disentangling Self-Selection and Participation Effects: The Impact of Service Programs on Business Students." ISTR, Stockholm.

Modelhart, Simone. 2014. "Kompetenzerwerb von Studierenden durch die Teilnahme an Service Learning Projekten von Hochschulen [Students gaining competencies by participating in service learning projects at universities]." Masterarbeit, Nonprofit Management Institute, Wirtschaftsuniversität.

Are further evaluation planned and when will the results be available?

Despite research projects and the supervision of bachelor and master thesis, “Volunteering@WU - Lernen macht Schule” is evaluated in terms of regular dialogues among all stakeholders (students, trainers, supervisors, contact persons from the Caritas and Red Cross organizations...) in order to document the benefits of the program, and to record suggestions for the further improvements. In addition, written feedback forms – collected once in a semester - assist registering opinions and notes of participants which aids identifying problem areas at an early stage and elaborating joint solutions.

What has been the impact of the measure?

It is a matter of common knowledge that education not only leads to better chances on the job market, but also serves as a prerequisite for active participation in societal life of a democratic country. In Austria, the structure of society consistently reproduces itself, given the comparatively low proportion of the population with tertiary education (OECD 2016). Social class still remains one of the most important barriers hindering access to education. Poverty in the family and concomitant social exclusion severely lowers chances of successful participation in higher education. “Volunteering@WU - Lernen macht Schule” focuses on the interaction of WU students with children from socially deprived families. The program serves as a bridge between otherwise two separated social strata of society – students from

middle or upper-class families and less fortunate children from working class families or parents who are first generation immigrants to Austria. The paths of these two groups most probably would have never crossed unless the initiative had brought them together. By interacting with each other through school related and cultural activities, both students and children are faced with a challenge of confronting societal inequalities in real-life situations. The program explicitly connects two groups of actors embedded in different social contexts with the aim of broadening the horizons of each group of participants.

What resources are involved (material, space, amount of funding)?

Cooperation among the founding partners (WU, Caritas Vienna, REWE International AG) is mutually rewarding and beneficial, because it combines competences, solutions and ideas from the private, educational and social sectors. Each of the partners enables the program's implementation by contributing vital resources for its long-term success. WU supports the program by providing organizational and intellectual resources. These are: the program management team, which consists of three WU employees subordinated to the Vice-Rector for Academic Programs and Student Affairs; the corresponding research program and theses supervisors at the Management Department; and the increasing involvement of faculty members in the activities of Volunteering@WU. In-kind and pro bono resources are supplied by Caritas Vienna. Financial resources are provided by the major sponsor, REWE International AG as well as by over a dozen of its partner corporations.

Is the measure still running? If not, why not?

Yes, the measure is still running.

Further info (website, contact person e-mail, organisation details)

www.lernen-macht-schule.at

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