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THE PROFESSOR EGGERS COURSE

A PROGRAMME ASSISTING YOUNG ADULTS WITH MENTAL ILLNESS TO OBTAIN A SCHOOL CERTIFICATE TO IMPROVE THEIR EMPLOYABILITY AND AUTONOMY.

Experiencing mental illness during childhood can mean spending time in clinical therapy instead of going to school. This can result in young people leaving school without any certificate or chance of integration into the labour market.

About 300 young people leave school without any certificate every year in Essen and without any prospect of integration into the labour market. About 4,000 young people under 25 years old are unemployed and live on welfare; one quarter of these are single parents.

In the framework of its screening project 'Support 25', which ran from 2007-2009, the job centre in Essen found out that nearly all of their 300 clients under 25 had been diagnosed with a mental health issue (post-traumatic and stress disorder, depression, borderline disorder and others). At the same time in 2006 the Professor Eggers Foundation and the Volkshochschule, started a partnership to offer courses devoted to young people with mental illness.

The Professor Eggers Foundation specialises in socio-psychiatric and rehabilitative living and housing models for young people suffering from schizophrenia or other mental illnesses. The Volkshochschule is an adult education centre with a Department for Second Chance Education.

THE PROFESSOR EGGERS COURSE

Started in 2006 the course is a joint project between the Department for Second Chance Education at Volkshochschule and the Professor Eggers Foundation. It helps young adults with mental illnesses like schizophrenia, depression and social phobias to obtain school certificates which they didn't receive during their compulsory

education because of their illness and hospital stays.

The specific features of the course are:

- a quiet learning environment in small groups
- psychosocial accompaniment by an experienced psychologist
- experienced teachers providing individual learning models
- additional support from a theatre pedagogue
- competence orientation
- a strict weekly monitoring of each student's progress





YOUNG PEOPLE WITH MENTAL ILLNESS ARE ABLE TO OBTAIN THEIR **SCHOOL CERTIFICATION**



70%

OF THE BENEFICIARIES WENT ON TO OBTAIN A FURTHER SCHOOL CERTIFICATION

- constant individual feedback given to the students
- specific evaluation of all courses given

Specific attention is paid to the preparation of the transition from school life during the course to working and social life, in particular through:

- training to write CVs and prepare applications
- training in public speaking and communication
- training in IT
- a two week internship
- attending a series of events that advocate the integration of young

people with mental illness in an entertaining way

- theatre projects
- photo exhibitions
- a joint initiative with the local rotary club to restore and preserve historical public signs

SUCCESS FACTORS

- The results achieved so far are much better than expected and show that young people with mental illness are able to obtain their school certification if they are supported in a dedicated way.
- After two years, over 70% of the beneficiaries went on to obtain a further school certification with eight of them either achieving a qualification to attend higher secondary education or receiving the highest German school certification.
- The individual and personal development of the beneficiaries was impressive with an evident improvement in their self confidence and social and communication skills.

INNOVATION

- A specific methodology was identified to help young people with mental illness get their school certificate and become reintegrated into society and the labour market step by step.
- Cooperation between the city of Essen (Adult Learning Centre) and the third sector associations involved has proven to be mutually beneficial and has led to positive results.
- The course itself is unique in Germany and shows the impact of such initiatives in terms of reducing prejudice and improving integration.

CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED

This project addresses head on some of the main challenges that young people with mental illness face; from attending lessons daily to taking public transport and being asked to relate and communicate with classmates and teachers. This requires a specific individualised support and some dedicated investment in terms of the professional expertise needed.

The results achieved both in terms of formal educational attainment, personal development and social inclusion show that these kinds of initiative provide a unique opportunity for learning, improving self confidence and breaking cycles of isolation and bullying.

