



CONTACT VISITS VIENNA

Involvement, participation and information for older people in the community.

What are the objectives of the project?

The objective is exchange information between the city administration and senior citizens:

- to ensure city-wide comprehensive information on social services relevant for older people
- to gather comprehensive and specific information on the needs of older people.

Timeline

There is a long tradition of contact visits in Vienna. They began in 1977.

Background

There are many reasons behind the setting up of the Contact Visits initiative. Vienna wanted to comprehensively inform its elderly population (or at least those people who had been living in Vienna for a long time) about all the different social services options available to them. From 2000 on, a general consensus developed in the city for involving elderly people in the political and social development of the community. Politicians and social science researchers were increasingly interested in systematically evaluating how elderly people living in Vienna learned about the services available to them.

Who is responsible for the project's implementation?

The Contact Visit Service is run by the city. Responsibility is shared by the city council, the Vienna Social Fund (who are responsible for the social services in the city) and the NGO 'Wiener Sozialdienste' (Vienna Social Services). Wiener Sozialdienste trains the new volunteers in how to carry out the visits

How does the project work?

Every Viennese senior citizen is visited by a volunteer from the Vienna Social Fund in cooperation with the NGO Wiener Sozialdienste and the respective local district mayor. Voluntary workers, usually senior citizens themselves, act as intermediaries between older people in the community and the local authorities.

These visits include:

- an assessment of the needs, concerns, interests and contentment with the living environment
- gathering information on the older persons activities, aid and support they receive from family and organisations

- contact with social organisations if needed
- information on opportunities to participate in the local community.

The volunteers give their findings to the local authorities every month.

People with a migrant background are interviewed in their mother tongue when possible, including Bosnian, Croatian, Serbian and Turkish.

What are the results of the project?

Vienna council is using the information to establish the needs and requirements of older people. This information will be built into the social and health planning of the city.

The feedback from the older people on social services, as well as district and neighbourhood issues will be integrated into the plans.

Was the project evaluated and were there any follow-up activities?

The project is assessed annually. It has been used in the Vitalis project¹ and in the Vienna council monthly reflection meetings. The visiting service has met all its objectives.

An in-dept survey was carried out in 2010. The findings were extensively evaluated and reported to the district steering committees. The steering committees also looked at the evaluations carried out over the preceding three years to detect trends. The findings of these surveys and evaluations shape the content of the contact visits.

What lessons did you learn?

Innovation and remodelling the service can be a challenge, given its long history.

It took a long time to clarify the legal and organisational framework for the evaluation. The evaluation development also took a lot of time.

To tackle these challenges the stakeholders tried to implement the project gradually, starting with pilot districts. The visitors are screened and offered intensive training before they begin conducting the visits.

How is the project funded and what resources (financial and human) are dedicated to its delivery?

It is financed through the Vienna Social Fund. Three full time employees (social workers) and 130 voluntary workers run it. The district mayors' staff give administrative support.

Who is the contact person for the project?

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¹ 'Vitalis - Vulnérabilités en contexte' is a research project on the vulnerability of social work and its coping strategies. The research was recently completed and was a Franco-Austrian co-operation project. The information used in the research included that collected through the Viennese visiting service.

Website

There is a page on the website of the NGO Wiener Sozialdienste dedicated to the contact visit service: <http://www.wiso.or.at/wiso/kbd.php>.

If you have an example of a good practice that you would like to include in the database, please send an email to caroline.greene@eurocities.eu.



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