

SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAMME

2011/2013

Study Visit Report

By

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Another thank you goes to all the employment counsellors at ARINET who welcomed me with open arms and for introducing me into their daily work, showing me around and allowing me to participate. Special thanks to Andreas Brillert who provided great support throughout my visit and beyond and for the help in writing this report.

I would also like to thank my organization, Interwork Arbeitsassistentz and its Managing director Margit Burger who encouraged and supported me in applying for the scholarship.

And finally a big thank you to EUSE for selecting me for this scholarship and giving me the opportunity for this brilliant experience.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. BRIEF OVERVIEW OF MY ORGANIZATION

Arbeitsassistenz (AASS) is a service enshrined in the Behinderteneinstellungsgesetz (BEinstG) (Act on Hiring Disabled Persons) since 1994. The core mission of Arbeitsassistenz is the counselling and guidance of people with disabilities/illnesses to ensure that they attain and secure a place of employment.

In Lower Austria Arbeitsassistenz is split in different organisations each focused on a specific target group. These are people with 1. physical disabilities/illnesses, 2. cognitive disabilities/illnesses, 3. psychological and neurological disabilities/illnesses, 4. hearing impediment and 5. impairment of vision.

Interwork Arbeitsassistenz offers services to adults with psychological and neurological disabilities/illnesses. Interwork also provides services to adolescences and young adults (max. 24 years) with psychosocial disturbances as well as to businesses and enterprises that employ them.

People who are in danger of losing their job on account of their disability/illness (psychological and neurological) or who need support in finding a job can turn to interwork Arbeitsassistenz for help. Interwork services are provided free of charge.

Interwork Arbeitsassistenz is a project supported by the Federal Social Welfare Office (Bundessozialamt), Federal Employment Office (AMS), Federal Province of Lower Austria (Land NÖ) and European Social Fund (ESF). It was founded in 1996. In 2008 Interwork merged with the "Psychoziales Zentrum" (PSZ), an association that offers a range of social and social-psychiatric options throughout Vienna and Lower Austria. PSZ has offices located in Vienna and Lower Austria (for further information see www.psz.co.at).

My organisation has 11 employment counsellors and is located in The South of Lower Austria with 6 branch offices. Our main office is situated in Baden (see Fig.1). It guarantees the availability of, access to and accessibility of employment integration services to our target group.

1.2. MY PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUND

I studied Psychology at University of Vienna and specialised in clinical and health psychology. Since 2006 I am certified as an organisational Psychologist. My work experiences include psychiatry and psychosomatic clinics. I have been employed with Interwork-Arbeitsassistenz since 2004. As a support employment officer I am responsible for two locations in Lower Austria: Neunkirchen and Wiener Neustadt.

The focus of my role is the integration and maintaining of employment of people with psychological and neurological difficulties into the first labour market.

Goals and Tasks of my work

...for people with psychological and neurological disabilities/illnesses

- *) Providing support in searching and securing employment; supervision/guidance with the transition from school to work (no job coaching)
- *) Clarification of professional perspectives, information and counselling regarding professional alternative goals.
- *) Working out constructive solutions and helping with crisis management
- *) Counselling and guidance with measures that primarily serve to secure long-range professional (re)integration, physical (re)habilitation and/or establishing a livelihood
- *) Providing assistance in securing employment

...for businesses

- *) Information about the legal and financial conditions encountered when employing people with disabilities/illnesses
- *) Consultation regarding implications of disabilities/illnesses in the workplace and health promoting measures
- *) Speedy and unbureaucratic assistance with crisis management and with arriving at constructive solutions
- *) Support with the search for and employment of eligible employees from our target group



Fig..1 locations of Interwork

1.3. AIM OF STUDY VISIT

My objectives were to learn and discover new ideas and introduce them to my organisation. I searched for a way to improve and adapt our recruitment processes to help and maintain our clients in the work place. My passion was always to help and support my clients in their daily work and facilitate their commitment and motivation to their employee. I was also very interested in a skills transfer to the benefit of both organisations with respect to the similarities and differences between the German and Austrian Supported Employment Assistance Services with an emphasis on the following...

* Who are their referring partners? Do they obtain clients from regional or national sources, such as pension insurance authorities, health insurance funds, hospitals, social services, doctors or advisory centres?

* Which tools, training materials and co-operatives/ networks to other counselling centres do they use to help remediate vocational-specialist and social deficits in a target orientated way in order to qualify their clients for the first labour market?

* What are their acquisition strategies for the first labour market: direct vs. stealth acquisition, fixed cooperation with companies, split vs. centralized acquisition responsibility for work assistances

* How are they funded and how does the sources and level of funding available relate to their work procedures, outcome and success rates?

* Which sources of additional income within the scope of flexible employment schemes for mentally ill people who are not yet available, cannot yet return or are no longer available to the primary labour market, are used?

Along with the aims above, I hoped to gain knowledge about Company Health Management that German Supported Employment Assistance Service offers in form of workshops and seminars. I intended to learn about funding, acquisition and outcome. I was also interested in how it is used as an employment-promotion instrument for the primary labour market and how it improves the cooperation between employment services and companies.

Last of all I hope to set up a sustained and long lasting collaboration between the German and Austrian Supported Employment services to improve and adapt our processes.

2. OVERVIEW OF THE ORGANIZATION VISITED AND SERVICES THEY PROVIDE

2.1. ORGANISATION INFORMATION



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ARINET GmbH is located in Hamburg/ Germany. ARINET (Arbeitslosen-Integrations-Netzwerk GmbH) translates for “network for integration of unemployed”.

ARINET was founded in 1995 as a project of Hamburg Initiative to help integrate people with psychological disabilities into the workplace.

ARINET covers a broad range of consulting and support services to severely disabled people with psychological and neurological problems. Severely disabled in this case is categorised as those people with a degree of disability of at least 50% . ARINET facilitate the reintegration into work and for employers of this target group.

In 1998 ARINET attained charitable status (ARINET gGmbH) offering integration field services (Integrationsfachdienst or **IFD** for short) according to the severely disabled person's law.

In 2010 the work accompanying IFD, known as “**Hamburger Fachdienst**”, was affiliated into their organization. Hamburger Fachdienst provides assistance in securing employment for people with psychological and neurological problems and their prospective employers.

“**Arbeit im Netzwerk**” offers integration services with lower barriers to entry. It is directed at people who can't fulfil the high job market standards yet. It offers a contingent in working opportunities which can be customised around the needs of the both employees and employers.

Continuous socio-paedagogical care and qualification measures support the individual process of integration. The work opportunity serves not only as a conveyor instrument, but also as a diagnosis instrument.

At the end of the 12-month conveyor period profound statements can be met concerning the working ability and occupation ability of each participant recommended suitable connection perspectives.

„**Zurück in Arbeit**“ (“Back to Work”) focuses on people with occupational disability or invalidity on account of psychic or neuro-logical illness and who are able to work 8-10 hours short term and 15 - 20 hours long term. At the start an individual plan is developed for the first 3 months. Then an occupation phase with qualification and training units (up to 24 months) follows.

"**Unterstützte Beschäftigung**" ("supported employment") takes place in companies of the general job market.

The participants have the possibility to test different occupational fields and to qualify under support of advisers within two years.

In 2010 „**NPO-Service**“ (services for Non-Profit-Organisations) started. NPO-Service offers work opportunities for 65 people lasting up to 12 months. It is considered as a protected and at the same time practically oriented preparation on the reentrance into the labour market

Under technical and socio-paedagogical instructions the participant realise independently charitable activities and projects of different kind - from the first idea about the conceptual planning up to the practical conversion.

In 2001 **vocational rehabilitation** (Berufliche Rehabilitation) was added. It offers a labour-market orientated qualification on an out-patient basis. Vocational rehabilitation has continued to grow over the years.

In June 2009 a craftwork production facility (“**Handwerker-Haus**”) in Groß Borstel was opened. Long term unemployed who suffer from psychological disorders are systematically introduced to wood working.

Some months later **SDC** (Service- und Dienstleistungszentrum) started. SDC is considered as a preparatory module of vocational rehabilitation that trains business management/ commercial education. It is a 3 month business practise training and supplies support for commercial processes within ARINET.

In the same year **PiCo** („Personenindividuelles Coaching“) started to support long term unemployed with severe psychological disability to find back into the labour market. Pico offers individual and group training sessions.

Today ARINET has 52 staff members that provide these services to approximately 305 clients per year.

Within Occupational health management (Betriebliches Gesundheitsmanagement or BMG for short) ARINET offers a comprehensive training program for employees and employers to maintain health and safety in the workplace.

NetQ, started in 2010, is a training and consultation program exclusively for employees with severe disabilities and for “SMEs” in Hamburg. The programme contains education modules that can be booked individually and combined with each other. The participation in the events is free.

In 2012 ARINET conducted over 120 advanced and continuing education courses/ workshops.

CSR is an ESF project with the aim to develop and implement individual CSR strategies for the support and maintenance of the psychological well being of employees in “SMEs”.

The end to end process spans approximately 18 months and subdivides itself into the following phases: Preparation, Analysis, Qualification, Guidelines, Implementation, Evaluation.

ARINET helps job seekers improve their chances of securing a job by offering training programs in other EU countries on the transnational exchange program "**IdA**".

IdA-Hamburg offers training periods in Austria and Denmark for 8 to 10 people. The stay abroad is intensely prepared by linguistic courses, intercultural training and individual coaching during six weeks. The participants work abroad for 4 weeks. Subsequently a review and evaluation period of 2 weeks is carried out.

Types of services provided

Following chart shows all services provided by ARINET

Glossary

QMB = Qualitätsmanagementbeauftragter (Quality assurance representative)

BEM= Betriebliches Eingliederungsmanagement (Company Integration Management)

IFD = Integrationsfachdienst

PICO= personenindividuelles Coaching

AIN = Arbeit im Netzwerk

NPO = Services for Non-Profit-Organisations

BGM = Betriebliches-Gesundheits-Management

SDC = Service und Dienstleistungscenter

CSR = Corporal Social Responsibility

IDA = Integration durch Austausch

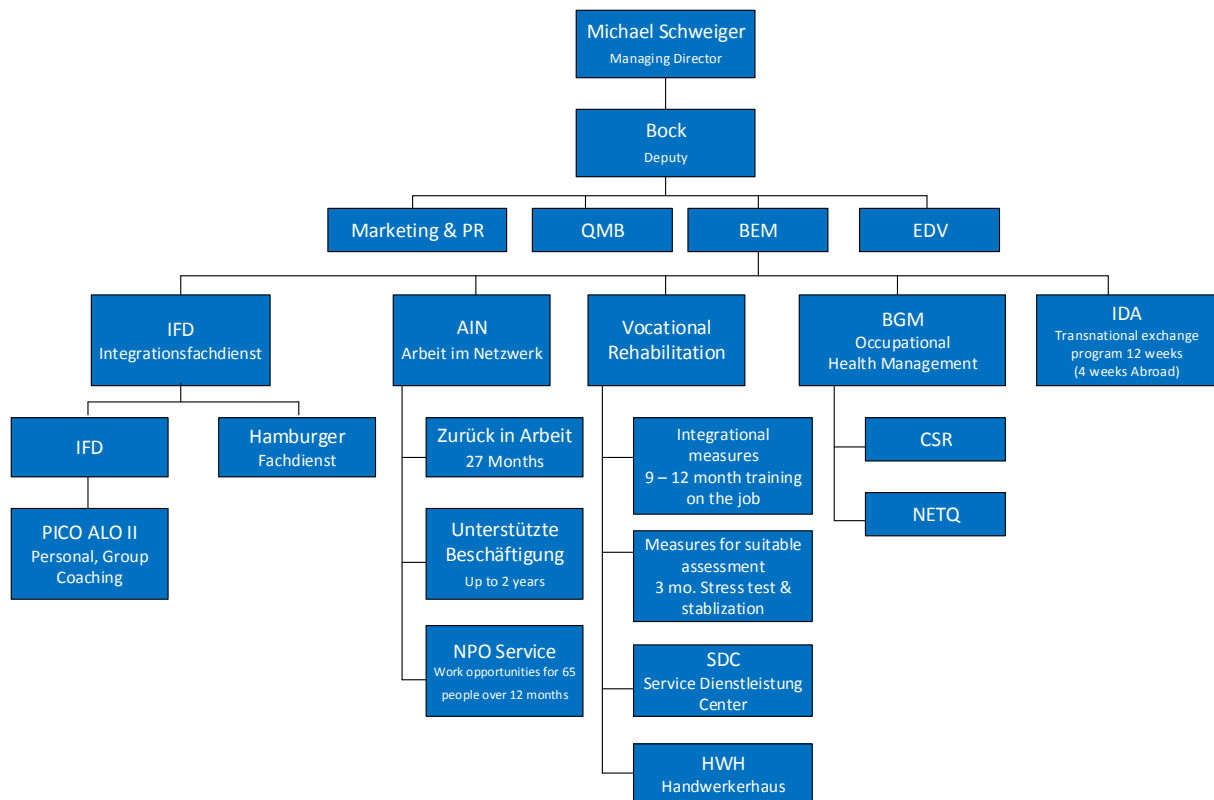


Fig.2 Services offered by ARINET

Mission and values

Below are the principle cornerstones set out to maintain Arinet's quality assurance policies

- orientation towards the humanistic image of man
- continual further development of company's service sector
- consideration of gender mainstreaming principles
- high level of responsibility of employees
- evaluation of work and assurance of quality
- effective use of resources
- targeted networking and cooperation

ARINET is funded by

- Integration Office (Integrationsamt) of Hamburg
- Authority for economy and work of Hamburg (Behörde für Wirtschaft und Arbeit Hamburg)
- Federal Employment Office of Hamburg (Agentur für Arbeit)
- team.arbeit.hamburg Hamburger Arbeitsgemeinschaft SGB II
- German pension scheme (Deutsche Rentenversicherung)
- employers' liability insurance association (Berufsgenossenschaften)
- European Social Fund (ESF)
- Aktion Mensch

- Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (Bundesministerium für Arbeit und Soziales)

ARINET receives referrals from the Integration Offices of Hamburg, Federal Employment Office and Job Centres of Hamburg as well as the German pension scheme, National Health Insurance Funds and local social and medical institutions.

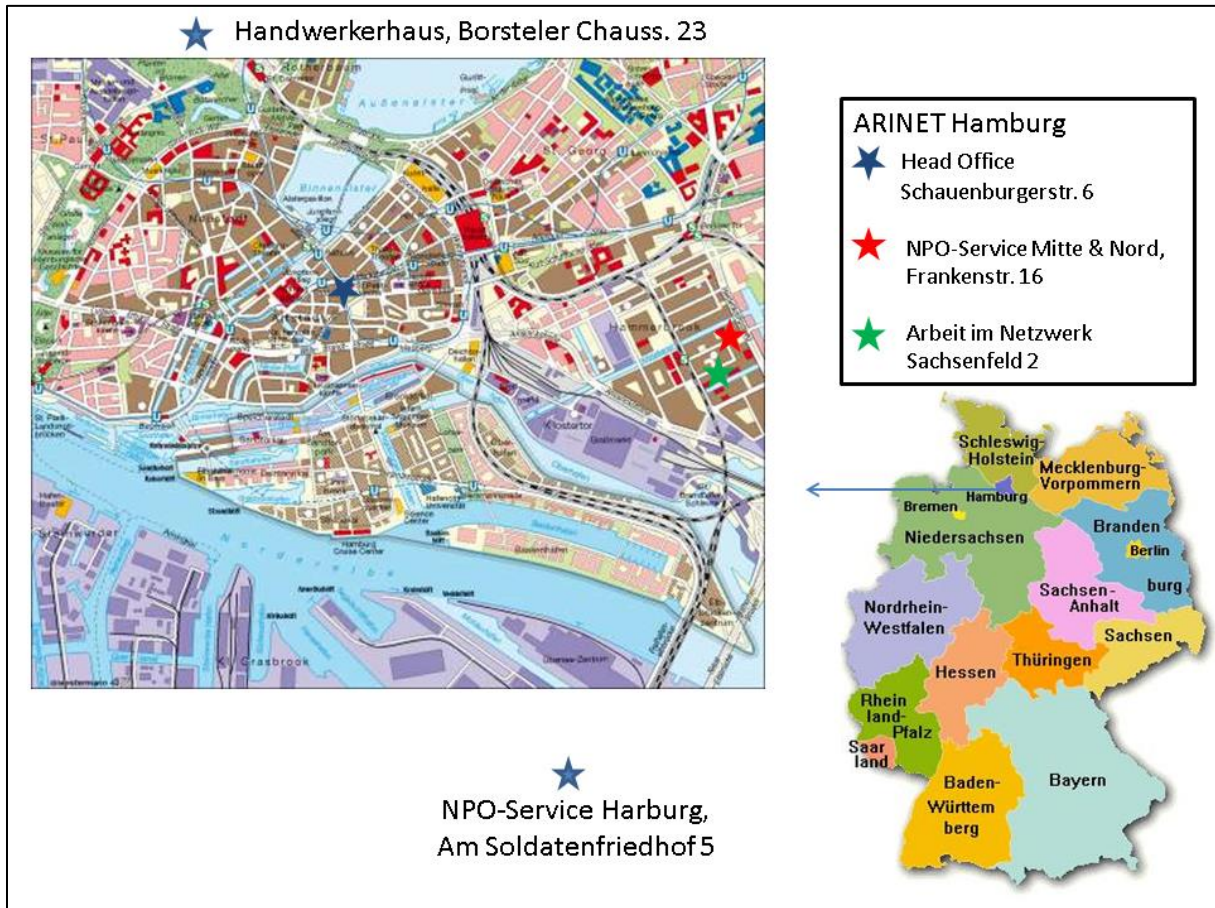


Fig.3 Five locations of ARINET

2.2. SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT IN GERMANY

Supported Employment in Germany is regulated legally in the new Social Code (§§109 SGB IX or §33 paragraph 6 SGB IX). Integration services generates interfaces between Federal Employment agencies and the Integration Office (Integrationsamt) as well as the rehabilitation bearers (e.g., integration after an accident).

Integration services were established in 2000 and built in every district all over the country in Germany.

In recent years the federal government in Germany has launched a number of initiatives to improve the labour market situation for people with severe disabilities. Since 2004 the Federal Ministry for Employment and Social Affairs has been running the campaign Jobs Without Barriers (*Jobs ohne Barrieren – job*) together with

partners from industry, the trade unions and disability associations. This campaign has included projects to promote the employment of people with severe disabilities. Despite efforts to create equal opportunities for people with disabilities it is particularly this demographic that experience relatively high unemployment because of the economic crisis.

In Germany, similar to Austria, companies of 20 employees or more with less than 5% of employees classified as severely disabled must pay an additional tax. In 2012 the following rates applied:

- € 115 at an employment rate between 3% and 5%
- 200 € at an employment rate between 2% and 3%
- € 290 at an employment rate below 2%

In many cases companies preferred to pay this additional tax than hire a person with severe disabilities even if additional financial incentives were offered.

Despite fierce competition in the labour market employers may also be reluctant to employ people with severe disabilities because of legislated protection against dismissal (further information see „Comparison with countries perspective“ p.16).

Since 2010 the German employment agency writes out measures after §46 SGB III regardless of the integration field services. Integration field services have to compete with other projects, who are paid by the professional achievement hour. As a consequence the continual financing of Integration services is in doubt.

3. OVERVIEW AND DESCRIPTION OF STUDY VISIT PROGRAMME

3.1. TIME SCHEDULE

The study visit took place from the 21st of May through the 1st of June and incorporated participation in almost all services offered by ARINET.

3.2. SERVICES AND PROJECTS VISITED

During my 10 day stay I had the opportunity to visit all the available services of the craftwork production facility (“Handwerker-Haus”) in Groß Borstel. These visits helped me to get an overview of the organization. Unfortunately, because there were many services on offer it was difficult to immerse myself further into the subject matter

I visited two work preparation placement sites (NPO-service) in different districts of Hamburg and participated in a group meeting with 10 clients of “Unterstützte Beschäftigung”. Some clients had already completed a trainee apprenticeship program in a company while others were still looking for apprenticeships. Everybody was asked to say something about themselves, their feelings and what they did that week. Then two teams were created with the following subject: “expectations and

fears of a traineeship". Team number 1 was instructed to reflect from the perspective of their employer and colleagues. Team number 2 was asked to reflect from the perspective of the trainee. After 20 minutes they presented their outcomes on a flip-chart to the other team. It was a very good intervention and inspired me. It highlighted the advantages of a group session very well.

Participants of SDC, a preparatory module of vocational rehabilitation presented their research findings. There were 3 teams who were tasked with researching the following propositions: "how to sell products over the internet", "how to start a radio programme" and "how to establish a foundation". I was surprised at how well the participants were prepared, how well structured their approach was and how professionally they provided the information. They considered Web accessibility as an important aspect of e-accessibility which offers disabled people the possibility to perceive, understand, navigate, interact with and contribute to the Web.

The leader of SDC has more than 20 years of work experience in the private sector. Prior to joining SDC she had worked as a global consultant to large companies.

Later in the week I joined a meeting of the vocational rehabilitation team. They review all clients and discuss their next steps in the process. It was very interesting to listen to.

I was given the opportunity to join a group session of IdA participants. The group consisted of 9 participants. Some participants suffered from hearing impairment and sign language interpreters were involved in these group sessions. In June 2012 they came to Vienna/ Austria to work for 4 weeks. IdA arranged internships at 4 Austrian cooperation companies. They were very excited about working abroad and pleased to welcome a native Austrian who could answer many of their questions about Austrian's culture and habits. They said that they liked my accent and we discussed the image of Austrians. For me it was funny to hear about the perceptions that Germans have about Austrians. Some I could deny as prejudices, some I could confirm.

During their stay in Vienna I met up with them again. It was very interesting to hear about their experiences and impressions about working in Austria. I got told that sometimes they have problems to understand Austrians and that even the German sign language differs from the Austrian sign language.

It was a good comparison to my own experiences in Hamburg.

3.3. KEY AREAS EXPLORED AND REVIEWED

The motivation behind my selection of ARINET is that both ARINET GmbH and PSZ Interwork help people with psychological and neurological problems to find work and maintain their job on the first labour market. We also share the same values and aspirations.

One of the key areas I wanted to explore was the integration field service (IFD).

I had the opportunity to join initial interviews with new clients. IFD offers initial consultations every Wednesday between 14.00 and 16.00. I noticed that clients were handed a questionnaire to gather essential information. This saved time in the following session. I attended a session with a client who asked for information about government legislation regarding working and searching for work with a severe disability.

IFD employment officers do their own analysis of the client by creating an initial and vocational profile. One employment counsellor of IFD Hamburg is responsible for the field of acquisition. Brief job profiles are forwarded to him by the other employment counsellors.

In Germany there are two types of unemployment benefits. Unemployment benefit I is 67% of the former salary and paid by the Federal of Employment Office (Agentur für Arbeit). The duration of payment depends on the duration of employment: If the employee has been working continuously for 3 to 5 years then the employee is entitled to unemployment benefit for one year. If the duration of employment was less than one year then the employee receives unemployment benefit lasting 4 to 5 months. After unemployment benefit has run out the person is supported by unemployment benefit II. Recipients of unemployment benefit II, no matter how much they earned before, receive €374 per month. Rent, heating, energy and phone costs are funded additionally.

Unemployment benefit II is paid by so called "Jobcenter".

While IFD provides support in searching for jobs for recipients of unemployment benefit I with psychological and neurological disabilities/illnesses, PiCO offers individual and group training sessions for recipients of unemployment benefit II. I was given the opportunity to join a group training session with 10 clients. The training course aspires to support participants' sense of self-esteem and self-efficacy and encourages self-perception and self-reflection. Group sessions help also to promote acceptance and create a support network for individuals who were excluded from working life for a long time.

I visited "Hamburger Fachdienst" which provides support in securing jobs. Every Thursday between 15.00 and 18.00 "Hamburger Fachdienst" conducts initial interviews with potential clients that I was allowed to observe. The clients talked about their problems at work and received information about employment support to secure their jobs. After these preliminary consultations the clients were reviewed and referred to the employment counsellors. Each employment counsellor makes an appointment individually with their clients.

Another session I observed was with a client who was accompanied by a Representative for Employees with Disabilities. In Germany the Representative for Employees with Disabilities represents the interests of severely disabled employees in the company and works closely with the employer and the employee. The Representative is required to intervene when difficulties arise in the job.

I was very interested in the occupational health management that ARINET offers to employees and employers to maintain health and safety in the workplace. Unfortunately I was not able to attend a NetQ or CSR seminar because at that time there weren't any. Nevertheless, I did talk to members of the team about

occupational health management in Germany and about design, implantation and experiences of the seminars.

Topics for employees included time management, communication strategies and coping strategies with stress and conflict situations.

Topics for employers included operational integration management, identifications and analysis factors which cause can stresses and strains for employees in the workplace and develop interventions.

I participated in a network meeting with other institutes in Hamburg that offer CSR seminars to businesses. They talked about how to reach companies and raise their interest for corporal social responsibility. They came to the conclusion that employers have to see real business benefits outweighing their costs by implementing CSR sustainably. Benefits are an increase in their staff's quality and competence and low levels of sick leave.

The aim of the network meeting was to connect with a wider range of public relations activities.

3.4. SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT PROCESS AND COMPARISON WITH ORGANISATIONAL PRACTICE

Supported employment in Hamburg is split into a service that is providing assistance in securing employment ("Hamburger Fachdienst") and a service that is providing support in searching employment (IFD). This is different in Austria.

Furthermore, IFD is split into a service for Recipients of unemployment benefit I (still called IFD) and for recipients of unemployment benefit II (called PICO).

The reason for that lies in different funding sources in Germany. In Austria it is considered as one service. It happens that a client who has found a job by interwork comes back after some time to get support in securing the job. Because a foundation of trust has built up over the time while looking for appropriate employment, clients say that it does not take much effort to seek help and vice versa. . In the case of a dismissal while receiving support from interwork, the client stays with their personal support employment officer while looking for a new job. Some of my clients have received reoccurring support from interwork for the past 8 years, either at the same workplace or looking for new employment.

In the case of a dismissal of a client of Hamburger Fachdienst, IFD can take over 3 months before the employment is terminated (a copy of notice is required). This is the duration of the legal notice period. On the other hand, IFD continues to provide support for six months after employment has commenced. 6 months is the legal probationary period. Further demand will be covered by Hamburger Fachdienst. According to the unemployment support officers of Arinet this is a very rare case. If problems can be resolved within 6 months after the commencement of work, it mostly ends with a dismissal. Special legal protection against dismissal starts after expiration of the probationary period (see p.16).

One major difference in supported employment practice has been the time limit. "Hamburger Fachdienst" offers support in maintaining employment up to 24 months.

New guidelines state that the service receives 275€/month per person. In addition to that they have to meet a certain quota. Consequently it is economically more viable to support the client as long as possible.

IFD has no time limitation. A quota has to be met and subsidies are paid in 2 parts. 1000€ are paid 6 weeks after the commencement of work and 1500€ after expiration of the probationary period. Unfortunately, if more than 50% of clients who received employment stop working the following year, Arinet has to pay back the money.

The time limit for PICO are 12 months. The target group has been absent from the labour market much longer period than those of IFD. As a consequence the performance criteria is lower. The aim is either to get employed on the first labour market or to secure voluntary work or so called "minijobs" of 400€.

The time limit of services provided by Interwork Austria is one year. If an extension is justified, it can be granted by the Federal Social Welfare Office. The Federal Social Welfare Office also monitors and examines the quota. To date Interwork has managed to fulfill it's quota every year.

In Austria the unemployment benefit is reduced after 6 months and named differently. Still the money gets paid out from the same address, the Federal Employment Office. Recipients of both kinds of unemployment benefit can be supported by Interwork under the same conditions.

Interwork Austria has to meet a quota within one year. A client is considered a "success" if employment has been secured for a minimum of 6 months (in case of existing employment) or employment has commenced with a minimum term of three months.

The more clients that are successfully place into employment, the more money IFD receives. In Austria we have a fixed budget to deal with as long as we have met the quota. In my opinion the German IFD seems to have rather harsh conditions. If there are not enough clients with secured employment the survival of IFD is endangered. Furthermore the Integration field services have to compete with other private projects that also support the same target group.

Another difference i observed is that one employment counsellor of IFD Hamburg takes care of job acquisitions. It is very useful to have one person specialised and dedicated to jobs hunting. Often there is not enough time for me to research intensively for jobs because I have too many clients to support. We discussed this concept in my company already some years ago, but funding conditions don't allow it. Every integration counsellor has to meet a certain quota equivalent to their monthly working hours. If one counsellor would be responsible for job research only he still would have to keep up with the quota. In that case the other counsellors would have to compensate this and increase their own quota. In comparison, the employment counsellor of IFD Hamburg who takes care of job acquisitions has no quota to meet.

There are no major differences in general process of IFD and Hamburger Fachdienst. The meetings are conducted one-to-one between clients and employment counsellors in a confidential atmosphere.

Both IFD and Interwork use direct and stealth acquisition strategies depending on the needs and capabilities of the client. My experiences show that it can jeopardise job opportunities if the client is open about his/her disability. Consequently we encourage clients to contact the HR department of companies themselves. If a supported employment officer contacts the company the disability is transparent and might lower the chances.

If "Hamburger Fachdienst" contacts an employer to arrange a round table meeting between employer and employee, the employer gets offered a personal supported employment officer. Experiences showed that the supported employment officer of the client can't be neutral to the employer. To balance the employer's side, the employer is offered their own supported employment officer to help resolve conflicts. This strategy is equal to that of Interwork.

There were no major differences in the composition of the target group. Depression and anxiety are the most common disorder among the target group.

3.5. COMPARISON WITH COUNTRIES PERSPECTIVE

First of all, Germany and Austria use different wording for the job descriptions. In Austria, services for people with disabilities to assist with employment in the general labor market are called Arbeitsassistenz (Work assistance). In Germany Arbeitsassistenz (Work assistance) are services that offer support in cases of problems at work that require personal assistance in the workplace. In Austria this type of service is called Job Coach. It is important to note that in Germany the Integration Services (Integrationsfachdienst or IFD for short) are known as Arbeitsassistenz in Austria.

In 2001 legislation for people with severe disabilities was ratified in the new Social Code (SGB IX). Disabled people are classified as individuals with a certified degree of disability of at least 50 percent (SGB IX, § 2, para 2). They have special legal protection against dismissal.

Disabled employees may be terminated only in extraordinary circumstances and only if the Integration Office has given prior approval. Dismissal without prior notice is not allowed.

The requirement for special protection is that the length of employment at the time of receipt of the termination notice has been no less than six months. The notice period shall be at least four weeks.

The integration services (IFD) are involved in the whole process. They contact the employer and employee and weigh the interests of both parties on application for consent to termination. The aim is to work towards an amicable settlement. A written report including a recommendation is sent to the Integration Office for final decision.

In Austria the additional employment protection is restricted to so called "favoured disabled" people. Not only do they need a certified degree of disability of 50 percent or more but have to ask for the status of dismissal protection.

In case of dismissal the Austrian Disability Committee of the “Federal Social Welfare Office” (Bundessozialamt (BSB), Integrationsamt in Germany) decides on the arbitration. The Arbeitsassistentz service in Austria is not involved in the process like in Germany.

The main difference between Austria and Germany is that a person of a certified degree of disability of 50 percent in Austria can decide if he or she wants protection against dismissal and may apply for it. The problem is that once you attain that status, you keep it in perpetuity.

My job as a support employment officer is to consult with my clients about the advantages and disadvantages of the “favoured disabled” status. Experience shows that most employers prefer people without this status. Employers are afraid that they could never dismiss them. The chances of receiving a job decreases if this status is official.

As a result, Austria has many disabled people applying for jobs without giving any notice about their disability. It increases their chances even if statistics show that dismissal protection is limited. In 2010, there were 530 people involved with dismissal procedures. Only 19 cases was the agreement to terminate denied.

Austrian companies also have to pay an additional tax if they don't employ severely disabled people. In Austria companies of 25 employees or more are required by law to hire one favoured disabled person for every 25 employees. If the employment obligation is not fulfilled then the employer must pay an additional tax. This is at present EUR 232 per month (since 2012) for each person who would qualify for a position within the company. Companies with 100 or more employees must pay EUR 325 per month for every person who would qualify and companies with 400 or more employees EUR 345 per month.

This additional tax is higher than in Germany. Yet, saving this compensational fee is rarely incentives employers to hire people with disabilities.

In Germany, Company Integration Management, Betriebliches Eingliederungsmanagement (BEM), is a legal obligation for every company irrespective of the number of employees. It is the intention to reintegrate employees after long and serious illness. In the wide sense it is about the operational health management for the protection of the health of the staff. The legal basis is §84 a paragraph 2 the ninth book Social code (SGB IX) with the aim to identify and implement any preventative, health promotion, rehabilitation and integration measures as early as possible.

Any employee who has been on sick leave for longer than six weeks in the past year or was incapacitated repeatedly is invited in writing by an official contact person who is responsible for BEM in the company.

This invitation means that the procedure shows a voluntary offer. Should the offer be rejected, the procedure would be concluded at this point. Then the employer would have to check the possibility of whether further action should be taken beyond the Company Integration Management (e.g., of nature pertaining to labour law).

If the company dismisses an employee because of absenteeism due to illness and fails to contact the employee by BEM in advance, the company has to pay a fine.

To determine the concerning circle of acquaintances, evaluations are raised monthly above the sick person's states of the employees of the responsible personnel place.

The BEM-contact person checks whether external facilities can help, e.g., Integration Office (Integrationsamt) of Hamburg, Federal Employment Office of Hamburg (Agentur für Arbeit) or German accident and pension scheme (Deutsche Unfall- und Rentenversicherung).

Company Integration Management (Betriebliches Eingliederungsmanagement) does not exist in Austria.

4. KEY AREAS OF LEARNING FROM THE STUDY VISIT

From an individual point of view I learnt a lot about supported employment in Germany. First of all, I am aware now that Austria and Germany use different wording to describe my job.

Differences in existing legislation as well as the varying forms of funding resources motivate differences within the structure of services between Austria and Germany. For example in Germany searching and maintaining employment are provided by 2 independent services in Germany. Personally I prefer the Austrian system because it offers me a bigger variety of work experience. I think that for clients it is easier, too. During the time that I have guided a client into employment we have built up a foundation of trust. When problems show up in the work place, it does not take long until the client contacts me to ask for help.

I also observed that IFD has to compete with other private projects that also support the same target group.

Because of the funding system I would expect IFD to support as many clients as possible to increase the chances of success. It is IFDs policy to have a maximum caseload of 26 clients per employment counsellor. I agree with a limitation because over the years I experienced an increase of client caseload in my work field. Interwork has no maximum caseload, employment counsellors are free to decide how many clients they support so long as the quota is met. In the last years our caseload has gone up quite considerably. Consequently we had to consider how to deal with it. I did like the concept of one employment counsellor responsible for job acquisition. An employment counsellor who takes care of acquisitions would help to save time and deal with the big caseload.

Another idea I got from IFD was the questionnaire for the collection of essential information in advance. This would save time in the following session.

Another idea to improve our service is to implement group sessions beside the one-to-one sessions between clients and employment counsellors. Group settings preserve time resources of the employment counsellors. Moreover it opens up a

platform for people with similar problems who could inspire and support each other. Through my study visit I discovered new ways to implement group interventions.

My company is also keen to implement comprehensive training programmes for employees and employers to maintain health and safety within the workplace. We consider it as an important preventive measure for mental health and a way to promote awareness and acceptance for people with disabilities. ARINET is a good example how measures to preserve occupational health are provided. Unfortunately without additional funding my company will not be able to provide both supported employment and occupational health management. Moreover, occupational health management isn't claimed of companies by law.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is very difficult to give recommendations to such a professional and highly successful organization. Legislation and funding structure prevents some of the changes that I would recommend, for example not to split IFD and Hamburger Fachdienst.

One recommendation for ARINET, suggested by an employment counselors of IFD, would be to strengthen the cooperation with companies. One way to achieve this could be to have an employment counselor exclusively responsible for the development and maintaining of operational contacts (company liaison officer). The aim of the company liaison officer would be the determination of and the orientation towards the needs of companies on the first labour market.

This would create a large pool of companies that represent the interface to the job market and an important source of employment. There is no budget for a company liaison officer right now but the return on investment through the increase of employment provided by this role could be recovered very quickly.

There are some recommendations that may help improve our own services at Interwork

- * improve acquisition and find a way for easy access to vacant employment
- * strengthen cooperation with companies, company liaison (see above)
- * caseload management: find strategies to deal with the overload of clients
- * implement group sessions as an intervention to manage massive caseload
- * create training programs within PSZ organization
- * suggest more projects that provide real life work experience for clients within the field of supported unemployment in Austria

* find funding resources to offer comprehensive training programs for employees and employers to maintain health and safety in the workplace

Since January 2013 there is a new novella of Labour Act in Austria considering Company Health Management. This law emphasizes the importance of mental wellbeing and the prevention of work-related mental illness. The innovation of this Law includes the evaluation of operational psychological conditions, monitored by Labour Inspectorates and an organisational Psychologist.

6. DISSEMINATION

Upon my return I shared my experiences with my Interwork colleagues, the PSZ team with 40 employees and to the leaders of the 3 organizations of Supported Employment for people with psychological and neurological disabilities in Lower Austria, providing examples and comparisons from my host agency. My report will be published on the PSZ and Interwork's website, on facebook and I will also submit an article to following organizations:

- Umbrella association of Supported Employment Services in Austria www.dabei.at
- the Federal Social Welfare Office (Bundessozialamt)
- Federal Employment Office (AMS)
- Federal Province of Lower Austria (Land NÖ)
- www.behintertenarbeit.at- an information network site about disabilities
- Österreichische Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Rehabilitation (ÖAR)/ www.oear.or.at- a network about rehabilitation
- regional papers

The aim is to engage in public relations and actively promote awareness of Supported Employment for people with disabilities.

In 2013 a conference about professional integration of people with disabilities in Lower Austria is planned. I intend to present my experiences, recommendations and information.

I will also distribute copies of my report to the host organization and to the EUSE. My report will also be available to anyone that expresses an interest.

7. CONCLUSION

It was an excellent experience to observe a supported employment provider in another country. It became evident from the visit that an organization that covers a broad range of consulting and support services to severely disabled people with

psychological and neurological problems is a great benefit for a service user. Due to funding sponsor's decision, clients can be forwarded within the organization.

For example, clients who are finished with vocational rehabilitation have access to receive support by IFD to find work.

NPO-Service for instance offers excellent work opportunities in a protected and at the same time practically oriented way.

I very much liked the concept of SDC because training of business management isn't only virtually but in a productive way. SDC supplies support for commercial processes within ARINET.

In Lower Austria there is definitely a lack of projects that provide real life work experience for clients before accessing external employers. It would help building key employability skills and confidence prior to returning to external open employment.

Working in the field of supported employment it is necessary to adapt to changing work environment. For me ARINET represents a very flexible, innovative and open organization that is able to cover a broad range of support to our shared target group. Since I have visited ARINET in May 2012 some innovations have taken place. ARINET has introduced two new services since January 2013. These services are:

- „Hamburger Budget für Arbeit“: This is a service that supports people with disabilities who work in sheltered workshops (so called WfbM) to find employment on the labour market
- Netzwerk B.O: a service that provides support and guidance to pupils with severe disabilities and psychosocial disturbances on their way to work

I got very much inspired by IdA. Not only did I enjoy participate in the preparations of Vienna but I also had the opportunity to get to know it. IdA is an important project that enables people with severe disability to gain work experiences abroad. The labour market expects high flexibility. Working abroad offers possibilities to get a fresh look from a different perspective. It can often broaden the viewpoint, can widen and deepen knowledge and help increasing social and practical skills.

At least these are my experiences of my study visit in Hamburg.