

Effects in the diversity project

The diversity project of the DEUTSCHEN **JUGENDFEUERWEHR**
"Together into a colorful world of youth fire brigades!"



A project of the **DEUTSCHE JUGENDFEUERWEHR** (German Young Firefighters Association, DJF), supported by the



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Federal Chancellor Merkel in the fire-fighting attack (Berlin in 2016)
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Perception, group dynamism, communication (Bremen-Blumenthal JF)



Brief description of the diversity project

- **Projekttitel:** "Together into a colourful world of youth fire brigades"
- **Motto of the diversity project:** Vielfalt gemeinsam gestalten
- **Project sponsor:** DEUTSCHE **JUGENDFEUERWEHR** (German Young Firefighters Association – DJF)
- **Duration:** 2013 to the end of 2019
- **Project frames:** The project is incorporated into the campaign promoting diversity and integration, "Our world is colourful!" (longer-lasting effect/embedding).
- **Project support:** Supported with more than Euro 590,000 by the Motorola Solutions Foundation (USA).
- **Target group, aims and procedure:** The project addresses socially and educationally disadvantaged young people (for example due to immigrant background, disability or gender) with a diversity-aware mentoring programme in the youth fire brigades, which are a part of the volunteer fire brigades. It aims to improve equality, future prospects and integration of the target group by learning through volunteering and by providing support to its participants. It also aims to achieve the continued intercultural opening of the youth fire brigades and to make them more diverse. In addition to providing support for young people, the project addresses the mentors and multipliers in the youth fire brigades, who receive coaching and qualifications in tandems to better understand and make use of diversity.

The effect stair *(adapted from phineo)*



The diversity project – OUTPUT / OUTCOME / IMPACT

- For more than seven years, the project “Together into a colourful world of youth fire brigades” shaped the work of the German Young Firefighters Association (DJF). The in-depth introduction of topics with a focus on diversity was made possible by the support of the Motorola Solutions Foundation.
- This brief description of the resultant effects of the project is based on the effectiveness model of the PHINEO counselling centre and the results of an external evaluation. There are three target areas where changes have occurred: in the target group (output), in the social environment of the young people and their youth leaders (outcome) and in the association/organisation (impact).

OUTPUT

1. Activities

The German Young Firefighters Association (DJF) carried out 62 measures with two target groups. Right from the start, the project aimed to support and qualify the youth fire brigades in the model regions in a number of events over a period of several years!

2. Target groups

Members of different youth fire brigades (including structurally disadvantaged young people) and multipliers from volunteer and youth fire brigades took part in the activities of the diversity project. With the project's 62 measures, we have directly reached a total of 1,222 young people and youth leaders! 24% of the participants were girls and young women and 16% had an immigrant background. About one third were under 18 years old.

3. Identifikation mit dem Projekt

Both target groups entered the project with different levels of knowledge, experience and expectations. Together with the project managers, they developed schemes which included goals and methods with which to approach and deal with their own topics or questions with an awareness of diversity.

The target groups were provided with qualifications on 114 event days. Many participants repeatedly took part in the various measures. The feedback was mostly very positive.

OUTCOME

4. Changing awareness and abilities

The project specifically addressed different diversity issues in the youth fire brigades. The aim was to create a culture in which everyone is welcome and perceived as individuals with strengths who are able to contribute accordingly.

As a result, the main focus was on raising awareness of diversity. The target groups learned to deal with diversity in a more conscious, differentiated and appreciative way: seeing the differences, for example, in eating habits, origin and religion, but also questioning gender roles and looking for the potential and strengths of all youth fire brigade members.

This was followed by raising participants' awareness of diversity in order to perceive it from multiple perspectives. The necessary skills to achieve this were then trained correspondingly. According to the external evaluator, the project showed “its effectiveness of outcome in direct action”, i. e. in the measures themselves as well as in the everyday context of youth fire brigades. The participants developed a “greater care, diligence and sensitivity in their interactions with and for each other”.

The skills developed through the project included peer consultation, mentoring, communication/leadership styles, conflict management, feedback culture and self-reflection. The youth leaders learned to better understand group dynamics and acquired a range of reactions that can be used constructively and appreciatively in different situations. This resulted in the targeted support of sound relationships within groups and the joint finding and implementation of solutions for the respective challenges.

5. Participants changed their behaviour

In the external evaluation, we found that the target groups showed behavioural changes. The training of skills (e. g. with regard to communication and conflict management) as well as team-building measures resulted in the target groups talking to each other more openly and carefully, and also being more attentive to contradictions. The focus was on mutual understanding - the acceptance that others, due to their socialisation, ask questions from different perspectives, interpret facts differently or react differently to situations increased significantly.

In addition to raising awareness by dealing with the subject of diversity, the two target groups learned new skills and expanded them by applying what they had learned. More active listening, acceptance of existing needs and differences (eating habits/restrictions, language backgrounds, etc.), reflection etc. became more natural for the participants. In some cases, youth fire brigade members transferred what they had learned to their own lives and applied it, for example, in the oral portions of their university entrance exams (Abitur). The tutors also acted with a greater awareness for diversity, as they “perceive differences, exercised more care when dealing with irritation and expressed their tasks in a less commanding manner”.

Through self-reflection as a trained skill, the awareness and key points of diversity were taken into account in the participants' own thinking and actions, resulting in personal/structural change processes. This can be seen in a number of simple steps, small or large, which were put into practice by making deliberate decisions:

The food was vegetarian or prepared with beef instead of pork and the participants used only halal meat (if possible). In order to gain trust, the organisers assigned the task of buying the meat to the participants of Muslim faith.

On the topic of religion: Girls wearing headscarves wore the training gear of the youth fire brigade just like everyone else and experienced unrestricted acceptance. Ramadan, for example, was taken into account in the scheduling and participants wished each other a “happy Ramadan” and celebrated a joint “breaking of the fast”.

Seeing weaknesses as strengths: In our visual impairment awareness training, the participants slipped into the role of a blind person, examined firefighting equipment and trained how to deal with people who are visually impaired. When combating fires, firefighters often have to operate in the dark. The training helped to show participants how to find their way without sight in such situations.

6. Life situation of the target groups changed

In fact, these are almost the most challenging effects that can be achieved. The evaluation found the following: Via the process-oriented, open and dialogical approach, together with self-empowerment, the target groups were reached and change was achieved or initiated in certain life environments.

More young people with an immigrant background participated permanently, and until the end of their youth fire brigade membership, in the projects on offer in the youth fire brigades in the different model regions. As a result of their raised awareness, some of them were able to deal more successfully with things that were new or different to them. They were shown ways to overcome challenges more easily through support in tandem mentoring and, as a result, it became easier for them, for example, to transfer to the operations department.

In addition, refugee or girls' groups were founded to encourage the target groups of young refugees and young women to take up voluntary work in the fire brigade using a peer-to-peer approach and to win them over to the youth fire brigade in the long term. The act of welcoming others turned into an actual culture of welcome.

In the project, socially disadvantaged young people ‘climbed the career ladder’ – they went from young people to tutors or firefighters!

For the leadership team of one youth fire brigade, their situation has changed as a result of a more differentiated division of labour, which resulted in a cooperative search for the motivations and strengths of the various team members.

Via the project, the participating tutors initiated an independent networking process between the model regions in order to arrange mutual visits to youth camps and exchange information on how such events can be organised with a greater awareness of diversity, for example, through pork-free menus and barrier-free accessibility.



IMPACT

7. Changes in organisations (and society)

Changing society through a project is always a utopian aspiration and yet the project radiated that special something and contributed to such a change through its events and word-of-mouth propaganda as well as through its coverage in a variety of media and publications. As a result, diversity became visible in the association's media and, at the same time, the multipliers took up the project's impulses.

The same is true for the German Young Firefighters Association (DJF). Information about the project and the topic of diversity in general was distributed through media, events, consultations and exchanges in the committees and panels. Within the association, the necessary importance was therefore attached to the task of achieving intercultural openness, initiating change processes and establishing a culture of welcome.

■ Impressions of the diversity project



- 1 Youth forum of the town youth fire brigade Leipzig in the federal state parliament Saxon 2 Besuch einer Moschee – Kennenlernen von Religionen 3 Dialogues of the generations 4 Professional days of the DJF "How there tick youngsters? How varied is JF?" 5 Urban youth of the town youth fire brigade Stuttgart 6 Federal Chancellor Merkel visits to the integration summit in 2016 the diversity project oft he DJF and the youth fire brigade, here together with Aydan Özoğuz, at the time in the rank of a Minister of State for migration, refugees and migration 7 Young fled – greeting and getting to know 8 Rural youth of the circle youth fire brigade Odenwald 9 Workshop on the professional day of the DJF "How tick youngsters? How varied is JF?"



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