



International Network for School Social Work

<http://internationalnetwork-schoolsocialwork.htmlplanet.com>

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In Vienna: Supporting pupils with school social work, plus prevention and guidance

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Vienna, the capital of Austria, has about 700 schools, 220,000 pupils and 12,000 teachers. I am a teacher and additionally *Schülerberater* at my school, offering services similar to school social work. *Schülerberater* translates roughly as “school guidance counsellor”, and the position is viewed as a specialised consulting teacher who is fully integrated into the teaching staff of a school, and is certified through additional education at the University College of Teacher Education (*Pädagogische Hochschule*) in Vienna. In this article I give an introduction to the social support we give the pupils in Vienna and some references for more information about school social work in other parts of Austria.

School Social Work in Austria

In the last decade there has been discussion about passing legislation to regulate professional social work, but as yet no law has been passed. Meanwhile the report *Nationaler Bildungsbericht Österreich 2009* recommends expansion of school psychology and institutionalization of school social work. Pilot projects for school social work have been carried out since that time, funded by the Federal Government and the 9 Federal states.

The objective of the projects was to provide a clear position for school social work. Best-practice models should be used as a template for schools and registered non-profit associations. The Ministry of Education (*Bundesministerium für Bildung*), responsible for this project, will end the project prematurely by the end of August 2017 and will not implement it by 2020 as originally planned. It appears that Austria is facing a sad and uncertain future in school social work.

The *Bundesministerium für Bildung* has a web page for the European Social Fund project on school social work regarding developing a nationwide model. *Schulsozialarbeit in Österreich* has details about specific school social work projects in several Austrian states. <https://www.bmb.gv.at/schulen/pwi/pa/schulsozialarbeit.html>

The Ludwig Boltzman Institute Health Promotion Research surveyed school social work in all 9 states in Austria in 2011. The study describes projects and provides a baseline for school social work in Austria. https://www.bmb.gv.at/schulen/pwi/pa/ssa_oesterreich_fb_22071.pdf?5te936

***Schulsozialarbeiter/in* - School Social Worker in Vienna**

In the 2015/2016 school year there were 27 school social workers employed by the Vienna School Board to serve the compulsory schools (serving school children aged between 6 and 15). The pupils can easily refer themselves by showing up at the social worker's office or they may be referred by a teacher. The school social workers

Gunter's website features a Community for School Social Workers, including all newsletters of the International Network <https://www.guenterbrus.at/community-for-school-social-workers/>.

advise, counsel and support pupils, parents and teachers on many issues such as bullying, violence, addiction and sexuality. They can do home visits if needed. The school social worker decides whether to handle the case or to coordinate with another agency. The overall goal is to promote personal development using many approaches including preventive projects, groupwork, casework, crisis intervention, mediation and consultation with teachers.

***Schülerberater* - "School Guidance Counsellor"**

At compulsory schools in whole Austria, and in Vienna additionally at vocational schools, *Schülerberater* provide services similar to school social work, such as problem solving in critical social, professional and/or personal areas. The responsible Federal School Boards offer from 2 to 5 hours a week for an entire school, divided mostly between a male and female worker.

School Mediation

Mediation is established in primary and secondary schools in Vienna. It consists of a structured, confidential method of conflict resolution, often using neutral mediators, that helps to settle questions and allow for different viewpoints. It seeks viable solutions acceptable to all parties, to create an agreement and resolve a dispute. Although there is no guarantee that school mediation will be effective, my experience and involvement with a wide range of school-based disputes is that the process is extremely beneficial and brings lasting resolutions in about 85-95% of cases. Some schools offer peer mediation, while in others professional mediation is provided by non-profit organizations, sponsored and promoted by some Viennese districts. The focus of **peer mediation** is that pupils with interest and competence in solving conflicts are found and can register for training in peer mediation. After finishing a basic training in conflict management they are called in to help their peers work together to resolve everyday disputes. **Professional school mediators** are called for assistance in more difficult issues. In Vienna they work as teams of 2, for example on challenging conflicts or complex conversations (sometimes including teachers), for bullying prevention, appreciation of diversity (Vienna hosts a large number of refugees, who have to attend compulsory education), classroom management, team-building, mentoring, tutoring, and so on. At times a school administrator orders mediation to optimize classroom climate.

Coordination

The "Coordinating Platform for Youth, Education and Employment" www.koordinationsstelle.at offers a summary of services of all kinds for youth in Vienna. All *Schülerberater* from vocational schools meet four times a year providing the opportunity to meet contact persons in the Coordinating Platform, improving the communication around working for our clients, the pupils.

The development of the Austrian school social work scene is summarized on pages 6 through 8 of the International Network's **2016 International Survey of School Social Work**. The summary was provided by Michaela Marterer, Styrian Association for Education and Economics, Coordinator of the Development Partnership Project School Social Work in Austria. (use Google or Bing to view the pdf) https://www.guenterbrus.at/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/16_International-Network-Survey-2016_web.pdf