

## Abstract

# **euro peers**

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# **euro peers - a European practical project in the field of prevention of addiction**

## **1. Development of the European cooperation in the project**

The coordinating agency specialised in drug issues and further training - part of the health department of the Landschaftsverband Westfalen-Lippe located in Germany - participated in the „European week for drug prevention“ in 1992 and 1994 by holding two „European workshops concerning prevention“. Experts from 10 and 12 European countries respectively were invited.

Within the framework of these workshops, coordinators responsible for prevention as well as experts specialised in prevention agreed that the fruitful exchange between different European regions had to be continued and developed in order to be able to tackle the problem of legal and illegal drug abuse in our society by applying effective preventive strategies. Furthermore all participants likewise agreed on the fact that the European Union should not only be considered as economic community, but also as social community.

On the basis of these findings a committee composed of experts from Austria, Belgium, France and Germany was established. Within the framework of several meetings, the conception of **euro peers - ways of improving the ability to manage life** was elaborated and, in autumn 1995, all participating countries decided that this programme should be the basis for future cooperation. An application for funding has been filed and sent to the Commission of the European Union which approved it in November 1996.

## **2. Definition of peer group / peer education**

### **Peer groups**

are usually groups of persons of the same age who have similar interests. For the development of the personality in the adolescence they assume central and essential functions:

- \* They are important mainstays for the individual young persons during the process of dissociating themselves from their parents and provide, at the same time, stabilisation and support on the way to develop their own self-confident personality.
- \* They are able to grant behaviour and status stability for parts of everyday life in contrast to the rather uncertain status that adults usually concede to young persons. They can contribute to the stabilisation of young people's personal development by offering the possibility to gain experience in similar situations and to respect certain rules valid in the respective groups;
- \* They can practise new forms of authority levels on the basis of criteria which differ from those applied by adults;
- \* They can provide scope for different experiences and give room for experiments with new behavioural roles and for taking on the sex role.

(Winfried Ferchhoff in:  
Das Grazer Peer Group-Modell „SAS“, Graz 1996)

Peer work is based on the assumption that especially young persons are more receptive for contents and messages regarding health promotion and the way of coping with life when they are transmitted by persons of the same age. In this context, there are two different aims and forms of transmission:

- \* The person trained for the role as peer approaches the social group by means of pedagogical methods (talk, paper, presentation)

**=> knowledge-orientated approach**

- \* The person trained for the role as peer acts in an interactive way in his social group and - by a modified behaviour in everyday life - he/she motivates the members of this group to reflect their way of life.

**=> behaviour-orientated approach**

One of the main aims of the project *euro peers* was to test the behaviour-orientated approach; but on the other hand the peers should be given the opportunity - by means of a two-hour presentation which was divided into several parts - to give their social groups (classes) an understanding of the contents and structure of the peer trainings.

### **3. Aims of the project**

#### **a) Training of young opinion leaders aged from 12 to 14 years**

Young persons of this age group should be familiarized with offers existing in the field of prevention of addiction in order to enable them - in their role as peers - to set positive examples against the basic conditions for the development of addiction such as the lack of the ability to enjoy good things of life and to cope with conflicts.

**b) Achievement of a peer effect in the social groups/classes**

For the first time, main emphasis was put - beyond the pedagogical effects transmitted by the peers merely by means of talks in their classes - on the influence they exert on their class mates within the framework of social contacts.

**c) Inclusion of young people's social relationships / parents and teachers**

By including and informing these groups within the framework of such a longer-term European project, preventive effects should be achieved in this field as well.

**d) Elaboration of common methodical and evaluative criteria and exchange between European specialist agencies**

For many experts working in the field of prevention, the project *euro peers* opened up new dimensions for cooperation at European level: not only by the mere exchange of experiences gained in individual projects, but also by means of common experiences gained within the framework of a project which was based on a common curriculum, the cooperation should be encouraged and intensified.

**e) Evaluation and accompanying scientific research**

The common observation and gathering of all data by a research institute should assure that the evaluative methods applied in this project can also be used for own evaluations in the future.

**f) Comparison and analysis of the significance of regional socio-cultural conditions**

The variety of European cultural regions invites - especially within the framework of a **common European project** - to perceive the differences between the regions, their working methods and the social history behind them. Indeed, it is important to do so in order to analyse the levelling out of efforts in the field of prevention resulting from the European harmonisation.

When looking back on the project *euro peers*, it becomes evident that many an objective like the European cooperation has been attained. Other aims - such as the peer transfer in the classes - still have to be adjusted.

#### **4. Organisation**

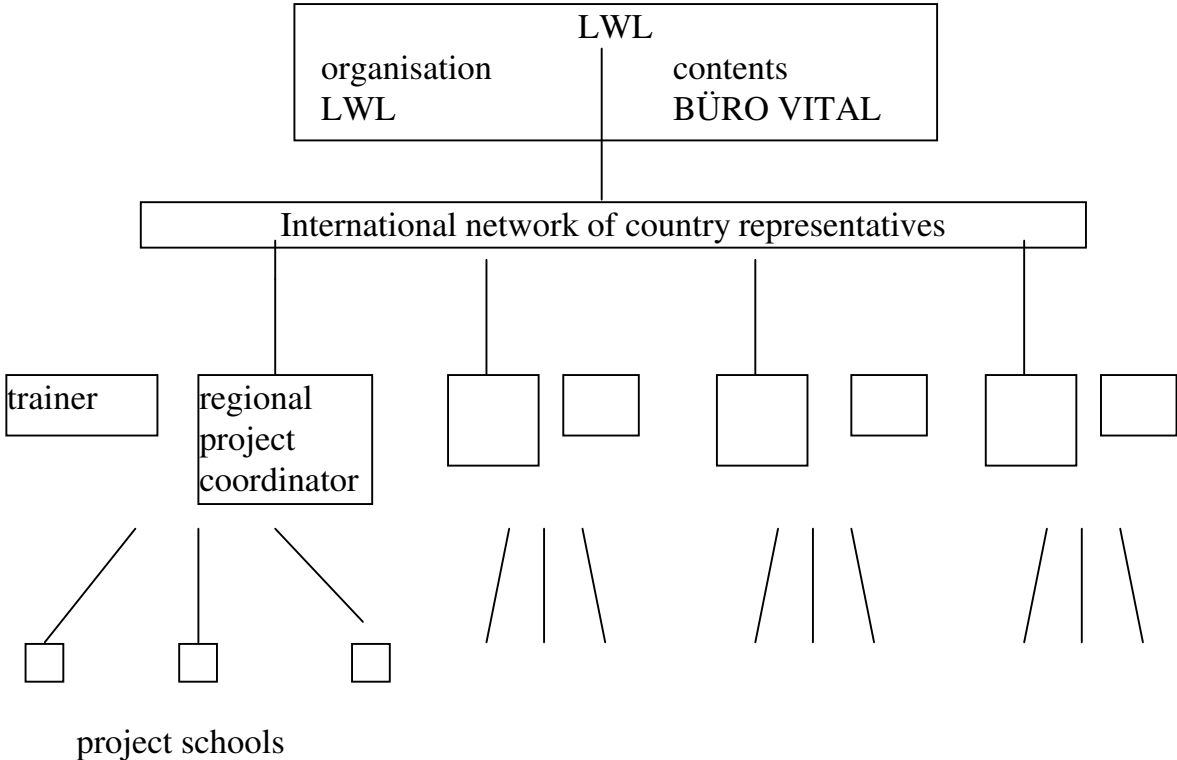
The Landschaftsverband Westfalen-Lippe - department of health care - coordinating agency specialised in drug issues and further training - was responsible for the implementation of the whole project. For several years it has implemented regional, national and cross-border projects in the field of drug aid and is thus very experienced in this field.

BÜRO VITAL, Steyr/Austria, having many years' experience in supraregional work on conceptions and networks in the field of drug prevention, was responsible for the coordination of the contents and for the elaboration of the curriculum.

Each region involved in the project nominated a „country representative“; this was usually the coordinator responsible for drug prevention in the respective country. These persons formed the „conference of the country representatives“ and were responsible for the implementation of the project in the respective countries. These country representatives - including the associated organisations - are essential elements of the network.

The country representatives nominated a regional project coordinator who was entrusted with the realisation of the concrete peer-education-project at schools. This project coordinator implemented - in cooperation with another trainer - the school project which lasted several months.

The following **chart** shows the organisational structure of the project:



The cooperation contract was signed by the following European regions and institutions:

- \* Amt für Jugendarbeit, Bozen/Italy
- \* Centrum voor Alcohol- en andere Drugproblemen (CAD) Limburg, Hasselt/Belgium
- \* Centrum voor Alcohol- en andere Drugproblemen (CAD) Twente, Enschede/Netherlands
- \* Fachstelle für Suchtprävention, Caritasverband für den Kreis Coesfeld, Coesfeld/Germany
- \* Fachstelle für Suchtprävention der Krisenhilfe Bochum, Bochum/Germany
- \* Fachstelle für Suchtprävention, Graz/Austria
- \* Genralitat de Catalunya, Department de Sanitat i Seguretat Social, Barcelona/Spain
- \* pro mente Oberösterreich, Focus Institut für Suchtprävention, Linz/Austria
- \* Ribe Amts Ungdomscenter, Esbjerg/Denmark
- \* Scènes de Villes, Villeurbanne/France
- \* D.E.S.P.Y. Institute of Child Health - I.C.H School Health Promotion Unit, Athens/Greece

Apart from these 9 European countries (Germany and Austria were represented by 2 regions) Switzerland - which is not EU member state - decided to participate in the project as associated partner. The partner organisation is the Pestalozzianum Zurich, Fachstelle für Suchtprävention, Zurich/Switzerland

## **5. Resumé**

### **5.1. At project level**

- \* In each country the practical projects were implemented with great commitment. The interest in continuing work and exchange at European level is great.
- \* The project period of 14 months fixed for such a large-scale European project was too short and had negative consequences on the quality of the outcome. A period of 2 to 3 years would have been appropriate and organised in this way, the expenses would have not been considerably higher.
- \* All participants considered the experimental period after the peer trainings during which the peers should exert influence on the members of their social groups as

too short. As a result, it was not possible to obtain accurate results within the framework of this project.

- \* When planning the project, it was important to ensure that interested persons should be enabled to transfer this project to other places and schools at relatively low costs.

By the implementation of this project, the interest in the method of preventive peer-group-education has been aroused in many regions and, in consequence, the peer work has been appreciated and stabilised at regional and supraregional level.

- \* The process just described has also led to further developments in the field of preventive peer-group-education: for example, the need for appropriate further trainings for teachers especially regarding the way in which the young peers shall be accompanied, has already been met in a number of places.
- \* The wish expressed by the young people to meet their colleagues from other European countries shows that the young people's interest in European meetings and exchange is great. This wish has been fulfilled by the Austrian partners who organised in 1998 the one-week meeting „LIFE EVENT“ - the first European peer meeting.

## **5.2 At network level**

- \* The basic idea to network specialist agencies at European level by means of the work within the framework of a common project, has entailed a far-reaching improvement of the cooperation which is now no longer restricted to the mere exchange of information and experience.
- \* It has to be discussed to what extent potential EU member states (especially East European states) are to be integrated into the project cooperation.
- \* The significance of existing specific regional conditions which influence the cooperation at European level has been confirmed. There are clear differences between the Northern and Central European as well as the Mediterranean regions regarding the basic understanding of prevention, but also regarding organisation and project handling. These regional differences have to be taken into account. The fact that there are regional differences has to be considered when planning the project and the respective methods to be applied in order to avoid misunderstandings which hamper work.

- \* The obvious need for sensible mediation in European communication processes has been met by setting up an advisory body for communication in the non-profit sector called „NICE“.

**Summary:**

The encouraging results at project level, that is the great satisfaction among the peers and the schools participated in the project as well as the good communication within the European network induced the partners involved to implement another European project in 1998/99.