

Reducing youth unemployment through mentoring in Basel, Switzerland

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Organisation: Municipality of Basel

Country: Switzerland

Level of government: Local government

Sector: Social protection

Type: Public Service

Launched in: 2000

Overall development time: 1 year(s)

Link to the innovation's website

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Description

While unemployment in Switzerland is relatively low (four percent in 2011) a growing number of young people find it increasingly difficult to manage the transition from school to the labour market. An innovative partnership between the two Cantons Basel-Stadt and Basel-Landschaft in Basel has developed a new approach to reduce youth unemployment. Instead of public agencies providing advice to young people about apprenticeships or placements, young business leaders provide personalised support through mentoring of young people. The results speak for themselves.

Why the innovation was developed

- In the last few years a growing number of school leavers have been registering at the unemployment offices in Switzerland, with young women and non-Swiss young people disproportionately affected.
 - Clearly, the transition from school to the labour market is a challenging time for young people. They need to grapple with a mix of questions and thoughts about their future when they're deciding on their next steps. And during this process, they can often become disappointed and discouraged, making the search for apprenticeships and placements even more difficult.
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Objectives

Improve access, Improve effectiveness, Improve social equity, Support economic growth

- The mentoring programme was established in Basel to offer support for young people (school leavers up to 25 year olds) who are having difficulties finding a apprenticeship or placement.
 - It establishes a mentoring relationship between unemployed young people and experienced adults, which gives the young people a helping hand and enables them to get started on their career. This personal relationship between the mentor and mentee helps develop young people's ability to define and focus on their goals, as well as cope with the frustrations of the search process.
 - In summary, the programme aims to strengthen the boldness and stamina of mentees, while they are searching for placements or apprenticeships; discuss mentees future plans and assess their skills and expertise; set goals; help with planning the steps needed to achieve these goals; help with collecting and using relevant information; encouragement in finding a placement or apprenticeship; use mentees own professional networks; and provide further contacts (through mentees' professional and personal networks) for further advice and support.
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Main beneficiaries

Students, Young people

- Unemployed youth

Results

Effectiveness

- The results of the programme are impressive: around 70% of mentees find a apprenticeship or placement each year, and while the length of time spent on the programme can vary from three months to two years, it is often the case that mentees find an appropriate training after eight months.
- Around 10% drop out of the programme altogether, although in some cases mentees have returned to the programme, experiencing later success. Mentees whose search runs for longer than expected or who also face more complex challenges, for example learning difficulties, are referred to other relevant support in the local area.

Development

Design

The programme was established 11 years ago, with initial funding coming from the Büro für Gleichstellung (the Kantonal Office for Gender Equality), who set about looking for future partners. As with many new programmes, time, patience and persistence was required to get the programme up and running.

However, politicians in the Basel area were conscious of the youth unemployment problem and as such were willing to contribute resources to the programme. Since 2003, the two kantons in the Basel area, Basel Landschaft and Basel Stadt, as well as the federal agency, Bundesamt für Berufsbildung und Technologie (Federal Office for Professional Education and Technology) have jointly funded the programme.

Similar programmes have been established in Kanton Zürich, with programmes in other Swiss kantons following. Today, all the mentoring programmes meet on a yearly basis to discuss their achievements and challenges, which helps to assure their quality and strengthen the various programmes across the country.

Implementation

Resources used:

- Clearly, the major financial saving offered by the mentoring programme is a reduction in the social insurance (unemployment benefit) bill. On the other hand, the cost of the programme involves 80% of one local government officer's time, along with 20% of an administrator's time (totally approximately CHF 120 000).
- The officer position organises and supports the mentoring programme. It promotes the programme through the school system, the unemployment office, local media and, of course, face to face, as well as assessing the mentors and mentees and partnering them together. It also involves providing an introductory course and organising five conferences a year for the mentors. As well as infrastructure costs, a further CHF 35 000 are spent on: professional development of staff, meeting costs, publications, books, events, consultants and evaluators.
- In addition to this, the mentors provide their own voluntary time. Around 150 volunteer mentors have participated in the programme so far, with a range of professional backgrounds, covering industries such as: administration, hotels and restaurants, marketing and communications, social work, health care, academia and skilled manual trades. The mentors support the mentees for approximately four hours a month, averaging around 30-40 hours in total.

Lessons Learned

Lessons Learned

- Like all innovative programmes, the mentoring programme required considerable time, effort and persistence to initially get it off the ground. Those wishing to launch similar programmes should ensure they have enough resources, as well as sufficient commitment from officers and politicians.
- Mentoring programmes work most successfully when they have a clear structure that is communicated to all those involved. It is essential that the mentors and the mentees fully understand how the mentoring process works, and the commitment required from themselves to make it a success.
- Fundamental to the success of the programme is partnering the 'right' mentor to the 'right' mentee. One of the programme's strengths is its relatively small scale which enables the programme managers to get to know the mentees, helping them choose the best mentor for each individual. In the past six years only three to four mentoring relationships have not worked well and, in these cases, the programme officer has worked with the mentor and mentee to resolve the issue and re-partnered them if necessary. Scaling up of the programme may require additional officer time to ensure that the partnering service continues to be successful.
- The informal approach taken by the programme is also seen as a strength. The programme is designed to keep the bureaucratic face of the Kanton in the background, and instead, to encourage the mentors and mentees to develop strong, informal relationships through meeting in their homes or in cafes.