

## **Taking charge of delinquent minors and young adults aged 14- 21 Outpatient projects and procedures available in the city of Göttingen**

My name is Monika Gleitze. I am a specialised youth worker with a State diploma and work for the youth legal protection service of the city of Göttingen's youth department. My two colleagues and myself are responsible for minors and 18-21 year-olds (subsequently designated as 'young adults') of Göttingen, charged with crimes. We accompany them throughout the criminal procedure, make a preliminary report to the public prosecutor's office and juvenile court on their personal evolution and living conditions and propose a possible way of reacting to their offence, from our pedagogical point of view.

My intention is to present you with a general idea of the different procedures and projects used in Göttingen, in view of reacting pedagogically to the crime of minors and young adults charged with offences ranging from petty to moderately serious such as, for example, theft, fraud, insults, driving without a licence, assault and battery, etc. if it is a first conviction, we generally get a concrete alternative sentence, elaborated in cooperation between the public prosecutor's office and youth legal protection: in that way, the public prosecutor's office first of all abandons, in an investigation procedure, the charge and calls on youth legal protection.

We convoke the minor with his parents or the young adult and verify, in the framework of an interview, if and to what degree the interested party and his entourage have thought about the crime committed. We then indicate to the public prosecutor's office, if and under what conditions, the halt in the procedure can occur. For example, it can be participation in criminal mediation, financial compensation, repairs of damages, work obligation, outpatient supervision as concerns drug addiction, attendance at police driving lessons, etc., all measures that we are in charge of setting up and supervising.

In the event of positive change, we manage a definitive halt in proceedings, otherwise the charge takes its normal course, this happening fairly rarely. The advantage of this procedure lies in the reaction that occurs shortly after taking action, which is primordial for young people from the pedagogical point of view, and in the fact that the interested party can avoid the charge by active cooperation.

At the same time, we can remedy, by concrete offers of advice and consultation issuing from help to the youth, the shortcomings of the education that preceded it. In this area, we work in close collaboration with the general social service of the youth department and various medico-psycho-pedagogical centres.

Over the past few years, alternative sentences have proved themselves in Göttingen, according to the estimation of all the participants, a fact confirmed by the increase in their number. Thus, my colleagues and I worked on 77 cases in 2003 and 212 in 2007, which also resulted in relieving congestion in juvenile court.

Minors and young adults who have committed assault and battery, made threats or indulged in insulting behaviour, quite often in a gang, can be discharged by the public prosecutor's office or the youth legal protection to the registered association of Göttingen for mediation (Göttinger Verein für Mediation e.V.), which works in the criminal mediation project ("Täter-Opfer-Ausgleich") for the young people of Göttingen and the district of Göttingen and Osterode.

The on-site collaborators first verify, during an interview with the victim(s) and guilty party/parties, the disposition for participation and the conditions of the mediation. Following other interviews relative to the content, social and pedagogical mediation is carried out between the guilty party/parties and victim(s), at the end of which, in general, an individual agreement is concluded between the parties that may include, for example, apologies, repair of damages, work obligation, etc.. As soon as the agreement has been transposed, the on-site collaborators inform the youth legal protection office and the public prosecutor's office, which then closes the procedure.

The advantage of this measure lies in the possibility of detecting a conflict that has often been latent for quite some time between the parties and avoiding its degenerating later on.

The guilty party/parties must also be concerned with the feelings of the victim(s), which is not often the case. Here, too, the interested party has ample possibility to participate since he can put in a lot of effort and contribute actively to the clarification of the conflict.

In the sector of the city of Göttingen, 67 cases (often involving several young people) were assigned to the association in 2007.

The association receives an annual subsidy from the city of Göttingen, the districts of Göttingen and Osterode and the Lower Saxony Regional Office of Social Affairs, Youth and Family and is supported by Justice with the allocation of the income from fines.

Minors and young adults, already charged on various occasions for moderately serious offences, such as burglary, assault and battery, threats, etc., and who risk a sentence of 1-4 weeks in prison, can, in order to avoid detention, be sentenced by juvenile court to attend apprenticeship classes in social behaviour, something that can also be imposed as the infliction of probation in the event of a prison sentence for minors having committed serious crimes.

The caring offer of this socio-educational group is the recognised youth help association of Southern Lower Saxony (JSN), an association founded by the towns of this region and which also proposes several offers of help to youth including, precisely, apprenticeship classes in social behaviour.

This group course is given by two specialised educators and is aimed at minors and young adults who have been sentenced by the court to attend. The group is made up of 8 to 10 participants, and the obligation for everyone is attendance at the 24 group meetings, which take place once a week, for three hours, in late afternoon-evening, and collective participation in a weekend group outing.

During the meetings, under the leadership of the group's director, participants talk about themselves and the other participants in the group, their behaviour and what they feel. They discuss what poses problems and then, together, search for solutions and alternative ways of acting. Naturally, the recurrent theme is the participants' delinquent behaviour, at the origin of their sentences.

Experts—some of whom are also ex-convicts—are invited to deal with interesting subjects, or the group moves outside, e.g., to go to meetings of the debtors' counselling service, family planning, etc.

In the group, film, theatre or music projects can be carried out by the participants thanks to outside contributors. These projects generally have as a theme the daily life of the participants and also include their own experiences facing the police and justice. Thus, for example, hearings of young people before the magistrates' court have been acted out and filmed, with the participation of judges

for minors and youth legal protection; the participants can interpret other roles, such as the judge, prosecutor, victim, etc., which often leads them to reconsider their previous way of seeing things.

Shared cooking, sports and cultural events and introducing other leisure activities supplement the offers proposed to the group. The group weekend outing makes for an additional, intense experience: thanks to joint activities such as rock-climbing, the participants learn to what degree trust and mutual help are important in the group. The allocation of roles, seemingly set within the group, can thereby still be modified.

In addition to the offers proposed to the group during the classes in apprenticeship to social behaviour is a case-by-case offer of help by the two course directors. Thus, whether a matter of difficulties at school or in the workplace, relational problems at home or amongst friends, or any other problem, the participants can turn to the collaborators who also organise home visits, (re)establish contact with teachers, etc., or accompany the participant to appointments that overwhelm him.

Even after completing the social behaviour course, former participants can go and see the directors when in need of consultation.

Training in anger management (AKT) is also offered by the Southern Lower Saxony registered association of youth help. It concerns a two-month group socioeducational offer, especially aimed at repeat offenders charged with crimes committed with violence.

This course is integrated into the social behaviour course; participants in AKT also take social behaviour classes, from which they are excused solely during the duration of AKT. The classes are given by two specialised educators who have been specially trained in anger management.

Thanks to precise exercises and role-playing, participants are confronted with their own behaviour and learn to avoid provocations and not pay attention to those of others. New strategies for conflict resolution are developed and worked on.

At AKT, persons subject to trial by the minors' probation commission can also participate, who are also integrated into a group offer by the minors' probation commission and charged with crimes committed with violence.

Training in self-control (Skoll) of the Diaconal Works (*Diakonische Werk*) addiction help centre is aimed, amongst others, at minors and young adults whose delinquency is often related to their consumption of alcohol and/or drugs, for example, drunken driving, crime linked to narcotics purchases, assault and battery under the influence of alcohol or drugs, etc.

Participation in the self-control training can be imposed on underage or young adult delinquents in the framework of an alternative sentence, as directive in the framework of a judgement or infliction of probation in case of criminal sentencing for minors.

A ten-week training programme is developed as a closed group offer and proposed to a group of 10-12 minors/young adults by two counsellors from the addiction aid centre. The programme includes preparation and evaluation interviews.

Within the training programme, participants discuss their own consumption and elaborate a self-control training plan, which is transposed inside the programme and jointly evaluated.

This is an open area of exchange and mutual support; group participants can elaborate new strategies for crisis management and learn alternative behaviours for their personal use.

At the completion of the programme, each participant must make his own decision, with full knowledge of the facts, as to his future consumption: the self-control training goes in this direction, stabilising consumption, reducing consumption or giving up the use of drugs completely.

Subsequent to the programme, the addiction aid centre offers consultation supervision and the good offices of outpatient or **stationary** therapies.

I hope that, with this brief general view of our different projects, I have been able to show you that we are determined, in Göttingen, to make minors and young adults face up to their criminal responsibility very early on whilst also showing them the means and aids allowing them to modify problematical behaviour.