APPRECIATION AND RECOGNITION

Strengthening the recognition culture in voluntary services

"That is exactly the big mistake, which one believes, one must criticise things, while one actually must characterise them. That is what matters."

(R. Steiner, 1917)

Volunteers' engagement and the societal responsibilities that come with it deserve recognition. They experience appreciation, encouragement, and public visibility through a practiced recognition culture.

Yet sometimes it is difficult to understand, what a strengthening of recognition culture in voluntary services is and which measures are necessary. What can and should be done to reach this mutual goal?

Recognition Culture in Voluntary Services – What is it?
Generally, recognition is understood as public appreciation, respect, trust, attention, consideration, and interest. It should be as personal and individual as possible. We, as supporting institution and service location, stand in direct contact with the volunteers and therefore have the best possibility, through everyday actions and positions, to give volunteers recognition which directly resonates with them.

According to evaluations done by us at service locations, our volunteers especially appreciate openness, trust, humanness, and authenticity. Despite this already positive rating, we would like to further improve ourselves together with you as service location to live out a successful recognition and appreciation culture.

Important for appreciative feedback are the following aspects:

- Good timing
- Concrete
- Self-revelation
- Authentic
- Prompt

A helpful tool for experiencing a situation differently and for expressing feedback in the corresponding form, can be "reframing".

Reframing: Terms and feelings, with which situations/circumstances are judged, can be replaced with different words, which can describe the situation just as well or even better. This doesn't change the situation itself but rather the perception/meaning/stance of/to the situation.

The basic assumption of reframing is:

- In principle, every behaviour makes sense when it appears to the person perceiving it in the "right" context.
- The meaning is not always apparent to the observer/participants.

The meaning can be changed, for example:

- Meaning of behaviour i.e. a child is aggressive—demands that his boundaries be respected; gains respect
- Context of the behaviour—a behaviour can be appropriate in one context; in another not, for example a person is barely or not able to focus on a task—this characteristic is for example then positive, where flexible and the ability to quickly re-think are necessary.

Possibilities to change the perception of volunteers' negative behaviour

Work Shy	- High standards of quality - Perfectionistic
Rebelliousness	- Courage - Active & powerful - A question for myself: do I take the volunteer seriously? - Distancing, calling for attention, looking for the self - Wishing to be seen
Resistant to Advice/ Arrogant	- Can set oneself apart - Knows what he/she wants
Know-It-All	- Deals with one matter intensively - Steadfastness - Thinking/is interested - Invites one to reflect
Smart Alec	- Plays a part - Self-assertion - Thinking/is interested - Invites one to reflect - Engaged
Pushes Boundaries/ Lacks Distance	- Enthusiasm - Personal initiative - Courageous - Goal-oriented - Highly motivated - Openness - Opens oneself for closeness - Unselfconsciousness
Mobile Phone Addict	- Communicative - Networked - Always well informed - Translation
Slow	- Especially thorough & meticulous - Consciously works in own tempo
Sleepy head/ too relaxed	- In peace lies strength - Has a calming and relaxing effect - Feels comfortable - Balanced - Calm focus
Always Hungry	- Gregarious - Healthy
Uncared for Appearance	- Naturalness

	- Lives by own values
Tardiness	- At peace when the sea turns stormy - This behaviour can be seen positively as a way to feel seen and expected - Nonchalance - Finds joy in life - Spontaneous - Flexible - Rested
Unreliable	- Careful with resources and energy - Follows own interests - Examines sense of purpose - Exposes feelings of being over- and underwhelmed
Forgetful	- Helps to see what is essential - What do I say? How do I say it? (time/space) ➔ Time of differentiation
Objections	- Has own opinions

Forms of Recognition on the Level of Service Location-&-Volunteers

- Welcome Culture: First Day and Training
    1. Figure-out before hand and inform the volunteers: who is responsible for this volunteer? When should they come for the first time and where?
    2. Orientation phase-> Does the volunteer has an overview of the institution and the people who work there?
    3. Training phase: Conversation after the first three weeks: Discuss intentions and learning goals for the year
    4. End of the trial period: In writing: "We want to work with you!"
- Culture of thanks/farewell culture
- Inclusion in the team (recognition of the volunteer as full member of the team) i.e. Participation in team meetings
- Appreciation, awareness as volunteer (clarify and integrate the roll of volunteers at the service location—and create transparency about this)
- Attentive, devoted practical guide (permanent contact person)
- Regular reflexion conversations:
    1. At start of service
    2. 3 Weeks before the end of the trial period: Intentions and learning goals + individual arraignments, how often such conversations will take place
    3. Middle of the voluntary service
    4. End of the voluntary service
- Feedback culture, i.e. allow for and receive suggestions and impulses from the volunteers
- Employees' time, which they use for guiding volunteers and answering their questions ->including this as much as possible in their work hours
- Allow for choice of tasks and involvement in their design
- Involvement in making (certain) decisions

- Give volunteers the freedom to try new things and carry out their own projects during their service
- Participation by the volunteers in continuing education courses at the service location
- Release volunteers' spokesperson from work for their duties
- Grant cost reductions, i.e. food at employee prices, purchase food at lower prices, free internet, allow use of car or bicycle, leisure time opportunities (i.e. billiard table),…
- Reciprocal learning from one another
- Honouring of the volunteers' contribution by the director of the institution
- Public relations work
- Take feedback from the volunteers seriously and evaluate it for the daily work in the institution for new volunteers.
- Complaint management
- Strengthen the roll of volunteers in the institution's conception (established in writing, communication, sensitise employees, work with volunteers is included in the conception of the institution)
- Language courses
- Volunteers have the chance to try out other work areas
- Volunteers have a place for their belongings in the institution
- Attractive living spaces for the volunteers
- Exchange rolls
- Remember volunteers' birthdays and celebrate them
- Day of Recognition