

Vocational Training and Therapeutic Care of Young Asylum Seekers and Refugees in Germany

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Abstract

Against the background of the huge rise in the number of asylum seekers and refugees absorbed into German society over the last couple of years this article examines the innovative Bavarian programme of preparatory classes for asylum seekers between 16 and 21 years of age. The challenges faced by educational and social work professionals working with this target group are documented alongside the particular resources which these highly-motivated young people as a rule bring with them. Specific requirements for psychotherapy professionals are addressed as well as a range of recommendations formulated by the author to enable the longer-term success of this vocational training programme in integrating these young people into the German educational and employment system. It has become apparent that a holistic approach to the lives of the target group by professionals in education, social work and therapy is necessary to enable young asylums seekers to complete vocational training successfully. Transitional management is a key part of the process of setting asylum seekers on the path to an apprenticeship. Coordination with the Labour Office, local authority administration and local decision-makers are further parts of the equation. This must intermesh with civil society engagement to provide the maximum use of resources giving young refugees access to training, the labour market and long term integration into German life.

Keywords

refugees, education, social work, vocational training, trauma therapy

Background and Recent Developments

Germany has been the focus of one of the largest migration movements in Europe in recent times over the last couple of years. Over a million migrants deemed to be refugees (in the colloquial rather than the legal sense) entered the country in 2015 alone. As a large number of those entering the country will remain at least for a longer period of time issues of incorporation into the accommodation, education and labour market systems have become of paramount importance for the receiving society.

The following article is based on a talk given at the conference of the European Network of Rehabilitation Centres in Munich in October 2015. The focus is on the specific demands of absorbing and incorporating students over 16 years of age into the highly developed structures of vocational training in Germany. The article is, in a wider context, an attempt to give some insight into the challenges facing therapists, social workers, and teachers when supporting unaccompanied minor refugees in the process of social and educational integration into German life.

Against the dramatic background of the huge rise in asylum seekers attempting to access Germany in the summer and autumn of 2015 these issues have acquired a hitherto unknown urgency (Johannson, 2014). The author has spent the period 2012–2015 monitoring vocational training preparatory classes in Munich, which were part of a broader programme set up by the Bavarian

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Ministry of Education from 2011-2012 to enable young asylum seekers and refugees (independent of their residential status) to gain access to vocational training within the framework of the Dual System of apprenticeships in Germany.

The author was commissioned by the City of Munich to devise a strategy for the successful support of young asylum seekers in these preparatory classes to enable them to go on and complete courses of vocational training. This strategy, based on the monitoring programme, participant observation in the refugee classes and wide ranging qualitative interviews with experts and students, was published by the City of Munich in summer of 2016. The concept with a total of 38 practice-based recommendations provided the basis for ongoing discussions by decision makers in the field of vocational training in Bavaria and as part of the broader debate on educational integration of refugees in Germany (Anderson, 2016).

The Dual System is a sophisticated structure of cooperation between a plethora of large, medium-sized and small enterprises providing training and apprenticeships for in excess of 500 different trades working in tandem with vocational training schools, set up across the whole of the Federal Republic. Apprentices do their vocational training (as a rule over a period of three to four years) primarily focused on the workplace, with blocks of 2–3 weeks of vocational school four or five times per year. This is designed to ensure that they acquire a high level of theoretical knowledge in their chosen field alongside the practical and workplace-based skills learnt in the company. This system has set Germany in good stead since the Second World War in maintaining a high level of technical skills at work level within the workforce in small and medium-sized enterprises (the German *Mittelstand*) in a rapidly changing and innovative working world.

This paper will focus on the Bavarian context of access to vocational training for asylum seekers over 16 years of age, because there has been rapid progress in this particular educational field, and the Bavarian approach, as briefly sketched above, has attracted a lot of attention across the republic, as it is representative of a model practice. It will then go on to address some of the challenges faced by social, educational and therapeutic professionals working in the field with this target group. The article will conclude by articulating a number of recommendations for improving the programme incorporating young asylum seekers into the vocational training system.

Looking first at the numbers: while in 2014 a large rise in the number of asylum seekers in comparison to the previous year resulted in a year's end total of 202,000 across the Federal Republic, the development in 2015, and especially from the summer onwards, brought a completely new dimension in refugee flows into Germany. Towards the end of the year previous estimates of up to 800,000 new asylum seekers had been discarded as too low; not least because the machinery was so overloaded that registration of new arrivals was deemed to no longer function in a comprehensive manner. Equally, the estimate of 13,000 unaccompanied minors in Bavaria alone in the first half of 2015 was thought later in the year to no longer be valid by a long way (Anderson, 2016). Estimates in mid-2016 assumed that there were around 60,000 unaccompanied minors in Germany.

The background to this is that there has been something of a sea change in the attitude of established institutions (politicians, the administrative levels of local authority, government at both *Länder* and the Federal level, as well as the business community from the major multinational players to the small and medium-sized enterprises of the German *Mittelstand*) to refugees as a source of potential for the labour market (IAB, 2015).

Until recently those in the asylum system were not, as it were, on the screen, but of late, fired by the ongoing debate on the German demographic (a rapidly ageing populace) and an increasingly acute skills shortage. It has been widely acknowledged that young asylum seekers could prove a major potential labour reservoir to address these issues.

Nonetheless there still remain large regional disparities when it comes to a cooperative, resources-oriented approach regarding this target group. There are parts of the country where, the local authority offices (Youth Office, Aliens Office), the Labour Agency, schools, residential projects, medical services, and therapists all appear to engage seriously and work well together. There are others in which certain actors do not understand the rationale or see the need to enable these young people to learn the language, access education and vocational training and to join the labour market. Local authority Aliens Offices in particular find it difficult to adjust to a “welcoming” mindset towards this target group, not least because the customary official view has for many years been the exact opposite (Barth and Meneses, 2012).

For new arrivals the initial concerns are existential. They need accommodation, and provision of residential projects for unaccompanied minors has been expanding rapidly with the rising numbers (Berthold, 2015; Berthold and Espenhorst, 2011). They need appropriate social and psychological care. Therapeutic services have been expanding accordingly, but the waiting lists for therapy of the few, but highly respected, specialist institutions like the *Refugio* psychotherapy organisation in Munich are long.

Access to language courses is officially not available for the first three months, but there have been numerous civil society initiatives to provide language facilities from as early as possible for both unaccompanied minors and the young with their families in general, in both reception centres and the hostels which they, as a rule, then move on to. The next step in terms of education is for the under-16s attendance in transitional classes (*Übergangsklassen*), which gives them a grounding in the German language and some essential knowledge of the structures of the German school system.

Vocational Training Preparatory Classes: The Dual System

Vocational training preparatory classes for over-16s were introduced by the Bavarian Ministry of Education via a decree setting up the framework enabling asylum seekers to attend a two-year course which culminates in a school certificate. This is, in turn, the basis for beginning an apprenticeship within the German vocational training system. The prerequisite for this innovative programme was the raising of the compulsory vocational school age from 18 to 21 years (under certain conditions 25 years). This gives teenage asylum seekers the time to “catch up” in terms of learning the essentials to become a craftsman. When the course was first set up, it was assumed that the preparatory classes, ending with the school certificate equivalent to a Middle Secondary School certificate (*Mittelschulabschluss* or *Qualifizierende Mittelschulabschluss*), would only last one year. The range of challenges, linguistic, academic, social, therapeutic, which the adolescents and young adults face have, however, made it clear that two years are necessary for them to be able to adjust to a (relatively) stable environment, learn the basics of the language, and begin to get an idea of the range of options which the Dual System of vocational training offers them.

Originally set up in 2011–2012 the classes began with a couple of hundred pupils in Munich and Nuremberg. It was soon recognised that the model should be applied across the state. Since then the expansion has been dynamic in the extreme and accorded priority by the Vocational Training Department of the Education Ministry. At the beginning of the 2015–2016 school year there were 450 classes in 95 locations across Bavaria with 8,100 pupils. Of the age group concerned, it is estimated that the classes cater for between a third and a half of those who would (theoretically) be eligible (Anderson, 2016), i.e. the expansion of demand constantly exceeds available supply.

Even though virtually all the students attend basic language courses before beginning the preparatory vocational classes, the levels of language and academic ability of students in the classes are extremely disparate. This is a major challenge for the teachers and social workers working closely with school psychologists on an interdisciplinary basis. This disparity is only logical: the unaccompanied minors are a heterogeneous group in terms of social background, educational knowledge and other skills, from the illiterate former shepherd to the A-level student ready to start university. Teachers and other members of staff must deal with a great range of ambitions (including family's), assignments, dreams, yearnings, and frustrations. This calls for both sensitivity and commitment.

It is a great advantage when there is ethnic-cultural diversity in the staff room. Under the prevailing conditions in Germany it is, however, difficult to engage migrants as teachers because of the requirement that members of this profession, as a rule, be state or civil servants. This in turn entails having German nationality. Nevertheless, if there are members of staff with a minority ethnic background (e.g. social workers) this enhances both the linguistic profile of the classes, as well as providing a deeper pool of intercultural knowledge and experience. It also has a motivating effect for the pupils who are experiencing the disparate role models of teachers in classes of students from a plethora of countries, cultures, and religions.

The diversity profile in the preparatory classes is equally well served when there is a good age mix of younger and more mature colleagues, a range of qualifications, from trained vocational school

teachers to German language specialists, higher school teachers, and German literature graduates (with language teaching expertise). As the classes are recruited on a voluntary basis, the staff mix tends to be motivational, open-minded and enthusing, which in view of the steep learning curve for all involved in the preparatory classes is just as well.

Experience to date has shown that a relatively high percentage complete the two-year course, receiving a school certificate at the end. If the students are successful in finding an apprenticeship depends on several local contextual factors on the ground: the degree of cooperation with local actors such as, social workers in the residential groups for the minors, the attitude of local authority administrators, as well as the Labour Office, voluntary and individual mentoring structures.

Young Refugees' Perspective

An important dimension of the project was the research into the attitudes of young refugees themselves. Seven young people, between the ages of 16 and 21, were interviewed: two of them looked back in retrospect at their vocational training, and the rest were still participating in the preparatory two-year course. Several flanking interviews conducted with experts involved in educational, therapeutic, and social work with the target group, broadened and deepened the perspective on young asylum seekers' experience.

Virtually all the interviewees, whether within or outside the school context, mentioned the high degree of motivation and willingness to learn on the part of the young asylum seekers. There is a range of factors contributing to this. For one thing, the young people (if they are unaccompanied minors) know that they are the "Chosen Ones" in the sense that they have been sent by the family, generally as the only member, to get to Europe, attain an education and ultimately a job with high earning potential. It is fair to say that, regardless of individual experience of persecution, violence or trauma, this is a consistent hope or expectation on the part of relatives in the region of origin. They expect the young member of the family, in material terms, to succeed (Dieckhoff, 2010).

This is intermeshed with a further distinguishing feature in the situation of young refugees compared to, say, 20 years ago. In former times, flight and exile meant being cut-off from the old roots, family and friends (Kauffmann and Riedelsheimer, 2010). Today social media and mobile phone technology mean that young asylum-seekers/refugees can be in more-or-less constant contact with their families which can be a mixed blessing. There is less primary loneliness than previously, because there is regular, reassuring contact via Skype, Facebook or cell phone. But, relatives are in a position to apply more immediate pressure: cash is necessary to repay the debts to the human smuggler, other financial demands or simply the expectation that the young man (80 to 85% of the students in the preparatory classes are male) will be finished soon with the language course and training and the cash will begin to flow. In this sense, there is the sober expectation of a tangible return on investment in human capital in the short to medium, certainly *not the long-term* (Detemple, 2013).

Then there is the issue of job and career aspirations. These vary enormously, as already indicated, according to social and educational background. This means that many of these young people face a difficult landing into the central European professional reality: no, a young man with three years of schooling hitherto will not become a pilot with *Lufthansa* within a year or two. There is often a drastic discrepancy between the young person's dream of their job as opposed to their actual skills and knowledge base.

Beyond this there is the shock for many that the work they want to do requires a course of three years or more training in Germany. This is particularly true of adolescents who have had experience in their family's businesses, selling from behind the counter or helping repair cars in the garage. The fact that in Germany apprenticeships are a prerequisite for working in these trades as a qualified craftsman is an unpleasant surprise and hard to understand for many. In Germany training takes time. Thus, asylum seekers become aware that time frames for earning and paying back debts suddenly shift dramatically.

Some of the students are under immediate pressure to earn, because the human smugglers or "agents" who enabled their passage to Germany expect them or their families to reimburse them immediately. Students may be attending the course while working evenings or night shifts to earn ready cash for repayments. This creates a quandary for some, reported by interviewees in the school

or residential projects, of either opting to work and earn ready cash in the interim or study for a better qualification (and higher earnings) later.

Teaching staff or social workers have to come to terms with many students' "double bind". The fact the latter have been independent for some time through the process of migration and having to leave their families behind means they have learned to cope and decide for themselves in many situations. They have acquired a sense of independence and thus may chafe more than their peers at the restrictions of school and in the residential projects for unaccompanied minors (Korntheuer and Anderson, 2014).

But, and this point was made in particular by psychotherapists working with the target group, once they are able to settle down in a more stable environment (a distinct framework with a routine, emotional support and clearly-defined and -attainable goals), then the façade comes down and with it the emotional and other needs become evident. Thus, the professionals (or volunteers) providing sustaining relationships become figures of trust, indeed role models, even if the adolescents may sometimes seem to signal the opposite.

Furthermore, it was pointed out that asylum seekers often have an ambivalent attitude to being refugees. They yearn to be just the same as other adolescents, in other words, they want to be seen as "normal", just like their peers in central Europe (of whatever background), with all of the attendant concerns and challenges of people their age.

The Role of Therapy and Social Support

There are a number of factors which therapists have to bear in mind when they treat unaccompanied minors. These young people have gone through the process of forced migration; they left their home area, family and friends behind them under duress. They may have suffered traumatic experiences prior to their departure or during the migration process. Support and treatment of these young people imply the development of culturally sensitive psychotherapeutic techniques, which means applying intercultural skills to interact appropriately with clients of varying ethnic, cultural, and religious backgrounds.

One of the challenges facing psychotherapists and psychiatrists in Germany and other Central European countries which have received large numbers of refugees in recent times is that many of the professionals have no experience of the specific demands of working with this target group. This can mean that trauma therapists are trained and experienced in dealing with patients whose problems are embedded in a European cultural and experiential context, but are unprepared for the challenges of young asylum seekers traumatised through (civil) war, persecution and flight (Geier et al., 2012).

However, these challenges are increasingly being addressed. Centres providing community-based support for people with social and mental health issues at local level, and socio-psychiatric services, are increasingly concentrating on asylum seekers as a vulnerable group in need of immediate support and referral for treatment at local level. The major representative bodies in the psychiatry and psychotherapeutic fields in Germany are organising conferences, and training programmes, as well as setting up regionally-based collegial networks as a response to what is now recognised to be a major challenge to mental health services in terms of resources and professional skills. Steep learning curves regarding treatment of refugees are the norm for therapists in practice as well as in Child and Adolescent Psychiatric units across Germany.

An essential part of this process of skills enhancement is broadening the deployment of language interpreter skills in diagnosis, counselling or therapeutic treatment of those who have gone through the frequently traumatising process of forced migration. Existing interpreter services are being expanded, many therapists in practice who have hitherto had no experience of therapy sessions through and with interpreters are facing this new challenge, but it is one which, when mastered, can mean a considerable enhancing of one's professional skills (Hargasser, 2014).

Then there is the issue of intercultural out-patient services provided by the major psychiatric hospitals in the regions outside the main cities. Up until now the form of emergency service provided by these institutions for those experiencing some form of mental crisis has been resolutely mono-cultural. In the author's view the development of a culturally sensitive approach on the part of such emergency services is an issue which has to be addressed immediately, because there are so many potential situations in which a psychiatric first port of call with culture-sensitive skills is required, e.g.

dealing with a young asylum seeker who is in the grip of a psychosis. First steps are being taken in some areas to broaden the language skills pool of these services and provide training for staff on intercultural and asylum-related issues.

One innovative option currently being examined in Regensburg, for instance, is an outreach service, combining both professionals and students of psychiatry, who go into the hostels of asylum seekers to offer in-house diagnosis, on-the-spot counselling and, when required, referral for ongoing therapy at a clinic or practice. This kind of service can provide the backbone for a growing network to improve standards of psychiatric intervention for a highly vulnerable, but of necessity mobile (and thus not easily accessible), target group.

One further aspect of the dynamic expansion of demand and provision of therapeutic-psychiatric and social support services is the vital role of those few institutions with long years of experience and expertise in the field like *Refugio* e.V. in Munich. They face not only the challenge of great demand for individual, group, and art therapy but also consult on a wide range of issues, requests for further training, supervision, and media interviews. There is a sense of vindication, at long last, among experienced professionals in the field at the recognition of the need for their expertise. But these organisations are being pressed to the limit of their resources in trying to meet these rapidly-growing demands.

In view of the challenges presented by the sheer numbers of asylum seekers coming to Germany it is of vital importance to coordinate professional and voluntary efforts in a mutually beneficial way. This should entail tandem arrangements between professionals and their volunteer counterparts; when appropriate. The helper networks should be made aware of the professionally-trained social workers from welfare organisations in hostels, who provide coordination of activities, information, as well as referral to medical, administrative or other services. There should be regular meetings of all those involved to ensure an up-to-date flow of information and addressing of misunderstandings or conflicts, if, and when, they arise. Structures for further training courses on legal, educational, or therapeutic issues could usefully be installed over the longer term, as well, if requested, the availability of supervision and other forms of psychological support for voluntary helpers.

Barriers and Challenges

There are impediments to the establishment of a sustainable, high-quality network of support and treatment for unaccompanied minors in Germany in the immediate future.

The first challenge is the question of “atmospherics” at the local level. The question is to what extent are the local authorities and other actors actively refugee-friendly or -hostile in their approach? If an Aliens Office at the town or parish level decides to adopt a less cooperative or conciliatory attitude, then all sorts of problems can be created when the asylum-seeker wants an authorisation for a placement or an apprenticeship or indeed to accept a job offer. The local employment exchange can play an equally important key role in encouraging training and labour market integration, or the opposite.

At this point, we have to distinguish clearly between the attitude towards this area of educational and labour market integration policy adopted by local government and that of State/*Länder* and federal levels. The local community, town or city is the lynchpin of everyday life when dealing with asylum seekers. Social, educational and health professionals, grassroots activists and migrant groups, as well as committed local authority and labour office administrators and politicians, have cooperated in the last two years with sympathetic media outlets to get the practical issues addressed. There has, particularly from the summer of 2015 onwards, been an immense and sustained mobilisation of civil society engagement to welcome and help incorporate refugees at local level. In Munich and many other towns this has led to modest but significant improvement in housing, educational and health provision for newly arrived asylum seekers in critical situations. Committed civil society groups at local level have tried, as far as resources allow, to provide, at the very least, a minimum standard of accommodation, educational, and health provision.

Experience has shown that ultimately it is of considerable importance that the local institutional representatives meet regularly, in the form of working groups or round tables, to discuss forms of cooperation, new strategies and initiatives for the overcoming of obstacles to social, educational, and economic integration at the local level. Regular exchange of information and views help overcome the

obstacles attendant on different “official” or civil society mentalities and approaches. The challenges presented by the refugee scenario, aid understanding, when approached collaboratively, how they think and act.

This of course does not absolve the decision makers in the political realm at federal and *Länder* level of their responsibility for setting the framework to ease access to the training and labour market, to provide greater long-term security and a basis for life planning for young refugees. There are a number of aspects to this, from statutory permission of access to the labour market as an asylum seeker as soon as possible after entry to the country, to provision of financial support during vocational training. Then there is the increasingly vocal demand from employers’ associations in the debate that asylum seekers should have security of residential status at least for the duration of their apprenticeship (three years) plus a further two years as a qualified craftsman. These, and many more issues, are being addressed with an urgency by politicians and other decision makers which would have been unthinkable just a few years ago.

This is a fascinating aspect of recent developments: mass (forced) migration into Germany, which is very hard to stop at the borders without resorting to military and politically untenable measures in democratic states, has concentrated the mind wonderfully. The intermeshing of large-scale civil society involvement with mass mobilisation of administrative, political, educational, social and economic resources to meet the challenges involved has led, in thousands of locally-based initiatives, to the creation of a “welcoming culture” worthy of the name. This has meant that large numbers of people (volunteers at the railway stations, helper groups in the hostels, and many more) were prepared to provide support in whatever way they could, and many seem to be in for the long haul. In this sense, there is a groundswell of support for Chancellor Merkel’s, “we will manage it.”

This is not to ignore the scepticism of some, and outright rejection, anger or hatred towards refugees of a small, potentially violent minority. The situation in Germany is volatile. But, in societal terms, nobody wants a breakdown in the system. This means that there is a broad consensus across social classes, established institutions and professions as forums of public discourse that Germany must promote integration in the short to medium-term. Nobody, in the mainstream and quite a way beyond, wants to be seen as the “naysayer” who declares this to be undesirable, or indeed unachievable, for this approach could prove explosive. Violent incidents in the summer of 2016 (Munich and other southern German towns) showed how sensitive the situation remains.

This will, however, mean that the procedures for distinguishing between those who have a right to remain and those who are likely to face removal or deportation are likely to become more, rather than less, rigorous. Legislative and political decisions taken at European Union (EU) level aim to stem the flows of migrants/refugees more effectively at the point of countries of transit (such as Turkey), if not of origin (Klingholz and Sievert, 2014). The result is that within Germany local authorities and professional actors will work more closely together to promote easier access to education, vocational training, the job market, and further qualification for those asylum seekers in the country and with a prospect of remaining. This will mean more effective cooperation between vocational preparatory school classes, social workers, local administration, chambers of commerce and trades, employment exchanges and other relevant institutions.

Beyond this there will potentially be greater engagement on the part of smaller and medium-sized enterprises of the *Mittelstand* as they realise the worth of promoting “stay” of the highly-motivated target group of young refugees, whether accompanied by family members or not. It will be an important part of the function of teachers and social workers, watchful for the well-being of their charges, to ensure that the migrant-friendly and more open-minded businesses become part of the apprenticeship network, rather than those on the lookout for a cheap labour reserve to exploit, or prone to stereotype these young people in racist terms.

Holistic Approaches to Vocational Training

In the following section, there will be a summary of some of the most important supportive measures required to enable young refugees to complete an apprenticeship and enter the labour market as qualified workers over the next few years. The assertions are based on the author’s recommendations in a report for the city of Munich based on the three-year research project referred to at the outset.

It is essential that young refugees receive intensive support in learning the specialist language terms they need in their respective vocations. This could be in the form of extra language sessions which begin during the preparatory classes and should be intensified when they start their apprenticeship.

Vocational training should be organised in a culturally-sensitive way. The key issue for these students concerns the aspects of training which are harder for them to comprehend due to the very different cultural and social learning processes they have gone through, not least the fact of growing up in a very different environment to that of central Europe, quite apart from the specific experiences leading to flight from the home area. Many trades and crafts will be unknown to these young people; this diversity of background entails the task of developing an interculturally competent teaching approach (Scharrer et al., 2012).

Many young refugees, especially if they have had little or no schooling, will face the challenge of illiteracy and then the need to “learn how to learn.” The preparatory classes and vocational schools will need to adapt to provide for the needs of these pupils. A number of innovative projects for non-native speakers have been developed of late to address such issues as learning to read texts focusing on key words or developing note-taking skills (ISB, 2014).

It will be essential to overcome legislative and administrative barriers to funding for vocational trainees because of their lack of secure residential status as well as access to forms of training support provided by the local labour offices. There has been much debate of the need to reduce or remove these obstacles and the Legislative and Executive at federal level has been made aware of the need for pragmatic change.

There has to be longer term life and job-planning security for young refugees themselves and potential employers in the sense of “3+2” (stay for three years’ training followed by at least two years working as a skilled craftsman). This issue, too, is being addressed, not least because many businesses are increasingly aware of the potential of these young asylum seekers and are lobbying accordingly. Parallel to this there also needs to be appropriate provision of sustained and culturally-sensitive psychotherapeutic support for the target group.

An important part of this process of social and psychological support can be provided by mentoring on an individual basis. Advice and accompaniment provided by volunteers over a longer period of time can be an essential element, particularly during the transitional phase from preparatory class to apprenticeship, when the differing worlds of vocational school and workplace present special challenges for the unaccompanied asylum seekers. The danger of them giving up and breaking off the vocational training course is greatest at this time. Individual mentors may make the vital difference, encouraging their mentees not to leave, but rather endure the tough phase when the steep learning curve is most challenging. In addition to this, there should be regular educational assessments and monitoring of progress to ensure that the right supportive strategies kick in, if, and when, required.

It is essential to bear in mind that these young asylum seekers are excellent candidates for “life-long learning.” It should also not be regarded as a tragedy if a young person breaks off their vocational training, because of the pressure to earn more cash due to debts, pressure from relatives, or because the linguistic and training demands are simply too tough. But they should not leave the course with the feeling that they are failures and that the chance to do vocational training is gone forever. They need to be made aware that the door stays open: they can return in a couple of years when they have acclimatised, seen the value of good qualifications in Germany, speak the language better, and feel mature enough to take on the challenge, not least because of the positive memories of being supported by people who supported and believed in them during that first formative phase in Germany.

The Way Forward

Local authority initiatives regarding this area of educational and social support must be systematised (Roitsch, 2012). At present, there is inconsistency across Bavaria leading to a “postcode-determined” range of vocational training opportunities for unaccompanied minors and young refugees in general, which means those living in the cities have much better chances. As has been indicated, there needs to be coordination at national level (legislative, administrative, and financial) of measures and structures

for asylum seekers, in particular, as opposed to recognised refugees, to be afforded the chance to get appropriate training.

The watchword should be biographical orientation, i.e. to make the most of people's talents and resources (Anderson, 2000). For therapists, this entails the development of intercultural skills, provision of a wide range of further training on the pertinent issues, effective networking at local and supra-regional level as well as a growing and mutually beneficial collaboration with interpreters.

The key thought underlying these processes should be that nobody is forgotten in the longer term. Hence, there should be a constant bolstering of these young people's motivation for "life-long learning," based on the concept which refugees understand very well: that if at first they do not succeed, they will try until they achieve their goals.

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