

Volunteering@WU - Lernen macht Schule

The idea of the project

Learning with and from one another is the motto of the initiative „Lernen macht Schule" launched in 2010 by the Vienna University of Economics and Business (WU) together with Caritas Vienna, sponsored by REWE Group and BILLA AG. This initiative supports socially disadvantaged young people on their educational path and at the same time promotes the commitment and social responsibility among students.

To foster equal opportunities in our education system, more than 130 students are involved in „Lernen macht Schule" each semester and support around 260 children and teenagers regarding their educational and social development. In this respect, the central objectives are promoting the social participation and support of socially disadvantaged young people along with training of self-determined, critical thinking and reflective students, who think outside the box and are ready to take on social responsibility.

Learning Buddies

As learning buddies, the students support children and teenagers aged 6 to 18 from various social facilities run by Caritas Vienna (accommodation for asylum seekers, mother-child houses, counselling centers, etc.) and the Austrian Red Cross (Lernhaus). For a period of one semester, and often even longer, the students meet with the children for around 2-3 hours a week. Learning settings vary between the social facilities (1:1, 1:2 or group settings). The form of support depends primarily on the needs of the children/teens and their assessment by the social care institutions. Thus, studying for exams or schoolwork can be in the foreground as well as joint leisure activities:



„Our meetings are not restricted to just learning, we have now become real friends, who also have a lot to talk about." (learning buddy Arianna)

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the program was adapted and extended into digital space 2020 in cooperation with the Austria-wide initiative [#weiterlernen](#). In case of lockdowns or homeschooling, students are also able to continue their contribution to greater educational equality by supporting the children through digital channels.

Music Buddies

As music buddies, the students participate in a choir with children between 7 and 12 under the artistic direction of the Caritas cultural initiative “Brunnenpassage" and work towards several performances each semester. As part of the team, they take responsibility for the group and thus become important contact persons for the children. The main focus here lies on the personal and educational development of the children, which is encouraged by engaging in music and singing in an entertaining

and playful way.

Due to their social background, many of the children have to overcome barriers that not only limit their involvement in education, but also in cultural and social activities. As music buddies, the students take on a bridging function for the children by supporting them in their regular participation in the choir and by acting as positive role models.



„In the children’s choir, integration can really be lived, it makes no difference where we come from, what our names are or what faith we have. We are the children’s choir.” (music buddy Katharina)



During the COVID-19 pandemic, the situation has deteriorated significantly for many of the children. It was and is all the more important for their mental health, their social development and their (learning) motivation that the rehearsals also take place in an online format.

The framework program

All learning buddies and music buddies get prepared for their work by training seminars at WU. These are divided into basic training at the beginning of the activity as well as practical seminars and workshops, offered in the form of advanced elective modules during the semester. In addition, all students are supported in their voluntary work through supervision and coaching. The learning progress is documented by the students themselves in a learning diary and in a final reflection work. Taking part in the programs is recognized as a free elective in WU’s curriculum (3 ECTS/semester) and is awarded the WU Social Skills certificate.

Within this framework, students receive a buddy budget of up to EUR 50 per person and per semester to finance leisure activities with the children or to buy supporting learning materials. At the same time, a leisure time program is offered to students and children each semester, so they can spend time together, discover new things in a playful way and strengthen relationships with one another (e.g. guided tours in museums, trips to the zoo or ice skating, visits to football matches etc.).

Moreover, BILLA, REWE Group and partners are also actively involved in the framework program by organizing activities for the children and offering the students an opportunity for networking (e.g. invitation to management talks, buddy evenings at the end of the semester etc.).



Effects of participation

Through the contact with WU-students, the participating children receive support and learn from positive role models in order to develop their individual interests and goals. In this way, the project increases the children's self-confidence as well as their pleasure in learning and strengthens various skills such as social behavior, perception ability, language skills and creativity.

„I enjoy learning with my learning buddy, particularly when he starts joking, then everything is even more enjoyable. He knows so much. I hope someday I will be like him.“ (M., 10 years, lives in a refugee home run by Caritas Vienna)



The students broaden their horizons by getting to know people from different cultures and social backgrounds and are challenged to contribute and develop their own skills and competences. Last but not least, social capital is also strengthened by participating in „Lernen macht Schule“: The students will network with colleagues, project partners and companies who also take responsibility for social issues. The children receive new reference persons from different environments, who support and encourage them to break new ground.

Great success

Since 2010, more than 1,300 students involved in „Lernen macht Schule“ and carried out more than 130,000 hours of volunteering. Through their voluntary work, the students are not only contributing to better coexistence in our society, they are also learning to deal with and combat complex social issues – a key skill for tomorrow's leaders.

Due to its great success, the concept of the Lernbuddy program was passed on to the University of Education in Lower Austria (PH NÖ) in 2013 and to the international research center for social ethics (ifz) at the University of Salzburg in 2014. Accordingly, and following the example of WU, students in other federal states are volunteering as buddies for socially disadvantaged young people.

The „Lernen macht Schule“ initiative was recognized in 2011 as an innovative teaching project at WU; it was among the finalists of the Erste Foundation Award for Social Integration in 2013; and it won the “Wirtschaft hilft” award presented by the Austrian Fundraising Association in 2019.

Further information (in German language)



Folder

- [Website](#) for students
- [Website](#) for partners and sponsors
- [Videos](#) and [photos](#) from the „Lernen macht Schule“ projects
- [Reports](#) from students