

Certificate course for young adults with mental illnesses at the VHS Essen

Up to 15 young adults participate in a program at the VHS which is unique in Germany. The intended goal which is ambitious, is to assist the students to achieve a school certificate so that they can develop the skills to live independently. The program features:

- a maximum of 15 participants per course
 - **quiet** learning environment
 - individualized teaching plans
 - **professional psycho-social support, supervision and evaluation**
 - **emphasis on developing competence**
 - diverse teaching methodologies
 - ongoing development and training of occupational skills
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The Course

- Description
- Comments from the course participants
- Concept and pedagogic background

Description

The VHS Essen cooperates with the Professor Dr. Christian Eggers Foundation which works to improve the social and occupational integration of young adults with mental illness.

This program is only for young adults who were not able to graduate due to a mental illness during their compulsory time at school. Within 2 years of enrollment they can attain their school certificate. The limited class size facilitates the students' success by providing a learning environment conducive to their special needs. The small teacher student ratio fosters individual attention. The class takes place at the Villa Rü in Essen Rüttenscheid. Additionally the ICT-Rooms of the Volkshochschule at the Burgplatz can be used.

Beginning of the next course: September 2014

During a total of 32 hours a week the following subjects are taught:

- German
- Maths
- English
- History
- Economics
- Biology
- Occupational training
- Life skill training
- Information Technology (IT)

Comments from the course participants

Read some of the opinions and comments of our alumni:

“For the first time in my school career I felt like I was being taken seriously, I felt normal”

“This doesn’t exist at other schools. Every teacher supported us.”

“You notice that the teachers care what becomes of us”

“We were motivated again and again, even during difficult times, to keep going.”

Concept and pedagogic background

The class is participant and competency based and aims to improve the education, skills and self-esteem of the students. Key skills like teamwork and independent studying are developed through individualized plans, frequent group work, practice oriented and cooperative learning. Individual support of the students is achieved through consistent teacher-student feedback, monitoring and evaluation.

The student group is consistently supervised and supported by a psychologist. The psychologist focuses on helping the students to live with their mental illness and manage symptoms that manifest in order to assist them in developing the skills for independent living.

Weekly Team meetings

The team, consists of 7 teachers and the psychologist who work together closely and have weekly team meetings to assess and discuss student/group progress.

Evaluation and supervision

Documentation on each student’s progress is maintained through regular transcriptions and feedback is consistently given to the student. The psychologist also provides ongoing support and guidance to the teaching staff.

Application

- Requirements
- Financial coverage
- Schedule

Requirements

The number of participants is 15. The program is specifically for young adults with mental illness who have completed their compulsory time at school but did not receive a diploma. Prior to acceptance the psychologist conducts a psychological assessment to determine the applicant’s suitability for the program.

Financial Coverage

What started as a pilot project in 2006, is now an permanently established program. At this time all costs for the course are covered by the Office of Youth and Integration Welfare.

People who are mentally ill are entitled to integration welfare if:

- Their mental health deviates from what is typical for their age by more than six months in so much that it impairs their ability to effectively function in society.

- Upon recommendation of the State Youth Office(Cologne and Münster 2007) and the State Office of Social Services (Cologne 2005) the following applies:
- According to section § 35a i.V. with § 41 SGB VIII Integration welfare /Help for young adults between the ages of 18 and 21 should be granted or in cases of justified exceptions until the age of 27.
- Integration welfare in accordance to § 53 SGB XII is granted beyond the age of 21 as a new case.
- Young adults under or of the age 21 contact the responsible youth welfare office with their application.
Young adults beyond the age of 21 apply as a new case at the responsible social welfare office.

Schedule

The next course begins in the winter semester of 2016 and encompasses 20 months.

Job Training

- Network

Occupational Orientation

The present course provides the participants with an extensive support program. The goal is to facilitate the transition from school life to working life for the students with chronic mental health illnesses, featuring:

- Application training
- Coaching to determine personal goals
- Style guidance as part of the preparation for job interviews
- Training in public speaking
- Training in communication
- 2 week internship
- Theatrical-and art-education projects
- IT Training
- “Der Rote Salon” – Series of events that advocate the integration of young, mentally ill people in an entertaining way.

Network

To ensure the success of the program the professionals involved work cooperatively and communicated effectively with their peers. There is a close collaboration between the medical authority, the Youth Welfare Office of the City Essen and the Office for Social Services and Living. For the provision of internship possibilities, the Volkshochschule Essen can rely upon a broad network of institutions, companies and sponsors which is constantly expanding. The project is further linked to the „Arbeitsgemeinschaft für die Planung und Koordinierung psychosozialer Einrichtungen“ in Essen.