

# Frühe Hilfen: The Austrian „ideal model“

Haas, Sabine; Weigl, Marion (2017): Frühe Hilfen: Eckpunkte eines „Idealmodells“ für Österreich 2017. Gesundheit Österreich GmbH

## Summary

Early childhood interventions represent – according to the agreed definition for Austria – an overall concept of measures for health promotion and targeted early intervention in early childhood (pregnancy to school entry), which considers the resources and burdens of families in specific life situations. A central element of *Frühe Hilfen* is the interdisciplinary and interprofessional networking of diverse approaches, services, structures and actors in all relevant policy and practice fields.

As a contribution to the implementation of the Child and Adolescent Health Strategy, the then Federal Ministry of Health commissioned the Austrian National Public Health Institute (Gesundheit Österreich GmbH, GÖG) in 2011 with the project "Early Childhood Interventions – Preparing the Groundwork". The project provided an analysis of available services, knowledge, and views regarding early childhood interventions in Austria, analysed scientific literature and involved a broad group of stakeholders. The project laid the foundations for the establishment of early childhood interventions in Austria.

The central product was the so-called "ideal model" for early childhood intervention in Austria. It supports a coordinated and (as uniform as possible) implementation of early childhood interventions. The development of the model was originally based on the experiences of the *Frühe Hilfen* initiative in Germany and the Vorarlberg model project *Network Family*, as well as on the results of an extensive field analysis (Haas et al. 2013) and analysis of (inter)national evidence (Knaller 2013).

An initial concept was drafted parallel to the analysis and research activities and repeatedly discussed with the various project committees (steering group, advisory board) as well as in stakeholder workshops and external events during the project. Based on the experiences in broader implementation of regional early childhood intervention networks in all Austrian provinces, the model was revised in 2017.

### Key Elements of the Austrian "ideal model"

A standardised model of early childhood interventions has been developed for Austria, which can be adapted to regional conditions. This basic model provides a universal basic offer (for all families) in combination with regional early childhood intervention networks that provide in-depth support to families in burdened life circumstances. This approach is in line with international recommendations to promote health equity, primarily through universal measures in combination with – according to the respective need – graduated further measures (so-called "proportionate universalism").

The basic offer for all families is to provide limited support for all families (universal offer) in the sense of health promotion. This is to be achieved with an initial contact during pregnancy and several home visits to the families in the first year of baby's life with focus on psychosocial aspects. Ideally, the basic offer should be well coordinated with the measures of the "mother-child pass" (preventive programme for pregnant women, infants, and young children up to the age of five).

The regional early childhood intervention networks ensure needs-based support for "families" in burdened life circumstances (indicated offer). The core element is a regional network that functions as multi-professional support system with coordinated, diverse services for parents and children in the early childhood phase of life. For a functioning network, a network management is needed that takes responsibility for the development of the cooperation as well as for the continuous maintenance of the network. The core of the in-depth support is family support over a longer period in cooperation with a variety of networked services that are used according to need.

The implementation of *Frühe Hilfen* at the regional level is accompanied and supported by a National Centre for Early Childhood Interventions – analogous to the successful model in Germany. In particular, the national centre ensures nationwide coordination, provides quality development and knowledge transfer, and is available for process support and advice in the implementation of regional networks.

Ideally, the basic services for all families and the regional early childhood intervention networks would be established in parallel. As a matter of fact, this is hardly possible at present for reasons of resources. Therefore, the regional early childhood intervention networks are established first. They can build on the specific services already available in all regions, which can be integrated into the regional early childhood intervention network both as referrers and as service providers.

## References

Haas, Sabine; Pammer, Christoph; Weigl, Marion; Winkler, Petra (2013): Ausgangslage für Frühe Hilfen in Österreich. Ergebnisse der Feldanalyse und der Stakeholder-Workshops. Gesundheit Österreich GmbH / Geschäftsbereich ÖBIG, Wien

Knaller, Christine (2013): Evidenz zur Vernetzung von Frühen Hilfen und zur Erreichbarkeit der Zielgruppen. Gesundheit Österreich GmbH / Geschäftsbereich ÖBIG, Wien