

Implementation of regional Early Childhood Intervention Networks in Austria

Final report of summative evaluation

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Contractor: queraum. kultur- und sozialforschung

Summary

Between November 2015 and March 2017 a summative evaluation was carried out by 'queraum. kultur- und sozialforschung'. The main objective was to find out, to what extent *Frühe Hilfen* is successful in creating better circumstances for the upbringing of (dis-)advantaged children and making a contribution to social and health equity. A further aim of the evaluation was to establish whether families in need are being reached as well as the characteristics, problems, motivation and expectations of the families supported by *Frühe Hilfen*. The central research approach was to analyse the significance and the benefit of the programme from the view point of beneficiaries, family support workers and network managers. It was examined, to which degree the programme is improving the material and social environment of the supported families, as well as their capabilities and personal skills.

Design and Methods

Qualitative face-to-face interviews were carried out with 69 family support workers, network managers and other staff members of all 23 regional early childhood intervention networks. Intermediate evaluation results were discussed in two focus group discussions with 27 participants from regional networks. Furthermore 21 in-depth-interviews were carried out with beneficiaries. Further methods employed included the construction of egocentric social network maps, photo interviews, development of 8 representative snapshot case studies and analysis of existing documents (results from FRÜHDOK documentation, family feedback and the formative evaluation).

Target group outreach and health equity

Successful outreach to target groups provides a crucial prerequisite for the improvement of health equity. FRÜDOK documentation has shown that that take-up is excellent (see FRÜDOK annual report 2016). It is characteristic that many beneficiaries struggle with multiple burdens. At the beginning of the support process, families often reported that the psychosocial health state of primary carers and the financial household situation constitute challenges. Many respondents stated that the offering has had a positive effect on their material and social life circumstances as well as personal resources.

Success factors

Concerning the fostering of parent–child bonding and parenting skills as well as the betterment of family climate, several respondents answered that the reduction of burdens and stressors was beneficial. It was also shown that home visits are an important success factor. They make it possible to supervise families in their known surroundings and perceive their habitual behavior patterns and resources. The attention given to the families' social networks has proven to have an impact. Families' informal support systems have improved. Beneficiaries reported having made new friendships or reactivated existing contacts. Some families also learned to better manage burdensome relationships or to put an end to them when necessary. With regard to psychological health, the offering helped to reduce fears and feelings of overstraining concerning child care and daily life management.

It was also reported that beneficiaries could develop new or reanimate existing perspectives for the future. The family support workers were perceived to be helpful and competent by families throughout the sample. This is highlighted by the fact that family care workers were positioned as an important element in all social network maps created by families. From the viewpoint of family support workers a gradual approach in relationship building, intensive efforts in establishing a trustful relationship, empowerment of families and a focus on the mobilization of strengths and resources were important success factors.

Recommendations

Since the evaluation results show high satisfaction of beneficiaries, the team of 'queraum.kultur- und sozialforschung' recommends strengthening the success factors which are already in place. *Frühe Hilfen* should keep its focus on empowerment, cooperation in multidisciplinary teams (incl. the dual control principle) and its approach of low threshold access and needs based outreach-work. In terms of model improvement, the evaluation advises to strengthen efforts to foster a common understanding of *Frühe Hilfen* among the regional intervention networks.