

Going **BEYOND** Awards

VOLUNTEERING@WU – LERNEN MACHT SCHULE

Compared to other EU countries, access to education in Austria is strongly linked to family background: Children from socially disadvantaged, low-income families have up to 10 times less chances of earning a university degree than kids from academic households.

The initiative "Volunteering@WU - Lernen macht Schule" was launched in 2010 by the Vienna University of Economics and Business (WU) together with Caritas Vienna and REWE Group to promote educational equality regardless of the socio-economic background.



WU VIENNA UNIVERSITY OF ECONOMICS AND BUSINESS

WU's Mission WU provides space for contemplation and creativity and is a pioneer in research and teaching, all with the goal of increasing economic capability and social prosperity. WU's faculty, staff, students, and alumni take social responsibility and are characterized by their expertise, open-mindedness, and eagerness to make a difference. WU is a leading academic institution and one of Europe's most attractive universities in business and economics. True to its role as an open-minded institution, WU also sees itself as an international university, as an important hub for global exchange, and as a place where students and teachers work together. Open-mindedness and diversity were already among the university's key values at WU's founding in 1898. WU is committed to the principles of fairness and equal opportunities, scientific integrity, academic freedom, and especially plurality in topics and methodology. WU is a responsible university (*As based on the six Principles for Responsible Management Education - PRME). This means that WU not only accepts responsibility for the quality of its performance in research, teaching, and 3rd mission activities, but also that it acts in a socially responsible manner in all that it does.

WU's guiding principles can be found here: www.wu.ac.at/en/the-university/about-wu/strategy

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Each semester more than 130 students participate in the program and support around 260 children and teenagers on a weekly basis.

The main objectives of the program are to support disadvantaged young people in their personal and educational development and to promote equal opportunities and social participation, as well as to train the social skills of WU students, to raise their awareness for socio-economic issues and to promote social responsibility.

Learning Buddies

As learning buddies, students support children and teenagers aged 6 to 18 from various social facilities run by Caritas Vienna (accommodation for asylum seekers, mother-child houses, counseling centers, etc.). For a period of one semester, and often even longer, the students meet with the children for around 2-3 hours a week.

The form of support depends primarily on the needs of the children. Thus, studying for exams or schoolwork can be a priority, as well as joint leisure activities. WU students support the children in their educational needs, serve as important role models and are a valuable resource in their personal development.

Music Buddies

As music buddies, students participate in a choir with children between 7 and 12 under the artistic direction of the Caritas cultural initiative "Brunnenpassage" and prepare several performances each semester.

As part of the team, they take on responsibility for the group and become important role models for the children. Due to their social background, many of the children face barriers that not only limit their participation in education, but also in cultural and social activities.

As music buddies, the students take on a bridging function for the children by motivating and supporting them in their regular participation in the choir.

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Framework

All students participate seminars on pedagogical, didactical and social skills in order to prepare them for their role. In addition, they are supported through supervision and peer group meetings. Students document their learning progress through a diary and a final reflection essay.

Taking part in the program is recognized as a free elective in WU's curriculum (3 ECTS/semester) and is awarded the WU Social Skills certificate. WU and Caritas are responsible for managing and further developing the program.

WU is especially in charge of recruiting students, matching them with institutions/children, organizing the complementary program (seminars, supervision, peer groups) as well as recreational activities for students and children (e.g. trips to museums or the zoo, sports events etc.), and supplementary research (publications on national and international level).

The Caritas manager serves as main contact for the 20 participating institutions and monitors the conditions for the student volunteers. REWE Group and its partners are also involved by organizing activities for children and offering students an opportunity for networking (e.g. invitation to management talks, events for buddies at the end of the semester etc.).

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PROGRAM IMPACT AND SUCCESS

Supplementary quantitative and qualitative research projects show that the program serves as a stepping-stone towards voluntary engagement among WU-students. It allows them to gain key skills such as social responsibility, reflection and teamwork skills, intercultural awareness, and empathy.

For the participating children, the buddy-relationships are a valuable resource, helping them to build self-confidence, enjoy schoolwork, achieve good academic performance and develop various abilities such as social behavior, creativity, team work or language skills. In fact, 97 percent of the children are able to pass the school year successfully. Since 2010, a noteworthy number of friendships have already developed between students and children, even after the kids finished school and/or the students graduated. Some of the kids already started to study at an Austrian university, and many former students now put social responsibility into practice in their careers.

In this respect, social capital is also strengthened on both sides: students network with colleagues, project partners and companies who also take responsibility for social issues. Children build relationships with people from different environments, who support and encourage them to break new ground.

Since 2010, more than 1,300 students involved in „Volunteering@WU“ and carried out more than 130,000 hours of volunteering. Due to its success, the concept was transferred 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.

Through their extracurricular engagement, the students train their communication and social skills, self-reflection, dealing with diversity, and develop an awareness of sociopolitical issues as well as a sense of social responsibility – all key skills for tomorrow’s leaders.

“Volunteering@WU - Lernen macht Schule” 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.

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SDG IMPACT

GOAL 1: No Poverty

End poverty in all its forms everywhere

GOAL 9: Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure

Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation

GOAL 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth

Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all

GOAL 4: Quality Education

Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all



LOOKING FORWARD

Socially disadvantaged children often have few opportunities to learn certain types of sport. They use existing sports programs less often, be it for financial reasons or due to a lack of motivating role models.

As a result, they are more likely to be overweight and less able to develop motoric skills.

Studies also show a positive correlation between participation in sports and success in school. In this regard, future plans are to expand the program focusing on sports and healthy nutrition.

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LOOKING FORWARD

After collecting first experiences through summer sports camps, it is planned to start a sport buddy program on regular bases in 2022. Thus, students will be trained to support children developing positive body concepts and movement experiences.

While student community service is very common in the US, volunteer work only plays a minor role at Austrian universities.

The program is an example of effective inter-sectoral cooperation between the higher education, business, and nonprofit sectors – the largest of its kind in Austria – fostering civic engagement among students.

Through academic publications, presentations and media reports, the program aims to reach a broad public.

In the future, it is planned to increase networks and degree of recognition on national and international level.

www.wu.ac.at/en/students/my-program/bachelors-student-guide/volunteering-support-and-honors-programs/volunteering

