
NEWSLETTER

The first START NOW Newsletter is now available!



A START NOW Newsletter will from now on be distributed on a regular basis in order to inform all people involved with the training about new developments within the project. The structure of the Newsletter will remain constant: the first part will present project updates, the second part will introduce the specific research sites of the START NOW project within Switzerland, Germany and the Netherlands, while the third and final part will introduce some of the youth welfare institutions that apply the intervention. The November version introduces youth institution “Bellevue”. Within each Newsletter trained staff will report their experiences with START NOW. This way the Newsletter links START NOW co-workers with each other and provides clinically relevant content and tips.

**Youth center Bellevue
located in Altstaetten,
St. Gallen under
direction of Mrs. Uta
Arand**

Current updates

At present the START NOW project has successfully started in Switzerland, Germany and the Netherlands: within Switzerland there are currently 3 youth welfare institutions participating in the project, in Germany there are 5 and in the Netherlands 1 big institution is taking part, where several groups will be conducted.

The research sites: 1. Switzerland

This part is devoted to the introduction of the specific research sites. Switzerland is the first site to be introduced, since the research department of the Child- and Youth Psychiatry Basel has the leading position of the START NOW project.

Prof. Christina Stadler is the center of attention, as she is the so-called principal investigator of the study and thus the woman in charge.

What made her conceptualize such a big project and why START NOW? We have asked her:

The European Union approved a big training program that allowed us to offer help to adolescents with emotion regulation problems. We are working closely with clinical/social workers that know these youth well and work with them on a daily basis.

What do you like best about the project? What is the fun part?

I am convinced that we have to offer interventions in settings where these girls live, in their direct living environment. I enjoy seeing how these girls respond to the training. The sentence from one participant (see last page) within the START NOW group at Bellevue totally inspired me!

Any final remarks..?

I am well aware of the fact that all staff workers within the institutions invest a lot of time and effort, for instance, when taking part in the interviews and filling out questionnaires. Thank you so much for taking part! I am certain that this commitment will be awarded with positive results. Our study may prove that linking pedagogical and therapeutic services, as done in START NOW, is an approach that is beneficial for the girls as well as the institutions.

The implementation of the START NOW project would not be possible without Mrs. Stadler's team: psychotherapist and PhD student Sandra Mannstadt contributed substantially to the modification of the original START NOW program that was



Prof. Christina Stadler

Professor for developmental psychopathology at University of Basel

Executive director of the diagnostic-therapeutic day care clinic of the child and adolescent psychiatric clinic Basel

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adjusted to meet the needs of teenage girls placed within youth welfare institutions. Furthermore, Mrs. Mannstadt conducts START NOW trainings.



Linda Kersten and Martin Prätzlich, Basel

PhD students Linda Kersten and Martin Prätzlich coordinate the START NOW project, conduct assessments with participating girls and are the contact persons for all youth institutions within Switzerland. While Ms. Kersten further conducts START NOW trainings and is the contact person for all other research sites as well for the data monitor, Mr. Prätzlich handles the ethics procedures.

Further project assistance is provided through research assistant Christin Dietrich and PhD students Lynn Fehlbaum and Willeke Menks. Ms. Menks and Ms. Fehlbaum coordinate and conduct in collaboration with Dr. Nora Raschle all neurobiological assessments.

The institutions

The first institution to be introduced in the third and final part of our START NOW Newsletter simultaneously represents the first institution within Switzerland to have taken part in the project: youth welfare institution Bellevue in Altstaetten, St. Gallen under the direction of Mrs. Uta Arand. The START NOW training in Bellevue was conducted by highly motivated and competent social workers. The two START NOW trainers, Ms. Sarah Hertner and Ms. Sandra Fischli, share their experience and draw some first conclusions within the following paragraphs

We have conducted the START NOW group training as one of the first institutions within Switzerland with 5 girls in total. The preparation and performance of the intervention required a significant amount of time on an organizational as well as content-wise level. This, however, did pay off. The institution, the trainers as well as the girls benefitted immensely from START NOW. We advertised the intervention and subsequently the girls were looking forward to participating. With regard to the assessments next to receiving gift certificates, the girls also appreciated the fact that they received a CD that contained images of their brains.

With regard to content, we decided to mainly stick to the intervention manual. Since the manual offers a wide range of exercises and is so highly structured, this method proved of value. The specific structural frame (i.e., duration, breaks) was specified by us trainers. We found this important in order to convey and evoke seriousness and commitment. Within this framework the girls were free to actively get involved with their own ideas and suggestions. The design of the setting, for instance, was set up in collaboration with the girls: the girls wanted to be able to

show up in sweatpants and drink coffee/eat snacks during START NOW. It was important to them to create a comfortable atmosphere. The group rules were also formulated together with the girls. Since they participated in the process they were more willing to accept these rules. On the other hand, some rules determined by the trainers were also put forth: e.g., it was clearly stated that anything that was being said within the START NOW group setting would remain in that setting, in order to provide a secure environment within which all group members would be willing to share their thoughts and experiences. Comments indicating endangerment to oneself or others would remain the only exception. The START NOW trainers sometimes experienced the role conflict (START NOW trainer vs. social worker) as challenging, especially when the girls



The Bellevue located in St. Gallen

possessed skills that disagreed with the institution's rules and standards. In such cases, being able to clearly highlight the institution's rules while at the same time validating the actions of the girls was not always easy. Here, the regular supervision meetings as well as discussions within our team were very helpful.

The first module appeared to be very challenging for the girls because of the strong self-focus. What proved to be helpful here was that the trainers shared their own experiences with the girls. The girls

appreciated such openness and it helped them realize that, e.g., it may also be difficult for adults to regulate their emotions or engage in mindfulness exercises. Authenticity and transparency on the side of the trainers represent two of the most important aspects to us, because they turned out to become essential for a successful group session. In addition, the clear and strict rules with regard to participation and confidentiality helped encourage the girls to actively participate. The longer the group worked together, the stronger the trust in each other grew and the greater the girls' willingness to share personal experiences became. With increasing duration of the training and sensitive handling of the shared comments and topics, in the end even girls participated that initially appeared very reluctant to take an active part. At this point, we noticed that especially with regard to the more reluctant group members it was very important to accept their individual choices as START NOW trainers. We did not build up any pressure and applied motivational interviewing when possible, which turned out to be very effective. Another positive side-effect of START NOW was the development of a collective language. In many situations only key words, such as "thought error or ABC" were required to remind the girls of the discussed topics.

In sum, it can be said that the preparation as well as implementation of START NOW was beneficial for all people involved in the training. Our institution Bellevue has decided to apply START NOW on a regular basis from now on.

In addition to the social workers' experience we would like to present one creative and important guiding sentence from START NOW group member here. Within one START NOW session it is discussed how one is unable to change the past, but well able to actively design one's present and future. In this particular session, one girl said:

With the tears from the past in my eyes, I can't look into my future.

This sentence captured the message of the START NOW session so well, that we asked her to share that sentence with the rest of the START NOW project.

For more information about the european research project FemNat, please visit our web site with following link: <http://www.femnat-cd.eu>