

# Austria

## Health Venture at Schwarzau Prison

### Background

During the annual WHO conference the member countries were invited to carry out a health promotion project in a prison. The Ministry of Justice in Austria took this opportunity to initiate a project in Schwarzau Prison together with the management of the prison and the Health Forum Lower Austria. This project was also submitted to the Healthy Austria Fund, where it was greeted with great interest, although no decision has yet been taken. At present there are 172 prisoners in the prison who are cared for by 90 employees.

### Objectives and measures

The aim of the project is to reduce the mental and physiological stress of both the employees and the inmates by carrying out 'health-promoting' activities. Additionally, both the employees and the inmates should be encouraged to take responsibility for their own health by participating in the work and organisation. To implement workplace health promotion in an enterprise it is necessary for there to be an awareness that health promotion is the responsibility of the management and also for it to be integrated into the existing system of management.

A steering group was set up to plan the project and decide on its framework. This was made up of the prison management, representatives of the officers, the prison doctor – who was also project leader – and a member of the Health Forum of Lower Austria.

### Health circles

Health circles were set up in order to identify the weak points and the potential improvements concerning health. Because of the special internal structure of the prison and certain legal requirements, the steering group decided to subdivide the project into three, according to the respective target group. Division 1 included the prison officers, division 2 the 'outgoers' (prisoners who work at external companies during the day and come back to the prison in the evening) and division 3 the 'permanent residents'. This meant that there were separate health circles. 5 - 8 voluntary representatives of each target group worked in these groups, which met regularly, with an external presenter to produce a catalogue of proposals. These proposals for improvement were presented to the steering group and consequently implemented in the prison. The health circle participants have an important additional function. Not only do they pass on the results and information from the health circles to their colleagues but also, as their representatives, they bring their wishes and suggestions to the attention of the group.

### Survey of the present situation

The concrete project design was based on an evaluation of the present situation according to the results of a questionnaire given to the employees and inmates. This questionnaire was developed by a market research and opinion poll institute together with the Health Forum Lower Austria. The results were

**Contact:**  
**Justizanstalt Schwarzau**  
Dr. Dieter Brechtelsbauer.  
Phone: +43-2627-823520

**Health Forum Lower Austria**  
Judith Cechota  
Phone: +43-1-5350111  
E-mail: j.cechota@gfnoe.at

presented to the prison officers and the inmates. The main aim of the project in Schwarzaeu is to establish an awareness of health in thinking and in the consequent measures. The surveys carried out before and after the project are intended to give statistical support to the resulting advantages.

### Planning the health circles

Based on the results of the survey and the special structural conditions in prisons, it was decided to give the health circles three fields to work on – nutrition, exercise and the psychosocial field, each of which would be dealt with by the health circles in three meetings. Within the fields mentioned, the idea was to work out preventative measures dealing with conditions and with behaviour.

### Health Day – information for the prison officers and for the inmates

The prison officers and the inmates were informed about the project during a 'health day', when it was possible to have a medical check-up performed by the prison doctor, and also to have an assessment of body fat and information about nutrition from a dietician.

### Health Circle meetings

A short talk is given by an expert on one of the three defined topic areas in order to arouse interest and increase the motivation to become active in one of the health circles which will meet

afterwards. After 1-2 weeks, during which the 5-8 volunteers for these health circles are found, the first of the three health circle meetings on this topic takes place. Concrete measures on the relevant topic are worked out during these 3 meetings.

After this the next talk is given on the next of the three topics. A new health circle is formed and works out proposals for improvements concerning the new topic. In this way prison officers, 'outgoers' and permanent residents work separately until concrete suggestions are worked out for each topic and for each target group.

### Presentation of the results

The proposed list of measures is presented to the steering group at the end of the health circle meetings. The steering group decides on the implementation of the measures suggested or explains why it is not possible to implement a proposal.

### Implementation of the proposed measures

How to implement the proposals should be worked out as concretely as possible in the health circle. The consequent implementation of the proposal is organised by the project leader with the agreement of the steering group. When necessary, an external expert can be consulted to give advice and support.

### Evaluation and quality control

In order to evaluate how successful the project was and as an instrument of quality control a new survey of the prison officers and the inmates will be carried out after a year. In order to do this the same questionnaires will be used as at the beginning of the project. The results will be compared with those from the initial survey. As a further quality control, the participants in the health circles will be asked to give written feedback.

### Time schedule

Preliminary talks	since April 2001
Survey of the prison officers and inmates	June, July 2001
Presentation of questionnaire results	September 2001
"Impulse" talk	November 2001
Health circles start	December 2001