

Vorstand DAG SHG e.V.
Prof. Dr. Raimund Geene

Tenth European Expert meeting on Self-Help Support 2nd -4th September 2009, Berlin / Germany

Welcome speech

Dear colleagues,

On behalf of the German association of Self help-groups DAG it s a honour to welcome ...
10th European Expert Meeting on Self-Help Support: "Networking in Europe - Chances,
Challenges and Demands"

As 1 out of 4 governmental accredited associations we try to coordinate the multidimensional
work of self help as well as patient's support and patient's self-organizing.

Our biggest organisation is the NAKOS, we are specially proud: NAKOS works since 25
years.

Big celebration in the house of the Federal Ministry in June.

But: although the success of NAKOS is evident, there is still only very few financial support,
and in 2008, the conservative party even planned to stop nearly half of the budget of NAKOS
(→ 240.000 €). Luckily, we got big support from all over out of the society, hundreds of
social and self help workers, scientists, politicians ... wrote to the parliamentarians, and finally
the (left) majority decided to continue the money support – but only for another year. So we
are still unconcern what the election end of this months will hold for us ... but anyway, we
know the big support in the society which encourage us a lot.

It s part of a bigger movement in the society.

Self-help groups and self-help organisations are an important part of the social security
system. In Germany, self-help centres, senior citizen centres, volunteer agencies, citizen
centres and multi-generation-houses combine citizen participation with innovative
professional services. Unfortunately, there is no guarantee of continuous financial support for
these important locally-administered institutions.

There are 273 self-help centres and more than 400 federal organisations that support and
promote self-help in Germany. In recent years, the social epidemiological research proves
the significant relevance of social capital and identifies the benefits of support-group
participation as a decisive health resource. People who come to believe themselves
competent, who find social resonance, and who can participate in decisions, are better able
to cope with challenges and are less likely to be sick. Self-help programs have a positive
effect in this regard.

Healthy communities, healthy workplaces and healthy people need a decentralized system of
self-help programs operated at the local and regional level, in districts and towns. The
professional support systems that operate and promote the self-help programs must be
managed in a similar regional format.

There are already new forms of cooperation from the regional and local governments, private
companies, and citizen involvement. There are also regional projects of integrated
maintenance systems with the regional health maintenance institutions.

But strangely, as I said in the beginning, these structures are not financed in a stable way, esp. not on the federal level. So our work is always vulnerable.

Currently, to find a way for more robust structures, we have to work at our political influence as well as at our legitimation. Legitimation means the professional need of our work. Concerning this task, in our board's discussion of last year we identified 3 central challenges of the self-help:

1. quality development,
2. inclusion of people with social disadvantages and of people with migration background
3. integration of the self help groups in the movement of the civil society movement, esp. the movement for health promotion.

The essential assumptions of this work are continuous financial support and a political supported infrastructure, to prove that in fact it is an important health investment.

It is very important for us to discuss this topic with people from different countries, because we need to have the perspective how this work can be part of the health and social care systems in Europe. Cause even if there are a lot of self help in Germany, on the other hand side we suffer a lot about the disintegration of our system – the 2 sides of the medal ...

Thank you very much for joining our conference,
Special thank goes to the team of the NAKOS for 25 years of doing a great job,
And esp. to Jutta for organizing this meeting on such a long run, I'm sure it will be great pleasure for all of us to be hosted by you, thank you very much ...

And now the word goes to Heike Wöllenstein, she is a long and good friend of our access of self help and health promotion, working at the federal health insurance in Germany, showing how strong partners and supporters we have.
Thank you for coming!