

Vehicle Attendants on Public Transport – WupperScouts



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Problem description:

Buses and trains are still the safest forms of mobility. Correspondingly, many schoolchildren use the transport system of Wuppertaler Stadtwerke AG (the Wuppertal transport company) to get to and back from school every day. Because of general violent tendencies and a rising number of aggressive incidents among children and adolescents, conflicts occur frequently during school transport. This presents a danger to the health of the children and adolescents while being annoying to other public transport customers and alienating them. In addition, the costs which are necessary for the repair of damage caused by vandalism are another unpleasant result of these conflicts.

In view of this development, a pedagogical measure was developed, which helps children and adolescents to solve their problems constructively and without violence. This measure is referred to as the Project for Vehicle Attendants on Public Transport – WupperScouts.

Description of the campaign / measure:

WupperScouts are schoolchildren who help to peacefully resolve conflicts among other children (usually the same age) while on the way to or back from school (by bus or elevated train). This type of conflict resolution includes telling other students to stop damaging seats and windows, making sure that students are not pushed when getting on the bus or train, making sure that smaller children are able to find a seat, and much more. WupperScouts are mediators between public transport employees and their fellow schoolmates. However, they definitely don't act in the capacity of "deputy sheriffs", "security personnel" or "assistant inspectors". They serve on a cost-free and voluntary basis, and are always with others while on duty. Their job is to "convince, not tattle-tale". The WupperScouts show civil courage and are proactive against vandalism and violence, without putting themselves in danger. The goal of the project is to raise the level of security on the school routes and to improve the atmosphere on buses and trains on a long-term basis.

Well-founded training is the key instrument to enable children to exert a positive influence on the behaviour of their fellow students. The mobility advisors of the Wuppertal transport company, together with officers of the department for security and crime prevention of the Wuppertal police, intensively train the WupperScouts over a period of several weeks. The students learn the key aspects of non-violent conflict resolution, to a certain extent on a theoretical basis, but predominately through role-play. A neutral stance, as well as active listening skills, consciously employed body language and self-assurance are all required of the children.

Who is the driving force behind it? Who is the beneficiary?

The WupperScouts violence prevention project unites the interests of the Wuppertal transport company, the local schools and the police. With the introduction of the project, the following goals are being pursued:

- Improvement of image
- Increased earnings
- Gaining customers (students use the bus and/or train to get to school)
- Increasing the level of satisfaction among public transport employees – motivation
- Improved quality for all public transport customers
- Reduction of complaints
- Reduction of damage to public transport equipment
- Increased level of safety on the way to school
- Avoidance of traffic incidents/accidents in connection with public transport
- Increase in self-trust and self-confidence
- Advantage to students applying for college or a job
- Heightened sense of responsibility
- Advancement of civil courage
- Advancement of understanding between generations
- Improved social competence
- Reduction of violent offences



For transport companies the business-related aspect is of particular importance. It would have to be investigated, however, whether the financial and operational benefits to the company would cover or actually exceed the costs arising in the context of the project. The economic value to the community is attained through the development of social behaviour patterns. Aside from the conscious choice of transport type, the children are given a better understanding of civil

courage, the assumption of voluntary work and responsibility. An additional, essential advantage for the community lies in the possibility of preventing traffic accidents involving children and adolescents.

The WupperScouts project can be expected to have a significant effect in terms of PR. The number of past reports in the local and national press shows the interest of the media and the community in this project.

Results:

The project was first introduced on March 1, 2004 at the Erich Fried comprehensive school in Wuppertal Ronsdorf. Fifteen students were trained as WupperScouts. In November 2004 the second training session began at the above-named school with students in the ninth grade.

In addition, the project is scheduled to be introduced in a second school in Wuppertal in early 2005, and a third school has already expressed a strong interest in the project. The WupperScouts that have been trained so far are firmly committed to the project and rate it very highly. They report that the assignment is fun and that they are learning how to treat one another fairly and with mutual respect.

Results

The project was introduced in Bochum in 1998 and, after six years, has long proved to be a definite success. Damage from vandalism was reduced by around 120,000 euros per year in the buses and facilities of BOGESTRA. The number of complaints during school traffic hours is zero. The drivers have found reliable dialogue partners in the committed schoolchildren, who effectively support them in their daily work. To date, the project has been successfully implemented in many cities in Germany.

Opportunities / barriers:

Factors of influence and criteria of success:

The most important criterion to be agreed upon by all project partners is that the project is economical and therefore viable only when it is carried out over a longer or undefined timeframe. The WupperScouts project has proved to achieve lasting success. The presence of the trained students ensures a higher level of safety and a better atmosphere on the way to school. The children who are trained as WupperScouts act with increased self-confidence and show civil courage. They are motivated and encourage positive communication in daily school transport. The WupperScouts get involved in the community and acquire social competence.

For the transport company, the main benefit of the project is the prevention of damage from vandalism. For the drivers, the presence of a WupperScout means an enormous relief from stress, particularly when considering that their jobs are already taxing because of traffic jams and time pressure. At the same time, tolerance and a better understanding of the challenges of public transport are stimulated. Behind this stands the conviction that adults are more likely to use the bus or train when they have had positive experiences with public transport in their childhood and youth.

Possible barriers:

A problem lies in the fact that, on the one hand, the project is recognised as effective and important, but on the other hand, it is likely to be one of the first projects to fall victim to general budget pressure. A project like the one described above cannot be judged on the basis of short-term success and monetary gain. Particularly the changes in the community which develop through the WupperScouts require a lot of time, involvement and personnel resources.

Steps for implementation – Frequently asked questions:

Working steps for introduction:

1. Evaluation of the transport company
 - Damage from vandalism
 - Complaint management
 - Accident count
 - Customer satisfaction
 - Transport employees
 - Students
 - Parents
 - Teachers
2. Acquiring project partners – police and schools
3. Establishing the tasks and responsibilities of the project partners
4. Selection of students to participate
5. Training
6. Experience day
7. Reflection

Time of implementation:

At least eighteen months are required for the initiation and introduction of the project. The goal is to train around 200 WupperScouts in the next four years.

Frequently asked questions:

- What do the students receive in exchange for their service?
- Why should children do the job?
- Are the children replacing the professional security personnel?
- Should the children monitor the bus driver?
- Based on what criteria are the children selected?
- How many children should participate in the project?
- Where should the services of the WupperScouts be used?
- What was the parents' reaction?
- How are the WupperScouts insured?
- In what way are transport employees involved in the project?
- Are the damages from vandalism only connected with schoolchildren?

Examples:

The positive development of the project has motivated a large number of transport companies, city councils and communities to offer and implement the vehicle attendant project.

Cost / Benefits:

The costs for the training of the WupperScouts and the associated expenses for trainers' fees are self-financed by the parties participating in the project. Marketing, logistics and publicity costs are borne by the transport company.

Add Photos / Diagrams:

who shot the photo? / who is the owner of the diagram? / Original source!!!

Link and or article for more information

For more information on this project, perform a Google search – search for “vehicle attendant” – or go to www.wsw-online.de.