

The history of FICE Austria between 2008 and 2023

Responsibilities and objectives of FICE Austria for the further development of quality in child and youth welfare in Austria

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One has to know one's organisational past within a social context well in order to shape the future adequately and effectively. On the occasion of this publication of FICE International, the occasion arose for FICE Austria to analyse intensively its own history regarding child and youth welfare. For FICE Austria too, questions about identity formation — who we are, where we head and what makes us **us** — are of high importance.

So where do we come from? FICE Austria was founded in 1959 in Vienna, a city with a long tradition of socio-political reforms. Education of the people, improvement of living conditions and searching for the "new human being" have always been a concern of Social Democrats here. As is generally known, Vienna was also the place where Sigmund Freud, Alfred Adler, Charlotte Bühler, Julius Tandler and many other personalities from fields of psychology and education worked.

At the time FICE Austria was founded, many achievements and ideas in the field of professional alternative child and youth care in group homes in Vienna and Austria had been lost due to the Second World War and its consequences. Both society and country had to be rebuilt.

The extent to which international networking and professional exchange had already contributed to the development of child and youth care in Austria is unfortunately not documented at this time. We do know, however, the Secretary Generals of FICE International in the past, namely Josef Docekal from 1967 to 1973 and Othmar Roden from 1973 to 1984.

Ever since its foundation, the history and objectives of FICE Austria have therefore been characterised by international networking as well as working on the quality of professional alternative care in Austria. This article describes the goals and activities of FICE Austria amidst its international embedding in Austria as well as in the context of specific professional and legal developments: Firstly, (1.) the path of professionalisation of professional child and youth care in Austria is traced, which has played a major role in shaping FICE Austria. This is followed (2.) by elaborating on the development of the legal framework and forms of assistance as well as the current challenges Austrian child and youth care are facing. This provides further information about the context and the objectives and activities of FICE Austria. In order to adequately understand the priorities of FICE Austria, it seems necessary (3.) to briefly present current approaches to professionalisation in Austria. Changing demands on professionalism in the field of professional child and youth care, subject-specific developments and developments in the field of training have significantly influenced the fields of activity and objectives of FICE Austria and have in turn been "driven forward" by FICE Austria. After presenting the legal framework and subject-specific context, (3.), particularly important historical milestones, goals and tasks of FICE Austria in the professionalisation and quality improvement of professional child and youth care are discussed in detail.

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1. The long road to socio-pedagogical professionalism and quality of alternative child and youth care in group homes

From restoration of education in group homes to de-institutionalisation

Demands for child and youth welfare services that are both socio-pedagogically sound and of high quality are still relatively new in Austria. The beginning of the more recent history of child and youth welfare since the end of the Second World War is characterised by the economic and social conditions after the war, which brought with it impoverishment, displacement and destruction. There was a large number of orphans, refugee children and neglected or abused children "whose parents or single mothers lived in abject poverty" (Schreiber 2014, 34), which posed a major challenge for youth welfare services. A society-wide "parenting emergency" was discussed, this, however, focused primarily on families from the lower social strata (Ralser 2022, 432f.). An expansion of large homes followed, which went hand in hand with a restorative family and gender policy. Educational practice within the group homes largely followed the military-orientated, disciplinary pedagogy of the Nazi era, which was associated with inhumane, violent practices. Numerous staff from the (Nazi) period before and during the World War were kept on. The staff had little or no pedagogical training and were overwhelmed by the large number of children and adolescents in their care. Ralser noted that the educational centres in Austria had the highest occupancy rates during the 1950s and 1960s (Ralser 2022, 433).

Alongside the expansion of large group homes, family-like forms of accommodation emerged on private initiative, which, by focusing on the ideal of the "ideal family", created a counter-model to the anonymous, violent residential care (Bütow/Holztrattner 2022, 13f.). The best known example of these are the SOS Children's Villages, which opened their first children's village in Imst in 1951 and have since spread worldwide. Education was intended to be similar to family education, which facilitated a caring relationship between adults and children, but was not initially associated with aspirations of professionally based pedagogy. The children's villages also aimed to restore traditional, patriarchal family and social structures (Schreiber 2014, 36). Schreiber noted that in the mid-1970s, the proportion of professionally qualified staff in all residential child and youth care centres in Austria was still very low (Schreiber 2014, 39).

The low level of professionalisation is also reflected in the lack of sound vocational training. Until the early 1960s, social pedagogical training took place in form of short courses and staff training sessions, some of which were organised by individual federal states, but most of them by the institutions and providers themselves. Not only did this result in inadequate qualifications, but also in an enormous dependence of educators on their employers (Gnant, 2003, 464f.). The first Austria-wide professionalisation of educator work emerged in 1962 as part of new school legislation. Courses at a technical college level were introduced, which were intended to qualify students for work in the areas of home education, after-school care and working in boarding schools (Gnant, 2003, 463).

The lack of professionally sound socio-pedagogical qualifications meant that medically orientated "curative education" was able to establish itself as the dominant perspective in the field of out-of-home care in Austria (Loch et al. 2022, 103ff.). Psychiatric-paediatric assessments were carried out at curative education child observation centres, which "decided on the placement of thousands of children in Austria" (Ralser 2022, 433). For over three decades, they supported a system of residential care that was increasingly criticised by society due to its repressive structure.

In the wake of the student movement of 1968, the so-called "care home campaign" was launched in Vienna, which called for the opening of care homes (Scheipl 2007, 149ff.). In 1971, the first assisted group home was opened in Linz, followed by the establishment of further group homes in other federal states (Perl/Schöffmann 2022, 376ff.). From the 1970s onwards, this development led to the gradual

dissolution of large-scale facilities and to a differentiation of care services, which were increasingly taken over by private providers. In group homes a more humane, child-friendly form of social-pedagogical care was to be realised, which largely abandoned repressive structures and sanctions. The focus is on "special personal relationships" between adults and young residents, which enable "positive bonding experiences", reliability and development of trust (Perl/Schöffmann 2022, 389ff.). Other characteristics include the "private character" of the accommodation, a sense of community and participation in the organisation of everyday life as well as normalising the living situation, enabling inclusion and self-determination.

With the expansion of social-pedagogical group homes, the occupancy rates in the large-scale care homes gradually declined. At the same time, more and more care homes were closed entirely. In 2012, only 17% of institutional care took place in care homes, 48% in small group homes and the remainder in children's villages, crisis centres and other forms of assisted living². The last children's home in Vienna was closed in 2013. Care in group homes became the new standard, while care in the remaining homes in Austria was restructured in line with the residential group principle. The term "care home" has now disappeared from the Austrian professional debate (Perl/Schöffmann 2022, 392-395).

In line with these developments, the legal framework for alternative care of children and adolescents also changed, as did forms of support for children, adolescents and families.

2. The Austrian child and youth welfare system – legal framework, challenges and prospects

Types of support

The Austrian child and youth welfare services provide two principle forms of support in cases of child endangerment: mobile services for parents, children and families on the one hand and alternative forms of out-of-home care for children and youth – either in professional small group homes and placements or in foster families. There are now also new hybrid forms in Austria available. These include assisted living arrangements for parents and children or foster care with qualified foster parents.

With regard to the alternative care in Austria there are nowadays no large facilities in the form of children's homes implemented. Professional out-of-home care is realised in small group homes including different types of facilities:

- Care facilities for emergency situations;
- Care facilities for the long-term care of children and young people: this covers a wide range from trauma pedagogy via therapeutic approaches to animal-supported therapy and education;
- Supervised forms of living for young people;
- Temporary forms of intensive inpatient care (e.g. stays abroad).

In 2022 a total of 12 888 children and young people were cared for outside their families of origin: nearly 8000 in professional care facilities and about 5060 children and youth in foster families³. All professional facilities are subject to the supervision of the public child and youth care. In addition, the facilities are inspected by the Austrian Ombudsman Board (AOB) and the legally enshrined residents' representative.

The legal framework

² In addition to institutional care, which accounts for around 60% of all placements, around 40% of child and youth welfare services in Austria are provided by foster families.

³ https://www.statistik.at/fileadmin/user_upload/Kinder-und-Jugendhilfestatistik-2022.pdf

The Austrian child and youth welfare service (*Kinder- und Jugendhilfe* - KJH) represents a system under the responsibility of the state authority whose aims and services are regulated by laws. The services of the KJH are defined at national level as:

“Services by public and private child and youth care service providers who contribute to upholding the rights of children and young people to support for their development and education to become self-reliant and responsible individuals, to protect them from all forms of violence, and to strengthen their families’ capacity to bring them up”.⁴

The child and youth welfare service in Austria is in the responsibility of the nine federal provinces, but until 2019 it was regulated by a national framework law, the Federal Act on Child and Youth Protection and Support from 2013 (*Bundes- Kinder- und Jugendhilfegesetz* 2013). The law established a legal framework for the individual child and youth welfare laws of the federal states. One problematic aspect of this law, however, was that the federal states defined their specific quality requirements at provincial level and accordingly laid down in the laws and regulations of the nine Austrian Provinces.

This fragmentation was exacerbated in the beginning of 2020 as a new statutory amendment was made to the child and youth welfare legislation in Austria: In an agreement between the Federal Government and the nine Provinces in accordance with the Federal Constitutional Act, it was determined that the aims, tasks and services of the child and youth welfare service should now only be defined and formulated in the Provincial laws. In other words, parts of the federal law that defined the quality of services for children and families were dropped. Although the federal states are bound to maintain the former quality level of protection in matters of child and youth welfare, experts see this as a danger that children’s rights and the quality of the child and youth welfare service in Austria will now be even more unequally implemented in practice. The importance of quality standards, particularly in the realm of alternative care, was also stressed in March 2020 by the UN Commission on the Rights of the Child in their *Concluding Observations*, Clause 29. The Commission stated that Austria-wide quality standards for alternative forms of care need to be defined and suitable further training measures offered to those who work in the field of alternative care.

However, as the Provinces have committed to adopt the aims embodied in the Federal Act and the minimum requirements associated with them, the Federal Act remains the central point of reference upon which the Provinces’ child and youth welfare laws are based.

The important aims for child and youth welfare throughout Austria therefore continue to be those enshrined in the law from 2013:

- 1) Developing a general awareness for basic principles and methods of supportive care and education;
- 2) Strengthening the parenting skills of families and supporting the parents’ awareness of their duties;
- 3) Supporting the appropriate growth and development of children and young people as well as their process of independence;
- 4) Protecting children and young people from all forms of violence and other risks to the welfare of the child in terms of care and education;
- 5) Reintegrating children and young people in the family in the best interests of the child, particularly in association with child and youth welfare provisions.

Challenges and prospects for the Austrian child and youth welfare services

As already mentioned, a central challenge of child and youth welfare in Austria concerns its **federal structure**. As a result, nine federal states formulated different requirements for the quality of care and implemented different forms of funding and assistance. Children and their families in Vienna are therefore confronted with different support options than in Vorarlberg, for example. This is linked to

⁴ <https://www.women-families-youth.bka.gv.at/>

the fact that the qualification requirements for care persons in private as well as public facilities of child and youth welfare differ considerably in different Austrian provinces (Sting/Lauerermann 2020). Although all provincial laws specify that the services of the child and youth welfare may only be fulfilled by qualified staff, “the definition of qualified staff varies greatly” (Volksanwaltschaft 2017: 33). Also the recent report of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child for Austria identifies in its Concluding Observations a need for action in relation to the level of training for staff. Thus, the Committee recommends that, “appropriate personnel, technical and financial resources for child protection services and professional training for those who work with children and those in the realm of alternative care” (item 29d) must be ensured. In view of this, FICE Austria realized a cooperative project to develop a practice-focused curriculum for the further training of staff in residential child and youth welfare.

Another challenge relates to the fact that in Austria different systems operate for children and young people with different starting points. A **separate service system is primarily responsible for children with disabilities and unaccompanied refugee minors**. The segregating structures combined with difficulties in cross-service cooperation (Kapella et al. 2018) contradict an inclusive social policy and the right of children and young people to equal treatment (More 2023). Furthermore, inclusion must be strengthened as a professional principle in child and youth welfare (Schröer/Struck 2018: 126). This concerns for example an inclusive child and youth welfare planning and the implementation of the principle of dialogue with young people with disabilities and their families as experts in their life situations (Struck et al. 2010: 201). In addition, specialisations for young people with disabilities must be questioned self-critically in order that specialisation does not exacerbate social injustices.

For unaccompanied minors, if they are over 14 years of age, this segregating structure is also associated with serious care deficits. On the one hand, the young people often spend months in initial reception centres without guardians available to them and without going through a help plan procedure. On the other hand, they are placed in separate facilities following the initial asylum procedures in the reception centres. These facilities have considerably fewer resources than small group homes in the regular child and youth care system, for example in terms of funding and group sizes (Sax 2019). As has long been stated by the Children and Young People’s Ombudsman and the Austrian Ombudsman Board, this is “extremely problematic in view of the legal provisions on the precedence of the best interests of the child, the principle of non-discrimination and the youth welfare law” (Volksanwaltschaft 2020:1). Thus, the separate and less well-resourced care for young people who have fled to Austria does not correspond to the right to equal quality for *all* children and young people. It is therefore urgent that all responsibilities of child and youth welfare (custody and assistance planning, authorisation of facilities and contracts with facility providers etc.) are also applied to unaccompanied minors (Volksanwaltschaft 2020: 21).

Another challenge concerns **socio-economic inequalities**, which have a significant impact on the opportunities of children and young people. The majority of adolescents whose custody has been taken over by the welfare authorities through the courts come from disadvantaged backgrounds (Lampe/Schöne 2017). Poverty therefore poses a risk to the welfare of the child, even in a prosperous country like Austria. Therefore an increased attention by the welfare authorities to **poverty as a risk factor** for child welfare is necessary. So far, however, the main focus of child and youth welfare has been primarily on *care*-related risk potentials. Material or structural conditions that significantly affect the living conditions of families and therefore children (e.g. poverty) remain largely outside the scope of the child and youth welfare service. In the words of the Austrian sociologist and social worker Peter Pantucek, we speak about “support for upbringing” and not “supporting families for a secure life” (Pantucek 2014: 17). This limited direct material support for families from the child and youth welfare system should be compensated by cooperation with other assistance systems (ibid.). However, reductions in financial support and current macroeconomic developments in the social security system in recent years have led to serious shortages.

Socio-economic disadvantages also affect young people in alternative care. This particularly affects **care leavers in the transition to adulthood**. As the legal entitlement to support ends at the age of 18, young people in alternative care are confronted with disadvantages compared to the general population. Many young adults struggle with access to housing and higher education. As educational research has impressively demonstrated in recent years, care leavers are also at a particular disadvantage when it comes to further education, as they have far less time available for their formal education than young people with family support (Groinig et al. 2019). The *right* to support from the child and youth welfare system beyond the age of 18 is therefore urgently needed.

Finally, important developments also concern the **assistance structures** in the Austrian child and youth welfare system. Although the forms of help differ depending on the federal state, all federal states make a rigid distinction between inpatient and outpatient care for children and adolescents. In many federal states, it is also not possible to combine outpatient and inpatient care. Therefore it is important to make assistance more flexible. Such flexible assistance would be, for example, simultaneous support through outpatient support for the parents/family and inpatient care for children or the possibility for children and young people to move back and forth between the residential group and parents or relevant persons. The care of children in their families with simultaneous custody by the authorities could help to ensure that children can remain in their families of origin. There is also a need for more individual flats with outpatient care for young people. In addition, more resources are needed to work with the children's and young people's systems of origin and to strengthen the conditions in the system of origin. Furthermore, Austrian child and youth welfare is characterised by a certain "familialism". The focus of support planning is usually on the parents; key reference persons outside the family of the children and young people concerned are often not adequately involved as a central part of the child's social resources.

A further challenge in Austria should be pointed out that jeopardises needs-based support for children and their families. While on the one hand the demand for high-quality care is increasing (partly due to the publication of the FICE quality standards), we are also seeing the opposite **trend towards de-professionalisation**. Due to the current shortage of staff in the field of social pedagogy and social work, but also due to efforts to reduce costs, some federal states are currently lowering the qualification requirements for working in out-of-home care. Such de-qualification trends are at the expense of the necessary quality of care and the children and young people concerned. FICE sees it as its task to take countermeasures here. The development of a curriculum for the further training of professionals in child and youth welfare is one component of this. In FICE's view, however, many more measures are needed to combat de-qualification. These include, for example: comparable training content and requirements for all basic training programmes throughout Austria, more resources and appropriate opportunities for professionals to reflect regularly and systematically on their work with children and youth, the strengthening of support structures for practitioners within and outside their organisations (e.g. external counselling and coaching free of charge, cross-organizational exchange and training) and securing structural framework conditions (in particular personnel resources) for care processes.

Promoting the development of children and young people requires time above all: time for building relationships, working through biographical experiences and conflicts, for participation processes and group processes – and time for the unplanned. In other words, since care work is essentially based on subject-subject relationships, its success is essentially dependent on human resources and time resources. The time resources of one professional in a group of several children and young people cannot be sufficient for beneficial support of children and youth. What is needed is to make care visible as a relationship-based profession and to raise awareness of their importance for society as a whole.

3. Approaches towards professionalisation

Increased demands on professionalism and quality

The de-institutionalisation and restructuring of child and youth welfare services in Austria took place largely without scientific support. According to Perl and Schöffmann, well-founded professional concepts for social-pedagogical group homes have only existed since around 1990 (Perl/Schöffmann 2022, 386). In addition, evaluations and scientific research on child and youth welfare issues have only been able to establish themselves hesitantly and discontinuously (Amann et al. 2010).

The academisation of social pedagogy at Austrian universities began in 1978 with the establishment of pedagogy studies with an option to specialization in Graz. Further social pedagogy specialisations were established in Innsbruck, Vienna, Salzburg and Klagenfurt. In Innsbruck, the social pedagogy specialisation was discontinued in 2002 (Scheipl & Heimgartner, 2022, 272). In Salzburg and Vienna, social pedagogy is limited to individual, optional study contents in educational science programmes. Currently, independent Master's degree programmes with a social pedagogy focus are only offered in Graz and Klagenfurt (Sting 2015). Research did not initially play a major role in the academisation of social pedagogy. In 2012, Heimgartner and Sting stated that social pedagogical research was dominated by qualification papers and individual studies, between which there had been hardly any recognisable thematic and conceptual continuity; it remained regionally limited due to the federal structure of child and youth welfare and was hardly noticed beyond its context (Heimgartner/Sting 2012, 9f.). This situation has improved in recent years thanks to a number of supra-regional studies; at the same time, however, the only independent "research institution of national importance with an explicitly social pedagogical profile", the "Social Pedagogical Institute" of SOS Children's Villages in Innsbruck (Heimgartner/Sting 2012, 13), was dissolved.

The increased demands for professionalism associated with the reorganisation of child and youth welfare services were accompanied by discussions about the quality and level of training. In 1982, the existing educator training programmes were transferred to a secondary school, which offered either a five-year school education with a school-leaving certificate and educator training or a two-year, post-secondary collegiate training. From 1993, all these institutions were renamed "Bildungsanstalten für Sozialpädagogik" (educational institutions for social pedagogy) by an amendment to the Education Act (Gnant, 2003, 467ff.). Training at educational institutions for social pedagogy is regulated throughout Austria by a binding curricula; it forms the "professional core" of social pedagogical qualification but, contrary to international trends, remains at the non-academic, post-secondary qualification level ISCED 5 (Lauermaun 2022, 294f).

At the same time, the university of applied sciences degree programmes for "social work", which were introduced in 2001, have integrated some social pedagogical content into their study programmes. Some social pedagogy content can be found in pedagogy programmes at universities, and specific child and youth welfare-related study components have been developed in the social pedagogy master's programmes at the universities of Graz and Klagenfurt as well as in the master's programme "Child and Family-Centred Social Work" at the University of Applied Sciences Campus Vienna.

Over decades, developments in this field of training have led to the establishment of various basic training programmes for working in child and youth welfare services; specific training content, however, has only been taught in individual cases. To date, there has been no systematic training programme for child and youth welfare services that builds on one another and is based on standardised professional requirements and quality standards (Mayrhofer 2010). The various training programmes are at different levels and reflect the heterogeneity of professional requirements in the different Austrian federal states. The state-specific child and youth welfare legislation, which regulates access to work in child and youth welfare, includes divergent qualifications at different levels of education throughout Austria, from specialised schools to academic training. The accepted professional spectrum is quite broad in some cases; and in most federal states, the option is kept open to allow unqualified persons

access to care work in child and youth welfare facilities (Sting/Lauerermann 2020). Attempts are still being made to remedy the resulting skills and professionalism deficit through more or less well-founded regional courses and further training programmes.

Overall, it becomes apparent that despite general positive developments, there is no consistent understanding of quality of care, neither in training nor in childcare practice or in the legal foundations of the various federal states; this means that the child and youth welfare landscape in Austria appears very heterogeneous and confusing and that children and adolescents find different opportunities and conditions of care entirely depending on what region they grow up in.

Efforts towards professional networking and quality of care

A certain amount of pressure to further develop professionalism and quality in child and youth welfare care has arisen as a result of the reappraisal of the history of institutional violence in children's homes in Austria, which began in 2010 and has since led to numerous academic studies, media reports and public events (e.g. Bauer et al. 2013; Helige et al. 2013; Schreiber 2014; Ralser et al. 2017; Loch et al. 2022). In most Austrian states, regional victim protection centres were established, which made compensation payments and drew public attention to the issue of residential care (Ralser 2022, 435ff.). At the same time, child and youth welfare issues were increasingly used as an opportunity for Austria-wide networking and professional associations that contributed to the professionalisation and quality improvement of child and youth welfare work.

The „*Österreichische Berufsverband der Sozialen Arbeit*“ (Austrian Professional Association of Social Work) (obds), which has significantly shaped the social work profession in Austria by representing the interests of social workers, has been trying to expand its profile and incorporate the perspective of social pedagogy for several years. For this purpose, a new job profile was developed in a cooperative process with representatives from various training centres, aiming to encompass social work and social education activities (obds 2024). At present, attempts are being made to establish a professional title derived from this throughout Austria. Since the 2000s, representatives of social pedagogy at Austrian universities have formed a "Social Pedagogy Section" within the framework of the „*Österreichischen Gesellschaft für Forschung und Entwicklung im Bildungswesen*“ (Austrian Society for Research and Development in Education, ÖFEB) in an attempt to intensify the exchange of research in social pedagogy, which, among other issues, includes research on child and youth welfare. At the same time, an informal association has been formed, the „*Netzwerk Sozialpädagogik*“ (Social Pedagogy Network), which consist of people from various educational institutions and aims to establish an Austria-wide dialogue on issues relating to education, research and practice.

FICE Austria is in dialogue with these associations and the „*Österreichische Gesellschaft für Soziale Arbeit*“ (Austrian Society for Social Work, ogsa) and regularly takes part in their events. With the „*Dachverband Österreichischer Jugendhilfeeinrichtungen*“ (Umbrella organization for institutions for youth welfare, DÖJ) a monthly ZOOM exchange on current projects and developments is held. As part of the Youth Research Network, FICE Austria founded a "Virtual Research Forum for Child and Youth Welfare" (VFKJ) in 2023 to promote research in child and youth welfare and to provide employees in the field with easy access to its findings.

4. The role of FICE Austria and its tasks in the professionalisation and quality improvement of child and youth services

In order to better understand the role of FICE Austria with regard to quality improvement and professionalisation, we should first look at FICE on an international level. FICE International consists of national sections, which each are organised in different ways. As a rule, they include institutions such

as small group homes, residential care facilities and other institutions for non-family education, schools and workshops for the disabled, training centres for social and special needs teachers, etc. The FICE National Sections also accept individual members such as directors and staff of institutions, academics, representatives of public authorities and ministries in the social, educational and health sectors as well as friends and benefactors.”⁵

Since FICE Austria was founded in 1959, the association has been committed to the above-mentioned goals. As mentioned earlier in the text, the documentation and scientific monitoring of professional development and the endeavour to improve quality was previously non-existent.

A new millennium - a new project: Quality4Children

FICE Austria's current involvement with the topic of quality in residential child and youth care began in 2004 during a networking meeting between the then President Monika Niederle, Christian Posch and Werner Hilweg from SOS Children's Villages International.

Posch and Hilweg presented 2004 the idea of a Europe-wide project to develop quality standards in out-of-home care. This project was to be called "Quality4Children". Monika Niederle was quickly convinced by the idea for the project and presented it at the FICE International Council meeting in Plovdiv, Bulgaria in April 2004. FICE International then decided to participate in "Quality4Children". IFCO, the International Foster Parent Organisation, was involved as a third partner.

Monika Niederle became a member of the team that was steering the project and Otmar Mittermayr was appointed National Coordinator. FICE Austria thus took on the task of promoting the project in Austria and collecting stories from people who had experienced residential child and youth care themselves for the further development of the Quality4Children standards. These could be children and young people, but also their family members, social pedagogues and social workers. They were all asked to share their experiences in form of storytelling.

From the first European congress in Gmunden, which took place on 1 and 2 June 2005, Bettina Terp took over the national coordination for Austria. Subsequently, she also became "Cross National Team Facilitator" for ten European countries.

The Quality4Children Standards were finally presented to the European Parliament in Brussels on 13 June 2007. In Romania, Malta and Turkey, the Quality4Children Standards have found their way into legislation. Unfortunately, this was not the case in Austria, but they have had a lasting impact on the professional discourse.

FICE Austria – an office for children's rights

From 2007 to 2011, FICE Austria's development work with regard to quality in residential child and youth care was dormant. During Otmar Mittermayr's time as President of FICE Austria, work focussed on the implementation of children's rights, particularly in the area of residential child and youth welfare. A particular highlight of this period was the opening of the "Children's Rights Square" in the 20th district of Vienna, located at the corner of Dresdnerstraße and Winarskystraße.

Care home scandals, de-institutionalisation and the quality debate

Almost at the same time as Hermann Radler took over the presidency in 2011, abuses first became known at the Wilheminenberg home (a children's home run by Vienna's child and youth welfare organisation) and subsequently at other child and youth welfare facilities in Austria. The reappraisal of these scandals led to many operators of residential child and youth welfare centres coming to terms with their own history and the framework conditions for the extra-familial care of children and adolescents.

⁵ <https://www.davidlane.org/fice%20history.htm>

Hermann Radler was very involved in European and international networking and participated with FICE Austria in the "Opening Doors for Europe's Children" campaign. Under the motto "Strengthening Families. Ending Institutional Care"⁶, the main topic of discussion was the need to close large homes, i.e. de-institutionalisation. FICE Austria wanted to add another component to the highly ideological discussion, namely the debate on the quality of care. The focus should not be on the "where", but above all on the "how".

In order to be well prepared for this debate, Hermann Radler initiated round table discussions in which experts from the field of inpatient child and youth welfare could exchange views on quality in the inpatient care of children. The idea for the project "Quality standards for inpatient child and youth welfare" emerged from these discussions.

33rd FICE International CONGRESS & 2nd CYC WORLD CONFERENCE

The 33rd FICE International CONGRESS & 2nd CYC WORLD CONFERENCE, which took place from 22 to 25 August 2016 at the FH Campus Wien, is certainly a highlight in the recent history of FICE Austria. The title of the congress was "Together towards a better world for children, adolescents and families". Over 600 participants from 60 different countries were able to exchange views on highly relevant socio-educational topics, which were analysed by international experts from a scientific, theoretical and practical perspective. Hermann Radler was elected President of FICE International at the General Assembly of FICE International, which took place during the congress.

At the same time, more than 50 young people from 15 countries who grew up in care centres or foster families met for a joint exchange - "Be the change". These young people analysed the reality of their own lives. They analysed their future plans, hopes and dreams. Together, they developed ten standards for the transition to an independent life. The highlight was their participation in the international conference. Here, the young people presented the standards they had developed and FICE International and the International Child and Youth Care Network officially recognised them.⁷

This project, which was funded by the Erasmus+ programme, won the Austrian Youth Award in 2017, which was presented to FICE Austria on 19 November 2017 at Vienna City Hall.

The quality debate continues to develop

As mentioned earlier in the text, round table discussions on quality had led to an awareness of the need for further discussion on this topic. It was incomprehensible to the participants in the round table discussions that the quality of care for children in residential child and youth welfare centres should vary depending on the federal state.

In November 2017, the project "Quality standards for inpatient child and youth welfare" was launched under the leadership of FICE Austria. Over a period of around one and a half years, 19 organisations active in Austrian child and youth welfare put together quality standards for inpatient child and youth welfare from a specialist educational perspective, taking into account the applicable national legal provisions and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Bettina Terp was in charge of the project, while Monika Lengauer worked with the members of the quality circle to draw up the standards and put them in writing.

⁶ <https://www.openingdoors.eu/>

⁷ <https://jugendarbeitinoesterreich.at/kategorie-erasmus-jugend-in-aktion-2017/>

The process of cooperatively developing quality standards across provincial and organisational boundaries required a high degree of dialogue and consensus from all participants. The fact that agreement could be reached on relevant aspects of quality despite the different professional mandates and roles of those involved is unique in the Austrian child and youth welfare landscape and demonstrates the high potential of a cooperative commitment to the rights and the best possible support for children and young people in difficult circumstances.

At the same time, FICE Austria is working intensively on international projects such as the "Opening Doors Campaign" and the "Leaving Care Project"⁸ in cooperation with many international organisations.

FICE Austria's restart in May 2019

The relaunch of FICE Austria was decided at the General Assembly on 30 April 2019 in Vienna and, following an amendment to the statutes, a new Board⁹ was elected with two presidents for the first time. See table for the presidents since 2008:

Name	From (year and month)	Until (year and month)
Monika Niederle	October 2003	December 2007
Otmar Mittermayr	December 2007	March 2011
Hermann Radler	March 2011	April 2018
Bettina Terp (interimistisch)	April 2018	April 2019
Bettina Terp, MA (Co)	April 2019	Ongoing
Dr. Christian Posch (Co)	April 2019	ongoing

Objectives

FICE Austria advocates for the further development of quality (orientation, process, structure and outcome quality) in all areas of child and youth welfare. Key activities to achieve these goals are

- developing, implementing and documenting projects (e.g. quality standards, curricula, manuals, etc.),
- organising and implementing exchange platforms (e.g. KJH 2030 ZOOM platform, virtual research platform on child and youth welfare), conferences (e.g. impulse conferences on child and youth welfare 2030, seminars (e.g. quality standards), etc.),
- supporting and promoting the target group-specific publication of the results of scientific work (e.g. FICE Forschungsinfo KJH aktuell) and writing articles on quality issues in Austrian child and youth welfare (see literature list).

"The activities of the association are carried out in cooperation with all stakeholders in child and youth welfare for the benefit of children/adolescents, parents, professionals and the organisations and authorities involved" (FICE Statutes 2020)¹⁰. Dialogue and cooperation are conducted across organisations and federal states.

Highlight

⁸ Maximilian Ulrich und Roger Winandy

⁹ Members of the Board: Reinhard Halder, Peter Heidlmair, Monika Lengauer (Schriftführerin), Nicole Nassar, Christian Posch (Präsident), Daniel Reifer (Schriftführer), Ingrid Schuneritsch (Kassierin), Herbert Siegrist, Bettina Terp (Präsidentin), Maximilian Ullrich, Roger Winandy

¹⁰ Statutes approved at the FICE General Assembly on 17 May 2023

The presentation of the book " Quality standards for the professional alternative child and youth care in group homes"¹¹ on 7 May 2019 at the premises of the Austrian Ombudsman Board in Vienna was a forward-looking step for the further development of FICE Austria in terms of content and organisation. The FICE quality standards are still used today as basis for auditing inpatient child and youth welfare centres by the Austrian Ombudsman Board and are still being successfully sold in their third edition, implemented in child and youth welfare centres, used at training centres for social work and mentioned in many specialist articles. The conferences that followed the kick-off meeting in Vienna to present the FICE Q-Standards in five federal states (Tyrol, Lower Austria, Salzburg, Carinthia and Vorarlberg) together with child and youth welfare centres contributed to the success in Austria.

The first constituent FICE Austria Board meeting took place in Vienna on 23 May 2019. Two further Board meetings followed in 2019, during which the financial consolidation was finalised with the support of former FICE President Hermann Radler. A new project with the working title "Practice-oriented further training for professionals based on FICE quality standards" was discussed. A project on quality standards in educational support was considered at the 1st FICE retreat on 11 September 2019. The translation of the Q standards into English was approved at the 2nd General Assembly (10 December 2019).

Three months after the presentation of the Q-Standards, the Austria-wide search for partner organisations (technical expertise and/or financial support) for the project "Continuing education curriculum based on the quality standards" began. The board meeting on 7 February 2020 was decisive for the further content orientation of FICE Austria in the following years, in which both a round table for 12 March 2020 (= start of the further education project) and further activities for the development of quality standards to support education were decided.

During this time, the Leaving Care Training was also drafted as part of the International Leaving Care Project (lead SOS Children's Villages International), in which FICE Austria participated as an Austrian partner. The active support of the association Care Leaver Austria by the assistant to the presidents was decided by the board on 11 January 2021, as was the part-time employment of an assistant (first employee of FICE Austria). Today, there are four part-time colleagues within FICE Austria. Funding comes mainly from fundraising for specific projects, a portion of the membership fees and from the sale of FICE books.

The number of members of FICE Austria almost tripled in the period from the beginning of 2019 to the end of 2023. While twelve organisations and two individuals were members of FICE Austria at the beginning of 2019, there were thirty organisations and nine individuals at the end of 2023.

Child and youth welfare 2030 as a focus of FICE Austria

Quality assurance is primarily about preserving what has already been achieved, i.e. ensuring that quality does not fall behind. Quality development, on the other hand, is dynamically, future and process-oriented and open to development – in terms of content, this is also the approach of FICE Austria. At the beginning of 2023, it became clear that FICE Austria should focus more on the bigger picture, with the aim of looking at developments and new challenges up to the year 2030. Among other things, this involves

- children / adolescents / young adults today: social and personal growth conditions, risks, values and dreams - generation Z

¹¹ German and English version of the book available, see www.fice.at

- legal framework for 2030? (Child and Youth Welfare Act, children's rights, regulations and guidelines, catalogues/measures, service descriptions and standard daily rates, ...) and conclusions: pro and con; offers in child and youth welfare in a legal vacuum
- organisational framework conditions for work in child and youth welfare, custom-fit help 2030?
- trends and developments within social policies (values, attitudes, ...) and economics

For this reason, existing and future projects have been and will be aligned with the challenges and developments for child and youth welfare in 2030. This focus will play a significant role in the various co-operations of FICE Austria.

Austria-wide topic-specific cooperation (2019-2023)

FICE Austria attaches great importance to working together in a variety of co-operations on specialist topics relating to child and youth welfare. The most important projects were

- a) The "Quality standards for the professional alternative child and youth care in group homes" (2017-2019) were developed under the leadership of FICE Austria in cooperation with 19 organisations active in child and youth welfare. They represent the first cross-organisational and cross-provincial description of the process quality of inpatient child and youth welfare services in Austria.
- b) The curriculum "Dual practice-oriented for professionals in inpatient child and youth welfare" (2020-2023) was developed in cooperation with 27 Austrian organisations from the field of child and youth welfare (institutions and authorities), universities, universities of applied sciences, academies, child and youth advocates, etc. under the project management of FICE Austria. The aim was to provide an impetus for the professional content of child and youth welfare in the training and further education landscape. To reflect on socio-pedagogical actions and the reflection on them in light of the relevant theories in order to be able to adequately realise quality standards in everyday practice.
- c) The "Quality standards for mobile services in the context of educational support" were developed in a cooperation of 16 child and youth welfare organisations (2022 to 2023) and will appear as a FICE publication in 2024.
- d) The Austria-wide virtual exchange platform on future issues "Child and youth welfare 2030" started in March 2022 with the topic "staff shortage" and developed further in autumn 2023 to the current topic "child and youth welfare 2030". The 1.5-hour exchange between many stakeholders in child and youth welfare takes place approximately every six weeks. For 2024, the start of "FICE impulse conferences on child and youth welfare" is planned twice a year to deepen the topics in different federal states.
- e) For FICE International, the presidents launched the "thematic bundle: Quality in Care" in 2022, which was further developed into the "Platform implementing Quality" in 2023 and deals specifically with the realisation of quality in the member countries and meets virtually 3 to 4 times a year.
- f) In autumn 2023, the "**Virtual Research Forum for Child and Youth Welfare**" was launched with the following objectives
 - a. collating and processing what relevant research has been carried out in recent years, what is currently happening and what is planned for the future,
 - b. utilising synergies for joint research projects,
 - c. publishing articles and books recognised as relevant both in FICE *Kinder- und Jugendhilfe-Forschungsinfo* (Information, about research on children and adolescents) which is published twice a year, and on the FICE Austria homepage,

- d. every one to two years, the research results should be published in a concise and popular-scientific form as a book and thus made accessible to practitioners and decision-makers,
 - e. in the medium term, the "Virtual Research Forum for Child and Youth Welfare" could be expanded internationally.
- g) In order to report on the diverse activities of FICE Austria throughout Austria, there is a biannual "Letter from the Presidents" (since January 2021)
 - h) Since February 2022 an "INFO" mail is sent to the members of FICE Austria approximately every six months, with an overview of the national and international events of FICE Austria / FICE International and other organisations taking place in the next six months.

Outlook into the near future

For 2024, a further development of the strategy for FICE Austria is planned in the direction of opening up to social issues of child and youth welfare and new target groups, such as all types of media and socio-politically relevant target groups.

The "Hand(lungs)buch" (*Action book*) project for child and youth welfare services was launched on 1 March 2024. In a cooperative process with many stakeholders in child and youth welfare, work is underway to write a book for social pedagogues with a focus on everyday actions and the corresponding professional reflection on them. The **"Quality standards for mobile services in the context of educational support"** will be published as a book at the beginning of summer 2024.

FICE Austria's publications and presentations (2019-2023)

FICE Austria emphasises the importance of communicating the completed and ongoing projects to interested colleagues in specialist articles, books and lectures:

Publications

- FICE Austria (2019): Qualitätsstandards für die stationäre Kinder- und Jugendhilfe. Neudruck der 1. Auflage. Freistadt: Verlag Plöchl.
- FICE Austria (2021): Quality standards for professional alternative child and youth care in group homes. Freistadt: Plöchl.
- Lengauer, Monika; Posch, Christian; Terp, Bettina (2019): Qualitätsstandards für die stationäre Kinder- und Jugendhilfe. In: iFamZ 5/14. Jahrgang: 334-336
- Lengauer, Monika; Posch, Christian (2021): Weiterbildungscurriculum entlang der Qualitätsstandards für die stationäre Kinder- und Jugendhilfe in Österreich. In: Forum Erziehungshilfen 27 (4): 237-239.
- Lengauer, Monika; Posch, Christian (2021): Organisationale Angewiesenheit. In: sozialpädagogische Impulse 2: 21-23.
- Lengauer, Monika; Terp, Bettina; Posch, Christian (2021): The child and youth welfare system in Austria. In: FICE Austria (Ed.): Quality standards for professional alternative child and youth care in group homes. Freistadt: Plöchl, S. 10-17.
- Lengauer, Monika; Posch, Christian (2023): Qualitätsvolle Betreuung in stationären Einrichtungen der Kinder- und Jugendhilfe durch Weiterbildungen stärken. In: SIÖ - Fachzeitschrift für Soziale Arbeit in Österreich 2: 45-49.

Lectures

- Lengauer, Monika; Magometschnigg, Anton (2019): „From quality standards to their positive impact on children“. Vortrag, gehalten am 34th FICE International World Congress 2019, Tel Aviv.

- Lengauer, Monika; Posch, Christian (2020): „Was heißt fachliches Handeln?“. Vortrag, gehalten im Rahmen der Vortragsreihe „Sozialpädagogische Blicke“ des Fachbereichs Erziehungswissenschaft, Arbeitsgruppe Sozialpädagogik der Universität Salzburg.
- Lengauer, Monika; Posch, Christian (2021): „Kernmerkmale des „Könnens“ - Weiterbildung von Fachkräften entlang der Qualitätsstandards“. Vortrag, gehalten in der JuQuest Fachtagung.
- Lengauer, Monika; Posch, Christian (2022): „Organisationale und familiale Schutzkonzepte – eine Reflexion“. Vortrag, gehalten in der Fachtagung „Kindern Schutz und Halt geben“ von Plan B in Linz, Leonding.
- Lengauer, Monika; Posch, Christian (2023): „Forschung als Hilfe für die Kinder- und Jugendhilfe“. Vortrag, gehalten in der Jugendforschungstagung an der Universität Innsbruck.
- Lengauer, Monika; Posch, Christian (2023): „Was sollte die KJH 2030 leisten? Thesen zu Entwicklungsnotwendigkeiten und Ambivalenzen“. Vortrag, gehalten in der FICE-Tagung „Schritt halten? Gestalten? Qualität weiterentwickeln?“ an der FH Linz.

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