



The Hotline to Good Advice

Do the principles of lean management also work in the charitable and social sector? Consultants from Porsche Consulting risked a field trial in the voluntary sector. While they optimized the processes used for the “No Worries Number” helpline, they also learned a lot about what really preoccupies children and young people.

📄 Horst Walter, 📺 Matthias Hangst

Conversations that help: Uwe Bodmer, adviser on the children's and young people's helpline



Sina (all names have been changed) is desperate. Her parents often argue, and her father is usually drunk. Now he has even been picked up by the police. “I think that’s mean,” says the 12-year-old. She wants to know what she can do. “After all, I love my parents.”

It is 4 o’clock on a Wednesday afternoon. Uwe Bodmer, an adviser on the children’s and young people’s helpline, listens to the story for a quarter of an hour. And although the girl does not want to accept his advice to ask for help from the youth welfare department, she is obviously satisfied after this quarter of an hour. She says that just talking has helped. And she will now have a very serious conversation with her parents in any case.

Real life, with all its large and small problems, happens here in this narrow office on the premises of the Stuttgart Child Protection Association at Christophstrasse 8. Ronja is stressed because her friend now wants to spend school recesses only on the right side of the playground, not on the left side as before; Fabian is sad because his dog was run over and he feels guilty; and Leona ran away from home yesterday. She is now lonely and forlorn outside the stadium, is hungry, has no money, and doesn’t know what to do now.

Last year, 5.2 million children and young people dialled 0800 – 1110333, the “No Worries Number” (Nummer gegen Kummer). But the 3,291 volunteers in Germany were able to answer only 0.9 million calls. “Of course, our objective must be to expand the advice we offer,” says Rainer Schütz, manager of the “Nummer gegen Kummer” association. But they also have other difficulties to contend with: Income from donations has fallen so much that the Wuppertal office has shrunk from twelve staff members to four part-timers. “We were already quite frustrated because we wanted to continue to maintain our broad range of services,” says qualified educationalist Beate Friese, who is responsible for the

public relations department. As a result, the 110 member organizations which are affiliated with the “Nummer gegen Kummer” umbrella organization and which provide advice on the number to which Deutsche Telekom provides free access throughout the country have also noticed the financial collapse and have been trying to find ways to save money. Some of them wanted to reduce the administrative costs at head office even further.

Is “Nummer gegen Kummer” a case for Porsche Consulting? For a consultancy firm that otherwise supports successful company empires with turnovers in the millions? Scarcely conceivable. And yet...

Client: “Nummer gegen Kummer”

Sector: Charitable/Social

Special feature of the project: Pro bono work in the voluntary social sector

“The interesting question was whether our method also works in the nonprofit sector,” says Sven Seidel—and the Porsche Consulting GmbH partner immediately supplies the answer: “It works.” And it works in all respects: process analysis, workshop/interviews, Continuous Improvement Process (CIP) approach, strategic market development. The results: an increase in efficiency in the branch office, definition and agreement of interfaces, refocusing of activities on the value creation process. “We approached this in exactly the same way as we would in commercial enterprises,” says project manager Holger Brandt, who examined internal workflows, checked interfaces—and discovered that the administrative department in Wuppertal provides “an increasing range of services at a time when employee capacity and budget are both decreasing considerably.” And, to his own surprise, he found that these “employees and volunteers are more passionate about their work than those in other occupations. They identify with their activity to a considerably greater extent.” ▶



Always ready to listen to children's and young people's problems, large and small: Beate Friese, Rainer and Heidi Schütz (left to right)

This is despite the fact that the job is not always entertaining. The voluntary advisers are often sworn at on the telephone, they listen to stories of sexual abuse and suicide threats—and many of these stories are still on their minds days afterwards. “There was a 16-year-old boy who confessed to me that he was having a relationship with his 35-year-old neighbor. You really think about whether you’ve given him the right advice,” says Uwe Bodmer, telling of colleagues who read the newspaper for days after suicide threats, fervently hoping that nothing has happened. All callers remain anonymous—and often all the advisers can do is to make recommendations. “After all, we’re not experts at the art of living ourselves. We can only try to use our common sense in order to work out solutions together with the callers—and refer extreme cases to appropriate professional organizations.”

They are prepared for their work in courses lasting more than 100 hours, in which they learn about the methodology of holding a conversation and about the topics which come up: on the children’s and young people’s helpline, the most popular topic is partnership and love, accounting for 34 percent of callers, followed by sexuality (23 percent), personal problems (19.9 percent), circle of friends (16.2), family (14.5) and school/education (9.5). On the parents’ helpline, which “Nummer gegen Kummer” has provided since 2001, the main topics are problems with bringing up children, physical and psychological features of the children, social conflict, and violence. “We have also noticed that increasingly poverty crops up in conversations with the parents,” says Bodmer, who is chairman of the Child Protection Association on the Stuttgart local committee.

The Child Protection Association provides most of the sites for the “Nummer gegen Kummer” telephones—and so most of the interfaces that involved some degree of conflict with the umbrella organization also arose here. For the Porsche Consulting employees, this was

one of the most important starting points in their work. They undertook a kind of tour of Germany, establishing transparency for the office’s work locally and collecting and passing on to Wuppertal the members’ requests and suggestions. In addition, “We sat the people concerned down at a table and discussed the boundaries and areas of responsibility,” says consultant Dr. Kilian Sauerwald of Porsche Consulting. The outcome was fewer trouble spots and thus more time for the office employees to deal with public relations work, quality assurance, further training, and procurement of donations. “The backing provided by Porsche Consulting enables us to get to work with even greater determination,” says Heidi Schütz, a qualified psychologist, and it is clear to manager Rainer Schütz that the tasks are too important to let them rest. Especially since a test at the Württemberg grammar school in Stuttgart classified the “No Worries Number” as the best helpline for children and young people and identified only one shortcoming: too few consultation times. “Our number one priority now is to obtain money,” says Schütz.

At any rate, the Porsche consultants have confirmed that the money is being well invested. There is plenty of evidence of this. “You’re just plain cool,” says a card written by a young girl a few weeks after a telephone conversation. Back then, she wanted to kill herself because her boyfriend had fallen in love with a younger girl. Now she is with an older boy, and very happy. ◀



No WorriesNumber
**0800
111 0 333**
Helpline

No WorriesNumber
**0800
111 0 550**
Parents' helpline

Donations help. Even with problems.

Often, children and young people don't know where to go with their problems, and so they reach for the phone. On the "No Worries Number," they remain anonymous, receive comfort and usually also support. But this advice cannot be expensive—it has to be completely free. Make a donation and enable children and young people to continue to get their problems off their chests. Or you can donate an annual amount of 120 euros and immediately become a supporting member of "Nummer gegen Kummer."

"Nummer gegen Kummer"

is an umbrella organization of 110 member organizations that provide free advice from local volunteers on the same telephone number across Germany.

Children's and young people's helpline:
0800 1110 333
Monday to Friday from 3 p.m. to 7 p.m.

Parents' helpline
0800 1110 550
Monday and Wednesday 9 a.m. to 11 a.m.,
Tuesday and Thursday 5 p.m. to 7 p.m.

"Nummer gegen Kummer" is financed by donations.

Account for donations: Bank für Sozialwirtschaft, sort code 370 205 00, account number: 7213801

Address: Kleiner Werth 34
42275 Wuppertal, Germany
info@nummergegenkummer.de
<http://www.nummergegenkummer.de>