

PREVENTION OF EARLY SCHOOL LEAVING
REPORT ON THE NATIONAL SITUATION

Case Studies in Germany

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CASE STUDY: Jan

(Carried out by Dr. Beate Braun, BRAUn-CONCEPT.)

NAME, AGE, PLACE

The 16-year-old Jan lives with his mother and a younger sister in a rather rural area in North Rhine Westfalia (Germany). His parents got divorced when he went to kindergarden, he grew up with his mother and a stepfather. The mother has a diploma in educational science and works for the youth welfare office. Currently, Jan attends the ninth grade of a secondary modern school and is endangered to drop out without a graduation.

CASE DESCRIPTION

Jan's troubles started very early. His mother describes him as a toddler who used to be very agitated, quickly upset, enraged on one hand and very lazy on the other hand. He started speaking very late and at the first grade his problematic social behaviour and school achievement was so bad that he needed to repeat the first class of elementary school. His reading and writing competition have been very poor. Aged seven Jan was diagnosed with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and since then he has been in therapy and under medication.

After elementary school, Jan went on visiting secondary modern school. He always reached the next grade, although he continued making trouble. At the eighth grade he was temporarily disqualified from school because of his maladjusted social behaviour.

Jan actively avoids school only once in a while. His passive avoidance finds its expression in low participation in class, infrequent homework and opposition to rules and agreements with his teacher. He frequently disturbs class and refuses cooperation.

Right from the beginning of the first class Jan had additional lessons with a private tutor until he refused even this a half year ago.

At present his school performance is so weak that he will probably leave school without any graduation. He intends to move to the place where his biological father lives to continue his education at a vocational school. An internship he made not long ago made clear to him that he prefers working instead of going to school. The importance of a good graduation, though, motivates him to continue going to school to get a middle school degree.

His mother states that Jan has always judged his own achievements wrong and isn't sure he will make it. She emphasizes how glad she will be when Jan will have finished school.

ANALYZE THE SPECIFIC ELEMENTS OF THE CASE

CAUSES

According to the teacher and the mother, Jan's trouble can to a great part be attributed to his diagnosed ADHD and disturbing social behaviour. It is difficult for him to follow rules, accept problem solving suggestions and listening to the explanation of reasons. Also his deficient insight ability and far from reality self-assessment of his own performance are contributing to Jan's problems at school.

Despite medication and therapeutic assistance Jan is not able to concentrate and participate in class. As a result he's continuously experiencing failure and there are frequent conflicts with teachers.

APPROACH

Jan's mother admits that it is difficult for teachers to deal with class and additionally handle a child like him. Likewise his current class teacher states Jan would need one-to-one care and alternative ways of learning to achieve good results. Throughout the years a close co-operation of Jan's mother and the school has been established. Frequent dialogues have taken place into which Jan was integrated. In case Jan is absent at school, the mother is always informed immediately. She describes the contact with Jan's teachers as positive, although not all of her suggestions are carried through. For example, she made good experiences with a reward system using Smilies or red and yellow cards as known from soccer.

Since it is difficult for him to take in information by reading, his mother tries to visualize facts, write down rules and include physical activity, e.g. press-ups, into the learning process. She thinks school was not able to give proper attention to Jan and his special needs.

CASE STUDY: Sven

(Carried out by Dr. Beate Braun, BRAUn-CONCEPT.)

NAME, AGE, PLACE

The 17-year-old Sven lives in a rural area in North Rhine Westfalia (Germany) with his parents and a twin brother.

CASE DESCRIPTION

Sven is currently visiting secondary modern school at 9th grade. At the moment it is not foreseeable if he will drop out without graduation or get his degree and start practical training.

Sven skipped school at 217 days this year, 211 are excused. As a reason for the school avoidance he names stomach ache caused by ongoing conflicts with his class teacher. With other teachers, classmates and parents he has no problems.

His parents did not know that Sven played truant until the teacher called them. He left home and came back as if he went to school. He also went to the doctor on his own. His mother says that nobody could imagine Sven skipping school.

The class teacher does not really believe in Sven's stomach ache are caused by stress with him. He thinks Sven had problems before he became his class teacher but he does not know the previous history. Sven himself does not report previous problems. He is convinced that he would have attended school regularly if he had had a better relationship with his class teacher.

According to the class teacher other teachers also complain that Sven is disturbing and boycotting instruction. His mother describes him as nice and polite, the girl sitting next to him told her he is the most quiet pupil in class.

Sven thinks his class teacher will be glad to get rid of him and would not support an application to continue school attendance up to 10th grade. He wants to start a workmanship training and his parents support this ambition.

ANALYZE THE SPECIFIC ELEMENTS OF THE CASE

CAUSES

Sven and his parents see the school avoidance caused by the conflicts with the class teacher. Sven thinks that the class teacher is not fair to him and disciplines him without any reason. This leads to the stomach ache that makes it impossible for him to go to school. For most of the skipped days he got a medical certificate. His mother is convinced that the only reason why her son is not good at school is his absenteeism.

APPROACH

Many conversations are carried out between school and parents. The class teacher attests a good relationship with the mother.

Because of the presumably psychosomatic stomach ache Sven has started to see the school psychologist once a week (due to his father's suggestion). Sven experiences this contact positively and can talk openly to this person. He promotes Sven in persevering at school and avoiding conflicts with the class teacher. Once a month, his father meets the psychologist and they talk about Sven.

Since Sven sees the psychologist he has also been more open towards his parents.

SOLUTIONS

The solution for Sven seems to be leaving school and starting a practical training.

RESULTS

Results are not foreseeable at the moment because it is not clear if Sven will be able to graduate after this school year. However, he is convinced of leaving school and getting rid of the conflicts with his class teacher. He already had an admission interview in his new school where he talked openly about his problems and the teachers told him they wanted him to make better experiences than with his current teacher.

CASE STUDY: Antonio

(Carried out by Margit Simon, KOMM Beratungsstelle, CJD Darmstadt.)

NAME, AGE, PLACE

The 20-year-old Antonio was born in Ecuador and lives close to Darmstadt (Germany) with his mother, his step-father and his sister.

CASE DESCRIPTION

Antonio's problems began when he came to Germany with his mother and sister in 1999. He was 11 years old and could not speak any German. It took 1 ½ years to find an appropriate school for him. Because of his language problems he started two classes lower at 5th grade in a secondary modern school. From the beginning on he had problems at school. Since he had to visit an additional German course, he missed regular school quite often, could not keep up with his classmates and increasingly lost interest in school and stopped engaging for it. He also had problems with his school mates, was afraid to do something wrong and did not integrate himself in class. His mother reports that school was the most unpleasant location for him, and the language was a barrier he could not overcome. Antonio remembers how hard it was when he had to read something because he was ashamed for his pronunciation.

Due to the continuous failures, Antonio played truant more often. It became better when he got a new class teacher who gave him support and appreciation. But his grades were so low that he could not graduate at that school and had to look for an alternative.

His previous class teacher cherishes that Antonio became active in planning his future and prove his motivation and willingness to proceed in a practical training as mechanic.

Meanwhile, Antonio graduated from a school focussing on electronics. At the moment, he is completing an apprenticeship as metal worker and is planning to get a middle school graduation afterwards.

ANALYZE THE SPECIFIC ELEMENTS OF THE CASE

CAUSES

According to the mother, the previous class teacher and Antonio himself, the main cause for his school problems was his problem with the German language leading to steady difficulties and failures. Antonio says he was overstrained. He could not keep up with his class mates from the very beginning and was not able to catch up despite of private lessons and efforts from school and his mother. To avoid failure he started playing truant. His mother admits that she worsened the situation by additionally pressuring him.

APPROACH

Different approaches were tried to cope with Antonio's school problems. The family got psychological support from the family help service. Antonio perceived this contact very positively, could speak openly and felt supported.

Furthermore, there was a close contact between the class teacher and Antonio's mother trying to find solutions.

They tried to help him by private lessons and special education at school but he could not compensate his deficits any more.

Finally, the school offered information about potential perspectives and ways to get his secondary modern school degree what he already did. For Antonio it was helpful to understand what would happen if he did not get a school degree and what he could do to act in his situation.

At his new school it was helpful for him that lessons were less difficult and there were less pupils in class. Teacher repeated a lot and paid attention that every pupil could keep up and understand subject matters. He got along well with the teachers and felt supported and understood by them.

Additional support came from the KOMM-service for school tired kids in Darmstadt.

RESULTS

Changing school after 9th grade was successful for Antonio. He went to a Berufsschule (vocational education) where he graduated. Since then he feels better at school and with his family. His mother is glad that Antonio has taken responsibility for his education.

CASE STUDY: Barbara

(Carried out by Dr. Kirsten Pühr, University of Halle.)

NAME, AGE, PLACE

The 20-year-old Barbara lives on her own in Northern Germany.

CASE DESCRIPTION

Barbara is currently participating at the reintegration program "Jump plus", a national program to combat youth unemployment.

She started playing truant at 7th grade. Until then, she had rather good marks (except for German). But then she lost interest in achievement and school. Her peers also skipped school, and they did not see how important it is to get a school degree at this point in time. Because of the truancy and concomitant bad performance in school she had to repeat 7th grade three times. In the beginning, she gave in medical certificates, but stopped doing that because she felt that nobody was really interested in her school attendance. She changed school once because of friends but did not feel comfortable in the new school. Because she had no graduation, she became unemployed and homeless. She did not know enough about her qualifications and failed to get an apprenticeship position. Her parents were disappointed and sad and could not support her any longer because her mother was very sick.

Youth and social service helped her to get a residence, unemployment benefit and a job as a social worker. Her own social worker arranged for her to participate at "Jump plus". Instruction is better than school there. She is very proud of herself, and so are her parents and brother, too. She is convinced that she will be able to graduate and get an apprenticeship position as a mechanic or as a social worker.

ANALYZE THE SPECIFIC ELEMENTS OF THE CASE

CAUSES

Main causes why Barbara dropped out of school were the peers who played truant themselves and the lack of reaction by the school. She was not interested in school any more and was not aware how important it is to get a school degree. The parents could not support her enough because of her mother's illness.

APPROACH

Youth and social welfare supported Barbara to get on her feet again. Her social worker pushed her into the program "Jump plus" that helps Barbara to get her school degree after all. For Barbara the alternative ways of learning outside of regular school are helpful. Lessons start between nine and ten, the atmosphere in class and one-to-one explanations promote learning, the pupils are having fun.

SOLUTIONS

The solution for Barbara is getting a secondary modern school degree, maybe even a middle school degree if she successfully stays in the program for one more year.

RESULTS

Barbara's case shows a successful reintegration. It is very likely that she will graduate and get an apprenticeship position first and a job as a mechanic or a social worker afterwards.

CASE STUDY: Norbert

(Carried out by Dr. Kirsten Pühr, University of Halle.)

NAME, AGE, PLACE

The 23-year-old Norbert lives together with his girlfriend and their two year old child in Northern Germany.

CASE DESCRIPTION

After Norbert changed school at the age of 13, he was the only one who did not know his classmates. However, he did not have problems with the classmates but with the teachers because he always felt discriminated. Teachers often complained about him at the director. Then he had to change classes again – and again he was the only new pupil. He started playing truant until he had to leave school at 7th grade. He started going to another school but after three months he decided not to go to school any more. He stayed out of school for two years, hanging around, doing nothing, waiting for his friends coming home from school. His parents didn't know what to do and even had to pay school fines because of his absenteeism. They tried everything – also in cooperation with the youth help service – but without success. Finally they gave up trying.

He started hanging out with peers who took drugs and stole. He got in trouble with the police and was arrested for burglary – even though he was out of town and could not be guilty. He was convicted for 20 working hours. This was the starting point for visiting a second chance school where he graduated. After graduation he started a practical training as a cemetery gardener which he did not finish because he had difficulties learning the Latin names of plants. Then he worked for a security agency and for a demolition company. After this he got the chance to participate at a course to increase job reintegration and is in an apprenticeship position for becoming a carpenter at the moment. He has always been interested in working with wood. He is not very fond of school (traditional learning, old teachers, too little individual support), but the additional remedial training at the apprenticeship placement is very good for him.

ANALYZE THE SPECIFIC ELEMENTS OF THE CASE

CAUSES

Main cause why Norbert dropped out of school was his history of changing schools and classes leading to feelings of being a disturbing factor in class and discriminated by the teachers.

APPROACH

Norbert has recognized that graduation and education are important for getting a job, earning money and improve life quality – even more if you have a family. For Norbert getting a second chance outside of the regular school system was the starting point for changes. Since he has always wanted to work with wood, he is eager to successfully finish his practical training as a carpenter.

SOLUTIONS

The solution for Norbert is finishing the apprenticeship and getting a job as a carpenter. Since he has a family, he is very interested in getting a job close-by.

RESULTS

Norbert's case shows a successful reintegration. It is very likely that he will finish his practical training and get a job as a carpenter.

The following case studies were carried out with pupils from the “Girls Project Future” in the Female Craftsman House Cologne described in chapter 6.3.

CASE STUDY: Clarissa

NAME, AGE, PLACE

Clarissa is 17 years old, lives in Cologne and participates at the “Girls Project Future” in the Female Craftsman House Cologne.

CASE DESCRIPTION

Clarissa dropped out of school because she was hit, mobbed and segregated. Furthermore, she was not interested in learning.

It took her 3 years for the decision to drop out.

She got along well with only a few teachers and not at all with her classmates. They did not care about her dropping out. Neither school nor experts outside of school did something to prevent her dropping out. But she thinks nothing would have been successful at that time.

The relationship to her parents is very good. They found it “shitty” when they noticed her dropping out. She thinks it was okay to leave school without graduation. Now she visits another school and is working on getting her degree. With the staff at school she has a very good relationship.

She went back to school because she realized that she needs a degree for her future.

She would like to become an elderly care nurse and feels well prepared for that job by the school.

She is convinced that her chances to get a good job increase when she attends school regularly and feels acknowledged and supported by the staff at school.

CASE STUDY: Katharina

NAME, AGE, PLACE

Katharina is 15 years old, lives in Cologne and participates at the "Girls Project Future" in the Female Craftsman House Cologne.

CASE DESCRIPTION

Katharina played truant because school was boring for her, she was lazy, ignored and did not like her classmates, more important than school were her friends. After skipping school a few days she could not keep up with learning material.

She had no good relationship with most teachers and ignored her classmates except for her best girl friend.

First, the teachers talked to her, then they were not interested any more. The classmates did not understand her.

Neither school nor experts outside of school did something to prevent her dropping out. She thinks that the teachers should have paid more attention to the relation within class, should not have ignored her or been unfair to her. But she is not sure if that had changed something at that time.

The relationship to her mother has become good since she has returned to school. She helped her to look for alternatives.

She thinks it was not okay to leave school without graduation. Now she visits another school and is working on getting her degree. With the staff at school she has a pretty good relationship.

She went back to school because her aunt supported her and she wanted to get a degree.

She would like to become a cabinet maker and feels well prepared for that job by the school.

CASE STUDY: Isabella

NAME, AGE, PLACE

Isabella is 16 years old, lives in Cologne and participates at the "Girls Project Future" in the Female Craftsman House Cologne.

CASE DESCRIPTION

Isabella had to leave two schools because she did not integrate herself, was not interested in learning and didn't get along with her teachers from the first school and with teachers and classmates from the second school.

When it became clear that she would have to leave the first school she started playing truant. To the second school she went only twice and then never again.

Her teachers and classmates did not react to her dropping out. She thinks they did not even know that she exists. After half a year a letter came stating that she got late to class repeatedly although she went there only two times.

The school social educator talked to her but this was not very useful. One year after leaving school a youth welfare worker supported her.

The relationship to her parents was pretty bad at the time of her dropping out. Her father did not care, but her mother was disappointed and helped her to find a new school. They did not realize her dropping out before nine or ten months. Meanwhile, her parents got divorced. With her mother she has become best friends.

She thinks it was not okay to have her leave the first school. To drop out of the second school was okay for her.

Now she visits another school and is working on getting her degree. With the staff at school she has a very good relationship (even though sometimes they get on her nerves).

She went back to school because it was boring to do nothing what made her getting aggressive towards her parents and friends and because she wanted to get a degree.

She feels well prepared for a future job by the school.

She is convinced that her chances to get a good job increase when she attends school regularly and feels acknowledged and supported by the staff at school.

CASE STUDY: Dolores

NAME, AGE, PLACE

Dolores is 16 years old, lives in Cologne and participates at the "Girls Project Future" in the Female Craftsman House Cologne.

CASE DESCRIPTION

Dolores dropped out of school because she was not interested in learning and did not get along with the teachers and class mates. Since 6th grade she went to school only three times a week, had to repeat one class and went to school only twice a week afterwards.

According to her, the teachers and classmates did not care about her dropping out. The headmaster initiated a conversation with her and her mother but this did not lead to any changes. Also a youth welfare service worker talked to her.

The relationship to her parents was not good at the time of dropping out. Her mother told her that she had to go to another school.

She thinks that neither the school nor her parents had a chance to persuade her to go back on a regular base and get her school degree.

She thinks it was okay to leave school without graduation. Now she visits another school and is working on getting her degree. With the staff at school she has a good relationship.

She went back to school because she realized that cannot do anything without a degree.

She would like to become a cook or confectioner and feels well prepared for that job by the school.

She is convinced that her chances to get a good job increase when she attends school regularly and feels acknowledged and supported by the staff at school.

CASE STUDY: Larissa

NAME, AGE, PLACE

Larissa is 15 years old, lives in Cologne and participates at the "Girls Project Future" in the Female Craftsman House Cologne.

CASE DESCRIPTION

Larissa dropped out of school because she was not interested in school and had stress with the teachers.

The teachers told her it was "shitty" not to get a degree but she had her own view and decided according to it. Otherwise, school did not do anything to prevent her dropping out. Her parents, siblings and brother-in-law tried to convince her. They all told her it was "shitty" not to get a degree because of her future but they could not force her to go on with school.

The relationship to her parents is good ("perfect").

She thinks that the school did not have a chance to persuade her to go back on a regular base ("hating once = hating always"), neither had the parents.

She thinks it was okay to leave school without graduation. Now she visits another school and is working on getting her degree and hopes to get a good work later.

With the staff at school she has a good relationship.

She went back to school because her parents and siblings informed her.

She does not know which job to choose yet.

She thinks she is acknowledged and supported by the staff at school.

CASE STUDY: Miriam

NAME, AGE, PLACE

Miriam is 15 years old, lives in Cologne and participates at the "Girls Project Future" in the Female Craftsman House Cologne.

CASE DESCRIPTION

Miriam dropped out of school because of problems at home and at school.

It took her two days to notice that she did not fit into the new class. After that she did not go to school anymore.

School did not react to her dropping out.

She is in contact with a youth welfare service worker.

The relationship to her parents was bad at the time she was dropping out but has become very good again. They found it "shitty" that she did not go to school any more.

She thinks that neither the school nor her parents had a chance to persuade her to go back on a regular base and get her school degree.

She does not know if it was the right decision to leave school without graduation.

With the staff at school her relationship is superb.

She went back to school mostly because of her mother.

She would like to become a cabinet maker and feels well prepared for that job by the school.

She is convinced that her chances to get a good job increase when she attends school regularly and feels acknowledged and supported by the staff at school.

CASE STUDY: Nadine

NAME, AGE, PLACE

Nadine is 16 years old, lives in Cologne and participates at the "Girls Project Future" in the Female Craftsman House Cologne.

CASE DESCRIPTION

Nadine dropped out of school because she had stress with teachers and pupils, disturbed lessons, did not pay attention, played truant, had no interest in school.

It took her 4 years for the decision to drop out.

At some schools, she got along well with teachers and classmates, at others she did not.

The teachers were stressful when they noticed her dropping out (called in continuously). School did not really do something to prevent her dropping out.

The relationship to her parents is good again (after having no contact for some time).

She thinks it was not okay to leave school without graduation because one does not have a future then.

Now she visits another school and is working on getting her degree.

She goes to school regularly, in time, and has fun at school.

With the staff at school she has a good relationship.

She would like to do something with cosmetics in her future job.

She is convinced that her chances to get a good job increase when she attends school regularly and feels acknowledged and supported by the staff at school.

CASE STUDY: Nabila

NAME, AGE, PLACE

Nabila is 15 years old, lives in Cologne and participates at the "Girls Project Future" in the Female Craftsman House Cologne.

CASE DESCRIPTION

Nabila dropped out of school because she hated school and had no interest in school anymore.

It took her approximately half a year until she decided to leave school without graduation.

She got along well with her classmates, but not with her teachers.

The teachers did not react to her dropping out.

Neither school nor experts outside of school did something to prevent her dropping out.

The relationship to her parents is good although they were disappointed.

She might have stayed at school when teachers would have done more to let the pupils have fun with learning.

She thinks it was not okay to leave school without graduation.

Now she visits another school and is working on getting her degree.

With the staff at school she has a good relationship.

She would like to become a hair cutter in her future job and feels pretty well prepared for that job by the school.

She is convinced that her chances to get a good job increase when she attends school regularly and feels acknowledged and supported by the staff at school.

CASE STUDY: Angelik

NAME, AGE, PLACE

Angelik is 15 years old, lives in Cologne and participates at the "Girls Project Future" in the Female Craftsman House Cologne.

CASE DESCRIPTION

Angelik dropped out of school because she had no interest in school anymore and felt being dealt with in an unfair manner.

It took her approximately three to four years until she decided to leave school without graduation.

She got along well with her classmates, but only with some of her teachers.

From her point of view the teachers especially provoked her to get rid of her even sooner.

Her classmates wanted her to stay and told her to back off. Also the living group attendants tried to motivate her and were disappointed in the end.

She does not know what school could have done to prevent her dropping out. Her parents could have done nothing – when she has come to a decision she will push it through.

She thinks it was okay to leave secondary modern school but it was not okay to leave middle school.

Now she visits another school and is working on getting her secondary modern school degree and is planning on getting the middle school degree one year later.

With the staff at school she has a very good relationship and fees supported 100%. The support by teachers and class mates is motivating her to get a degree.

She would like to do something in retail in her future job and feels very well prepared for that job by the school.

She is convinced that her chances to get a good job increase when she attends school regularly and feels acknowledged and supported by the staff at school.