

“Engage” with Kinder & Jugendarbeit Regio Kerzers

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As a strategic partnership that supports municipal level local youth work, Europe Goes Local doesn't only aim to raise the quality of youth work development but also to create and influence a multiplier effect through **identifying and promoting diverse good practices of local youth work to its members, partners and stakeholders**. Thanks to the quality of its cooperation, EGL has become a rich platform of activities and practices that showcase the diversity and success of local youth work in various local settings and contexts.

Capturing these good practices in local youth work, we interviewed **Cosima Oesch**, Sociocultural sector Manager from **Kinder & Jugendarbeit Regio Kerzers in Switzerland**. We asked Cosima to tell us more about their local youth work initiatives in rural areas and one such good practice – 'Engage' process, which is significantly contributing to youth participation efforts in the region.

What is Kinder & Jugendarbeit Regio Kerzers and how does it contribute to the quality development of local youth work in Switzerland?

We've been developing youth work in the region of Kerzers for the last 15 years. It's a rather rural area, located near the capital Berne and the city of Fribourg in Switzerland. We offer different

programs and activities and develop projects with and for a target group from 6 to 25 years old. The interaction between a favourable environment, a large professional network and a dedicated team of youth workers let the quality of youth work grow in our region, as well as in other regions, because we like to share good practices and learn about innovative ideas and best practice from others.

One of your good practices ‘Engage’ is addressing Youth Citizenship and Participation. What does it include and why is it important for your municipality?

It includes questioning youngsters from 12 to 25 years about what they miss in Kerzers. The goal is to collect their ideas and opinions. This campaign lasts for about a month. Once we have a list with all the different requests, we summarise them under different categories, such as “infrastructure”, “public transport”, etc.

The next step is to invite the young people who had posted a request and politicians to an event where the requests are discussed directly together. Each table represents a category with the corresponding requests. As a result of these discussions, project ideas are born and project teams are built. The contribution of the politicians often consists of giving advice or a promise of support in case it’s needed for further steps of the project. This may be essential for the later realization of the project.

In our role as youth workers, it’s important to encourage and accompany the project groups and to support them through the different stages of their projects.

The “Engage process” is important for our municipality because it allows us to collect the dreams and needs of young people, and to discuss this directly with youngsters and on a political level. This experience leads to greater understanding, respect, and appreciation for each other. It helps build and develop a further sense of community in the municipality between different generations. In addition to that, youngsters learn about the political instruments and procedures that need to be followed if you want to put an idea into practice in your municipality.

What has been the impact of Engage in your opinion?

We have a more youth-friendly infrastructure in Kerzers Due to the “Engage process”. A very cool skate park is a result of an *Engage* project for example. Youngsters, families, and even grandparents love the skate park. It also stands as a sign of solidarity and encouragement: it shows that the local politicians can support ideas from youngsters so that the resources (like space and funds) are given to make a project’s group dream come true. Besides this, the impact for youngsters is that their personal competencies grow in many ways as they play a very active role in their project groups.

For us as a team of youth workers of Kinder- und Jugendarbeit Regio Kerzers, the recognition of our work has improved by the “Engage process” because we met all members of the district council personally. This led to open and direct communication in other matters. In addition to that, we feel that the recognition for youth work on the political level has grown in our municipality.

Who are your key stakeholders and how do you include them in projects such as Engage?

- *Youngsters*: online survey and invitations to events, and later by the coaching of their project groups
- *Politicians, members of the advisory board of the municipality*: They’re invited to the event where the project ideas are discussed directly with the youngsters. Later, collaboration may be

essential as advisors, door openers, and ambassadors for the realization of the project.

- *School:* At the second edition of the “Engage process” in 2021, we proposed to meet all youngsters from 12 to 16 years old in their classroom to explain the idea of “what do you miss in Kerzers”. We collected the ideas by online survey directly in the classes. This was essential in order to reach all members of this age group and therefore to enable large participation.
- *Press:* We found it important to inform the population about this aspect of youth work and about the identified needs and origin of project ideas, as well as of the active role that young people may play in local politics and community work.

What have been the biggest challenges in implementing Engage?

It's essential to reach all young people to give them the possibility to send in and voice their wishes and needs. Therefore, a very good collaboration with schools where all children and youngsters have access to is essential. In the first edition of “Engage”, the collaboration didn't work so well. But in the second edition in the fall of 2021, the collaboration was very successful. In the second edition, our team of youth workers had access to each class for the duration of one lesson. That way they could make an appropriate introduction of the project, encourage and help youngsters to fill in the form and write down their ideas, wishes, and needs. We had double the input in comparison to the first edition! In addition to that, this was a very good occasion to connect directly with more youngsters who hadn't known youth work and youth workers before.

How do you use the European Charter on Local Youth Work in your work?

We periodically read through the Charter together to discuss which points we already work on according to the charter (by giving examples) and on which points we could put more emphasis on in the future. It's a good instrument to ensure and develop further local youth work.

What other areas does Kinder & Jugendarbeit Regio Kerzers cover?

- Weekly activities for children (age 6 -12) and youth (age 12 – 18), with different emphasis (playing, music, handicrafts, cooking, motion, etc.) in different locations.
- Coaching for integration in professional life (finding mini-jobs, applying for apprenticeship, etc.).
- Mobile youth work in public areas, e.g. Skatepark, Public pool etc.
- Project developing with and for young people (age 12 – 25).
- Encouraging intercultural and international youth exchange.
- Networking, supporting private initiatives and NGO's for a broad offer of youth activities and youth friendly infrastructure in the region of Kerzers.
- Promoting youth-friendly political structures

More information

[For more information about Kinder & Jugendarbeit Regio Kerzers in Switzerland, click here.](#)

Take a look at the Kerzers Skate Park, one result of the ‘Engage Process’ in 2019.

[Interested in submitting your good practice of local youth work? Click here.](#)