

The Way that Leads Further

At the end of the 1980s, drug abuse was the source of much misery in St. Gallen. To confront this situation, the City and the Canton of St. Gallen, supported by the City Churches, resolved to work together on all levels, closely, quickly and pragmatically.

Together they set up the Foundation «Hilfe für Drogenabhängige» (Help for Drug Users), since 1998 the Foundation «Suchthilfe» (Addiction Help). This document describes the practical work done over the past years and the approach that is now used, called the «St. Gallen Way».

The «St. Gallen Way» is the successful attempt to confront a complex social problem, partly outside of government institutions, by working in a small, well-functioning coalition: close to the problems, creatively defining its policies and translating them efficiently into action, making quick decisions, interfacing pragmatically with all stakeholders and incurring little administrative overhead. The model has proved reliable.

Being a history of the Foundation Suchthilfe, this document, which is being revised and updated, is necessarily one-sided. It highlights the enormous work of the Foundation, whereas the work of the Social Services, the Police and the Judiciary and the fruitful co-operation with all these institutions unfortunately cannot be emphasized enough.

In recent years, the drug issue has become more complex. Drug problems have taken new forms, such as multiple addiction, increasingly aggressive drug dealing and, most prominently, conspicuous alcohol abuse. Public spaces have become more and more characterised by various groups of people whose behaviour is considered bothersome or even intimidating.

The drug problem is not solved in St. Gallen, nor indeed anywhere else. The «St. Gallen Way» leads us further into a future which will challenge us again and again.

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The St. Gallen Way

The Foundation Suchthilfe was set up in 1990 as the Foundation «Hilfe für Drogenabhängige» out of the necessity and desire to respond to an urgent social problem by taking on responsibility and confronting it practically.

The drug problem cannot be resolved at this point; the influences on a national and international level are too strong and too diverse, and the manifestations of the problem change too rapidly. Practical policies and projects can only ever be partial solutions, small individual steps, which have to be adapted to developments that are only partly under our influence. Therefore, drug related social work on a local level, as it is practised by the Foundation, is a continuous and highly specific day to day effort.

The basis for the Foundation's work is laid by the laws and policies of the Swiss Federation, the Canton and the City of St. Gallen. The practical work must be constantly reorganised within this framework. In its decisions, the Board of the Foundation has always been fundamentally guided by the following principles:

No extreme solutions

Everyone concerned with the drug abuse problem in our society occasionally inclines towards extreme solutions. Unbounded tolerance on the one hand, total repression on the other are such extremes. Experience shows, however, that both extremes are neither feasible nor suitable. Unilateral solutions are easy to suggest, but in the long term, they are unsustainable and always come at an otherwise avoidable human cost.

Cooperation is indispensable

When working in practical drug related social work, one quickly understands that projects can only be realised if the counsellors cooperate, working together with representatives of both the public services and the private individuals concerned: with parents and other relatives, with Social Welfare, the Police and the Judiciary. Without mutual cooperation, without coordination of each individual intervention, without an understanding for one's partners and their tasks nothing will come to fruition. Only when everyone involved fully endorses the project is there a chance for success. It is and has always been the goal of the Foundation Suchthilfe to refine projects until such a consensus is found. This may explain the success of the Foundation.

Professionalism

Many experts, both genuine and self-appointed, are engaged within the field of drug related work. Accordingly, there is great diversity in suggested solutions and methods.

Convincing projects can only be realised if the best and most up-to-date knowledge is brought together and put into practice by the best-qualified and most competent workers. It rings especially true in drug related social work that «meaning well» is the opposite of «doing well». Therefore, the Foundation Suchthilfe has always attached great importance to a high level of professionalism.

Working in drug related politics and social work does not often win you praise. It is a never-ending task with few successes and many setbacks. Thus, to undertake this work day by day also requires commitment and stamina.

Pragmatism

This day-by-day work requires plans that can be quickly put into practice. These plans must be designed to fit the actual problems and not just problems of a generic nature. Thus, practical drug related social work means developing and implementing solutions that immediately provide a real, tangible benefit to the drug users and to the public at large.

Dividing the Work

Depending on their personal situation, each drug user requires different forms of help. The Foundation mainly offers primary prevention and education programmes, harm reduction and preparation for therapy and reintegration, concentrating on those projects outlined in the following pages and leaving the actual clinical therapy to other organisations, public and private, which have both the competence and responsibility for it.

The intention of the following text is to outline how the city of St. Gallen has approached the drug problem in the past and the instruments that have been developed to deal with it. The text is a brief survey of drug related social work on a local level and a guide to the services currently offered by the Foundation. It is aimed towards readers interested in concise and comprehensive information about the history, the present situation and the services of the Foundation.

The History of the Foundation

AIDS

Until 1989, drug abuse in the city of St. Gallen did not seem such a pressing issue as to require a separate institution to deal with it. Existing social projects, offered by the City and the Canton, the City Churches and the youth charity «Pro Juventute», were already accessible to drug users and worked well within their respective areas of operation.

The spread of AIDS completely changed the situation, abruptly turning the distribution of condoms and clean needles into a priority on public health grounds. This task was organised quickly. An emerging problem that remained unresolved for the time being, however, was that of the disposal of used needles, which were lying around in the city, justifiably bothering and disquieting the public. In general, the drug abuse problem only entered public awareness through the advent of AIDS. The old structures could no longer cope and only managed to patch up the problems - new institutions had to be set up.

In 1990 the Foundation «Hilfe für Drogenabhängige» was founded. From the beginning it was supported by the City and the Canton of St. Gallen, the Roman Catholic and the Protestant City Churches, and «Pro Juventute» St. Gallen. The first project of the Foundation was the «Bienehüsli».

The «Bienehüsli»: Providing Day-time Structure

Until 1989, there was no place for drug users to spend their time. They met where other drug users were and where drug dealing was taking place. They were unwelcome wherever they went. Social institutions could no longer cope with the situation, not knowing where they could attend to their task of providing care. Even though the police had a clear legal mandate, the repressive means at their disposal were not sufficient to gain control of the situation.

The need for day-time structure, for a common room, was met through a centrally located building, Unterer Graben 55, later to become known as the «Bienehüsli» (bee hive). At that time, the Foundation employed a small team of counsellors who looked after the drug users, provided them with clean needles, were available for conversation, tended to wounds and handed out food. Drug users gained a place where they could spend some hours without constantly being moved on.

However, the «Bienehüsli» also drew in problems. The surrounding area became a meeting point for drug users and dealers, who often came from far away, the number of drug users (especially those from outside of town) grew constantly, and tensions inside the «Bienehüsli» often became unbearable. Drugs were being injected all over the place. Despite all their efforts, the team at the «Bienehüsli» barely managed to enforce the strict prohibition against injecting on their premises. The situation around the building became increasingly intolerable - for social, hygienic and legal reasons or, simply put, for human reasons.

The Fixerraum: A Room for Injecting

To tackle this situation, an attempt was made in 1990, under strict conditions determined by all public agencies concerned, to open a room which could be used for injecting.

This obviously met an urgent need, as it was actively utilised by the drug users. Their situation stabilised somewhat, while the agreed conditions were generally being observed. However, the law knew no provision for such pragmatic solutions. Many people were scandalised by the fact that the «Bienehüsli» effectively stood outside the law.

In addition, there were still problems in the surroundings of the «Bienehüsli»: the frightening influx of drug users, and the fact that the grounds surrounding the day-time structure were also often used as a meeting place at night. Violence in and around the building, emergencies, resuscitations, barely hidden drug dealing, overt injecting of drugs in spite of the prohibition formed part of the picture at the «Bienehüsli» - and all this amongst piles of rubbish and faeces. Social workers, police and the emergency services were in permanently high demand.

These negative aspects, however, were counterbalanced by many positive experiences. The «Bienehüsli» and the «Fixerraum» at least made it possible for Foundation staff to establish contact with drug users, to give advice to some, encourage others to come clean, and to give basic advice for survival in such dignity as the situation allowed. In the «Fixerraum», drug users had a decent environment in which they could inject substances which they had obtained elsewhere.

The 1991 Referendum

Without a legal foundation, the «Fixerraum» could not be maintained in the long run. Therefore, in 1990, the Grosse Gemeinderat (City Parliament) agreed to the budget proposed by the City Executive and the Foundation for the continuation of the «Bienehüsli» and the «Fixerraum». A popular referendum was called against this decision. After many fierce discussions, the majority of the people voted against the continuation of the project. The «Bienehüsli» and the «Fixerraum» were forced to close, resulting in the loss of the day-time structure, and setting the City's drug policy back to square one.

Meanwhile, the situation for drug users worsened dramatically, and the nuisance for the population grew accordingly: Once again, used needles were lying around everywhere, the drug users met under the Waaghaus in the city centre and provoked discontent in the population. For the second time in a short period, an open drug scene emerged. The situation threatened to slip out of control.

While the open drug scene was soon moved to the area of the Schellenacker, away from the city centre, and was therefore largely hidden from the public, the overall state of affairs remained intolerable. Social care for the drug users was reduced to the distribution of clean needles and fleeting, almost coincidental contact with often very little tangible benefit.

The Four Pillar Model

Although the problems surrounding the drug scene remained within the responsibility of the Foundation, and although it continued its practical work wherever possible, the outcome of the referendum also ignited a phase of reflection and planning. The result was the «Four Pillar Model», which was introduced in 1992 and entered the realisation phase the same year.

The model introduced two Medical and Social Aid Centres, MSH 1 and MSH 2. MSH 1 was aimed at mitigating harm for those drug users who could only be reached with a very low pressure approach, while MSH 2 was open to those who could be expected to cooperate to a certain extent in accepting the care provided. A joint medical service was planned for both

centres, the responsibilities of which included both providing medical care for the drug users and administering a methadone programme that was yet to be developed.

The Gassenarbeit (Street Work), which had been a part of «Pro Juventute» St. Gallen until this point, and the Drug Counselling Service (today's Addiction Counselling Unit), affiliated with the Social Psychiatric Service of the Canton St. Gallen, were envisaged as the remaining two pillars.

The «Four Pillar Model» was implemented step by step. Further projects were added on the basis of new developments.

The Methadone Project

In January 1993, thanks to a financial subsidy from the Verein Drogenhilfe St. Gallen (Association for Drug Relief), an emergency aid project to issue methadone was set up in a building on St. Leonhardstrasse. As a low pressure project, it set no preconditions and was immediately frequented by many drug users.

With this, the situation for many drug users changed. Where to date they had been permanently exposed to the stress of acquiring the drugs they needed, with all its negative consequences such as crime or prostitution, methadone now gave them much more time to themselves. But how should this time be used? The Foundation staff quickly set up a range of occupational programmes.

To replace the emergency aid project, MSH 2 was opened in 1994, where, thanks to better infrastructure, medical and social help could be offered in conjunction with issuing methadone.

The Closure of the Schellenacker

A stipulation for the further realisation of the «Four Pillar Model» was the closing of the open drug scene on the Schellenacker, a measure that was carried out in autumn 1993 with the combined forces of the Police, City Social Welfare and the Foundation. In preparation for this event, the needle distribution programme had also been reorganised.

HIV Prevention and the Heroin Programme

At the time of the open drug scene on the Schellenacker, it was easy to provide drug users with clean needles, and some of the users had also organised themselves. To a large extent, HIV prevention was guaranteed. This changed with the closure of the open scene. The drug users partly withdrew into private accommodation, thus creating small closed scenes which were almost inaccessible.

When it was opened in autumn 1993, the original MSH 1 had the difficult task of ensuring the provision of clean needles. It was also meant to replace the day-time structure - albeit without a room for injecting - which had no longer been available since the closure of the «Bienehüsli». It soon became evident, however, that the envisaged scheme of drug users collecting their clean needles was not effective enough. Once more, the risk of contracting HIV increased. The MSH 1 team therefore partly returned to delivering the needles. The provision of needles was further improved when two needle dispensers were installed in 1994 to ensure the availability of clean needles 24 hours a day. At present, five such dispensers are in use across the city.

Medical Prescription of Heroin, a project initiated by the Swiss Government in 1995, presented a new challenge. Following a request from the City and the Canton of St. Gallen, the Foundation developed its own project with 40 places. It started in September 1995 at the MSH 1, adding this new angle to the existing responsibilities of the centre.

The Reorganisation of 1994

In its first four years, the Foundation had grown continuously. Not only were the projects set up by the Foundation constantly expanded and amended, but in addition, two pre-existing departments, the Gassenarbeit and the then Drug Counselling Service, were integrated. Although their work fitted well into the Foundation, they brought their own traditions with them.

In addition to questions concerning the Foundation's practical work, new challenges also arose in the area of management. The Foundation was still mainly led on a voluntary basis. Although one manager was employed on a part-time basis, the demands placed on him and on the voluntary members of the Management Committee of the Board of the Foundation were enormous.

The size of the Foundation now required professional management to ensure competent leadership and the efficient realisation of new projects.

In 1994, the Foundation introduced a new organisational structure, setting itself rules of competence and responsibility and defining not only the projects but also the detailed roles and positions involved. With the appointment of a full-time manager, this reorganisation was completed in mid 1995.

1997: A Referendum and a Popular Initiative

Within the new structure, the Foundation consolidated its work; the Gassenarbeit, the Methadone Programme and the Heroin Programme were continued. The HIV prevention programme was reorganised:

Since 1996, the team of Blauer Engel (Blue Angel) has been in charge of supplying drug users with sterile needles, observing their state of health and coordinating the disposal of used needles.

A shortage of occupational programmes for the participants of the Methadone and Heroin Programmes grew ever more obvious. Therefore, in 1997, a building waste recycling project was established together with the local transport and waste disposal firm, Max Müller AG, which has been providing six to seven people with work ever since. Six other people are cultivating a garden at Oberstrasse. The two projects would later merge into a joint occupational programme.

With a popular referendum on March 2nd 1997, the City agreed to further annual public funding of the Methadone Project within the MSH 2. On September 28 of the same year, the national popular initiative Jugend ohne Drogen (youth without drugs) was rejected. The success of these two votes enabled the Foundation to continue and improve their work in all areas. They showed that the «St. Gallen Way» was broadly supported by the population.

Recognition

The «St. Gallen Way» has widely influenced policy in drug related social work and has found national and international approval. In recent years, the Foundation has welcomed numerous experts and media representatives from Switzerland, Austria, Germany, the Netherlands, Italy, the United Kingdom, Scandinavia and even from the United States of America and China. Delegations from the World Health Organisation and the United Nations came to ask for detailed information. They were impressed by the level of cooperation between social and repressive means, which is indispensable when making solutions sustainable in the long term. This approach has been adopted elsewhere.

Specifying the Projects ...

At the end of 1997, the projects of the Foundation were rethought and redefined. The future of the Foundation's work was ensured by pooling the knowledge and experience of all its departments along with that of external experts:

The Foundation targeted its departments more specifically towards the situation of people with addictions in society. Rather than concentrating primarily on the substances of abuse (methadone, heroin) in the case of drug users, the projects were to become strongly need-oriented, providing support for a life in dignity and guiding them specifically towards reintegration. In addition, the Foundation began to offer counselling and projects for other kinds of addiction (eg alcohol) and has strengthened the work in the Primary Prevention and Education Programme with regular visits in schools.

... and Reorienting the Foundation

As early as 1997, the Foundation established its own Psychiatric Service. This service was initially affiliated with the Addiction Counselling Unit and employed a psychiatrist for 20 hours per week.

In 1998, the Foundation continued its reorientation and implemented the following new projects:

– The activities of the Sozialdienst für Alkoholprobleme (a service for alcohol-related problems) - hitherto an independent association in St. Gallen - were integrated into the Foundation.

– Initially, the Drug Counselling Service was aimed at those using illegal drugs. Now, it expanded to become the all-inclusive Addiction Counselling Unit St. Gallen, counselling and accompanying also consumers of legal drugs (alcohol etc.) as well as people with addictions which are not substance related (e.g. gambling). This required the Foundation to be renamed from «Hilfe für Drogenabhängige» to «Suchthilfe», reflecting the shift in focus from drug abuse to general addiction relief.

– The Gassenküche (soup kitchen), previously a winter-time self help project subsidiary to the Gassenarbeit, was extended into an independent, year-round operation with its own management. In addition, the occupational programmes, which had grown under the Foundation's direct management since 1995, were also devolved to the new Gassenküche management.

– 1999 also began with an innovation: The Federal Department of Health gave the green light for the Foundation to moderately extend the heroin-based treatment. This enabled the Foundation to grow the medical prescription of heroin at MSH 1 from 48 to 75 places. In the same year, the continuation of the Heroin Programme was confirmed by popular vote.

A New Millennium: The Work Continues

At the beginning of the new millennium, the Foundation took over the residential community “Arche” (Ark), which offers perpetual accommodation for up to six people with an addiction and impaired physical health. The Arche had been established by a private carrier in 1991. With the acquisition and integration of the residential community, the Foundation added stationary care to its responsibilities.

The Gassenarbeit, now formally “Fachstelle für aufsuchende Sozialarbeit” (Social Care Outreach Unit), redeveloped its approach to street work in 2002. In cooperation with the City Police, a working paper titled “Attitude and Behaviour Guidelines for the Use of Public Space in the City of St. Gallen” was developed.

The Addiction Counselling Unit expanded its service in 2003, adding expertise in the area of gambling addiction. In addition to offering advice and a support group for compulsive gamblers, the end of October 2003 also saw the creation of a support group for addicts' relatives. The Addiction Counselling Unit also developed offers in the area of eating disorders. Finally, the online platform www.suchtknacker.ch was established, aimed at counselling young people.

In early 2002, the Foundation introduced quality management into its operations. In parallel, the position of health officer was created, and a concept to promote workplace health was developed.

In summer 2003, the Foundation inaugurated its presence at the music festival OpenAir St. Gallen with a prevention project.

Noise and Littering in the Town Centre

Meanwhile, popular discontent grew over noise and littering in public spaces. Young people became a particular issue, as they intensively used a number of areas in the town centre, drinking alcohol and leaving rubbish behind. The public, politicians, and the media discussed questions of addiction, crime, racism, violence and unemployment. In May 2004, the School Administration launched the project “Aufsuchende Jugendarbeit in der Innenstadt” (Youth Outreach in the City) together with the Foundation and in consultation with the Police.

In 2005, the people of St. Gallen approved new municipal police regulations. These included a provision for the removal of individuals from public spaces, which was hotly debated during the campaign.

In 2007, the Foundation and the Grand Casino St. Gallen signed a mutual agreement, mandating an enlarged counselling service for at-risk and compulsive gamblers visiting the Casino and promoting the exchange of information and experience between employees, including staff training by the Addiction Counselling Unit.

Since the theme of "new media" had taken an increasingly dominant role in the life of young people, became a focus of the Foundation as well. After drawing up internal expertise, the Foundation called attention to the opportunities and dangers of electronic media at the OFFA special exhibition "up2date" and published a brochure for parents and educators titled "Zapping & Computer Games".

The same year, the Gassenküche celebrated 20 years of offering a common room and warm meals to marginalised individuals. In recognition of its work, the Foundation published the book "Brot und Socken" (bread and socks) replete with stories from and about the soup kitchen. In addition, an exhibition was held at the Lokremise.

Ensuring Protection of the Youth

In the following years, various campaigns and projects to counteract the excessive alcohol consumption by young people were initiated. Together with Zepira, the Centre for Prevention and Health of the Canton of St. Gallen, the Foundation developed the project "Smartconnection" for the City, which rewards young people for not drinking on their night out, the idea being to encourage event organisers to comply with the protection of minors.

In April 2008, the Foundation Suchthilfe presented its policy for alcohol test purchases, including a standardised procedure for test purchases in the area of youth protection legislation. In cooperation with the City Police, all major events in the city, municipal points of alcohol sale, restaurants and clubs have since been routinely subjected to test purchases.

2008 saw the first cooperation between the Foundation and exhibitors at the Olma trade fair to ensure compliance with the protection of minors in alcohol sales. Adolescents and young adults were encouraged to wear an "Altersbändel", a bracelet indicating their age, as a stand-in for showing their ID at every booth and entrance.

The Addiction Counselling Unit and the Social Care Outreach Unit (formerly Gassenarbeit) celebrated their 25th anniversary in 2008.

A Municipal Alcohol Policy Emerges

In 2009, The Parliament and City Council decided to commission a municipal alcohol policy. It was created under the auspices of the Foundation Suchthilfe in collaboration with various partners. The newly created Alcohol Commission, presided over by the Foundation, was composed of representatives of 23 groups and institutions, including youth welfare offices and physicians, operators of petrol station shops and breweries, parents and young people. With its broad composition, the Commission embodied the principle that everyone must be involved in the solution to any major social problem.

The formulation of the municipal alcohol policy opened up new avenues of responsibility for the Foundation. More than ever before, public engagement without direct relation to the Foundation's original drug-related work became a key part of its portfolio. One example of this is the "S:Bar", which is used on weekends and at festivals. This vehicle can act both as a mobile bar with soft drinks and snacks, and as an information hub, depending on the event to which it is deployed.

In response to the open alcohol scene which had increasingly established itself in public space, the Foundation initiated the Round Table "Brühlgasse". Various interest groups discussed possible solutions to the problems caused by the altered night-life behaviour around bars and clubs. Subjects under discussion also included the station square, where a national punk scene had taken root, and the Kantipark. For the latter, rules for the peaceful co-existence of marginalized people with other park users were agreed upon.

Committing to Quality With Certificates

In March 2009, after several years of intense preparation, the Foundation Suchthilfe received the two certifications ISO 9001:2008 and QuaTheDA modular. Management and staff both were under immense pressure. They examined work flows and processes, restructured them, and created new documentation. One of the results of the effort was the creation of a highly structured, standardised IT infrastructure used across all operations of the Foundation.

After a series of highly constructive negotiations, the Foundation agreed on a new framework contract with Santé Suisse, the national association of health insurance providers, ensuring amongst other things an increased compensation for the heroin-based treatment. A survey in the two Medical and Social Aid Centres revealed that their services were highly valued.

The end of several years of litigation with regards to the operating license of the Gassenküche was met by the Foundation with great satisfaction and relief. The Federal Supreme Court ruled against the complaint of a neighbour who had demanded stricter conditions, and gave its final approval to the operation of the soup kitchen.

Another victory was achieved when the Canton of St. Gallen reauthorised the residential community "Arche", which had briefly dropped off the list of approved residential facilities. The "Arche" provides perpetual residential housing for up to six people with addiction problems.

Defining a Strategy for the Period from 2011 to 2014

In 2010, the Foundation Suchthilfe celebrated its 20th anniversary by redefining its strategy. In drafting the strategy paper for the next four years, it became clear that the Foundation's work had lost none of its relevance and importance over the years. The constantly shifting sands of the issues surrounding addiction, however, necessitate constant readjustments of the care and outreach programmes.

An analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the Foundation revealed that the wide range of services offered by the Foundation remained in constant and strong demand. The Foundation's well-trained staff, its participation in research, and its cooperation with a wide variety of actors were identified as some of its unique strengths, along with its broad acceptance by the public, demonstrated for example in the ceaseless flow of donations for the soup kitchen.

A particular weakness of the Foundation was identified in its largely fruitless efforts to encourage its clients to greater personal responsibility or to integrate them into existing social projects. This point therefore received particular attention in the Foundation's strategy. Amongst other things, a recreational integration project was launched to support clients in their efforts to reintegrate into society.

The strategy paper formulated specific measures to be taken, amongst which were the submission to the City of a policy for fan outreach and increased public engagement. Also envisaged was the establishment of two to three additional round table meetings with various interest groups to discuss problems that arise in public spaces and find commonly accepted solutions.

Together with the City of Zürich, a feasibility study was conducted to consider establishing a point of provision for medical cannabis.

“Respectful Coexistence” Campaign Launch

With the implementation of the municipal alcohol policy in 2010, another joint project was commissioned and closely supported by the City of St. Gallen, a campaign called “Gemeinsam mit Respekt” (respectful coexistence). The campaign called on people to behave considerately in public spaces, towards other people and towards themselves. The initiative was not only directed against binge drinking, but also against violence, noise and littering. It envisioned St. Gallen as a vibrant and colourful city that embodies respect and tolerance.

Turning the soup kitchen into a non-smoking space was a real challenge. Many of its visitors strongly disliked the change. Given the Foundation's habit of not making any exceptions for its clients, however, it followed logically that the Canton's new ban on smoking in food outlets be implemented here, too.

As part of the Respectful Coexistence campaign, the Foundation launched the pilot project “Pausenplatz” (playground) in 2011. During school breaks, Foundation experts invited students at two municipal schools to playful conversations about alcohol.

New Projects 2012 - 2014

In 2012, the Foundation was very active in its outreach and ran several highlight campaigns. A number of topical evening events were held in the recreation area Drei Weieren, drawing the visitors' attention to problems and tensions arising from excessive drinking, noise, and littering.

In response to the side effects of alcohol abuse by young people on nights out, the Foundation launched the campaigns “Mondrausch” (lunar intoxication) and “Alk im Griff” (alcohol under control). The former saw Foundation staff out in the city centre and the Drei Weieren area during select weekend evenings and nights, reaching out to adolescents and encouraging them to drink in moderation. The latter campaign was also targeted at young people drinking alcohol, but used QR codes in bars, clubs and at large events as its outreach vehicle.

The awareness campaign “Die vergessenen Kinder” (the forgotten children) was launched to draw attention to the plight of children and adolescents whose parents are addicted to alcohol or other drugs of abuse, and the Foundation's services were expanded to include this target group.

For many decades, the Katharinenhof at Goliathgasse 12, home to the “Kathi-Treff”, a social space for marginalised and alcohol-dependent people, had been run by Gemeinnützige und Hilfs-Gesellschaft, GHG, (charitable aid society) St. Gallen. Due to financial and organisational difficulties in running the Kathi-Treff, the not-for-profit GHG sought to find a new carrier, and

the Foundation offered to take over. After refurbishing the premises, the space reopened in June 2014 under the new name “Blauer Engel im Katharinenhof (BeiK)”.

Looking to the Future

The Foundation Suchthilfe has adapted its priorities again and again to the challenges of the day. Providing care and support for users of illegal drugs remains its core concern, but the focus has shifted from merely stabilising their situation towards reintegrating them into society. New problems and risks have arisen from changing addictive behaviours, new substances such as designer drugs, new forms of consumption, and the addictive potential of social media. Publicly visible drug problems have become centred around primarily young people's excessive alcohol consumption in public, which is likely to remain a pressing issue.

Even after more than twenty years, it remains a fundamental challenge for the Foundation to work pragmatically and professionally, and to cooperate with the Police, Social Services and other municipal and cantonal authorities to continue the temperate, yet consistent style of intervention that has been so successful. It is this challenge that keeps the Foundation actively engaged in shaping drug-related policy in the City, the Canton, and the Swiss Federation.

By honing its versatile, sophisticated and highly integrated portfolio of aid and relief services, the Foundation must retain its ability to keep the balance between tolerable, controlled conditions, and abruptly altered situations that require swift intervention by the police, welfare or social institutions.

The St. Gallen Way goes ever on and on. The Foundation Suchthilfe, in collaboration with everyone involved, is uniquely placed to develop and implement solutions to the changing problems of today and tomorrow.

St. Gallen, January 2015

The Foundation Management