

Newsletter August 2023

Dear partners and supporters, dear parents and enthusiasts, dear new applicants, candidates, servants abroad and alumni,

Our association has gone through difficult times in the past weeks and months. After serious allegations were made in the media, especially against our former chairman, the funding by the Federal Ministry of Social Affairs was suspended. We were faced with challenging decisions to ensure the continued existence of the association and thus the comprehensive clarification of the allegations as well as the continued deployment of servants abroad, in particular of the 2023 cohort, which is ready to go. To our delight, this has now been achieved in constructive cooperation of the board with the new chairman, Tobias Aigner, and the ministry and so the first volunteers could already start their service as planned.

The mission of our association is to prepare volunteers for their Gedenkdienst, Social or Peace Service in the best possible and holistic way and to offer them a respectful, supportive and learning-oriented environment during their service to allow them to gain valuable experiences. For the new association board and us in the office, this is a matter close to our hearts and we would like to take this opportunity to apologize to anyone who has had negative experiences in the association in the past. To clarify the existing allegations, the association commissioned an external company to ensure an objective and comprehensive assessment and to be able to draw lessons for our future work.

We would also like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who has supported us in recent weeks and helped us to make a new start possible. We are currently in an intensive phase of restructuring and hope that in the future we will be able to focus on our main task again to prepare and accompany many more volunteers for and during their service.

This time we would like to give a small insight into our new Social Service partner organization in Argentina:



Social Servant Paul Malleczek at the Maria Luisa children's home in Buenos Aires, Argentina

The 'Hogar María Luisa' is a children's home founded in 1877 by María Luisa Schulz, wife of the then Consul General of Austria-Hungary. Since then, the home has undergone many changes. While in the past it was for the children of German-speaking immigrants, today it is exclusively Spanish-speaking children who are housed there for a variety of reasons. But the goal remains the same: to find an adoptive family! At the moment the children's home accommodates 20 children between the ages of 4 and 13. But already in September 2023 the next project will be implemented with a home for young women. These will move into the recently renovated second floor and will present the team with further challenges.

In September 2022, Paul Malleczek was sent out as our first Social Servant there and spent ten months at the children's home. During this time, he completed a wide variety of tasks from many different areas. These included looking after children, organizing donations, accompanying children to the doctor or to school, helping at events and working in the kitchen. Especially in the kitchen he could prove his knowledge and skills. As the cook's vacation replacement, he was solely responsible for the culinary supply of the children and caregivers for four weeks. Other special events included invitations to events at the Austrian and German embassies and baking gingerbread to raise funds. Not to be left unmentioned are the beautiful and close bonds that Paul was able to build with both the children and the caregivers during this time. This close cooperation made the ten months a unique experience!

Hogar Maria Luisa

Despite the turbulence of the last few months, most of the events could be held in a slightly scaled-down version and the candidates could thus still be well prepared for their service despite the many uncertainties.



Gedenkdienst seminar

Although the Gedenkdienst seminar on May 12-15 in Linz was overshadowed by the events surrounding the media coverage, the temporary funding stop by the ministry and the resignation of the former chairman of the association, we were still able to complete a wonderful program.

In the course of six alumni lectures, the media accusations and the history of the association were openly reflected upon, in addition to their experiences abroad, and the current situation was discussed with the candidates. Eduardo Catto further worked out suggestions with the volunteers on how Holocaust education could be designed in the future, stand-up historian Florian Graf fascinated us all with his detailed lecture on Adolf Hitler in the summer of 1942 and Hanna Feingold, the president of the IKG Salzburg, gave us all an insight into Jewish life in Austria in the last century. Two young people from the LIKRAT meeting had an open discussion with the candidates and Chief Rabbi Jaron Engelmayer was also able to share valuable information about Judaism. A special highlight was the excursion to Gusen on Monday - a lesser-known memorial site that is still in the development phase and thus also offered a lot of material for reflection.

In addition, the candidates had the opportunity to get to know each other better, to exchange ideas and to prepare mentally for their time abroad. Many thanks to all who took part!



Leadership team retreat in Vienna

The very next weekend, May 20-21, the leadership team met for a retreat in Vienna. A meeting which traditionally takes place every year, but which gained additional weight under the given circumstances. During the two days many topics could be discussed and solutions could be found. For example, the structure of the association was simplified somewhat and changes to the selection process and the Wednesday conferences were initiated.



2nd cohort meeting 2023

A bit more improvised than usual, the cohort meeting took place on July 10-11. After we had been officially invited to the sending party at the Ministry of Social Affairs only one week before, a large part of the cohort of 2023 came together in Vienna to get input for their service in workshops, talks and presentations. Communication and conflict management, self-management, development cooperation and anti-racism training were

the topics covered - but also presentations by alumni and input from the office on how to behave in crisis situations were on the agenda. Afterwards, we went to the reception with Federal Minister of Social Affairs Rauch in the Marble Hall, dressed in a suit and tie or in a festive summer dress. It was nice to see so many in person again!



Poland Gedenkdienst study trip

From July 17-23 the Poland Gedenkdienst study trip organized by the association took place. 30 people from Austria, South Africa and the USA participated. The educational leader was Tali Nates, Director of the Johannesburg Holocaust and Genocide Centre, whose father had been on the list of Oskar Schindler.

Stops visited included the Austrian Cultural Forum in Warsaw with a lecture by Konstanty Gebert, the POLIN Museum, the Nożyk Synagogue, Tykocin, the Łopuchowo Forest (scene of Einsatzgruppen shootings), Treblinka, the Warsaw Jewish Cemetery, the Jewish Historical Institute, the Uprising Memorial, Kazimierz in Krakow, the Krakow Jewish Community Center, the Galicia Jewish Museum, Podgórze, Plaszow, Auschwitz I & II, and the Auschwitz Jewish Center.

The trip was marked by strong emotions, profound conversations, extensive preparation and reflection sessions, great learning, sadness, joy and encounters with our Gedenkdienst partner organizations from Warsaw, Krakow, Oswiecim, Johannesburg, Durban and Cape Town. For the Gedenkdienst candidates, the participation was the ideal opportunity to prepare for their service abroad and to gain intercultural experience at the same time.

Gedenkdienst candidate Paul Brandacher described the week as a "once in a lifetime opportunity." In particular, Tali Nates' family story shared during the trip and the emotions felt during the week were the most meaningful of the trip for him. For most of the participants, the visit to Treblinka together with Holocaust survivor Wanda Albinska, who lost her mother at this place, was the highlight of the trip that will never be forgotten.

Further events:

- 23/09 Returnees meeting for the cohort of 2022 in Vienna
- 26/10 Presentation of the Austrian Holocaust Memorial Awards to Naomi Kramer and Carson Philipps in Canada
- Award ceremony for the servants abroad of the cohort 2022 (probably again shortly before Christmas in Vienna)

Last but not least, this time we would like to report briefly on the last General Assembly, with which important steps were again taken for a new start of the association into a successful future:

Extraordinary general assembly July 2023

In a three-and-a-half-hour meeting, four alumni were added to the board and some of the functions in the association were reorganized: Christoph Shawa (Gedenkdienst LA 2019) will serve as financial officer in the future, Florian Kössler (Gedenkdienst Brussels 2020, chair of the Auslandsdienst Alumni Community) as deputy chair and Tatjana Lang (Gedenkdienst Jerusalem 2021) as deputy secretary and Sigrid Simetzberger (Gedenkdienst Oradour 2022) will likewise complete the new board.

At the same time the statutes of the association were reformed and in particular the advisory board, the management team and the ombudsteam were anchored in the statutes, which serves as an independent contact point for candidates, servants abroad etc. In addition, it was determined that people who are in a personal and/or economic dependency relationship with the association (e.g. employed) cannot hold any leading functions under association law and the rights and obligations of the members including the candidates and servants abroad were also clearly regulated.

In the course of this, further organs of the association were also newly appointed: Daniel

Haim (Gedenkdiener Oswiecim 2014) will complete the audit, Oliver Pulsinger (Gedenkdiener Brussels and Mauritius 2021) will take over the chairmanship of the arbitration court and Michaela Franjo (Peace Servant Osijek 2022) together with Andreas Oliva (Gedenkdiener Rome 2020) will take over as the new ombudsteam.
We say thank you very much for your commitment and look forward to your input!

We are very happy that we are finally able to send all candidates and are already looking forward to the many new experience reports! We wish all returnees of the cohort of 2022 a good arrival back home and a nice summer, and the cohort of 2023 a good start into their service abroad!

All the best from the Vienna Office

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