

Mirjam Klausberger | S.1
NCM 2024

Ruedi Hächler | S.2
ABÖJ-
development
course

Daniel Horst | S.3
Servant leadership
or coaching?

Nikolay Niuniaiev | S.4
About Youngstars
Group in Odessa

Cosmin Tamas | S.6
New CEO

National Coordinators Meeting in Langenthal

Mirjam Klausberger, CEO of Youngstars International and Juropa



Mere names in emails and WhatsApp chats become real faces, friendly greetings become warm hugs.

Nothing can replace personal encounters between people. I already know many of the 50 or so participants, and yet there are new faces at the National Coordinators' Meeting every year. It is very rewarding to meet the people behind the work of Youngstars International in person and to exchange ideas with them. It is refreshing not only to discuss issues at a meeting, but also to have an informal, in-depth conversation while queuing for the shower, for example. I am delighted to meet so many wonderful, motivated and talented people from different countries who are all working towards a common goal.

Looking back - giving thanks - celebrating

At this year's meeting from March 14 to 18, we celebrated two anniversaries: 10 years of Youngstars International and 50 years of BESJ (Bund Evangelischer Schweizer Jungscharen). The first step was to delve into our own history. We were able to look back on many beautiful but also difficult experiences. "We must learn to celebrate" is a statement that I took away with me as an

insight. In the face of upcoming challenges, it is easy to forget the good things that God has given us so far. It is people who have shaped us and accompanied us to this point. There is so much to be thankful for and celebrate! We spent Saturday together at the BESJ team weekend in Huttwil, where we celebrated their anniversary together with over 1,000 youth leaders from Switzerland. We were able to offer and attend workshops and present the individual associations from the countries. The video clip from Cuba was particularly moving to see how children in such a far-flung part of the world are given gifts through youth work.



Shooting promotional videos

"Shhh, be quiet" was heard from time to time. Together with a videographer, film footage was shot during the NCM, which we will use to expand and professionalize our advertising material. We will need it this summer, for example, when we'll have a stand at the major OM (Operation Mobilization) Teenstreet event and are allowed to present a fundraising project there.

Cheese Sponsored Run

In keeping with the host country, we organized a special sponsored run this year. The runners had to roll a 25 kg cheese wheel (dummy) through the

course for five minutes and cover as much distance as possible. Three to four runners started at the same time and were loudly cheered on by the spectators in various languages. The run was very strenuous and everyone was grateful for the moral and culinary support we received from cheese dairies.

Although the NCM was very exhausting for me, especially with two small children, the meeting left me with a special feeling: the feeling of pride to be part of the Youngstars network. I am already looking forward to the next meeting.



Great atmosphere despite rainy weather

Ruedi Hächler, National Coordinator of the ABÖJ Austria

Despite the bleak weather forecast, the 30 participants did not miss the opportunity to take on the challenging introductory exercise of the development course, which took place from March 23 to 30, 2024.

On Palm Saturday, they set off in two groups on the approximately five-hour walk to the course-house near Salzburg. There were several tasks to complete on the way. Among other things, they had to get themselves dinner and breakfast and find a legal place to sleep for the night. It quickly became clear that, in view of the rain and the almost freezing temperatures, permanent accommodation was a more pleasant option than a bivouac in the open air. Equipped with the bare essentials, the two teams set off, and the first

challenge of the day was not long in coming. The participant information sheet read: "We start the course with a 22-hour exercise. Bring everything you need for a hike with an overnight stay outdoors, packed in a rucksack." While some participants showed up at the meeting point with a suitably packed rucksack, others turned up with a simple college-style backpack. Accordingly, the equipment was sometimes better and sometimes



rather minimal. Due to a lack of space in or on the rucksack, the sleeping bag was simply carried in a shopping bag or even just in its cover. At the latest when it began to rain more and more heavily, the differences in preparation and equipment became apparent. On the way, one participant announced that she wanted to invest in a more practical rucksack and rainwear before the summer camp. Some of the better-equipped participants were so motivated when packing that they immediately thought of those who might need help. Spare jackets, bin bags and rescue blankets were shared so that everyone was more or less rainproof.



Finding suitable accommodation for the night proved equally difficult for everyone. The teams had to accept several cancellations and detours until they found accommodation. One team

seriously considered building an emergency bivouac in the forest with just five army tarpaulins. Before doing so, however, they decided to take another detour of around two kilometers to ask for overnight shelter at a large farm. So they stood outside the farm in the dark and rain and rang the bell. When the door was opened, they were confronted by a nice person who unfortunately spoke very little German. While the courage of some of them sank to zero, the others were able to find out that the farmers lived in the house opposite. So the group set off to make one last attempt. Within a few minutes, two suitable rooms were available for the night. While one group was earlier and had less stress looking for accommodation, the other was able to use an empty barn, including a heater. The challenges they overcame together forged the participants into a motivated team for the rest of the week, who learned a lot from each other in theoretical lessons



and various practical tasks.

For me as a course instructor, it is always a privilege to be out and about with such motivated, talented and enthusiastic people. Great atmosphere despite the rainy weather.

Servant leadership or coaching?

Daniel Horst, CEO of Youngstars International

Servant leadership is the key to intercultural cooperation - or is it now called coaching?

During our annual National Coordinators' Meeting (NCM), I made the most of the time available to talk to all the coordinators from the various countries. Among others, I had a conversation with the leaders from Hungary. They told me what they wanted to do next and who would be responsible for what in the future. I deliberately invited my successor Cosmin Tamas to the meeting. Unfortunately, I failed to inform him in advance about what was going on in the country, so it was difficult for him to properly assess the situation.

This situation showed me how individual our response has to be to the particular circumstances in the different countries and how important it is to introduce Cosmin properly. There are countries that need clear guidance and precise steps that they can take. Others need encouragement and perhaps the right questions to reflect on their situation. Older organizations such as the ABÖJ in Austria need little guidance as they have board members who set the strategic direction. Then there are the different cultural contexts, which vary from country to country. It is not easy to figure out how to coach the person in charge.

In my own coaching training, we were repeatedly told: 'Those who ask, lead' or 'Be a questioner'. I often used this phrase in my cultural introduction for short-term employees. I think this is also the key to being successful in intercultural cooperation. We also find this approach in the Bible with Jesus. He often 'only' asked questions and thereby challenged his counterpart to think about his behaviour. However, in a church environment we do not call this coaching, but servant leadership. The basic idea here is not to place ourselves above others, but to encourage the other person. I think that if we apply it in this way, we can't go far wrong in an intercultural environment. Servant leadership is very important in Youngstars International and in youth work in general. I am very pleased that I have already been able to see this attitude in Cosmin in a number of situations, including on the course in Brazil. Nevertheless, I want to take plenty of time to give him a good introduction to each country and the

respective situation. Coaching is our core business, and that's what drives me.



Of course, there are still many administrative tasks that I have to hand over to Cosmin and questions that we still need to clarify. As he will be working in Romania, we need someone in Switzerland to take care of administrative matters. Someone who can continue the relationship with the German-speaking supporters. I am very grateful for Markus Sigrist, who does our bookkeeping. We are well on the way to successfully mastering this transitional phase.

How are Youngstars doing in Odessa?

An Interview with Nikolay Niuniaiev, National Coordinator for Ukraine

What has changed in the last two years?

Before the invasion, we had a youth group here in Odessa for teenagers aged 12 and over that met once a week. However, the teenagers left Ukraine after the first major attacks. I also fled with my family (with our two children and my pregnant wife) to the west of Ukraine for the first few months. We lived in a house belonging to Operation Mobilisation (OM) in a very small space with many other refugees, who were also able to stay here for a short time as they passed through. We then returned to our home in Odessa. Over time, new children came to our church. We started our weekly meetings again with these children aged eight and over.



What would an outside observer write about your meetings?

They would say that despite the difficult situation in the country, someone is committed to the children. You give them the opportunity to spend a happy time outdoors in the fresh air and learn scouting skills. This will help them to become useful citizens who may be ready to help in difficult times to come.



What special adventures or experiences would you like to tell us about?

- It is not a Sunday school in a church, but a biblical lesson outside in the beautiful natural surroundings that can be experienced with all the senses.
- God is not only found in the Bible or in golden verses, but I experience his presence in everything I see, feel, touch and hear.
- Lighting a fire and cooking a meal over it, making friends and building good relationships with other people - all this and much more can be learnt.
- Reverence for nature is taught, everyone should keep it as natural as possible and move through it with respect, together with loving, adventurous friends.

Where have you experienced God's guidance in an impressive way?

After I started organizing weekly youth group events again, two former teenagers from abroad soon returned to Odessa with the desire to become mini-leaders. An older girl also joined them and now actively supports the girls' group. I look after these three young people and support them in their tasks as mini-leaders.

We also have children in our group who are traumatized. One girl who fled from an occupied area had to see things that no child should see. Another girl is going through a difficult divorce of her parents, and an adopted boy has lived in terrible conditions, which have had a negative impact on his development. But after two years in the youth club, positive changes were noticed in him.



What challenges and difficulties do you face?

Switching from working with teenagers to a children's group was a challenge. I also didn't understand the children's lack of attention and their mood swings, from great interest and enjoyment of electronic devices to hyperactivity, for a long time. Over time, I realized that stress was the cause. Air alarms during rocket attacks cause anxiety in the children and also in my mini-leaders. They don't enjoy school very much, but extreme activities help them to relieve stress. My strategy is therefore to help the children return to normality through more adventures in nature.

What impact has the event had on the development of our national Youngstars Movement?

Our country has changed and we expect a large number of traumatized children and young people. This will be a challenge for churches and society. Our systematic courses will help to heal and restore children. The churches are showing increased interest in this. Unfortunately, we have lost many potential future leaders due to the war and therefore cannot fulfil the existing requests. But with God's help, we will be able to continue to spread the valuable Youngstars work in Ukraine.



My vocation continues

Cosmin Tamas, new CEO of Youngstars International

From May 2024, Cosmin started working 50% at Youngstars International and then 100% from August. Daniel Horst will remain employed by Juropa until the end of September and will induct Cosmin into his new role during this time.

A single word, but with far-reaching consequences: NO. A year ago, during the National Coordinators' Meeting in Poland, Hensie and I were discussing the position of future CEO that Youngstars International was looking to fill and whether I had thought about it... My answer was NO. I was in my comfort zone, professionally self-employed and volunteering at Youngstars events in Romania and abroad with Youngstars International. At the time, I was happy with my income and my involvement in the Youngstars programme. Throughout 2023, I was repeatedly asked if I could imagine the job as CEO of Youngstars International and my answer always remained the same: NO. It was a no because I didn't want to give up my comfort zone. I invested a lot in the youth work and in Youngstars International, but it was not 100% dedication.



With a clear NO in my heart for the position at Youngstars International, I travelled to Brazil as a volunteer in October 2023 to take part in a team leader training course. I was excited to see what

God would do through me, but I didn't expect what He would do for me. Until my trip to Brazil, I had never asked God if He was calling me to Youngstars International.



Wednesday 11 October was a sunny day. We spent a few hours kayaking through the Brazilian jungle and in the evening a personal prayer walk was prepared for the participants. I used this time for myself and asked myself the question: 'Lord, do you want me to work with Youngstars International?' God answered me with a question from the verse in 1 Timothy 6:11 (New Testament): 'But you belong to God and are in his service.' That's when I realized that I wasn't 100% seeking God's will. I spent at least 30 minutes in prayer and let God search me. Then I asked another question: 'God, are you calling me to Youngstars International?' And the answer came from the same text, one verse down: 'Fight the good fight of faith (LUT)...' I realized that I was fighting the fight I had chosen, not the one God had called me to. I travelled to Brazil with a NO to Youngstars International, but returned to Romania with a new perspective on the fight I was called to fight and a YES.