

CALL4GIRLS/CALL4BOYS HELPLINE TO SUPPORT VICTIMS OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN SPORT

Austrian Ministry of Sport, and Association for Sport and Fitness in Austria (ASKÖ)

This description comes from the study commissioned by the European Commission on gender-based violence in sport ([Mergaert L., & al., Study on gender-based violence in sport – final report, European Commission, 2016](#)). It was updated within the framework of the European Union-Council of Europe joint project [Pro Safe Sport + “Put an end to sexual harassment and abuse against children in sport”](#), by collecting more recent information from the organisation responsible for the project.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PRACTICE

Background

Drawing on examples from a Swiss Olympic Federation project called 'Stop', ASKÖ developed Call4Girls/Call4Boys as a pilot project in Austria. The project, which was funded between 2006 and 2009 by the Austrian Ministry of Sport and managed by ASKÖ, targeted national sports organisations. When funding ended in 2009, financing and management was taken over by the Viennese government and the Viennese branches of ASKÖ, ASVÖ, and SportUnion Austria. Consequently, from 2009 the target audience was scaled back to target only sports organisations within the city of Vienna.

Awareness-raising activities

Call4Girls/Call4Boys team members delivered free workshops to sports organisations to sensitise members to gender-based violence. Workshops lasted between two hours and one full day and the content was tailored to stakeholder groups – either officials, coaches, or athletes. In total, around 150 officials, 50 coaches and 100 athletes attended the workshops. Information on gender-based violence in sport was also distributed at national sporting and non-sporting events (such as Girls' Day in Vienna) to raise awareness of the issue and give visibility to the helpline and Trust Person role.

Free promotional and informative resources on gender-based violence in sport were created and distributed to sports organisations. Stickers featuring the telephone number, website and email addresses of the project were distributed to ASKÖ member organisations to display within their clubs. In addition, flyers with definitions of gender-based violence in sport, the contact details of the helpline, and details of the workshops were sent to ASKÖ member organisations and distributed at the European Women and Sport conference in Vienna in 2006. In 2011, a brochure on prevention and management of gender-based violence in sport was created for distribution to all major Viennese sport organisations and to download from the project's website.¹ It covered definitions of gender-based violence, the legal framework for gender-based violence in Austria and its application to sport, mechanisms for managing incidents, and the importance of co-operating with victim groups to support those affected.

Building support networks

In the second phase of the project, a working group on gender-based violence in sport was established in co-operation with victim organisations, who offered support and knowledge to the project's sports partners. The working group comprised Call4Girls/Call4Boys members (including ASKÖ), and representatives of the Ombudsperson for Children and Young People Vienna, the Men's Counselling Centre (Männerberatung), Selbstlaut, Women advise Women (Frauen beraten Frauen), Zartbitter, the Swiss Advisory Board (Schweizer

¹ See: http://www.selbstlaut.org/_TCgi_Images/selbstlaut/20120917135546_brosch_re_ak%20sport.pdf

Beratungsstelle), WienXtra, the Vienna Social Fund (Fonds Soziales Wien), and the 24-hour Emergency Helpline of the City of Vienna (24-Stunden Notruf der Stadt Wien). The working group, which still exists, aims to share knowledge about gender-based violence in sport and discuss prevention measures.

Developing support for victims

Call4Girls/Call4Boys developed support services and resources for sports organisations about gender-based violence in sport and encourage them to implement initiatives to prevent and manage this kind of violence. Central to these activities was the establishment of a telephone helpline on sexual harassment in sport in co-operation with the public psycho-social service of Vienna. The helpline allowed people to report sexual harassment in sport, offered information and psychological support to victims, and helped them to bring disciplinary procedures against perpetrators.

In addition, the role of so-called 'Trust Person' was established within some sports federations. These acted as key contacts for information and advice on gender-based violence within their organisation.

OUTCOMES AND STRENGTHS

One of the key strengths of Call4Girls/Call4Boys lies in the fact that it adopted a broad and inclusive understanding of gender-based violence that incorporated violence against boys as well as girls within its remit in recognition that such violence can affect both sexes. To date, it remains one of the few projects across any of the EU Member States to explicitly consider boys as victims of gender-based violence in sport.

The quality of the awareness-raising activities and resources was another key strength of Call4Girls/Call4Boys. Participants reported finding the educational materials and workshops useful. Indeed, the fact the educational materials are still in use several years after the end of the project is testament to the extent to which sport stakeholders value them, as is the fact the resources developed during the project were used to create a new information brochure on gender-based violence in sport. The latter will be published in late 2016 as part of the country's National Action Plan on Gender Equality in Sport. These factors resulted in Call4Girls/Call4Boys receiving the Sport Cristall award issued by the national umbrella sport organisation (BSO) as one of the best projects in 2006.

A key outcome of the second phase of the project was the creation of a working group of members of sports organisations and victim support groups. This collaborative network, which includes members of the original Call4Girls/Call4Boys project team, has outlived the Call4Girls/Call4Boys project and continues to share knowledge and ideas relating to the prevention and management of gender-based violence in sport to this day.

Finally, the project's decision to team up with victim support organisations was crucial as it enabled the Call4Girls/Call4Boys' leaders to draw on the experience of those with expertise in working with victims of gender-based violence, and ensured the telephone helpline provided professional support to those affected by gender-based violence in sport.

LIMITATIONS

Although the first phase of Call4Girls/Call4Boys (2006-2009) was subject to an evaluation of the effectiveness of the measures introduced, the extent to which the activities in the second phase (i.e. the brochure and the working group) have (or have not) helped raise awareness of gender-based violence in sport is unknown as no evaluation of this has been conducted. While this is not to say that some of or all the facets of the projects were not effective, it does mean that this cannot be assumed, and a robust system of independent monitoring and evaluation should have been in place to establish this.

Another limitation relates to the initial reach of the Call4Girls/Call4Boys project. As the project was managed solely by ASKÖ in its first phase, the resources on gender-based violence in sport were disseminated to only ASKÖ-affiliated organisations, reducing the distribution network for the project.

Finally, the Trust Person role was not widely adopted within sport federations, perhaps because it was not mandatory. This resulted in some federations having Trust Persons while others did not. As a result, organisations that chose to adopt the Trust Person role were likely to have provided more information and advice about gender-based violence to their members, thereby increasing the visibility of the problem, while awareness of the issue was likely to have been lower among organisations that did not have Trust Persons. Given the benefits of the Trust Person role to the prevention and management of gender-based violence in sport, it is disappointing that this role has not been maintained following the end of the Call4Girls/Call4Boys project as it may mean that awareness of gender-based violence in sport now has a lower profile within sports organisations than while the project was being implemented.

LESSONS LEARNT

As Austrian sports organisations had not addressed the issue of gender-based violence in their ranks before the development of the Call4Girls/Call4Boys project, one of the main challenges for the project was to reach as many sport stakeholders as possible and convince them of sport's role in preventing gender-based violence so they would be willing to implement the Call4Girls/Call4Boys project. To achieve this, the Call4Girls/Call4Boys project team adopted a personal approach in the early stages, drawing on personal contacts to gain access to sports organisations to 'sell' their message. Despite these efforts, this approach was only partly successful. Information events arranged through friendship groups of like-minded individuals tended to reach only those individuals who already had an interest in combatting gender-based violence. This should not be perceived as a failure; informing people with an interest in gender-based violence about developments in the project likely still resulted in an expansion of knowledge, albeit in a limited way. However, gaining the support of the wider sport stakeholder network was more difficult. Many sports organisations initially either refused to support Call4Girls/Call4Boys, or participated reluctantly in the project or in a limited way. There were several reasons for this: denial of the extent of gender-based violence in sport; fear among sport stakeholders that addressing such a sensitive issue would result in a backlash from their members; and a lack of time, money and support from within sports organisations to implement the project's initiatives. While the disclosure of cases of gender-based violence within sports organisations served as a prompt for many to take action, on-going efforts to sensitise sports stakeholders to the issue were key to overcoming this initial resistance.

All the key facets of the Call4Girls/Call4Boys project are now mainstream activities in sports organisations in Austria, and there is now acceptance of gender-based violence as an issue for sport. This transformation was achieved in large part by the slow-but-steady, and on-going, process of sensitisation and awareness raising over several years initiated by those involved in the Call4Girls/Call4Boys project. Indeed, a long-term 'softly softly' approach that aims to engage people and organisations with the issue over time is important when the topic at hand is sensitive, as was the case here. As a result of this approach, the project succeeded in making it more acceptable to discuss gender-based violence in sports settings and paved the way for the development of policy measures to combat gender-based violence in sport within a National Action Plan on Gender Equality in Sport in Austria.