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Education and culture

20 years of integration through education - VHS Bocholt-Rhede-Isselburg celebrates its anniversary

Anniversary event at LernWerk

For exactly 20 years, the Bocholt-Rhede-Isselburg Adult Education Centre (VHS) has been offering a very special educational programme: the BAMF integration courses. The first integration course started two decades ago under the direction of Dr Wolfgang Westphal and Beate Koch. "This was an important milestone for the city of Bocholt and a sign of openness, cohesion and the future", emphasises VHS director Isabel Testroet.

What began back then has developed into a large and successful area. Since then, over 150 courses with over 112,000 lessons have taken place at the VHS, where numerous people from all over the world come together every year to learn German and actively participate in our society. Over 2,000 people have taken part in integration courses at the VHS, taking important steps towards participation, education and career prospects. Around 360 participants are currently taking part in 18 courses, which take place in the mornings, afternoons and evenings.

The VHS thus makes an invaluable contribution to integration and strengthens social cohesion in the region. "The integration courses are much more than just language lessons. They are a bridge to our culture, to important information about life in Germany and to active participation in social life. Here, learners not only experience language, but also appreciation and support on their everyday and professional path", says the full-time pedagogical employee Danuzza Mendonca-Leuters enthusiastically. The courses conclude with a scaled A2-B1 exam and the "Leben in Deutschland" test.

"We at the VHS are proud of this success story, which we have achieved together as a large team. I would therefore like to thank all the teachers and staff who have put their heart and soul into making this work possible. Our thanks also go to the many participants - for their courage, their perseverance and their willingness to work with us on an open and diverse city of Bocholt despite the great challenges in their biographies", says Isabel Testroet proudly.

Working as a team is a strong pillar here, as the integration courses are subject to strict guidelines from the ministry, meaning that bureaucratic rules etc. must be adhered to, which often lead to challenges for both participants and the team. This makes cohesion all the more important in this area, which is demonstrated by our cooperation with the Foreigners' Registration Office of the City of Bocholt, among others: "We work in close and collegial consultation - this enables us to pursue goals together and support educational biographies. It's understandable that it's not always easy for those involved and my team - but acting as equals and working hand in hand makes a lot of things possible", emphasises Isabel Testroet.

The VHS knows that language enables understanding, creates trust and opens doors to active participation in social life. The VHS therefore took the 20th anniversary as an opportunity to invite many participants to the LernWerk for a morning full of diversity.

In addition to the words of appreciation from the deputy mayor Gudrun Koppers, the statement from the policy regional coordinator of the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF) Michael Sternberg and the creative language mediator, musician and music teacher Fabian Wege, the contributions from some course participants were particular highlights: In a colourful programme, two Ukrainian participants who had completed B2

performed an expressive dance theatre performance that moved them to tears, an integration course led by Jannik Horstmann sang a rewritten St. Nicholas song and Syrian and Ukrainian participants answered questions from the audience under the guidance of course instructor Kerstin Lotz.

Another highlight was the honouring of Dr Wolfgang Westphal and Andrea Polifka, who have been active as course instructors in the integration courses since the beginning of 2005. The ceremony was rounded off with a highlight: led by a Ukrainian course participant who worked as a chef in his home country, a colourful buffet was offered to match the theme.

"What we have celebrated today is not just 20 years of a programme area: we are celebrating 20 years of meeting, learning, cohesion and creating together. We would like to thank everyone involved from the bottom of our hearts", said Danuzza Mendonca-Leuters, summarising the successful celebration.

Funding information: The event was part of the project "Shaping diversity - Participate. Learn. Develop. (Er)leben." and was supported by the Ministry of Culture and Science of the State of North Rhine-Westphalia.



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Many guests attended the anniversary event at LernWerk