



## **INCLUSIVE EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION (IECE) PROJECT**

### **The Integrative Day-Care Centre Am Gänsberg Lebenshilfewerk Rheingau-Taunus e. V.: our day-care centre – structure, basic conditions and offerings**

#### **Foreword**

This concept document is the result of more than 20 years of inclusive practice in the Integrative Day-Care Centre Am Gänsberg. The broadest range of people, parents, employees, trainees, those performing community service in lieu of military service, those in their voluntary year of social service, external co-operation partners and, of course and especially, the children have contributed to its formulation.

It is addressed to all interested parties wishing to gain insight into our work and describes the principles, conditions and objectives for living, learning and growing together in our day-care centre.

Our attention centres on common development and common, co-constructive learning and growth. To this extent, this concept is a snapshot that repeatedly changes and develops further with new children, new people, new challenges and requirements.

#### **Philosophy**

‘It’s normal to be different.’

This statement, coined by the Federal President of the time, Richard von Weizsäcker, in 1993, has formed the foundation of our work since the Am Gänsberg day-care centre opened in 1994; a place for preschool upbringing, education and care for all children.

Well-developed children and children with developmental risks, children with and without disabilities, children with very varied family and cultural backgrounds all have a right to esteem and respect, and are warmly welcome in our day-care centre together with their families. On the basis of their extremely different prerequisites, we offer to accompany them on a path that enables participation, opens up a variety of possibilities for learning, creates the opportunity for new experiences with oneself and with others on a daily basis and supports individual development.

In addition to this, as a member organisation of the Deutsches Rotes Kreuz (German Red Cross), we are also committed to its philosophy and to promoting the well-being, peaceful co-existence and dignity of all people.



## **Our day-care centre**

### ***Agency responsible for the institution***

The provider of the institution is the Lebenshilfe Rheingau-Taunus e. V., based in Aarbergen. In addition to the integrative day-care centre Am Gänsberg, the Lebenshilfe Rheingau-Taunus e. V. operates one other integrative day-care centre, residential facilities for people with disabilities and sheltered living facilities in the Rheingau-Taunus district.

The Lebenshilfe Rheingau-Taunus e. V. is a non-profit association headed by a voluntary board. The institution management bears responsibility for business operations together with the full-time business management.

### ***Legal basis***

The United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of the Child, the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Basic Law of the Federal Republic of Germany provide the legal basis for our work.

As a day-care centre in Hessen, we work on the basis of the Social Code (SGB) VIII and the federal state-specific regulations in the children and youth code of Hessen in its currently valid version. In addition, the specifications of SGB XII in combination with the Hessen agreement on the integration of children with disabilities of 01/08/2014 apply.

With reference to upbringing and education in our day-care centres, we work on the basis of the Hessen education and upbringing plan from 0 to 10 years, published in 2007.

The specifications of labour laws in combination with the collective agreement for public service (TVöD) in its respectively valid form are decisive for the working conditions of employees in our facility.

Finally, contractual agreements between the city of Idstein and our representative ensure the economic safeguarding of the day-care centre. They also regulate details involving criteria for acceptance, parent fees and staffing.

### ***Acceptance criteria***

In accordance with our operating licence and the agreement with our most important sponsor, the city of Idstein, our day-care centre is open to all children resident in Idstein who have reached the age of three prior to enrolment.

Exceptions from these rulings can be agreed upon in consultation in individual cases and on valid grounds.



### ***Location of the facility***

The day-care centre is located in a reduced traffic area at the eastern edge of Idstein city centre. Fields, forest and meadows are found in the immediate vicinity. The centre of Idstein, as well as the local primary and special schools can also be easily reached on foot. A bus stop at the door provides a direct link with the public transport system.

### ***Size of the facility***

The kindergarten has an operating licence for 100 children, who are cared for in four groups irrespective of age. Within the framework of inclusive educational theory, group sizes with a maximum of 20 children and a total occupancy of 80 children are strived for.

### ***Space***

#### ***Buildings***

The entire facility, with the exception of the administration office and a few installations, is built to be accessible on one level. All entrances are also accessible.

Each group has its own group room. The design and furnishings are geared to the children's varying needs. The furnishings can be changed and adapted flexibly. A high degree of internal differentiation is thus made possible. Various games, offerings and activities can take place simultaneously.

Two groups each share a child-oriented and, of course, accessible bathroom. Possibilities for diapering of individual children are available.

A large corridor equipped with a variety of children's vehicles and seating offers space for cross-group encounters and the possibility to play or withdraw in a manner involving high movement and a large amount of space inside the building.

There is also a variety of functional rooms:

- The kitchen is partially furnished at a lower level suitable for children. The daily preparations for breakfast and lunch take place here. Each group uses the kitchen once a week to prepare a meal and cook together.
- The workroom with a painting workshop is available to each group once a week. Here there are workbenches at child level, various tools as well as a painting wall for working on large surfaces.
- Each group uses the multipurpose and gymnastics room once a week for psychomotor movement offerings. In addition to this, cross-group offerings also take place in this room, for example, parents' events, sport offerings in



the afternoon, cross-group project work, the common closing circle for all children and their families on Friday or festivities and parties. An ample and varied stock of equipment and materials for the promotion of movement is available. Following consultation, the gymnastics room can also be used independently by individual children or small groups.

- The therapy room is used as needed for therapy offerings by external therapists in the fields of speech and language therapy, physiotherapy or occupational therapy. Work can also be carried out there with small groups in a differentiated fashion. Here too it is possible for individual children or small groups to use the room independently.

### *Outside grounds*

The kindergarten has a naturally designed play area of approximately 2,000 m<sup>2</sup>.

A redesign decisively influenced by the children took place several years ago. Many of the children's ideas were realised. For example, we now have a permanent play shop and a difficult climbing course.

The outside grounds offer a variety of possibilities for play. On the whole it is designed and equipped in such a way that it gives all children the possibility to be self-efficaciously active. In particular, the play equipment is built in such a way that, for the most part, children with motor disabilities can use it independently. At the same time, it provides challenges for children with well-developed motor skills. The play area's design also creates spaces for unobserved, independent play. In addition to the usual play material, we also keep everyday materials like sticks, boards, beverage crates, tyres, etc., which inspire the children towards creative play.

### **Care times**

In addition to the educational upbringing mission, we also understand our offering as a service for families that should contribute to a work-life balance. We therefore offer a variety of care times, which families can select according to their needs: half-day-care from 7:30 a.m. to 12:35 p.m.; six-hour care from 7:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.; and full-day-care from 7:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Within the framework of six-hour care, the children can avail of lunch catering for a fee. In the context of full-day-care, they must.

In the context of changing demand on the labour market, we have developed a model of supplementary full-day-care on individual weekdays together with the parents' council. Families that make use of half-day or six-hour care can arrange for supplementary full-day-care for their children on individual weekdays.



### ***Parent fees***

The fees for the day-care centre correspond to those also charged at the municipal day-care centres.

A staggered fee table is available for the use of supplementary full-day-care on individual weekdays.

The fee for lunch catering is billed as a lump sum and charged monthly. The goal here is complete coverage of costs. Here too there is a staggered table for usage on individual weekdays.

### ***Meals***

The kitchen of our day-care centre is not designed for self-catering, but only for the distribution of meals. Accordingly, an external caterer that specialises in child nutrition supplies the lunch.

In addition to appetising food, we also attach importance to the nutritional value of the lunch meal. The food offering is in agreement with the recommendations of the German Nutrition Society. Requirements with regard to the consistency of the food, for example, by liquefying food, can be addressed. No pork is offered and consideration of children with allergies is exercised to a great extent, so that nearly all children can make use of the catering offering. In exceptional situations, individual agreements extending beyond this are also possible.

The caterer is selected in consultation with parents or their representatives in the parents' council. Satisfaction with the lunch offering is also a component of quality development and is regularly included in the parent survey, which takes place in cooperation with the municipality.

Water and fruit tea are offered as beverages. Fruit juice is sometimes provided for special occasions.

The children bring their own breakfast with them to the day-care centre. We appeal to the parents to pay attention to nutritional value. In the context of using the function rooms, the children prepare a meal together with their childcare worker once a week.

### ***Daily schedule***

Our understanding of ourselves as service providers supplementing the family is also reflected in the design of the daily schedule. The objective here is to maintain the balance between the educational and upbringing mission and the differing needs of individual families.



### *7:30–9:00 a.m. – Drop-off time*

The children can be brought to the kindergarten during this time.

The possibility for cross-group, independent activity and play throughout the kindergarten exists.

Parallel to this and until approximately 9:30 a.m., the children can eat the breakfast they have brought with them. For this purpose, a breakfast table is prepared in each group room together with the children.

### *9:00 a.m.–12:15 p.m. – Group phase*

During this time, offerings, common activities, discussions, excursions, etc., take place in the group context.

The activities in the individual groups are oriented to an obligatory weekly structure that also includes the use of the function rooms.

### *12:15–12:35 p.m. – Pick-up time*

Families that make use of a half-day provision for their children can pick up their children from the kindergarten during this time. We ask that the common closing circle be respected on Fridays.

### *12:35–1:30 p.m. – Lunch*

Lunch and dental hygiene take place in the respective groups.

Children with six-hour care can be picked up at precisely 1:30 p.m.

### *1:35–2:30 p.m. – Rest period*

The rest period takes place across all groups. For younger children it is possible to rest or sleep in two groups. A staff member from their group accompanies them.

For the children in the last year prior to beginning school, we use this time period on a daily basis for a supplementary educational offering in the area of language and literacy. Children cannot be picked up during this time.

### *2:30–4:30 p.m. – Afternoon offering*

Afternoon care takes place across all groups. According to demand, a varying number of groups are created. The offering consists of open possibilities for play and directed activities, for example, in the areas of handicrafts, sports, gardening, etc.



At parents' request, it is also possible during this period to make use of the offerings of external providers in the kindergarten for a fee. To this end we work together with, for example, a local music school.

Children can be picked up at any time during this period.

#### *4:30 p.m. – The kindergarten closes*

In the context of staff planning, we pay attention to ensuring that the care density is oriented to the quantitative demand and our offering in the daily routine.

### **Parents' work**

#### *Parents' council*

The parents' council is elected to represent parents' interests and is an important instrument for ensuring the appropriate degree of parent participation in the context of the upbringing partnership. It has the right to be informed and heard with regard to all important matters of education, upbringing and care (please refer to §27 Hessen children and youth services code (HKJGB)).

The parents' council is elected in the first two months of the respective kindergarten year. It should consist of two representatives from each group.

#### *Sitting in on the kindergarten routine*

All parents have the opportunity to participate in the kindergarten routine as an observer following consultation.

#### *Parent involvement*

Assistance with the design, organisation and carrying out of celebrations and parties of the entire day-care centre is wished.

The same applies for assistance with caring for the garden and the upkeep of the day-care centre. The funds saved in this way can be invested in the operation of the day-care centre.

#### *Parent discussions*

Active communication and discussion with the parents of the children entrusted to us, is a central element of successful educational work. We therefore attach a corresponding level of importance to it. From the feedback and parent surveys we have learned that direct everyday discussion, the so-called 'word in passing', is highly valued. Our staff planning is therefore oriented to ensure that such discussions can take place to the greatest extent possible in accordance with needs. In addition to this, discussions with parents are possible by appointment at any time



in the framework of the weekly opening hours. Deviations can also be agreed upon in exceptional cases.

### *Parent complaints*

Up to 80 families have their children cared for simultaneously in our facility. Differences of opinion and conflicts are unavoidable in such a group and always present an opportunity for change and continuing development.

In the event of a complaint we also rely on verbal, direct communication. Our staff planning ensures that parents always have a discussion partner for their concerns. These are generally the staff members in their child's group. Of course, parents also have the opportunity to directly involve the day-care centre administration. If an acceptable solution cannot be found at this level, the staff must involve the administration. As of this point the process is accompanied by written documentation. Parents have the right to receive a response to their concern within two working days. This should present suggestions for the subsequent procedure and possible solutions where these exist. Further communication and agreements will be recorded in the context of documentation. Of course the parents also have the option of involving the parents' council.

If an acceptable solution cannot be found at the level of the day-care centre, the parents have the opportunity to register a complaint with the management of the Lebenshilfe or even with the responsible supervisory body, the district youth welfare service.

The parents are informed of the possibility to present their concerns and complaints in the context of the acceptance process.

### **Quality development**

Within the framework of municipal quality development, we participated in a two-year quality development process moderated by the Pädagogischen-Qualitäts-Informationen-Systeme gGmbH (PädQuis). The foundation of this process is provided by the results of the National Quality Initiative in day-care. The instruments of this process continue to be used in the educational routine.

Parallel to this, we were decisively involved in the development and implementation of the parent survey at the municipal level, with which we continue to be regularly involved, and which we use to continuously improve the offer in our day-care centre.

We also see ourselves as a learning organisation, in which informal processes are of central importance for the quality of continuing development. Of primary importance here is everyday exchange with our users, the children and their





families. Beyond this, we work intensively on the networking of our institution, so that participation in various committees (state working group of Frühe Hilfen e. V., sub-working group on kindergartens of the LIGA der Freien Wohlfahrtspflege, the kindergarten and migration working groups of Lebenshilfe Hessen, the inclusion working group of the district, the Idsteiner Netzwerkes für Familien, to name a few), co-operation with primary, special needs and professional schools (for example, in the context of the state of Hessen education and upbringing plan or childcare worker training) and co-operation with early childhood intervention service, therapists, continuing training measures for the staff, etc., provides important impetuses for development. These impetuses for development are continuously reflected upon and adapted where appropriate.

### ***Training and internships***

Well-trained specialists provide the foundation for successful educational work in our institution, as in elementary education in general. This is why we see training as an important field of activity for our day-care centre and each year offer one or two students the opportunity to complete the practical component of their training as a teacher or childcare worker in our institution. We in no way see this as only an additional requirement, but are instead convinced that we also benefit from it.

In keeping with our financial resources, we also offer the opportunity to complete the practical component of the training programme for social assistants in our facility.

We are committed to maintaining the principle of retaining qualified employees in day-care centres. At the same time, we are open to the training of lateral entrants and are also active in this area within our financial boundaries.

In the context of recruitment for our vocational field, we co-operate with the secondary and special needs schools on location and offer appropriate pupil internships in our day-care centre.

### ***Voluntary services***

We appreciate employees who complete a voluntary year of social service or federal voluntary service. They are an asset and a valuable addition. They increase diversity in our day-care centre. To this purpose we co-operate with Volunta, the voluntary service provider of the Deutsches Rotes Kreuz (German Red Cross) and offer – depending on our financial situation – appropriate positions in our institution.



## **Living and learning in the day-care centre – our educational routine**

The concept of learning and education currently enjoys a great deal of respect among the general public, especially with regard to the discussion of the future of our knowledge society.

Unfortunately, we experience extremely limited usage. Learning is mostly restricted to the conveying of scholastic knowledge, in the process of which the focus is placed on directly utilisable knowledge, for example, the acquiring of foreign language or science, technology, engineering and mathematics skills. We in no way deny the value of such knowledge, but consider such an exaggeration to be inappropriate. For our work area of elementary education we reject this philosophy and, in agreement with the Hessen education plan, subscribe to another educational concept that focuses on social learning and developing the personality.

Even more so than in later stages of life, living and learning in the elementary area are directly and indivisibly linked with one another. Everyday activity and social interaction with other people, adults and children, the co-construction of life practice, language and knowledge are the central elements of this educational process. This in no way excludes the use of learning programmes.

Education and upbringing in our day-care facility are successful when we are able to provide the children and their parents with a solid foundation from which they can face the challenges of the future with a spirit of optimism and confidence.

Living and learning take place in processes that have been able to withdraw from final conceptualisation, especially considering our view that attitudes – and not instructions for action – form the basic principles. Nevertheless, in the following sections we attempt to outline the basis of our work.

### ***Being welcome***

We welcome every child – without exception. This also applies to their families.

We do not ask whether we can care for a child, but instead what we need to do to create the conditions that would make it possible for us to meet this child's needs. In this way, special needs, gender-specific requirements, the cultural and domestic initial situation, existing social contacts, families' wishes, etc., are already incorporated into our planning and taken into account to the greatest extent possible prior to acceptance.

Every child and every family is different. The introduction process must be structured just as individually. Transitions are phases of accelerated and condensed learning that place special demands on all participants, be they children, parents or educators. We therefore pay special attention to the introductory period and dedicate a high degree of care density to it. Because we do not yet know the



children at this time, estimations and possibilities, as well as direct communication with parents, provide the central points of orientation for us.

Our intensive exchange with parents and sensitive, attentive accompaniment of the child provide the basis for coping with the new situation, the transition to the day-care centre and a group of children. It of course goes without saying that we offer parents the opportunity to directly accompany their child in the day-care centre.

### ***Feeling comfortable***

Feeling comfortable and having fun form the basis for openness to developmental stimuli and create the basis for making learning easier. Feeling comfortable has nothing to do with so-called Kuschelpädagogik ('I'm okay, you're OK' educational approach). It does not mean that everything is easy and painless at all times. Anger, rage, tears, sorrow and pain are important building blocks of any development. They are part of life and must of course also have their place in a day-care centre.

Nevertheless, our principal attention is devoted to well-being.

Feeling comfortable encompasses a variety of sometimes conflicting facets: the experience of being held with a parallel development of confidence in one's own possibility, one's competence for taking action; to accept help and at the same time learn to cope with challenges appropriately and independently; to participate and at the same time retain one's own identity and be able to continue developing; to be appreciated and respected; to be respected for one's strengths instead of being measured by one's weaknesses. This list in no way claims to be complete – in fact it cannot be complete –, but it adequately outlines the field of tension involved in work in a kindergarten. We therefore see a central challenge for all employees in our kindergarten in designing and accompanying the environment and the social interactions in such a way that children can feel comfortable accordingly.

For us, the children's well-being is indivisibly coupled with the well-being of the adults in our institution. Although the children are the focus of our attention, we also work towards maintaining a view on the situation of the parents, of external co-operation partners, as well as on our employees' working conditions. We are convinced that employees who feel comfortable in our team and are largely satisfied with their work situation can better fulfil the requirements of their position.

### ***Feeling secure***

Security is another central aspect of early childhood development. A good, stable bond in turn forms the basis for developing a sense of security.

Although this requirement is of primary relevance within the family, a reliable complementary bond in the day-care centre and elementary education, is also of



utmost importance. We see the establishment of a viable bond with the individual children in their group, and then releasing them again from this bond with a view to their development and the change to school life, as one of the most important tasks for the professionals in our institution.

Such requirements could of course be decreed, but whether they would ultimately be productive remains doubtful. The requirement of the professionals therefore consists of offering the children a relationship and creating a basis upon which they can accept it. At the same time, by employing at least two professionals in a group, we offer the children several options. This is an initial situation that clearly improves the chances for successful work with relationships.

However, bonding processes are in no sense limited to the children's interaction with the professionals. The relationships of the children among themselves also play an incredibly important role, which increases in importance throughout the kindergarten period and over the course of the personal development process. Here we see our task as creating the structural prerequisites, for example, within the framework of group structures or free and undisturbed possibilities for play, but also the continuous accompaniment and support of the children in their interactions with as much sensitivity as possible.

Besides the social factor, we also consider structural aspects that can convey a feeling of security. With the group structure we offer the children a reliable framework that helps to endow them with a sense of belonging. This sense of belonging makes going out and exploring possible. Consistent daily and weekly structures, the incorporation of rituals into the course of the year, as well as commitments with regard to the course of the entire time in the kindergarten also convey a sense of security.

### ***Diversity***

We unreservedly understand dealing with the diversity of human life in our day-care centre as an asset. It is an important resource and reveals great potential for learning. As already mentioned several times, our day-care centre is completely open to all children. However, diversity does not only refer to the children. We also welcome differences in the staff team and the enrichment that it brings to our education work. However, diversity also presents the staff with special requirements in dealings with the children. Not doing 'the same for everyone' but instead making 'each to his own' possible is the goal of our educational work. This requires a high degree of internal differentiation, which makes it possible to structure the everyday routine, as well as the offers and projects in such a way that impetuses and chances for developments are created for everyone. The starting



points are always provided by the children's strengths, interests and inclinations, in order to allow them to have experiences of self-efficacy.

However, dealing with diversity also involves accepting one's own limits. Especially with regard to the promotion of children with disabilities, therapeutic aids extending beyond educational support are often necessary and require the expertise of and co-operation with external specialists. Openness and allocating appropriate time resources to this (in some cases, quite complicated) work is self-explanatory for us.

### ***Involvement***

The concept of involvement has increased considerably in importance recently. It originates from the disability rights movement. It describes inclusion in a life situation. It is inseparably linked with the concept of participation, which in turn refers to the right of people to be involved in decisions concerning their own lives.

This is nothing new in the field of education. Many reform educators, in particular Janusz Korczak, already referred to the right of children to design their world at the beginning of the last century. Janusz Korczak sees appreciation of and respect for children as the vital prerequisite for making participation and involvement possible.

Appreciation of and respect for children also form the foundation of our work. Offering children a variety of possibilities to reach decisions concerning their lives in the day-care centre is thus self-evident for us. This is reflected both in the individual interaction with the child, but also in the structural design of the kindergarten's routine. Opportunities are thus planned on a daily basis in which the children can decide for themselves, what, with whom, for how long and where they want to play, or even with voting processes within the group. The current situation is discussed within the framework of the daily meeting of the individual groups. Suggestions and complaints are incorporated; joint plans are made, voted on and decided. Over the course of their time in kindergarten, in this way the children have the possibility to gain experience with democratic processes. Within the context of the preschool project in the last year prior to entering school, democratic voting processes are of central importance and to a great extent determine the work of the group.

A particular challenge in this area is presented by the involvement of children who, due to their disabilities, cannot actively reach decisions or take part in decision-making processes. This also applies conditionally to the involvement of children with inadequate communication possibilities. These children are generally dependent upon assistance, empathetic interpretation or an advocate of their interests. This task usually falls to the professional. We have also had good experiences with children who assume this task sensitively and empathically. Joint consultation on the respective child's interests can offer a good possibility and provide a broad learning field for all children. Empathic accompaniment following a decision reached



vicariously and awareness of whether one was correct with the form of assistance, are of great importance on the way to better involvement and participation for this child. Here too, this involves a co-constructive learning process, whereby the question is also posed here as to who is learning more in such cases.

### ***Child welfare – endangering of child welfare***

Up to now we have described ways of ensuring good possibilities for the development of the children and thus of child welfare in our day-care centre, and now we must address the matter of protection from the exact opposite of this: the endangering of child welfare.

The endangering of child welfare involves an indefinite legal term that must be filled with content in each individual case. The endangerment of child welfare is principally understood as the sustained damaging of childhood development, for example, through physical, emotional or sexual abuse. Special importance is also attached here to the attentiveness of the individual staff members. Signals must be noticed and adequately interpreted. This attentiveness should be maintained and further developed through regular training and supervision and in the context of inter-colleague consultation. As a foundation, we, together with the municipal institutions and supported by the vitos-Jugendhilfe, have co-operated in the development of a prescribed, binding procedure in the event of suspicion. In addition to this, we co-operate actively in the district-wide network Frühe Hilfen & Kooperation im Kinderschutz and maintain contact with the appropriate aid systems and specialists.