

Seehaus Leonberg - Germany

Introduction

Seehaus Leonberg is a prison for juveniles in a free form (in German: Jugendstrafvollzug in freien Formen), which means it is an alternative program for young people to serve their sentence instead of a closed or open prison. It is located in the municipality of Leonberg, in Western Germany. The facility



is run by an NGO - named Seehaus e.V. - and was founded in 2003. The goal of the overarching organization is to create a "school of life that gives young prisoners the chance to make a change of life". To achieve this, the residents learn positive social behavior through group culture and family-like living which reflect the values of trust and responsibility. In 2011 started another Seehaus near Leipzig / Saxony, today at lake "Hainer See".

Scale

Seehaus Leonberg has room for a maximum of 21 residents. On average, there are 15 residents living at the facility. Residents are divided and live in three separate family units. Each unit consists of a family (parents and children) and 5-7 residents. The NGO is planning to expand Seehaus Leonberg and therefore wants to create a fourth family unit in attendance of the necessary approved permits.

RESCALED-principles in practice:

- Small-scale
- Differentiated
- Community-integrated

Differentiation

Target group:

Seehaus Leonberg accommodates 14-23-year-old people and is a male-only facility. They focus on persons who have sentences of about 1-5 years in prison. Although, a person in pre-trial detention can also apply. Residents stay for a period of 12 to 36 months. Other criteria for placement in Seehaus Leonberg are personal motivation, the will to cooperate and the absence of risk that the person would avoid the execution of juvenile detention or would abuse the free form to commit crimes.

Seehaus does not accept young offenders who have been convicted of sexual offences or murder. Additionally, those with a remaining sentence of less than nine months or those who have limited proficiency in the German language are not accommodated, as the facility strictly uses German as the primary language. Moreover, people with severe substance use disorders or significant psychiatric issues cannot be accommodated, as the facility does not have adequate support for these problems.

Forms of security:



Seehaus Leonberg has no static security measures. The security is mainly based on relational security, combined with procedural security. Seehaus ensures a safe environment by giving the residents responsibility and building relationships of trust and confidence. One-to-one discussions in informal

formats, a positive peer culture, which involves a culture of helping each other out, and the buddy system are also seen as important in the facility. In addition, Seehaus Leonberg provides a full and thorough program. This way, residents are actively engaged and occupied throughout the day.

In Seehaus Leonberg the residents are always surrounded by a staff member, volunteer, or another resident. The staff has implemented a phase system that aligns with different levels of freedom, autonomy and responsibility depending on the phase a resident is in. There are six phases and the higher a resident is in the system, the more autonomy they get, for example being able to participate in leisure activities or becoming a buddy for another resident.¹

Seehaus uses twelve basic norms in the facility, such as “we do not hurt anyone, neither through words nor through deeds”, “we respect ourselves and each other” or “we confront in order to help, not to hurt”. Breaking these rules can result in being expelled from the program.

First impression of a visitor: “The first impression before entering the premises was the proximity to the road. Once there, the road noise was still very loud. However, this was compensated by the presence of many animals and trees that are present along the way to the main buildings. The main building which dates from the 17th century is remarkable. The spaces are very spacious and surrounded by plants and nature in general, with a forest behind the property”.

¹More information about the phase system can be found here: Seehaus e.V. (2020, August 12). *Phase System - Seehaus e.V.* Retrieved July 19th, 2023, from <https://seehaus-ev.de/alternative-juvenile-prison/phase-system/>

Activities:

Seehaus Leonberg has a strict weekly schedule that includes different activities, training or workshops and time spent with the family. Vocational training and school are central to the weekly schedule. The vocational training focuses on reintegration into the job market by, among other things, organizing different workshops in three different work fields: carpentry, metal work and joinery. Seehaus Leonberg has partner organizations with whom the residents have the possibility to work after their release.

While most residents work within the facility, those who have progressed to higher steps in the phase system may also have the opportunity to work outside of the facility. The residents go to school three days a week and have vocational training two days a week. Besides this, the weekly schedule consists of sports and leisure activities, confrontational pedagogy, community service and volunteer service. Christian faith plays a role in the weekly schedule



by organizing church service and reading of the Bible in the first weeks at the facility. Seehaus Leonberg also strives to prepare the families of the residents for their return by visiting them and offering seminars on life after detention.

The facility proposes an additional program wherein a staff member visits the former residents for two hours every week for a period of six months to sometimes a year, depending on their individual needs. This



follow-up program includes regular one-on-one discussions, assistance with job searches, guidance on engaging in leisure activities, support with schooling and training, assistance with resolving debts, and advice on managing finances effectively. If the residents have chosen godparents during their stay, these individuals also continue to provide support to them after their sentence has ended.

Community-integration

Location and architecture:

Seehaus Leonberg is located in Leonberg, in the state of Baden-Württemberg, and is part of the community. The municipality of Leonberg has a population of approximately 49 256 inhabitants.² This location has been

²Current population. (z.d.). *Federal Statistical Office*. Retrieved June 12th, 2023, from https://www.destatis.de/EN/Themes/Society-Environment/Population/Current-Population/_node.html

chosen as Baden-Württemberg was the first area in Germany where it was possible to set up such a project. In addition, this location is situated outside the city yet not isolated which is important for the reintegration of the residents. Seehaus Leonberg is also accessible by public transport.

The property of the facility is situated near the road. Along the way to the main buildings, one passes by many animals, such as pigs, cows, rabbits, chickens, and cats. Seehaus Leonberg is close to nature, with a forest right next to it. The main building has different family living units. Each family apartment has a balcony, kitchen, living room, bathroom, and bedrooms. The residents of the facility share a bedroom with two or three people. Outside the main building, there are different houses for various activities, a small playground for the children of the families, and table tennis.

Interaction with the community:



Seehaus is an organisation that cooperates with different organisations and services in the community. On the one hand, the community offers services to the facility. Companies can hire residents for different kinds of work possibilities. In addition, Seehaus relies on many volunteers such as host families or godparents. The facility also receives money and material donations from the

community.

On the other hand, Seehaus provides community service through projects that are relevant to the community (Picture: residents, families, staff and volunteers at a local “cleaning day”). This is a form of symbolic restitution to the community by the residents. For example, they carry out minor repair work on a voluntary basis, such as trimming hedges, painting fences, etc. They also have a kindergarten for young children, organize events and offer self-defense training that is open to all. Moreover, Seehaus runs various projects, in which they bring different people from in and outside the facility together. A good example is the Sycamore Tree Project, where 4-6 victims and 4-6 offenders meet a total of six times to allow both victims and offenders to share their stories and begin the healing process. The project aims to help the young people in detention understand the consequences of their crimes, develop empathy, and take responsibility for their actions and the damage caused.

Seehaus Leonberg
Founded: 2003
Capacity: 21
Security level: Medium
Nearest city/town: Leonberg
(Germany)
Nature of interaction: Visited
by Prison Insider
(14/11/2022)

Publicity/ read more

- About Seehaus Leonberg at the official website of Seehaus e.V.:

Seehaus e.V. (2022, November 9th). *Jugendstrafvollzug in freien Formen - Seehaus Leonberg*. Retrieved June 4th, 2023, from <https://seehaus-ev.de/arbeitsbereiche/seehaus-leonberg/>

- About the phase system in Seehaus at the official website of Seehaus e.V.:

Seehaus e.V. (2020, August 12). *Phase System - Seehaus e.V.* Retrieved July 19th, 2023, from <https://seehaus-ev.de/alternative-juvenile-prison/phase-system/>