



Impact Stories

Creating Career Opportunities Together: Ways to Achieve a Positive Impact on a Systemic Level

The **Zukunftsträger initiative** (ZT) is setting new standards in **supporting disadvantaged young people** in Germany on their **path to employment**. Following the Collective Impact approach, ZT fosters **strong regional networks** where schools, businesses, government agencies, and civil society organizations closely **collaborate**, seeking solutions to the challenges in the transition from school to work. A well-coordinated support system for young people can significantly improve their prospects.

Challenge and Opportunity

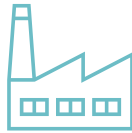
Over **two million young people** in Germany between the ages of 20 and 34 have **no vocational qualifications**, and tens of thousands a year are **unable to find an apprenticeship**. At the same time, the **shortage of workers and skilled professionals** is becoming more acute. Addressing this issue requires examining the systemic structures in place:

All stakeholders share the same goal: to guide young people from school to work.



Schools

The primary environment where young people spend most of their time and complete their education.



Businesses

Provide practical experience to youth or guide them through mentoring programs.



Youth Services

Free providers, such as associations, contribute to vocational orientation and impart necessary expertise for specific professions.



Politics & Administration

Public institutions like job centers support young people in (re)entering their professional careers.

However, there is a lack of regular exchange between these stakeholders due to various factors:

- 1) Different actors operate under different frameworks.
- 2) They often work in silos, with little understanding of each other's needs and constraints.
- 3) They sometimes view each other as competitors, especially when vying for the same funding resources.
- 4) Most do not have a comprehensive view of the entire support landscape.
- 5) Networking efforts are rarely funded, leaving little room for collaboration.

To strengthen the available services and bring together regional stakeholders from all sectors who typically do not communicate much, the Zukunftsträger initiative seeks to connect existing actors instead of duplicating structures. The goal is for these actors to come together to **discuss common challenges and needs** and **implement innovative, sustainable solutions**. After the first three years of the initiative, sustainable impacts on the educational system at the regional level are already evident. This is demonstrated by the following Impact Stories from the networks in the Rhine-Neckar Metropolitan Region and Leipzig.

Impact Story 1: Creating effective exchange formats to connect stakeholders.

ZT in the Rhine-Neckar Metropolitan Region established "Round Tables" as formats for exchange, which include participants such as teachers from secondary and vocational schools, didactic coordinators, and representatives from the Employment Agency and the State Pedagogical Institute. In Ludwigshafen, the "Transition Round Table" developed a new **information session for students** transitioning out of school. This session covers topics such as vocational orientation, application processes, deadlines, and other relevant questions. Together with the Youth Employment Agency and the city of Ludwigshafen, vocational advisors from the Employment Agency and the schools' didactic coordinators address the students' uncertainties and fears, helping them navigate the transition successfully.

These formats not only meet an urgent need but also bring together actors who previously had little common ground in cooperation. This fosters **cross-sector collaboration** with **lasting impact**.

Impact Story 2: Improving work processes through standardized structures and creating clarity for all involved.

Through the new exchange formats in Ludwigshafen, secondary and vocational schools realized that they were using different registration forms for students **enrolling in vocational schools**. The group agreed to **standardize** both the forms and the process overall. Now, everyone knows where the forms can be found (on the websites or through designated contacts at the schools) and what specific information needs to be provided.

For students, this process standardization creates new **clarity regarding the steps required for vocational school registration**. They now have a better overview of the process and can consciously and systematically address their career aspirations and take the necessary steps.

Impact Story 3: Acting in harmony with the local community – Strategic action for a connected community.

To provide a better overview of available support services, ZT Leipzig, along with stakeholders (see page 1), developed a **service map**. This map serves

as the foundation for coordinated actions in the local community and makes **contact, information, and support services visible**. The interactive map is continuously updated and widely used within local networks and individual discussions as an information platform. ZT Leipzig has become a go-to resource for referral conversations, particularly around the issue of school absenteeism. The map can be found at: www.zukunftstraeger-leipzig.de

Coordinated efforts, such as **education fairs**, bring schools and extracurricular actors together in the community. They enhance **awareness of projects and services** available to students and future apprentices or university students as they face various career orientation challenges. For example, in 2023, an education fair was held in Leipzig's Grünau district, which will now be an annual event. The fair helped, among other things, foster closer collaboration between Leipzig's juvenile court services and local youth welfare organizations in the Grünau neighborhood, enabling them to work together in assigning social service work to students as a consequence of school absenteeism.

These forms of collaboration resonate well with the youth, who provide **positive feedback** about their social service activities, particularly regarding improvements to their daily routines and their future planning. Additionally, they become well-integrated into the community during their social service work and continue to receive support through open meetups or counseling centers. They also appreciate the recreation opportunities that match their interests and needs.

The approaches developed by ZT in collaboration with the community management differ positively from conventional approaches. In Leipzig, institutions such as the State Office for Schools and Education, the Youth Welfare Office, and the Office of Education, which initially had little involvement in ZT's exchange formats, now regularly attend network meetings. The new action **approaches are motivating**, and the State Office has expressed interest in further, more detailed exchanges in the future. Over the course of the project, it has become clear that ZT is fostering a **cultural shift in network collaboration**.

In Ludwigshafen, the value of collaboration is also evident through the development of the mentoring program **„ÜbergangsMentoRing“** in cooperation

with JOBLINGE e.V. The organization supports young people facing difficult circumstances on their path to employment. In Leipzig, a similar pilot project was launched with JOBLINGE, which, thanks to the joint networking and development efforts, is now being successfully sustained independently by a network partner, enriching Leipzig's service landscape.

As a result, regional networks are being recognized as lighthouse projects by other system actors:

The practical implementation and quick wins have increased the **acceptance of the regional networks** among other system actors. More efficient communication, transparency, and standardization and simplification of processes have contributed to this.

For example, local actors such as the municipal education management or youth welfare planning now specifically rely on ZT's expertise. Initial skepticism is giving way to growing **trust in ZT within the local social and educational landscape.**

The regional networks are increasingly seen by other actors as **key contacts for issues related to school-to-work transitions** and school absenteeism, working to establish themselves as important **multipliers for best-practice approaches** in these fields. Furthermore, it has become clear that ZT operates between information and service provision, bringing actors together and developing inspiring and sustainable projects with interdisciplinary approaches.

In the long term, our society benefits from these networks as they **create prospects** for young people, contribute to **social participation**, and strengthen societal cohesion. At the same time, they help **address the acute shortage of skilled workers** and **counteract marginalization in society.**

So far, the Zukunftsträger initiative supports three civil society organizations that build and coordinate their networks in their regions:

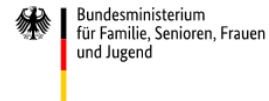
- [EDUCATION Y e. V.](#)
in the Rhine-Neckar Metropolitan Region
- [HEIZHAUS gGmbH](#) in Leipzig
- [STARTSTARK gGmbH](#)
in Munich (until Dec 2023)

Since January 2024, the anchor organization [Condrops e.V.](#) has been coordinating the Munich network.

In the current second funding phase of the initiative, the establishment of additional regional networks is ongoing.

Sponsored by:

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