THE PROJECT

The transition from school to working life is often difficult for young people with special needs. Learning difficulties and other restrictions make many forms of training impossible — and without training the applicant has poor prospects in the labor market. But there is viable and meaningful work for these young people. The Fördercentrum Mensch & Pferd (Human & Horse Support Centre) trains them to become grooms — a qualification recognized within the industry. As long as they fulfill the requirement profile — reliability, perseverance and commitment — their placement chances are high. In the Fördercentrum, the horses are the focal point of work while also offering therapeutic benefit. To them it is irrelevant whether someone can express themselves well or not. But they certainly know if they’re being fed reliably and punctually and treated with care.

At the outset of the qualification measures there is a skills check, with learning in small groups, that is individual and practice-oriented. Over 18 months and multiple internships, the youths are prepared for work in various areas of riding sports before finally undergoing the test to become “FN-tested grooms” as certified by the German Riding Association. During training participants are housed in a boarding school, and there they get to grips with day-to-day activities. They also receive support from social workers along with medical and psychological assistance. With their qualification in hand, the young people are then actively placed by the association in equestrian facilities, where they live and work. These training measures are funded by the employment agency.

IMPACT

Fördercentrum Mensch & Pferd is a special place for special people. The project has found a unique means of enabling young people in Germany with special needs to live self-determined lives. To date, 149 youths have taken part. The majority of them are now in a position to live independently and earn a living with a meaningful occupation. Here the ideal of youth social participation has been realized. Their success in transitioning to the labor market is also testament to the association’s wide network, which encompasses contacts among all the relevant actors. And the association generally maintains contact with the youths for years after training has finished, following their professional development and offering support where necessary.