



Sparkassenverband Cooperates with the Umbrella Organisation Hospiz Österreich on Behalf of Sparkasse Group

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On 17 July 2007 Sparkassenverband signed a two-year cooperation agreement on behalf of the Sparkassen Group with the umbrella organisation Hospiz Österreich (referred to below as "Hospice Austria"). "The goal of this cooperation arrangement is to promote charitable hospice services in Austria and, in particular, in the province of Burgenland," said Gabriele Schneider, director of the Erste Bank branch in Eisenstadt during a press conference introducing this nation-wide project.

The aim of the cooperation is for the umbrella organisation Hospice Austria to create and maintain active associations in Austria's nine provinces (with a total of 200 different regional institutions) and to ensure permanent training and guidance to the voluntary staff. The central element of this sponsorship by the Sparkassenverband for the Sparkassen Group is to promote and support the essence of the voluntary hospice movement, which consists of accompanying, caring for and treating gravely ill individuals and their family members. The hospice movement itself has no nursing care component. Thus, it does not provide home care for the ill or home assistance, but can help arrange for these services to be set up.

The Sparkassen Group accompanies people throughout their financial life and helps them to make long-term provisions for the future. Since being established in 1819, Erste Bank und Sparkassen have sought to create a secure future for the society as a company dedicated to the common good. Besides its material business activities, it has always generated added value for society with charitable and socially minded activities. "As part of our company's responsibility to society, this cooperation will create a first permanent joint project for the entire Sparkassen Group. It conveys the founding idea of Erste Bank und Sparkassen and is part of our corporate social responsibility," explained Michael Jeserschek, director of the Oberwart branch of Erste Bank at the press conference.

In recent years, Hospizbewegung Burgenland (referred to below as "Burgenland Hospice Movement") has provided important incentives for attending to the needs of the dying and their family members. As so often in a project, what people want to do is juxtaposed with what they can do. "From the outset, what all of us wanted, and that we includes all committed members of the Management Board and the hospice groups, was to help implement the guiding principle of the hospice movement: 'A life with dignity to the very end'", explained Heinrich Kiss, chairman of the Management Board of the Burgenland Hospice Movement and medical director of Oberwart Hospital, at the press conference.

"The sole purpose of the cooperation arrangement is to create structures for promoting voluntary hospice services and for providing permanent training and guidance for these volunteers. This support has always been of great significance to Erste Bank und Sparkassen, all the more when it involves a regional commitment in Burgenland. This project emphasises once again the importance of our decentralised structures and our being firmly established in the various regions," Jeserschek continued.

"Training volunteers is the major goal of the Burgenland Hospice Movement. Our thanks to everyone who has gone through this demanding training and who makes him or herself available as volunteer staff," said Waltraut Kocaget, Managing Director of the Burgenland Hospice Movement. "Attending to the needs of the severely ill in the last phase of their lives and being there for them to talk to, shows great social consciousness and responsibility to society. The desire to do something is important. When it comes to our ability to do something, the care situations constantly put us to the test," Kocaget continued.

Volunteer services are provided free of charge but don't come without costs

It is an utmost duty to society to support the commitment of grassroots volunteers. "Qualification courses and training, official coordination and supervision, travel expenses, appropriate insurance protection, all this has to be financed in a reasonable way," Kiss explained.

"The objective is to integrate the hospice idea and hospice standards nationwide in the social and health-care system in Austria, wherever people live and die, because death is part of life.

Three things are essential in doing so. First, a binding concept and standards (i.e. an overall strategy). Secondly, reliable, long-term financing (i.e. planning certainty). Thirdly, a clear will (i.e. a willingness to move even more decisively from talk to action at all levels)", Kiss said.

Regional partnerships in addition to interregional cooperation

In addition to interregional cooperation, steps will be taken at regional level to forge further partnerships between Erste

Bank und Sparkassen and hospice organisations. For example, Erste Bank und Sparkasse will help to line up event venues and logistics, handle organisational tasks, get health coordinators (at district Sparkassen) and employees involved, and provide on-site support for hospice teams and financial support to regional hospice teams.

Almost a third of all Sparkassen have already forged ties with a hospice organisation in the region and a further third will forge such ties after the provincial association provides them with the name of a suitable hospice organisation. The remainder is currently cooperating at an interregional level.

Providing for a secure old-age is a subject everyone is talking about now, along with the aging of the population and the crisis in nursing care. Policymakers and government agencies are called on to act. Being there for the dying to the end of their lives is a humanitarian issue. In keeping with our mission statement, "In every relationship, people count," we want to support this commitment as best we can.