## Inclusion experienced in ventilator production

# SIEGENIA and AWORK are stepping up their cooperation

Raphael Weber, AERO site manager at SIEGENIA, is completely satisfied with the course of the first few weeks. „The AWORK employees have become well familiarised with their new tasks; you clearly notice this by the number of pieces increasing daily. They obviously like coming to us, enjoy working and have settled down well.“

Since the middle of January, initially four employees from AWORK have been coming daily to the factory in the Wilnsdorf Industrial Estate Lehnscheid, which has been a production site for the wall-mounted and facade ventilators from SIEGENIA for many years. As organisational unit of the AWO Siegen workshops, which belong to the AWO district association Siegen-Wittgenstein/Olpe, AWORK collates the offers of vocational rehabilitation of people with disabilities outside the Siegen workshops. „Our objective is to support people with disabilities in such a way that they will be able to participate in the general job market. In order to be able to control the necessary processes even better, we founded the new organisational unit AWORK two years ago and have since been able to deploy many people with disabilities to Siegerland companies“, according to Michael Dietermann, Pedagogy/Rehabilitation Management.

AWORK looks after plant-integrated workplaces and internships as well the supervision and support for the change into insurable employment relationships „Of course, we are especially happy when a company accepts one of our employees in a permanent employment relationship. This usually happens initially through an industrial internship and afterwards via an external workplace with supervision by our specialist personnel“, Michael Dietermann continued. „As a rule, companies repeatedly praise the high working motivation of our employees and the performance capacity and the great willingness to learn are also well received. People with disabilities enrich the corporate culture – we hear this repeatedly“, added Tim Sprengel, Head of Business Managment/Technology at AWORK, convinced. „The high motivation and the cheerfulness that these people bring into our partner companies are a positive side effect, which reinforces recognition and appreciation.“

#### Ergonomic workplaces created

Michael Heppner, AWORK on-site supervisor at SIEGENIA, can only confirm this. He is also in Wilnsdorf on a daily basis and ensures efficient procedures and good communication. The AWORK employees currently have their own working area in the production dept. Raphael Weber from SIEGENIA explained the backgrounds: „An independent workplace presented itself insofar that, with a glance at our Quality Control, we had recently shifted the more noise-intensive activities of our ventilator production to other premises. The resulting free area has created ideal framework conditions for the integration of the AWORK employees. We have set up the workplaces just as we would do for our own employees. We place great value on ergonomics, e. g. in the form of height adjustment, meaning that we don't have to take any special measures.“ added Tim Sprengel from AWO: „It is not absolutely necessary for our employees to have their own workplace. We generally try to integrate the disabled people into the corporate procedures as well as possible. In this way, they are able to relieve the specialist staff more easily.

SIEGENIA has supported the inclusion of disabled people in the working world for 50 years now. The commissioned work was previously carried out in the AWO workshops. On the occasion of a guided tour in a company with external workplaces, Raphael Weber came up with the idea of taking a similar path and intensifying the collaboration. „There are activities in which the employees of AWO can provide us with outstanding support - however, this outsourcing would be associated with high logistic expenditure. An integration in the factory is considerably more efficient,“ he explained. Impressed with the potential of possible collaboration, he initiated the first negotiations with AWORK; the implementation promptly followed. „I had just been working at AWORK for one week and consequently very new to the job when Raphael Weber phoned me. We mutually dedicated ourselves to this task and successfully promoted the project“, said Tim Sprengel, remembering the good collaboration.

#### Promising growth in the test phase

External jobs like at SIEGENIA are initially advertised internally by AWORK. The company also untertakes the selection of the applicants itself. And then the actual customer comes into play. „We initially supplied AWORK with components of which past experience had shown that they could easily be handled by disabled persons“, said Raphael Weber in hindsight. This procedure is also recommended from the perspective of AWORK. „For us, this is an outstanding training effect. We can train our employees and find out which aids they will potentially need“, described Tim Sprengel. Raphael Weber followed the number of pieces produced in the AWO workshops with anticipation: „A small growth was perceptible from day to day. During an on-site visit, it was clearly evident that the AWORK employees enjoyed doing their work. The whole thing makes a great impression!“

The start at SIEGENIA was also promising. The AWORK employees travel to Wilnsdorf independently by bus; currently one woman and three men. A fifth worker is to strengthen the team soon; the job is currently in the application phase at AWORK. The task of the AWORK employees, who are affected by varying degrees of disability, is currently the production of substructure groups for the wall-mounted ventilator AEROPAC, a compact sound absorbing ventilator for noise-polluted environments e. g. in the proximity of airports.

#### Complete assembly is also conceivable

"When the workflows have been fully established, it is conceivable for us that the AWORK staff, in the next step, undertake the complete assembly", Raphael Weber pictured potential perspectives. Tim Sprengel appeared to be optimistic with regard to this matter: „The workflows have already become very well established. Our experience with disabled people is that the learning curve rises slowly but consistently. When the taught knowledge has become consolidated, the workers keep their number of pieces consistent – regardless of what happens.“

SIEGENIA is approaching the equipment of the workplaces incrementally. Everything should be allowed to develop organically. Raphael Weber reported: „We have intentionally dispensed with digital material procurement for example, and want to to observe for the moment whether such a use would be feasible.“

As a trained specialist in pedagogy, Michael Heppner plays an important role in the familiarisation phase. It is planned that he will be on site at SIEGENIA daily during the first few months, the time intervals will later increase. „The communication has to be right. It is helpful if the supervisors have extensive knowledge concerning the specific workflows in the respective company. The fitter he himself is in production, the better the communication with the plants succeeds. We make sure of this" Tim Sprengel emphasised.

#### Creating a win-win situation

When the AWORK employees are familiar with their tasks and the new working environment, they can and should be deployed in other areas of the ventilator/fan/blower production at SIEGENIA. Michael Dietermann explained: „Such an extension of the task fields and working areas is to be welcomed and is ultimately the special nature of such collaboration. By taking over the niche work, our employees can relieve the specialists in the company perceptibly and enable the concentration on core competences. This is very interesting for the company economically.“ Raphael Weber agrees: „The project business in which we are particularly well represented with our ventilators/fans/blowers, is distinguished by frequently short-term orders which we have to quickly react to“

#### An expandable partnership

AWORK welcomes partner firms who offer their new employees a full-time job: „Underlying this is the rehabilitative concept. We want disabled people to develop their competence for vocational activities and be able to be integrated in the job market“, argued Michael Dietermann. Tim Sprengel added: „The model for which SIEGENIA has currently decided is the step towards the fixed employment of AWORK employees. We wish to point out in this context that a full integration is also financially attractive for our partner firms due to the state wage subsidies.“ Whether this will be the case for SIEGENIA is not yet absolutely clear, however, Raphael Weber emphasised: „The inclusion measures in our production dept. are planned on a lasting basis and are expandable from our perspective. For example, we can now imagine that, after successful training and familiarisation, more AWORK employees will follow.“

#### Captions

Image database: SIEGENIA

*Image I: SIE\_PW\_AWORK\_3457.jpg*

SIEGENIA has expanded the traditional inclusion of disabled people in the working world even more: since recently several employees of AWORK have been working in the production for the wall-mounted ventilator and facade ventilator.

*Image II: SIE\_PW\_AWORK\_3471.jpg*

As a trained specialist in pedagogy, Michael Heppner from AWORK (I.) ensures efficient procedures and good communication. Here he is supporting the AWO employee Maik Winnen in the familiarisation.

*Image III: SIE\_PW\_AWORK\_3467.jpg*

Like the other AWO employees, Carlos Mingas has become familiarised with his new tasks and has settled down well at SIEGENIA.

*Image IV: SIE\_PW\_AWORK\_3448.jpg*

If the workflows have been fully established, it is conceivable for SIEGENIA that AWORK staff undertake the complete assembly.

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