

## [Bahnhofsmission - More than just a room in the Hauptbahnhof](#)



The Bahnhofsmission in Düsseldorf is an important local charity supported by the British Business Club Düsseldorf.

Our local Bahnhofsmission is a voluntary organisation jointly run by the Evangelical Diakonie and the Catholic Association "IN VIA" in Düsseldorf.

Monique-Alexandra Kerslake and Committee member Geoffrey Catlin visited the Bahnhofsmission at Dusseldorf Hauptbahnhof on Tuesday 5th June 2018. The work of the mission and its importance in today's society was explained by our hosts Barbara Kempnich and Ute Langen (Diakonie Düsseldorf, Spendenservice).

Located just off the central concourse, adjacent to the "Trix Express" model railway, the Mission features two locations. Firstly a reception, meeting and relaxation area where needy individuals and travellers enjoy a welcoming point of contact. Secondly the mission feature is a unique special "Children's Lounge" with play and baby changing facilities. *Dusseldorf Hbf is one of many Bahnhofsmissions in NRW (24 in total), the largest Länder representation of its missions in Germany.*

### **Bahnhofsmission Figures 2017**

Distress, contacts with distressed persons: 34 400

special social problems: 22 600

acute financial problems: 8 400

mental illness: 15 000

Mobility Travellers: 9 200

Children travelling alone: 1 100 incl. Kids on Tour

Children's Lounge: 6 000

## **Engagement in Düsseldorf**

Two voluntary social service staff, 16 interns, 50 volunteers

## **Culture and the Local Community**

Lodging: Community Development and Engagement

- Festivals since 2015 (linked to the local area community)
- Quarterly walks since 2016
- Meetings and workshops on current topics EKISO, reconstruction KAP
- Art project Wunderkammern in the framework of "foreign countries in their own cities" ([www.vonfremdenlaendern.de](http://www.vonfremdenlaendern.de))
- Quartiersfest staged in late June with cooperation of various partners.

## **History**

The Bahnhofsmission was launched in Berlin in 1894 and became the world's first ecumenical organization where both Protestant and Catholic Church bodies organised the mission and worked together, as truly equal partners. The role was to help those in acute need, existential emergencies and to assist train travellers. From the outset, the missions were opened in the country's most important travel hubs. Düsseldorf's Bahnhofsmission was one of the first to open its doors during 1902. By 1910 over 50 missions were located at main railway stations across Germany. During the early years the relationship with the railway developed when representatives of the Missions point of contact with the needy was confined by the "Länderbahn" to the station platforms, mission workers each had to purchase their individual "Bahnsteig Karte" (Platform Tickets) before they could access those who needed their help and assistance! The "Bahnsteig" was deemed to be the best place available to make contact with the needy as they disembarked from trains.

During this earlier period of railway history (Epoch 1) working practices evolved and the Prussian regional state railway (K.P.E.V.) provided a room and free electricity in stations for the mission. The mission's role, based on its founding principles, evolved constantly to be relevant in continually changing times. Starting at a time when people were relocating from the countryside to the large cities, the mission's role was mainly helping women and children who had arrived in a totally different alien environment. The 1914-1918 war placed different needs on the mission involving returning troops and their family needs. refugees, amnesty convicts and emigrants

The Bahnhofsmission continued its role during the period of the national railway, the "Deutsche Reichsbahn" from its founding in 1920, helping the needy during the great recession period. Children, travelling workers and unemployed young people were among the most in need of the mission's help. This continued through until the National Socialists came into power, when a continual erosion of the mission's presence took place, culminating in all the Bahnhofsmissions being totally banned in 1939.

After 1945 the mission hurriedly reformed and returned to its original role in the British, US and, to a lesser degree, in the French sectors of Western Germany. The Soviet Sector maintained the 1939 ban on the Bahnhofsmission. The immediate post war role again placed huge demands on the mission as vast numbers of German citizens fled west from Ostprussia, Silesia etc. The DDR governing party, the SED, banned the Bahnhofsmissions throughout the communist era, but re-openings have taken place since unification, principally in Berlin, Sachsen Anhalt and Saxony. However, some significant gaps remain, including Dresden and Erfurt.

The mission worked alongside the newly formed "Deutsche Bundesbahn" from its formation during 1950. During the Cold War era new provisions for assisting travellers on "Inter-zone Trains" especially pensioners and citizens was introduced. Special arrangements were made to serve the many special trains operating to take DDR citizens to the Federal Republic, via the DDR, after being stranded in Czechoslovakia and Poland during 1989. Special reception areas were set up at the transit Border Stations in the Federal Republic. German unification also enabled the Mission to return to some former locations in Berlin, Saxony and Sachsen-Anhalt

Bahnhofsmission has provided help for the needy in an ever-changing world since 1894. An interesting account of working at a Bahnhofsmission in 1906 is available in German (E-Mail Geoff Catlin [catlin@online.de](mailto:catlin@online.de) for a copy.)

The Bahnhofsmission in Dusseldorf Hbf is open seven days a week. There are employees of the Diakonie and the Catholic Association IN VIA, who together run the mission. They do not ask for denomination, nationality or social status, they are simply there for the needy. Travellers and the needy can contact the

station missions, Mondays to Saturdays from 7 to 19 hrs. on site, on Sundays and public holidays from 11 to 19hrs.

The station missions help everyone, immediately, without registration, without having to fulfill conditions and is free.

Travelling: With information and assistance when entering, leaving and changing trains. With accommodation and overnight accommodation, wheelchair, luggage cart or lift. Or by accompanying children traveling alone\_ (Kids on Tour) .

In acute need: clothes damaged or lost. No cellphone. Without sleeping space. Hungry. Thirsty. Robbed. Injured. Sick. Weak.

In existential emergencies: Homeless. Addicted. Sick. Impoverished and Desperate

The mission is always looking for new volunteers to assist with its work in Dusseldorf and there are certainly occasions when English-speaking helpers are required.

If you are interested in assisting as a volunteer, donating or just bringing along cakes or coffee or other items for the mission to use then please contact:

Barbara Kempnich  
Bahnhofsmission  
Konrad-Adenauer-Platz 14  
40210 Düsseldorf  
Tel: 0211 36 28 28  
Fax: 0211 3 55 81 36  
Email: [bahnhofsmission@duesseldorf.de](mailto:bahnhofsmission@duesseldorf.de)

**See below for photos:**

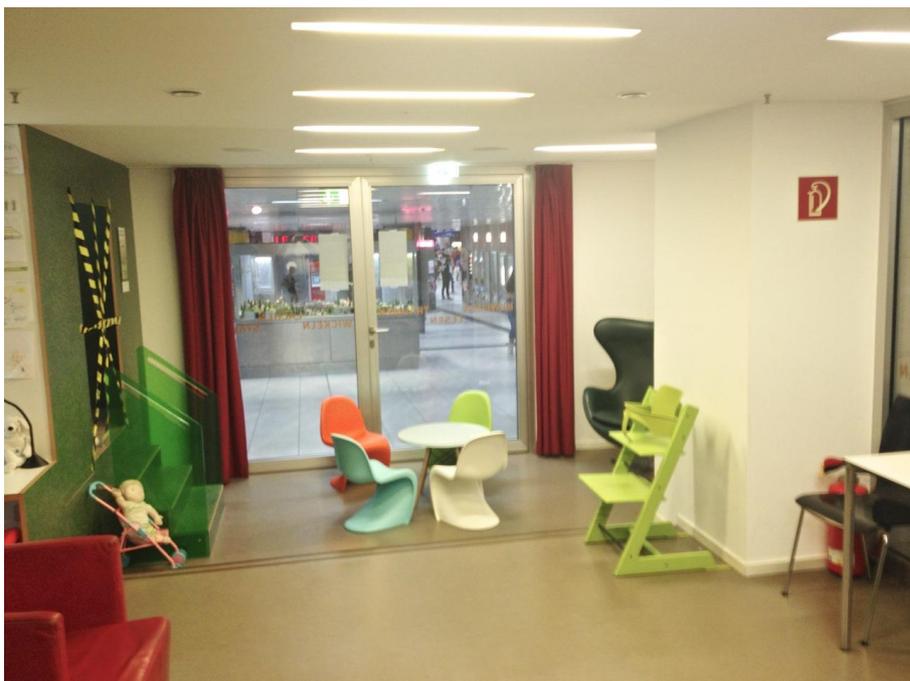
Left to Right: Barbara Kempnich and Ute Langen from Diakonie Düsseldorf, Spendenservice at the Bahnhofsmision, Düsseldorf Hauptbahnhof:



Children's Room in the Mission:



Children's Room in the Mission



Wunderkammern - The Bahnhofsmision Local Community Displays - created by local citizens from the Hauptbahnhof Quarter:



No customers for the Bahnhofsmission when the world's fastest working steam locomotive arrived at Dusseldorf Hbf for the first time at 23.00 on 9 June 2018. Former DR "VES-M Halle" High Speed Testing Locomotive 18 201 hauling a special 90th Anniversary Train "The Rheingold 1928-2018". (Magdeburg - Köln):

