

# **A collection of stories told by grant recipients**

**participating in «Bridging divides in conflict-affected communities to develop capacity for conflict sensitivity» and  
«Bridging divides in conflict-affected communities to ensure social cohesion» projects**



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## **Introduction**

Caritas Ukraine's mission is to develop traditions of charitable activities to overcome poverty, inequality, and social isolation by providing humanitarian aid, creating an effective system of social services in Ukraine, and promoting community development based on Christian moral and ethical values. Therefore, apart from providing social services and a huge amount of humanitarian aid, Caritas Ukraine has been supporting social cohesion in communities for over 5 years. During 2023, one of our project areas was small grants provision to organizations or self-organized groups operating in communities. The main purpose of the grants was to support activities contributing to the integration of IDPs into host communities, namely, the creation of social initiatives environments, psychosocial support services and measures, and conducting training sessions and seminars to raise awareness of conflicts and ways to overcome them.

This collection includes team stories of their projects, from the concept to implementation, implemented in 10 regions of Ukraine. Some of them are internally displaced persons, and the activity of assisting others and implementing social initiatives helped them find new senses and feel useful in the communities of their current residence.

Caritas supports CSOs, local self-government bodies, and self-organized groups to improve their capability to provide quality and continuous aid to war victims within communities where access to social services and assistance is limited. It is the support of such initiatives and organizations that contributes to interaction, civil society development, and aid localization realizing its purpose and target audience.

Such activities are crucial for the support of recently established organizations operating in small communities as these ensure sustainability and aid continuity not only for the most needy persons who have suffered because of the war, but also contribute to the community capacity, development of sustainable interactive networks, and creation of structures and systems to assist people within the community.

**f. Andriy Nahirniak,**  
**Director of the Network and Identity Directorate**  
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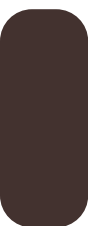
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## Story 1. Family Health Center “Green Energy”

- Local organization: Caritas Kolomyia
- Project: Family health centre «Green energy»
- Region: Ivano-Frankivsk
- Community: Horodenkiv community, Soroky village

**The project objective:** the Family Health Center “Green Energy” was established to help residents of the Soroky village and forcibly displaced persons maintain health, competencies, and ecological relations via social cohesion.

**When writing the story, employees of the Caritas Kolomyia CF spoke with Horodnycha Svitlana Andriivna.**

This story started not with the application but with the relocation...

Svitlana Horodnycha lived in the Novopetrykivka village, Donetsk region. After the invasion, she and her family moved to the Horodenka community, Ivano-Frankivsk region. However, she did not abandon the active life she led before. Svitlana volunteered at Caritas Horodenka for more than a year and held training sessions for children of IDPs and locals. She claims Caritas pulled her out of depression and even helped her live on as she has lost a job: her school, where she was a chemistry teacher and a head of activities, did not function even online, and she was used to constant hustle.

Ms. Svitlana held her first event in the children’s environment on her birthday. Later, she moved to a shelter in Soroky village, where residents did not take immigrants kindly. Ms. Svitlana thinks that this could be caused by them being placed in a local kindergarten re-purposed for a temporary shelter.

Ms. Svitlana sought unity, but at the same time she saw that the children in Soroky had nothing to do and nowhere to go, and there were no leisure options. When she learned







about the mini-grant, she got enthusiastic about the idea. An interesting fact: Ms. Svitlana's team consisted of her mother, daughter, son, and Ms. Anna from the Luhansk region.

When implementing the project, the most difficult part was to establish a civil society organization, open accounts, and manage finances. There were some dark moments but Caritas and her team helped Svitlana to overcome everything.

### **Family Health Center "Green Energy" is a project for children and more. It is for leisure.**

Ms. Svitlana held her first event on June 1, on Children's Day, even before the project started as she could not deny the children a holiday. She and her mother baked sweets and bought minimal supplies for workshops at their own expense. Svitlana was delighted to see the number of children and parents who came.



Nowadays, up to 20 participants come every time, which is quite a large number by the village standards. A table with 12 games (soccer, air hockey, etc.), a tent, cozy sacks, tables for children to work, a speaker used for short exercises, a printer, and paper were purchased for classes. Events take place in the shelter yard or indoors if the weather is not favorable.

According to Ms. Svitlana, the ice moved. **After the workshops on making a photo frame using natural material, the saleswoman in the store shared: "We all saw what you did, it's so nice, children needed it."**



Within the project framework, they organized a family picnic challenge “Let’s learn to rest properly”, when everyone had a task related to a healthy lifestyle. They also held a family holiday “Strong, brave, and agile”.

Ms. Svitlana shares that the project made her learn something new, become stronger, and changed the relationship between the locals and the shelter residents for the better. The most important part is the grateful feedback from the villagers and the children’s smiles.

Ms. Svitlana became a leader for the Soroky village community, who took responsibility for cohesion by working with children.



## Story 2. Equipping office premises for a volunteer group

- Local organization: Caritas Kamianske
- The organization implementing the grant: Village Society of Greeks “Great Janisol” SCO, We Scale the Good SCO
- Project: Equipping office premises for a volunteer group
- Region: Dnipropetrovsk
- Community: Vilnohirsk Territorial Community

**The project objective:** *to equip the existing premises for the IDP volunteer group*

**When writing the story, employees of Caritas Kamianske CF talked to Andriy Halabuzar, head of the Village Society of Greeks “Great Janisol” SCO, and Lilia Khrustaliova, head of We Scale the Good SCO.**

It is the story of interaction, help, friendship, and making a dream come true. It would be incorrect to mention only one civil society organization operating on the territory of the Vilnohirsk community as here, in Vilnohirsk, the volunteer movement, and civil society in general are actively developing. Currently, one of the most proactive ones are Village Society of Greeks “Great Janisol” CSO and We Scale the Good SCO.

Village Society of Greeks “Great Janisol” CSO was registered in 2017 in Velyka Novosilka village, Volnovakha district, Donetsk region. The organization had 140 employees at that time. When the full-scale invasion of Ukraine began, the Village Society of Greeks “Great Janisol” CSO and about 50 of its members moved to Vilnohirsk. Nowadays, there are four people in the Janisol team, including Andriy Halabuzar, who is the head of the organization. Previous “Great Janisol” projects were related to security and implemented in Velyka Novosilka village, namely, the installation of video surveillance cameras and arranging a “green room” in the local police station for psychologists to work with children or adolescents who have suffered from violence. Following their movement to Vilnohirsk, Janisol’s team met Lilia Khrustaliova, an active volunteer, who was also forced to leave her native Yampil village, Kramatorsk district, Donetsk region. The volunteer group headed by Ms. Lilia actively supports internally displaced persons in the community, finds opportunities to help those in need, and cooperates with other activists, public and charitable organizations, as well as local entrepreneurs. The geography of organizations and activists interacting with volunteers is quite wide – these are the Good Deeds of Ukraine CSO from Pitikhatky, the Seventh-day Adventist Church from Krynychky, Oksana Yesko from Dnipro, Caritas Kamianske CF from Kamianske, Access Point CSO, Olena Novikova and Volodymyr Melnyk from Vilnohirsk. The local government gave the activists free premises in the city council building, where representatives of the volunteer association could distribute humanitarian aid to internally displaced persons and distressed persons. In 2023, Ms. Lilia and her team of 15 volunteers (IDPs and locals) decided to register a legal entity. Then the Great Janisol CSO assisted the volunteer group, and together they managed to submit a grant application. Although the process of registering a volunteer organization was long,





a new We Scale the Good CSO was registered already at the beginning of September 2023.

**The initiative of two civil society organizations was to equip premises – a volunteer hub.** The project provided for the purchase of furniture and office equipment (a laptop and a multifunctional device). The equipped space has become a modern center for the provision of humanitarian aid, social support, and coordination of internally displaced

persons, assistance to the families of fallen heroes, large families, and distressed persons.

**“This project is aimed at preventing and eliminating conflicts between residents and IDPs,”** says Janisol’s head. Since the volunteer group has been operating for more than a year, the activists have experience working with the community’s population in need. Apart from the constant humanitarian aid provision within the “Bridging Divides” project, they held several joint events with Caritas Kamianske for social cohesion in the Vilnohorsk community, in particular, Mother’s Day and Children’s Day.

The Janisol team and the volunteer group had an even more ambitious idea – to create a public center to unite all volunteer and civil society organizations in Vilnohirska. This required alternative premises to be found. Previous cooperation with local authorities came in handy. Volodymyr Vasylenko, the city mayor, supported the initiative and the activists – and provided the former dormitory for the future community center. Utility services, caring city residents, volunteers, and members of public organizations helped to organize and carry out a large-scale cleaning of the premises. Such joint gatherings, as well as holidays, are important to unite residents and internally displaced persons. “We are already seeing a positive effect,” says Ms. Lilia. – If at first the residents, and also some settlers, were negative about the activities of the volunteer group, they did not believe that our organization would last for a long time and knew nothing of the aid provision terms, now there are much fewer such rumors. More and more people are joining our initiatives. Nowadays, the locals see that the IDPs wish to integrate, to change something, and to prevent conflicts.”

In the photo above: equipped premises – volunteer center of the We Scale the Good SCO

The Village Society of Greeks “Great Janisol” CSO rented three rooms in the dormitory, carried out repairs, installed furniture and office equipment, and also bought







an accumulator and heaters. Janisol immediately transferred the premises to the newly established civil society organization for use. And on September 8, 2023, the official opening of the volunteer hub of We Scale the Good CSO took place.

Both Mr. Andriy and Ms. Lilia believe that the grant project implementation has a great positive impact on social cohesion within the community. "When the project started, one

civil society organization was declared, and at the end, there were two already", notes the Janisol head. "And if we look to the future, there will be a large association of the public sector in the Vilnohirsk community."

The leaders of both organizations consider the psychological support of war victims and the socialization of children to be priority directions crucial for the development of social cohesion in the Vilnohirsk community. Psychological training and individual consultations with psychologists are required today (and be mandatory in the future) for people returning from the war, those who have lost relatives, and those whose family members live in the zone of military operations or the occupied territories. Various classes, activities, and workshops for children of residents and internally displaced persons will help to avoid conflicts and strengthen cohesion.





### Story 3. Inclusive hikes “We are here for a reason”

- Local organization: Caritas Zhovkva
- The organization implementing the grant: On3Wheels. Affordable trips CSO
- Project: Inclusive hikes “We are here for a reason”
- Region: Lviv
- Community: Chervonograd Territorial Community

**The project objective** is to help participants of inclusive trips (four people with disabilities and volunteers) experience safety, community, and interaction during four inclusive mountain hikes, which will contribute to their psychological stabilization and support.

**When writing the story, employees of Caritas Zhovkva CF spoke with Oleksandr Lutsyk, the project head.**

By helping others, we help ourselves...

On3Wheels CSO has been engaged in inclusive mountain hiking since 2016. Its team consists of 10 self-fulfilled individuals who, in addition to their main job, devote part of their time to serving their neighbors. More than 1,000 involved volunteers during the entire period of existence of the organization.

The war caused the number of people with disabilities to increase. Therefore, it is





important to study the basics of cooperation in an inclusive society. The On3Wheels team strives to create conditions of a friendly atmosphere of trust during inclusive hikes where every participant can show their knowledge and abilities. The feeling of safety and co-creation during the hike can inspire young people to take active actions and provide them with the skills of social interaction as one of the tools to change the world and themselves for the better.



### **This initiative contributes to several important issues:**

**Raising awareness and training:** Inclusive mountain hikes increase public awareness of the needs and opportunities of people with disabilities. They are not simply entertainment but also an educational tool to distribute information about inclusion and equality.

**Developing active citizenship:** volunteer participants learn to be active citizens and develop their social skills and empathy. This encourages them to take part in various charitable and social initiatives.




**Strengthening solidarity:** volunteer participants realize that their combined efforts can have a positive impact on society by promoting mutual aid and solidarity. This solidarity can be used to solve other social problems and provide support to those in need.

**Increasing self-awareness and self-determination:** for people with disabilities, this initiative can be a chance to discover new horizons, improve self-awareness and sense of self-worth, and also to find their place in society.

*Inclusive mountain hikes not only fulfill dreams and promote social integration, but also facilitate ideas of active citizenship, education, and strengthening solidarity in society.*

The impact of such initiatives and projects can be long-term and can



potentially transform society by making it more open, fair, and inclusive for all its members. A psychological impact can also be highlighted, as such projects show people with disabilities that their needs and rights are important and should be taken into account, thus, they can improve self-esteem and self-belief.

On3Wheels CSO believes that its project has the potential for further development and expanding its impact on social cohesion in Ukrainian communities.

### **Their plans include the following development areas:**

**Expanding geography:** involving not only locals but also volunteers from other regions of Ukraine in inclusive hikes and trips. This will involve residents from affected communities and expand the impact to more people.

**Development of partnerships:** the civil society organization will try to strengthen cooperation with local civil society organizations, veteran organizations, social support centers, and other stakeholders. This will allow them to join efforts and implement a wider range of programs and activities aimed at social cohesion.

**Training programs development:** the CSO plans to develop and implement training programs aimed at understanding and developing an inclusive society. These can be training sessions, seminars, workshops, and other forms of educational activities to help people realize the meaning of inclusion and active participation in public life.

**Creating a support network:** creating a support network and sharing experiences between participants of hikes and trips. This will allow for continuous support, mutual learning, and assistance.

### **During the surveys, the participants of the inclusive hikes “We are here for a reason” project evaluated the latter as follows:**

- All participants noted the relevance and benefit of participation in hikes;
- 100% felt being respected by the organization’s employees when attending events;
- 95% of respondents noted that the project’s activities made them meet new friends; 90% increased their interaction with other community members.
- When commenting on the formats of future events, the participants noted that they would be interested in joining: hikes with military personnel; communication training with people with disabilities; and obtaining theoretical information about inclusion.
- The only recommendation the participants of the hikes made was to increase their frequency.



## Story 4. «SMACHNO»

- Local organization: Caritas Zhovkva
- The organization implementing the grant: Religious community of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, UGCC, in Lopatyn, Chervonograd district, Lviv region
- Project: SMACHNO
- Region: Lviv
- Community: Lopatyn Territorial Community

**The project objective:** *manufacturing dry soups and meat products for long-term storage (stew, canned meat, pates) by a volunteer group operating at the KNYGLI social kitchen involving IDPs to gather food kits.*

**When writing the story, employees of Caritas Zhovkva CF spoke with the reverend Vasyl Zhdan.**

The Lopatyn religious community started implementing various projects back in 2017, with the main focus on social and educational initiatives. These projects include the KNYGLI social kitchen, where dumplings and semi-finished products are made, the English language school "YES", a candle workshop, as well as the catechetical youth space "Territory of free development TViR", involving about 200 children from the parish, as well as FAJNO workshop, where they are engaged in printing and branding clothes within the initiative framework.

**SMACHNO is an initiative aimed at active involvement and establishing unity in the community.** The main project objective is a responsible attitude towards society and the promotion of mutual understanding and cooperation between different population groups. Both residents, who have long been part of this community, and internally displaced persons, who came from other affected regions, participate in the project. There is a belief that each person has something valuable to contribute to the overall development and maintenance of public welfare.

The idea to make dry soups arose during the blackout times. When providing humanitarian aid to the IDPs in the parish, many of them asked for instant products such as noodles and other similar dishes. This made me think about making soup kits as they are healthier and more nutritious. This has some advantages:

**Long-term storage:** dry soups can be stored for a long time, which makes them ideal for emergencies and people with limited access to fresh products.

**Easy to transport:** dry soups are usually easier to transport and store, which makes them a practical choice for aid distribution.

**Nutritional value:** dried vegetables, mushrooms, cereals, and other healthy ingredients can be added to dry soups, increasing their nutritional value and taste.

**Cooking speed.**



### **This initiative was intended to aid:**

- People living in the parish shelter (12 people).
- IDPs living in the community (52 people).
- Single elderly people who are residents of the community (15 people).
- Volunteer group at KNYGLI social kitchen (25 elderly women).

When implementing the SMACHNO initiative, the organizers cooperated with local entrepreneurs and businesses. Their donations of food, vegetables, and meat were of great importance. This support allowed us to provide quality and tasty food to those who needed it most. Cooperation with local businesses is a great example of how a community can unite to achieve a goal. Partnership with the business community continues, so the project organizers believe that together they can achieve even greater results in supporting their community and reaching common goals.



SMACHNO provides for further operation and expansion of activities, including the following issues:

- **Scaling up the volunteer movement involving IDPs for self-reliance:** attracting more volunteers, including internally displaced persons, and allowing them to actively participate in projects and initiatives.
- **Supporting distressed persons:** to expand activities by providing help and support to people experiencing difficult life circumstances.
- **Participation in charity fairs:** active participation in charity fairs, when the funds raised will be used to support people from socially vulnerable groups through food kits, hygiene products, and medicines provision.

The religious community also plans to open a House of Mercy for the elderly, and a bakery.

## Story 5. Together

- Local organization: Caritas Kyiv
- The organization implementing the grant: Religious community (Parish) of the Nativity of the Most Holy Theotokos Exarchy, UGCC
- Project: Together
- Region: Kyiv
- Community: Irpin

**The project objective:** to promote social ties and cohesion development, to overcome isolation among representatives of vulnerable population groups of the Irpin Territorial Community through a focus group creation (15 people), which will function as a self-help group based on the parish of the Nativity of the Most Holy Theotokos.



**When writing the story, employees of Caritas Kyiv CF spoke with Marta Yatsyshyn, head of the Together project.**

When the full-scale invasion of the Russian Federation on the territory of Ukraine began in 2022 and after the Irpin Territorial Community was de-occupied, reverend Myroslav Latynnyk and reverend Vitaliy Voietsa together with the parishioners of the religious community of the Nativity of the Most Holy Theotokos in Irpin, Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church, have been actively volunteering to help all war victims and restore the territorial community: they provide humanitarian aid to the residents and IDPs, send aid to soldiers and residents of the front-line territories, actively cooperate with the Irpin City Council, Caritas-Kyiv CF, the "Knights of Columbus" community, Patriarchal Foundation "Mudra Sprava" CO, St. Joseph's Center for Development and Psychological Assistance (Kyiv), GURT Resource Center, and other organizations and foundations, as well as foreign donors.

Together project is a series of Saturday meetings for a group of 15 people involving various vulnerable categories of the Irpin Territorial Community, united by their desire to get support and assistance, as well as to find internal resources to live on and improve their future. These are IDPs, Irpin residents, as well as local volunteers – all those who somehow suffered from the war, lost relatives, homes, and jobs, who are waiting for their relatives from the front line or abroad, who survived the occupation; who have emotionally burned out, and are worried about enemy air raids.

The project's target audience is extremely complex, so the program had to be carefully tailored and comprehensive. At first, the organizers tried to create an atmosphere of acceptance, tolerance, and openness, so that people who have experienced a lot of pain can find an "island of safety", relax and rest, and at the same time receive support and understanding. Since the main principle of dealing with trauma is that a person heals together with another one sharing a similar experience, the related rules have been set for a



self-help group, where communication is open, confidential, and based on the "peer-to-peer" principle.

The project's professional block of help included psychological and emotional stabilization sessions by a crisis psychologist, art therapy sessions, and art coaching sessions contributing to the ecological and safe processing of traumatic experiences, reducing anxiety and emotional tension, and, as a result, finding mental balance and internal resources to live on.

Отже, участь у проєкті – це своєрідна подорож знайомства із собою та іншими людьми. Therefore, participation in the project is a kind of journey of learning about yourself and other people in the group, sharing tears and laughter, and new feelings and impressions. It was crucial for the organizers not just to hold a few individual events but to achieve integrity and allow a positive experience of support, unity, and cohesion to thrive. Thus, an additional positive component of the program was joint leisure time, in particular, a trip to Bohuslav and Stebliv, and also a workshop at the Lviv Chocolate Workshop.

The biggest challenge was working with a group that had a difficult traumatic experience. Almost everyone cried when they started talking about themselves (even just at the presentation stage). So, it was not easy for the organizers and participants, first of all emotionally, to open up, communicate, and get out of isolation and thoughts about the past. Every time the participants cried less and smiled more, and this became important evidence of the psychological and emotional state improvement, the reduction of the traumatic experience, and social isolation among the project participants. Finally, there appeared

a group where everyone could be open, sincere, and heard. Moreover, the participants gained knowledge, skills, and experience in testing various psychological emotional, and art therapy methods, which they can use in their lives, and families, and share with their friends. For example, some participants have already shared that they use the "Butterfly Hug" exercise during air raid alerts or nervous situations at work, and are also willing to share the experience of creating and holding self-help groups, which will allow them to continue to maintain the group or start similar groups in other environments. Spreading the experience of the project participation

and creating similar groups in other territorial communities in all cities of Ukraine would be the best project outcome.

It is crucial to note that the project had a positive effect on community cohesion. The project participants got to know each other and became friends, have the desire to continue meeting and seek to direct the jointly acquired resource to support and help others. For



example, they have already jointly prepared souvenirs for wounded soldiers in hospitals for the St. Nicholas Day and Christmas. Some of these souvenirs were sold at the Christmas fair and the proceeds were donated to support the Armed Forces of Ukraine or war victims.

When the project started, the community residents looked at the initiative in detail, probably because the project involves methods that are not yet widespread among Ukrainians. On the other hand, the project became a breath of fresh air for the community, a place of rest and leisure. For example, after an art therapy session, when participants worked with semolina, they shared that they had not had such leisure time in a very long time. Participants began to meet outside the project, to support each other, and started a chain reaction of unity, which will last for sure.

### **Feedback from the Together project participants**

- "If possible, I would like another meeting with a priest–psychologist"
- "Service provision was excellent"
- "The organizers managed everything at 5+"
- "Very good services"

## **Story 6. Social cohesion in the Volochysk community. Conflict prevention and resolution**

- Local organization: Caritas Khmelnytsky
- The organization implementing the grant: KALINA Foundation SCO
- Project: Social cohesion in the Volochysk community. Conflict prevention and resolution
- Region: Khmelnytsky
- Community: Volochysk Territorial Community

**The project objective:** *to bring together and unite different social groups in the community through the psychological stabilization of IDPs and residents. The goal is achieved through environment creation and conducting a series of psychological training and art therapy classes for internally displaced persons and residents.*

**When writing the story, employees of Caritas Khmelnytsky CF spoke with Inna Humeniuk, the chair of the board of the KALINA Foundation SCO.**

When a full-scale invasion began, KALINA FOUNDATION CSO could not just sit and do



nothing, thus, already on February 25, 2022, they created their small team. During the first weeks, they actively rallied, organized the weaving of camouflage nets, looked for housing for IDPs, and announced the gathering of food and essentials for people who fled the war and evacuated to the Volochysk community.

In April 2022, they officially registered KALINA Foundation SCO. This was a certain response to the challenges brought by the wartime in our country. The SCO's mission is to help those most in need of protection and support: women and girls, children, the elderly, people with disabilities, and orphans. For more than a year, the organization has been implementing various initiatives, namely: humanitarian and psychological assistance for the locals and IDPs.



### **During the SCO's existence, it participated in:**

- "Supporting rural women and girls affected by the conflict" project in October 2022. The project involved women volunteers from four communities of the region, its target audience was rural women, including IDPs. A series of "Own business" training sessions was held on the territory of the Khmelnytsky region.
- "Advocacy support for IDPs in the western regions of Ukraine" project to support women from IDP families, October 2022 – May 2023.

Usually, the activities of the organization are volunteer and supported by local entrepreneurs.

In the spring of 2023, they tried to get a grant from Caritas Ukraine at the local branch level, Caritas Khmelnytsky CF. Only three winners, including us, had the opportunity to implement the «Bridging divides in conflict-affected communities to develop capacity for conflict sensitivity» grant project. After all, we lacked equipment and materials for high-quality events.

After receiving a grant, we implemented several psychological training sessions for adults and children (both locals and IDPs) in Volochysk dedicated to overcoming conflicts among the population. This initiative arose due to the forced displacement of many families to the Volochysk community and the natural increase in the level of anxiety and stress among the locals and IDPs.

Following a long-term living together in the community, being under the influence of emotions and general tension, people can react more aggressively, thereby provoking conflict situations. After all, misunderstanding and ignorance of the rules of behavior in conflict situations resulted in irreversible consequences destroying relationships, both in the family and with strangers. Accordingly, this led to a decreased level of cohesion and mutual understanding in the community.

To improve trust and dialogue skills, and strengthen ties between groups in need, repre-

representatives of the KALINA Foundation CSO developed the project **“Social cohesion in the Volochysk community. Conflict prevention and resolution”**. Namely: creating the environment and conducting a series of psychological training and art therapy classes for internally displaced persons and residents.

First of all, the project implementation began with the planning of actions, distribution of duties and responsibilities, and a procurement plan development. Then groups of event participants were set. Population monitoring was done earlier, and the audience’s interest was quite high. Therefore, within the project implementation, a series of psychological training was organized at a new, higher quality level involving professionals.

During the project implementation, there were certain difficulties, but they were minor and we resolved them immediately. For example, when a new flip chart was delivered, the item appeared to be damaged and had to be promptly replaced. When buying a projector, we consulted about the characteristics and model, and not all sellers wanted to provide registration documents and participate in the tender. When setting the list of participants, we faced the fact that men refused group classes, but later changed their minds and attended events, which became a pleasant surprise to them. Another thing was that not everyone agreed to be photographed, so in some photo reports on social networks, faces had to be retouched.

To monitor the need for psychological training, we cooperated with the Council of IDPs at the city council (representatives of our organization are members of this council) and the UGCC parish in the community. All training sessions were held on the premises of the INVOL Center and provided free due to the partnership with the Alina Koval EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATION. Also, during the project implementation, we mostly cooperated with local entrepreneurs who have good reviews and a set reputation.

This project implementation has a positive impact, especially on children, as such classes are not often held in the community. A pleasant bonus for the organizers was positive feedback from parents given immediately after the training. In general, after each event, we received good feedback and new requests from people wishing to participate in the next training. However, not all those willing were able to attend events within the project, as the number of participants was limited.

People’s reaction to the project was mostly positive from the very beginning. Given that the level of anxiety and aggressiveness has increased over the previous year, not all people and children know how to control themselves and behave correctly during disputes. Currently, there is no open space in the community for communication and holding such events. First of all, the organized training sessions not only had a positive effect on the general condition of the participants but also allowed everyone to find new friends and like-minded people. It is worth quoting the conclusion from the questionnaire after the





training sessions as an example.

The training participants were given knowledge about the concept of “conflict”, they realized the consequences of conflict situations, behavior in a conflict, and how to control one’s emotions, as well as considered the difference between manipulation and persuasion, and practiced their skills.

**Based on the feedback, we can conclude that the project implementation allowed us to:**

- inform the participants about the conflict concept and its causes;
- help people develop the correct behavior to prevent conflict;
- develop communication skills, patience, and tolerance towards people;
- recognize the individual’s rights to autonomy and independence.

KALINA Foundation CSO will be looking forward to new opportunities and projects to participate.

It is planned to organize thematic screenings of films with further discussion shortly.

Several educational information projects for children and adults of the Volochysk community are planned. Organizing thematic photo exhibitions (perhaps traveling around the Khmelnytsky region). In the future, we would like to continue holding psychological training sessions and art therapy for adults and children. The team has plans and ideas, and we will transform them into future projects. We would like to implement them, but they lack finances, so we are unable to implement them on our own currently.

**Participants of the “Social cohesion in the Volochysk community. Conflict prevention and resolution” project completed a questionnaire, which results can be briefly presented as follows:**

- 97% noted that the event was quite useful for them. 80% of participants assessed the event relevance as “definitely relevant”, while another 20% chose the option “rather relevant”.
- 87% of respondents noted that the project’s activities allowed them to meet new friends and improve interaction with other members of the community.
- The future activities that respondents are interested in include training on psychological topics and creative workshops. More than half of the survey participants claimed they would be happy to attend events similar to these.

**In the recommendation field, respondents expressed their gratitude.**



## Story 7. Happy team united to act – Krasnosilka today

- Local organization: Caritas Odesa
- The organization implementing the grant: Youth development vector CSO
- Project: Happy team united to act – Krasnosilka today
- Region: Odesa
- Community: Krasnosilka Rural Territorial Community

**The project objective:** to increase the socialization level of affected families with children from among IDPs and residents experiencing a difficult life situation, single mothers and large families, and to expand their potential for sensitivity to stress and conflicts by creating a safe and friendly environment – a children's entertainment (developmental) playground in the "residential district" of Krasnosilka Village, Odesa District, Odesa Region.

**When writing the story, the employees of the Caritas Odesa UGCC BF spoke with Ms. Ksenia, a member of the "Youth Development Vector" SCO, Krasnosilka Rural Territorial Community, Odesa Region; Ms. Yevgenia, a communications manager of the Krasnosilka village council; Ms. Olena, deputy head of the Krasnosilka village council.**



*The "Happy Team United to Act – Krasnosilka Today" project is about the creation of a safe and friendly place – a children's entertainment (developmental) playground in the residential area of Krasnosilka, Odesa district, Odesa region to increase the socialization level of affected families with children from among IDPs and residents experiencing a difficult life situation, single mothers, and large families, and to expand their potential for sensitivity to stress and conflicts.*

*Ksenia and her team constantly monitor topics and issues that concern people. They do this to improve life in the community and unite residents, IDPs, and repatriates.*

*"Perhaps those locals who are not well-off, those who came to our community and learned they need to pay attention to an issue that is somehow material, the playground, and to create there such an atmosphere of benevolence and unity so that people could further communicate with each other. Because every person's natural desire is to live in society but not to be isolated from it. There are not enough such places, especially since the territory of the community is extensive and we have such an area of two-story buildings with a large*



*number of residents. We wish to improve their living in that area given there are many IDPs there. We thought this idea would be the best. It is the place where both locals and people who have come to the community will be able to share their problems and joys and reduce the stress we all live with nowadays.».*

Studying the local community needs and conducting a survey among parents and children, both locals and IDPs, allowed the team to identify social, cultural, and infrastructural elements of problems and wishes.

Ksenia believes that people who are forced to leave their homes because of the war have various social and humanitarian problems. Loss of contact with relatives results in loneliness and isolation, loss of home and family – trauma and stress. Difficulties in a job search complicated integration into a new environment.

**For a gradual and seamless integration into the community, IDPs need help and support from the public, professionals, and authorities.**

Ksenia believes that the idea of setting up a playground has a socially important character – there are not enough places for children to play and exercise physically in the densely populated area of the village, which is commonly called a “residential area” – a complex of two-story apartment buildings where a large number of families with children reside. IDP families with children, many of whom have nowhere to return, found their new homes in this area.

The project team includes experienced professionals in social work with children, psychologists, sports coaches, and holiday organizers, who care for the Krasnosilka territorial community.

The enthusiasm and professionalism of each team member ensured the successful project implementation and the achievement of the goals set. Members of the initiative group can boast of their experience in the implementation of organizational measures and financial support; creating a favorable environment for the development, learning, and self-fulfillment of young people in the community side by side with adults, thus increasing social cohesion.

The grant implementation was started with the transparent purchase of a playground; informing about the availability of participation of IDP children and residents in events; organizing joint events involving residents of the “residential area”, including IDP families, the public, representatives of the village council to arrange the site after the playground installation; organizing sports events, group games, and entertainment for war-affected people to strengthen their physical and mental health, recover lost skills and abilities, as well as develop new ones, social adaptation; determining the need for the aid by psychologists, lawyers, social workers



of local self-government bodies and the Starosty district when communicating with IDPs.

This site is located in a residential area with 1,500 residents, 500 of whom are children who come with their parents and grandparents.

Three events for children were held on the playground, a tennis table, and billiards were installed, and coaches held sports competitions with children.

Ksenia plans to organize groups including psychologists of the “Wings of the Future” project gathering for a cup of coffee on the site.

“As of today, IDPs have already relaxed a little, and started to contact with the locals, so such measures will be relevant.”

**The following events have already been held at the site:**



- 21.08. The event “Bright Childhood” with aqua grime and soap bubbles aimed at the social adaptation of IDP children with local children.
- 22.08. Competitive games to strengthen physical and mental health.
- 23.08. The Sports Day program aimed at uniting different groups of children to establish communication between their parents and interaction of people with their environment.
- 24.08. The creative event “Painting Ukraine” aimed to create the grounds for peaceful coexistence within the community and support vulnerable groups.
- 25.08. Competitive games to strengthen physical and mental health.
- 26.08. A workshop on making balloon figurines to strengthen mental health, restore lost skills and abilities, as well as develop new ones aimed at social adaptation.

- 27.08. The game program “Visiting Friends” aimed at cohesion, strengthening community peaceful coexistence, and developing communication skills.

*“This is the first friendly, entertaining, and developing children’s playground within walking distance. The chosen site is already popular for walking and socializing, the area is equipped with a convenient playground. This playground helps children and adults spend time usefully – children communicate with peers and develop their physical skills and abilities, and adults make new friends, communicate and socialize more, and participate in children’s creative development. Residents, the government, members of SCOs, and creative coaches are involved in the project”, Ksenia’s opinion.*

Given certain circumstances, people have become more private and it is very difficult for them to confide. The most important thing in this project is the inclusion of everyone:





you can be either indifferent or involved. Some were skeptical at the project start, then they developed trust, some trusted from the very beginning, and some just wanted to participate.

Ms. Natalia, who came from the Ochakiv district of the Mykolaiv region about a year ago, may be an example. She stayed at home as long as she could, until the neighbor's house was bombed. Natalia moved to Krasnosilka with her children: a seventeen-year-old daughter and a nine-year-old son. They managed to adapt surprisingly quickly. Children went to hobby groups and meetings and found new friends. Currently, she is a member of an initiative group holding events for children within the framework of the "Youth Development Vector" project.

Therefore, the practice of conducting various social and humanitarian activities in the community shows residents' involvement in the initiatives by the civil society organizations and authorities aimed at helping IDPs.

**During the surveys, the participants of the events of the "Happy Team United to Act – Krasnosilka Today" project evaluated the latter as follows:**

- 89% of respondents rated the event as "really useful", and 11% – as "fairly useful".
- The participants noted the relevance of the event topics for them and the convenience of the event organization;
- 95% felt being respected by the organization's employees when attending events;
- 95% of respondents noted that the project's activities made them meet new friends; 89% increased their interaction with other community members.
- Participants' comments on the future event formats proved that they would be interested in a charity fair.

## Story 8. Social service in Bukovyna. Children environment

- Local organization: Caritas Chernivtsi
- The organization implementing the grant: The religious community of the parish of the Holy Great Prince Volodymyr and Princess Olga, Equal of the Apostles, Chernivtsi Diocese UGCC, Vashkivtsi, Vyzhnytsky district, Chernivtsi region
- Project: Social service in Bukovyna. Children environment
- Region: Chernivtsi
- Community: Vashkivtsi



**The project objective:** *to promote support for socially vulnerable people of the Vashkivtsi community using street sports children's complex for self-development and physical health via joint efforts of the local community residents.*

**When writing this story, employees of the Caritas Chernivtsi CF spoke with reverend Andriy Kunitskiy, who is the priest in the parish of St. Volodymyr and Olga, Equal of the Apostles, in Vashkivtsi.**

The town of Vashkivtsi in Bukovyna in the foothills of the Carpathians is known throughout Ukraine despite it being quite small (about 5.5 thousand people). It was a place visited by people from all over the country to celebrate the Old New Year (we still have this concept from our Soviet past) and to witness Pereberia (or Vashkivtsi Malanka). It is a traditional carnival event held every year on the night of January 13–14, on the eve of St. Basil's Day.

The holiday dates back to pre-Christian times, but it was not prohibited by the Church, which has authority and numerous believers in Vashkivtsi as the town hosts not only an





Orthodox community but also an Orthodox nunnery of St. Righteous Anna on the so-called Anna's Mountain.

In 2020, as part of the parish infrastructure development in the Chernivtsi Diocese, UGCC, the construction of a parish building with two catechetical classrooms was completed. The works lasted for more than a year under the leadership of the reverend Andriy Kunitskiy, and the very process of construction united the community and strengthened the desire to carry out some activity other than just praying.

So when the reverend and his family settled in a newly-built house, he was ready to work with children and found like-minded people – teachers from a local school, who helped willing children with homework outside of school hours (this need arose due to long-term distance learning because of the Covid epidemic), and also organized joint screenings of educational fiction films and cartoons followed by discussions over tea.

The next challenge for everyone, including the people of Vashkivtsi and the UGCC parish, was the full-scale invasion of the Russian Federation into Ukraine. Many displaced persons from areas of military operations found shelter in the town. Three families with children still live in the catechetical classes of the parish building, and reverend Andriy lives on the second floor. During this war, the parish also tried to adapt children who came to the community from the areas of hostilities and grouped them with local children by holding joint classes, holidays, and various activities for them.

However, the community decided not to limit itself to catechetical classes.

Observing the activity and behavior of children during classes, taking into account the convenient location (near the school), they decided to build a sports ground, since there were no modern sports facilities on the territory of the community. After all, the playground is a motivation to play in the fresh air, reduce morbidity, strengthen immunity, and promote sports. It is about children of different ages, from families of different social status and

financial capabilities, and even from different regions – given that there are many IDP families with children in the town.

And precisely on the eve of St. Nicholas Day, the UGCC parish of the Holy Volodymyr and Olga, Equal of the Apostles, opened a sports ground in Vashkivtsi for all those willing.





The ground is located near a local school, it is open and accessible to everyone. Therefore, half a hundred students, as well as their parents and even grandparents, attended its grand opening. These are people of different faiths and regions of Ukraine.

So now there are even more opportunities to grow in a large friendly community. An open-air sports complex is a great alternative

to TV and computers. Gymnastic exercises (climbing crossbars and a net, pull-ups, and abs exercises) will contribute to the child's physical development.

They can also play table football, air hockey, and mini billiards in any weather – these have already been placed in the bell tower, also accessible by everyone.

Today, everyone expects the results: strengthening the health of young Vashkivtsi residents, developing their sports talents, self-confidence, unification, cohesion, and building social ties both between children and their families.

## **Story 9. Art festival "Community in miniature"**

- Local organization: Caritas Volyn
- The organization implementing the grant: "Think and act for Ukraine" SCO
- Project: Art festival "Community in miniature"
- Region: Volynska
- Community: Boratyn Territorial Community

**The project objective:** *promoting social cohesion in the Boratyn community by implementing the spiritual and creative potential of residents and IDPs, increasing their involvement in community life, creating a sense of belonging to a unified community that shares responsibility for the territory development and cares for security and equal opportunities for all categories of people.*

**When writing the story, employees of Caritas Zhovkva CF spoke with the Head of the Social and Economic Development Department of the Boratyn Village Council and**



## **“Think and act for Ukraine” SCO, Olha Tsuz.**

The organization takes various steps to introduce people who came to our community to the locals. The idea of holding an art event, namely, an exhibition of art objects – installations, by making miniatures of historical, cultural, and natural monuments in the center, appeared.

Think and act for Ukraine CSO was established almost a year ago, during the war. It consists of young activists and people involved in various activities, all in their specific fields. So they decided to join efforts and work together. The main direction of the organization’s activities is a certain support and development of youth, at the same time, they focus on other areas, though the main one is the support of internally displaced persons living in the community.

They learned what people needed and wanted, and it turned out that they desired to hold some kind of cultural and artistic event to get to know each other and share experiences.

The event was aimed at uniting and consolidating our community, to ensure dialogue and interaction of representatives of various social groups, and is aimed at residents and IDPs who live here. There are 600 people including children. We held an exhibition of the locations of various villages, people saw different places of interest and had a virtual tour of all corners of our community. The festival also featured other activities: art workshops, different photo zones, and performances for children and adults.

The level of IDP awareness about the Boratyn community – settlements, historical, cultural, and natural monuments – increased, and social ties improved.



Material and organizational resources were meant to hold the event and improve community cohesion. We made installations and ensured a space for organizing the event, which will later serve as a platform for the implementation of the next initiatives. There was also an informational issue of when not everyone knew the community well, and where to turn to, so we made





brochures to be distributed at the festival.

During the project implementation, our team invited local artists, internally displaced persons who are craftsmen, and various professionals. There were certain difficulties, some craftsmen refused to do this or that.

The project had a positive effect, a lot of people attended the event thus creating an art platform, which united the community. The created art installations made the local park, where excursions and lessons are held in the open air, come to life.

More than 1,500 people attended the event as planned. Experience proves that informal settings are more effective in bringing people together. People open up, share, get to know each other and sing in the cultural and artistic environment. The event helped to see people and their potential as well as to get to know IDPs wishing to implement their initiatives in the community. We plan new projects created by IDPs and supported by SCOs, which will be targeted at several age categories, and platforms for people of different social statuses, different generations, and different ages to communicate.

## **Story 10. One Hundred Paintings by Wives of Real Heroes**

- Local organization: Caritas Kyiv
- The organization implementing the grant: Radoslava SCO
- Project: One Hundred Paintings by Wives of Real Heroes
- Region: Kyiv
- Community: Kyiv

**The project objective:** to provide psychological support to women who lost their husbands in the war, to promote their social cohesion



**When writing the story, the employees of the Caritas Kyiv CF spoke with Olha Mykolaivna Drozdova, the head of the “100 Hundred Paintings by Wives of Real Heroes” project. Ms. Olha told the incredible story of this project**

The project organizer, Ms. Olha, was forced to leave her home and move to Kyiv from Zaporizhzhia when the full-scale invasion of Russia began. In 2020, she established Radoslava CSO in her hometown to care for women and children. She’s worked for more than 14 years in management positions in the Social Protection of the Population Department of the Zaporizhzhia State Administration, has practical knowledge of current legislation on social protection of the population, experience in managing social projects implemented at the expense of the regional budget. She currently teaches at the Zaporizhzhia Regional Center for Advanced Training of Civil Servants and is also a member of the IDP Council at the Kyiv City State Administration, and the deputy chairman of the IDP Council at the Obolon District State Administration in Kyiv; deputy head of the IDP Council at the Vyshgorod Regional State Administration, and invited expert of the IDP Council at the Kyiv Regional State Administration.

In Vyshgorod and Kyiv, Ms. Olha implements the following events: counseling women who have suffered from the war, in particular IDPs, on humanitarian aid, employment, social services provision, and the mechanism of receiving appropriate payments; the project



“100 Hundred Paintings by Wives of Real Heroes” (artist Oleh Yurov) for women who lost their husbands in the war; in cooperation with Reborn – consulting civil society organizations on the topic “Actual issues when organizing children’s health care and recreation activities”, attracting humanitarian aid from Hungary (Avent bottles for newborns and medicines) to hospitals located in Kyiv and Vyshgorod, etc.

The artist Oleh Yurov, author of the “100 Hundred Paintings by Wives of Real Heroes” project, organized 9 exhibitions, in particular, abroad, in the USA, Germany, and more than 1,000 workshops all over the world. Together with “We Have to Live” CF, he organizes an exhibition of paintings of the wives of fallen heroes in the art gallery “D12” on 28.11.2023 - 07.12.2023. To create the paintings, the artist held a series of workshops for women so that they could create the most beautiful paintings



presenting their own love stories. The project concept appeared back in February 2023, when wives of the fallen heroes contacted Mr. Oleh with a request to help in organizing a painting workshop. After the first workshops, Oleh realized that he wanted to continue helping these women.

When implementing the project, they managed to establish cooperation with the president of the "Clean Planet" SCO, Eduard Viktorovych Lynnyk, who helped resolve issues with the media, Oksana Borkun, co-founder of the "We Have to Live" CF, Yulia Saliutina, activist of the community of wives of fallen heroes of the "We Together" CF, Anna Chudnovska, consultant on community development.



Oksana Borkun and Yulia Saliutina created a community of wives of fallen heroes, "We Have to Live" CF, and gathered wives of fallen heroes, who later expressed their desire to participate in the project, although most of them had never held a brush before.

This project has a positive impact not only on the female participants but also on the whole community and even Ukraine in general. Women express their feelings, memories, and love, and relieve their tension through art. The paintings they are drawing remain with them as a memory of their beloved person. Women are united, even though it is trauma (loss of a beloved one) that unites them, but they do not isolate and do not remain alone with their grief, on the contrary, they help each other endure this pain and live on. The love stories put on the canvases draw the attention both of the public and the international community to the consequences of the war in Ukraine and motivate support for women who lost their husbands in the war.

When implementing the project, the organizers faced certain difficulties. Thus, due to a misunderstanding with the bank (unreasonable bank commission for account maintenance, even though at its opening no commission option was chosen), the budget had to be reallocated. At first, they thought it would be difficult to select project participants, since there were not enough willing ones, but the "We Together" CF helped to involve even more applicants than places available. Such interest allows us to believe that the project is relevant and requires a continuation.

The organizers plan to continue workshops in painting and pottery by expanding the project to all regions of Ukraine (12 months -- 12 regions), to publish the book "Stories of the Wives of Fallen Heroes" to draw the attention of the international community to the consequences of the war in Ukraine.



## **Feedback from “One Hundred Paintings by Wives of Real Heroes” project participants**

- “The project has everything for complete relaxation and pleasure!”
- “Everything went well. I am infinitely grateful for the opportunity to confide my feelings without any words but via paints and colors”
- “I was surprised to learn I could draw, I was positive all day long. Very, very cool. I am grateful for the idea. You are doing a great job. Thank you for not leaving people like me alone with our grief.”
- “I wish to have more such meetings with girls”
- “Everything is highly professional, an artist with a God-given talent, respect, dignity, care, attentiveness, sensitivity, and patience towards us, wives of Fallen Heroes. Having never held a brush in our hands, due to the pain of loss, we are trying to move from black colors to less painful pastel ones”
- “It was incredible, nothing needs to be changed”
- “Everything was perfectly organized! Thank you. I am delighted with the organization, with Oleh. The approach is just great. You express your emotions through painting”
- “Incredible. I am really grateful to Oleh Yurov for the opportunity to touch the beauty and to feel stronger.”
- “I wish such projects to be scaled throughout the country, and not limited to Kyiv only”
- “I am thrilled and grateful for the opportunity to put my emotions on canvas and tell about my beloved one”
- “I would add the opportunity to attend a workshop in regional centers”
- “Only to hold such workshops for as many participants as possible”
- “The project was created at a high level! My respect to the organizers!” I am amazed at how I could put my soul on canvas! Our artist was also the psychologist, we were grateful to him for such a recovery session!”
- “I wish it were possible to organize such workshops for children of different age categories. I have a 14-year-old daughter who would also like to attend such a workshop.”
- “I don’t want to change anything as the project atmosphere charms with its ease.”

## Story 11. Speaking club is a territory of barrier-free space, mutual understanding, and tolerance

- Local organization: Caritas Odesa
- The organization implementing the grant: "Community Social Initiatives" SCO
- Project: Speaking club is a territory of barrier-free space, mutual understanding, and tolerance
- Region: Odesa
- Community: Pischana Rural Territorial Community

**The project objective:** social: creating a platform for barrier-free communication between IDPs and community residents; adapting internally displaced persons to a new living environment; integrating IDPs into the community. Educational: improving the level of Ukrainian proficiency and practical skills of using it in everyday life.

**When writing the story, employees of the "Caritas Odesa UGCC" CF spoke with Tamar Muzychuk, a volunteer of the "Community Social Initiatives" SCO.**

The project "Speaking Club is a Territory of Barrier-Free Space, Mutual Understanding, and Tolerance" is a platform for barrier-free communication between internally displaced persons and community residents; adaptation of internally displaced persons to a new living environment; integration of IDPs into the community; improving the level of Ukrainian proficiency and practical skills of using it in everyday life.

When the full-scale invasion of Russia into Ukraine began, not surprisingly a large wave of internally displaced persons reached the Pischana community.

445 IDPs were officially registered and, of course, both local authorities and civil society faced the issue of adapting IDPs to the new conditions they found themselves in. The organization tried to find topics to unite IDPs and residents based on common values. The Ukrainian language became such a value, and, therefore, they tried to implement the initiative which purpose is not only to master the knowledge of the Ukrainian language

among IDPs, to improve the practical skills of using it in everyday life, but also to create a platform for barrier-free communication, where both IDPs and residents could not only communicate but also implement certain other joint initiatives.

As of today, there were 4 events held in Pischana. Scheduled speaking club classes for IDPs and residents were conducted





by a professional Ukrainian language teacher and a practitioner psychologist. The topics of these classes were linked to the project idea: "Greet in Ukrainian!", "Ukraine in its diversity", "Time flows like a river. Peculiarities of time definitions in Ukrainian", "Ukrainian song – the soul of our people". Psychologists' training sessions were also relevant to the project: "Techniques to overcome stress", "Basic skills of conflict-free communication", "Skills of team interaction", and "Techniques of positive thinking".

***"We wished to show that speaking Ukrainian is easy, beautiful, possible, and, most importantly, necessary."***

Within the project, a material and technical base was created, a projector, a multimedia board, stationery, an office table, and furniture were purchased; a special zone was separated for psychological relaxation, where special cozy sacks were put and where the psychologist worked.

From the project start, there was close cooperation with the Pischana village council followed by a memorandum of cooperation signed on June 20, 2023. This memorandum on cooperation and partnership provides help from the village council in the form of premises provision, which is the communal property of the Pischana village council. In this way, the premises of the Pischana village club were used.

The project beneficiaries were IDPs and community residents – 40 people participated. There were indirect beneficiaries – representatives of local authorities, at least 10 people. Each of them benefited from this project implementation. Therefore, for the first time, IDPs got a platform to meet residents and get to know them. A lot of IDPs admitted that they first started speaking Ukrainian after taking speaking club classes. The psychologist helped them to somehow overcome the limitations of using the Ukrainian language in everyday life and not to be afraid to be laughed at and not understood. The psychologist also helped to master certain skills, namely, how to coexist without conflict and how to use the Ukrainian language and master it to develop one's potential.

Residents developed the skills of dialogue with new community members and mastered their native language: the trainer worked on eliminating Russianism and correct pronunciation. Of course, the first step was to overcome the psychological friend-or-foe barrier,



which to some extent was found within the community. They also increased their level of trust and cohesion.

As for local authority employees, they also took an active part in the speaking club. The head also attended our classes, where we learned a new model to integrate IDPs into the community, accordingly, the authorities could more effectively implement the state policy strategy related to IDPs, and the authorities could improve the community's capacity to overcome the challenges of migration."

The entire community population did not participate in the project, but the improvement of the psychological climate, even at the participants' level, is already a big advantage for developing social cohesion within the community. "At the project start, residents were wary of this initiative and responded rather half-heartedly to the invitation.

IDPs in Pischana village had a hard time making contact, it was difficult to understand the speaking club's purpose, but they needed to meet, communicate, and get closer. Internally displaced persons often said that this was their temporary home, but after the first class they realized it was useful for them, and they shared positive feedback, so there were no more such difficulties," says Tamara.

According to Tamara, the **"Speaking Club Is a Territory of Barrier-Free Space, Mutual Understanding, and Tolerance"** project was started as a long-term one. Therefore, of course, these were only the first four classes. During 2023/2024, we plan to hold 20 different thematic events for the IDPs participating in the speaking club and the local population and to promote their social integration, cohesion, and mutual understanding. We had 4 classes, 16 more to come. We will adapt to our coaches since they have their main jobs, so they will choose the time, but we see their desire. All coaches were involved on a volunteer basis, they did not receive any financial benefit from this, but every single class was held with enthusiasm, and their sincere wish to make their community more cohesive. It allows us to move on and develop the project without any financial support.

Moreover, **the material and technical base created as part of the grant will allow us to implement other planned projects.** Members of the CSO and volunteers agreed on one thing – it is necessary to unite people using everything that is Ukrainian. In September, we will start a week of Ukrainian cinema, and we are planning to organize a themed cinema hall to show several Ukrainian films for IDPs and residents. These will be Ukrainian traditional, modern, and documentary films.

Our CSO also plans to help people who are our target audience and experience difficult living conditions, in particular children. We will work towards their involvement in the community's cultural and public





life. We plan to cooperate with the Office of Children's Services."

"We wish to pay attention to whatever inspires us and whatever is worth doing. Within the project, we invited IDPs living in a shelter in the Rakulove village to the last class. So we realize that we are moving in the right direction and we need to continue," Tamara shared her opinion. Following the meeting of the shelter residents with the project representatives, Ms. Alla Bila (who lives in the shelter) left the following message:

**"Thank you for communication at this meeting. You touched the pain of our hearts and souls through communication. You soothed our pain and a large part of it left our bodies. Thank you for the Ukrainian language and Ukrainian songs. They gave us new strength, a new sense. We spread our wings after the meeting. It gave more than a visit to a psychologist, even more than we expected. Don't stop! We do need your work, you are on the right track. I wish we meet again and again."**

Therefore, of course, the cooperation will continue. The CSO considers the option of organizing a certain cultural and educational event to go to the shelter so that its residents become full members of the community.

Link to the Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/groups/991894678644762>

**During the surveys, the participants of the "Speaking Club Is a Territory of Barrier-Free Space, Mutual Understanding, and Tolerance" events evaluated them as follows:**

- 76% of respondents rated the event as "really useful", and 24% – as "fairly useful".
- The participants noted the relevance of the event topics for them and the convenience of the event organization;
- 96% of respondents noted that the project's activities allowed them to make new friends; 91% increased interaction with other members of the community.
- The participants noted that they would be interested in attending events aimed at studying the history of Ukraine and the cultural peculiar features of the country, creative workshops, and joint events for parents and children. The respondents also expressed their desire to increase the number of events aimed at IDP adaptation in the community and establishing communication with locals.

In the "Recommendations" field, the participants wrote a request to reduce the number of participants in the groups to the optimal (5-8 people), to diversify the topics of the meetings, and to invite children

## Story 12. Social and humanitarian project Digital Educational HUB «Skorokhodove 2.0»

- Local organization: Caritas Poltava
- The organization implementing the grant: Education, Culture, Youth, and Sports Department of the Executive Committee of the Skorokhodove Village Council
- Project: Social and humanitarian project "Digital Educational HUB 'Skorokhodove 2.0'"
- Region: Poltava
- Community: Skorokhodove



**The project objective:** to create a modern, open, and comfortable environment to improve the human potential of the community, where residents will learn digital literacy and develop (acquire) skills to effectively and safely use modern digital technologies in work and education, in professional and personal development based on a municipal institution "Skorokhodove Village Library"

**When writing the story, the employees of Caritas Poltava CF spoke with Serhiy Sovyn,**

**project head and acting head of the Education, Culture, Youth, and Sports Department of the Executive Committee of the Skorokhodove Village Council.**

### Library update:

A newly established team, which consisted of young and active people, employees of cultural institutions, and some – employees of the Education, Culture, Youth, and Sports Department of the Executive Committee of the Skorokhodove Village Council, started working on the project. Therefore, they decided to participate in the library update project.

They believe: "The type of library we, our parents, and grandparents are used to, should not remain the same nowadays. First of all, we should forget the statement of it being a quiet and resilient place, it should be a place for people, a noisy one, where people can come and solve any issues."

Books and magazines are not the only sources of information nowadays, it can be found on the Internet. So the main point is to do this correctly as there is a lot of it and it is all different.



**The project objective** is to teach people to search for the right information to benefit but not harm them.

Therefore, the issue was to create a digital educational hub in the Skorokhodove library, which will help people, first of all. To acquire and develop digital skills and media literacy, because any data found should be filtered.

The project is aimed at several age categories:

- Youth and teenagers for whom media literacy and cyber security will be very highly relevant

*"Social networks have become an integral part of our lives and, let's be realistic, there are many cases of the same cyberbullying, and whatever else can happen. Therefore, we should prepare children for this, we must explain that if anything happens on social networks, they do not need to keep it to themselves or be afraid, but talk to adults, and tell them, there is a way out of any situation", says Serhiy Sovyn, the head*

- People of the older generation requiring educational events

*"Nowadays, there are a lot of services in the Diia application, a lot of services to be obtained via gadgets and access to the Internet, for example, utility payments, and all this is a challenge for them, they do not understand the way it works and need support"*

The team wishes to create an open space for all age groups to meet and share experiences, especially digital skills. Young people will have the opportunity to feel like mentors and help their loved ones and acquaintances of older age acquire certain knowledge.

Within the project, the organizers introduced a comprehensive update of the library premises.

*"...that is, we got rid of standard shelves we used to see in the library, we got rid of that strange furniture when no one understands why it is there and what to do it, we completely updated it."*

They did partial repairs themselves. And the center, the main area within the project framework became a large conference table, where every community resident will feel placed at the center of events, that is, they will feel united, together.

*"We decided to focus on their central role, the main human-centrism of our project, where a person is the most important part, and they need to be developed and shaped."*

We have also chairs for visitors who want to engage in independent activities, several laptops, a projector, and a screen. When choosing equipment, the team thought of comfort.





When the project started, we had a survey among older people, youth, and children, who were very interested and required such changes a lot. At all implementation stages, the organizers of the initiative listened to and took into account the wishes of the public on their work. Interest in the digital hub increased when the actual implementation began, especially given such a short time. The team implementing the project believes its main

task and challenge is to keep the community's trust so that people are also interested in space development.

About the possibility of participation in the "Peace-building. Bridging Divides 2" project, Serhiy learned during one of the Caritas Poltava CF events:

*"As soon as we became aware, I had an idea flashing in my mind. Upon return and discussion with my team, we decided we could try and then on social networks, if I'm not mistaken, within 2 weeks after this training, the information appeared and we decided we should give it a try."*

The project had a positive impact on the community, the following environment:

- Communication promotes community cohesion;
- Education, digital literacy;
- Overcoming communication and information barriers;
- Gaining experience vital for the modern world.

*"Some people, internally displaced ones, did not have specific information or opportunity to find out this or that information. In particular, I believe, as in most communities, in most regions of Ukraine, there were some chats, but it is a common situation that a question remains unanswered there. The environment will help people to know who to turn to, and the related requirements, in particular, using e-democracy tools. If they learn their possibilities, they will become a full part of our territorial community life"*

Within the project framework, we cooperate with local self-government bodies, the deputy corps, and the executive committee, who support the organization with funds from their contributions, with the Regional Youth Center of the Poltava Regional Council for training. In partnership with them, we created workshops for people of elderly age. The Ministry of Digital Transformation of the Poltava Regional Military Administration helped to conduct a series of training sessions related to the Diia application features and ways to use the Administrative Service Centre services online. The Center employees explained how to promptly get this or that certificate without any queues.

*"Given the data we have now, especially under martial law in our community, many people*



*complain about the limitation of certain information, but the point is that since the Ministry of Digital Transformation was established, we were given such a message as the country in a smartphone. And the main objective of our project is to show people that it still works and that all the information they claim missing can be easily found using a phone."*

The purpose of the digital educational hub was primarily to show how to do that. Therefore, it will have a significant positive impact and minimize the adverse impact of social networks to certain extent.

Future scaling is planned, and the initiative team will create Digital Hubs in each Starosta district (4 in our community).

The organizers consider projects important if they help people to communicate, with people of different statuses and age groups, authorities, and residents. For example, dialogue labs or creative dialogues will contribute to greater mutual understanding and cohesion within communities.

*"The point is whether we see it as a priority, but first of all, we need to ask the residents whether they need it or not, and what exactly is important to them today. Perhaps we will learn that currently, it is the support of the Armed Forces, after our victory – roads, schools, hospitals, whatever else, but communication must be independent of the events as communication is primarily a search for implementation of certain ideas given different points of view. As they say, first of all, the truth is out there, so the most relevant activity is communication."*

The project participation allowed us to create a Digital Educational Hub in the library, which promotes cohesion within the community based on educational space.



## Conclusions

- Mini-grants are an efficient tool to activate groups and organizations to satisfy and improve the well-being of vulnerable community residents.
- Project implementation via mini-grants increases trust in civil society organizations and self-organized initiatives in communities and improves the organizational capacity of young CSOs.
- Our support of newly-established organizations and self-organized groups, such as IDPs with social projects implemented in small towns, villages, and remote communities ensures localization of assistance and reaches the most needy people who are unable to receive assistance in large cities.

- Mini-grants should be given via an open competition. It is important to conduct grant writing training and information sessions about the mini-grant competition. This increases the quality of project applications.
- Our experience has shown that the final selection of organizations for grant awarding should take place live as short presentations (pitchings). Moreover, it is an opportunity to get to know the project team and assess their capabilities and a good opportunity for networking between organizations, when they can exchange contacts and jointly write new projects to cover a larger number of people in need even if no funding is awarded.
- Following the results of the mini-grants implementation, 2 months of joint activities, guided tours, and psychological stabilization activities, people became friends and organized other joint meetings and interactions. Thus, projects are aimed at social cohesion to ensure stability and interaction due to the activities organized by the grantors. It is also an impetus for establishing groups/communities of like-minded people, which is important both for the psychosocial support of communities and the development of new social contacts. For that, stable groups with same participants are to be established, which helps to build trust.
- We have two examples of projects by religious organizations where children's environments were created (a playground and a safety room). Although these environments are related to religious organizations, they are open to the whole community, in particular, educational institutions (schools, lyceums) are interested and already use them, and also actively attract children there. It is also an example of the sustainability and positive impact of religious organizations' activities on community life in general.
- Following the mini-grants implementation, organizations strengthen their capacity to realize and report for projects, which increases their chances for better projects and attracting additional funds to the community for future recovery
- Organizations have launched initiatives that will last in communities after the mini-grants expire. So, new service providers to respond and provide for the needs of vulnerable residents are set in communities.



**For notes**

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