

Refugee
children
integration
assistance



EVALUATION REPORT

The report is a part of the project "Refugee children integration assistance"
realised by Homo Faber Association.

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INTRODUCTION

The following report was commissioned by Homo Faber Association. It contains the outcome of the evaluative research on the project called 'Refugee children integration assistance' and provides not only cognitive knowledge – by describing the course and outcome of particular actions taken in the project - but also instrumental and useful knowledge, which will let one make suitable decisions while carrying out similar projects in the future.

The research was prepared and carried out in the last quarter of 2012. I would like to extend my thanks to all respondents, who devoted their time to individual interviews and shared some important opinions and reflections about the project.

The following subchapters summarize the activity of both Homo Faber Association and the project, which is a subject of the evaluation.

HOMO FABER ASSOCIATION

Homo Faber is a non-governmental organization in Lublin, which focuses on broadly defined human rights. The association was registered in 2004 and has the status of a public benefit organization. The mission of the organization is the motto: "We're actively changing our surroundings. For the better!" and its vision is as follows:

"The vision of Homo Faber is a world, in which people can enjoy a wide range of human rights and liberties that guarantee subjectivity and an opportunity to satisfy their

needs, both individually and in teams. It is a world, in which people, either individually or in groups, can influence reality around them – on the local, national and global level".

The organization's basic area of interest is the relation between the authority and an individual. The aim of our organization is a critical, yet merit-related observation of public authority to see if it fulfills its duties effectively and respects human rights and liberties.

The Association advocates for minority groups and excluded people. It fights with discrimination based on sex, political (and other) beliefs, race, skin colour, nationality and ethnicity, religion, language, age and sexual orientation.

Homo Faber tries to get to know / follow the challenges that contemporary states are facing nowadays. It wants to capture the latest social phenomena, ask questions and look for modern solutions.

The Association is active in Lublin and the Lublin region. The methods applied by the Association involve: educating, monitoring and advocacy.

Within the scope of its work the Association runs three basic programs:

Good Governance

The Association believes that in order to let the citizens fully enjoy their human rights, the authority needs to comply with the principles of Good Governance. Consequently, the Association makes the Lublin / Lublin Region citizens familiar with the basic concepts and principles of Good Governance. It also cooperates with the authorities on different levels, trying to build an innovative system of wielding power. The promoted values include openness and availability of public authority, accountability of its actions, social engagement and a ban on discrimination.

Interculturalism

In this program Homo Faber observes and analyzes processes happening in the more and more diversified society; it also wants to shape the social bonds existing in society and thus influence the direction of its development. It tries to find and animate a new space for a dialogue, so that people of different identities could make use of it. It tries to look for new solutions, which would be adequate for the problems connected with life in a multicultural reality. The organization's main object of interest are ethnic, national and religious minorities and migrants living in the Lublin region.

Sustainable development

This program focuses on challenges related to global poverty and sustainable development. The detailed areas of activity embrace: global education (relations between the Global North and the Global South), ethical, responsible consumption and developmental cooperation.

The project 'Refugee children integration assistance' is run within the scope of the second of the mentioned programs – the Program of Interculturalism. Thus, the Organisation's activities are focused on two aspects of multiculturalism in Lublin and the region – on the one hand, it works for and with the local communities, who are facing the challenge of accepting the groups of immigrants and refugees; on the other hand – by drawing on Poland's and Europe's experience with ethnic minorities, it creates educational programs for children and youth, thus preparing them for life in a more and more diversified society.

Within the first aspect, i.e. work for the integration among immigrants, from July 2009 til December 2011, Homo Faber carried out a project "Welcome to Lublin". Its purpose was to give both the foreigners and the locals an opportunity to get to know each other, as well as to understand mutual needs. It also ran an information point and a website, by means of which it tried to solve as many everyday problems as possible. It also put forward many other initiatives that would help the sides to get to know each other.

Homo Faber works independently and in cooperation with the association "Dla Ziemi" (eng. "For Earth") in communes with refugees' centers. It runs integrative and adaptive courses for children of school and kindergarten age, who live in the centers, as well as courses for schools – the content of these courses includes inter alia expanding knowledge about the Caucasus and Islam religion.

Within the second aspect, i.e. multicultural integration, since 2010 Homo Faber has been running the project called "The Multicultural Lublin Region". It is a series of tours in the region, the aim of which is to debunk myths connected with religious and national minorities. In fact, it is a 10-hour workshop on diversity. The Association tries thereby to draw young people's attention to their region and to present it as a neighborhood that used to be and still is multicultural.

REFUGEE CHILDREN INTEGRATION ASSISTANCE

The project Refugee children integration assistance, carried out in 2012, is a continuation and an extension of Homo Faber Association's present activities, which aim at evening out the chances of refugees' children at school and supporting their integration with the local community. The project's aims are following:

Creating three units that would constantly and systematically work towards evening out the chances of children from Chechen communities.

Spreading knowledge and rising people's awareness of Chechen cultural wealth.

Integrating the local community with the foreigners through volunteers' work and advocacy acting towards the appointment of a cultural assistant in the communes Zalesie, Łuków and Lublin.

The core of the project team are Aleksandra Gulińska, Magdalena Kawa and Alicja Kawka from Homo Faber Association.

A few types of activities were planned within the framework of the project. They were carried out in centres for the refugees (commonly known as "refugee centres"), who are applying for refugee status in Lublin, Łuków and Zalesie/Kolonia Horbów. The main task within the project was creating three day-rooms for refugee children in the aforementioned towns. Every day-room employs two day-room teachers – a Pole and a Chechen – and the classes are run simultaneously in two languages. The day-rooms offer permanent courses, such as extra-tuition and kindergarten classes, as well as cyclical psychological, artistic (inter alia dancing) and language workshops. There was also a plan to create day-room libraries, where books in three languages (Polish, Russian, Chechen) would be available.

The project also anticipates structured advocacy work towards the appointment of the cultural assistant, who would be paid from the community funds in the three schools the refugee children attend.

The project is focused on six types of actions:

Action 1

Collecting and analyzing all invented solutions for the functioning of integrative day-rooms and cultural assistants in Poland (the analysis of the so-called good practice).

Action 2

Preparing for the opening of day-rooms: preliminary meetings with workers and refugee centres' residents, recruiting day-room teachers, getting day-rooms fitted out and buying books for libraries.

Action 3

Everyday day-room work, including the following tasks:

- doing homework
- classes for children of kindergarten age
- Polish language classes
- Chechen language classes
- Artistic workshops: visual arts, dancing and music classes
- Psychological workshops

Action 4

Initiating cooperation between local teams of volunteers and day-rooms.

Action 5

Managing the libraries – lending books during day-rooms' working hours.

Action 6

Advocacy work towards the appointment of the cultural assistants from the communal funds of the communes, where the schools attended by refugee children are.

The project envisaged similar types of actions in all three communes. However, their final shape and course would depend on the situation in every refugee centre, hence there was a possibility of running different types of courses in particular day-rooms, basing on the children's age and needs.

The project was co-financed from the European Refugee Fund and State Budget, the Contract no. 3/8/EFU/2011 of 13 Feb. 2012. The project is financially supported by the City of Lublin and the Ministry of National Education as a part of the competition "Z pasją na Ty".



CONCEPTION OF THE RESEARCH

This chapter summarizes the aim and the scope of the evaluative research and presents the accepted evaluation criteria. It also enumerates the people of interest, who were separated as important at the stage of preparation for the research and with whom conversations were held. The following part also contains the description of the applied research methods and the course of the research process.

AIMS OF THE RESEARCH

As the research was being prepared, the project team, together with the evaluator, decided that the Project's evaluation would have two general aims:

The analysis of suitability and effectiveness of the actions taken within the Project "Supporting integration among refugees' children".

Formulating conclusions and recommendations necessary to create future projects, whose aim is to support people applying for refugee status in Poland.

RANGE OF THE RESEARCH

The evaluation embraces above all the work of day-rooms in the proximity of the refugee centres (Project's action no. 3) – this very action was considered pivotal for the Project. It

also deserves a deeper analysis, especially if the suitability of the action adjusted to beneficiaries' needs and the effectiveness of the implementation of Project's aims are concerned. Attention was also paid to the stage of preparation for the opening of day-rooms (Project's action no. 2).

The work of day-room libraries (Project's action no. 5) and cooperation with volunteers (Project's action no. 4) are not evaluated as thoroughly as other actions.

Basing on the Association's decision, the actions excluded from the evaluation include: the advocacy work towards the appointment of the cultural assistant at schools attended by refugee children (action no. 6) and the stage of collecting good practice (action no. 1). The evaluation does not include the Project's management, either –in both merit-related and financial aspect.

THE CRITERIES OF EVALUATION

The criteries of evaluation set standards of a particular kind, according to which a given program is evaluated. They should be clear and precise, because they are a system of values and are evaluator's reference point on every stage of the research. The evaluator points to the issues, which – from the program's perspective, its aims and effects – are most important.

The most often applied criteria of evaluation are¹:

Relevance

This criterion allows us to assess to what extent the program's aims correspond with the needs and priorities of a particular sector, region or beneficiaries. The criterion lets us assess to what extent the influence of the project/ program corresponds to the needs of a target group. It is therefore possible to assess whether the changes triggered by the project's/program's implementation are profitable from its beneficiaries' perspective. The differences in interests of the engaged people should also be taken into consideration. Something assessed as useful for one group may not prove equally useful for the other group. The conclusions drawn upon the application of the criterion of relevance will influence the decision about program's continuation, modification or its definite abandonment. The criterion is sometimes divided into relevance (sector's and region's needs) and utility (target group's needs).

Efficiency

The criterion of efficiency allows us to assess the so called "economy" of a particular project/ program, i.e. the ratio of the expenditures made (financial and human resources, the amount of devoted time) to the achieved products, results and influence. The criterion of efficiency is applied in analyses of the possibilities of achieving similar effects with fewer resources and increased effects while using a comparable amount of resources. The criterion is also applied in comparing the assessed project/ program with similar projects/ programs in a particular sector.

Effectiveness

The criterion of effectiveness allows us to asses to what extent the project's/program's aims, defined at the planning stage, were achieved. Considering the fact that the project's/program's aims are formulated on several levels (from general aims to detailed ones), it is necessary to state clearly to which level we are relating. It is important to consider not only the positive outcome of the program, but also its possible negative effects.

¹ The description is based on the information from the website of the Implementing Authority for European Programmes, www.wwpe.gov.pl

Impact

The criterion of impact allows us to assess the link between the project's aim and the general aims, i.e. the extent, in which the benefits gained by beneficiaries generally influenced a greater number of people in a particular area.

Sustainability

The criterion of sustainability allows us to assess whether the project's/program's positive outcome (planned in advance) will still be visible once the project/program comes to an end. This criterion is applied in assessing the value of the project/program, considering its utility in the long run. The criterion of sustainability is applied in ex-post evaluations (which are carried out once the project is closed), as it lets us assess if the changes triggered by the project/program will actually last and be visible once the financial support ends.

The criteria of relevance and effectiveness were considered the most pivotal for the evaluation of the Project "Supporting integration among refugees' children". Hence, attempts were made to answer the questions: to what extent do the Project's aims correspond with the factual needs and expectations of beneficiaries (relevance) and to what extent are the adopted aims and indicators carried out (effectiveness).

GROUPS OF INTEREST

During preparation for the evaluation, a few different groups of interest for the Project were specified and considered for determining the respondent group for the evaluation. They are presented on the diagram below.



The particular groups denote:

Coordinating team

three members of Homo Faber Association, who have the key role in the Project, being responsible for its management and implementation.

Children

direct beneficiaries of day-rooms, i.e. the children, who come to them – the recipients of most actions in the Project.

Parents

parents of the children coming to day-rooms.

Day-room workers

Polish and Chechen day-room workers, who take care of children and organize classes for them.

Volunteers

the ones who help as volunteers in the Project "Supporting integration among refugees' children".

Administration of refugee centres

in which day-rooms are run (refugee centres in Lublin and Zalesie).

Headmasters

of the primary school in Łuków, where the third day-room is run.

After the analysis of the specific, local situation in every town, following people were chosen as the respondents of the evaluation:

Lublin

coordinating team, day-room workers, parents, children, administration of the refugee centre, volunteers working in the Project (if there are any). It was decided that the children in Lublin would not take part in the evaluation because of their young age (2-5 years).

Łuków

children (at early school age), day-room workers, children's parents, administration of the refugee centre, headmasters of the school, in which a day-room is run.

Zalesie

a group of older children, day-room workers, children's parents, administration of the refugee centre

The above decision is based on both the assessment of the current Project's situation and the envisaged benefits connected with a conversation with every group, considering the time limit for the evaluation.

THE RESEARCH PROCESS AND THE METHODS APPLIED

At the initial stage of the evaluation a preparatory visit was conducted – a few hours' meeting of the evaluator and the coordinating team, connected with a visit in the refugee centre in Lublin and observation of the work in a day-room. The result of the meeting was setting out the guidelines for the evaluation, including its choice and scope, research criteria, methodology and schedule for the process. Evaluating visits were planned for the last month of the Project.

Considering the specific quality of the Project and the beneficiaries' profile, as the best research methods the following ones were regarded:

- analysis of the available documents (the motion for the Project, the quarterly reports)
- in-depth interviews (dyads)
- focus group interviews (focuses)
- participant observation (during classes in day-rooms)

As the research was underway, the evaluator visited every town, in which day-rooms were run, meeting the groups of interest and having individual interviews with them (day-room workers and refugee centres' administration) and group interviews (with children and parents). She also observed classes in day-rooms.

As it has already been mentioned, the aim of the evaluative research was the analysis of suitability and effectiveness of the actions taken in the Project "Supporting integration among refugees' children" and making conclusions and recommendations for similar projects in the future. Hence, with the research underway, the evaluator tried to answer the following (and other) questions:

- How did the process of preparing day-rooms look like? (Consider both the arrangements with the Project's partner and the technical aspects).
- How did the recruitment of day-room workers look like?
- How were parents informed about the opening of day-rooms? What were their reasons for enrolling children in day-rooms?
- Where and how are day-rooms run? What are their opening hours?
- Which children attend day-rooms: how many children are there on average and how old are they?
- How often do children use day-rooms? (everyday/2-4 times a week/once a week/not too often)
- How do children benefit from attending day-rooms? What are the advantages for their parents?
- To what extent does a day-room enable children to get to know the Polish language and culture?
- To what extent does a day-room enable children to get to know the Chechen language and culture?
- What is the extent of parents' and children's satisfaction with current classes: are these classes a response to children's needs? Should there be any other types of classes run in day-rooms? If so, which?
- How were day-room libraries organized?
- How do parents assess day-room workers' preparation for the job? What can be improved in their methods of running day-rooms?
- Which ideas/ subjects should be included into classes in the future?
- Were there any volunteers engaged into work? If so, how were they engaged?
- How does communication between Homo Faber Association and places hosting the day-rooms look like?
- How are the Project's suitability, effectiveness and relevance assessed by its groups of interest?
- What are other needs of refugee centres's residents (both children and adults)? Is Homo Faber Association able to respond to those needs?
- At the same time, a natural question for every issue was "Is that really the most suitable and effective means? How could one do it better?".

The interlocutors willingly accepted the requests for interviews and liked the idea of evaluating the Project. In case of people who had given their prior consent, the material was recorded on a Dictaphone (for evaluator's information only) and it was later replayed at the stage of drawing up the report. In some cases the evaluator decided not to record the interviews – especially in case of conversations with foreigners, for whom it would be too embarrassing and would prevent them from giving honest answers. In such cases only notes were taken.

The following report is the outcome of the Project's evaluative research.



OUTCOME OF THE RESEARCH

The following chapter focuses on the outcome of the research, collected on the basis of conversations with the Project's different groups of interest and on the basis of observation and analysis of the available documents. The conclusions and recommendations flowing from the outcome are summarized in the next chapter.

PREPARATIONS FOR THE OPENING OF DAY-ROOMS

Concurrently with the stage of collecting good practice at the beginning of 2012, the Co-ordinating Team prepared the opening of day-rooms for children – the most important component of the Project "Supporting integration among refugees' children". The strategic decision about locating day-rooms was made:

The day-room in Lublin was to be originally located in a nearby primary school, where the refugees' learn, however, once the HF Project was accepted by the donor, the school's headmasters informed that due to a different EU project and many extra-curricular activities, problems with finding space arose. The only time when the school rooms were available were afternoon hours, however, that clashed with the courses run by the Voluntary Service Centre in the refugee centre at the same time. In addition, children would have to visit the school twice a day, so this idea for localization was abandoned. A nearby junior high school wanted to rent the rooms for money, moreover, the proposed rent would greatly exceed the Project's budget. The Coordinating Team therefore decided to begin talks with

the refugee centre and received a room that used to be a warehouse. After redecoration the room was fitted with furniture and toys gained by Homo Faber Association.

In Łuków both the refugee centre and the nearby primary school were interested in creating a day-room on their premises. Eventually the school was chosen, as it would mean that more Polish children could attend it, which could lead to a multicultural dialogue. However, the day-room was moved to the refugee centre for summer holidays, because the school was closed at that time. The day-room opens after regular school classes, that is at 12 pm.

The day-room in Kolonia Horbów was created in the refugee centre, because the school the children normally go to is about 10 km away from the centre, in a village called Berezówka. It would therefore be too far away and, considering the difficulties to reach the place, too impractical. The refugee centre was very enthusiastic about the idea and represented the attitude that "there are never too many classes". The day-room was created in one room. Homo Faber Association had it fitted out, so the furniture in the room is certified.

It follows from the conversations with the people of interest that the process of preparation for the day-rooms' opening was conducted in a professional and effective way. As cooperation was established, numerous meetings and telephone conversation were held, allowing to lay out the details of cooperation and responsibilities of every side.

Every day-room was fitted with equipment, toys and didactic materials necessary for classes with children. The questioned respondents agreed that the equipment in day-rooms is appropriate – not only is furniture adjusted to children's height, but also toys are suitable for children - blocks, puzzles, soft toys and many more, not excluding books for children and materials for artistic classes. In response to a question "what else should be a part of day-rooms' equipment?" no new ideas emerged – an unanimous answer was "there's everything in there already!". It means that the Association carefully selected the equipment. Only small plastic cars in a day-room in Lublin were regarded as a wrong purchase – not because they were unpopular, but because they simply proved non-durable. Since little children hardly ever pay attention to what they tread on, the plastic cars quickly got damaged.

At the end of preparations for day-rooms' opening, the Coordinating Team organized informative meetings for parents in every refugee centre. Apart from the Association's representatives, the day-room workers also took part in the meetings and informed parents about the idea of day-rooms. The attendance differed between the centres – the lowest one was noted in Zalesie, although mothers were willing to use the day-room later. In addition to hanging notices, direct inviting to meeting shortly before it was held proved very effective as well – one may even speak of the "snowball effect" – a mother informed other mothers that something was going on and that "there's a meeting to be held". As a result, a great number of people came. Such an informative meeting is very important and thus should be carefully planned, because it will give the first impression and gain trust of the parents, who are supposed to leave their children to day-room workers' care. It is also important to organize the meeting in advance and to hang up notices about day-rooms on information boards. Informing parents about the meetings well in advance will prevent people from spreading gossip that may totally distort the Project's image – e.g. in Kolonia Horbów parents started to tell each other that a kindergarten was to be created in the refugee centre and it would be open 5 hours a day, so people to work there were needed. This false information, arising out of nowhere, was a tough challenge for the Coordinating Team, as it had to face a barrage of heightened expectations and announce that the classes would indeed be held, however, only for children at specified age (and not for the youngest ones). Moreover, the duration of the classes would be shorter and the personnel had already been employed. Therefore, giving precise information through various channels as early as possible is pivotal.

RECRUITMENT OF DAY-ROOM WORKERS

Recruitment of day-room workers was conducted openly. Institutions such as local Social Welfare Centre, Caritas, District Family Support Centre, refugee centre or the school proved helpful, too. The recruitment system based on recommendation has its advantages and

every choice made was good, however, in Kolonia Horbów it was a source of tension among the centre's residents, who – as it turned out later – wanted to put forward their own candidate for a day-room worker. It caused a temporary conflict with mothers. Therefore a note about any day-room workers needed in the future should be hung up in refugee centres as well, together with a list of criteria (along with the formal criteria, e.g. having a work permit). According to all interlocutors, that would have improved the atmosphere. At the same time, a parallel method of inviting for recruitment process people suggested by local institutions working for refugees is still recommended.

All the recruited day-room workers possess necessary competences to work with children – among them are teachers and a woman with a degree in psychology. All Poles had already had contact with Chechens (with different frequency), which contributed to a better understanding of cultural differences. In addition, the Coordinating Team held preparatory meetings for every day-room workers, informing them about the beneficiaries and their work. According to day-room workers, those meetings were helpful and should be held in the future, however, they should also contain very practical aspects, like e.g. informing about the custom of taking off shoes before entering refugees' rooms and day-rooms, about the behavior during Ramadan and also a calendar of Muslim holidays. One day-room worker said she was confused when she got pastries from women and some time passed before she found out that it was connected with the end of Ramadan and traditional celebrations.

Apart from training courses, day-room workers should be encouraged to expand their knowledge on their own and to contact the Coordinating Team if they have any questions or doubts. Such situations actually happened – as one day-room worker says: *The girls talked to me a lot. I had already been familiar with literature or films, I had taken part in workshops – theoretically, I was really prepared. The girls also provided me with lots of psychological support – if anything happens, they will help me. I simply know that if anything happens, help is always there.*

Polish day-room workers say that one of the key abilities that allows them to work effectively is their knowledge of the Russian language. It enables them to communicate with parents who do not know Polish yet (they are in majority) and it also facilitates communication with older children, especially in situations that involve translating homework and doing it together. As one day room worker said: *I know Russian well. This language comes in handy a lot, especially when I talk to parents. Once I established contact with them, they started to open up.*

However, most younger children (those of kindergarten age) do not know Russian and although they picked up Polish very quickly, translating text into Chechen by a Chechen day-room worker proved invaluable in many situations during classes – both workers complemented one another culturally and linguistically. It was also confirmed in conversations that running day-rooms by a pair of workers, the one coming from the host country and the other coming from the place of origin of over 90% foreigners (Chechnya), was a very good decision.

A non-obligatory competence, yet very useful during work in day-rooms, is knowledge from the field of psychology – it lets one identify some disorders in children and suggest parents seeing a psychologist in a refugee centre and take appropriate measures during everyday day-room classes.

Other suggestions from Polish day-room workers included prior voluntary work in a refugee centre (if it is possible), so that people could get to know the realities before accepting a job and fit into the community easier later on.



WORK OF THE DAY-ROOM IN LUBLIN

The day room in Lublin was open everyday, Monday to Friday between 9 am and 12 pm – according to mothers, such opening hours corresponded perfectly with their needs: the children already had breakfast, but they did not have dinner, which was served at 1 pm. As all offices are open during morning hours and the older children are at school, mothers can go out and do the shopping, visit offices or simply see to household chores. Another advantage is that children, although young, are not tired during morning hours and do not need a nap.

The day-room – although it was originally created for schoolchildren – in response to real needs, was eventually adjusted to younger children aged 2-6 years old. It is a group of children who do not go to school yet and very often they do not even attend a kindergarten, either. As day-room workers admitted, if there were such requests from mothers and if there was such a possibility, children who were a little older than one year were admitted into day-rooms, too. As one day-room workers says: *There were also kids who couldn't even walk yet, so they made they first steps in our day-room.*

The courses run in the day-room embrace all-purpose classes, language classes and also music/art classes run by people from the outside.

At the beginning, the-day room was attended by children aged 4-5, who could go to school in 2-3 years. Their age was suitable for giving them more complicated tasks that would keep them focused. However, in summer some children went out for holidays or started school or kindergarten education, so the average age of children changed and the day-room became more like a nursery. As one day-room worker says: *At the beginning we wrote, we did more complicated art works or read books, now it's more like play – it may be structured, but it's still play. We had to switch into a new mode of work, but it all came out pretty*

naturally. We also had appropriate books and equipment. Unfortunately, the day-room is small and sometimes there are over twenty kids here (the number depends mostly on the situation in the refugee centre- unfortunately, the rotation is pretty great). It limits older children's possibilities – it's impossible to separate the older kids from the younger ones, so it's harder to teach the older how to read or write if there's too much noise. Nevertheless, the day-room is divided into a couple of sections: for drawing, for playing with blocks or for any other form of play...

Different age of children is clearly a challenge. On days when volunteers came and there were more people to help, dividing children into subgroups in two or three corners and engaging them in activities suitable for their age proved to be a good solution. Children dealt with appointed tasks till they finished them and were not distracted by others (as other children were busy with their tasks in the other corner of the room).

Despite the fact that children's age is younger now, the day-room still runs language classes, in which pictures are used. Children learnt Polish words regularly. Earlier there were classes devoted to writing Polish letters, starting from repeating patterns, but now only pictures are used – as children are too young to write. In Lublin, just like in other refugee centres, day-room workers use Polish most of the time in order to increase children's knowledge in this aspect and to prepare them for school: *I talk to them in Polish. I don't think they can understand me very often, but they repeat after me and learn slowly. I use Russian when I need to shout at them or explain something. Besides, the Chechen day-room worker translates into their mother tongue if there's such a need.*

From conversations with day-room workers and parents it follows that the biggest advantage for children is learning how to behave and cooperate in a group and how to be self-sufficient when mum is not around. It is connected with numerous other benefits related to children's overall development, e.g. development of language skills (Chechen and Polish), learning how to hold crayons properly, boosting motor activities, learning how to write letters (for older children), the ability to perform in front of a group (during singing and dancing shows). One day-room worker also mentioned that "*the kids learnt here how to sit in peace and engage into something for a longer while. They also learnt to react to orders.*" It was observed that there is little difference between the day-room and children's behaviour and a Polish kindergarten or nursery: there is time for casual play, depending on children's interests, and for common activities, like watching children books, reading tales and art or music classes.

Running courses on Polish culture proved to be a sort of a challenge. children's age was mentioned as one of the reasons for it; the other, yet less obvious reason, was closing the day-room for all holidays, so the Voluntary Service Centre organized St. Nicholas' Day and Children's Day. According to day-room workers, children still have time to learn about holidays such as All Souls Day, Christmas Eve or Independence Day.

Because of children's age, the idea of running psychological courses was abandoned, which seems to be a good decision, as they were meant for schoolchildren. However, music classes are very popular among youngsters, including older children from the refugee centre. The opportunity to try playing different instruments was fascinating for everyone.

An interesting remark, also repeated in other evaluated centres, was the issue of mothers' participation in classes. In contrast to regular kindergartens, mothers can stay with their children and take part in day-room classes. Respondents claim that such an opportunity was often used for a couple of weeks after day-room's opening: most mothers stayed, sat in the corners and watched classes, being thereby a safe reference point for their children. Day-room workers admit that on the one hand, it was quite difficult for them, as they felt carefully watched, "just like during an exam", on the other hand – it was a great advantage, not only for children, who were not "pushed" into day-room reality without preparation, but also for mothers, who could see that the classes are safe and the workers are trustworthy. It proved beneficial for day-room workers, too, as mothers provided additional help in classes and informed them about their children's customs, abilities and problems.

Day-room workers from Lublin and Kolonia Horbów (where day-rooms are located in refugee centres) say that those beginnings and mothers' constant presence were something special: *I had no problems with contact with kids, but mothers' presence was a bit stressful.*

During the first few weeks mothers kept staying – they considered this space sort of theirs, too. And it was great, because that's how they got to know me. They stopped coming when they saw that this place is okay.

A Polish day-room worker from Lublin says: *It was a small female clique, a totally female clique – Jachita [the Chechen day-room worker], who came from the outside, had an important role as an adviser. I was an adviser, too – about clothes, cosmetics, supermarket discounts, medicines. But sometimes there were also some serious questions,, too, e.g. the ones connected with documents or legal issues. Sometimes they want to ask me instead of Jachita – maybe because I'm Polish and I come from Lublin or maybe because I'm younger, I'm their age. They ask about everything, they also need laughter, jokes, energy and female perspective. You can chat with those who speak Russian and if someone doesn't speak it, Jachita helps with translating. The room we work in is small, so it's not that easy, but we always manage to find some space.*

Despite enormous advantages for mothers who discovered that a day-room may be a good meeting point, they finally stopped coming there, because they wanted to have three hours for themselves. As one day-room worker says: *Parents don't stay anymore, only in special cases – sometimes mothers of new children stay for a day or two. But it totally depends on a child.* Women still treat day-room workers as a source of information and ask them various questions when they bring their children there or come back to pick them up.

According to parents, day-room is a great advantage, both for them and for their children. They really like the fact that workers of two nationalities were employed: they complement one another and they help children learn the Polish language, whereas a person knowing their native language is constantly at hand (because all children, except for a few ones, were of Chechen nationality). Opening hours from 9 am to 12 pm were considered best. If there was such a possibility, they would like to have the day-room open till 3 pm or longer, but with a dinner break, e.g. 9 m-12 pm and 2 pm-5 pm. Both day-room workers were literally praised to the skies for their attitude to children – and although a conversation with parents was held in a separate room and in day-room workers' absence, it definitely was not parents' courtesy, but their honest opinion. As it has already been mentioned, the most important things for parents were children's social development and picking up skills connected with being in a group, getting to know each other and integrating with other children. If there were things and changes they would wish for in the day-room, parents were unanimous about creating some space for physical exercises – some spare room or a part of the day-room (if only it could expand.) could be fitted out with mats, gymnastics ladders and gymnastics classes could be held. They would also wish for more information about Polish culture, especially national holidays – as one mother said: *"Children keep asking why there are Polish flags hanging all around the centre and I have no idea what day it is, because I'm not from here."*

The perspective of closing the day-room at the end of the year due to financial reasons was a great worry to parents – as they said, children are really accustomed to classes and they would even love to play there at weekends, too.

Music classes were highly recommended: *They are just brilliant. Although the noise may give you a headache sometimes, the kids are in their element. The classes are run so well that even the youngest children benefit a lot from them.* Respondents were also satisfied with art classes and volunteers' presence – they knew them by their names and although they noticed that volunteers are much more lenient with children and give them more freedom, they would not say that children would run the volunteers ragged. If they could suggest anything, it would be more games focused on developing children's particular skills, so they would be ready for school or kindergarten and prepared to go out of the centre and explore its surroundings (*we have no idea where we could take them, because we don't know Lublin*). Mothers, encouraged to share their dreams, also mentioned improving the playground on the centre's premises – *right now, there is only a sandbox and two see-saws and sadly, the kids are chased away from Polish playgrounds.*

In response to a question if there were any other needs that should be met, mothers had one, very specific idea: creating a room where only women could train: *Men have their room for praying and we are banned from entering it. We have no place to ourselves at all. Although*

we're Chechens, we would also like to look pretty or have an opportunity to do some exercises, use training bikes or other fitness equipment. We're too embarrassed to do it in men's presence.

It should be stressed that all parents were very positive about the Project and their praises were really honest – it was visible that opening of the day-room changed a lot in adults' and children's lives during their monotonous stay in the centre.

While analyzing the question of contact and cooperation with the centre's authorities, it turned out that from the very beginning of day-room's work the contact with the management and administrator is rare: *If we need anything, we go to the cook, the cleaning lady or to the reception. We receive very positive signals from the cleaning lady and if she has any comments (for example about chamber pots), she gives them in a normal way. The same with the cooks – they're very polite. The administrator and men from the reception sometimes express their grief about the Chechens, but they are supportive if we have any requests.*

It follows from the conversations that contacts were more frequent at the beginning of the cooperation, but they were not too often later. The Project's representatives think that there should be a more frequent contact with centre's authorities and it should be changed in the future. On the other hand, the centre assesses the work of Homo Faber Association positively and sees how valuable it is for this place. It also gave a helping hand with preparations, offering the room, cleaning it and organizing its redecoration. It seems that the lack of frequent contact with the administration is caused by the lack of time: running the centre is a demanding activity, it is not only work with numerous documents, but also with over a hundred of residents, each of whom has their own business to do.



WORK OF THE-DAY ROOM IN ŁUKÓW

The day-room in Łuków is the only one run in a school and not in the refugee centre. The consequences of this decision are: the older age of children taking part in classes (all the children already go to school), less parents' engagement in day-room's work or no engagement at all (if children go from school to the centre on their own) and more emphasis on help with homework. The classes are also run by a Polish-Chechen duo, with commuters running additional classes (music, art, dance and psychological ones). The day-room opens after lessons – with the research in progress, the opening hours in the school year 2012/2013 were 11.20 am to 2.20 pm.

It should be mentioned that at the same time in the refugee centre, as its administrator says, a kindergarten for children aged 2-5 years old is run from 8 am and 3 pm (although a couple-month old baby was also admitted). The kindergarten is not free of charge, but the charge is symbolic – 20 PLN for a month. The younger children from the refugee centre in Łuków have therefore opportunities for development, too.

The attendance in the school day-room varies, as it depends on families coming and leaving. According to respondents, the attendance is based on the season of the year – if the weather is nice and it is warm, children play outside (there were days when there were fewer than 10 children in the day-room), in winter there are over 20 young people in the day-room. As one day-room worker says: *Of course, it is possible to control a larger group of children, but the problem is that some kids come here only to chase one another. There's also a group of children, who want to do their homework here and they tell me about it as soon as they enter this place. But many kids still want to run. And why would they rather run in the day-room and not in the hall? I guess it's because there are other kids here and they feel safer. The day-room makes them feel safer at school.* After all, the day-room was often mentioned as a safe place

– it is definitely a place where children are in their own national and cultural circle, which makes them more daring – suddenly, they are not a minority anymore, but a majority.

One of the Project's concepts that was not fully carried out should be mentioned here: the day-room is very rarely attended by Polish children – they come regularly to music classes, but they are not a part of day-room's everyday life. The headmasters admit that they tried to encourage young Poles to visit the multicultural day-room (one of the reasons for it is quite trivial: the Polish day-room is simply overcrowded), however, they did not manage to convince neither parents, nor children. While looking for the cause for this situation, not only the issue of Polish children's negative attitude towards the Chechens was brought up, but also one day-room worker gave an honest account: *Unfortunately, the Chechen women chase Polish children away if they come – they even prick them with pins. Polish children come to music classes on Wednesdays. They simply follow the crowd – if one of the kids says they are going here, others are following, too.* Hence, in the future more emphasis should be put on work with children of both nationalities and solutions that would make it possible to run multi-cultural classes in the atmosphere of cooperation, not competition or dislike.

Just like in Lublin, the day-room workers said that they enjoyed working there and they felt prepared for it – the meetings with the Coordinating Team helped them, too. It is also important for day-room workers to know the Russian language: *Such a person should know Russian. The younger kids don't know it, but the older ones do. It helps in eliminating barriers. The kids are less timid when they hear me talking to them in Russian. I also try to use Polish, because I want them to learn Polish, but if I do homework with them, I often have to explain things in Russian.*

The issue of doing homework turned out to be pivotal for the day-room in Łuków. It was also stressed by school headmasters – they said, although they knew that children loved music or art classes, from the perspective of school as the place for education, helping children with their homework is really important. This view was also shared by parents – the opinion of one of the fathers was almost identical with the one presented by headmasters: *Although we know that the kids love dancing or drawing, from parents' perspective homework is more important.* However, according to all groups of interest, including parents, there is too little time for doing homework, especially if there are too few teachers in day-room. Hence, wider engagement of competent volunteers for such work should be taken into consideration. It was noticed separately that despite the efforts of non-governmental organizations, which support refugee children with school issues, there is a need for systemic solutions related to the teaching program for refugee children. Some people also put forward an idea for creating a reception class at school for the newly arrived foreign children.

Despite the fact that doing homework is important for adults, children, when asked, regard classes with people from the outside as most interesting: music, dance or art classes etc. Special emphasis was placed on music classes, which were very popular indeed (based on observation) and seemed to involve half of the school. The classes are run by Mr. Tomasz Kozdraj, who was praised in every day-room for the way of running them and various objects he always brought with himself – those include different drums, bells, flutes and some hand-made instrument, the so-called noise-makers. Dancing and music classes are held in gymnasium, so everyone has space and can move around freely.

The art classes are run by the members of the Coordinating Team. It gives the Team an opportunity to watch children's behavior and day-room life or to ask about classes. During these classes children learn about seasons of the year or birds leaving for winter by creating art. Children are divided into groups for the classes – every group has 1,5 h classes and other children do their homework at that time, then the groups change. The classes are also run in Kolonia Horbów (3 groups x 45 minutes) and in Lublin (45 minutes).

The psycho-social classes, run by two psychologists, were focused on work on cooperation and empathy. They included tasks that made children open up and speak about their emotions.

It follows from the conversations with day-room workers that they try to stick to the framework program, but it depends in large part on children's presence and needs on a particular day. However, they stress that homework is a priority. They would also like parents to

be more engaged in children's education and have more contact with the day-room – only three mothers come to pick up their children from the day-room, other children go home on their own, so it is hard to contact their parents and it is the Chechen day-room worker, who usually visits families in the centre and keeps them informed them about children, not the other way round. There was also a suggestion that for some foreigners money is the only motivation for sending their children to school, as a family is given a special benefit then and there is little interest in child's actual progress, which makes it hard to work on child's overall development.

When it comes to cooperation between the Project's organizers and the school's headmasters, both sides claim that it goes very well. The Project's coordinator admitted that *there have been suggestions concerning the way the classes are run, but they are very polite and connected with improvement*. Such suggestion are regarded as very helpful feedback, so they are very welcome in comparison with silent indifference. The headmaster expressed his opinion as follows: *I can only speak highly of the Project – besides, I have phone numbers to all coordinators, so there is a hot line if there's such a need.*

The headmasters are happy about the day-room – they admit that Chechen children didn't visit the overcrowded Polish day room-too often (which is attended by over 60 children) and they felt out of place, conflicts also arose more often when the place was overcrowded. They think that it is enough for children when they integrate with others during lessons: Chechen children have Polish friends and the fact that they go to a Chechen day-room after classes is regarded by headmasters as an added value, because they receive more individual help with homework. It should also be noticed that there is a new cultural assistant , who has been working in Łuków from the beginning of this school year and is paid from the money coming from the project run by the Association "Dla Ziemi". She takes care of children till 12 pm and when the day-room opens, the workers look after them. The cultural assistant also disciplines children, encouraging them to visit day-room and do their homework there.

The headmasters spoke highly of the people employed in day-room, their competencies, their methods and cooperation with the school. They also emphasized the fact that day-room workers are a great support for class teachers, who ask them for help if there are any problems with children and work together on a solution.

Among suggestions there was also a recommendation made by the deputy-headmaster. According to her, Chechen children, on the one hand, should visit the day-room and do their homework there, on the other hand – Polish children should be encouraged to visit the day-room nevertheless.

With regard to any future needs, there is a great need for a psychologist for Chechen children – it would be perfect if such a person knew Chechen, however, Russian may come in handy, too. The Polish psychologist tries to help, but it is his part-time job and he is very busy. The school headmasters claim that they are perfectly aware that it is a kind of a wishful thinking, as they have never heard of such a person living in Łuków. Nevertheless, they decided to tell us about it – maybe someday in the future an opportunity to fulfill this need will come.

To sum up, although the day-room in Łuków is different than the one in Lublin, it received very positive opinions – all respondents are very satisfied with its presence and the choice of such a solution (considering children's age, the place and types of classes) is assessed as perfect.



WORK OF THE DAY-ROOM IN KOLONIA HORBÓW

Considering the location, the centre for foreigners applying for refugee status is very different from the previous two ones. Both Łuków and Lublin are towns with an infrastructure appropriate for education, leisure, commerce and services. Kolonia Horbów is a village consisting of a couple of houses situated directly by the A2 motorway Warszawa - Terespol (or Berlin – Moscow in a wider perspective). The centre is a former motel and is situated by the route, where traffic is very heavy all the time. Luckily, the centre is fenced off and there is a sideways entrance, so the risk of children running into the street is minimized. The centre has a playground and lots of space for outdoor activities, for example football, however, there is a problem with free rooms, so the day-room was created in a small room. When there were more children in the centre (e.g. over 50), it was necessary to divide them into groups based on their age and every group (there were three of them) had an hour of classes. At the end of the year, when many families with children left, the number of the young ones decreased by half and it was possible to have all children in one room, therefore they could have three hours of classes everyday. The classes are run from 2 pm to 5 pm, so after their regular classes at school in Berezówka (a village situated a couple of kilometers away from Kolonia Horbów) children take a bus and arrive in the day-room.

Despite a strong parents' lobby, the Coordinating Team decided that no children aged 3-4 would visit the day-room – it is originally designed for children over 5 years (the ones born between 2000 and 2008), who already go to school, and such little children would disturb classes – it would also be hard for them to move around in a small room. Parents seem to have accepted such a solution, however, there is still a need for a small kindergarten or running regular classes for the younger ones – a day-room worker mentioned that there were situations when parents claimed that their offspring were older than they actually

were (it was later verified by the centre's administration), so there was a need to hang the list of children (together with their dates of birth), who were allowed to visit the day-room – the list is updated for arrivals and departures.

The classes include doing homework, artistic, technical, music and dance classes and casual play. The music and dance classes are held in a bigger room. While the evaluation was carried out, heating the buildings turned out to be a challenge – in order to reduce costs, the administration turned the radiators off and it was really cold. Moreover, children have to cross a backyard on their way to classes.

While talking about the classes with children, the Chechen day-room worker emphasized the importance of casual, free play: *They all learn to cooperate through play. They hadn't know any group activities before. Now they put puzzles together, they cook together and get on well.* In fact, the observations confirmed it: for example, four boys played with cars and blocks at first, making up a story together, later they collected the toys, moved to the other corner of the room and started to put the puzzles together. The girls, who played with soft toys, behaved in a similar way. Such an effect is achieved after children have visited the day-room for some time; the newcomers tend to gather many toys around themselves (there were even attempts of taking toys out of the day-room, especially cars – from the original 24 cars only three remained in the day-room) and they are afraid of sharing them for fear they will lose them. Only later are they ready to open for a group.

Drawing is especially popular among children in the centres: the girls are very keen on colouring books with princesses (which are also popular among Polish girls in their age). Such an activity certainly has its positive aspects: children learn to draw within contour lines (a skill required by the program), tell the difference between colours, hold crayons properly and use scissors.

One day-room worker admitted: *When I started to work here, I had very ambitious plans to carry out. However, the reality has verified them. The kids who go to school usually want to take a rest here. The ones who don't attend school yet are interested in toys.* She also listed other benefits of playing: *I taught them to play Old Maid (pl. Piotrus). The game may seem non-educational at first glance, but children learnt a lot from it – they learnt to share! According to the rules, you have to give a card to someone else and get it back later. Giving "their" card to someone else was a big challenge for these children. They learnt to share things with others thanks to such games!*

"Wild and crude" children (as some of them are like that at the beginning) change into individuals, who say "good morning" and "good bye" and do not slam the door anymore. As one of the coordinators says: *Sometimes the changes in personality are spectacular, like it was with Makka, who changed from a crybaby into a child, who can draw together with a stranger now.*

A lot of children from Kolonia Horbów were so diligent during their dancing classes that they managed to put on a dancing show at school in Berezówka in December 2012. It was an opportunity for children to present themselves in front of their Polish peers in a different light and impress them with their talent and culture.

Children learn Polish through practice, because the Polish day-room worker talks to them in Russian only when it is absolutely necessary. The day-room workers are worried about the attitude towards learning Polish expressed by some parents – a lack of interest in this language, sending their offspring to school only because of the financial benefits and seeing the-day room as a place where children can rest, not learn. Hence, they see a need for working on parents' attitudes at the beginning, however, it is definitely not an easy task, especially if parents want to leave Poland anytime soon.

Doing homework is not as important as in the day-room in Łuków, because two Polish language teachers used to come here and help children with work. Unfortunately, from December 2012 the funds for education have been cut and only one teacher visits the centre now.

The workers from Kolonia Horbów are satisfied with the day-room's equipment, too – if there were any additional needs (e.g. materials for art classes), the Project's coordinator provided them in time. If they could wish for anything, they would like to have a simple photocopier at their disposal to make copies of the materials and colouring books for classes. Right now they have to make copies outside the centre.

How did the cooperation between the centre and Homo Faber look like? Both sides assessed it as very good, despite the fact that they got to know each other just when they started to carry out the Project. The administrator of the centre has a great deal of experience in cooperating with non-governmental organizations: a couple of them are or were working on the centre's premises: Instytut na rzecz Państwa Prawa, (eng. The Rule of Law Institute, which carried out a research program and provided legal advice), Stowarzyszenie Centrum Wolontariatu (eng. Volunteer Centre Association from Lublin, which has been running classes for children and adults from 2009), Stowarzyszenie Interwencji Prawnej (eng. Association for Legal Intervention – lawyers supporting refugees), Stowarzyszenie "Jeden Świat" from Poznań (One World Association, which ran two workcamps, i.e. international volunteer camps on the centre's premises), Fundacja "Polskie Forum Migracyjne" (eng. Polish Migration Forum Fundation, which held informative campaigns and helped to organize the events, e.g. The Potato Feast /pl. Święta Ziemiaka/), Międzynarodowa Organizacja ds. Migracji (eng. International Organization for Migration, which ran workshops for adults and teenagers), Caritas (aid in kind, legal aid, also psychological aid earlier). Having cooperated with so many institutions, the administrator is familiar with the style and mode of work of non-governmental organizations and project realities – it may be the reason for the praises he received from the Coordinating Team and day-room workers.

The administrator is worried by the news of withholding financial aid for the day-room and the perspective of its closure – according to him, it would be a great misfortune for children. He would even like to increase its working time – *if 8 hours are a wishful thinking, I'd be happy with five, then.*

Speaking of other needs in the centre, the administrator thinks that the foreigners lack a computer room. Unfortunately, there is no spare room for it and wiring would be necessary, too. Right now the centre provides the refugees with a Wi-Fi Lan, but the connection is very limited, especially with so many users.

DAY-ROOM LIBRARIES

One of the tasks within the Project was creating in day-rooms mini-libraries for children. The book collection would include books in Polish, Chechen and Russian.

However, it was not so easy to achieve this goal. The first challenge the organizers had to face was waiting for the donor to transfer the first payment – the first instalment was transferred three months after work in day-rooms began. Among numerous other Project's expenditures (e.g. day-room workers' and teachers' salaries), Homo Faber was not able to cover another expense – it would have to be a couple thousand zlotys spent on books. It was therefore necessary to wait for the first instalment, which was received in May/June.

Another challenge was the donor's financial principle, of which the Coordinators were not aware while defining the process of obtaining books: it was possible to settle only the accounts written out in Poland. Therefore, it was impossible to order books directly from Chechnya.

In addition, the Georgian association that had promised to give a helping hand with choosing books backed out when the Project began, so the Coordinating Team had to start the process from scratch.

As a result, the Polish books were bought or received as soon as the donor transferred the payment. It was necessary to wait longer for the Russian and Chechen books. The day-room in Łuków was the first to get the books in Russian and the Chechen books were finally ordered through a Polish firm.

The Coordinating Team admits that it was a frustrating and a time-consuming process. They add: *The books were not a bad idea, however, we didn't know what we were engaging into.* They also say that if they had to carry out this process once again, they would not use a phrase "creating a library" in order not to raise people's expectations too high.

Nevertheless, there is a positive aspect of it all: Polish literature is read by children everyday (even if the shelves were filled with books in Polish only) and while they were waiting for the books in Chechen to arrive, tales in this language were printed from the Internet.

VOLUNTEERS' ENGAGEMENT IN THE PROJECT

Volunteers' engagement in the Project also proved to be a demanding task due to various reasons. It was difficult to engage volunteers in such a small town like Łuków and bad accessibility of the centre in Kolonia Horbów makes it difficult to find volunteers, too. Nevertheless, the Association succeeded in finding people supporting the Project for every town by coming up with volunteer-friendly solutions (e.g. giving them a lift from Lublin or Biała Podlaska to Kolonia Horbów on the way to classes).

The biggest number of volunteers was engaged in Lublin – the interlocutors listed over ten people who helped directly with the classes (most of them are students of pedagogy and related courses) and there are also those who support the Project outside the day-rooms – they prepare posters and flyers, collect books etc. The training for volunteers was not very formal – it was just a casual conversation.

During the evaluation all groups of interest were asked for their opinion about volunteers, that is: day-room workers, parents, headmasters / administrators and children. All of them spoke highly of volunteers. Of course, they were not absolutely uncritical – sometimes it was pointed out that some volunteers are too lenient towards children or do not set limits, which results in the fact that children do not recognize their authority and do not follow their commands. A couple of respondents' answers about volunteers can be read below:

Volunteers are real help for me, extra pairs of hands for work. When we say "Cleaning /reading/playing time, they always help us. I think it's the maximum of what the new volunteers can do. There are two girls who are more engaged and have their own ideas for playing, they teach the kids new songs and children respect them, greet them and notice them. A volunteer with a good idea is invaluable. That's why you should ask upon recruitment if they have any ideas for classes or what can they bring into them. The course they do at university is not as important as

their personality and openness. The command of language also comes in handy, but that's an extra wish. Ideas are important, because the kids start to realize that a volunteer is not a toy that can be pulled by hair. [a day-room worker]

Volunteers in parents' eyes: From what I see and from the signals I receive from mothers – it's just okay. Volunteers are extra people for work and that's it. There are, however, a few mums, who are happy about these additional people, but they don't see the day-room reality, because they leave. It makes children feel more laid-back, they start to go too far, because they feel they can overstep the mark and volunteers cannot set a limit. And volunteers are tired after such a day, because kids are – according to them – rude, nasty and run them ragged. And the kids simply sense that they can act that way. The Polish ones, too. It's a problem for the volunteers who don't come regularly or often. It's not a case of someone, who comes here for special classes, e.g. art classes. [a day-room worker]

I'm happy when these two Agnieszkas visit children. My daughters are very keen on them. It's always somebody from the outside, new ideas, new faces. [a mother]

It's beyond doubt that volunteers benefited a lot from the classes. They kept asking about children. There was no negative attitude. Those people were open for new experience, they wanted to find out something new. However, if they are not familiar with the culture and everyday customs, they may be surprised or dismayed. [a coordinator]

A person's outlook also does matter, it's important that they are open and have a positive attitude towards the centre's residents. Unfortunately, you can't check it beforehand. You can't check one's attitude to work, either. [a coordinator]

The engagement of volunteers is a great ideal [a statement that recurred regularly in many conversations as a summary of the opinion]

According to the Coordinating Team, volunteers are most helpful if they help on a regular basis: if one day-room worker calls in sick, such a person may be responsible for the classes together with the other day-room worker. However, the ones who come occasionally, but run their own programs (e.g. art workshops) are of great value, too.

The Association admits that volunteers' recruitment and their later training are not structured, which might be a weak point they need to work on. The lack of criteria according to which volunteers are selected results in the fact that sometimes inappropriate people are chosen – people, who have unreal expectations, which were not dispelled at the beginning. According to one Coordinator, a preparatory period for volunteers before they start their work would be a great idea – meetings, telling people how to work with refugees, cultural workshops. Right now all the preparation is reduced to conversations with no particular scenario, so it all depends to a great extent on a person having the conversation. The longer time of getting into the swing of work is sometimes a cause of impatience, too.



CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As a result of the evaluation process it was possible to draw a couple of conclusions and make some recommendations, which will be summarized briefly, as they have already been described in detail in the previous chapter of this report. The following three conclusions generally assess the Project's preparation and realization:

The outcome of the research lets us conclude that on a general level the Project called "Supporting integration among refugees' children", carried out by Homo Faber Association, was conducted according to the adopted merits-related assumptions and schedule and the Project's aims concerning day-rooms' work were met.²

The actions carried out in the Project were clearly defined: they correspond to the real needs of the beneficiaries (residents of refugee centres in Lublin, Łuków and Kolonia Horbów), which had not been satisfied by programs run by other institutions or organizations. The way of running day-rooms for children is clearly effective, professional and worth passing on as "good practice" for other projects for the benefit of foreigners and their children, who apply for refugee status in Poland.

² Let's emphasize that the research was mainly focused on the first Project's aim, namely the work of the day-rooms. It did not include advocacy for choosing the cultural assistants in the communes, nor was it focused on broadening people's knowledge about Chechen culture - though the research was interwoven with confirming the value added by the local volunteers working towards the benefit of refugees.

The subsequent conclusions and recommendations concern the more detailed aspects of the Project:

The Coordinating Team made a good decision by distinguishing the needs of every refugee centre and defining the children target groups' age basing on local needs.

The model of employing two day-room workers – one Polish, one Chechen - is worth recommending. A good command of Russian proves useful for Polish day-room workers, as it was a case with this Project.

Time spent at day-rooms was made more enjoyable by a wide range of additional classes: art, music, dancing or psychological classes run by people from the outside. Every class contributed some value to day-room reality. They should be continued in next projects.

Equally good was the decision about a margin of freedom for deciding and making on the spot decisions about the additional classes needed in every day-room (e.g. children in Lublin were too young for psychological workshops, therefore children in other day-rooms could have more hours of them).

Doing homework turned out to be a very important aspect of the classes for school children, especially in Łuków (unlike in Kolonia Horbów, there was no supporting teacher there). More time should be devoted to this activity in the future. It would be perfect if volunteers could help, so that every child would receive more individual help and attention. The day-room Project turned out to be so important for children's development that additional efforts should be made in order to continue its financing.

If it would be possible to finance a similar project in the future, it would be desirable to increase day-rooms' opening hours, especially if they are on premises of refugee centres. It would be good to think about classes for two groups of children: the ones of pre-school age, who do not attend any other educational units, could stay from morning till dinner (e.g. from 9 am to 1 pm) and later, after dinner the ones of school age could come (e.g. from 2 pm till 5 pm). Such a solution would allow the youngest children to learn how to function within a group. Older children could receive help with their homework and take part in interesting extra classes.

In case of day-rooms located in schools, like the one in Łuków, more emphasis should be put on integration between children of different nationalities, e.g. by running classes that will attract Polish children as well and encourage them to cooperate.

As far as teaching children of different age the Polish language is concerned (e.g. in Lublin), it would be suggested that children are divided into age groups, so that teaching methods are better suited to their capabilities. However, volunteers' support would be required here – they would take care of the rest of the group, while others would have their class.

In case of another similar project, it would be recommended to consult day-room workers and consider their suggestions before the type of envisaged classes is specified. For example, a day-room worker from Lublin suggest creating eurythmics and gymnastics / P.E classes, as she noticed that sometimes children have difficulty in bowing or doing certain physical exercises.

A separate suggestion, put forward by both day-room workers and administrators of the units where day-rooms are located, is employing a child psychologist, preferably with a good command of Russian (ideally – Chechen), who would know how to work with children with posttraumatic stress disorder. There are children who have problems with aggression or cope with emotional problems resulting from leaving their country or parents'

stress and they transfer bad behaviour onto others – work with a psychologist would let them deal with those challenges in a more effective way.

If it is financially possible and there are people willing to help, it would be a good idea to take children on mini-trips in their neighbourhood – in addition to regular classes. Mothers willing to help could take part in such trips, too.

Homo Faber Association and Volunteer Centre Association in Lublin should undertake efforts to increase cooperation and create a better exchange of information about tasks carried out in the same centres.

Any future recruitment of employees for the Project, especially day-room workers, should be an open procedure in order to avoid conflicts. However, it is still recommended that other institutions are asked for opinion before a particular person is employed.

The opening of day-rooms should be preceded by an informative campaign in the centre, including not only meetings, but also written information about the mode of work in day-rooms, children's age, the personnel etc.

Although work with volunteers requires plenty of time and energy before a new person gets into the swing of their duties, it should be continued, as all groups of interest regard volunteers as a great merit of the project. Every volunteer brings in something new.

The Association should consider implementing strategies for volunteers' employment and management.

The Association should still uphold good relationships with the units where classes are run. Should there be any signs of dissatisfaction, it should seek constructive solutions to problems. It is also recommended that the representatives of the centres / schools cooperating with Homo Faber should be invited to conferences and focus-topic meetings and asked to share their experiences.

As it sometimes happens that Homo Faber Association is confused with other organizations that help refugees, it should undertake image-building activities in contact with the units it cooperates with, e.g. by providing reports on its activities and other publications on a regular basis.

If any additional funds are obtained, the Association should further investigate other needs listed in the report by the centres' residents, e.g. the need for a sewing course or a training room for women, and consider taking appropriate steps towards achieving these goals.

Finally, the Team coordinating the project Refugee children integration assistance should be praised for their attitude and engagement. Not only do they fulfill all the regular requirements, which are usually imposed on projects' coordinators, but they also exceeded them considerably by working with passion, undertaking activities towards creating equal opportunities for refugee children and devoting much more time to them than any project indicator could tell.

Małgorzata Tur

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