



CHILDREN SUMMER WORKSHOPS

Polish Red Cross

CASE STUDY

Photo description: A group of children showing their crafts during an art activity.
Photo credit: Polish Red Cross

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Photo description: A group of children presenting in an art activity.
Photo credit: Polish Red Cross

Background

The summer workshops organized by the Wielkopolskie (Poznań) branch of the Polish Red Cross aimed at strengthening and developing creativity as part of the 'Summer with the Polish Red Cross' initiative aimed to provide care for children during their free time from school activities, as well as to create a safe and friendly space conducive to the integration of children from Poland and Ukraine. Special emphasis was placed on building relationships in a different setting other than school environment, which – unfortunately – all too often reinforces existing divisions.

Who was Supported and How

The workshops included children from families in need of support as well as children of single mothers from Ukraine, for whom participation in this type of recreation was not only an opportunity for active leisure but also important emotional and social support. Joint activities,

workshops, and trips allowed participants to better get to know each other, develop empathy, and break down language and cultural barriers.

As part of the activities, a safe space was organized for children, including short workshop sessions. During these meetings, children practice appropriate social behaviors, had the opportunity to express their emotions and needs, as well as learned effective and healthy forms of relaxation. This zone created a space conducive to building a sense of safety, developing interpersonal skills, and supporting the psychological well-being of participants.

During the implementation of the activities, the attitude of the educators and volunteers played a crucial role, as they treated all children with respect, dedicating equal attention to each of them. Their commitment, empathy, and openness created an atmosphere of trust and acceptance, conducive to integration and building positive relations within the group.

Successes

1- Ensuring safe and valuable care during vacation time

The program enabled children from families facing economic difficulties and children of single mothers from Ukraine to spend their summer time in an active, safe, and socially supportive way.

2- Integration of children from Poland and Ukraine

Activities took place in an environment different from school, which helped break existing barriers and prejudices, while also creating a space for natural interactions, joint play, and building friendships.

3- Creating a safe space – emotional and relational

Through workshops that developed social and emotional skills, children were able to learn how to express their needs, regulate emotions, and engage in healthy forms of relaxation, which positively affected their mental well-being.

4- Strengthening the sense of worth and belonging

Each child was treated with respect and received equal attention from educators and volunteers, which fostered a sense of being important and accepted.

5- Building intercultural bridges and counteracting exclusion

The program contributed to creating an open, inclusive environment where children, regardless of their background, could feel part of the community.

6- Development of children's social and emotional competencies

Through participation in workshops and joint activities, children developed empathy, cooperation, communication, and the ability to resolve conflicts.

Challenges and Difficulties

1- Language and cultural barriers

Children from Ukraine did not always speak Polish fluently, which could hinder communication and integration. This was overcome by using simple language, elements of non-verbal communication, translations, and common games that did not require fluent language skills.

2- Differences in the socio-emotional development of children

The children came from different backgrounds, which meant varied needs and social skills. This required an individual approach and flexible planning of activities by educators and volunteers.

3- Limited resources – financial and organizational

The program was directed at children from families living in difficult situations, where they had to deal with a limited budget. The support received from the British Red Cross and IFRC helped overcome these obstacles.

4- Difficult experiences of participants (traumas, migration, poverty)

Some children experienced difficult emotions related to war, separation from family, or poverty. The mindfulness of the staff, the presence of adults who could provide emotional support, and the creation of a safe, stable space were important.

5- Building trust and engagement in children

Not all children engaged in activities right away – some were withdrawn or distrustful. Time, patience, consistency in actions, and individual attention gradually allowed relationships to be built and include every child in the group.

Lessons Learned

The program's success proved that the non-school environment – free from grades, competition, and divisions – fosters authentic integration of children from different cultures and backgrounds. Children find it easier to establish relationships in a space based on play, collaboration, and a common goal. The attitude of educators and volunteers, their respect and commitment, were crucial for building a sense of safety, trust, and belonging among the children. This shows how important soft skills and sensitivity are in working with children. The safe space proved to be very necessary – children eagerly took the opportunity to talk about their feelings and needs, which is rarely possible in everyday school or home environments. Communication difficulties do not pose an insurmountable obstacle when children are provided with support, time to adapt to the new environment, and positive cooperation models.