

UA PIXLA - Provision of Low-Threshold Social Services for Ukrainian Children and Youth

Abstract of the case study describes the practice of the UA PIXLA project – provision of low-threshold social services for Ukrainian children and youth

Project implementer

The organization *Ponton z. s.*, founded in 1996 in Plzeň, specializes in supporting children and youth, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds. It operates three registered social services as well as other activities, such as an early care program. A second focus area is advocacy work related to housing in lodging houses.

Ponton is perceived as a flexible and professional organization that was able to respond to the situation connected with the arrival of Ukrainian refugees and the lack of support services for children and youth.

Project objectives

The main goal of the project was to make the low-threshold services offered at Low-Threshold Facility for Children and Youth (hereinafter NZDM) PIXLA accessible to Ukrainian-speaking clients.

The project aimed to prevent the development of risky behaviors, strengthen young people's ability to cope with stress, adapt to new conditions, and navigate the institutional system, which in many ways differs from the one they were used to. The intention was also to develop the social skills and interpersonal competencies of the newcomers, and to support their active participation in society through leisure activities. The project focused on supporting children and young people in education, in choosing a career path, or in finding employment.



Cooperating entities

During its implementation, Ponton collaborated with a number of entities, including:

- **Czech Streetwork Association**, the umbrella organization for low-threshold services, which provided Ponton with methodological support in working with refugees. Together, they developed a methodology for involving intercultural assistants and shared experiences within a professional platform.
- **Regional Education Centre**, which cooperated with Ponton in supporting Ukrainian children and adolescents by offering language courses and career counseling. They referred clients to each other and exchanged information.

Other cooperating entities included schools, non-governmental organizations, local government, the labour office, and others, with cooperation primarily focused on resolving clients' individual situations.

Target group

The target group of the project were children and youth aged 6–20 who had fled Ukraine as a result of the war and lived in Plzeň. Most refugee children did not participate in leisure activities, mainly due to financial constraints and language barriers. The families of these children often faced a lower standard of living than they had in Ukraine. The children struggled with integration into school collectives and with bullying.

Project activities

The project implemented three key activities, providing both walk-in and outreach forms of the service, as well as an activity focused on staff training and supervision.

- **Walk-in Service**

This activity enabled clients to visit the NZDM PIXLA. In the low-threshold centre, they received individual and group support in a safe and stable environment.

UA PIXLA - Provision of Low-Threshold Social Services for Ukrainian Children and Youth

that had been missing from the children's lives. The service included assistance with navigating the Czech education system, the labour market, and everyday life, as well as support in dealing with personal, social, and crisis situations. It also offered leisure activities, tutoring, and programmes covering various areas of life.

● Outreach Service

Through this activity, staff reached out to children and young adults directly in the places where they lived or spent their time. The outreach service also included accompanying clients, organizing outdoor events, and communicating with people close to the clients, such as parents (with the client's consent).

Benefits of the project

The most important impact of the project activities, according to staff, was the trust built – not only among the children, but also their parents. Children felt welcome at PIXLA, appreciated the friendly approach of the staff, and valued the support provided to them.

“No one here says bad words to me. (...) When I did something wrong, they said – do it again, don't do this, do it differently.” (project participant)

Staff also noted that the trust they managed to build with clients could be transferred to other organizations, which made it possible to create a **network of support** around the clients that they trusted.

Among the key benefits mentioned by the staff was **providing a safe space** for the children who came to them. PIXLA offered a variety of activities and **opportunities for development**, but also had clearly set rules that had to be followed (e.g., no use of vulgar language). The wide range of leisure activities was attractive to children, allowing them to develop their talents and express themselves.

Having found a safe place they could come to was the first step for many children towards finding new friends and **integrating into Czech society**.

“Before I found a friend who brought me here to Pixla, I was just sitting at home doing nothing...” (project participant)

Language clubs, as well as informal communication with staff, other children at the club, and during joint activities, helped the children **acquire the Czech language**. Staff also facilitated Czech language courses with other organizations.

In the area of education, impacts were observed both at the level of primary schooling and within the system of secondary and higher education and the fields of study available. PIXLA provided everything – from career guidance and preparation for secondary school to practical help with submitting applications. Equally important was **motivating children to pursue education** and helping them keep up with their studies.

Older clients were supported in **integrating into the labor market**. They learned how to find part-time jobs or employment, became familiar with different types of employment contracts, and gained an understanding of common working conditions.

An important topic was the **healthcare system and access to medical care**. PIXLA also focused on the **mental health of children**.



UA PIXLA - Provision of Low-Threshold Social Services for Ukrainian Children and Youth

Best practices

A notable example of good practice was the way **intercultural workers were involved and integrated into the existing social service** NZDM PIXLA. Originally designed for Czech children – mainly Roma children living in socially excluded conditions – the service was also made accessible to Ukrainian children. Intercultural workers became a permanent part of the PIXLA team. Initially, they acted as a “bridge” between Ukrainian children and the original staff, but by the time of compiling this case study, they also had their own Czech clients, and Czech staff, in turn, worked with Ukrainian clients.

The main advantage of strengthening an established social service was that **it would remain available to clients even after OPZ+ funding ended**. Clients were already connected to the service, and even if sufficient funds could not be secured for intercultural workers' salaries, the clients could continue using it.

Other good practice in working with the target group included:

- **PIXLA staff completed a training course on Ukraine**, its specificities, customs, and traditions, which they found valuable when working with Ukrainian children. Equally important was the training of Ukrainian staff, e. g. through completing a social services worker training course.
- **Connecting Roma and Ukrainian clients** was a major challenge. Staff worked on building relationships between the two groups. Initial fears of conflicts between Roma and Ukrainian children, as well as concerns that expanding the target group would be at the expense of existing clients, did not materialize.
- During the project, **operational measures were introduced** – the club was open on different days for different age groups. This was in response to the growing number of clients and aimed at ensuring and maintaining the quality of services provided.

Barriers and challenges

Ponton identified **housing in lodging houses**, often in substandard conditions, and the lack of social housing as a key obstacle to integration (not only for the Ukrainian target group), which the organization was unable to influence.

With regard to Ukrainian children, the **unavailability of healthcare** was also mentioned; in particular, it was not possible to secure a pediatrician or dentist for some children.

The target value for the indicator *Use of Supported Services* (670102) was considered to be set high. While the project team was confident the indicator would be met, they also felt it was at the upper limit in terms of maintaining the quality of services provided.

