



DEAR READER

This publication will introduce you to the achievements of a number of outstanding individuals who live in a wide variety of communities across Ukraine. These people have both transformed their own lives and made a real difference to living conditions in their communities by mobilising others. This change has been the result of their commitment to work with others, to learn new approaches to solving community problems, to apply this learning to make change happen, and to share this learning as widely as possible. The people whose stories are described here are very special, but at the same time, their backgrounds are typical of countless thousands of individuals across Ukraine. What they have achieved, others can also achieve.

These people and their communities were assisted through the Democratising Ukraine

Programme to learn and apply a range of community development techniques. They formed coalitions of NGOs, and partnerships with local administrations, local businesses and local mass media. They learned how to talk and listen to others, how to engage and empower others and resolve tensions, how to think strategically and work to make change happen.

By publishing these stories we hope to widen the circle of champions of our approach to community development, to encourage those who wish for positive change in Ukraine and who are interested in learning ways to achieve this change within a democratic context. The experiences recounted here are particularly relevant for those who have a concern for social justice and for ensuring the inclusion in democratic and community life of those who are most disadvantaged, enabling those most affected by social exclusion to have more influence over policy and service delivery which affect their lives. ■

The Democratising Ukraine Small Project Scheme (DU Programme) — is financed through the UK Government's Department for International Development and implemented by a consortium of Ukrainian NGOs, the Committee of Voters of Ukraine and the Ukrainian Centre for Independent Political Research, in partnership with the British Council Ukraine. The DU Programme works to help strengthen the democratic voice of the vulnerable by increasing their capacity to self-organise and influence policy, improve the delivery of services and broaden access to opportunities to secure their social and economic needs. The DU Programme contributes to development through non-governmental organisations and other civil society organisations, building partnerships, coalitions and networks between these organisations and other stakeholders, such as local and national administrations, local businesses and local mass media. The key to this work has been in the building of coalitions for change, bringing together the range of interests in communities, achieving a commitment to a common purpose for change and ensuring that those who are most often left out of these types of processes are included. ■



WORKING FOR CHANGE

The DU Programme encourages a partnership and coalition building approach based on creating a learning environment and promoting development, use and dissemination of practical skills. This approach helps make links between communities and NGOs, between NGOs/CSOs and public institutions and with wider stakeholders, including the media and the private sector. It works at the level of municipalities to engage communities and NGOs in both practical projects to demonstrate how different types of interventions can assist in providing a voice and improved services for poor and vulnerable people, and in partnerships with local authorities formed to identify where and how development can be assisted by policy and practice change.

The DU Programme is based on a participative community development methodology. This is based on values and principles of democracy, equality, empowerment, social justice and inclusion, self-reliance, learning and partnership working. The DU Programme works to bring the democratisation process from the sphere of political discourse to people at the community level by changing attitudes, relations and perceptions in communities, and enabling democratic transformations in them.

This community development methodology is an enabling and empowering method of working with people, which:

- Assists communities in identifying shared issues, experiences and needs which extend beyond individual or sectoral interests to the wider community;
- Assists communities in finding relevant and accessible ways of organising together, including a wide range of stakeholders;
- Assists communities in finding local solutions to local problems and turning these into appropriate community action;
- Assists in developing community capacity for local action and participation in democracy through learning, awareness raising and skill sharing;
- Assists communities in asserting more control over their own lives, over the environments they live in and over the policies that affect them in a just, equitable and sustainable way.

The DU Programme uses a wide variety of techniques to assist communities with their learning. These include formal training sessions, counselling and consultancy, mentoring and experience sharing, both within the individual communities involved in the Programme and across the 10 communities.





The DU Programme works to encourage change both at the local policy level by supporting local communities in their work with local authorities and by supporting local activists and organisations to mobilise communities to solve the most urgent problems at the grass roots level. Being an innovative programme, the DU Programme develops learning environments within and between the communities where new and creative approaches to community development may be explored. These learning environments are not just about the specific training or capacity building inputs that the Programme has provided. We have encouraged communities to learn within themselves, and through this process to recognise and accept difference, to change attitudes and approaches and harness a wide range of energies to make change happen. The Programme brings new opportunities to the local communities, NGOs and their people, first of all, through the extended possibilities of communication and the constant process of learning – they learned from each other and they learn better practices.

From the very start, the DU Programme saw the importance of a strong participative monitoring and evaluation strand to its work. Now, it is well equipped to trace change in every community. Recognising that quantitative data – for example, the number of people who

went through DU training, the number of activities organised in the communities, the number of young people who found a job because of skills developed through the Programme – do not on their own demonstrate all the complexity of links and interconnections which are being developing on the grass-root level, the Programme devotes significant attention to defining and evaluating 'soft', qualitative indicators of change including the increased capacity of local NGOs, strengthened community-local government partnership, engagement of the target audience in solving problems at the community level and their influence on policy direction, etc. In this work, the success of individuals engaged in the DU Programme becomes a key measure to transformation processes in our communities.

We believe that success can be measured by personal transformations such as the empowerment of local people, particularly those who are affected by poverty and by social exclusion, to unite and improve their life and the lives of their peers. Our success stories are only snapshots of the lives of many people living in the Ukrainian communities, but they demonstrate that with determination and change brought about through learning and applying community development processes, significant societal changes are achievable. ■





For Lesia Olievska, the mother of a disabled child and leader of a voluntary association for disabled children Nadiya ('Hope' in English), the opportunity to get involved in the project provided a chance to work on the issues that concern disabled children and their families. At the beginning of the project, she was concerned that some of the other member organisations of the coalition showed a prejudice towards disabled children and she wasn't sure how this would be overcome.

As the project developed, Lesia saw that things were the opposite from what she had thought at the beginning. It wasn't simple though. Recalling the development stage, Lesia said: 'We had doubts and were uncertain about the success of our project. We did not trust the community; we felt that the community was aloof and that it did not accept us. Parents ... had got used to the attitude when the community rejects their disabled children. However it did not happen this time...We discovered them and they discovered us.'

The project transformed the way the community viewed the rights of disabled children and their families. The centre that Lesia took the lead in building up works to integrate disabled and other children through shared activities. Education and medical staff have also changed their views of the needs and abilities of disabled children and integration and access are really on the agenda in Brody.

It wasn't easy to get this far, however, Lesia recalls that they faced considerable difficulties at the very beginning of the work in the coalition. There were 10 months of training, joint meetings, discussions, arguments, tears and hard work that eventually changed the attitudes of everyone who became involved in the coalition. Understanding the simple benefits of part-

nership working developed: non-governmental organisations got together to address an identified common problem, and by each organisation carrying out particular tasks, but also working together to a common goal, — significant change was achieved in the community as a whole and in particular for a marginalised and disadvantaged group — disabled children and their families. The work with this target group also mobilised the community to think of other projects they can do together, learning the strengths of community action. During the project implementation period, the number of organisations increased significantly: at present there are 40 members of the coalition, including partners. An active and engaged civil society has been developed in Brody.

After many months of hard and productive work Lesia states: 'Programme workshops served as a university education for us. Today we share our experience and information materials with other people; we develop new programmes not only for one organisation but for others as well...We simply want to make our local citizens more active and eager to improve their lives for better. People listen to us now, they ask for our advice, they recommend us to other people...At present we help not only disabled children, at the same time we promote the community development in general.'





BUILDING CONFIDENCE TO ENABLE PEOPLE TO ACHIEVE THEIR POTENTIAL HAS BEEN A THEME OF THE DU PROGRAMME...

Losing a job is more than just the income — it can also mean losing stability in life and confidence in oneself. This happened a few years ago to Svitlana Komar from Vuhledar, Donetsk oblast. Despite considerable efforts, she found it impossible to get a new job. As a result, she became very depressed. When Svitlana received an offer to participate in the Democratising Ukraine Programme, she was hesitant and would not accept the offer for a long time, explaining her refusal by what she saw as the big responsibility associated with the work. Eventually she agreed and became the project co-ordinator and then started building co-operation with other non-governmental organisations in town.

Now Svitlana says: 'Thanks to the workshops, and teamwork, I gained management and PR skills; I got substantial experience in various fields. I do know that I can use it. Also I feel confident because I am a part of a network of non-governmental organisations. I am not alone.' According to Svitlana, in the beginning she did not understand much but she acquired new skills and knowledge at the community workshops and from her everyday work. As a result, problems relating to the employment of the disabled and women were addressed in Vuhledar; local authorities became convinced that NGOs are effective entities, particularly due to their effective organisation of a small grants competition for the community, called 'Community Pride'. As a result of this competition, local people have become more active — the majority of the



projects that received funding within the framework of the Community Pride Programme were developed by initiative groups of local people and not by previously active NGOs.

Today Svitlana is the manager of the coalition project. Her plans include working on the establishment of a Community Foundation in order to generate funds for the town and to create a social enterprise, in particular a computer service centre.

Svitlana comments that the Programme has concentrated its attention on sustainability of the NGOs, developing their own local resources for the future. At present Svitlana is certain about her own future, as she knows that she has now built skills, experience and confidence for a successful career. ■



AND CONFIDENCE AND NEW SKILLS CAN ALSO HELP PEOPLE TACKLE DIFFICULT PERSONAL PROBLEMS...

A key goal at the beginning of the Community for Youth project in Sambir was to tackle the problem of youth unemployment. The project organised a range of activities, including PC training, office management, financial management and tour guiding, as well as various community workshops which aimed to encourage young people to find new directions, learn new skills and build confidence. For one young person who attended these activities, the experience was life-changing.

A young man was encouraged by his wife to come to a community workshop on Adaptation in the Group. He enjoyed taking part in all the activities during the workshop, in particular role-plays, simulating situations for communication with the potential employers, learning how to prepare a CV. He also enjoyed the friendly and warm atmosphere of the event. Later this young man completed computer courses and learned how to use the PC and the Internet. It would have been a simple story — but this young man was also an injecting drug user.



administrator. 'Can you imagine, I felt very confident; the workshop helped me, I knew answers to all the questions of the employer!' In this case it is not only employment and the opportunity to provide for his family that matters, but also the internal change and will to stop injecting drugs, to regain health and happiness and to feel a full member of the community.

As a result of his involvement in the workshops and training events, he stopped using drugs. Next, he found a job. According to the project managers, his eyes shone with joy after a successful interview at one of the local computer clubs of Sambir when he got a job as the system

administrator. Their availability, and the professionalism and understanding of the staff has helped many young people in the town, but in this case, the impact of the project has been significant, in helping a young man, and his family, regain their life, through overcoming his drug addiction. ■





WHEN PERSONAL CONFIDENCE HAS BEEN BUILT, THERE IS OFTEN A WISH TO MOBILISE OTHERS TO TACKLE PROBLEMS...

Ilona Hudkova is the mother of a disabled child. She thinks that the parents of disabled children should be able to say to the community 'We have a disabled child'. However, she has been only too aware that it is not easy for parents to be open in this way and many families with disabled children experience family breakdown due to stress and many parents suffer from depression. Ilona is the head of Chervonohrad Association for the Protection of Disabled Children — Strumochok ('Stream' in English), which was founded in 2000. Having this organisation has made a difference for parents of disabled children, as they have been able to come together, take part in training and mutual support sessions and this has helped in breaking down the isolation that they feel.

But being involved in a self-help organisation is one thing — and feeling that the community around you does not understand your issues and needs is another. Whilst Strumochok was able to provide support for the parents of children with disabilities, the group of these parents felt isolated and that their problems and needs were not understood by the wider society. They hoped one day that the community would start to understand their issues and treat them as equal members.

What has changed for Ilona and the other parents in Strumochok was the opportunity to become involved in the Democratising Ukraine Programme. Strumochok became a coalition member and co-implementer from the very beginning. Ilona found herself at the centre of project activities, and through the coalition and its work, found out about other NGOs in Chervonohrad, which she had not known existed. 'I did not know before that these people existed, I did not know what they were doing,' Ilona says. She discovered that many of these organisations, like hers, were concerned about the problems and needs of vulnerable and marginalised people. Working with them, she was able to get them involved in some key activities



to highlight the issues affecting disabled children and their families. One of these activities is an annual Walkathon, which she had been organising for a few years. The idea of the Walkathon is that families with children with disabilities 'come out of the shadows' and walk through the central streets of the town, together with other families and their children. In the past, she had had difficulty in getting the local authority interested in this event. But due to the project and its work to build constructive links with the local authority, in 2006, the Town Mayor and local deputies joined the event, and whereas in the past, about 20 people took part, over 1500 local people took part in 2006. Real public awareness of the issues of this group had been raised.

Ilona realises that it was difficult for one organisation to solve problems on its own. As a result of her leadership and participation in the DU Programme, Ilona Hudkova was awarded the Woman of the Year — Public Activist title in 2006 by the local authority. 'Today we are trying to do things not just for our families but for the entire community,' Ilona says. ■



AND CITIZEN ACTIVISM CAN RESULT IN CHALLENGING AUTHORITIES TO DEAL WITH A PRESSING ISSUE...

At the end of May 2005, the help line in Drohobych town that had been set up by the project received a call from a young, unemployed man, Andriy Dovzhko. Andriy told the help-line operator that he and the other residents of the street where he was living were suffering from poor quality drinking water. The water had greasy oil stains in it and was unpalatable. It was thought by the residents that the oil refinery located on the same street was causing the problems. Numerous appeals by local residents individually to the city authorities had not been responded to.

After talking to staff and volunteers at the project, Andriy realised that the community would have to work together to solve this problem. It was decided to hold a public meeting for the local residents, and then initiate a petition from the residents to the relevant authorities, requesting a water quality test. As a result of the public meeting, appeals were prepared and submitted to the local sanitary and epidemiological service, Drohobych city council, the management of the refinery and the oblast council. This action initiated an immediate response: the sanitary and epidemiological service took water samples and found admixtures of oil substances in the water. The water was unfit to drink. As a result of this investigation, the local authorities deliv-



ered drinking water to the residents of the street, and action was started to get a long-term solution. The oblast council also took up the issue and consequently, the oil refinery installed more advanced equipment to avoid environmental pollution.

Andriy says that he has learned a lot from the successful experience of solving the drinking water quality problem in his own street. Before his actions on this issue, he had never taken part in community life. He now understands that many problems can be solved by uniting people in community activity and effort. As a result, he became a project volunteer, in order to help other people learn from his experience and learn the effectiveness of positive community action.





MOVING FROM COMMUNITY ACTIVISM TO ELECTED OFFICE MAY BE THE NEXT STEP...

Bohdan Semchuk is a community activist in Brody. He was appointed as the DU Programme local co-ordinator there at the beginning of the project. His goal was to focus the work of the coalition of non-governmental organisations, not only on the target group of the project, in particular disabled children and their families, but also to find ways to involve the entire community in the project. Working with the project team, this approach proved very successful and many NGOs joined the project and this has enabled significant growth and development of the NGO sector in Brody.

Whilst doing this work, Bohdan started to learn new ways through which community problems could be solved. The workshops run by the Programme, participating in a study visit to Northern Ireland, meeting people involved in DU projects from other cities all increased his learning. Communication with representatives of local self-government also showed to Bohdan the ways in which elected office could be used for the benefit of communities. As a result, Bohdan decided to stand for election to the position of city Mayor — and in the elections held in Spring 2006, Bohdan stood and won. He is now the city Mayor in Brody.



shared his democratic experiences with newly elected deputies and helped them to understand the importance of initiatives such as the Compact and the need to have interaction and co-operation between authorities and the community. It is also symbolic that one of the first actions that Bohdan took as Mayor was to provide an accessible ground floor office facility in the city council offices, to serve as a citizen's advice point. Before, the office was located up a steep flight of stairs, which prevented easy access for elderly or disabled people.

As the city Mayor, Bohdan is applying the learning from the DU Programme. He fully supports the dialogue of local authorities with the community and believes that you must take people's views fully into account in making decisions. Whilst working on the Compact, which has been drawn up between the local authorities and the NGO sector in Brody, he

Bohdan's story shows that learning to work with common goals for community benefit can change the perception of the individual involved. People can gain a unique experience when working in an NGO. And as a result, these people can end up standing for elected office, where they can influence change and develop a new way of working, which encourages and uses active dialogue with the community, for community benefit. ■



AND ANYONE, OF ANY AGE, CAN GET INVOLVED...

When you see Nina Petrivna on the stage, acting with her female colleagues in front of the entire community at the local event called 'Sokal Autumn', you can hardly believe that just three years ago Nina was restricted in her social contacts, mainly communicating only with her colleagues from the Sokal District Association of Disabled People, the organisation that she is the head of.

Every community has people who need support and care — isolated and lonely older and retired people, people living with disabilities, etc. Elderly people without close family and friends about them can often feel lonely and abandoned. And this was the case in Sokal until the Club of Senior Persons was created, within the framework of the Democratising Ukraine Programme. Nina Petrivna Sergeyeva became the leader of this newly formed organisation.



Nina Petrivna has become an active participant in the project: she started working at the Citizens' Advice Bureau set up within the project; she suggested interesting proposals for project events. She keeps in contact with representatives of the local authorities, and participates in the preparation of various documents submitted by the coalition for review by the authorities. 'Before there used to be one dominating approach — here is a place where disabled people can get fed, here is a stadium for one day,' Nina Petrivna says. 'Today our people are full members of the community. We are recognised both by the local authorities and the town. At times I can't tell the difference between healthy and disabled people since disabled people don't feel inferior to healthy people.' Thanks

to the Club of Senior Persons, retired and elderly disabled people enjoy life again. The members of the Club discuss different problems, invite guest speakers to their meetings, constantly learn new things, and devise entertainment events, which often promote themes within the DU project. Fashion shows, cooking competitions, dance nights conducted by the members of the Club are really 'something else!' But the main thing is that thanks to the project they socialise with other members of the community, get engaged in a wide range of project activities and demonstrate that they have incredible stamina.

Now, after several years of active public work Nina Petrivna Sergeyeva comments that, in a way, the walls of her house have expanded. 'Maybe some people considered us <left in the cold>,' Mrs Sergeyeva says. 'But when new opportunities emerged, everybody could see wonderful people among us.'

As for herself, Nina Sergeyeva notes that the participation in the Programme helped her feel relaxed and confident: 'I feel I could fly.' We should note at this stage, that Nina Petrivna is over 80 years old! ■





LEARNING, AND CHANGING, CAN HAPPEN TO ANYONE — AND GIVES A DIRECTION FOR THE FUTURE...

Why are European non-governmental organisations much more active than Ukrainian ones? How can we change the situation? Leader of the coalition of the non-governmental organisations working in Yenakieve, Donetsk oblast, and head of the local organisation of employers, Yuriy Poliakov believes that Ukrainian NGOs should address problems themselves and not just wait government to do things for them.

In the past Yuriy did not particularly believe in the value of non-governmental organisations. However, a study visit to Northern Ireland, organised by the DU Programme, changed his views. 'I had an impression that almost each and everyone in this country belonged to some civil society organisation,' Yuriy said. For example, when a young disabled man failed to enter a higher educational institution, the public and mass media forced the authorities to adopt new laws to address this problem. According to Yuriy, the type of public review of draft laws in Northern Ireland, particularly those that will have an impact on excluded and marginalised groups, is important. 'Such a level of public participation in decision and policymaking is striking', comments Yuriy. However, the most important thing is that the community is not only successful in the introduction of the new legislation related to various fields but is very active in relation to existing laws and policy frameworks.

'Personally I have changed my perception of many things. I understand now that the NGOs can solve many local problems. At first, they may seem to



require budget funds but in reality they can be solved at a different level,' says Yuriy.

Yuriy is positive that if local non-governmental organisations were more engaged with local authorities, through consultations or through advocacy, Ukraine would be moving faster on the road of reform. These were the topics of his numerous talks and meetings conducted in Yenakieve. This town has a great potential to make the public movement more active, first and foremost, due to its youth. The Pupil's Parliament and the Co-ordinating Board for Youth Policy under the umbrella of the town mayor were established during the project run under the DU Programme. In Yuriy's opinion, community workshops and various events conducted within the Programme contributed to the development of the third sector in the region, since they helped identify the leaders among the youth and encourage them to participate in the public activities. Yenakieve, due to the work of people like Yuriy Poliakov, is making change happen. ■



CONCLUDING REMARKS

The DU Programme believes in placing people and the issues they face in the middle of a process of change. We achieve that by supporting local initiatives and motivating people. Working for change requires courage and self-confidence. It also requires a commitment to listen to the voice of people in the community, an understanding of the importance of following the principles of open, transparent and effective governance in everyday work. Self-confidence is particularly crucial for vulnerable people, and groups, who have been marginalised, to understand that they are not left alone with their problems — they can unite, work together, and open doors for change. Self-confidence contributes to the development of understanding and partnerships with other sectors which go beyond mere humanitarian aid. It is

the new sense of self-confidence that has enabled dozens of people in our communities to participate in the local elections. Most of those people had not even thought about doing that before engaging in the DU Programme. These women and men of different backgrounds and interests — micro-project staff, coalition members and volunteers, among them people with disabilities and people who had been marginalised — believed in themselves and came first on the elections lists to local councils.

It appears that the ambitious title of the Democratising Ukraine Small Project Scheme, which reflects the goal to which we are aspiring, is not an unattainable or faraway dream. In fact, democratisation is a real process where each of us, working together, makes this dream a reality. ■

