



Case Note

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THE PRACTICE OF PROVIDING PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSISTANCE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF THE THIRD AGE AND HUMANITARIAN CENTER FOR UKRAINIAN REFUGEES IN SLOVAKIA

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Abstract

Relevance. Universities of the third age (U3A) are institutions aimed at the post-labor socialization of the older generation, aimed at realizing the idea of "Education throughout life", which, unfortunately, have not become particularly widespread in Ukraine. All the more interesting is the experience of creating such an institution at the beginning of the war by Ukrainian specialists who ended up in Slovakia, and the generalization of the features of their interdisciplinary work on psychological support and social therapy of elderly Ukrainian refugees who are abroad.

Methodology. As part of the implementation of the project "Social and psychological assistance for children and adults" on the initiative of the NGO "League of Mental Health" (Slovakia), a University of the Third Age for elderly refugees from Ukraine was established in the city of Gabchykovo. Its activity is based on interdisciplinary, person-oriented and integrative approaches and principles of trust, mutual assistance, tolerant attitude towards the elderly.

Sample: 15 people aged 62 - 80 years.

Methods. The Spielberger-Khanin (1976) method, conversations, individual, couple, group consultations, occupational therapy, art therapy, social and educational therapy for the elderly; intergenerational programming program for children and the elderly.

The results. During the 5 months of work of the team of specialists at U3A, a favorable psychological climate was created; adaptation of the elderly to existence in a local foreign-language environment was carried out; their family conflicts were resolved; integrative classes for the elderly with children were implemented in the center for refugees, which contributed to the development of tolerance and mutual understanding between the two generations. These measures ensured a reduction in the manifestations of stress and anxiety of the study participants, and the steady development of the cognitive and creative spheres of the elderly participants of the U3A.

Key words: *old age, adaptation, psychological assistance, mental health, psychoeducation, university of the third age*



Relevance

Education of the elderly in Ukraine is represented by institutions that offer various types of formal and informal education, namely: civic education (public organizations, women's centers and associations, family clubs, associations of people of the third age); additional professional education (foreign language courses, computer courses); educational courses based on interests (clubs, cultural centers at libraries); adult education centers organized at state institutions (philharmonics, libraries, museums, cultural centers, medical education centers). However, such a variety of educational activities for the older generation in Ukraine, unfortunately, cannot be characterized as a complete system of education for the elderly, which has naturally interconnected elements, since all these institutions exist separately and are united only within the framework of the project activities on a temporary basis.

In the summer of 2008, the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy of Ukraine together with the population fund of the United Nations Office in Ukraine (UNF) joined the implementation of the "Universities of the Third Age" project. The main tasks of the "Universities of the Third Age" program, innovative for Ukraine, were defined, which consist in promoting the mental, social, intellectual and physical activation of people of the older age group, namely: comprehensive development of a person of retirement age; popularization of educational initiatives; assistance to people of retirement age in social and psychological adaptation to modern living conditions by mastering new modern knowledge; reintegration of the elderly population into the active life of society; forming the principles of a healthy lifestyle in old age and increasing their medical competence.

Methodology

Within the framework of the project "Social and psychological assistance for children and adults" on the initiative of the independent public association "League of mental health" ("Liga za zúslené zdravie" in Bratislava, Slovakia) a university of the third age for elderly refugees from Ukraine was created.

The functioning University of the Third Age "Nadvechirya" in the humanitarian center in the city of Gabchykovo (Slovakia) is an innovative educational and psychological project for a separate category of adults, which aims at introducing and practicing the principle of lifelong learning. Its activities are based on interdisciplinary, personally oriented and integrative methodological approaches and principles of trust, tolerant attitude, mutual assistance to the elderly who are socially active. The purpose of the operation of this institution is to provide psychological assistance to Ukrainian refugees by a team of specialists of the "League of Mental Health". The tasks of U3A are: 1) to provide individual and group psychological consultations to the elderly in order to stabilize their psycho-emotional state; 2) test and develop their personal abilities and adaptation skills in order to adapt to changing social conditions; 3) to create a favorable psychological climate for the elderly and their family members in order to reduce anxiety and stress; 4) support the

readiness for education of the older generation and, thus, promote their resocialization.

U3A work methods: diagnosis, conversations; individual, couple, group consultations; art therapy, occupational therapy. social and educational therapy for the elderly; psychological support, reduction of stress; development of the cognitive and creative sphere of the personality of an elderly person.

Number of listeners: 15 people aged from 62 to 80 years.

Results

At the beginning of the work, the elderly were diagnosed according to the Spielberger-Khanin Test in the modification of Y. L. Hanin (1976), which belongs to the methods used to study the psychological phenomenon of anxiety. This questionnaire consists of 20 statements that refer to anxiety as a state (state of anxiety, reactive or situational anxiety) and 20 statements to define anxiety as a disposition, a personality trait (trait anxiety). Situational and personal anxiety is established. All individuals, without exception, have a high level of anxiety, which correlates with the presence of neurotic conflict, emotional and neurotic breakdowns, and psychosomatic illnesses.

What interesting things came out of the three-month classes? At the end of the third month of systematic classes, the concept of intergenerational programming began to be implemented, i.e. creating such programs and conducting such integrated classes that expanded cooperation, interaction, and also facilitated the exchange of knowledge and skills between two generations that are at the opposite ends of human life: children and the elderly. We used the experience of the ONE generation center located in Los Angeles (California, USA) as an example of the implementation of intergenerational programming programs. It was created more than 40 years ago as a day care center for the elderly, and in 1994 a kindergarten opened on its territory. ONE generation unites approximately 160 pensioners who attend the program at least several times a week, and 10 children's groups for babies aged 6 weeks to 6 years. Each generation has its own plans for classes, but they spend time together (Causey M., 2015; Ohri A., 2021).

We also studied the experience of the center "Providence Mount St. Vincent" in Seattle in the USA, where a kindergarten and a nursing home were combined under one roof. This facility accommodates 400 elderly residents, as well as several dozen children who have become part of the International Learning Center (ILC) program. Since 1991, ILC has been trying to provide opportunities for children and adults to interact with each other. Five days a week, kids visit the older generation to play music, dance, art, tell each other stories, cook dinner, and do many other interesting things (Providence Mount St. Vincent. URL: <https://www.providence.org/locations/wa/mount-st-vincent>).

In this way, the children have many loving grandparents, they better understand the process of growing up and aging, and the elderly residents of the center again feel their need and demand, they are happy to share their experience and love, to talk about the center's activities.

The cooperation between the elderly and children provides children with role models,



helps them acquire new interests, develops emotional intelligence, as well as qualities such as respect and compassion. For the elderly, communication with children is an important source of vital energy: it reduces their social isolation, gives a sense of belonging, and increases the subjective assessment of personal well-being.

The result of integrated activities of the elderly and children aged 8-11 years is, perhaps, an ideal platform for intergenerational interaction. Intergenerational programming promotes the transmission of cultural traditions and values from the older generation to the younger, helps to form social identity, while encouraging tolerance and erasing negative behavioral stereotypes.

Intergenerational programming promotes the transmission of cultural traditions and values from the older generation to the younger, helps to form social identity, while encouraging tolerance and erasing negative behavioral stereotypes. We believe that such interaction will allow elderly Ukrainian refugees not only to feel needed and in demand, but also help them pass on their experience to the younger generation. And what is very important in the conditions of local cohabitation is to understand children's behavior and be tolerant of them. Thanks to such meetings, children can absorb wisdom, knowledge and cultural virtues from communication with people who have passed a long life path.

The separate direction of cultural and psychological communication of the elderly is also interesting, which is emphasized by Ukrainian scientists O. Vlasova and D. Koskina (Vlasova O.I., Kos'kina D.O. (2014). On October 1, 2022, a team of specialists congratulated the participants of the University of the Third Age "Nadvechirya" on the International Day of the Elderly. An excursion "Not the first rendezvous with Bratislava" to Bratislava, the capital of Slovakia, was organized for our listeners and their families, where they got acquainted with the history of Bratislava, took a walk through the historical quarters of the Old Town, viewed the Medieval Gate of the XIII century and saw the restored sculpture of St. Michael slaying the Dragon, visited the Cathedral of St. Martin. Over a cup of coffee on the main square of the city near the Old Town Hall and the Roland fountain, the tour participants discussed what they had seen and expressed their sincere gratitude to our team.

In the course of U3A activities, the following results were achieved during 5 months of comprehensive work by a team of specialists: positive: a favorable psychological climate of harmonious and tolerant communication was created at U3A classes; the first stages of socio-psychological adaptation of the elderly to existence in the local social environment were carried out; two pensioners found work, worked for a month, but subsequently did not pass the probationary period at work; family conflicts are resolved; integrative classes for the elderly with children have been implemented in the very center for refugees, which contributes to the development of tolerance and mutual understanding between the two generations; negative: lack of systemic therapy in couple and individual consultations; the emergence of conflicts among participants.

Discussion

Discussion issues include:

1. Psychological conditioning of the creation of U3A for elderly refugees: yes or no?
2. Is it correct to start work with the organization of the trust of such a target group to psychological influences?

Thus, taking into account the above, it is necessary at the state level to recognize the public benefit of institutions for the education of the elderly and to implement large-scale and targeted measures to provide psychological assistance to such a category of the adult population of Ukraine as forced migrants and refugees.

We express our gratitude to the management of the public association "Liga za zusené zdravie" in Bratislava, Slovakia, which initiated the project "Social-psychological assistance for children and adults" and provided us with the resources to implement social-psychological assistance for this target category of adults.

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