

– WE CAN BE **HEROES** –

Exploring Europe for a better world

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HERO N°13

**STREET WORKERS & CHILD CARE
WITH ANNA**

THE PROJECT

CAN YOU INTRODUCE YOURSELF ?

I'm Anna, I'm an [art-therapist](#) and animator. I have been working for [Parasol](#) since 2008 and I'm in charge of the [Rakowicka 10 Program](#).

WHAT IS PARASOL ?

Parasol is an association supporting people at risk of social exclusion, unemployment, drug addiction or prostitution in Poland. The founders started their social work with street workers but quickly decided to create a spot to increase their impact because there was a real need here. We used to work with sex workers and now we also visit prisoners in jails : we talk to them, provide therapeutic help and support with legal issues. We created a program to help especially precarious kids and street workers. It's called Rakowicka 10, and I'm in charge of our center here in Kraków.

CAN YOU EXPLAIN RAKOWICKA 10 PROGRAM ?

Street workers are kids skipping school and spending time doing things that might not be the best for them...In this Center, we are 5 employees and 2 volunteers. We welcome these [street kids](#) here, spend time with them, help them to make a decision and to give them confidence. We guide them but without pushing.

CAN YOU EXPLAIN YOUR ECONOMIC MODEL ?

One of our projects is funded by National Bureau for Drug Prevention [Ministry of Health]. And another one is a 3-year partnership with Krakow Municipal Social Welfare Center.

Something very popular here in Poland is the "1% tax". People can allocate 1% of their national or local taxes to an NGO or an association, and we're on the list.

« **We guide kids but without pushing.** »

THE INNOVATION

« **The way we work with the kids is based on shared decision making process.** »

SO, HOW DO YOU DO IT ? WHAT IS YOUR METHOD ?

The way we work with the kids is based on shared decision making process. Together we decide what we are going to do and what responsibilities the kids want to have. Recently, we had to check how many puzzles and toys we have in the center, so we did it together.

One of the keys is treating kids without a ready-made scenario. People know their needs and what part of their life they want to change. We also work with families, schools and social services. It takes a lot of time to gain trust from the parents. Social workers do a great job, but they often impose their own vision, and push people to follow a preconceived program. Here, we simply talk with them and create real relations. Here, kids can play, do some activities with other children and talk together.

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TO YOU, HOW IS IT INNOVATIVE ?

I believe that both the kids and myself can spend time together and engage in some activities which can be safe and productive for everyone. Every child comes with different needs, and I think these needs can be satisfied with group talks and games.

You know, people are often surprised by our method. We help kids without any pressure, and it's still unusual in our field. Adults often believe that they know what is good for children. We consider kids as equal because THEY really know what they need. It's similarly practice in associations like ours, they may be more organized, however they still build soft relations between the kids and staff.

THE CHALLENGES

« We have the ongoing process of gentrification. Our beneficiaries are little by little excluded from this city district and it might weaken the impact of our work. »

WHAT WERE THE FIRST PROBLEMS IN DEVELOPING YOUR PROJECT ?

I think it was renovating the previous center. Everything had to be redone, including toilets, the kitchen and rooms. It costs a lot of money and energy and we had to continue helping the kids at the same time.

WHAT ARE THE ISSUES YOU NEED TO BE CAUTIOUS ABOUT IN THE FUTURE ?

For me, there are two main challenges. Firstly, we have the ongoing process of [gentrification](#). Our beneficiaries are little by little excluded from this city district and it might weaken the impact of our work.

We can also see kids spending more and more time online and being alone at home with their smartphones. Of course, there is great content online, but there are also websites kids shouldn't access and nobody can warn them. Yet, what's even more alarming about this phenomenon is the difficulty among young people in establishing social relationships offline, behavioral addiction and low self-esteem.

APPROACH OF LIFE

WHAT WAS THE "TRIGGERING FACTOR" FOR YOU TO ACT ?

I knew Beata [one of the founders] before joining the association. We talked a lot about their activities. It was so great, I really wanted to be part of this adventure ! At the beginning I just helped them during summer craft workshops. They requested me to lead a workshop during a school year, so I said "Yes, I want to continue !". I like to challenge myself, and Rakowicka 10 Program is the kind of challenge I need. It takes time to build a deep relationship with a kid, but when it happens I can see the benefits. We do something positive for them, I believe it makes sense for everyone.

WHAT MOTIVATES OR INSPIRES YOU IN LIFE ?

I would say other people, that's why I'm here actually. Building relations and helping people motivates me a lot.

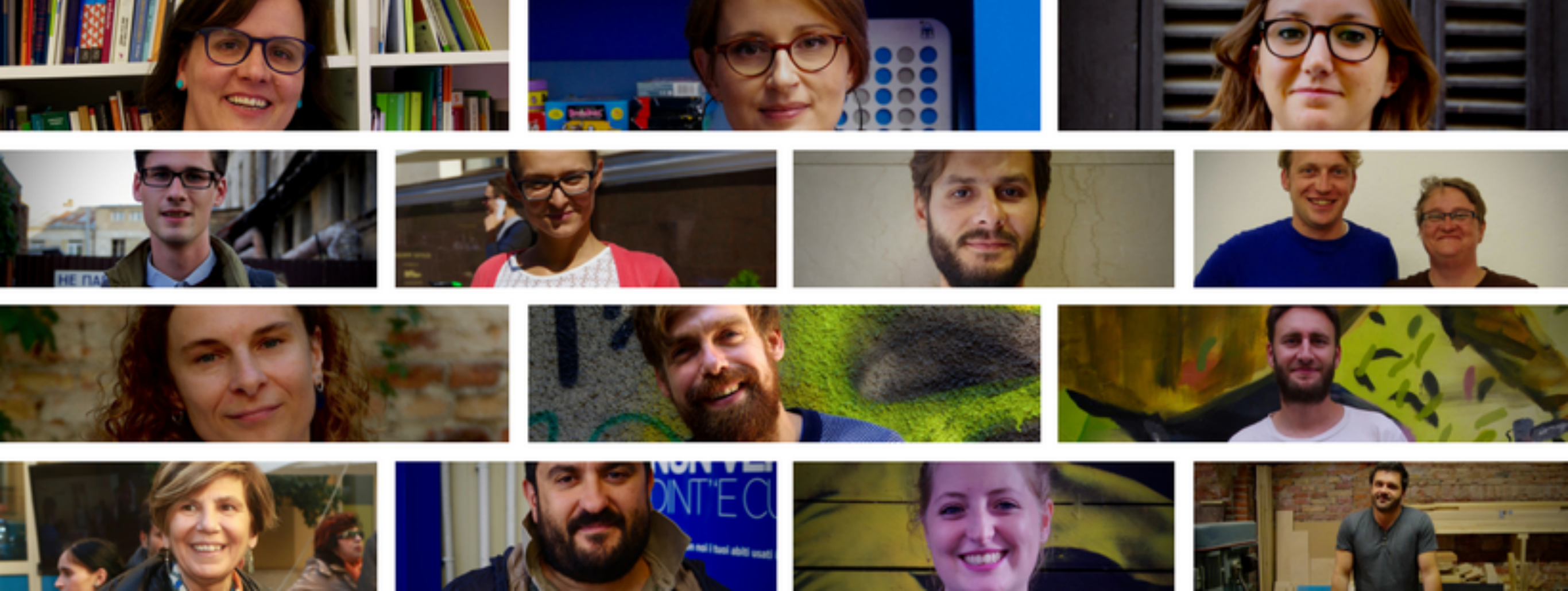
CAN YOU GIVE ME ONE WORD/ADJECTIVE/FEELING TO SUM UP YOUR ENGAGEMENT ?

I would say "honesty" or "authenticity". It's important to be authentic and not to fake, not to pretend to be someone you're not.

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credit : Rakowicka 10



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