



FFC
*Healing the wounds
of families at risk*

PROJECT TITLE	FFC – From family to society
IMPLEMENTATION PERIOD	01-04-2019 – 31-03-2021
ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED	NGO VitaTiim (EE), Pskov region state budget social service institution «Regional Family center» (RU), NGO “A home for every child” (EE)
PROGRAMME	Estonia – Russia CBC 2014-2020
TOTAL BUDGET	149.473,00 €



A small team of five experts has found the recipe to support vulnerable families in coping with life challenges: learn something, develop a project, put it in practice within the family, share with the community. In a word, create your own way to heal your own wounds, from beginning to end. The project seeks to activate, empower and support families at risk to expand their influence in the local society and to engage them in a lifelong learning process. It aims at contributing to the improvement of social services for families, rising professional capacities of social workers in sparsely populated territories and widening people-to-people contacts among populations.



SOCIAL PROTECTION & INCLUSION
PEOPLE-TO-PEOPLE
COOPERATION



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“We support families at risk to deal with their own problems through learning. The families not only turn out to be stronger, but are also empowered to participate in the community life.”

Julia Dem, project coordinator (Russia)

They were targeted as “families at risk”, but now they are stronger, they have learned how to handle their own problems. They can even help others out, becoming proactive members of society. The key words? Empowerment through learning.

It happens in the regions of Narva and Pskov, bordering territories between Estonia and Russia; areas among the most severely affected in terms of unemployment and poverty. It is here where the project “From Family to Society” – implemented within the Estonia-Russia CBC Programme – aims at enhancing the socio-economic inclusion of a variety of families at risk, whose problems are aggravated by the overall situation of a region with very low living standards. We are talking about large families with financial hurdles, single-parent or foster families, families with children who have special needs, families with minority or immigrant background. Each household is unique, and facing unique situations: what they all share is a similar culture, Russian as a common language, and a fragile base to start with.

The idea came from two small associations and a social services institution. They put together a dedicated, small team of five professionals willing to make a difference for those left behind. The diverse background of the partners – one with experience in education and youth, the other in social protection – was a key element to facilitate an innovative, multi-dimensional approach: drawing from their practice with youth, the project partners guided and encouraged families to face daily tasks or novelties counting on their own potential. And results were amazing.

Ten families from Estonia and ten from Russia were selected and assisted: individual meetings were organised for them with psychologists, rehabilitation specialists and social workers. Physical trainings and online events were as well set up among families, to facilitate the exchange of experiences. Sometimes practical problems were also solved, like in the case of a mother left alone with her two children: the divorce was affect-

ing her mental health and was impacting on the children education. Thanks to some of the activities organized under the project, this family was able to solve the most pressing issues.

The project implemented a family-by-family approach: each household was supported in a different, customized way. But there was something they all were confronted with: the challenge to set up an activity, from the initial idea to the final completion. Each family group had to put their skills in practice in what is called “micro-initiatives”, non-formal education events which were the perfect occasion not only to learn, but also to have fun and to bond together. Among the activities selected, there were workshops on communication skills, on conflict management, on IT trainings. The project also offered trainings on project development. “People learned and then challenged themselves – explains Julia Dem, the project coordinator – they could measure their own abilities, and in the end they realized that they were per-

fectly capable of facing tasks or new activities”. In fact, as a following step, families were encouraged to be active in the community, even sharing what they had learned: their engagement was not only beneficial to themselves, but also to the society at large. In the end, they were feeling less isolated, more connected. A real meaning for the word “empowerment”. One family for example decided to organize a public IT-day to teach the community how to code. This event was open to everybody and it was a real success, also because in a scarcely populated area, bringing people closer together is key to any real community growth.

Among the many activities and trainings, a learning programme for social workers was also set up by the project: a new generation of trained social workers can be considered one of the achievements of the project, whose ambition is to support public services in sustaining social inclusion.

Besides its material results, “From Family to Society” is a societal experiment to enhance active citizenship and participation in community life, with potential for expansion on a greater scale. The current COVID-19 crisis and its socio-economic aftermaths are certainly impacting even more on fragile families, cracking a door open for a stronger commitment to psychological and social support, also at cross-border level.

