EMERGING SETTLEMENTS

In 2019 the Hungarian Government launched a comprehensive initiative in order to facilitate the catching-up of the 300 most disadvantaged settlements of Hungary. The primary focus is on children and on creating a chance for them so that they would not necessarily inherit their parents’ destiny but would have a chance to live a different life. There are more than 310,000 people living in these 300 settlements (which were selected on the basis of a complex set of indicators established by the Hungarian Central Statistical Office), and 5,000 children are born each year.

The programme is managed by the Hungarian Charity Service of the Order of Malta, which had also laid down the foundations of this programme by the Presence programme several years back. The Presence programme demonstrated in numerous locations over the past decades that it can offer a real chance for change. The Presence programme is based on the most basic meaning of this word: we are present, we are there, we are by their side. The Presence programme takes stock of the locally emerging problems and prepares a diagnosis, on the basis of which it then offers a solution. This sort of work demands long-term commitment from both parties.

What can the continuous presence of the helpers change in the poorest settlements? For instance, more and more people go to work in the morning. The rate of school failure decreases. The heaps of garbage disappear from the streets; clean clothes are drying on the fences. People visibly start yearning for a different kind of life. It is no longer the helpers that want to change them: if children can grow up in a supportive, reliable and caring environment, if they join communities that can offer a perspective and can give them the feeling of belonging, and if their teachers and the professionals surrounding them formulate realistic expectations for them, they have a greater chance to exploit the talents they were born with and to be more successful in life. Another important field of intervention is to provide professionals (e.g. health visitors) dealing with children with human resource and professional support.

Pillars of the programme:

**The first 1000 days**

One of the key criteria for selecting the settlements to be included in the programme was the rate of childbirth. The majority of these children face constant and serious difficulties, often from the very moment they are conceived. On the other hand, as science proves, the first 1000 days of the child greatly determine the rest of her life. This is why we are putting much emphasis on this period by supporting parents in better helping their children: if children can grow up in a supportive, reliable and caring environment, if they join communities that can offer a perspective and can give them the feeling of belonging, and if their teachers and the professionals surrounding them formulate realistic expectations for them, they have a greater chance to exploit the talents they were born with and to be more successful in life. Another important field of intervention is to provide professionals (e.g. health visitors) dealing with children with human resource and professional support.

**Vision screening bus**

In order for children to develop in a healthy manner, it is indispensable to have good vision. Visual impairment can influence their general mood, their ability for social insertion, and it also affects their school results and their health. Based on international professional experience, as a new initiative, help basically travels to people’s home in Hungary. The vision screening bus transports qualified professionals to a selected settlement where they examine 150-200 children per day on average (entire schools and kindergartens). The screening consists of two parts: a pre-screening and a complex child ophthalmological check. Those children who need glasses can choose the appropriate frame right then, which is adjusted to the children’s head by the pre-screening medical staff, and then the glasses. Training children to wear their glasses, popularizing the wearing of glasses, and the replacement of broken or lost glasses are also part of the programme.

**Sports**

One of the special and indispensable tools of the Presence programme is sport. Sport can provide children with a perspective and satisfaction, and it can improve their school achievements. Since the Presence programme focuses on the children of the most vulnerable families, it employs unique and unusual solutions: trainings begin with a common meal and conversation instead of a warm-up because many come to the training without having had enough to eat. The leaders of the sports classes monitor the children’s condition, clothing and school achievements, and presenting one’s homework is a prerequisite to being allowed to participate in the training.

**Symphony Programme**

Music is an important tool of integration, especially as a community tool. It gives satisfaction, offers a useful leisure activity, and can also shape the community. The aim of the musical-social programme is to reach out to disadvantaged children, moulding the youth into a community in which the retaining force, the joy of playing music together and the depth of the personal relationships help solving the problems of children and youth arising from their socialization, and spurs them to do better in school.

**Housing**

The programme places a great emphasis on complex housing interventions during which human development also have a role in addition to infrastructural interventions. Most of the families live in untidy and, in many cases, dangerous housing conditions, and the ownership of the properties is unsettled. In the framework of this programme, we create transparent conditions, and by involving local workforce, we carry out refurbishment and comfort-enhancing works.
even building new homes if necessary. During the implementation of this programme component, the improvement of the urban landscape and the spatial development of disused and decayed properties are paramount.

Potager Gardens, development of local economy
The cultivation of potager gardens is an opportunity for self-sufficiency and value creation: even in the most remote villages, there is some free space where basic crops can be grown, and at the same time, social work is carried out because many families sort out their garden on their own, without having the necessary tools, knowledge, or experience. The aim of the work is to boost in these families their capacity of self-sustainment and the sense of responsibility felt for themselves and their environment.

On the other hand, we put great emphasis on strengthening local economic structures, and on improving employability and as a result of this several small production units were established in these settlements. The locally grown products and handicrafts are very popular among conscious buyers thus some our products are already available at big supermarkets.

Social Power Plant
Since children are in the focus of the Emerging Settlements programme, it is a priority goal to achieve that in all those households where children are being raised, there should be at least one room with healthy heating. Electric heating panels could be a simple and environment-friendly solution, but their operation implies substantial costs. This is why the first social solar plant was started in 2020 in Tiszabó as a pilot model programme, which helps the families in need with locally produced energy. The underlying concept is that the money collected from selling the energy produced by the solar panel park installed in the village goes into a support fund, from which the credit necessary for the operation of the electric heating panel is uploaded to the prepaid meters of the families during the winter.