

THE NEW FACE OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IN UKRAINE



DESPRO
LOCAL SELF-GOVERNANCE
SCHOOL



“After participating in DESPRO’s Local Self-Governance School, I became confident that anything is possible. I’ve participated in other educational projects, but DESPRO is on another level, with top trainers, homework, local strategy development, experience, exchange and practical advice.... The School made me stronger, gave me the opportunity to believe in myself, even when there’s lack of support,” – says Ilona Shemanska, Head of Economics and Investment Department, Letchyiv amalgamated territorial community (ATC), Khmelnytskyi region.

The integrated training programme “Local Self-Governance School” (LSG School) was developed and launched by DESPRO in 2014. It addresses topics such as Local Self-Government reform, decentralization, best decentralization practices (domestic and international), practical issues related to organizational and legal changes as a result of the reforms, as well as knowledge and capacities for personal leadership and communications skills development.

All of the training topics of the LSG School are focused around each ATC’s strategy. In particular, attention is paid to whether strategies are realistic, feasible, up-to-date, locally bound and applicable in a specific community. The LSG School’s modules are directly applicable to the strategies’ tasks and goals, so that participants see whether their strategies require actualization. As a result of participation in the LSG School, 100% of the ATCs’ strategies are updated, new community development projects are elaborated, skills for effective project implementation formed, concepts for introducing community branding are in place and widely discussed, and ATCs’ organizational structures revised.

“I remember how we had written our community’s Development Strategy before. In what way did we do it? Not in the right way, for sure. We didn’t ask people anything, didn’t study their opinions. Nobody in our community even knew about the existence of the Strategy. Only after the LSG School did the work group started to come together to develop the Strategy in a new way. We started to engage people in our discussions. Now everybody understands that the community should be listened to and communicated with. At the end



we even organized public discussions. Yes, the process wasn’t perfect, but it brought our Strategy closer to the community’s needs. We became more transparent and open...” – remembers Ilona.

“By coincidence, just before going to DESPRO’s LSG School I attended the Forum of Participation Practitioners. Then, at the LSG School there was also a training module on participatory budgeting. The trainer at both events was the same, and he is also a graduate of the LSG School’s Training of Trainers.

After listening to everything, I started actively implementing a program of participatory budget in our community. Before I was really afraid of this approach and wasn’t sure it would go well in my community. I didn’t think it was realistic. But everything went well and we implemented 4 projects – a film studio for children, an outdoor gym, a summertime cinema, and a playground. It wasn’t all that scary after all. A study tour to Poland organized by DESPRO also helped me in implementing the participatory budget,” – Ilona continues.

Developing a new generation of managers in local self-government is one of the primary tasks of the LSG School. All generations of graduates were involved in extensive communication and experience exchange, even after the end of the training programme. The best graduates are individually selected to undergo Training of Trainers and are certified by DESPRO upon completion. Some of these trainers later teach in the LSG School.

DESPRO also created a dedicated section of the LSG School for young LSG specialists (under 35 years old). Every year, DESPRO received applications from ambitious young specialists with a request to open the LSG School for individual participation (not only ATC teams). Along with the amalgamation process, an increasing number of young people have come to work for local governments and require specific training in terms of professional knowledge and expertise. After analyzing the situation, DESPRO decided to open a new "wing" of the LSG School to train young professionals and help build capacity for future community leaders.

Developing the LSG School as a safe space for representatives of local self-government to learn, practice and exchange, has resulted in a rise of



prominent local self-government leaders whose professional journeys bring a positive change to Ukrainian communities.

"Recently I've been nominated for the Cabinet of Ministers' award for special achievements of youth in development of Ukraine. Again, I realized that there's a purpose to my work in my community. I have no doubt that my participation in the LSG School played a big part in it," - concludes Ilona.

