

Concept Note

**Dream Achieve Realize Express - DARE Regional Program:
Education and social innovation in Ukraine, Republic of
Moldova and Romania for “a good life for our children”**



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Executive Summary

DARE Program is about helping children achieving educational and personal goals in life.

DARE program resulted from a long revision and reflection process between Caritas Austria and partners from the CEE region - Romania, Moldova and Ukraine - on the work of local organizations targeting children and youth. The main question underlying the process was “How can we improve our work to provide a better (future/life?) for our children?”. By “our” children, we refer to the 4178 children and youth targeted by the existing children projects and students in local schools. Besides them, the DARE Program will also involve 1067 parents and larger communities, including 245 teachers from local/regional schools.

Some of these countries share a common past as ex-Soviet countries, and all share common challenges vis-à-vis of poverty, social exclusion, adults and youth unemployment, poor parenting skills, negative discipline in schools, and challenges in achieving educational goals for children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Children have a multidimensional experience of poverty and vulnerability: They are exposed to multiple challenges in the environment where they live, and these challenges become toxic stress factors when adults around children are unable to create a stimulating and conducive environment for children to blossom.

The reflection and revision phase made it clear to all stakeholders that there is a need to invest in a “healthy ecology” for children. In other words, addressing children in a holistic way. This means strengthening children’s environments made of school teachers, parents, peers and communities, securing and making positive bonds between these key figures, and interlinking Child protection and Education. Children and youth of DARE Program will be able to improve their education goals, take ownership of their learning experiences and become active citizens who take responsibility over their lives. In order to achieve this, adult capabilities will be improved through parenting skills trainings and teachers’ trainings focusing on positive discipline and new teaching methods.

At the same time the DARE partners had the possibility to share in depth about the limitations of a project-based approach: it responds merely to immediate needs versus focusing on systemic change and sustainability; the project-based approach delivers outputs but is limited when aiming at achieving measurable outcomes and impact. They also noticed that their collective wealth of knowledge and experience is a tremendous resource with enormous untapped potential. Cooperation and collaboration between partners can not only increase the common pool of knowledge but foster the emergence of a collective approach to challenges, based on trust, proximity, and empathy for fellow practitioners. DARE Program focuses at how, through strategic partnerships and knowledge alliances, organizations and wider communities in the CEE region can achieve higher impact in their efforts to advocate for children rights; how they can collectively learn and collaborate to improve their outcomes; and how they can maximize their resources through the collective intelligence of the network, build a roadmap to sustainability, and realize a common vision: “a good life for our children”.

Where and when?

DARE Program will be implemented in nine locations in the countries of Romania (Alba Julia, Iasi, Timisoara), Moldova (Floresti, Edinet, Balti), and Ukraine (Kharkiv oblast, Lviv oblast, Kiev oblast).

It will last from June 1st 2017 until May 30th 2019. This includes 3 month of Implementation Planning Phase (June - August), and two school years of implementation (September 2017 - June 2019).

What is DARE about?

Our Vision: We want our children to grow up to become happy and responsible adults, capable of achieving their full potential in life. We want to give them the courage to strive for their dreams and, if faced with obstacles, the resilience to try again.

Program participants (organizations, communities, teachers children) grow and develop along three pathways: **Grow&Achieve**, **Love&Support**, and **Impact&Sustain**.

The program builds around the belief that children **Grow&Achieve** better in a stimulating environment that accounts for their individual needs and potential, and creates spaces to express dreams, needs, opinions, etc.; Children also need a supportive environment where parents, caregivers and teachers have the ability and skills to **Love&Support** them, interacting with and encouraging children in a positive way that helps to develop stable emotional relationships; Finally, involved organizations need to increase their capacity to **Impact&Sustain** the surrounding social-ecosystem, and achieve long-term impacts through sustainable and sustained interventions.

a. Pathway 1: Grow&Achieve

This pathway focuses on allowing children to establish a sense of self-worth and resilience. The program will use proven innovative tools and technologies to stimulate creativity and improve children's ability to find solutions; self-paced and personalized approach to learning will also allow students to adjust and progress while respecting individual specific needs; active participation in social and civic life allows children to become engaged community members and active citizens.

The main Outcome under Pathway 1 is:

"4178 Children from marginalized and vulnerable backgrounds are encouraged and supported to develop self-esteem, self-confidence and resilience, thrive in school, and become active members of their communities"

This outcome will rely on the following innovative methodologies and approaches:

- 1) Introduction of **SOLE (Self-Organized Learning Environment)** in 9 day-care centres and 8 schools in the targeted regions (See a [video here](#) and [SOLE Toolkit here](#)), and

- 2) Introduction of **Children Parliaments in Action**, targeting youth from 7 communities, and strengthening of Youth Resiliency.

Main impact indicators:

- ✓ Children improved self-confidence, motivation and presentations skills by using SOLE
- ✓ Improved pedagogical skills of educators using SOLE methodology
- ✓ 90% of Children Parliaments successfully address issues of common interest for the community and explore solutions by activating collective intelligence
- ✓ 80% of local authorities and communities take responsibility over the continuation of activities with Children's parliaments after end of funding phase

b. Pathway 2: Love&Support

This pathway focuses on parents, educators and teachers by increasing their capacities to support child-development. Through innovative interaction and support methodologies, parents, caregivers and teachers will improve their skills to address the multiple needs of children and play a positive role in their growth.

The main outcome under pathway 2 is:

“Capacities of 1067 parents and 245 teachers to achieve better outcomes for children development are increased”

This will be achieved by investing in building resilience and adults' capabilities. This will allow children to grow in environments (family, school, community) that provide them with a happy childhood and a pathway to become fulfilled adults. DARE partners will intensify their work with parents on positive parenting and with teachers on positive discipline. This includes a series of training of trainers for organizations' staff in family-based case management, trainings on parenting skills and training for teachers in positive discipline and peer-to peer approach. There will be continuous supervision and ongoing revision and adjustments to contextualize and iterate approaches around local realities.

Main impact indicators:

- ✓ Parents have increased their capacities and skills as adults to provide positive psychological support to children despite of social and economic circumstances
- ✓ Parents groups formed during DARE Program are perceived as a source of exchange, help, support, resilience and assist parents in developing coping strategies
- ✓ 75% of teachers trained use positive discipline in schools involved in DARE program
- ✓ 60% of targeted schools develop their child protection policies together with the help of DARE organizations
- ✓ Targeted teachers continue the use of SOLE after the end of the funding period

c. Pathway 3: Impact&Sustain

Implementing organizations are agents of change. Their capacity to lobby, advocate and mobilize civil society, allows them to create conducive environments for children's development. Also, the use of innovative methodologies and showcase of resulting quality in their projects, increases organizations' leverage *vis-à-vis* of governments and donors.

The main outcome under Pathway 3 is:

"The network of competences of 10 organizations from Ukraine, Rep. of Moldova and Romania is strengthened by sharing, spreading, and developing their knowledge in topics of Child Protection and Education, improving joint advocacy efforts and fundraising capacities to increase impact and sustainability of projects"

It is under this pathway that DARE fully becomes a program. The focus is on three main areas:

- Regional collaborative network activation and strengthening
- Fundraising capacity building
- Joint advocacy efforts

Also, DARE Implementing Partners (IPs) commit to carry out training of trainers in CP and educational innovative methods for staff of other NGOs / community-based-organization/local entities working in the sphere of children and youth (peer-to-peer between organizations). This peer-to-peer approach allows DARE organizations to expand the circle of knowledge, share innovative methodologies and widen the circle of competences and impact. This is done over the course of two years to avoid overburdening IPs.

Main impact indicators:

- ✓ Digital platform for exchange is co-created and kept alive by key leading regional partners
- ✓ Culture of trust, knowledge and best practices exchange, and collective intelligence activation is absorbed and endorsed by 80% of all DARE partners
- ✓ 80% of DARE partners follow the developed fundraising roadmaps and achieve increased fundraising outcomes by 15% the second year of implementation of DARE
- ✓ Regional EU grant applied to by DARE partners in 2018
- ✓ National Advocacy officers representing the interests of national DARE Partners become part of national coalitions for children's rights
- ✓ 1 main advocacy paper is formulated and submitted to the attention of respective governments and International CP actors by the end of the Program funding phase
- ✓ Child Protection policies and concepts are contextualised are in place in schools and local communities
- ✓ 10 Local NGOs/CBOs/local entities are trained by (10) DARE IPs and become promoters of CP and innovative educational methods

Who is involved?

Core partners: Caritas Romania, Caritas Ukraine, Caritas Moldova

Participants of Networking Forum: Partnership for Every Child, Regina Pacis, Diaconia Moldova, Social Services of Assistance, Fond Aspern

Further organisations: nine local schools and nine local administrations

Service providers: Newcastle University UK (introduction of SOLE Methodology), Caritas Austria Education Expert (Training for teachers), SOS Children’s Village Ukraine (Trainings for parents), Somos Más (development of a network of strategic partnerships and a digital platform), Caritas Austria (Children parliaments in Action, Capacity Building of IPs, overall quality assurance)

Beneficiaries and communities involved in DARE Program are:

Direct Beneficiaries	Children	Parents	Volunteers	Teachers	Schools	NGO
Outcome 1- GROW & ACHIEVE	4065	-	103	-	-	10
Outcome 2 - LOVE & SUPPORT		869	-	245	8	10
Outcome 3 - IMPACT & SUSTAIN	Social workers: 26 National Advocacy officers: 3 Fundraising officers : 10					10

How is DARE contributing to sustainability and systemic change?

DARE practitioners (meaning all the implementing partners and service providers) defined systemic change in this field as an approach that recognizes interrelationships and interdependencies between the educational system and its community, including parents, school teachers, local authorities, community-based organizations and NGOs, faith-based organizations, etc., with the consequence that all those stakeholders are given active ownership over the change effort.

At child protection level, DARE will support the role of parents and caregivers as those first responsible for care and protection of children; It will affirm the responsibility of States to guarantee the care and protection of children as outlined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other international human rights instruments; It will affirm the role of children as the final measure of effectiveness of child protection, and as critical actors in protecting themselves and their peers; and it will leverage local level work to strengthen child protection systems on national, regional and global levels.

DARE aims to build a sense of ownership at all levels: from children and youth that we serve and engage, to their parents, teachers, and community members, and local and national authorities. Ownership is built from a consensus on the common vision of DARE program:

“Ultimately, we want children to grow up to become happy and responsible adults, capable of achieving their full potential in life. We want to give children to have the courage to strive for their dreams and, if they encounter obstacles, the resilience to try again”.

Ownership also implies empowering all stakeholders to continuously revise and redefine the process during the implementation of the DARE Program, fostering reflection and two-way communication among all program partners. Through collaboration and consensus-building, stakeholders will define the roadmap to achieve their common vision, and lay the basis for long term sustainable impact.

This process connects practitioners of each-other’s work, impact, successes and methodologies. This allows for the emergence of a culture of trust and collaboration that is an essential element to achieving the systemic change that is at the heart of DARE.

Preparatory Phase

Early assessments of DARE partners during DARE program-design-phase showed the need to build-up inter-organizational trust, to assess organizational capacities, and to activate, engage and manage volunteer communities in the field.

Caritas believes there is much to win by bringing these actors together and effectively exchange knowledge and best practices.

A preparatory phase is planned starting from middle of January 2017 to end of May 2017. The objective of this preparatory phase is to ensure a smooth start of the DARE program by enabling and fostering collaboration efforts between local organizations and by increasing their know-how by using the internal knowledge of the network.

The main objectives of the Preparatory Phase are:

- Capacities’ and needs’ assessment: initial assessments of organizations capacities by using Caritas Internationalis Management Standards, mapping of strengths and weaknesses, interviews and survey with member organizations to better understand needs and anxieties of partners. This task will be carried out by Caritas Austria through engaged consultants and by Somoms Más under the supervision and coordination of DARE Program Manager.
- The **main Output** will be a co-authored assessment report mapping capacities and gaps of DARE partners. The implementation phase of DARE Program will see the investment in filling the capacities’ gaps of organizations as well as the further strengthening of the intelligence and knowledge of the network in a wholesome way.

- Facilitate the creation of a Community of Practice (including training on volunteers and community activation and management), where organizations know and trust others, and are willing to exchange and collaborate towards aligned impacts to achieve “a good life for our children”.
- The **main Output** of this process co-led by DARE Program Manager and Somos Más will be to help kick-start an active community of exchange and practice towards:
 - a culture of trust and effective collaboration
 - effective sharing of knowledge and best practices,
 - increased capacities in activating and managing volunteers on the field
- By harvesting on the knowledge existing in the network on the topic of Child Protection, organizations develop, revise and contextualize Child Protection Policies and are given the tools to train Social Workers on the minimum standards in Child protection who will then work with teachers in schools during DARE implementation.
- The **main Output** will be that organizations without CP policies will develop them in a participatory way under the supervision of a Caritas Austria’s consultant and the DARE Program Manager. Organizations with existing CP policies will actively contribute to the network by sharing the processes to build CP policies, and will have the possibility to adjust them.

We believe that investing in the kick-start of the community of practice will ensure a smoother start and more effective implementation period of the DARE Program.