



## CASE STUDY

# Schwarzlsee Refugee Shelter – Language and Integration

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Since Autumn 2015 Europe's cities have been affected by one of the greatest refugee crises in centuries. Samaritan Austria responded by immediately opening refugee shelters in Austria's hot spots. One of the shelters was situated in a leisure park called Schwarzlsee near Graz, which is the second-largest city in Austria. The refugees were accommodated in two halls with a total capacity of 1,400 people. Between 14 September 2015 and 4 March 2016 more than 4,800 residents lived in the Schwarzlsee refugee shelter. The shelter was first used for transit refugees and afterwards for asylum-seekers who were waiting for accommodation within the basic care programme (Grundversorgung).

Samaritan Austria provided housing, food and medical care. Additionally, teachers provided language training for adult refugees and activities for kids.







### SHORT SUMMARY OF THE PROJECT

Since Autumn 2015 Europe's cities have been affected by one of the greatest refugee crises in centuries. Samaritan Austria responded by immediately opening refugee shelters in Austria's hot spots. One of the shelters was situated in a leisure park called Schwarzlsee near Graz, which is the second-largest city in Austria. The refugees were accommodated in two halls with a total capacity of 1,400 people. Between 14 September 2015 and 4 March 2016 more than 4,800 residents lived in the Schwarzlsee refugee shelter. The shelter was first used for transit refugees and afterwards for asylum-seekers who were waiting for accommodation within the basic care programme (Grundversorgung).

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### DESCRIPTION OF YOUR ORGANISATION

Samaritan Austria (Arbeiter-Samariter-Bund Österreichs) is among the country's largest health and social organisations and the largest provider of ambulance services in the city of Vienna. It was founded in 1927 and has branches in all of the nine federal states of Austria.

In recent years the organisation's scope of operations has been extended, particularly in the area of health care and social services. Today, Samaritan Austria provides a wide range of services, from medical services at large events to home help and home care, shelter for the homeless and asylum-seekers, as well as emergency relief and nursing homes. Samaritan Austria provides housing and support to asylum-seekers in more than 40 refugee homes.

### PROJECT

#### What are the local social realities?

In the year 2015 around 600,000 refugees passed through Austria. 89,000 of them applied for asylum. NGOs like Samaritan Austria provided emergency and transit shelters as well as long term accommodation for refugees.

In Austria most of the integration measures and language training programmes are only financed for recognised refugees and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection. Therefore, most of the asylum-seekers lack activities to structure their day. They have to wait for their asylum decision before they can start public language and qualification courses. This can take several months. A lot of volunteer initiatives try to help out but they can't fill this gap nationwide.



#### What are the specific innovative elements in your project/service?

At the Schwarzlsee refugee shelter a big tent was built to create a separate area. In this location teaching staff provided games and several crea-





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tive activities for kids (i.e. sports, face painting, making crafts and learning language through play). Through these activities the kids are able to escape from their everyday life for at least a few hours. Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is common among refugee children and youth, so the support by the professional educators is extremely valuable.

When there was no programme for the kids in the tent, German language training was provided for adult refugees. Asylum-seekers often don't have any daily routine and there is a big demand to use the waiting time in the shelters to learn German. The employees of the Schwarzlsee refugee shelter reported that these activities had a positive influence on the general atmosphere in the project. The refugees felt respected and appreciated the training, knowing the importance of the German language for further steps towards integration. Integration started from day one of our activities. Although asylum-seekers are mostly excluded from official integration funds, Samaritan Austria managed to finance the language training through a donation platform.

What are the key characteristics of the project/service?

#### Target groups

The target groups of this project were transit refugees and asylum-seekers. There were activities addressing refugee children and youth as well as language training for adult refugees.

#### Principles

German language training improves the target group's chances of successful integration. Integration has to start from day one to give refugees the sense of having a future. Inclusive services for asylum-seekers are needed, for both humanitarian and economic reasons. The months or years of waiting for the asylum decision should be used in a meaningful way to prevent de-skilling.

#### Drivers

A lot of asylum-seekers report that they are legally forced to do nothing and somehow are living on stand-by. Asylum-seekers are excluded from official integration policies and funding for the most part. For this reason Samaritan Austria financed this project through private donations, raised through a fundraising platform.

#### Outcome

The smiles and the positive mood of the young refugees who participated in the leisure activities showed that they could forget their everyday struggles for at least a few hours. For this period they were just normal children, not young refugees. The adult refugees who participated in the German language training were able to take their first steps towards integration and therefore have better chances of succeeding in the whole integration process.

**Can this project be transferred to a larger context (a bigger region, the whole country, EU-wide)? If so, what is necessary to transfer it (special structures, finances, common definition of standards...)? If not, why not?**

Of course it's essential to implement minimum standards in all European asylum camps and shelters first. Most of the refugees are highly vulnerable after having had to flee their homes because of conflict or persecution. Many also experience traumatic events during their flight. So working with refugees after their arrival is a heavy responsibility. In addition to basic care, social support and leisure activities could be provided in refugee shelters. A human rights-based approach will help refugees to feel safe, which is a precondition





to further steps towards integration.

The “Language and Integration” project in the Schwarzlsee refugee shelter showed that positive effects can be achieved if the integration services for asylum-seekers start from early on. So the transfer of the project would be helpful for other refugee shelters, too. Volunteers can be involved to ease financial pressures and to enable connections with locals.

### CONTACT

Samaritan Austria - Accommodation for refugees (in German):

[www.facebook.com/samariterbundscharz2015](https://www.facebook.com/samariterbundscharz2015)

Samaritan Austria – Website article about the refugee shelter Schwarzlsee (in German):

[www.samariterbund.net/aktuell/detail/fluechtlingshilfe-16-tage-notquartier-schwarzlsee-8957/](http://www.samariterbund.net/aktuell/detail/fluechtlingshilfe-16-tage-notquartier-schwarzlsee-8957/)

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SOLIDAR, together with our national members and partners, has developed 17 case studies in 2016, presenting innovative, effective, sustainable and tailor made models to promote social inclusion, the social economy and quality job creation by adapting a social investment approach. In their daily work, SOLIDAR members and partners anticipate new or unmet needs of socio-economically vulnerable people and empower them to actively participate in society and to access the labour market.

These case studies gather strong evidence of the social impact of the activities undertaken by our members and partners to help Member States making progress towards the achievement of the social and employment objectives of the Europe 2020 Strategy and the implementation of the Social Investment Package.

SOLIDAR is a European network of membership based Civil Society Organisations who gather several millions of citizens throughout Europe and worldwide. SOLIDAR voices the values of its member organisations to the EU and international institutions across the three main policy sectors; social affairs, lifelong learning and international cooperation.



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