



Success Stories
#ChangingCities

Business Women's Space in Zaporizhia: A Place for Mothers with Children to Learn and Work

Business Women's Space is the first co-working center committed to supporting social innovations, women's entrepreneurship and startup campaigns. Since it opened in Zaporizhia in 2019, it has had more than 700 visitors during its first 8 months. The co-working space was created by the NGO Center for Career Development "Professionals" under the auspices of the Partnership for Local Economic Development and Democratic Governance international technical assistance project (PLEDDG)¹ through its SME Development Fund.

But the Business Women's Space is more than just a co-working center. It also offers child care, extensive training and valuable networking to working women.

Iryna Boyko, the brains behind the center, says that the idea to create the co-working space was no accident and was in response to the needs of women who want a career while also raising their children.

“For three years I have communicated with internally displaced women about their employment experiences. I noticed that even after learning new skills, they found it challenging to find employment or work remotely due to a lack of proper living conditions and the inability to work while also caring for their children. Even when they acquired a certain specialty, women did not know how to find customers and advertise their services. In other words, they could not find a way to monetize their knowledge. Hence the idea to combine two components: to teach women the secrets to successful self-employment and develop their entrepreneurial skills while also providing a venue where they can actually bring their projects to life,” says **Iryna Boyko, executive director of the NGO Center for Career Development “Professionals”**.

As of January 2020, the co-working space had 5 permanent women members. Among them is a Zaporizhia native Eleonora Muzyka, who has been teaching English and Spanish to students for over 12 years now. Eleonora's introduction to Business Women's Space began with the “Women's Business School” training program administered by the center.

“I was very interested in getting enrolled in this program. Despite my considerable experience as a teaching professional, I needed to expand my horizons when it came to managing a business of my own. And I ended up extremely satisfied! First, we had wonderful instructors – most of them experienced women entrepreneurs, who shared their truly valuable practical experience. Second, communication with trainees provided a boost of motivation, inspiration, and strength. Third, we explored many truly important aspects of creating an actual business. This became a significant acquisition for me,” says **Eleonora Muzyka, foreign language teacher and resident of Business Women's Space**.

The Women's Business School consisted of 8 modules and covered key topics essential to novice entrepreneurs: putting together a business plan, the Canvas business model, marketing and financial plans, sales funnel, communications and teamwork, search for sources of funding for business at the startup or expansion stages. Fourteen residents successfully

¹ The international technical assistance project Partnership for Local Economic Development and Democratic Governance (PLEDDG) is being implemented in Ukraine from April 2015 to December 2020 by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities and funded by Global Affairs Canada.

completed the course. Inna Boyko went on to say that after Women's Business School, which was a foundation program, two more supplemental courses followed in the summer: "Online Marketing Tools for Business Development" and "Expansion of Opportunities with Digital Technologies". In the fall, over the course of two months 10 women received consultations on how to do business as part of a mentoring program. Program participants have commented that the training not only enriched them with knowledge but also motivated them to make the first steps toward bringing their business ideas to life.

“My students would usually find me by word of mouth. I myself did not know how to and did not dare advertise my services openly. During my training as part of the Women's Business School program, I realized the importance of quality promotion. Since then I have been regularly making a conscious effort to promote my business. Having acquired valuable knowledge about self-presentation, I continue perfecting myself in this regard. Also, halfway through my training I came up with the idea of opening my own language school for women who cannot afford to pay market prices for language courses for a variety of reasons. I know that there are many such women. In this regard, I found the training block about filling out grant applications particularly useful. I believe that I will soon bring my idea to life with the help of grant funding,” says **Eleonora Muzyka**.

In the past, private online English lessons via Skype were Eleonora's primary method of teaching. Her students live not just in Ukraine but also in European countries: Spain, Sweden, and Germany. She says that her introduction to Business Women's Space prompted her to switch to the online teaching format. So in the summer she joined the co-working space as a member. Now she works there on a daily basis and gives 6-7 foreign language lessons per week on average. From time to time she additionally organized English discussion clubs and has plans to make them regular this year.

“I immediately liked the space created at the center: a comfortable open space with the added bonus of a well-equipped children's room where kids play, draw, read books or watch cartoons while their mothers study. I work with my students in mini-groups of 2-5 people, most of whom are women. Some of them bring children to classes. Sometimes I also bring my son to work, and he spends time in the children's area with great satisfaction during my lessons. I am certain that for parents it is a deal-breaker when it comes to choosing the place to study, since the city has very few educational institutions (let alone workspaces) where both children and parents can feel comfortable,” **Eleonora** says.

The majority of co-working space visitors are mothers who work as freelancers. Inna Boyko notes that during their training as part of the business programs the women would often bring their children, and the co-working space administrator watched over them in the children's room whenever necessary. Outside of training, women come with their kids less often, but one way or another, children are constant and welcome guests at Women's Business Space.

The co-working center is currently picking up the pace. In addition to facilitating access to business development services for Zaporizhia residents, it helps them form the essential competencies and accumulate knowledge instrumental to doing business on their own, as well as helping broaden the scale of entrepreneurship among women in the city. In addition to the training programs mentioned earlier, over the course of the year the co-working center hosted 55 various educational events, the most popular ones being "Women's Project Management School", "Startup from Scratch: Developing the Business Model", "Communications and EQ: How to Develop Business Easily and with a Smile", and others.

“We will keep on supporting women: we will provide them with resources in the form of knowledge and mentoring. We will most certainly repeat the Women's Business School program on account of its popularity and success. We are currently analyzing and perfecting the training programs held throughout 2019 and will shortly announce a new selection of trainees,” **Inna Boyko** summarized.

Establishment of centers committed to supporting women's entrepreneurship similar to Business Women's Space in Zaporizhia contributed to the emergence of communities of independent businesswomen, increases the share of small businesses in cities, promotes productive employment of the population, and facilitates the development of the infrastructure of services for business. All of this forms one of the priorities of PLEDDG that channels resources into inclusive economic development of cities.



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The series of success stories #ChangingCities demonstrate successful examples and innovative approaches to democratic governance and local economic development in Zaporizhzhia, Vinnytsia, Poltava and Ivano-Frankivsk oblasts in Ukraine, that have resulted from the efforts of the international technical assistance project "Partnership for Local Economic Development and Democratic Governance" (PLEDDG) which is being implemented by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities and funded by Global Affairs Canada.

