

BAYER CARES FOUNDATION SUPPORTS STAFF VOLUNTEERING PROGRAM IN UKRAINE

A warm place to play

Healthy children grow into healthy adults – that's what Kateryna Chechel firmly believes. The Bayer employee is committed to improving conditions in a kindergarten in Ukraine with financial support from the Bayer Cares Foundation. A lack of heating there meant that the children often got sick and stayed home alone with no adult supervision.

The walls of Kolosok kindergarten near Kiev are covered in lions, elephants and hedgehogs. White tables stand in the center of the room and there is a worn play carpet with a few building blocks, cars and stuffed toys in the corner, where a crowd of children between the ages of 18 months and six years brings some life to the otherwise spartan room. "The few toys that the children have here are very old," says Kateryna Chechel, a communications expert at Bayer in Ukraine. The kindergarten is located near the Bayer Seeds Center in the Kiev region. One day, she visited it without any particular purpose in mind. "I didn't actually plan to go in. It must have been fate," says Kateryna in retrospect.

She was concerned by the condition of the kindergarten. "I had never seen children being looked after in such poor conditions before," Kateryna recalls. The biggest problem – there was no functioning heating system. A large part of the kindergarten was empty as a result. There should have been space for 60 children to play and sleep in five rooms, but only two rooms and a small kitchen were actually in use. "In winter, the children couldn't even use the garden, either. When it's only about ten degrees Celsius inside, that is too cold for them to warm up again after playing outside," says Kateryna. The creeping cold was her primary motivation to get involved and apply for financial support from the Bayer Cares Foundation as a volunteering program. Her idea was one of 84 projects worldwide in which Bayer employees are voluntarily engaged in improving living conditions in the catchment areas of the company's sites that were chosen by a specialist jury to receive support. Chechel was awarded a grant amounting to EUR 3,000. "I wanted the children to be warm." Some time later, Kateryna met a few of the parents and the local authority representative to discuss the

measures needed. This gave new hope to parents and kindergarten staff – the lack of money and minimal support from the state had caused them to give up believing that they would ever be able to improve the situation in the kindergarten. Working closely with the Ukrainian charity fund "Let's help", Kateryna took charge of the support project that started in late April 2016. First of all, the funds were to be used to have a new heating system installed. Once the temperature in the rooms is back to normal, the next objective is to keep it that way. "The problem is that a new boiler is only the first step. The inside radiators are also very old and therefore not heat-retaining at all," explains the Bayer employee. "That is why the rooms cool down so quickly and even fixed windows do not improve the situation." The sick-bay is also far from ideal. "We have to improve these conditions, because only healthy children can grow into healthy adults," says Kateryna.

Many generations have grown up in Kolosok, but there has been little investment in recent years. Kateryna hopes this initiative will lead to greater support from the responsible authorities, parents and private individuals in the region. "We have to take care of our children – they are our future," she says. An up-to-date support concept must include the care and education of children. This is what makes the planned ongoing training of the kindergarten staff so essential. Kateryna Chechel is well aware that updating all the kindergarten equipment will take a lot of time and effort. Nonetheless, she is determined to make a start so that these young Kolosok residents will once again have a wonderful place to play and learn. ■



The kids at the Kolosok kindergarten had to make do with an old play carpet and a few old toys. Bayer employee Kateryna Chechel (photo left) was immediately touched by their plight. She resolved to help.