



KunstTherapie

Art Support Project Bautzen

On the second day of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the LYNC organization evacuated women and children from conflict zones to the safety of Western countries. LYNC (Love Your Neighbor Community) ([project weblink here](#)) is a U.S.-based nonprofit organization that acts as a facilitator of faith-based reconciliation in Central Asia. This involves humanitarian networks and securing existential needs such as shelter, warmth and food after bombings and during evacuations.

Through a strong partner network, LYNC serves over 2000 Ukrainian women, teens and children in Bautzen, Germany. Refugees arrive with psychological and emotional stress experiences from the war and suffer from anxiety and trauma symptoms. Early preventive support is critical to maintaining their physical and mental health while they cope with challenges such as existential uncertainty, grief, and threats to family members. Early trauma-sensitive *Art Support* can reduce long-term consequences and contributes to individual and family resilience. It is about enabling, creating and consolidating a safe place for regeneration.

1. Objectives of the *Art Support Project Bautzen*

Support by the means of visual arts helps women and children in the project to compensate and process traumatic experiences. Due to the foreign language, the low availability of Ukrainian and Russian therapists in Germany and in view of the massive need for support, the *Art Support Project Bautzen* builds a nonverbal artistic and aesthetic bridge to reduce language barriers and supports the preservation of emotional health of women and children who have fled from Ukraine.

LYNC, represented by Abigail Rodriguez, and the postgraduate program ArtTherapy, Dresden University of Fine Arts, represented by Prof. Dr. Alexandra Hopf, are cooperation partners in the *Art Support Project Bautzen* since March 2022. Alexandra Hopf, head of the postgraduate course Art Therapy, Theresa Schneider and Kerstin Schrems, research assistants, supervise the trauma-sensitive support of the refugees with artistic means in the pilot phase and coordinate the participation of the student art therapists, the graduates and the experienced art therapy trauma experts. LYNC finances the art support units, supervision in phase II and III, and the material and travel costs for the art therapists.

The goals of the *Art Supports Project Bautzen* are to restore dignity and alleviate suffering of Ukrainian women, children and teenage refugees displaced by the war.

The pilot phase of the project, starting first online-meetings on 09.03.2022, subsequently planned and coordinated by the cooperation partners, could already be carried out in May 2022 by student art therapists, Eva Walch, Freya Neumann, Elena Braune, Lara Hansen, Verena de Luca and the art therapy trauma experts, Luise Albert and Gudrun Falk. After this pilot phase the *Art Supports*

Project Bautzen was evaluated by LYNC. 96% of the participants wished for a continuation of the *Art Support*. In the following project phase II and III, ending in December this year (2022), the group compositions, inter- and supervision meetings and the communication of the art therapy experts with LYNC staff members is coordinated and organized by a graduate and art therapist, Freya Neumann. The *Art Support Project Bautzen* is flanked by psychotherapeutic accompaniment. Ukrainian Psychotherapists and art therapists exchange information so that good preventive support is guaranteed for the refugee women and children.

2. Art Therapy or Art Support

Art therapy, as it is taught in the postgraduate course Art Therapy at the HfBK Dresden, starts and reflects the actual artistic-therapeutic situation, refers to phenomenological theories and is therefore called *Phenomenological Art Therapy*. The client, the therapist, the therapeutic encounter, the place and environment, artistic means, designs and all situational conditions play an equally important role. These aspects are taken into account and are reflected upon in the context of Art Therapy.

The art-therapeutic reflection benefits from the exclusion of opinions, memories and presuppositions of the persons involved in the process. When situational experiences and sensory impressions of the here and now come to the foreground and not burdens and opinions, an open and unbiased space of self-exploration emerges, which clients can take up and shape in a self-effective way. Experiencing the here and now leads to a relief for clients, as it allows to distance themselves from challenging and stressful aspects of the recent past.

The *Art Support Project* works with the refugee women and children in a trauma-sensitive way, without an explicit therapeutic goal. Rather, the support is geared towards preventive and resource-oriented interventions with artistic means, since an art-therapeutic objective in the generally unstable situation of the clients would require more time and a longer commitment than is given within the framework of the *Art Support Project Bautzen*.

The focus is on methods that emphasize relief from current difficulties and on strengthening and stabilization of the participants. In addition, relaxation and clarification of current needs as well as the trust in the synergy of the *Art Support* - group are addressed. The experience of the material, their sensual qualities, such as haptics or the perception of color, are in the foreground.

Materials are paper, gouache paints, pencils, colored pens, and oil and pastel crayons, as well as receptive source material such as art postcards, e.g., portraits of women or images of nature. Clay and collage materials are also used. Some interventions have been group paintings or sculptural objects, which are created collaboratively.

3. Summary

Art Support Project Bautzen procedure:

1. *Decentering*: changing perspectives, focusing on resources and the joy of creation are in the foreground.
2. *Resource-oriented*: sources of strength, individual competences and abilities of the women linked with sensual experiences of materials and colors and other playful approaches.
3. *The here and now*: acknowledging the situation of the clients; opening the space for and recognizing stressful feelings through expression and sharing in the group; changing feelings of fear, sadness, anger or even helplessness through acknowledging and creating.
4. *Using topics and interventions*: Topics help to frame the therapeutic encounter and motivate and interventions focus on easy and doable artistic technics.

4. Format of the Art Support Project Bautzen

Pilot phase, May 2022: 4 Saturdays each from 1pm - 5pm, 2 Art Support groups with 12 Ukrainian children and youth and 12 Ukrainian women each.

Art Support Phase I, September to October 2022: 7 Saturdays each from 1pm - 5pm, 2 Art Support groups with 12 Ukrainian women each.

Art Support Phase II, November to December 2022: 6 Saturdays, each from 1pm - 5pm, 2 Art Support groups with 12 Ukrainian women each.

Text: Alexandra Hopf, Prof. in Dr.; Freya Neumann