



REACHING EACH AND EVERY ONE

Success Story

Ortona Gymnastics Club offers Ukrainian language classes for children

TETIANA HIERHIEVA ARRIVED IN Edmonton from Ukraine with her young daughters, Veronika and Diana, in July 2022.

The move was a big change for the family, and Hierhieva wanted to get her daughters involved in sports programs to help them adjust to their new life in Canada. But as a single mother, she faced many challenges: classes were not very affordable, and language barriers for her daughters made it difficult to register and participate in activities.



ORTONA GYMNASTICS CLUB,
ALBERTA

Canada

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Tetiana Hierhiieva (arrived in Edmonton from Ukraine with her young daughters, Veronika and Diana)

But in 2023, she found the perfect opportunity for her daughters when she learned that the Ortona Gymnastics Club, where she was working, was offering Ukrainian Language Gymnastics classes to children aged three to 12 who recently arrived in Canada from war-torn Ukraine – which broke down language and financial barriers to sport for Ukrainian families. The program ran every Sunday, and was supported by funding from the Canadian Parks and Recreation Association’s Reaching Each and Every One: A Community Sport Intervention program. This program, which was funded by Sport Canada’s Community Sport for All Initiative, seeks to remove barriers and increase sport participation rates for equity deserving groups across Canada.

“It’s challenging to put your kiddos in a sport, especially if you have more than one. It makes the struggle even harder,” describes Hierhiieva, adding that the gymnastics club and its executive director, Lydia Migus, helped her enroll her daughters into the program. “It was very nice to have this grant, and it was very appreciated.”

As part of the program, gymnastics classes were delivered in Ukrainian, a language that was familiar and welcoming to the participants and their parents - making the interactions less stressful and more welcoming.

Maksym Baluchynskyy, one of the program’s coaches, says that the program was divided into two classes for different age groups. Younger children ages three to five participated together, while children ages six to 12 were placed in another group to learn gymnastics skills.

“Most of them were children who just came from Ukraine and just fled the war, and they’ve been here for a few months,” Baluchynskyy says. “For them, language was the biggest barrier and they were still figuring out the English language.”

Baluchynskyy adds that while he can speak Ukrainian, it was a bit of a learning curve when trying to communicate gymnastics terms in the language.

He says he was able to get some extra help from Hierhiieva, who co-coached the program for the age three to five group, and was fluent in Ukrainian and English.

“I wanted to help our people, and I wanted to help myself” Hierhiieva says. “This job kept me in a good mental shape, after everything that is going on in my country. The work helped me because when you know you’re helping others, it helps you.”

She says that the program made a positive impact on the children who participated, but also, their parents.

“This sport made them happier and more relaxed, especially when they’re in groups with other kids who can understand them,” Hierhiieva says. “And it helped the parents. When they see that their kids are happy, they’re happy.”

She adds that the opportunity helped spark her own children’s love for gymnastics.

“They loved the bars, hanging there like little monkeys,” Hierhiieva laughs. “They just loved it. And they found people who shared that enthusiasm for gymnastics, who they could understand.” 🍁