



Reaching out to communities



Bringing people together

Insights from Community and Neighbourhood Work
at Caritas Vienna



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Caritas Vienna

over 6.300 employess

~ 4.500 volunteers work and support in different projects, ~ 11.500 volunteers support in parishes

The **territory of Caritas Vienna** corresponds to the territory of the archdiocese Vienna. It includes **Vienna as well as the eastern part of Lower Austria** – with the north-eastern part of Vienna (from the border to Czech Republic) as well as the southern part of Vienna (to the border to Styria and Burgenland).

Caritas Stadtteilarbeit

The department of Community & Neighborhood Work of Caritas Vienna has been committed to a **socially just, lively and inclusive development of districts or neighborhoods** in Vienna & Lower Austria (territory of the archdiocese of Vienna). It was established in 2012.

Our interdisciplinary **team (35 employees & 40 volunteers) with diverse experience** promotes self-empowerment, co-creation and solidarity-based actions in neighborhoods, districts or communities.



What we want to share with you today...

- Peer-support project Grätzel Peers and Healthy Communities
- “Cooking is bringing people together” – insights of Community Cooking
- Learnings & perceptions and challenges in our daily work

Grätzel Peers - Community Peers



- **Started in 2012 as a pilot project against energy poverty.**
- The core idea: Educating multipliers who support other people within their own communities and neighbourhoods who are challenged by high energy costs, flats with low standards, and other difficulties.
- Different phases over the last 10 years with slightly different focuses, but the core of the project remained the same.
- Fundings: Wiener Gesundheitsförderung, Donations (Caritas Vienna), Fonds Gesundes Österreich, Interreg Central Europe,...

Empowerment and Diversity

Empowerment of migrants and refugees, fostering networks and social inclusion.

Grätzel Peers have various **backgrounds and experiences and speak more than 10 different languages.** They support other people in their environment in improving their living situation, especially immigrants and refugees in Vienna.

Our aim is to **provide orientation in a new environment, to pass on and share knowledge, to create access,** and to **develop options for action.**



Different challenges that face refugees and migrants in Austria

- language barriers
- lack of or limited access to housing and the labor market
- insecure residence status
- limited financial resources and financial dependencies
- lack of social networks
- lack of knowledge about their new living environment and accessibility of different systems
- experiences of exclusion in various areas of life

Community Peers who support in the process of arriving and settling down

Giving information and orientation:

housing market (access and affordability)

labourmarket & education system

health system

financial support/security

social network & cultural dimension

participation / social cohesion

How we support the peers



Training for Volunteers

Before volunteers are getting active **they get a training which is held in German.** Over **the last 13 years, we had 5 trainings with 75 participants** in total.

Today we are happy to work with a group of 23 volunteers. 10 new participants are currently doing training.



As **Caritas-Team** we have following offers for the **volunteers:**

- Counselling sessions both for volunteers and people who are supported
- trainings and workshops for volunteers
- Excursions & field visits (Networking and exchange with other Organisations)
- Social activities to promote the team-spirit

Healthy Communities



- Promoting health literacy among people from different social groups, especially disadvantaged and socially excluded groups.
- Co-funded by the **European Union under the Erasmus+ program** (Dec 2023-May 2026).
- **Project Partners:**
Germany (GesBB & BGZ),
Poland (sTOP - NGO Trainers' Association)
Italy (Eurocultura).
- In collaboration with our project partners we were developing **low-threshold health education initiatives** and working with local institutions and organizations to implement and **promote health education in neighborhoods settings**.



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Healthy Communities



- Together with our partners we developed a **peer learning model** that was piloted in Germany, Poland, Italy, and Austria in 2026. As part of this model, **community health guides (facilitators)** will be trained to implement easily accessible health education activities and learning offers.
- The focus was **particularly on reaching out for people who are disadvantaged** and marginalized for various reasons.
- The whole **curriculum, learning materials as well as a diverse selection of learning offers are online available**. As inspiration for health focused community activities and training for multipliers:

healthycommunities.eu

Community Cooking

Community Cooking

ein Projekt der **Caritas**

Cooking together,
eating together,
living together.

Since 2015 with focus on healthy food and health promotion.

Fundings: Fonds Gesundes Österreich, Swiss SV Foundation, Association of Austrian Social Insurance Institutions, Donations, Caritas Vienna

Location: 10th district in Vienna – neighbourhood called Kretaviertel; residents of diverse backgrounds

Structural social disadvantages

Only a few open meeting spaces

Building: old bread factory, once the largest in Europe



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Community Cooking

Community Cooking

ein Projekt der **Caritas**



“The kitchen as a space of opportunity”

Our Principles:

- Diversity as an opportunity
- Promote intercultural exchange and integration
- Create opportunities for participation
- Use cooking as a means of communication
- Promote healthy eating in everyday life

Our Goals:

- Promote nutritional literacy
- Raise awareness and inform
- Strengthen social networks and neighbourhoods
- Strengthen networking and cooperation
- Ensure transferability and sustainability

Activities in different neighborhoods

Wärmestube (Warming Room)

Target Group: Homeless and people with financial difficulties

Goal: Provide a warm place during winter. Cook a warm dinner for those in need, to talk with one another



Mobile Cooking

Mobile Healthy Food Promotion

Target Group: participants of the host vicinity
Funded by Wiener Gesundheitsförderung

Goal: Reaching out to other districts of Vienna
Strengthen encounters in other neighbourhood
Promote social and cultural inclusion
Teaching alternative Protein of Legumes



Social Team Day / Team Cooking



“A project that enables people to connect through cooking”

Target Group: Corporate teams

Cook with a multicultural Cooking team,

Learn about the project & food cultures

Engage in team building

Prepare meals for the Day Center (Tageszentrum)

Goal: Promote group/team dynamics

Financial Sourcing for Community Cooking

Projects



Support by Volunteers

Is the core of Community Cooking activities;

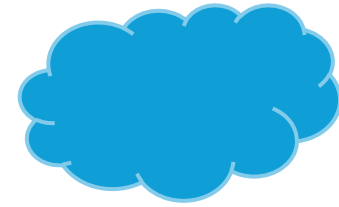
10 active individuals from various cultural backgrounds; **about 11 different languages**



Our Achievements in the last 10 years

- 300 Open Cooking Sessions with 8,000 guests (2015-2025)
- 45 Social Team Days with 720 participants and a total of 4,800 meals (up to 2023)
- 15 external rentals with 220 visitors in 2025
- 16 Warm Rooms on site with 465 people (2022-2025)
- 62 events for health promotion (for WiG) with 5,990 participants(2022-2025)
- 50 Language Cafe Sessions with about 400 participants (2018-2019)

Challenges that we face



- Engaging and involving volunteers is highly appreciated, important contributions: It needs time and good, personal contacts for activating and inviting people.
- People who get actively involved need time resource and secure living situation
- different languages and cultures might cause misunderstandings – therefore facilitating events is important
- For activities: Finding the right time where many people can participate – finding rooms/spaces a good network is needed
- In general for many of our offers: stable fundings for more sustainability

What we learned



- For many people volunteering is an important possibility of being part of a group, getting in contact and involved, people can also learn and improve competences through volunteering
- Volunteers often act as multipliers in their communities
- Flexibility, patience, space and courage to experiment,
- Language and cultural diversity in our team is a big advantage; it needs time and space for discussion and reflection
- For many people volunteering is a first step into labour market: sometimes you have different expectations
- Working with a diverse group settings needs a broad range of methods
- Good personal relations and contacts to participants/neighbours/guests/volunteers are an essential part of our work



Thank you very much for your attention!
We are looking forward to answering questions 😊

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