



life farm

is 10 years old!





The Life Farm in Więckowice near Kraków – also known as “The Farm” Residential and Educational Centre – is one of the most autism-friendly places throughout Poland. The Life Farm is the first specialist centre in the country, combining residential, therapeutic, educational and recreational functions. The Farm is a home to its residents, and at the same time, it provides a broad variety of options also to those who commute here for day activities. The centre is running programmes of social and vocational activation. It initiates cooperation projects – both nationally and internationally.



Above everything else, the Life Farm is the place where we strive to create the right climate for developing the individual potential of adults with autism to the fullest. It is a chance for a decent living, and an alternative to, oftentimes, dramatic fates – for instance, to existence in a closed psychiatric ward. Life Farm is the place where persons with autism find conditions for self-fulfilment and the highest possible degree of independence; they gain the sense of welfare and self-esteem. It is a safe place, where their rights are always respected and protected.

In 2015 the Life Farm is celebrating its 10th anniversary, but the concept is older than that. The idea was born many years ago in the heads of those who created the Community of Hope Foundation. Established in 1998, the Foundation has as its mission the creation of a comprehensive support system for persons with autism and related developmental disorders as well as their families. The Life Farm is the key element of that support. President of the Foundation, Alina Perzanowska, the mother of Michał, a young man with autism, was inspired by the examples of rural communities for persons with autism, which have been operating for decades in many countries of Western Europe and the USA, to a great success. She was particularly drawn to the Irish Society of Autism-run Dunfirth Farm. The latter centre, in the vicinity of Dublin, is considered to be a model example in its field. The Founders of Dunfirth Farm – Pat and Nuala Matthews – have been supporting the Life Farm with their example, and with their kind and experienced counsel, from the very beginning. The Life Farm also enjoys the patronage of the International Autism Organisation.





The Life Farm lies in a picturesque location, and it occupies an area of 7 hectares near Kraków, in the buffer zone of the Jurassic Nature Reserve. Only ten years ago, this was an empty, green field. Today, in the enclosed compound, there is an orchard, fruit and vegetable gardens, and hothouses. At the Farm we grow cucumbers, tomatoes, potatoes, beetroots, cabbage, salad, kale, pumpkins, many varieties of apples, pears, plums, strawberries, raspberries, currants... and more.



All crops are biodynamic – since 2008, the Life Farm holds the certificate of an organic farm. Experts from the Kraków University of Agriculture and the Małopolska Agricultural Advisory Centre are assisting us in developing our seeding and sowing plans. We belong to the regional NATURA Association of Organic Farmers.

Since 2014, our centre is even more environment-friendly – as we have partially transferred to solar power. This was made possible by the “Free the energy!” competition by Greenpeace Poland, which the Life Farm was lucky to have won. As a reward, Greenpeace sponsored the photovoltaic panels, which were fitted on the roof of one of the houses.



At the Farm, we also have a sledding hill, a bicycle path, and since recently, also a fitness trail constructed with the help of the Kraków Airport as a part of their “Supporting the Neighbours” action. We also have wooden arbours, hand-built by international volunteers with the help of the residents. Our Outdoor Recreation Centre organises integration picnics and sports activities such as Nordic walking and T'ai chi. All that is happening among the greenery, which grows more beautiful each year.





Over the long term, our concept envisions 5 homes for 35 permanent residents. According to the concept, each home is a small community of a few persons – which fosters close relationships, as well as the atmosphere of peace and comfort.



Until this day, two of the planned five homes have been built – the first was inaugurated in 2005, the second in 2011. The construction of each of the houses is a great organisational and financial effort, requiring the involvement of numerous people – among them many volunteers. It also requires fundraising from various sources. The construction so far has been financed from the MRPO and PFRON programmes, from the Foundation's own resources, from the funds of an anonymous Dutch foundation, and many other donors.

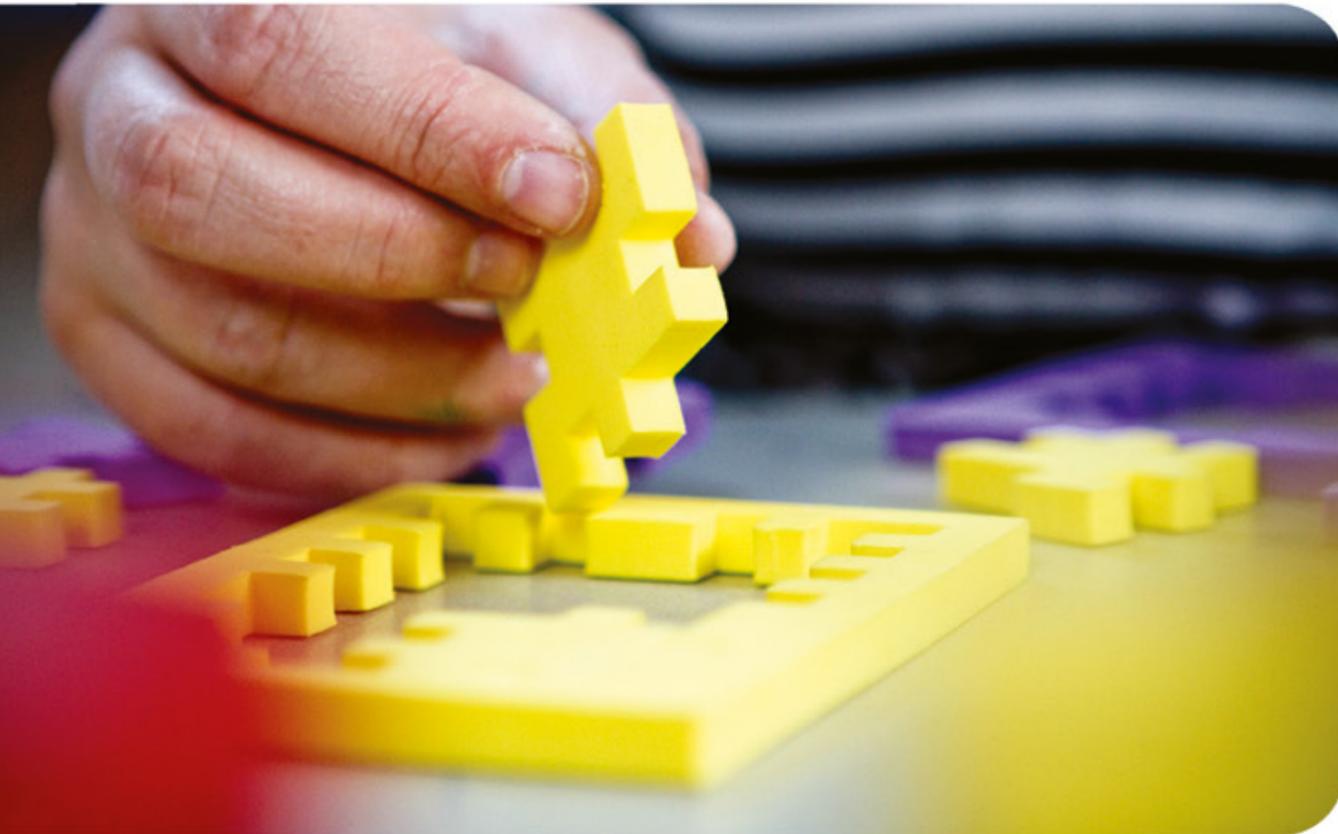


Both homes are housing the unit called the Małopolska Regional Social Care Home "At the Life Farm" (before: the Family Care Home). Adaptation and day activities started in 2005, while the first residents moved in three years later. Today 11 persons with autism are living here: three women and eight men. It is a great success that they feel at home – and there is no doubt that the Life Farm is their proper home. Each of the residents enjoys his own or her own room, individually furnished and decorated, and including en-suite bathroom. In addition, together with other inhabitants, they use spacious common rooms, kitchens with dining annexes, and outside terraces.





Since 2005, Day Activity Centre at the Life Farm has been in operation. It serves dozens of persons who commute to the Farm for workshops and other activities. The main occupation of both residents and participants in day programmes is working the organic farm and garden, but there are also a number of other workshops and studios. These include, in the First Home: an educational workshop – resident’s club, an arts and crafts studio, a computer and office workshop, as well as gardening, carpentry and laundry workshops. The upper floor of the Second Home houses a rehabilitation room, a ceramics studio, as well as offices and guest rooms for volunteers.



In their work, the Farm’s therapists combine a number of methodologies, with an emphasis on the TEACCH model. Activities at the Farm are based on a clear organisation of time and space. The day always starts with an individual plan of activities, in the format preferred by the participant – either in writing, or in pictures.

As each of the homes combines different functions, we carefully separated the residential part from the part used by the “external” participants. Persons who commute to day activities use a dedicated entrance and facilities, while the residential part remains strictly private. Rooms and equipment, as well as different areas of the farm and garden, are clearly marked using pictograms and photographs.

Some of the activities take place outside the Farm, for instance in Bobrek, Skawina, and Kraków. The hostel at Olsztyńska in Kraków is the city branch of our Day Activity Centre; in addition to workshops, it also hosts overnight stays. The hostel is adapted to offering hospitality services, which allows persons with autism to practise skills necessary in the hotel industry. Some persons take part in work placements in the open job market: they provide cleaning, gardening and office services. They also volunteer at the Food Bank, among other places.





It is at the Life Farm that Kraina OZA was created – an innovative ICT platform for adults with autism. The platform is educational and informative, assists in developing knowledge and skills, in pursuing individual interests, in personal and professional growth. It is aimed at social and vocational activation and inclusion, and it consists of two different websites, which complement each other: www.KrainaOZA.pl and www.KrainaOZA.org.



- ▶ www.KrainaOZA.pl
- ▶ www.KrainaOZA.org



The first website – www.KrainaOZA.pl – has been developed especially for persons with autism spectrum disorder, in both form and content. It is accessible and autism-friendly. The website uses tools to facilitate communication and understanding, such as simple text, pictograms, and a text-to-speech tool. It contains an accessible news service, which is subdivided into general news and the local news of the autism community. The website features articles, descriptions of interesting places to visit, step-by-step illustrated cooking recipes, and games. E-mail and chat, available for registered users, offer two options: traditional text, and pictograms. An important feature of the website is the information on possible careers, a listing of job ads, and the e-learning section: a series of online courses which explain, in simple language, the idea of work, and prepare persons with autism for entering the job market.

The second website www.KrainaOZA.org is addressed to parents, therapists, students, educators, potential employers of persons with ASD, and others – in other words, to the environment of persons with autism. Among other tools, this website contains an online course for potential employers, preparing them for employing a person with ASD. There is also a tool for posting job offers.

Kraina OZA was developed in the innovative project titled “Edu-Autyzm” (2012-2015), co-financed by the European Union from the Human Capital Operational Programme, and implemented by the Community of Hope Foundation together with its partners: Lewiatan Employers’ Association of the Małopolska Region, WAI-NOT Association, and Thomas More University. The platform was tested at the Life Farm, by the residents and workshop participants, in a computer lab created especially for the purpose. Today the platform is available as a free tool for everyone interested, throughout Poland. Worth noting is the ever-growing presence of articles contributed by persons with autism and Asperger Syndrome. Several young persons with autism have already written on such themes as: their experiences, hobbies, favourite places, topics of general interest – and had their articles published on the website.





Residents of the Life Farm and day participants are creatively active in the arts field. From the very beginning of the Farm's existence, arts and crafts objects have been made here. It is a tradition that twice each year, before Easter and Christmas, teachers and students from the Upper-Secondary School Complex in Giebułtów come to the Farm. They run creative workshops for persons with autism, during which they make Easter palms for Palm Sunday and beautiful Christmas decorations, respectively. More recently, as a part of their graduation projects, students from the Faculty of Industrial Design at the Kraków Academy of Fine Arts develop prototypes of simple objects, which do not require complicated production technologies, and can be made in the studio at the Life Farm.



More and more art projects reach also beyond the Farm. Persons with autism took part in a series of creative workshops at MOCAK – Museum of Contemporary Art in Kraków. Collages and other workshop creations were presented during an exhibition at the museum itself. In 2013, we started collaboration with the Museum of the History of Photography in Kraków. As a result, persons with autism not only saw several very interesting exhibitions, but also took part in activities designed especially for them by the Museum's educators at the Life Farm, and in the public spaces of Kraków.



Adults with autism from the Life Farm took part in the "Paradiso" theatre play, loosely based on Dante's "Divine Comedy". The play directed by Michał Borczuch premiered on 22 June 2014 at the Łaźnia Nowa theatre. It was preceded by theatrical workshops, preparing for entering the role and responsibilities of an actor: methods of acting, building the suspense, understanding the dramatic text, stage movement, and building the artistic persona. The workshops not only helped persons with autism to become familiar with theatrical tasks, but also helped the professional theatre makers to understand the specific, mysterious, and fascinating world of autism. Furthermore, the meetings informed the structure of the play, co-created by persons with autism, who were treated as partners in this theatrical endeavour. "Paradiso" is no art therapy, but it is a joint work by theatre professionals and amateurs with autism; above all, it is art in its own right. The performance met with great interest and a very warm reception from the audience and reviewers alike, and it was distinguished by the Dziennik Polski daily as one of the ten most interesting plays of the year 2014.





Between 2009-2014, learners and residents of the Life Farm took part in a series of travels abroad, co-financed by the European Union within the Grundtvig – Lifelong Learning Programme. These kinds of projects facilitate exchange of experiences and transfer of good practice in the field of informal adult education, in the European context. International meetings – “mobilities” or study visits to partner institutions, lasting several days – are the cornerstone of a Grundtvig project. The mobility is a chance to get to know the host country and institution, take part in a variety of workshops, joint activities, and other events.



Educational “journey with autism”, which combined learning, work, and pleasure, turned out to be a wonderful experience, visibly increasing the independence and self-esteem of the participants. For many of them, this was the first big journey of their life, the first time on the plane, the first meeting with a new and unknown situation. They passed the test with flying colours. Projects of this kind enrich the Foundation’s working methods, within the context of the comprehensive support system for adults with autism and their families, offered at the Life Farm.



Over the five years, persons with autism and their therapists – several dozen persons in total – visited Belgium, France, Greece, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy and Turkey. They visited an organic farm in county Wexford and Marakanda arts studio in Sasso Marconi, among many other places. They learned the traditional paper marbling technique of Ebru in Ankara, and took part in a large-scale volunteering action, of cleaning the ocean beaches in Brittany. They had a chance to make friends with their colleagues from other countries, and see how they live and work – for example, at the Baráthegy farm near Miskolc, where persons with autism live, keep animals and produce goat cheese, or in Belgian Casteau, where persons with intellectual disability live independently in protected housing, work in a mini-brewery, and run a cafeteria at the local university campus.





The Life Farm could never exist and function without the help of a great number of good people: the founders, the volunteers, the parents of adults with autism, the benefactors, as well as a team of truly dedicated, hardworking employees and collaborators.



From the blessing ceremony of the foundation stone, to the opening of the Second Home, we have always been accompanied by Cardinal-Priest Franciszek Macharski.

For the future existence and development of the Life Farm, financial support is also key – generated partly from the action “1%” of the personal income tax, from charitable collections and special events. In the past years, many great artists gave concerts for the benefit of the Life Farm: among them Anna Treter, Urszula Dudziak, Kabaret Piwnica pod Baranami and Marek Bałata. The concerts were accompanied by charity art auctions, led by the excellent Andrzej Ślaski, with the proceeds donated to the expansion of the Life Farm. In 2014, we received a gift of the collection of paintings by the late Richard Wawro, a Scottish painter of Polish origin, a person with autism himself. Some of his intriguing works, marked with great precision and a perfect palette of colours, will find their way to future charity auctions.

The Life Farm, which is based on model international solutions, today is a good practice model in itself: we receive study visits and student placements, including international ones. The Farm provides a blueprint for persons who initiate the creation of similar centres in Poland and abroad. We are always happy to share our experience and offer advice.

Today, on its 10th anniversary, the Life Farm is famous even beyond Europe. In autumn 2014 we hosted two consecutive visits by very special guests: Mrs Sharon Johnston, the wife of the Governor of Canada, and Mrs Akie Abe, the wife of Japan’s Prime Minister. Of course, persons with autism were the co-hosts and main protagonists of both these meetings.

The Life Farm is a part of the local and international community. It is our pleasure and joy to welcome our friends at the Farm – for instance, during Open Days and the annual picnic event, which came to be known as “Farmer’s Day”.



Persons who received the honorary title of the Benefactor to the Community of Hope Foundation:

Wanda Sokołowska, Katarzyna Trezise de domo Sokołowska, Krystyna Łyczakowska, Krzysztof Bogdanowicz, Jacek Stokłosa, Barbara Gruskoś, Radosław Sosnowski, Zbigniew Fijak, Maria and Michał Wroniszewscy, Irma Donders, Polish Scouting Organisation Abroad, Nuala and Pat Matthews, Anna Themerson, Private Dutch foundation wishing to remain anonymous, Andrzej Ślaski, Jerzy Wodnicki, Arkadiusz Malczyk, Władysław Wilk, RE-Bau



Our biggest dream is to continue building the Life Farm, to increase the quality of life and well-being of its inhabitants, and to receive further residents, now on the waiting list for this opportunity.



In the coming years, we are hoping to purchase the equipment for the central kitchen, which is otherwise prepared and occupies a dedicated space in the Second Home's ground floor. Launching the kitchen would let us prepare meals for residents and day participants independently, using the products of our organic farm – rather than employing external catering services. This would be beneficial for several reasons. It would enable us to prepare healthy, home-cooked, organic meals, at a lower cost. At the same time, kitchen work as well as processing of fruit and vegetables from the farm would provide another useful and satisfying occupation for persons with autism.

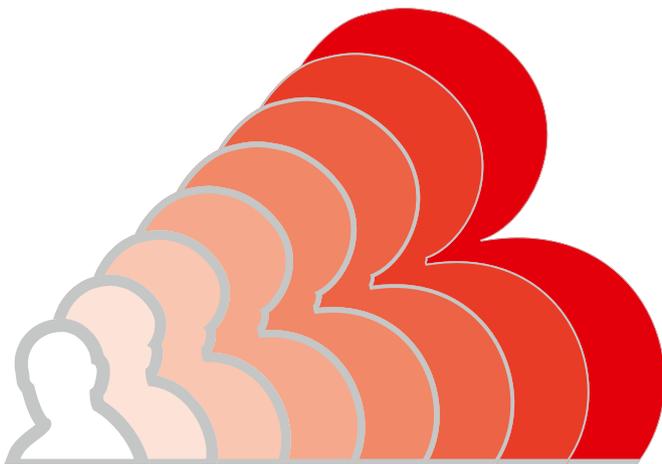
We would like to add medical services to the range of support we offer. Persons with autism and their families often face barriers in the access to health service, not merely organisational and administrative ones, but also, such as result from social and communication problems characteristic for autism.

We are dreaming of constructing a building for animals, as animal husbandry is indispensable for running a balanced organic farm. Presence of animals is extremely important also for therapeutic reasons – we had a chance to observe the confirmed benefits of the so-called animal therapy during our visits abroad.

Finally, we wish to start building the third house for candidate residents. The waiting list is long and we realise that we cannot meet all of the existing needs in the region – however, we would like to use the potential that we have. We have not yet exhausted all the possibilities – in addition to the two homes already built at the Life Farm, there is room for three more.

Please help us to make these dreams come true! We are most grateful for all your donations, and for all your help – either financial or in kind. We always strive to make the best possible use of the help we receive – by investing in the development, and striving for the highest possible degree of independence for persons with autism, for whom the Life Farm is a chance to pursue their personal growth, as well as a useful and satisfying occupation. You can now make your own contribution to this beautiful place, which is truly indispensable for persons with autism.





**FUNDACJA
WSPÓLNOTA NADZIEI**

to be continued...

Address:

Fundacja Wspólnota Nadziei
Więckowice, ul. Ogrodowa 17
32-082 Bolechowice
(48) 12 378 43 58
biuro@farma.org.pl
www.farma.org.pl

KRS 0000115868

Account number: 35 1600 1013 0002 0011 6204 9001
PNB Paribas Bank Polska SA O/Kraków

Edited and translated by:
Dorota Wąsik

Photographs:
Edward Bolak
Maria Bozowska-Bolak
Juriana Jur
Adeline Ong
Jacek Stokłosa
Dorota Wąsik

Production editor:
Iwona Pisiewicz

Design:
Anna Podczaszy