
World Jewish Relief

Tackling Loneliness in Rovno

World Jewish Relief is the UK Jewish community's international humanitarian agency. We combat poverty among the world's most vulnerable Jewish communities and beyond.

We have been working in Ukraine since the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1991. We operate in 42 locations, and through 51 programmes we support 44,000 people there.

One of those locations is the historic city of Rovno in Western Ukraine.



Rovno

Rovno is a historic city in Western Ukraine, with a population of 250,000, and a Jewish population of 1,300. It lies at the heart of Rovno province. The name Rovno, meaning plain, refers to its location on Ukraine's lowlands.

The Jewish community has been established in the city for a long time; a census in 1885 put the Jewish population at 4,950, over half of the entire town. At the time there were six synagogues and two Jewish schools.

Jewish Rovno today

Today Rovno is a medium sized city, and the small but active community is scattered across the region. There is a Jewish Welfare Centre, Hesed Osher, in the main city, and a second branch in the smaller town of Lutsk. The two organisations together support 817 clients in need in 66 different towns and villages.

The centres provide a wide range of support, including food cards, homecare and medication for the elderly, and a range of clubs and activities.

Despite this, because the community is so widely spread, it is a long journey for many people to travel to the centres. The distance is particularly difficult for elderly people. This is where World Jewish Relief's *Tackling Loneliness* programme, which coordinates social activities in peoples homes, can make all the difference.



Stefania was born in 1931 in Poland. After World War II her family moved to Lutsk. Stefania married, and worked in forest management until she retired. Her daughter moved abroad, and last year her husband died of cancer. She was incredibly lonely and became depressed.

After joining the Tackling Loneliness programme, visiting a local home once a week, Stefania's life changed. She is a fantastic cook, and bakes for every meeting. She enjoys the activities as well as meeting new people. She said: "I have new friends now, who I really appreciate and I feel appreciated by them. Life is starting to feel full again."

Tackling Loneliness together

World Jewish Relief now runs three *Tackling Loneliness* programmes in private homes in and around Rovno, in partnership with Hesed Osher. These houses act as local gathering points, and each week around 50 people go to the homes, meet, socialise, share a meal, and take part in an activity.

The homes act like a mini Community Centre. While the home owner acts as the host, the groups encourage active participation to make every member feel useful and empowered and a part of their community.

They host a wide range of activities, including lectures on Jewish history and traditions, workshops on arts and crafts, poetry evenings and roundtable discussions. The groups go on trips, visiting theatres and museums, and together the members celebrate the Jewish holidays and throw each other birthday parties.

Young volunteers often join the group to bring the generations together and provide support in activities.

Conclusion

We would like to thank Muswell Hill Synagogue for choosing to support the town of Rovno through World Jewish Relief.

If you have any questions or would like any further information, please be in touch with Emma Segal, Deputy Director of Philanthropy, on 0208 736 1253 or es@wjr.org.uk.