

# “SCHOOL OF PSYCHOLOGY FOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS” AS A PRACTICE OF SERVICE-LEARNING: EXPERIENCE OF ORGANIZING AND IMPLEMENTING THE PROJECT

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The “School of Psychology for High School Students” project was launched in 2016 at the Department of Psychology and Psychotherapy of the Ukrainian Catholic University as an educational and awareness-raising initiative for high school students. Its main idea was to popularize psychological knowledge among adolescents and to enhance their psychological competence. Since 2023, in the context of Russia’s full-scale war against Ukraine, the project has been rethought and has begun to function as a practice of service-learning, in which educational goals are combined with a response to urgent societal needs.

At the center of the “School of Psychology for High School Students” project is the creation by university students of a series of psychological trainings for high school students. This format allows students not only to acquire theoretical knowledge, but also to transform it into an accessible, safe, and practically useful educational product for an adolescent audience.

The program usually includes 10–15 meetings in the format of trainings, interactive sessions, and group discussions. Depending on security, organizational, and technical circumstances, the sessions may take place offline on the UCU campus, fully online, or in a hybrid format. Such flexibility is especially important in wartime, when some participants cannot always be physically present in Lviv or participate in sessions consistently.

The training topics cover issues that are important for adolescents during the period of growing up, social instability, and wartime experience: emotions, self-regulation, social relationships, personal

boundaries, stress, traumatic experience, mental health, resilience, leadership, and career orientation. Special attention is paid to ensuring that the material is psychologically accurate, clear, practical, and age-appropriate.

As a service-learning practice, the “School of Psychology for High School Students” has several goals. For high school students, it creates an opportunity to receive high-quality psychological education, discuss complex topics in a safe environment, and acquire tools useful in everyday life. For psychology students, the project is a space for professional learning through action: they learn to adapt psychological knowledge to the needs of a specific age group, plan trainings, work with group dynamics, respond to the needs of the audience, and reflect on their own role as future professionals.

A separate component of social action is the charitable dimension of the project. Participation for high school students involves an organizational fee, and the funds collected are donated to support the Armed Forces of Ukraine. Depending on the year, the project has raised approximately UAH 40000 to 60000. Thus, the “School of Psychology for High School Students” combines psychological education, practical student learning, and a concrete contribution to supporting the country in wartime.

An important aspect for reflecting on the project is the experience of two different models of student involvement. The first model involves integrating the “School of Psychology” into an academic course. In this case, all students enrolled in the course participate in the project, the completion of tasks is mandatory, and the preparation and delivery of trainings are assessed as part of the learning outcomes. This format has advantages for the institutionalization of service-learning: the project becomes a stable part of the educational program, students go through the full cycle of working with an audience, and the instructor can systematically support the process and connect practical activity with educational goals.

At the same time, the mandatory format has its limitations. Since the project is part of a course, all students are involved regardless of whether training, educational, or group work with adolescents is of genuine interest to them. For some students, this activity may not correspond to their professional interests. In such cases,

participation may be perceived more as an academic requirement for which they need to receive a grade than as their own initiative. This can reduce intrinsic motivation, the level of creative engagement, and the quality of the trainings.

The second model involves implementing the project outside the framework of a mandatory course. In this case, only those students who voluntarily express a desire to participate join the “School of Psychology for High School Students”. They may come from different years of study, choose topics according to their own interests, and form teams around issues that are personally meaningful to them. This format has proved to be more productive in terms of the quality of the training work. Voluntary participation strengthens students’ sense of ownership: they are not merely completing an assignment, but implementing their own idea that they want to communicate to high school students. This makes the trainings more creative, dynamic, and adapted to the needs of the adolescent audience.

The role of the instructor remains fundamentally important in both models. The instructor acts as an organizer, coordinator, and consultant: setting the framework of the project, helping to define educational and social goals, advising on the structure of sessions, selection of materials, age-appropriateness of topics, ethical boundaries, and safe communication. At the same time, the majority of the substantive, organizational, and creative work belongs to the students themselves.

The experience of the “School of Psychology for High School Students” shows that service-learning is most effective when it combines institutional support from the university with space for student initiative. Integrating the project into an academic course ensures sustainability and a connection with learning outcomes. At the same time, the quality of the trainings depends significantly on whether students have the opportunity to act from their own interest, choose topics, demonstrate creativity, and feel ownership of the process. It is precisely the balance between instructor support, educational structure, and voluntary student motivation that may be a key condition for successful service-learning in higher education.