

Hungary's first Community Learning Centre has been launched

Growing attention, shrinking distances

In the Community Learning Centre competition announced by the Community-Oriented Pedagogy Project, Menyhért Lónyay Baptist Technicum and Vocational School in Vásárosnamény, managed by the Baptist Charity Service, established a Learning Centre providing new experiences and quality leisure time for disadvantaged secondary school students coming from rural areas who are struggling with urban challenges.

✉ Eszter Szakácsi

Thanks to the steady increase in educational support and a strong on-the-ground Presence in recent years, dropout rates among children living in catching-up settlements have decreased sharply. Today, almost all students complete primary school. However, those who go on to study in urban secondary schools face a new and unfamiliar challenge — having to adjust to a completely different environment.

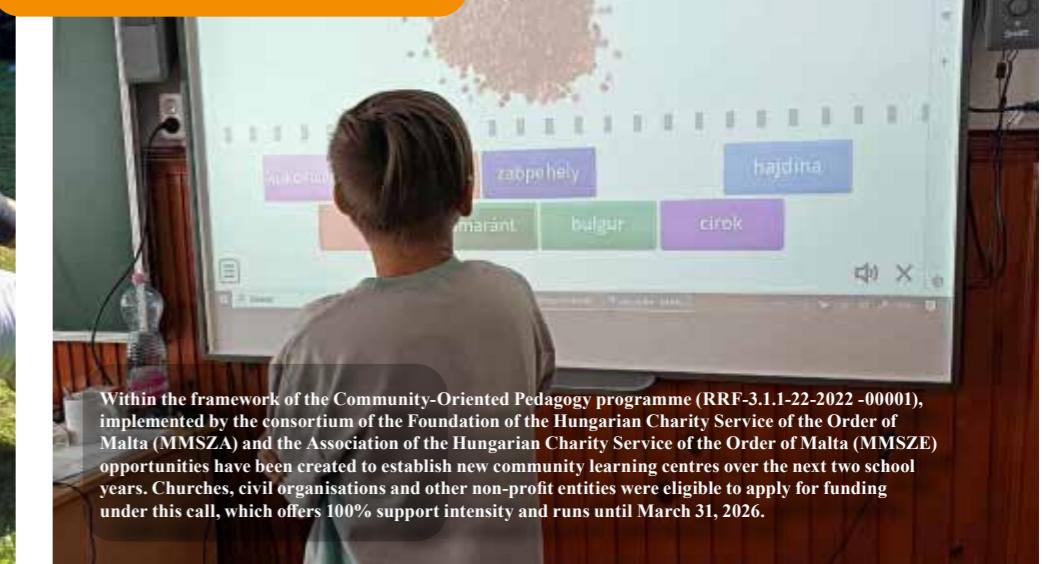
For young people and their parents, who are used to quiet, often traffic-free settlements, even the pace of a small town can feel overwhelming. Many find the daily commute intimidating, and parents often struggle with letting their children travel alone. Beyond these challenges, secondary schools also pose higher expectations. Added to which come personal and family difficulties — financial strain, long travel times, adapting to boarding school life, and sometimes even facing a hostile or hurtful school atmosphere. All of this can weigh heavily on teenagers. Over time, these constant and often compounding pressures can lead to a loss of motivation, more frequent absences, and eventually dropping out of school altogether. It's at this critical point that the Learning Centre steps in to support them.

The Learning Centre — still a relatively new service in Hungary — offers teenagers a safe and meaningful alternative to spending their afternoons in shopping



The first swallows

The Vásárosnamény Learning Centre opened its doors in the autumn of 2024 with twenty students, who took part in a community-building and career-orientation camp called "Knocking on the Learning Centre's Door." The participants came from seven villages included in the Emerging Settlements Programme — Nyírparasznya, Olesva, Tarpa, Tiszaadony, Tiszakerecseny, Tiszavid, and Rohod — with the help of Presence Programme staff in their local communities. Building strong connections between teachers, parents, and social workers is essential, as only through mutual support can students be encouraged and motivated to engage with the Learning Centre, allowing it to become a stable and positive part of their lives throughout their secondary school years.



Within the framework of the Community-Oriented Pedagogy programme (RRF-3.1.1-22-2022 -00001), implemented by the consortium of the Foundation of the Hungarian Charity Service of the Order of Malta (MMSZA) and the Association of the Hungarian Charity Service of the Order of Malta (MMSZE) opportunities have been created to establish new community learning centres over the next two school years. Churches, civil organisations and other non-profit entities were eligible to apply for funding under this call, which offers 100% support intensity and runs until March 31, 2026.

malls or parks. For secondary school students who arrive in the early afternoon, the centre provides a variety of activities tailored to their interests and talents, including sports, music, visual arts, and cultural programmes. They also receive help with homework and guidance on navigating school life and the challenges of living in an urban environment.

Launched in the autumn of 2024, the Learning Centre in Vásárosnamény has quickly become an important part of local students' lives. Thanks to the efforts of the animators, teachers, and local professionals, the centre offers a friendly, welcoming space where teenagers enjoy spending time and regularly take part in the programmes organised there. The animators make a conscious effort to understand and respond to the students' needs, with flexibility playing a key role in their success. The main goal has been to create a safe and calm environment for spending the afternoons — one that also offers opportunities for learning and personal growth — and ultimately helps prevent students from dropping out of secondary school. In line with the project's principles, the animators also maintain close contact with the parents, working hand in hand with the local Presence Point staff.