



**interaworks**  
Case Study

How the House of Guardian Angels in Poland won awards, more than doubled their funding and increased impact in their community by more than 159% over the previous year by expanding their use of Best Year Yet for Teams.

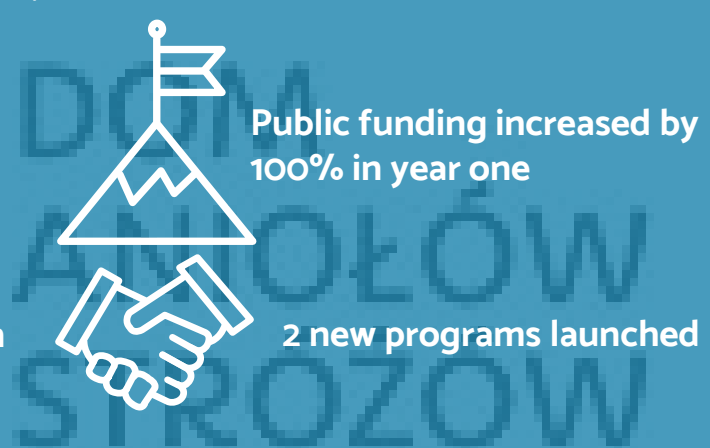
“The Best Year Yet program was a revelation.”



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“Before we decided to attend [the] Best Year Yet program, we were in a difficult situation,” recalls Monika Bajka, Director and President of the Board of the Anioly House of Guardian Angels in Poland. As a non-profit, the agency depended on volunteers and government grant awards to keep its doors open and meet the community needs. After 25 years, they were struggling with the loss of key leaders both within the agency and on the Board of Directors, which had a destabilizing effect on the agency. Lack of adequate funding threatened to close 2-3 children’s centers and put the agency in direct competition with local authorities for the limited government award dollars available. “We had quite a big dependence on public grants,” Monika shares, “and it made organizational independence and job security a challenge.” The pressure was leading to high staff burnout and turnover levels, as well as recruitment challenges related to high caseloads, limited funding, and lack of a clear path forward.

## What Matters Most



Best Year Yet Partner and facilitator, Katarzyna Jarońska-Kurowska, knew that Best Year Yet could empower Anioly to resolve these challenges and grow the impact of the important work they do. The Anioly House of Guardian Angels was an ideal candidate for support from The Best Year Yet Foundation. For 25 years, it has served children, youth and families who have been socially excluded in post-mining and post-metallurgical districts of poverty. In Silesia and Zagłębie, the agency provides a wide range of free services including 8 therapy day-care centres, kiddie clubs, clubs for the development of children and teenagers, “street work” extracurricular activity programs, and family guidance centers. In addition, Anioly maintains a close connection to a network of specialists who assist with specific needs of the children, ranging from speech and hearing issues to legal and housing services.



Through the Best Year Yet Foundation, Anioly was able to put two of its leadership teams through the Best Year Yet for Teams program. As part of their Best Year Yet work, “We realized that what was limiting us most was low self-esteem” more than the outside pressures, Monika shares. Anioly’s new plans focused on changing that mindset to one of inspiration and empowerment. They focused on designing a higher functioning management system, creating new roles with more responsibility and accountability, working together as a team, creating a plan to increase private funding, and building a prestigious brand that would help them compete for the money they needed.

Katarzyna reflects warmly, “Anioly does a great job for these communities; I’m so proud of them. But I’m conscious that is only possible with the cooperation [of] such [a] wonderful organization like [the] Best Year Yet Foundation.”



Monika agrees that “After a year of working with the Best Year Yet program, we had a lot of successes.” Anioly was finally awarded the City of Katowice grant they’d been pursuing for years and was honored with the Brand Silesia Award for their huge impact on development in the state of Silesia, Poland. Instead of cutting services as they feared might be necessary, Anioly was able to add two new programs and expand into a new city. Additionally, to remove the yearly fear of losing the grants they depended on, their new fundraising plan successfully increased their private donations by 150%. And their Best Year Yet plan empowered them to get creative, with the team designing a program that allowed the community to donate goods and services for their clients, open up funding opportunities, and increase their cash resources to take pressure off other areas.

“As time goes by, I know that the Best Year Yet program was a revelation,” Kids and Youth Program Director, Daria Mejsner reflects. After their first year of the Best Year Yet program, Monika and her team members all reported that it helped them come together to define greater responsibilities and execute in those roles with confidence. During that first year, the middle team at Anioly created a safe, supportive work environment for the team, which was now feeling empowered, secure in their jobs, and confident about the work they were doing. It was enough to spur Monika’s decision to expand participation in Best Year Yet programming in year two.

“After the success of implementing Best Year Yet for middle team last year, I had a strong feeling that we needed to go further and create the multilevel structure of responsibility and competency,” Monika shared. “And that was the moment at which it was obvious for me that we needed to make all the leaders a part of Best Year Yet to ensure all of us the same standards and way of thinking about mission, goals, and tasks.”

“Their Best Year Yet plan empowered them to get creative.”

The growth and success only grew in year two as Best Year Yet expanded into two Anioly leadership teams. Internally, the planning conversations led to some major shifts within the organization. “It was a breakthrough year in the development of organizational management,” Monika reflects. During that year, Anioly shifted to a completely new three-tier organizational structure to empower leaders to focus on growth of the organization and all employees, and to support a structured cascade of goal-oriented responsibilities. The leadership teams created a fundraising and public relations team to increase brand awareness, develop new funding strategies, and strengthen community relationships. And they also decided to outsource accounting and HR to focus energy on programmatic priorities. In addition, Monika says, “Due to working with Best Year Yet, recruitment in the Association reached a new dimension.”



Family Centers Director, Agnieszka Kubera, explains, “Thanks to the specific planning of recruitment for our Association, I created [a] recruitment team, I wrote recruitment procedures, and I started [a cooperative] with universities. As the result of those moves, we hired five new employees.”

The significant organizational developments Anioly has celebrated over the past two years have also come with major growth among the Best Year Yet program participants. “Our relationships greatly improved and that makes our organization safer and our position more stable. The Best Year Yet program [...] is a chance and guarantee of organizational and personal development!” Monika reports.

Daria Mesjer, who also serves as the Director of the Leadership Team shares, “I think the biggest success was [the] cooperation and integration of the [...] middle level leaders; their honest chats about difficulties, fears, things they messed up and successes. I was able to watch up close how they [got] set in their roles, organized their matters and matters of their teams. With every meeting they were getting more and more engaged and identified with the new challenges and tasks [...] We all dreamed that the new team leaders could cooperate as well as we do – and this dream is coming true.”

On the personal side, Family Centre Director, Agnieszka Kubera, says, “I have strongly developed myself as a leader of work with families. Furthermore, I created a new team of co-workers, thanks to which our students received professional support. Working with the Best Year Yet plan also brought changes in my personal life. Thanks to systematic planning, I have more time for my husband and children.”

These major developments in Anioly’s organizational structure and leadership led to big wins in the House of Guardian Angels programming for children and their families. Prior to working with Best Year Yet, Anioly feared they may have to shutter some of the impactful programs that had made such a difference in the cities they served; however, after year two, their funding had grown dramatically with new grants and private funding, including a new grant partnering with the European Union.

Not only was Anioly able to continue all ongoing programming and Day Support Centers operations, The House of Guardian Angels was able to add some brand-new programs and significantly increase capacity and offerings across all of their programming. After year two, Anioly added Specialized Counseling for Families, a supplementary feeding program called Yellow Plate in four Day Support Centers, a new Day Support Center for children in Sosnowiec Juliusz, doubled the capacity of the Active Club for children in Chorzów Batory, and established a cooperative with the Center for Diagnostics and Therapy and continued the Psychological-Pedagogical Counselling Centre cooperative, both of which supported families with children needing diagnostic examinations and specialized therapies, such as speech therapy, pediatric occupational therapy, hearing therapy, and neurological and psychiatric treatment.

## With the support of Best Year Yet, Anioly made a huge community impact:

New Family Guidance Centre: 23 people completed vocational courses, 6 young people began internships, 18 people gained professional employment

105 children received regular daily care at Day Care Centres

677 children participated in “Street Work” extracurricular activity programs

103 families received counselling, education, legal aid, diagnosis and access to prescribed therapies

Over 4,000 hours of volunteer work organized to aid recipients of Anioly’s programming

# “Step by step, she created a new plan for her life.”

In addition, Anioly extended the range of activities and increased the number of participants in the Angelic Academy of Talents, which helps children to access activities outside of Anioly’s “Street Work” offerings that the students wouldn’t normally be able to participate in. Through this program, hundreds of students can access enrichment activities such as English classes, computer programming, engineering programs, Judo, acrobatics classes, soccer, swimming, Academy of Dance, and a singing and acting troupe.

Natalia, 18, and Olivier, 7, and his family, are some of the community members who have benefitted from the continued and expanding Anioly House of Guardian Angels programming since they started their work with Best Year Yet. Natalia was 18 when she came to the Family Guidance Centre. After a difficult family situation led her to drop out of school, she didn’t know how to support herself going forward. “She was scared, very insecure, withdrawn, and she didn’t believe she could achieve anything,” Monika says. With individual support from an assistant at the Centre, Natalia slowly began to open up, participate in vocational workshops, and maximize the support provided to her. “Step by step, she created a new plan for her life,” Monika says. Natalia returned to an extramural school, and with the help of House of Guardian Angels legal aid, she was able to receive maintenance money from her father and take care of her finances. Next, with support, she went on a work study visit and earned an internship at an advertising company. Monika says that initially Natalia was very afraid to answer the phones, but that by the end of the internship, Natalia was confident and able to take over most of her supervisor’s duties.



“She completed her internship with flying colours,” says Monika. Natalia then went on to easily find a professional job, gain independence, and move out of her mother’s house, all within less than a year.

Seven-year-old Olivier also experienced inspirational success with the help of the House of Guardian Angels. Olivier was brought to the Association due to his aggressive behavior, psychomotor hyperactivity, and difficulties interacting with peers. His parents didn’t understand how much help he needed, or what was available to them. Olivier was accepted into the Therapy Day-Care Centre and the staff there worked with him and supported his parents in getting him to a specialist for diagnosis. As a result of “massive commitment and engagement on the side of the caregiver working with Olivier, and thanks to the trips to the diagnostic center, supporting parents in understanding how to handle the boy and a very individual daily work with him in a group, the process of change began,” Monika shares. As part of his diagnosis and treatment, Olivier also began a well-selected medication and therapies. Olivier quickly began having positive interactions with his peers and acquired the knowledge necessary to start primary school. Monika beams, “At the moment, he is a 1st [grade] student in a public school, he has friends, and trains judo. In all of these areas he still requires support, but his quality of life has improved radically.”



Anioly’s work with Best Year Yet has helped them to achieve many things leading to exponential community impact. “Thanks to the Best Year Yet Foundation,” Monika says, “we can realize our mission and aims in a better way, manage the organization more professionally, develop it and therefore be more effective in helping those in our care – kids and teenagers from poor families from Silesia and Zagłębie.” The Best Year Yet Foundation is honored to be able to support such meaningful work and looks forward to more astounding impact stories.