

## **Saving Lives in the COVID-19 Crisis with the Help of Andrew Carnegie (1835-1919)**

**COVID-19 is creating existential hardships for many people. At the end of 2020, the Carnegie Rescuers Foundation (Switzerland) supported five projects aimed at saving human lives or mitigating major hardships caused by the COVID-19 crisis.**

The Europe-wide influenza pandemic, also known as the Spanish flu, caused the death of 40 to 50 million people according to World Health Organization estimates, mainly young and healthy adults. The pandemic reached Switzerland in 1918 and led the Carnegie Hero Foundation to honor and offer financial aid to people who volunteered to help the sick. Hundreds received a specially created certificate of honor «in acknowledgement of your dedicated care of the sick during the 1918 influenza epidemic.»

A little over a century later the foundation was witnessing the COVID-19 pandemic and took it as a reason to repeat its earlier efforts: This time to support not individuals but new Swiss charitable organizations addressing the COVID-19.

COVID-19 costs human lives both directly and indirectly. Supportive social structures crumble or can no longer be maintained to the same extent or in the same form as before. Thanks to committed individuals who are responding quickly during this crisis and who have developed new support programs, human lives can be saved, and human suffering alleviated.

In keeping with its mission to honor or support rescuers, the foundation wrote to the cantonal governments, Health Promotion Switzerland and the Swiss Society for Public Health in the summer of 2020. It asked the institutions to identify forward-looking PPE projects with the potential to save lives or alleviate major hardship and to let them know about the possibility of receiving support. Edith Graf-Litscher, member of the Swiss National Council and president of the foundation, describes the criteria as follows: «The projects should be developed around the idea of solidarity and involve prevention, education or social commitment.» The plan was to award a grant of at most CHF 15,000 to each of the four projects.

Eleven applications were received from across Switzerland. The Foundation Council awarded grants to the following projects:

- **The website *Dureschnufe*** was created in 2019 and pools services for promoting the mental health of the population during the COVID-19 crisis: among other things, ideas for parents and adolescents on how to cope with the new family situation, tips for working from home, advice on dealing with fears and anxieties. With support grants from the Carnegie Rescuers Foundation, the website can make its services better known.
- ***Selbsthilfe Schweiz*** is a self-help organization that brings together people facing similar situations in life, so they can help each other. Since in-person meetings are often no longer possible in the COVID-19 crisis, *Selbsthilfe Schweiz* created an instrument for virtual self-help on the Internet and various kinds of assistance related specifically to COVID-19. With the grant from the Carnegie Rescuers Foundation, the organization can extend its support to COVID-19 groups and make its services better known.
- ***Perspektive Solothurn-Grenchen*** makes available drug consumption rooms and a soup kitchen. The COVID-19 protective measures made it impossible to operate the rooms that were previously used. Two provisional arrangements had to be set up in the spring and in the summer. Thanks to the grant, they were able to be replaced with a third provisional arrangement suitable for winter conditions.

The fourth support grant is shared by the following two projects:

- ***Verein Familienbegleitung Freiburg***. This association supports families with young children in the Canton of Fribourg on educational issues. In the COVID-19 pandemic, the association introduced new forms of counseling such as home visits over Skype or WhatsApp groups. Thanks to the support grants, these methods can be conceptualized and documented, and the counseling can be continued on a systematic basis.
- ***Berner Beratungsstelle für Sans-Papiers*** is an organization that provides advice and support to people living in the Bern region without a residence permit. The COVID-19 crisis has led to a situation in which many undocumented people are no longer able to work, at least temporarily. The support grant can alleviate the situation for these people by giving them additional interim aid and tailored advice.

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