

ZAPÖRUKA DIGEST '25

«This magazine is a way to stop,
reflect on the path we have taken
and see the love, trust and care that
are behind our every step»

Nataliia Onipko







Dear friends, partners, and everyone who stands with us,

We are presenting this Digest as a summary of our collective work throughout 2025. During this time, Zaporuka implemented dozens of projects and met hundreds of people, and now we would like to share these stories with you.

For us, this is more than just reporting—it is a way to show how the Foundation works in practice. We strive not only to provide support in difficult times, but also to create the conditions for meaningful, lasting change.

These changes can be seen on many levels. We witness them in the lives of individual people—for example, women who suffered from domestic violence but, with the Foundation's support, acquired a new profession, regained confidence, and started their own businesses. We also see these changes on the scale of entire medical fields.

We are proud that Zaporuka was the first organization in Ukraine to advance the development of psycho-oncology and continues to transform approaches to physical rehabilitation. Our support for healthcare—for example, in the field of neurosurgery—is also about creating a new standard of care,

making high-quality treatment available here at home.

For us, this Digest is a rare opportunity to slow down. In the rhythm of daily work, when one challenge follows another, the details often become blurred. Even within the Foundation, not everyone is aware of the full scale of what we have managed to accomplish.

The pages of this publication allow us to look back, reflect on the journey we have taken, and appreciate how profoundly we ourselves have evolved. This is incredibly valuable, because it is in these achievements that we find the motivation to keep moving forward. It is the inner fire that sustains us and enables us to act during these difficult times.

We invite you to read on. See this year through our eyes.

Sincerely yours,

*Natalia Onipko and the Zaporuka
Foundation team*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

HOME AWAY FROM HOME

5

“Dacha” is a place where, for the first time in a long while, we started living rather than merely existing	8
Traditions That Make “Dacha” a Family Home	13
Creative Resistance: How Volunteers Save Childhood	18

STRENGTHENING HEALTHCARE

21

Pediatric Neurosurgery in Ukraine: How World-Class Care Survives on the Edge	22
From Faceless Walls to an Art Space: How the Design for the Pediatric Oncology Department of the National Cancer Institute Was Created	27
An Island of Safety: How New Conditions in the Pediatric Oncology Department of the National Cancer Institute Are Transforming the Work of Oncopsychologists	32

PHYSICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL REHABILITATION

37

Rehabilitation Is the Right to Life After a Diagnosis — 38	38
Global Trends in Psycho-Oncology: “We Must Stay One Step Ahead of the Disease”	46
The Psycho-Oncology Division: How Zaporuka Is Shaping Professional Standards of Care	51

SUPPORT FOR FRONTLINE AND HOST COMMUNITIES

53

Breaking the Silence: The Story of a Silent Home and the People Who Gave It a Voice Again	54
A Language That Will Be Heard: Why Zaporuka Chooses Art to Communicate with Society	60
A Place for Happy People: How Iryna Invented Her Own Recipe for Independence	64
Kherson: Waiting for the Greenery How We’ll Have Somewhere to Hide	67



INVESTED IN THE PROGRAM AREA

€10 645 023



A HOME AWAY FROM HOME

☑ **The Dacha Family Homes in Kyiv and Lviv**

267 families received accommodation, psychological support services, transportation assistance, and physical rehabilitation.

☑ **Volunteer Community**

553 activities were organized for beneficiaries in hospitals in Kyiv and Lviv, as well as at the Dacha Family Homes.

The Foundation's volunteer community grew to **330** volunteers, **119** of whom joined in 2025.





The Dacha Family Home is the heart of the Zaporuka Charitable Foundation. Its story began in Kyiv in 2009, when the first families whose children were undergoing treatment at the National Cancer Institute and Okhmatdyt moved into a rented facility. For 17 years, the foundation has demonstrated that children recover faster when surrounded by their loved ones. That is why it is so important for families to stay together and preserve a sense of home throughout treatment. In 2023, Kyiv's Dacha finally moved into its own large, purpose-built house.

Russia's full-scale invasion transformed Lviv into one of the country's largest medical hubs. Children with severe illnesses and war-related injuries began arriving here from across Ukraine, from the Kharkiv region to the Odesa region. To support them, Zaporuka opened a Dacha in Lviv in March 2024.

Today, the Lviv Dacha operates from a rented facility, providing accommodation and support for patients receiving care at the Clinical Center of Children's Medicine and the First Medical Association of Lviv's St. Nicholas Children's Hospital.





«Dacha Is the Place Where, for the First Time in a Long While, We Started Living Rather Than Merely Existing»

For Vitalina, emergencies had always been part of everyday life. For 15 years, she worked as an ambulance doctor in Myrhorod. Her husband, Serhii, is a serviceman. They were accustomed to saving lives, protecting others, and staying strong. But on February 24, 2022, their world exploded twice.

«Our city was among the first to come under attack. For two weeks, I practically lived at work. Doctors were responding to calls under missile fire, while the children stayed with relatives in the countryside,” Vitalina recalls. “And in the middle of all that chaos, we noticed that Solomiika had started losing her balance. When we finally managed to get an MRI, we heard the words: ‘A brain tumor.’ We just stood there in the middle of the hospital and cried. There was a war raging around us, Kyiv was cut off, and our child had cancer.»

What followed were months of immense hardship.

First came Poland, where Solomiika underwent two complex surgeries. But the language barrier made an already difficult situation even harder.

“Being in a country where you don’t know a single word is incredibly overwhelming. You’re terrified, you don’t know what to do, and the doctors spoke only Polish.”

Then came Israel and a lengthy course of treatment in Haifa. But that journey, too, was interrupted by another war—the one that broke out there in 2023. Support programs were suspended, and Vitalina and her daughter found themselves alone with their struggle.

The first true home that welcomed them without conditions was waiting for them back in Ukraine, in Lviv. At the beginning of 2024, they crossed the threshold of Zaporuka Foundation’s Lviv Dacha for the first time.



Today, the Lviv Dacha is a two-story home with 15 cozy rooms, a kitchen, a spacious living room, and a dedicated play area. Psychologists and art therapists work here, while volunteers organize creative workshops to ensure that childhood does not come to a halt because of a diagnosis. Vitalina and her daughter, Solomiika, were among the first families to stay in this home, arriving during the early days when the house was only beginning to fill with warmth and life.

Dacha learned how to be a home, and we learned how to trust again and breathe freely

WE GREW ALONGSIDE DACHA

Vitalina says that she and her daughter were among the first residents of Dacha and witnessed how this house found its footing and grew into a true home. Back in early 2024, the Lviv Dacha was still very new.

“The rooms were already prepared, smelling of fresh linens and cleanliness, but the house didn’t yet have the vibrant energy it has today. There were no famous ‘Movie Mondays’ yet, and not nearly as many volunteers. We went through this journey together: Dacha was learning how to be a home, and we were learning how to trust again and breathe freely.”

Vitalina remembers arriving with her daughter for the first time—exhausted and worn down by the hospital, where six people shared a room and mothers slept in the same bed as their children.

“We walked into Dacha, and suddenly there was warmth, light, and space. Huge beds, our own refrigerator, everything spotless... But most importantly, there were the administrators. One was always confident and in good spirits; the other loved children so much that they naturally gravitated toward him.

We arrived in the evening, and we were overwhelmed by the feeling of, ‘Thank goodness you exist.’”

A WORLD THAT OVERCOMES LIMITATIONS

It was at Dacha that Solomiika, who because of her illness had seen very little of a normal childhood, began to discover the world.

“At Dacha, we realized that there is life beyond the hospital. Solomiika absolutely loves the cooking workshops. For her, the greatest joy is making pizza or cupcakes with cream and then enjoying them together. And art therapy? We take a sheet of paper, tear it into small pieces, and then use them to create the branches of a tree. It’s an incredible metaphor for our lives—to take scattered pieces and turn them into something beautiful.”

At Dacha, we realized that there is life beyond the hospital



OPPRESSIVE SILENCE: THE FEAR OF ASKING, HOW ARE YOU?

Dacha became the place where Solomiia experienced many firsts. It was there that she saw entertainers for the first time, went to the theater for the first time, and visited a large amusement park for the first time.

“We celebrated her seventh birthday here. My husband and our older daughter came, and there was a party, a cake, and our Dacha friends. At Dacha, we didn’t have time to dwell on the illness—we were too busy trying to make it to the next activity. Every Friday, every Monday is an event. Our ‘Movie Mondays’

with cartoons and pizza have become a tradition that Solomiia absolutely loves.”



People often think that staying silent is a sign of tact, but for a mother fighting for her child’s life, that silence can feel like abandonment





ДІМ ДАЛЕКО ВІД ДОМУ



Zaporuka brings life into places where there are limitations. If we cannot go out into the world, it brings the world to us

This fear that “ordinary” people often have of someone else’s suffering can leave families feeling isolated. Vitalina explains that phrases such as “Everything will be okay” are not particularly helpful either. They carry no real power to support and often sound like an attempt to end the conversation as quickly as possible. At Dacha, however, that barrier disappears.

“Here, you don’t have to search for the right words. Someone who is walking the same path understands you without explanation. At Dacha, we’re all in the same boat, so no one looks away. You don’t have to explain why you don’t have the strength to smile today or why your child looks different. That’s what it means to be among your own people—when your pain doesn’t frighten others but is understood by everyone around you. It was here that, for the first time in a long while, we felt that we were not defined by our tragedy; we were simply people living through difficult circumstances.”

For Vitalina, Dacha became a place of psychological refuge. Zaporuka accomplishes what often seems impossible: it brings life into spaces defined by limitations. “If we can’t go out into the world, they bring the world to us.”

Today, Solomiia is going through another difficult chapter. The tumor has started growing again, her legs ache after intensive chemotherapy, and a new treatment protocol lies ahead. Yet whenever the family prepares to return to Lviv for examinations, little Solomiia says: “Mom, I want to go to Dacha!”

“The illness never disappears,” Vitalina says. “But here, you don’t merely exist—you live. Dacha gives you that inner spark that keeps you from falling into the abyss. It’s the place where, for the first time, we truly felt that we were not alone.”



Traditions that make “Dacha” a family home



Traditions at “Dacha” did not appear by order. They were formed gradually, during all 17 years of the family home’s existence. When families come to us, they find themselves in a new environment, often locked in their pain. And it is traditions that become the bridge that brings them back to life.

PEOPLE OF ZAPORUKA



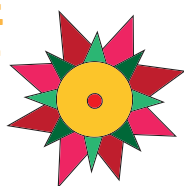
Yelyzaveta Popkova —
Director of the “A Home Away from Home” Program

Liza believes in fate—and with good reason. Her journey with Zaporuka began long before her official appointment. Back in 2021, at the “**I Run for Dacha**” charity race, she coordinated volunteers. There is an archival photograph from that day showing Liza standing shoulder to shoulder with Natalia Onipko. At the time, she had no idea that she would eventually lead one of the Foundation’s key strategic programs—“**A Home Away from Home.**”

Today, Liza is responsible for the day-to-day operations, safety, and overall management of the Dacha Family Homes in Kyiv. Her work involves not only complex operational and infrastructure processes, but also ensuring that each home is filled with vibrant creative activities and a lively community spirit.

This is exactly what Liza writes about in her column: how traditions at Dacha first emerged, which ones came first, and how they help transform these spaces into true family homes, where a genuine sense of warmth and comfort prevails. -

CHRISTMAS: THE STARTING POINT OF OUR FAMILY



Almost all our traditions were born from holidays. It was during the first shared Christmas evenings in 2008–2009 that the special atmosphere of Dacha, which we have today, began to take shape. At first, families lived very privately: each cooked food for their own family and remained alone with their grief. But preparing the Sviat Vechir (Christmas Eve Dinner) together changed everything. It

turned out that we were a “miniature Ukraine”: families from different regions brought their own recipes. Some make kutia (a traditional, celebratory grain pudding or porridge served as the first course of the Christmas Eve dinner) thick, others make it more liquid; some prepare twelve Lenten dishes (twelve dishes that are made with no meat, eggs, or dairy that is meant to symbolize the 12 apostles), while others bring meat dishes.

It was around this large table that people who had previously been strangers began to talk, share, and become like family. The holiday “brought us together,” like dough for pampushky (Ukrainian doughnuts).

EASTER: THE MYSTERY OF SILENCE AND BASKETS OF HOPE

At Easter, a true sense of mystery unfolds in our home. Dacha is usually full of sound and activity, but when the Pasochki (Easter breads) are being baked, everything falls quiet. We know that for the dough to rise, there must be silence and calm. In that moment, Dacha takes on a special, almost sacred atmosphere. Everyone feels the importance of what is happening—it is a deeply moving time for all of us.



WORKSHOPS: CONTEMPORARY “VECHORNYTSI”

In the past, workshops were a way to engage children. Today, they have become a tradition of creative “Dacha vechornytsi.” Just as women once gathered to spin thread or do embroidery together, now mothers and children gather in the living room.

This helps them step out of their “shells”—their rooms. While hands are busy with paint or clay, conversation begins, along with sincere advice. Someone starts singing along...

Little by little, we get to know everyone. For example, Radik was very withdrawn and did not engage even with psychologists. But when our content manager came to film a TikTok video, the boy became interested in the process. He asked about the script and the idea. This became his bridge to us: he took part in the video, opened up, and is now an active participant in all our activities.

Such activities help harmonize the relationship between mother and child. In the hospital, a mother is the one who holds her child during procedures. At workshops, they become partners and co-creators. This brings a sense of normality back into their lives and fills them both.



MEETINGS WITH SURVIVORS: LIVING HOPE

Meetings with Survivors have become one of our most powerful traditions. Young people who have already overcome cancer come to visit us. It is a living transfer of experience—the experience of victory.

When a family sees a healthy, active “graduate” of Dacha who, just a few years earlier, was going through the very same journey, it speaks more powerfully than any words. Such an example becomes a quiet but convincing proof: childhood cancer can be overcome.



SPRING SONGS AND VYSHYVANKA: A GENTLE RETURN TO ROOTS

Recently, more celebrations have been added. In Lviv, we have developed a tradition of spring songs: we don't just sing, but also invite pysanka (Easter egg painting) mactepi (artisans). On Vyshyvanka Day, our Dachas bloom. Even parents who previously did not own an embroidered shirt now buy them for themselves and their children. And despite the struggle with illness, we again and again feel and rediscover who we are.



BIRTHDAY: BECOMING A BIG FAMILY FOR THE BIRTHDAY CHILD



On this day, we become the child's extended family. In advance, we ask the parents what the child is dreaming of, and we prepare a personalized cake, balloons, and gifts. We do everything to ensure the child feels that today they are at the center of attention, surrounded by people who are genuinely happy to celebrate another year of their life.



DISCHARGE CEREMONY: A MEDAL FOR A SUPERHERO

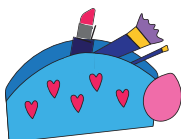


Previously, discharges were quiet—people were often afraid to “jinx” the joy and wanted to quickly pack their things and leave. Today, the completion of the main stage of treatment has become a celebration of victory.

We present the child with a “Courage Medal” in recognition of the fact that they and their parents have overcome a difficult journey. When a child sees the word “Superhero” on their medal, they begin to believe it themselves, and this realization—“I made it”—stays with them for life.



BEAUTY DAYS: CARING FOR THOSE WHO CARE



Mothers often feel almost “uncomfortable” thinking about a manicure or a haircut when their child is ill. That is why we introduced Beauty Days, yoga sessions, and meditation practices. At first, we had to almost persuade mothers to leave their rooms, but now the sessions are fully booked.

And this is about much more than self-care. When a mother sees a smiling, well-groomed woman in the mirror, she finds the strength to keep going and remain a pillar of support for her child.

OCTOBER 31: DACHAS BIRTHDAY

Now we have a shared date for all Dachas—both in Kyiv and Lviv, and for those yet to come. It is a day when we celebrate not the walls, but the very idea of a “Home Away from Home.” It always comes with a big cake, a concert, and a sea of gratitude—a day when we once again feel that everything we do has meaning.

Traditions are what transform Dacha from a temporary shelter into a place of strength. And this is exactly what every family takes with them: a memory of warmth, support, and faith in sincere, kind people who remain close.



Creative Resistance: How Volunteers Save Childhood



Nadiia moved to Kyiv from Sievierodonetsk while still a student. She studied foreign languages, built her career, and raised her daughter. Her volunteering journey began in 2014, translating investigative reports for the international InformNapalm community. But three years ago, Nadiia felt a need to be physically present with those who are struggling the most.

That is how Tuesdays and Fridays at the National Cancer Institute (NCI) became part of her schedule, where the Zaporuka Foundation has long been creating a space for life for young patients, including organizing creative workshops for them.

These are hours when the hospital transforms into an art studio, and Nadiia becomes the tireless “engine” of the process—preparing the space, pouring paints, and helping every little creator work their own kind of magic.

I AM BURNED BY INJUSTICE

Nadiia relates deeply to those affected by cancer, having lost her mother to the disease. But instead of distancing herself from pain, she chose to move toward it.

“When you’ve been through it in your family, it’s not as frightening anymore. But I am burned

by injustice. An adult has lived their life, seen the world, and here—there is a child who has only just learned to speak, and already has to begin such a cruel battle. I cannot understand or accept it. That is why I am here.”

ASSISTANT TO WONDER AND “MOOD MEDIATOR”

Nadiia is quick to clarify: her role is not the main one. She is the person who makes sure the celebration of creativity actually happens. What may seem like a routine task on the surface is, in reality, an essential part of creating a comforting and positive environment for those receiving care.

“I’m an assistant for the artists. I have to run through all the wards, invite the children, pour water into cups for painting. And the kids are on infusion pumps, with IV drips attached—it’s hard for them even to sit down at a table on their own. I carry heavy bags with materials. And a workshop is a living process where you need to ‘build’ the atmosphere. Sometimes teenagers turn up their noses: ‘Painting is for little kids.’ You need to find the right words for them, spark their interest, talk to them, and help the artist who is visiting for the first time and feels nervous. My job is to make sure that, despite exhaustion, a creative vibe appears in the room—a space where you actually want to live.”

WORKING WITH ARTISTS: EDUCATION BEYOND DIAGNOSIS



Nadiia’s particular pride is the people the Foundation brings into its work. These are not just entertainers, but professionals who transform a hospital room into something close to an academy of arts.

“I am endlessly inspired by our artists. They are people with such experience and approach that even medical staff come running to watch, take photos, and say: ‘We want to do this too!’ The artists from art studios like Art for Kids, KatArtsyS, and Van Gogh’s Studio give children



a real foundation. Today they talked about the German artist Gabriele Münter; another time, about Picasso. How many children in everyday life would know this? But ours do. I can see how they develop: a child from a rural area who had never held a paintbrush before is now confidently mixing acrylics to achieve the exact shade of a sky.”

MAGIC IN ACTION: FROM HARRY POTTER TO FLUID ART

Thanks to the professionalism of the artists, children create works that are impressive in their level of execution. Nadiia recalls these moments as a true miracle:

“The children do incredible things. For example, they paint sparkling artworks on black canvases—this is very popular right now. The artist prepares a sketch of Harry Potter, and the child learns to apply layers of paint, creating depth. Or take the ‘fluid art’ technique: the children mix paints in a cup, add a special solution, and pour it onto ceramic bears or round canvases. The colors spread in chaotic but fantastically beautiful ways. For a child, it feels like a miracle they have created with their own hands.”



THE PSYCHOLOGY OF ORANGE WALLS AND "DORMANT" FEAR

Nadiia is convinced that color and attitude can heal no less than medical procedures.

"The department is divided into two parts. One has the old renovation, which is emotionally depressing. The other has a new orange design created by Zaporuka. You cannot imagine how sunny it feels! But there is still a problem—human 'dormant' fear. Many people are afraid of oncology wards, as if cancer could somehow 'jump' from one person to another. I once had a volunteer who was literally trembling with fear. But she managed to overcome it. She spent three hours doing macramé with the children, laughing... You don't need to be afraid of a child who is undergoing treatment. This fear disappears with just one grateful look from them."

DOUBLE WAR AND SYSTEMIC RESILIENCE

Today, young patients are fighting two wars at once: against illness and against shelling.

"After night-time attacks, I come into the ward and the children are exhausted, 'boiled over' from fatigue. But they still get up and go to paint. When a child colors a figurine after a night in a shelter—that is our creative

resistance. And here, being systematic is crucial. Enthusiasm always fades—you can't outplay that. It's a natural process. Someone will always burn out and step back, and someone new will come in, freshly inspired. Those who stay long-term understand: this is a marathon. You do your work because without that stability, miracles don't happen."



WE MUST BE THERE

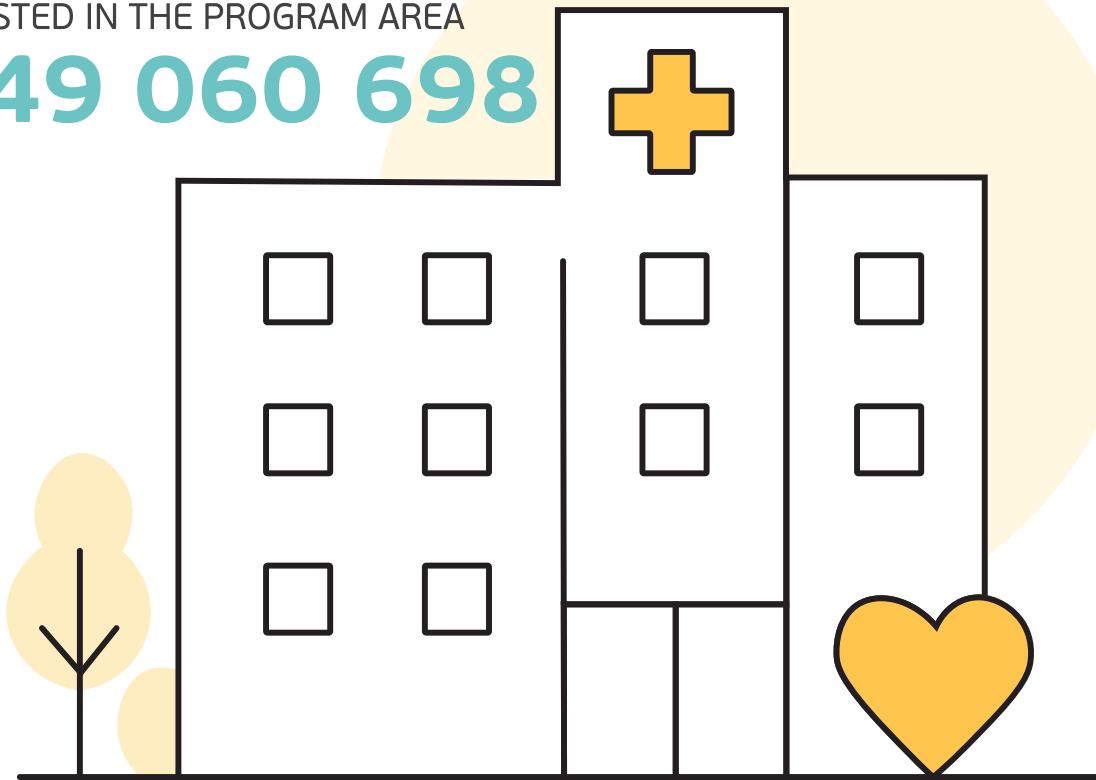
"If you're afraid to come, start small. Donate for materials, and I'll film a video showing how they turn into masterpieces. We have to be there. Cancer is not a sentence. Our task is to fill these children's world with such bright experiences that even treatment becomes just a backdrop to their creative victories. When you see their transformation—that is the greatest reward."





INVESTED IN THE PROGRAM AREA

€ 49 060 698



STRENGTHENING HEALTHCARE

✓ Medical Equipment and Medicines

UAH 35,000,000

- National Specialized Children's Hospital "Okhmatdyt" — UAH 11,473,900
- National Cancer Institute — UAH 6,171,758
- First Medical Association (Unbroken), Lviv — UAH 5,313,843
- Regional Center for Family Health, Dnipro — UAH 4,351,122
- A. P. Romodanov Institute of Neurosurgery — UAH 2,237,080
- Lviv Clinical Center of Pediatric Medicine — UAH 1,310,905
- City Hospital No. 4, Dnipro — UAH 700,000
- Other hospitals — UAH 3,441,392

✓ Renovations and Facility Upgrades

UAH 7,820,439

- Renovation of the inpatient rehabilitation department at the Regional Center for Family Health in Dnipro
- Renovation and outfitting of the pediatric oncology department at the National Cancer Institute





The systemic problem of pediatric neurosurgery in Ukraine today is both complex and acute. Despite the world-class training of Ukrainian doctors, the field remains critically dependent on the goodwill of charitable foundations rather than stable state support.

A lack of funding for high-tech equipment—navigation systems, sEEG devices, microscopes—forces surgeons to spend precious time searching for resources instead of saving lives. Each operation is not only an intellectual and physical challenge, but also a financial quest: where to find hundreds of thousands of hryvnias for electrodes or specialized consumables?

Add to this the systemic demotivation of mid-level medical staff and the constant risk of brain drain. Pediatric neurosurgery survives thanks to the patriotism of specialists who choose to stay in the country. But long-term resilience requires not only heroes, but also strong, centralized, and properly funded state medical centers.

While the state is still searching for a path toward this, the Zaporuka Foundation serves as a reliable support system for those who hold the scalpel—proving that investing in neurosurgery is an investment in a future that cannot wait.



A surgeon should not be thinking about a microscope lightbulb—they should be thinking about a child's brain

Pavlo Plavskyi

Pediatric Neurosurgery in Ukraine: When World-Class Standards Depend on the Edge of Survival

Our interlocutor is Pavlo Plavskyi, Head of the Pediatric Neurosurgery Department at the National Children's Specialized Hospital "Okhmatdyt." He is a specialist with more than 20 years of experience who, every day, stands on guard for children's health, performing surgeries that are unique for Ukraine. Pavlo Serhiiiovych belongs to that generation of doctors who do not merely work within the system, but actively help build it: he remembers the times when the department had only three wards and has since helped develop it into a modern, high-tech center.

However, today the doctor is sounding the alarm. Despite vast experience and modern

equipment, the department has reached the "ceiling" of its capacity.

"At present, we perform nearly 500 interventions a year, and unfortunately, this has become our limit in terms of capacity. We cannot take more patients. There is a huge waiting list of patients with various conditions who are waiting for their chance," says Pavlo Plavskyi.

To move forward, the department needs not only physical infrastructure, but also systemic state support, which today is often being replaced by charitable foundations.

"THE HOLY OF HOLIES": NAVIGATION WITH NO EQUALS



Pavlo Serhiiovych calls his operating room the “holy of holies,” as its equipment enables work at the level of the world’s leading clinics.

“Here we have almost everything we could wish for. Our navigation system has no analogues in Ukraine. It combines both magnetic and optical systems—they literally build the surgeon’s trajectory inside the brain. When we capture the patient’s head and load MRI scans, we can see in real time where our instrument is and where we are ‘attacking’ during the operation. This gives us extraordinary precision,” says Pavlo Plavskyi.

SYSTEMIC DEAD END: WHY THE FIELD RELIES ON CHARITY

It is this precision that allows surgeons to take on cases that previously would have been considered inoperable due to the high risk of disability. One such success was saving a child who had suffered from severe epilepsy for six years. The epileptic focus (focal cortical dysplasia) was located in a critical area—the motor cortex.

“Just three years ago, we would not have offered this surgery because the risk was too high: the child could have permanently lost the ability to move an arm or half of the face. However, thanks to modern equipment, we performed intraoperative brain mapping, identified functional zones, and very carefully removed the lesion. A month has passed, and the child has had no seizures. We preserved arm function, and I am confident that the mild facial symptoms will recover over time.”



VICTORY OVER EPIL EPSY: WHEN RISK IS WORTH IT

Despite these technological breakthroughs, the doctor acutely feels the shortcomings of the state funding system. The main problem is “leveling,” where highly complex neurosurgical procedures are financed without accounting for their real cost.

“If funding continues in a generalized, ‘one-size-fits-all’ manner, pediatric neurosurgery will collapse. It will only persist as long as the patriots who remain in Ukraine are here. But a specialist with unique skills will eventually start asking themselves: ‘Why am I exhausting myself? Why do I have to think about where to find threads, needles, or hemostatic materials, or ask a charity for a spare microscope bulb?’ A surgeon should focus on the quality of care, not on logistics of consumables.”

Pavlo Plavskyi is convinced that behind every technical problem lies a human fate. Incomplete operating room equipment or a shortage of consumables is not just an inconvenience for doctors—it is a direct risk to a child’s life.

“Pause for a moment and think about what a doctor feels when they realize there is a risk of failure simply because of a lack of equipment. Every decision carries immense weight, because it involves responsibility for someone else’s child. It is looking parents in the eye after surgery. When everything goes well—everyone is happy, but what do you do when it doesn’t? That is why we have no right to compromise on quality. And that is why the support of the Zaporuka Foundation is critically important for us—they patch the gaps that the system ignores, allowing us to simply be doctors.”

**Neurosurgery is not
about profit, but about
saving lives**

Mykhailo Lovha

Our second interlocutor is Mykhailo Lovha, Head of the Center for Neurosurgery, Epilepsy Surgery, and Neurophysiology at the Clinical Center of Pediatric Medicine in Lviv. His path into the profession was shaped by personal tragedy: after the death of a close person in a road accident, he—then a young doctor—felt powerless due to a lack of knowledge in neurosurgery. This became the impetus for him to master one of the most complex medical specialties. Today, Mykhailo Ivanovych is one of the leading experts whose team performs interventions that are unique for Ukraine.

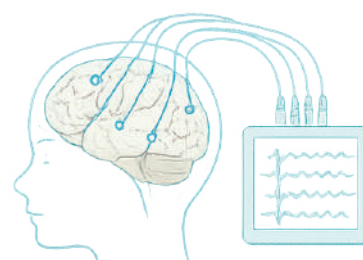
Like his Kyiv colleague, Mykhailo Lovha is convinced that the state healthcare system is not yet fully prepared to support such a complex field.

EPILEPSY: RESCUE THROUGH A “SNIPER SCOPE”

The Lviv center has one of the most extensive experiences in pediatric epilepsy surgery—over 100 different types of interventions. According to statistics, every fifth patient with this diagnosis does not respond to medication and requires surgery.

“We have made a major step forward thanks to equipment donated by the Zaporuka Foundation—a system for multichannel long-term EEG recording. It helps us identify the focus of epilepsy with maximum precision. We dream of implementing stereo-EEG—a kind of ‘sniper scope’ for the brain. It is extremely expensive: the electrodes alone for one patient cost about 200,000 hryvnias. As long as the state does not fund such expenses, we rely on the support of charitable donors,” the doctor explains.

“Pause for a moment and think about what a doctor feels when they realize there is a risk of failure simply because of a lack of equipment. And this is responsibility for someone else’s child. It is looking parents in the eye after surgery. When everything goes well—everyone is happy, but what do you do when it doesn’t? That is why we have no right to compromise on quality. And that is why the support of the Zaporuka Foundation is critically important for us—they patch the gaps that the system ignores, allowing us to simply be doctors.”



system for multichannel long-term
EEG recording

STAFFING CRISIS: NURSES AS A SCARCE PROFESSION

A particular pain for the doctor is the condition of mid-level medical staff. He is convinced that without nurses, even the most successful surgery can end in catastrophe during the postoperative period.

“Nurses are the most under-supported link in the system. This is a profession that is disappearing, because people are leaving for private clinics or cosmetology, where it is calmer and better paid. Without a proper system of incentives, we will lose those who care for children 24/7. I am proud of my team—they are the best—but patriotism cannot be an endless resource.”

THE PHILOSOPHY OF RESPONSIBILITY

Mykhailo Ivanovych is known for his frankness. He honestly warns parents: neurosurgery is not a health resort—it always involves risk.

“My guiding principle in life is to use materials of the same quality that I would want to be used for myself. We have no right to cut corners, because this is responsibility for someone else’s child. When you wake up in the morning knowing that you can help someone who has already lost hope, it gives you the strength to keep working. And in this struggle, the Zaporuka Foundation is not just a donor for us, but a partner that understands the complexity of every case.”



Technical development

An EEG long-term multichannel recording device is the foundation for implementing the stereo-EEG method.

- **What does this enable?** It allows doctors to “see” the brain from within in real time.
- **How does it work?** Physicians insert very thin needle-like electrodes directly into the brain. This makes it possible to record seizures at their source, where external sensors are ineffective.
- **Result:** The surgeon removes only the millimeters of tissue responsible for the seizures, preserving healthy areas responsible for a child’s speech, movement, and cognitive function.

Technical development

A Le Fort III procedure is one of the most complex operations in craniofacial surgery, involving the separation of the midface bones from the base of the skull.

- **Why are distractors needed?** These are special devices that gradually (by about one millimeter per day) move the facial bones forward after surgery.
- **Result:** This creates space for normal brain growth, corrects breathing and vision problems, and restores the child’s facial structure and appearance.

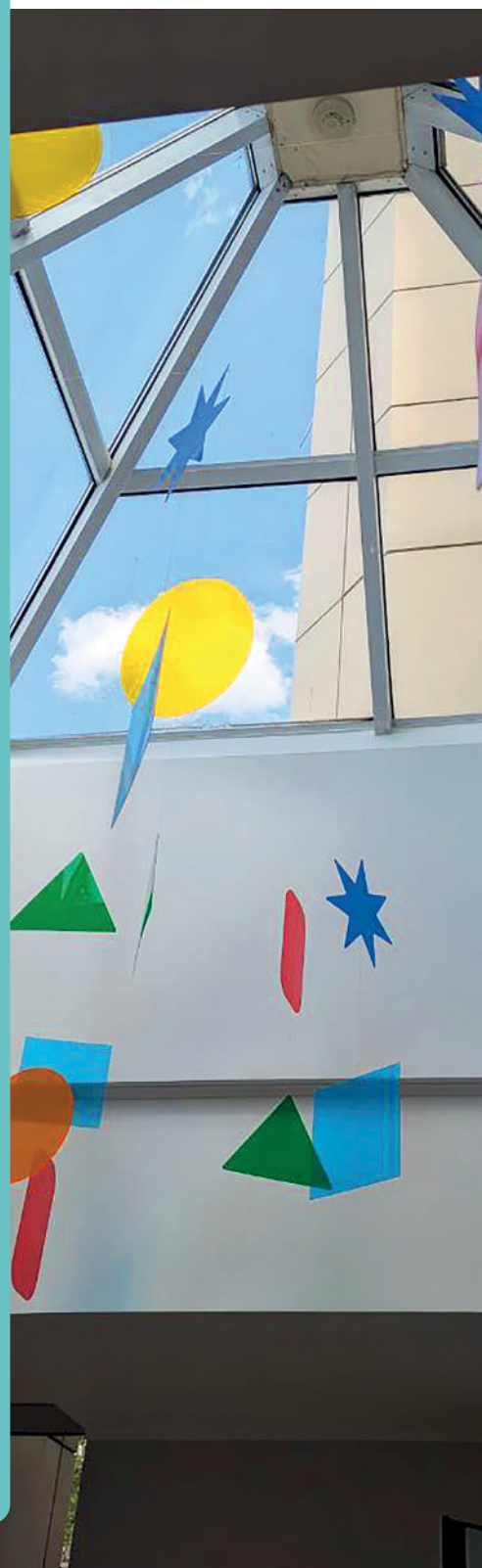
From blank walls to an art space:

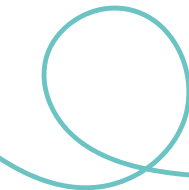
Designing the Pediatric Oncology Department National Cancer Institute

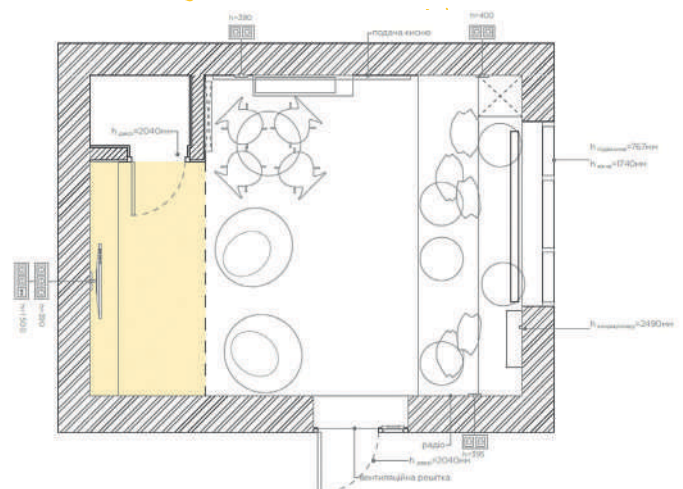
The main idea behind the renovation of the space at the National Cancer Institute was to erase the painful contrast between the warm, family-like atmosphere of the Dacha Family Home and the reality of cold, grey hospital walls. For this, Zaporuka invited architect Anastasiia Tolchynska, who once designed the Dacha Family Home, and her colleague, designer Daria Konopatska. They intuitively understood the needs of young patients and, as volunteers, developed the project free of charge, realizing their own social mission through it. After five months of intensive work, the hospital space became almost unrecognizable. Sunlight finally entered the hospital walls.

The two-stage project covered seven hospital rooms, four accessible bathrooms, a large hall with a library, a playroom, a treatment room, and a psychologist's office. More than 7.5 million hryvnias were invested in the renovation. The works included a full replacement of utilities and ventilation systems, as well as the purchase of new furniture and medical equipment.

To understand how ideas turned into reality, the challenges of working within the constraints of a hospital environment, and the design solutions that helped transform the hall and playroom into such a joyful space for children, we spoke with Daria Konopatska.









The playroom is quite small. How did you manage to make it engaging for children of different ages so they don't interfere with each other?

"This turned out to be the most difficult task. In a very limited space (19.9 m²), we had to create zones for different interests so that children could interact rather than compete for space.

When the area is small, what do you do? You go vertical! (laughs)

We used the height of the room. For example, next to the TV and gaming console area, I designed stepped seating. This allowed us to fit more children, and it also created a space where they can move around a bit, climb, and play. In addition to that...

We transformed the bottom row of steps into drawers for storing toys and books. For younger children, there is a separate zone with tables, a chalkboard for drawing, and interactive wall panels. While the older kids play on the console, the little ones can create in their own corner.

Hospital design always comes with strict medical regulations. How difficult was it to combine creativity with the requirements of sterility?

"It is truly a challenge. You cannot just place a soft armchair or hang curtains. Everything has to be inclusive and highly durable.

For example, the flooring is a special medical-grade grey linoleum that can withstand constant disinfection. Even the furniture was designed with engineering requirements in mind: the panels include special openings so as not to block heat from radiators and to maintain proper ventilation.

We were looking for a balance where every material meets medical standards, and at the same time does not feel cold or 'hospital-like'."



But perhaps the most interesting story is connected to the lobby. Tell us about the ‘saved sun.’

“Oh, yes! In the lobby there is a glass pyramid on the ceiling—a skylight that lets in natural daylight. There were plans to cover it with a special darkening film, but I was completely against it. I didn’t want to block out the real sun in a department where it is already so scarce!

I started looking for ways to transform this, at first glance, technical feature into something special. I came across an art installation in a foreign gallery and realized—this was it! We suspended transparent colored plates of different shapes and at different heights on thin, almost invisible threads inside the opening. When sunlight passes through them, multicolored shadows begin to sparkle across the entire lobby. It becomes a living, dynamic space! You look up—and it feels like figures are floating in the air, creating magic. In the end, the element they wanted to get rid of became the heart of the entire space. A home for the sun.”

Besides the ‘sun from the ceiling,’ what other unusual solutions did you use in the lobby?’



The lobby is not just a waiting area—it is a full-fledged art space. Workshops take place here, children draw, and they communicate with each other. So instead of a traditional sofa, we installed a modular system of poufs. They can be easily moved, combined into a large sofa for watching cartoons, or separated into smaller pieces to create cozy corners for conversation.

To reinforce the idea of the sun, I painted a large orange semicircle on one of the walls, as if it is peeking out from under the ceiling. It echoes both our “window” and even the foundation’s logo.



You are also working on redesigning the spaces for Dacha in Lviv. Can we say that this ‘sunny’ style is becoming a shared language across the Foundation’s projects?

— Yes, we are continuing this story. In Lviv, we are currently implementing a project for a family kitchen—also within a very limited space. It will feature bright colors, a gallery for children’s drawings, and even a TV on designer wheels that can be moved around.

We want that wherever Zaporuka is present, a child feels: they are not in isolation, they are at home.

You can do it, you can do it, work on it, and everything will definitely work out

Your work is filled with deep empathy. What or who inspires you?

I want to mention my father, Serhii Konopatkyi. He was a military officer, a lieutenant colonel. But by nature, he was an extremely creative person who dreamed of becoming an artist. It was he who introduced me to these worlds, taught me how to draw, helped me with design work, and supported my decision to become a designer.

Despite all difficulties, he always told me: “*You can do this, you are good at it, keep working, and everything will definitely work out.*” He was killed in 2023 while carrying out a combat mission.

My father is the person who inspired me and helped me become who I am today. And in creating these spaces filled with light and hope, in a sense I am continuing what he believed in.



An Island of Safety

How new conditions in the Pediatric Oncology Department at the National Cancer Institute are changing the work of psycho-oncologists

In psycho-oncology, space is part of therapy. When a child enters the office, they need to take off the “armor” of a patient and become simply a child again. Until recently, the work of psychologists at the National Cancer Institute (NCI) took place in extremely cramped conditions. But the renovation supported by the Zaporuka Foundation became something far more than just a refurbishment or change of interior: alongside the transformation of the office, the “island of safety” itself was transformed. The quality of psychological support changed. How new conditions in the Pediatric Oncology Department of the National Cancer Institute are changing the work of psycho-oncologists.

Yulia Tkachenko,
psychologist at the Zaporuka
Charitable Foundation



Oncopsychologist Liliia Sirokha shares how the “physical” renovation of the office has affected the daily support provided to families.

PEOPLE OF ZAPORUKA



Liliia Sirokha —

Doctor of Philosophy, clinical psychologist, and lecturer at Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv.

Her professional growth is closely intertwined with Zaporuka: having begun her journey with the Foundation in 2019, Liliia is now one of the team’s leading experts. She skillfully combines a scientific approach with hands-on support, guided by the standards of evidence-based psychology.

Liliia’s mission is to develop a culture of professional psychological care in Ukraine and to implement the most effective support models for those in need.

NO LONGER PAINFUL: A NO-PROCEDURE ZONE

The main difference between a psychologist’s office and any other room in a hospital is the absence of fear.

“For children, this is always a safe zone. While they are here, they know for sure that no one will hurt them. This is not a procedure room. It is a place where they can hide from nurses looking for them for blood tests, or from a mother walking around the ward with a bowl of porridge,” Liliia smiles.

It is precisely this sense of safety that leads to “small miracles” in the psychologist’s office: children who refused to eat in their hospital rooms suddenly agree to have a meal here, and those who were afraid of a catheter allow doctors to perform the necessary procedure in this space.



HOW IT USED TO BE: A HIDING PLACE WITHOUT WINDOWS



Previously, psychologists worked in a tiny room. It could barely fit a desk, a small cabinet, and a narrow sofa. If three children came into the office, there was no space left for play.

“The previous office was very small and, most importantly, it had no window. A closed-off space. On one hand, it really felt like a hiding place, but it was difficult to work there. When many children of the same age wanted to gather together, we were literally sitting on top of one another.”



WHAT CHANGED: LIGHT, SPACE, AND A LARGE CABINET

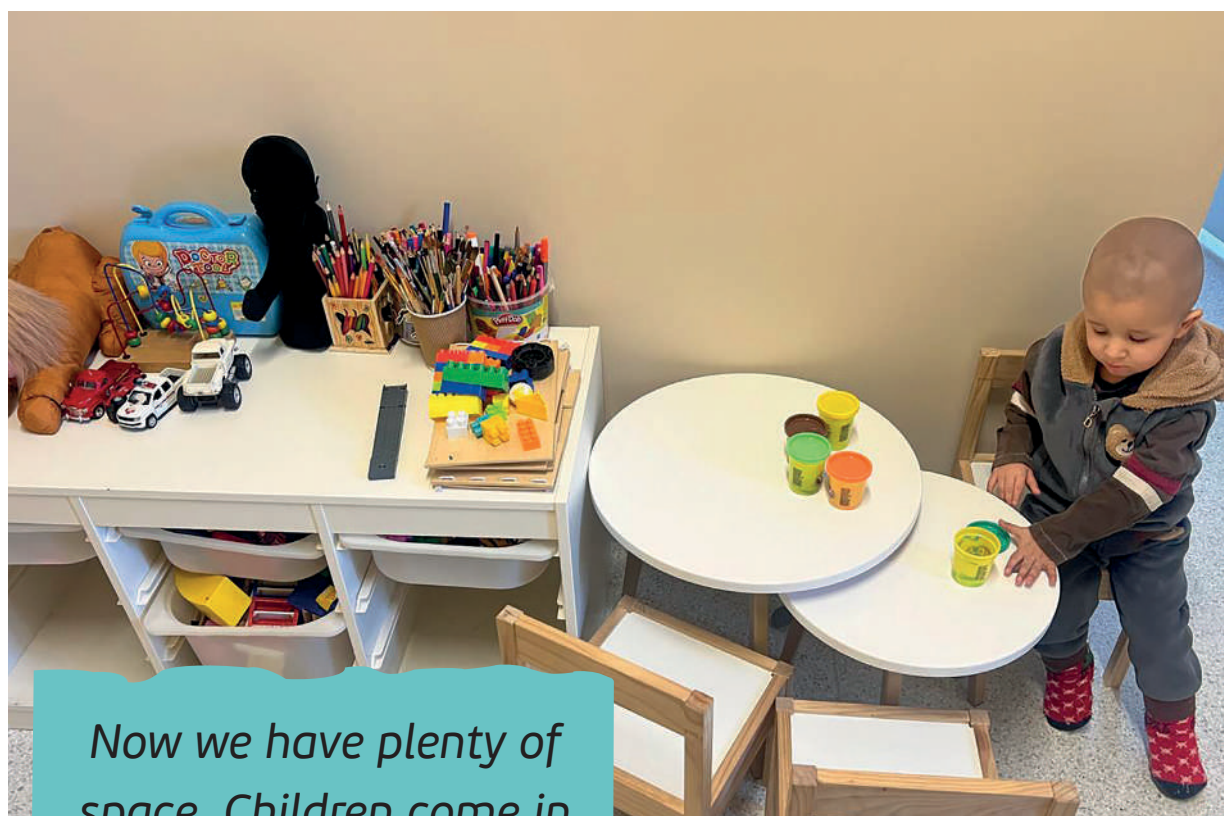
The new office is a bright space with a large sofa and, most importantly, its own window. It is now a place for full-fledged “childhood life.”

“Now we have a lot of space. The children come in and immediately run to the cabinet—we let them choose toys themselves. In a

The previous office was very small and, most importantly, had no window

hospital, this gives a child an extremely important sense of control: ‘I choose what to play with.’ It restores the feeling of a normal childhood.”





Now we have plenty of space. Children come in and immediately run to the cabinet—we let them choose their own toys

NOT JUST FOR CHILDREN: A "RESOURCE SPACE" FOR DOCTORS

It may sound surprising, but the new office has also become an "island of silence" for medical staff. Previously, doctors rarely came to see psychologists, but now the situation has changed dramatically.

"Doctors are highly motivated now, but the workload is enormous. Sometimes a doctor writes to me: 'It's been a very hard day—can I take the keys and just sit in your office in silence for 10 minutes?' They come in, settle on our new sofa—and instead of 'just a minute,' they stay for forty. They also need a place without the 'white noise' of the doctors' lounge, a place where they can simply exhale."

In addition, it is now in this office that the most difficult conversations take place. When a doctor needs to deliver serious news to parents, they do so here—not in a corridor, but in a private, humane setting where the family has time and space to process what they have heard.



CLEAN WALLS FOR NEW VICTORIES

The new office now looks immaculate, but Liliia admits it is still waiting for its old vibe.

“In the previous office, all the walls were covered with children’s drawings. Now the walls are still brand new and clean. But the children who have returned for treatment are already making remarks: ‘Why is it so empty? We need to fix this!’ So now we are thinking about installing a large cork board, so we can once again turn these walls into a living story of our little heroes.”

*I choose what to play.
This restores a sense of
a normal childhood*

The renovated psychologist’s office at the National Cancer Institute (NCI) has become proof that quality support begins with respect—for the child, for their parents, and for the demanding work of the specialist. It is a space where healing happens not through medication, but through calm.





INVESTED IN THE PROGRAM AREA

₺ 5 527 098



PHYSICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL REHABILITATION

- ✓ **802** physical therapy sessions for 143 children
- ✓ **38** physical therapy sessions for 169 adults
- ✓ **3,290** individual psychological counseling sessions for children and their families
- ✓ **12** group counseling sessions for parents
- ✓ **4** meetings of the Psychological Support Division for children with cancer and their families
- ✓ Publication of a guidebook for families facing cancer
- ✓ Educational course for physical rehabilitation specialists in cooperation with NYU Langone's Rusk Rehabilitation
- ✓ Training "Modern Approaches to Oncological Rehabilitation" by specialists from St George's Hospital
- ✓ Training "Physical Therapy for Back and Lower Back Pain in Oncology Patients"
- ✓ Training "Comprehensive Therapy for Lymphedema"
- ✓ Co-organization of the Third All-Ukrainian Congress on Physical Therapy, Lviv
- ✓ Co-organization of the III Congress "Children and War: Modern Challenges in Psychological Support and Rehabilitation in Wartime"



Rehabilitation is the right to life after a diagnosis

For many years, a stereotype prevailed in Ukrainian oncology: the patient was seen as a “crystal vase” that should not be touched, with any movement perceived as potentially harmful. The Zaporuka Charitable Foundation has taken on the mission of changing this perception. Today, rehabilitation is becoming an integral part of the treatment protocol—one that helps people return to a full and meaningful life, rather than simply marking the absence of disease.

We spoke with Valentyna Kovalchuk, Coordinator of the Physical Rehabilitation Program, about why rehabilitation should begin even before surgery, how data and measurable outcomes can help transform the national healthcare system, and why the Foundation decided to extend its support beyond children to include adult patients as well.

ABOUT THE PATH TO THE FOUNDATION

Valentyna, you came to the foundation with experience working at the Ministry of Health, where you were involved in international medical partnerships. How did this transition from public service to the charitable sector happen?

“In the Ministry, I coordinated cooperation between Ukrainian and foreign hospitals. But at the same time, I was volunteering with Zaporuka. It was actually connected to personal pain—I lost my mother to cancer, and I knew what these families were going through.

When I decided to leave the Ministry, the head of the foundation’s board, Nataliia Onipko, wrote to me that same week. She offered me a new role—heading the physical rehabilitation direction. I had no doubts, so I agreed immediately. Today I understand that my experience in the public sector helps the foundation communicate with the system in the language of facts, not just emotions.



THE “FRAGILE VASE” STEREOTYPE AND REHABILITATION AS PART OF TREATMENT

Why has rehabilitation for oncology patients in Ukraine remained such a ‘blind spot’ for so long?

“There is still a belief that an oncology patient is a ‘fragile crystal vase.’ They should be ‘preserved,’ and are not supposed to make any unnecessary movements. Some doctors are even afraid to refer patients to rehabilitation, believing that activity may worsen complications. Our goal is to prove the opposite. Without rehabilitation, the risk of losing bodily function is extremely high. Victory over cancer is not only the end of treatment—it is the return of a person to life, where they can take care of themselves, walk, and work.”

ABOUT A MAJOR STUDY AND SYSTEMIC CHANGE



PEOPLE OF ZAPORUKA



Valentyna Kovalchuk

Coordinator of the Physical Rehabilitation Program Zaporuka

Specialist in International Relations (Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv). She has experience working at the Ministry of Health of Ukraine, where she was involved in developing international medical partnerships. She joined the Foundation team a year ago, transforming a personal family history of battling cancer into a professional mission to change the rehabilitation system in Ukraine.

“Rehabilitation should begin not after the hospital, but at the moment of diagnosis. It is preparation of the body for battle.”

You mentioned a case where rehabilitation literally became a ticket to surgery. Could you tell us about it?

Yes, this is the story of Oleg, a long-distance truck driver from the Poltava region. He had stage IV stomach cancer, but he could not be operated on. He weighed 170 kg, had obesity, and his lungs were functioning at only 20% of normal capacity—he simply would not have tolerated anesthesia.

For three weeks, rehabilitation specialists prepared him: they trained his lungs and helped reduce his weight. As a result, his lung function increased to 65%, and the doctors were able to perform a successful surgery. This is called “prehabilitation”—preparing the body for battle.

Rehabilitation should begin not after hospitalization, but at the moment of diagnosis.

Zaporuka” is currently conducting a large-scale analysis of rehabilitation needs, the results of which it plans to present even at the level of a WHO technical group. Why does the foundation need this research?

“We need ironclad arguments. We are conducting interviews with patients and specialists across Ukraine together with our partners—the Patients of Ukraine Foundation and the Center for Social Research. It is important for us to understand exactly where the gaps are: in personnel, in knowledge, or in equipment. When we have concrete numbers and percentages, we will be able to advocate for this issue at the state level. These will no longer be just our emotions—they will be proven facts. We plan to present these results to a WHO working group so that oncology rehabilitation can finally become part of the state funding strategy.”

THE FUTURE: A COMMUNITY OF INFLUENCER-THERAPISTS

You also launched an educational course with New York University. What is its goal?

“We want to create the core team of onco-rehabilitation specialists across the country. We received 150 applications for 25 places—the demand is enormous. Our specialists are trained by top lecturers from the United States and discuss real cases of their patients. We are not just providing knowledge; we are building a community. These 25 individuals will play a key role in shaping awareness and adoption within their regional hospitals. They will pass on their knowledge further, so that in every corner of Ukraine, an oncology patient has the right to high-quality recovery.”



Rehabilitation is preparing the body for the fight



New York Standards in Ukraine:

How Our Oncological Rehabilitation Specialists Are Trained

The lack of unified rehabilitation standards in Ukraine is one of the greatest challenges in the field. To address this, the Zaporuka Foundation launched a unique educational initiative: a comprehensive training course for physical therapists in partnership with the Rusk Rehabilitation Institute (New York, USA).

Figures and Facts:

- **High demand:** 150 specialists from across Ukraine applied for only 25 available places in the course.
- **Geography:** Participants included physical therapists from public hospitals across different regions, helping to build a core network of specialists nationwide.
- **Training program:** 19 lectures delivered by leading American experts, covering everything from the fundamentals of oncology to specialized approaches in lymphedema management and post-operative recovery after complex surgeries.

MORE THAN JUST LECTURES

The main value of the course lies in the shift from theory to evidence-based practice. Each session is composed in equal part of discussions of real Ukrainian patient cases.

“In typical online courses, participants are passive, but here there are always more questions than time for the lecture. Our therapists are incredibly motivated: they bring specific cases from their own practice to receive advice from American mentors,” says project coordinator Valentyna Kovalchuk.

MOTIVATION FOR THE BEST

Training is only the beginning.

The most active participant of the course—demonstrating the strongest results and highest motivation—will have the opportunity to attend a prestigious international rehabilitation conference in April in Dublin, Ireland.

Zaporuka’s goal is not simply to train 25 specialists, but to develop opinion leaders who will return to their hospitals and become drivers of modern standards of care in their communities.

No Age Limits:

Why Zaporuka Is Expanding Onco-Rehabilitation to Adults

For many years, the Zaporuka Foundation was primarily associated with helping children. However, 2025 marks a year of important transformation: the foundation is officially scaling its onco-rehabilitation program to include adult patients. This decision was not spontaneous—it is a logical continuation of the foundation’s mission and a response to real systemic challenges.

WHEN CHILDREN GROW UP

One of the key drivers behind this decision has been the foundation’s own beneficiaries. The children whom Zaporuka has supported over the years are growing up. They enter adult life carrying the experience of severe illness, intensive treatment, and its long-term consequences. Yet once they turn 18, they often find themselves in a vacuum: pediatric support programs end for them, while adult onco-rehabilitation in Ukraine is still only in its early stages. The foundation has taken on the challenge—not to stop at an age threshold, but to continue supporting its patients further into adulthood.

PSYCHOLOGICAL RESILIENCE: A CHALLENGE FOR ADULTS

While working at the National Cancer Institute, the foundation’s team observed that adult patients often need support even more than children. Psychologically, it can be harder for them to accept changes in their own bodies and way of life. While children have a natural reserve of strength, perceive the world through

play, and find motivation more quickly, adults are often emotionally exhausted. After aggressive treatment, they frequently lose confidence in their own abilities, which becomes a serious barrier to recovery.

Adult patients often need support even more than children

MISSION 2025: SUPPORT WITHOUT AGE LIMITS

Women after mastectomy or men after complex surgical interventions need professional rehabilitation just as urgently as children do. That is why Zaporuka is scaling its experience to adult departments, providing patients with modern equipment and access to trained specialists.



Instruction for living

How Zaporuka Supports Women After Mastectomy

Breast cancer is one of the most common oncological diseases among women. After treatment and the removal of lymph nodes, many patients develop lymphedema—a severe swelling of the arm. While it is not life-threatening, it significantly restricts movement and makes everyday activities difficult, from getting dressed to doing household chores.

LEARNING THROUGH TOUCH

To help women overcome this symptom, the Zaporuka Foundation organized specialized training for physical therapists at the National Cancer Institute. Physical therapist Inna Nahorna from Kropyvnytskyi, Head of the Rehabilitation Department at the Kirovohrad

Regional Clinical Oncology Center, shared her expertise in lymphatic drainage massage and proper bandaging techniques.

A distinctive feature of the training was the participation of a real patient: specialists practiced their skills not on mannequins, but in real-life conditions, allowing them to sensitively experience all the nuances of working with the human body.

Specialists practiced their skills not on mannequins, but in real-life practice, in order to finely sense all the nuances of working with the human body

Since the patient spends only a few hours a week with the therapist, the foundation created a unique tool for independent work at home—a special informational booklet.



It is a true “instruction for life,” providing answers to the most common questions:

- Which side is better to sleep on?
- How to choose clothing properly so as not to compress blood vessels?
- What kind of diet should be followed?
- What exercises should be performed (the booklet includes QR codes linking to video instructions).

“For a woman after surgery, it is important to feel that she is not alone. This booklet is like a caring guide she can turn to at any moment,” explains physical rehabilitation coordinator Valentyna Kovalchuk.

Printed copies are currently available at the National Cancer Institute, while the digital version can be found on the Zaporuka website. Soon, the foundation plans to distribute it to all oncology departments across Ukraine.



STEP BY STEP TOWARDS THE DREAM OF FOOTBALL

Yehor is only 10 years old. Before his illness, he was extremely active and could not imagine life without sports. Ewing’s sarcoma (bone cancer) changed everything: aggressive treatment, a complex surgery on his femur, and many months of immobilization.

Before his illness, he was extremely active and could not imagine life without sports

But thanks to physical therapy in the pediatric department of the National Cancer Institute, Yegor is learning to live again. First came simple exercises in bed, then his first attempts to sit in a wheelchair, and now—confident steps on crutches. Ahead lies the implantation of an endoprosthesis and a long road of recovery, but every movement the boy makes is a small victory over illness.

The goal of rehabilitation is not just to restore function, but to give a child the ability to run and play as before,” the Foundation explains.



MIRO SYSTEM: WHEN REHABILITATION TURNS INTO PLAY



Technical development

How do you get a patient exhausted by illness to repeat the same exercises over and over again? The answer is gamification. Thanks to Zaporuka, the rehabilitation department at the National Cancer Institute has introduced the interactive “Myro” system.

It is a large touchscreen where patients complete specific tasks. For example, they “collect apples into a basket” across the screen. By focusing on the game, a person unknowingly performs complex arm movements, training muscles and joints.

“We see women and men smiling during sessions. When rehabilitation brings excitement and joy, recovery happens faster,” the specialists share.”

Global Trends in Psycho-Oncology: “We Must Stay One Step Ahead of the Disease”

Liudmyla Baletska, a psycho-oncologist at the Zaporuka Foundation, shares insights into where the world is heading in its efforts to ensure the psychological well-being of young patients.

PEOPLE OF ZAPORUKA



Liudmyla Baletska
MHPSS Program Development
Manager

Liudmyla Baletska holds a PhD in Psychology and serves as an Associate Professor in the Department of Psychology at Uzhhorod National University. She is also the MHPSS (Mental Health and Psychosocial Support) Program Development Manager at the Zaporuka Charitable Foundation.

Her journey in this field began in 2019 and has evolved into a deeply specialized area of expertise. Liudmyla continuously studies international best practices, examines the work of leading clinics across Europe, and contributes to the implementation of modern clinical psychology standards in Ukraine.

Liudmyla is conducting a unique study titled, “**How Do Families of Children with Cancer Make Sense of Their Experience in the Context of War?**” Her research spans three historical contexts: present-day Ukraine, including experiences of occupation and filtration camps; **the Bosnian War of 1992;** and **Zakarpattia in 1939.**

“During war, vulnerable children often die not from cancer itself, but because the systems of treatment and safety break down,” the researcher explains.

By examining archives in **Sarajevo** and medical records from **Zakarpattia** dating back to the **Second World War**, Liudmyla demonstrates that war systematically alters the prospects for recovery. Her research provides valuable insight into the psychology of families who are fighting for their children’s lives amid displacement, migration, and ongoing armed conflict.



TREND №1:

**CLINICAL DEPTH: THE
PSYCHOLOGIST AS PART
OF THE MEDICAL TEAM**



Liudmyla, you often emphasize that psycho-oncology is not just support, but a clinical discipline. What is the core of this global trend?

The world now clearly distinguishes between general psychological support and clinical psychology. In the first case, responsibility for a child's comfort is shared by everyone—from reception staff to the head doctor. Emotional support through communication is provided by nurses, social workers, chaplains, and parents.

In contrast, psycho-oncology is clinical work. When a child is admitted to the hospital, it is necessary to screen their cognitive and emotional functioning. Clinical psychologists monitor “red flags”—for example, whether there is prolonged insomnia or how treatment affects brain development.

As my Italian colleague says:

There is no point in just talking here — you need to understand how the brain functions under the pressure of illness



TREND №2:

**CHILD-FRIENDLY
HOSPITALS WITH A
SCIENTIFIC APPROACH**

You have visited leading clinics in Europe. How are space and scientific work organized there?

Regardless of the country—whether it is the Netherlands with some of the strongest clinics in Europe, or Slovakia with its post-socialist experience—the direction of development is the same: medicine must be as child-friendly as possible, while remaining firmly grounded in an evidence-based scientific approach.

In Utrecht (Netherlands), the Princess Máxima Center operates—two large buildings, with a third soon to be added. One of them is fully dedicated to clinical research. There, the focus is on an “analytical brain”: specialists study how illness changes family life and how a child feels psychologically years after recovery.





The space itself is incredible. During treatment in the day hospital, children ride therapeutic bicycles (Máxima Bike) through the hospital, helping them maintain physical activity. Doctors do not call patients into examination rooms; instead, they come to the children in the relaxation areas.

I was particularly impressed by the preparation for MRI scans: there is a playroom equipped with a mock-up of the machine, where a child can “treat” a toy, get used to the sounds, and learn to lie still without fear.

*When fear disappears,
recovery
happens faster*

This is the best way to minimize stress and prevent medical trauma in both children and adults. Even in more modestly resourced Bratislava (Slovakia), I once heard a small

patient say: “I thought I was here on vacation, but they’re making me study! I want my vacation back!” And that is exactly our goal—to create a “safe cocoon,” so that a child perceives the hospital as a stage of life where there is also room for joy.





TREND №3:

**HIGH-QUALITY RESEARCH
— STRATEGY INSTEAD
OF INTUITION**

Why have data and research become so important specifically during the war?

For me, this is about the maturity of society. We have no right to think only about “today.” In psycho-oncology, the planning horizon is 5, 10, 15 years ahead.

Treating a child in wartime is not only a medical issue, but also a political one. The Balkan experience showed me that the consequences of conflict can determine access to healthcare even three decades later. I have seen situations where a child could not receive treatment in a hospital near their home—not because of a lack of medicines, but because of administrative divisions that remained after the war.

Together with colleagues from the Zaporuka Foundation, we are already integrating research questions into our projects. For example, we study the experience of doctors working in oncology under wartime conditions. We analyze their needs and professional well-being, immediately sharing the findings with the medical community.

*Evidence-based data is
the only path to building
a resilient healthcare
system*



*When you face death
every day, you learn
to cherish
every moment*



TREND №4:

**QUALITY RESEARCH
— STRATEGY INSTEAD
OF INTUITION
NEUROPSYCHOLOGY:
PRECISE NAVIGATION IN
TREATMENT**

How do neuropsychologists differ from regular psychologists?

They work at the intersection of psychology and neurobiology, analyzing physiological indicators. Such specialists are rare. Colleagues from the Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP) in the United States say: “We are incredibly lucky to have a few such specialists.”

A neuropsychologist measures how chemotherapy affects memory, attention, or motor skills. They can provide evidence-based recommendations—for example, instead of 20 art therapy sessions, a specific child may need targeted cognitive exercises or adjustments in medical support.

One of the most recent studies involving neuropsychologists was a study of how chemotherapy received by a woman during pregnancy affects the later development of the child's brain. Not guessing, but relying on data—that is true effectiveness.



TREND №5:

CHANGING THE CULTURE OF TRAINING IN CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGY

Zaporuka is launching a large-scale educational project. What do you aim to teach colleagues in the regions?

We aim to build a professional community where colleagues can develop clinical thinking, discuss complex cases, and align with modern standards of pediatric clinical psychology in the field of chronic and severe illnesses. For us, it is important not only to transfer knowledge, but to create an environment of shared professional growth.

Today, the main challenge is the shift from one-off trainings to systemic development. We don't just teach psychologists evidence-based practices—we also mentor them for six months. The entire focus is on real clinical practice. We work with concrete cases from oncology and chronic disease wards because it is important for us to see how a specialist's work changes after training and how it truly impacts the quality of care for children. This is not just another course, but a fundamental shift in the approach to the profession, one

*Not guessing, but relying
on data—that is true
effectiveness*

that takes into account the complex realities in which our specialists work.

We are building an environment based on shared standards and a culture of mutual support. Psychologists often hear painful questions from patients: “Will I die tomorrow?” “Why are they taking my leg?” We are working to ensure that no specialist is left alone with these challenges, without the support of colleagues. With this approach, every family will have access to dignified psychosocial support in any medical institution.



TREND №6:

RESILIENCE: A VITAL CURIOSITY FOR LIFE

Psycho-oncology is a marathon. What gives you the strength to stay on the course?

When you see the limits of life every day, you begin to value every moment. In individual consultations, we always assess patient safety. And when I ask about suicidal thoughts according to protocol, many people reply: “No, what are you talking about! I'm incredibly curious to see how this war ends.” This extraordinary curiosity about the future is what real resilience is.

Psycho-oncology teaches us to value life precisely because it is not eternal. We need routine, networking, and deep care. When our psychologist Liliia Sirokha enters the Cancer Institute and, within minutes, reads the emotional state of every mother, connects with medical staff, and supports them—the atmosphere changes instantly. It is not magic. It is professionalism, without which the system simply does not work.

Psycho-Oncology Division: how Zaporuka is shaping professional care standards

For a long time, psychological practice in Ukraine did not have clear standards. Only in 2023 was a standard for clinical psychologists adopted, and last year a law on psychological practice was published. These steps finally separate academic science from questionable practices and equate clinical psychologists with medical professionals.

Experts from the Zaporuka Foundation initiated the creation of a separate Psycho-Oncology Division within the National Psychological Association (NPA)—the largest professional community in Ukraine, which works according to international protocols.

QUALITY OVER QUANTITY: 20 VS 1000

To establish the division, the Foundation team went through a complex process: preparing scientific justification and defending the idea before peers. Compared to the largest division of child psychology, which includes over a thousand members, the psycho-oncology division is a very small, specialized community.

“There are few of us—today around 20 specialists from all over Ukraine. And this is intentional. In our field, quantity has never been a marker of quality. Psycho-oncology is not just psychology; it is work at the point of highest human vulnerability—between fear, pain, and hope.”



That is why creating a separate division for such a narrow professional community is an important step toward recognition: this type of care is critically important and has its own standards,” says Liliia Sirokha, onco-psychologist at the Foundation and moderator of the division.

WHY DOES THIS MATTER FOR THE PATIENT?

The division is, first and foremost, a filter.

A mandatory requirement for membership is a degree in psychology. This ensures that families are supported not by “psychics or numerologists,” but by qualified professionals who continuously improve their knowledge.

Today, the community brings together not only psychologists from Zaporuka or colleagues from other foundations, but also, for example, teachers from the “School of Superheroes” who work in hospitals.

All of them come to gain experience: how to properly communicate with a child undergoing exhausting treatment.

NEW STATUS: POINTS THAT CONFIRM LEVEL

Since clinical psychologists are now equated with physicians, they are required to follow the Continuous Professional Development (CPD) system. This means that specialists must undergo training every year and accumulate points to validate their certification, which is issued by the Ministry of Health for a five-year period.

The division has become a key platform for this professional growth. Already this year, Zaporuka is preparing to launch a fundamental educational course that will help specialists from across the country gain specialized knowledge and official CPD credits.

TRANSFORMATION 2025: FROM PEDIATRIC TO GENERAL CARE

For three years, the division operated under the name “pediatric psycho-oncology.” However, reality showed that both psychologists working with adult patients and those providing professional training also urgently needed support.

In 2025, the division expanded and changed its name—it is now a community for psycho-oncologists, patients, and their families regardless of age. The focus on pediatric oncology remains a priority, but opening up to adult care as well has made it possible to raise the overall level of support across Ukraine’s entire oncology system.



Team of psychological services
of Charitable Foundation
“Zaporuka”





INVESTED IN THE PROGRAM AREA

€ 7 118 944



SUPPORT FOR FRONTLINE AND HOST COMMUNITIES

- ✓ We support communities in Kherson, Dnipropetrovsk region, Sumy, and Lviv.
- ✓ We opened a shelter for women who have experienced violence in the Lviv region.
- ✓ We provided support for children and adults with disabilities in Nikopol and Kherson totaling UAH 678,467, as well as support for frontline hospitals amounting to UAH 693,308



Breaking the silence: The story of a silent house and the people who gave it back its voice

For over 17 years, the Zaporuka Charitable Foundation has been known as a reliable support system for families whose children are fighting cancer. However, with the beginning of the full-scale war, the foundation's mission evolved into an even broader responsibility: improving the quality of life of children and their families not only during treatment, but in any crisis situation. "To be there, no matter what" became the foundation for comprehensive support—psychological, social, and humanitarian—during the most difficult life challenges a family can face.

Domestic violence is precisely such a challenge—it destroys families and human dignity no less cruelly than illness. That is why the launch of the "Breaking the Silence" project became a natural continuation of Zaporuka's mission. Yet the project's name proved prophetic first of all for the team itself. Because the first thing they encountered was not women in need of help, but the icy silence of empty walls.

About how it was possible to turn a legal abstraction into a place of rescue in just 11 months is shared by project coordinator Yuliia Rudiuk.

PEOPLE OF ZAPORUKA



Юлія Рудюк

Coordinator of the "Breaking the Silence" project

By education, she is a specialist in economic cybernetics. Her future was supposed to be in IT, but everything changed in 2014—specifically the Maidan revolution. That experience decisively redirected her from computer code to human lives. She was connected with the chair of the foundation's board, Nataliia Onipko, through studies at the Ukrainian Catholic University in a program on nonprofit management.

In just 11 months, Yuliia managed to transform an empty "ghost shelter" into a full-fledged educational hub and strengthen a large-scale protection network for women across the Lviv region.



THE EMERALD RING AND THE “GHOST HOUSE”

This story begins like a Hollywood script. At its center is a noble gesture by American writer, philanthropist, television host, and businesswoman Mitzi Perdue. A woman whose heart ached for Ukraine decided to auction off her most precious possession—her ring, a gift from her late husband.

The proceeds were meant to fund the construction of a modern shelter for Ukrainian women who had experienced domestic violence.

And the house was indeed built. In Lviv region, in the town of Hlyniany, on the basis of a former polyclinic. New furniture, bright colors, individual bathrooms—everything was ready to welcome those fleeing danger in their own homes.

But when we first arrived there in early June 2024, we saw neither women nor children—nor life.

I still remember that moment very clearly. The sun was flooding the courtyard, and the building looked perfect—like an architect’s rendering. We opened the doors and... stepped into a vacuum. The mattresses in the rooms were still wrapped in factory plastic. There were no personal belongings on the shelves. The air carried the smell of new furniture and dead silence. The shelter stood empty.

It was my first and strongest professional shock. I had come to meet my “beneficiaries,” bringing ideas for business accelerators and workshops, but I was greeted by a “ghost house.” According to the plan approved with UN Women, there was a strict target: 155 women were to receive support within nine months.

And I stood in the middle of that sterile emptiness, realizing: first, we ourselves had to break the silence that had swallowed this House.

LEGAL TRAP AND HOSTAGES OF COMMUNITIES

It turned out that the House had become a hostage of bureaucracy. The shelter was subordinated to a small Hlyniany territorial community (only 10,000 residents). According to the law, only women from that community could be placed there. But imagine a small town where everyone knows everyone. Would a woman go to a shelter on the outskirts of her own village under such conditions? The silence of a small town is the loudest of all—everyone knows everything, but no one speaks.

At that moment, we realized: if we do not pull this shelter out of the hands of the community, it will remain a monument to Madame Mitsi's ring. We had to convince the regional authorities to take it onto their balance sheet so it could become a state institution under regional governance.

It was summer—June, July, the vacation season. Deputies were away, sessions were not scheduled. We lived in the offices of the Lviv Regional Military Administration. We were supported by Deputy Head Khrystyna Zamula, who had previously worked at Zaporuka and knew that if the foundation takes on a case, it does not step back.

In Hlyniany, skepticism was not hidden: “Why do you need this? There is no one there, domestic violence is always a ‘dark horse,’” they said.

But we kept preparing documents, justifications, charts... Finally, in August, the deputies voted to transfer the Hlyniany shelter to the balance of the Lviv region. It became a turning point—we broke the silence at the legal level. The House was able to open its doors to women from the entire region.



MECHANISM OF CARE: 24/7 WORKING SYSTEM

We had to cover five major blocks: support for women (psychologists, lawyers, doctors), institutional strengthening (training staff, improving spaces), economic empowerment (new professions for women), training for social workers across the region (how to respond to and prevent violence), and communication (to ensure awareness of the issue).

Since the shelter in Hlyniany was only beginning to come to life after a leadership change (we helped find a new director—Ms. Halyna Ivasechko, a woman “made of steel and love”), we made a decision: if women cannot come to us, we must go to them.



Thus, the project was scaled across the entire Lviv region.

We held up to 20 meetings per month. We began cooperation with the Mother and Child Center in Drohobych, the shelter department for women and children affected by domestic violence in Truskavets, and day centers in Novoiavorivsk, Sheptytskyi, and Sokal.

Later, we started working with mobile psychosocial support teams. When the police responded to domestic violence calls, mobile brigade specialists would accompany them with “Care Bags.” These were rescue kits: food, hygiene items, and everything necessary so that a woman could take her child and leave into the unknown, knowing she would be supported for the first few days.

WHEN THE HOUSE FILLED WITH VOICES

In September, the first woman finally moved into Hlyniany. Then a second. Then a fifth. The silence that had frightened us in June began to dissipate. It was replaced by the sounds of children’s laughter and... the smells of home cooking.

We purchased household cleaning products, food, and bed linens. However, we did not want the shelter to become just a “hotel” where a woman waits for her wounds to heal. We wanted to help her become independent. For this purpose, we created training spaces in Hlyniany and Drohobych. We purchased equipment for training in hairdressing, manicure, pedicure. We brought sewing machines and equipment for candle-making.

As a specialist in economic cybernetics, I now know everything about dehydrators for fruit paste, professional hairdressing chairs, and “French garden beds.”

One of the important stages was a business accelerator in Novoiavorivsk. We taught women what SMM (Social Media Marketing) is, how to calculate the cost of a gingerbread cookie, and how not to be afraid to become the owner of their own business.

Today, the shelter in Hlyniany is no longer a “legal abstraction,” but a living organism filled with children’s laughter, the smell of home-cooked meals, and most importantly—plans for the future. Silence is not just the absence of sound; it is paralysis of will. Our team once again proved what can be achieved when we refuse to play by the rules of silence and indifference. We broke the silence of empty walls so that women could finally break the silence of their own lives. Now their voices sound confident—and this is our greatest achievement.

PROJECT TIMELINE

01
START AND
ADVOCACY

June 2024

The team is actively building the project ecosystem: more than 20 meetings have been held with relevant departments of the Lviv Regional Military Administration (JIOBA), social hubs ("Vona," "Vilna"), and regional shelters to exchange experience. Legal groundwork is currently being prepared for transferring the Hlyniy shelter to the regional balance sheet and integrating it into the social protection system of the Lviv region.



Official launch of the "Breaking the Silence" project. The team's first visit to the empty shelter in Hlyniy and the study of the experience of a state shelter in Truskavets. The beginning of a strategic partnership with the Lviv Regional Military Administration (JIOBA) and the Regional Center for Social Services: a process was initiated to transfer the Hlyniy shelter to the regional balance, in order to make it accessible to women from across the country.

02
NETWORKING AND
PARTNERSHIP
BUILDING

July 2024

03
LEGAL VICTORY
AND LAUNCH OF
SYSTEMIC ASSISTANCE

August 2024

Thanks to successful advocacy, the Hlyniy shelter was transferred to the balance of the regional administration (LOVA), which made it possible to restore its operation and form a new team. At the same time, support for the Truskavets shelter was strengthened.

Key achievements of the month:

- **"Care Kits":** the first 50 emergency aid kits for women were developed and delivered to mobile teams.
- **Professional training:** together with "Gender in Detail," a study of the needs of social workers was conducted—"Study of the Needs and Specifics of Work in the Field of Social Protection in the Lviv Region."
- **Comprehensive support:** in partnership with the "Perspektyva Nova" Foundation, regular psychological and legal consultations, as well as activities for children, were launched.
- **Therapy:** the first three art therapy sessions were conducted to restore women's emotional well-being.



On the other hand, continuous information and advocacy support of our activities represents an interesting experiment in testing approaches.

Results of the first quarter of the project:

- **Coverage:** 81 people (including three children) received comprehensive support.
- **Support in numbers:** 28 psychological and 11 legal consultations were provided.
- **Resource support:** 50 women were provided with "Care Kits." The Truskavets shelter received a batch of food, hygiene products, and materials for activities with children.
- **Strategic development:** working meetings were held with donors regarding the further development and functioning of the Hlyniy shelter.

04
REVITALIZATION OF
THE HOME AND
SCALING UP ASSISTANCE

September 2024



05
INFORMATIONAL
BREAKTHROUGH
AND STRATEGIC
PLANNING

October 2024

Active preparations are underway for the economic empowerment of women and the rollout of a large-scale communication campaign through art.

Key achievements of the month:

- **Awareness-raising:** informational booklets with step-by-step guidance for survivors were developed and printed; the materials were integrated into the work of the psychological service within the education system of the Lviv district.
- **Economic component:** together with the "Vona" hub, a concept for professional training for women was developed (makeup, SMM, handmade skills).
- **Artistic advocacy:** negotiations were launched with the Academy of Arts and the Lesia Ukrainka Theatre to create an installation and a performance that "break the silence."

Community outreach: field art-therapy sessions were conducted in Kamianka-Buzka; the Hlyniy shelter received additional humanitarian support.



The focus of the month is the rollout of women's professional empowerment programs and the scaling of advocacy activities.

Key achievements of the month:

- **Economic independence:** together with the Butterfly Foundation, the launch of courses has been prepared (grooming, barista work, makeup, eyebrow and lash specialist). More than 40 initial applications for training have been received.
- **Psychological support:** 54 women received professional support; mobile therapeutic sessions were conducted in Bibrka, along with a quality monitoring visit in Sheptytskyi.
- **Advocacy:** the team became a co-organizer of the 4th Regional Forum "The Price of Silence"; preparations have begun for the large-scale "16 Days Against Violence" campaign.
- **Accessibility of support:** 85 humanitarian kits have been prepared for distribution to mobile teams in remote communities of the region.
- **Digitalization:** a unified project beneficiary database has been implemented to streamline data management and reporting.

06
SYSTEMIC
APPROACH
AND ECONOMIC
START





The shelter in Hlyniany has reached full capacity, becoming a center of professional psychological assistance and safety for mothers with children. At the same time, the project transformed the "sleeping" communities into real business opportunities for women.

The defining achievements of the month:

- **Business accelerator.** In Novoyavorivsk, 12 women took the course "How to turn a hobby into your own business";
- 7 business projects were presented at the final pitching - from baking to creating a children's development center.
- **Educational finale:** a large-scale series of training has been completed — 112 specialists from 60 communities in the Lviv region now have the knowledge to identify and responding to cases of violence.
- **Expert support:** psychologist Marina Poturail was engaged for individual therapy of shelter residents and mentoring support for the institution's staff.
- **Expansion:** cooperation started on three daycare centers in Sokal.



07 CULTURAL RESONANCE AND PROFESSIONAL AMPLIFICATION

DECEMBER 2024

The project focused on advocating for violence through art and training professionals in communities. The large-scale campaign "16 Days Against Violence" received significant media coverage, and the first women began their journey to economic independence.

The defining achievements of the month:

- **Artistic advocacy:** the installation "Silent Observers" was presented at the King Cross Leopold shopping mall (jointly with the LNAM), which attracted the attention of thousands of people and leading media outlets to the problem of domestic violence.
- **Economic viability:** The first 20 women received professional training in barista, groomer, makeup artist, and eyebrow and eyelash artist.
- **Education for professionals:** together with "Gender in Details", a series of trainings was conducted for 85 social workers from territorial communities in the Lviv region on responding to gender-based violence.
- **Assistance in numbers:** 91 people received psychological support, 51 - legal assistance, 85 hygiene and food kits were purchased and distributed among shelters and mobile teams in the region.
- The project has moved to the level of deep individual support and systemic advocacy. The shelter in Hlyniany has become a center not only for safety, but also for restoring legal justice and domestic confidence for women.



08 PROFESSIONAL START AND FULL FUNCTIONING



09 LEGAL PROTECTION AND STRATEGIC PLANNING

FEBRUARY 2025

The defining achievements of the month:

- **Mobile therapy:** 6 field art therapy sessions were held in the communities of the region: Sokala, Novoyavorivsk, Kamianets-Buzka, and Dobrosyn.
- **Economic start:** the purchase of professional equipment for training shelter residents (hairdressing and sewing, candle and pastille making) has begun.
- **Strategic role:** participation in the development of the UN Strategy in Ukraine for 2025-2029 and presentation of the project results to the Lviv Regional State Administration.
- **Preparation for "A Woman's Voice in Silence":** launching a podcast series and preparing a large theatrical performance at the Lesia Ukrainka Theater.



The month passed under the sign of artistic advocacy and training of women for independent professional life. Proskit entered the broad media field, transforming complex topics of violence into formats understandable to society.

The defining achievements of the month:

- **Art against silence:** Lesia Ukrainka's Theater organized performative readings of plays about domestic violence and panel discussions.
- **Information resource:** together with Radio Skovoroda has recorded a series of 5 thematic podcasts on how to recognize violence and where to find it assistance.
- **Investments in independence:** Business accelerator participants received the necessary materials and resources for a practical start of their own businesses.
- **Summary:** Completed. The work of subgrantees is summarized, the results of providing legal, medical and psychological assistance are summarized.



11 CULMINATION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

APRIL 2025

The final month of the project became a stage of practical implementation of knowledge and summing up the results of systematic work. The project ended, leaving behind not only reports, but also a fully equipped learning space and real business startups for the students.

The defining achievements of the month:

- **House of Opportunities:** The shelter in Hlyniany is equipped to provide training opportunities for those who long-term residents of the shelter, professional equipment was purchased and transferred for training in hairdressing and sewing, manicure, and making pastila candles, practical courses for residents were launched.
- **Investments in their own business:** four women of the project received equipment for a professional start and starting your own business.
- **Education for professionals:** a three-day final intensive for social workers of the region (facilitation, public speaking, art therapy) was held with a field trip to Hlinka to exchange experiences.
- **Research work:** a study was prepared "Study of the features of the work of shelters, the procedure for settling and referring women who have suffered from domestic and gender-based violence".
- **Shelter reinforcements:** French beds for gardening were created on the shelter and equipment for growing microgreens was installed. A leisure area with a trampoline was set up for children.
- **Project completion:** On April 30, the Breaking the Silence project officially ended; final communication materials were prepared and submitted applications for continuation of activity.



A language that will be heard: why Zaporuka chooses art in communicating with society



When it comes to domestic violence, direct communication often does not work. In a world already saturated with daily pain, people subconsciously build emotional defenses. Statistics, appeals, and dry reports tend to trigger detachment, because someone else's suffering feels too overwhelming. But silence is the best environment for abuse. That is why the Zaporuka Charitable Foundation, within the "Breaking the Silence" project, chose a different path.

Art is a language that will be heard. It is a language of metaphors that does not attack through guilt, but gently stops a passerby, draws attention, and only then tells the story. The viewer is no longer a random witness—they become a person who empathizes consciously.

STOPPING AND ENGAGING: “SILENT OBSERVERS”



How do you draw attention to domestic violence in places where people come for leisure and shopping?

The Foundation installed an art installation in the largest shopping mall in Lviv—King Cross Leopolis. The project was created by young students of the Lviv National Academy of Arts under the curatorship of Volodymyr Kohut.

Each artist, through the lens of her own experience, created a section of the “room-walls” exhibition: a children’s room—reminding viewers of the trauma experienced by children who witness what they should never see; a room of chaos with overturned furniture—symbolizing danger within one’s own home; a bathroom—the only (yet fragile) space of safety; and a dangerous stairwell—a space where neighbors often remain silent witnesses to tragedy.

“People stopped because they saw something unusual and large-scale,” recalls project lead of “Breaking the Silence,” Yuliia Rudiuk. “They turned a special ‘wheel of words’ on the stand, choosing those that resonated with them. It was a moment when the art object turned a passerby into an active participant in the dialogue.”



FEELING FROM THE INSIDE: THE VOICE OF THE THEATER



If an installation stops you, theater also gives you the opportunity to experience another person's reality. In collaboration with the Lesya Ukrainka Theater, the foundation organized performative readings titled "A Woman's Voice in Silence." Two plays were presented: "War of Frau Kozak" by Liudmyla Tymoshenko—a monodrama about a woman's internal struggle for dignity; and "Stickers" by Ihor Nosovskyi—a story about social stereotypes that conceal tragedy behind closed doors.

After each performance, the audience did not disperse—panel discussions began with psychologists and lawyers. It became a space where emotions triggered by what was seen were transformed into understanding: violence is not normal, and there is a way out of it.

It was important for us to find a genuine tone of voice. And I hope we succeeded in doing so



HONEST CONVERSATION: THE PODCAST "I NO LONGER REMAIN SILENT"

When attention has already been captured, it is time for an honest and profound conversation. In collaboration with Radio "Skovoroda," the foundation launched a series of five podcasts, hosted by Yana Pekun—an expert in gender equality and social inclusion.

Who became the voices of the project?

Yuliia Rudiuk, coordinator of the "Breaking the Silence" project—speaking about how violence manifests itself and why society tolerates it.

Marina Poturai, a psychologist on the project, speaks about abuse that begins with small things and disguises itself as “care,” as well as about religion and the manipulative phrase “endure it, this is your cross.”

Oksana Bilan-Zvizlo, Director of the Social Services Center of the Novoyavorivsk City Council, discusses sexual violence within marriage and the sequence of actions after the words “I ran away at night.”

Nataliia Ivankova, lecturer at Lviv Polytechnic National University and trainer in economic empowerment, explains why financial dependence is a trap—and why owning a business can become a path to freedom.

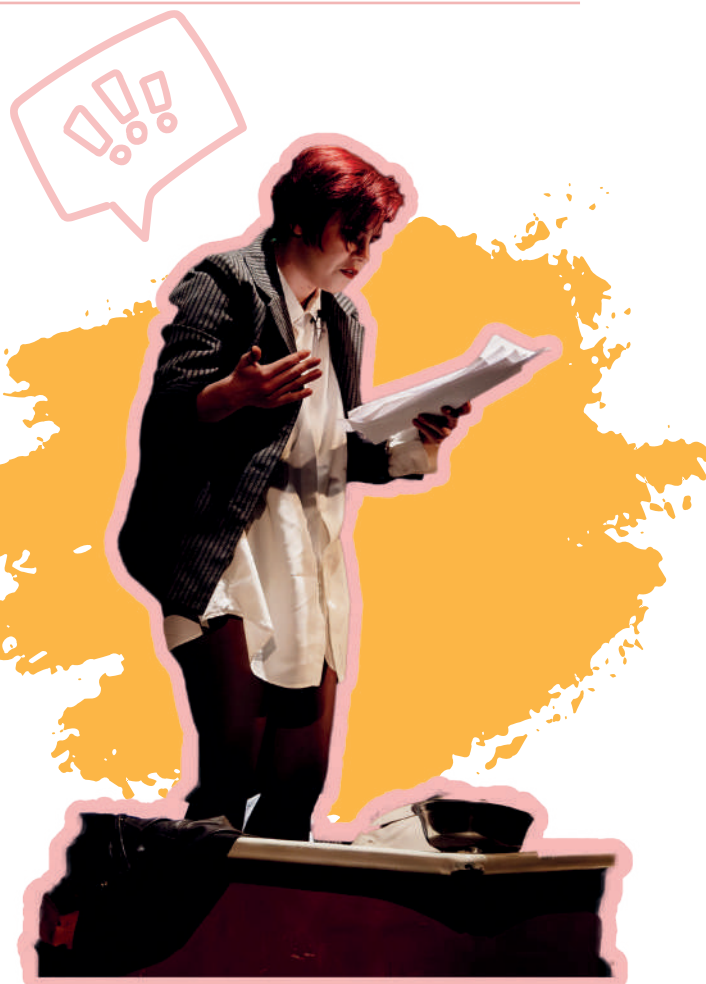
To ensure each story in the podcast sounds authentic, the team carefully worked on every recording.

“With the actor who read the stories, we first recorded one version,” says Yuliia Rudiuk. “But when we listened, we decided it wasn’t right. Because when a man simply reads a woman’s story, it doesn’t sound authentic—it loses its truth. We redid everything, adjusted certain accents, re-recorded... It was important for us to find a genuine intonation. And I hope we succeeded.”

PHILOSOPHY OF HUMANITY

Art has become a tool for the Foundation that allows it to speak about difficult topics in a delicate way, without turning someone else’s pain into an informational spectacle. It is a way to shift the focus from the image of a “victim” to a woman’s inner strength, and to bring the topic of violence out of the zone of taboo.

Ultimately, artistic language often proves more powerful than any facts or numbers. It helps society see the real person behind everything. Art has become the loudest way to break the silence, because it speaks directly to the heart.



Dramatic readings of plays and all episodes of the podcast «I’m Not Silent Anymore» are available on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, and the Lesia Ukrainka Theater YouTube channel.

A place of happy people: how Iryna discovered her recipe for independence

Iryna is a woman with incredible energy. She is determined, fast, and has a gaze that immediately makes it clear: in this family, she is the “commander-in-chief.” She is the kind of Ukrainian woman who “doesn’t care which side of her husband’s cap is on, because she stands with hands on hips.” Iryna is a servicewoman, a mother of three, and the founder of her own confectionery studio. Yet behind this present-day confidence lies a story of a difficult choice that once changed everything.

THE TURNING POINT: WHEN HOME STOPS BEING A FORTRESS

Seven years ago, Iryna’s life resembled a thriller that she eventually dared to end herself. At the time, she lived in a civil marriage with a former law enforcement officer. At home, there was double violence: both her partner and his mother drank heavily. Iryna recalls how he could even raise a hand against his own mother, how he belittled his wife, and always placed his friends above the family.

“He could just take the car and go to his friends, even if I urgently needed to go somewhere with a small child or to the hospital. My requests always received the same answer: ‘You’re with a child? Then call a taxi and go.’ The priorities were clear: I was a convenient cook, cleaner, and someone who could earn money,” Iryna says. At the time, she worked from home, selling car parts online and effectively supporting the family financially.



The most terrifying thing was that this atmosphere had a destructive impact on their little son. Although he was only two years old, the child lived under constant stress. Iryna saw how the boy would start to panic and flinch whenever he heard shouting or saw someone intoxicated.

She realized that what lay ahead was only an abyss.

She made her decision in one day. *“I understood: the children only need me. Either I try and succeed, or I will spend my whole life blaming myself for not daring to act.”*

She packed her things, ordered a truck, and left with her children to her parents’ home.

*Either I try and succeed,
or I will spend my whole
life blaming myself for
not having the
courage to act*

THE ARMY AS A SCHOOL OF STRENGTH

In Nikopol, Iryna started everything from scratch. First, she got a job in a shop, then went to work at a pipe plant. And then came the decision that ultimately hardened her: she chose to join the military.

“I entered military service, probably to become more confident in myself. To understand that no man would ever be able to hurt me or my children again.”

There she met her current husband, also a serviceman. He accepted her children as his own (her older daughter even took his surname) and became a real authority figure for her son. It was for her husband that Iryna moved to the Lviv region—he convinced the family to relocate to him, and Iryna herself followed.

She was later officially transferred through military service. That’s how Novoyavorivsk became their new shared home.

Now their home is peaceful, although Iryna jokes:

“In our house, everyone says mom is a tyrant, because I’m very strict.”

SUPPORT FROM ZAPORUKA: FROM HOBBY TO A STUDIO

Iryna began her military service back in 2019, so she met the start of the full-scale invasion already in her unit, side by side with her husband. Those days were extremely difficult not only because of service: her older children had to be sent to their grandmother for three long months.

But life goes on—and a few years later, the family was expecting another child. While on maternity leave, the restless Iryna decided it was the perfect time to finally give her long-held dream a chance and turn her passion for baking into a professional business.

That’s when her path crossed with Zaporuka’s “Breaking the Silence” project, which became a bridge between hobby and entrepreneurship.

She joined a business training in Novoyavorivsk, where she finally structured her plans: how to build a business model, calculate costs, and promote her product.

“I am a very straightforward person: if I want something, I achieve it. But the training helped me understand the sequence of steps.”

Zaporuka also provided Iryna with professional equipment—an airbrush and chocolate molds.

“The atmosphere was very warm, really great. It’s a pity such training aren’t held all the time, because many women need this push to stop doubting and start believing in their dream,” Iryna shares.



ADVICE FROM SOMEONE WHO MADE IT OUT

Today, Iryna looks back at her former self with understanding, but without self-pity. When asked how her character has changed, she smiles: “I used to allow myself to be hurt; I didn’t know my own strength. Now I am in control of my own life. To those women who are afraid to change something, I want to say: no one needs you as much as you need yourself. And children are incredible motivation. For their peaceful sleep, you can turn the world around—the main thing is not to feel like a victim, but to become the master of your own destiny.”

Iryna managed to break the silence and build her own “place of happy people.” And Zaporuka was there precisely when this strong woman needed a professional tool to finally secure her victory.

Many women need such a push to stop hesitating and start believing in their dream



“NOVOYAVORIVSK” CAKE AND “A PLACE OF HAPPY PEOPLE”

Today, Iryna is the owner of a confectionery studio. Her handmade truffles, homemade marshmallows, and macarons already have their fans. But her ambitions are much broader. She is working on the recipe for a signature “Novoyavorivsk” cake and an original mousse dessert called “A Place of Happy People”—named after a song by Andriy Kuzmenko (Skryabin), whose name is closely connected with Novoyavorivsk. “The main ingredient there is hazelnut. There is a lot of it in the forests; it is a symbol of our region.”

Among Iryna’s plans is not only to sell sweets but also to conduct workshops, teaching confectionery skills to other women.



Kherson: waiting for greenery so we have somewhere to hide



Olha Tsilynko is the head of the Kherson Family Rehabilitation Center for Children with Disabilities “Sofia.”

Olha is a person known by everyone in Kherson. In 2010, she founded “Sofia” to help her own daughter with cerebral palsy learn to stand and walk. She succeeded. And then she began helping others. She survived the occupation, hiding people from the Russians, and the Kakhovka disaster, when her own family lost their home—yet she continued evacuating grandmothers and cats from flooded areas in a battered car. Today, Olha is the heart of a community of 56 families who, despite everything, remain in Kherson. She does not speak about resilience. She simply knows where to find fuel briquettes for heating and how to take children to the zoo in a way that keeps them safe from drone surveillance.

Do you know what distinguishes Kherson residents from people in other cities? We don't get upset when there is no electricity. We survived occupation. After that, nothing really frightens us anymore. Our city now has its own specific reality. Power cuts are avoided—not because we are lucky. It's because when you turn on a generator, you can't hear the sky. And you need to listen to the sky all the time. A drone is silent—it's not a Shahed. The noise of a generator can simply drown it out, and that means death. So we adapt. More than half of the families I know are not living in their own homes. They have moved into other people's houses, closer to private sectors, because in apartment buildings the chances of survival after a strike are lower.



ABOUT WINTER AND VITAMINS OF CARE

This winter was brutal—there hadn't been one like it in twenty years. The city's combined heat and power plant was destroyed, and there was no heating in apartments. So when Nataliia Onipko from Zaporuka called me and asked, "Olia, what do you need help with?", I immediately said—briquettes. Not firewood, but fuel briquettes, because people even use them in apartments, installing small stoves. Finding funding is only half the challenge these days. The real quest is sourcing the

materials and getting them into Kherson. Not everyone is willing to come here. And when you unload that fuel, you have to do everything very quickly, because drones are constantly overhead. Zaporuka responded immediately. These briquettes saved 14 of our families during the harshest frosts.

The foundation also provided real "vitamins of care." They transferred funds, and we locally bought fresh fruit and sweets for children. It was incredibly important—to let them feel a moment of celebration and know that they are remembered.

WHAT DO FAMILIES NEED MOST RIGHT NOW?



When I survey parents about their most urgent needs, food with a long shelf life is always at the top. People try to make at least small reserves: canned goods, cereals, oil. Hygiene products are constantly needed as well, especially diapers for our bedridden children—they are very expensive right now. But there is another, no less important need—an emotional one. Right now, we are preparing for our big Children's Day campaign on June 1. We traditionally want to take the children to the Mykolaiv Zoo. It's complicated: we need two buses (because we already have 82 children), we need animators willing to work from 7 a.m., and we need to feed this "army" several times a day. The trip costs over 100,000 hryvnias, but for many of our children, it is the only time they go out into the world during the entire year. It is their breath of normal life.

Just when you turn on a generator, you can no longer hear the sky. And the sky must be listened to all the time

DRONES AND THE "TRAINING RANGE"

Now Kherson is waiting for greenery. Everyone is waiting for the leaves to bloom. You might think it's for beauty? No. Leaves are camouflage. We wait for greenery so there are places to hide from drones. Drones are our biggest problem. During the day, you run from tree to tree, from one shop awning to another. At night it's even worse, because they have thermal cameras. We discussed it with the military: the Russians are using Kherson as a training ground. A new rotation of their drone operators arrives, and they practice on us—chasing civilian cars, flying into apartments. These are not random strikes. It's a human safari.

We live in a city without choices. There is only one road in our lives: Mykolaiv–Kherson. It is constantly under threat and frequently closed due to shelling. That's why everything here is more expensive than anywhere else. Going into a shop and choosing cheese? Forget it. You buy whatever is on the shelf. You come to the market and there is one meat seller for the entire city. That's our assortment.

WHY DO WE STAY?

"Sofia" is no longer just a rehabilitation center. It is a safe environment where everyone understands each other, where there is no judgment. Parents say: "Only here can I relax." We have teenagers we worry deeply about, because their socialization happened during the war. But they are truly unique. This winter, our children took part in the theater project "My Home." Thanks to a German grant, the teenagers wrote their own plays. They were given complete freedom in choosing topics, yet all the texts turned out to be about the same thing: occupation. Later, we traveled to Kyiv, and professional actors staged these plays. The audience was shocked. There is now even



discussion about translating them into German and performing them in Germany. Two of our children are now filming a documentary about Kherson.

Our children read a lot. One entrepreneur gave us 89,000 hryvnias for books. When he saw the list, he asked: "Olia, are we really buying this for children?" Because more than half of it is adult literature. Our girl Karina finished two volumes of Stephen King in a week. I laugh: "Aren't you afraid of King?" and she says: "Olia Anatoliivna, after what we see outside the window, King is a bedtime fairy tale."

We hold the parents so that the parents can hold the children. That is our main goal. We are waiting for victory, but we are not sitting idle. We bake Easter cakes, build libraries, and learn to see light where it seemed to have been switched off long ago. The main thing is to endure. And it is very important to know that we are not forgotten. Thank you, Zaporuka, for being with us in these cold Kherson apartments. A warm embrace to everyone. We are in touch!

THIS SUPPORT BECAME POSSIBLE THANKS TO YOU





AND SEPARATELY — TO THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE WHO SUPPORT US WITH DONATIONS, SHARES, VOLUNTEERING, AND BELIEF THAT CARE CAN CHANGE LIVES.

THANK YOU!



Learn more and support children and families with the Zaporuka Foundation



zaporuka.org.ua

The following worked on the issue:

Editor-in-Chief and Journalist: **Natalya Buzhynetska**

Design and Layout: **Hanna Sviatnenko**

Editor-in-Chief: **Oksana Pysana**

Creative Team: **Zaporuka Charitable Foundation**