

Ukraine Crisis Appeal

Impact of the Child Program

Given that the war in Ukraine is in its active phase, the number of affected people continues to grow, and the social and humanitarian status of those at risk is deteriorating. Therefore, families are left alone with their own pain of losing relatives in the war, children feel constant stress and anxiety, many of them experience long-term separation from their relatives ('military' parents).

In order to change this situation the Ukraine Crisis Appeal of RAWCS and the AFUO has launched the Child Program. Together with Caritas Ukraine we managed to establish the New Safe Home – a shelter for IDP families with children placed in Nazareth (western part of Ukraine), and the Child-Friendly Space for the war affected children in Berdychiv (Zhytomyr region).

Those 2 centers provide a wide range of protection services to the most suffering families, who are unable to cope with the challenges brought by the war on their own:

- displaced mothers with children who lost their husbands as a result of the war;
- children raised by other relatives (because of the war, they stayed with their grandmother/aunt, etc.);
- displaced families with children who left their homes because they were damaged or destroyed during the war;
- mothers with children who have experienced severe traumatic events during the war and need intensive psychological support;
- low-income large families with three or more children and low-income single-parent families with children;
- women with children with special educational needs who require special conditions and care;
- children whose mothers undergo rehabilitation services for addicted people;
- children of military personnel or veterans and children from other vulnerable families.

Zoriana Lukavetska, head of the program "Education, Formation and Child Protection" of Caritas Ukraine, reports on the program's impact on the lives of children affected by the war.

"More than 650 vulnerable children and their parents have received assistance under the Child program since the outbreak of full-scale war in 2022. These children lost a lot because of the war: they lost their relatives, sometimes even their parents, they lost many friends, they left their homes and favorite toys, they forgot how their schools looked like, and some even forgot what it means to play carefree without threats from the air. It was only thanks to the comprehensive services provided by the program that we managed to change this situation. Families found shelter, children made new friends, parents received support and a sense of security, and found the strength to give their children happy childhood moments. Even if the war continues."

Displaced children, children of military personnel or veterans and children from vulnerable families get access to psychosocial support, useful daily leisure and recreational activities to improve their well-being within the Program.

Children are provided with social and pedagogical support, inclusive developmental classes after school, leisure and recreation in accordance with the age and needs of the children. While parents and caregivers receive social and psychological assistance and counseling on parental skills and coping mechanisms.

The shelter provides additionally the round-the-clock care and psychosocial support for the internally displaced children and children whose mothers undergo rehabilitation services for addicted people.

*“The children feel supported and cared for, which has a very positive impact on their psycho-emotional state.” - says **Anna Kilas**, project manager of Caritas Ukraine.*

“The Child Friendly Space provides an inclusive space for children where they can feel safe, play and learn, integrate and communicate with peers, and participate in a variety of stress relieving activities. Professional psychologist works on improving mental health and strengthening resilience by providing individual and group counselling both for children and for adults. They use the Emotional First Aid Kit program, fairy tale therapy, Teddy bear therapy and many other creative methods to help the war-affected children reduce their anxiety, resolve emotional difficulties, learn coping strategies and open up in a safe environment.”

The war affected children and their parents or caregivers benefit from the program by receiving complex social and pedagogical, emotional and trauma support services. Below are a few feedbacks from them.

Dear Ukrainians in Australia!

On behalf of our Charitable Foundation “Caritas Berdychiv” and the children affected by the war in Ukraine, I would like to express our sincere gratitude for your generous support of the non-formal education and psychosocial activities for children in our Child Friendly Space in Berdychiv. Your help is extremely valuable and important to us.

In this difficult time, when Ukraine is going through a war, children especially need our attention and support. Thanks to your donations, we have been able to provide them with the opportunity to learn, develop and make new friends in a safe and supporting environment. In addition, we organize interesting and useful events, workshops, and excursions for children, which help them to escape from difficult experiences and return to normal life.

We are deeply grateful to you for your kindness and compassion. Your help is not only material support for us, but also a testament to your faith in our common future. We believe that together we will be able to overcome all difficulties and build a better life for children affected by the war.

Thank you once again for your support!

With respect and prayer

Fr. Roman Shkribenets

Director of Caritas Berdychiv UGCC

Eva, 15 y.o., orphan

“I wish I could fit in all my emotions about every Caritas event I've been to!

I have been visiting the Child-Friendly Space for a short time, but I already have new friends and so many pleasant memories, each of which I remember with a warm smile. The atmosphere is friendly and bright, there are games in free time, interesting workshops that are well conducted by the staff. Sometimes you even forget that they are employees, you feel like they are one family that has gathered together to spend time and learn something new, or just have fun! These days, such events are like gold, and I am happy that I can attend them. I also really like that the events are varied, and you can tell your own ideas and wishes for the next master class, what you want to do!

There are also wonderful charity events that inspire new kindness, filling your heart with light.

In a way, Caritas helps me to cope emotionally with the difficulties I am going through now, to distract myself from problems and recharge my batteries to solve everything.

I am happy that I can attend Caritas and be part of such a team.

And I am immensely grateful to everyone who makes it all possible!”

Nadiia, mother, internally displaced family

"With the outbreak of war, our family was forced to leave our home, our favorite things, and the city close to our hearts in the Kherson region and moved far - to Berdychiv. As an internally displaced family, we were in a difficult financial situation, so we turned to various organizations for help. That's how we met Caritas in 2023, when we were receiving humanitarian aid. When I learned about the Child Friendly Space, I enrolled my daughter Eva in school preparation classes and workshops. But because of the war, she did not speak, so it was difficult for her to communicate with other children. We started attending speech therapy classes in the sensory room to help her start speaking. Eva really liked playing in a large dry pool with balls, standing in the rain (sensory light rain). All those exercises with the speech therapist have a very positive effect on my daughter, she started to speak. At the moment, she is already communicating in sentences.

I am sincerely grateful to everyone who makes efforts to ensure that such centers exist! Thank you for the dedicated work of the speech therapist! It is a great help for us!"

Olga, internally displaced mother of 4 children

"I came from Nikopol, with my children Valeria, 13y.o., Veronika, 4 y.o., Margaryta, 3 y.o., Mykhailo, 1.5 y.o., and my husband. Due to the shelling, we lost our home and had no place to live. In September 2023 our family was settled in Nazareth.

I am on maternity leave. My husband is a veteran and has one arm that is not fully functional, so he cannot work fully, but if there is an opportunity to earn extra money, he helps with yard maintenance or certain repairs. In Nazareth, he also takes care of horses and other animals.

The New Safe Home provided my family with psychological and social assistance. All my four children attend the children's center, where they can play safely, and participate in various activities. They enjoy attending creative workshops where they develop their skills and gain new knowledge. They received gifts for St. Nicholas and stationery for the Schoolboy's Day, which was a pleasant support and a joyful moment in their lives.

The Children's Center has become not only a place of development for our children, but also a center of joy, communication and care."

Alina, internally displaced mother from Kherson

"Glory be to Jesus Christ!

My name is Alina. I came to Nazareth with my children, Ania, 12 y.o., and Kyrylo, 6 y.o..

We found support and good conditions in Nazareth. First, my mother went to the shelter, who lost her leg as a result of shelling, and then when our house was destroyed, my children and I moved to Nazareth as well.

They helped my family to adapt and feel safe there. I started working in Nazareth, cooking for the IDP community. The children were also supported, social workers helped to enroll them in school, to settle in, and to reduce their stress level.

It is important, especially for children, that they have a safe environment to develop and socialize.

The children attend school in the village of Rychtychi, and in their free time they visit the children's center. I'm very grateful to Nazareth for hosting us in very good conditions and I'm especially grateful to the children's center for their work with the children. Thank you very much!"

Yulia, mother of a large family

"We got acquainted with Caritas when we were looking for school preparation courses for one of my children Dania. He is happy to attend the course "Year Before School" now. Previously, my son was reluctant to visit unfamiliar places - the change of environment caused him anxiety and discomfort. He needed to get used to it, and it was often accompanied by doubts and uncertainty. But it was in the child-friendly space that he felt comfortable and made friends very quickly. My child has become more attentive, confident, and relaxed. Thank you for your care and concern!"