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SPOTLIGHT

HelpAge International in Ukraine

HelpAge

International

A monthly digest from HelpAge International, bringing the faces behind our work into the spotlight - those whose lives are being transformed and those who make it all possible.

DEC Ukraine Emergency Response

Supported by Age International and Disasters Emergency Committee



"MY BIGGEST WORRY IS UNCERTAINTY"

Eleonora, 81, from Bakhmut, recalls with heartbreak how she was forced to leave her native city. "There were no more volunteers, no more police, no more city, just ruins. I was one of the last people to leave," she recalls.

At first, she lived in a rental apartment in Dnipro, but soon had to move to a shelter in Novomoskovsk due to financial challenges.

The war and stress have significantly aggravated her health problems - her eyesight and hearing are rapidly deteriorating, and her blood pressure is often too high. Within the project she received hygiene kits, as well as cash assistance of 6,660 UAH (123 GBP).

"I can't provide for myself with my pension of 4,000 UAH (75 GBP). Our generation has worked hard all their lives, but we had low salaries and now low pensions. A lot of money is spent on medicines. That's why your help was very important."

Eleonora has children, but they have been living abroad for a long time. "My biggest worry now is the complete uncertainty about the future. For now, I live here, but what happens next? My apartment in Bakhmut is gone, it was destroyed. God willing, the war will end soon, but what will happen to us who have nowhere to go? Today, housing is the most important and acute problem for us," she says.



SUPPORT IN DIFFICULT TIMES

The war caught 70-year-old Valentyna in Lysychansk, where she was caring for her husband, who had suffered a stroke. "We had no water, no electricity, no gas. We cooked food on the street and fetched water from a well," says Valentyna. "It was also impossible to buy food. We relied on food brought by volunteers."

The health of Valentyna's husband was deteriorating. Volunteers urgently evacuated the couple to Dnipro, where he underwent a leg amputation that saved his life. Due to stress over displacement and her husband's condition, Valentyna's own health started to decline: "I have very high blood pressure, and I am also a cancer survivor - back in 2012, I had to have a mastectomy. And now I have to take care not only of myself, but also of my husband."

The couple lives in a shelter near Dnipro. Despite support from kind people in the community, they still face a number of acute challenges. "I can't take him to a doctor on my own, we need special transportation, which we can't afford," the Valentyna says. "My pension is only 2,800 UAH (54 GBP), and my husband's is 2,100 UAH (41 GBP). This is not enough even for medicine or food."

As part of the project, Valentyna received a hygiene kit, personal care products, and through the referral system, bedding, food, and specific care products. "This makes our lives a little easier," says Valentyna. The couple is also set to receive cash assistance in the amount of 6,600 UAH (128 GBP).

Multisectoral humanitarian assistance to vulnerable groups of people affected by the Ukraine war, in Ukraine and surrounding countries

Supported by German Federal Foreign Office, Aktion Deutschland Hilft and HelpAge Germany



NAVIGATING THROUGH WAR AND ILLNESS

Alla, 72, and Anatolii, 76, survived five horrific months under occupation in Kherson region. Constant shelling, fear for their lives, deteriorating health became their daily experience. With the help of their children, they managed to evacuate to Warsaw. But two months later, not wanting to burden their children and wanting to be closer to home, Alla and Anatolii decided to return to Ukraine. Since September 2022, the couple has been living in Kryvyi Rih, Dnipropetrovsk region.

Anatolii, who has a disability due to a progressive spinal cord disease, finds it increasingly difficult to move around. Alla suffers from dizziness, high blood pressure, and impaired coordination. In addition to hygiene kits, the family received financial assistance from the project. "Thanks to this, we were able to buy the necessary medicines and pay the rent, which greatly eased our situation," says Alla. "And I even managed to undergo inpatient treatment for my spine and head. It was very timely."

However, Anatolii's illness is progressing, which makes it difficult for him to move around even with crutches.

In addition, to providing psychosocial support, social worker Tetiana helps with the procedures for obtaining disability status for Anatolii.

REVIVING DREAMS AND SPIRITS AT THE COMMUNITY SAFE SPACE

"When I was young, I used to dream of attending drama school and becoming an actress, but it didn't work out. Now, my dream has finally come true – I'm performing on stage! It's an incredible feeling," says 69-year-old Svitlana. She recently acted in a play with other older people at HelpAge Community Safe Space in Kryvyi Rih.

Vibrant traditional costumes, choreography, vocal performances, folk music, and, of course, Ukrainian cuisine, all contributed to uplifting the spirits of the audience and participants alike.

"During the war, it is important to preserve our identity and maintain a healthy psychological state. This play demonstrates that, even under these circumstances, Ukrainian cuisine and culture continue to flourish. For us, this has a profoundly positive impact. It distracts us from our difficult situation, teaches us new things, allows us to share experiences, discuss everything, and fills us with positive energy. This is my second family!" Svitlana adds. "I attend all the activities here – singing, fitness, drawing, knitting. It gives me the energy and strength to carry on."

Mykhailo, 82, from Kharkiv, shares his own experience of the Community Safe Space. "I live with my daughter in a rented flat, and we have many challenges. But when I'm here, I feel as though I've been reborn," he says.



Humanitarian response to deliver lifesaving assistance and early recovery support to older people affected by the conflict in Ukraine

Supported by Canada-Ukraine Foundation and HelpAge Canada



"THIS SUPPORT CHANGED EVERYTHING"

When 75-year-old Nina fled occupation, it took three harrowing attempts and 23 military checkpoints before she, her daughter, and granddaughter finally reached Lviv and rented a small apartment.

Their meagre income barely covered rent and utilities. "The support changed everything," Nina says. "I received essential hygiene products. And with the cash assistance I was able to buy the medications that I really need."

HelpAge's support went beyond basics.

"My 75th birthday was especially memorable. HelpAge staff met me with flowers and a cake with candles on it. It reminded me that I am only 75 years old and have a happy and long life ahead of me. I felt that I was not alone, there were good and kind people around me who cared about others," Nina recalls.

"The war will end, and we will return home. I'm extremely grateful for the warmth, care and support I have received in these difficult times. I am very touched."

PARTNERING UP TO HELP MORE

Russia's military aggression has forced many Ukrainians to leave their homes. The town of Kamianske in the Dnipropetrovs'k region has become a refuge for people who have been forced to move, about 60% of whom are older or with disabilities. Mental and physical trauma, exacerbation of chronic diseases - all of this has a negative impact on their lives. Through small grants received within the project, our partner, "Event Space", purchased wheelchairs, anti-decubitus mattresses, spinal corsets, crutches, and canes for the most vulnerable.

"Event Space" also provides psychosocial support for displaced older people, which is designed to last for four months, with sessions with a psychologist, workshops,

and excursions to help them better adapt to their new communities and reduce stress caused by the war and displacement.

One of these excursions was organised in July, to the DniproAzot rose garden - a famous tourist attraction in Kamianske. Outings like this can be a welcome relief for older people spending most of their time indoors, often in shared spaces.

"I live in a so-called modular settlement. It's great to have this opportunity to take part in this tour, see something new and relax in the nature," says 77-year-old Valentyna, displaced from Luhansk.

In addition, older people can participate in various creative workshops. "I'm learning how to make soft toys. I am just delighted, it is very interesting to make something with my own hands," says 66-year-old Halyna, displaced from Avdiivka.

"I am happy with both the process and the result. I also received a cane, so now it's easier to move around and attend such interesting events!" says 75-year-old Liubov, who also evacuated from Avdiivka.

One of our partners in the Lviv region, a local NGO "Enjoying Ageing" is implementing a project to provide psychosocial support to displaced older people living in nursing homes and shelters.

The organisation conducts art therapy workshops and Nordic walking classes that allow displaced older people to improve their psychological state and strengthen social ties, which contributes to mental well-being and social integration.

"I am from the Luhansk region. I was displaced by a cruel war. I have no home, no farmyard, nothing at all. It's not just me, we're all displaced people here. We are grateful to be here. Some of us came here from a bunker, some have been left blind, others disabled. But here we stick together, like friends. And we're grateful to the people who visit us and spend time with us," says 83-year-old Kateryna.



Supporting older people in Ukraine

Supported by HelpAge USA



"THESE ACTIVITIES SAVED ME FROM DESPAIR"

Nina, 75, is from Luhansk Oblast. Her life has been filled with challenges and struggles since the outbreak of the armed conflict in 2014. In 2022, her son joined the army as the situation in the city became increasingly difficult. Fighting and shelling forced her and her grandson to seek shelter in basements.

"It was very cold. There was no gas or electricity. We took water from a well on the street, and my grandson brought it to the neighbours who could not get it themselves," Nina recalls. But the threat to their lives from shelling and hostilities made them decide to evacuate.

That's how Nina ended up in Lviv, where she has been living in a modular settlement with her daughter and grandson for more than two years. Nina's son is considered missing in action, severely affecting her mental wellbeing.

"If it weren't for the Community Safe Space, I don't know what I would have done. It saved me from despair," says Nina. "I started meeting people like me, socialising, drawing, knitting. It helps to distract from my worries and find a new meaning in life."

Nina would like to return home, but fear of shelling and danger stops her. Sharing a room with her adult daughter and grandson, she admits that the conditions are far from comfortable. "I would like to have at least some privacy," she says, "but unfortunately, housing for displaced people is a difficult problem."

STEPS TOWARDS RECOVERY

As part of the project, four Community Safe Spaces are operating in the Lviv region, western Ukraine, in Lviv, Sambir, Novoyavorivsk, and Drohobych.

In addition to training older people in digital literacy, where they learn the basics of communication and information search in the digital world, special attention is also paid to fitness and Nordic walking classes. Regular training helps participants improve their health, fitness, and overall wellbeing.

Art therapy is an important part of the psychosocial support for the older people. Drawing and other creative activities allow participants to express their emotions, reduce stress and find inner peace.

Cultural trips and excursions are organised for older people who survived the war and ended up in displacement. Visits to theatres, museums, concerts, and historical sites allow them not only to enjoy art but also to get a boost of positive emotions. Cultural events are important for the social integration of displaced people in the host communities. They are able to interact with one another, share experiences and feel part of a vibrant cultural environment.



Home-based palliative care to alleviate the suffering of older people in Ukraine

Supported by Global Giving and HelpAge USA



SUPPORTING THROUGH TRAUMA AND ILLNESS

82-year-old Zoia has faced many trials in her life. She lost both her husband and son – a severe blow to her frail health. The war only intensified these problems, forcing her to endure shelling and evacuation from Kramatorsk.

Zoia has dementia; she has lapses in memory, barely speaks, and often cannot orient herself in space and time.

She also has high blood pressure, requiring constant medication. For over two years, Zoia has been living in a monastery shelter near Lviv with her 86-year-old sister and her daughter Olena, who cares for both women.

“Zoia cannot be left alone for long. She needs a neurologist’s consultation as dementia progresses. But doctors do not come to us, and we cannot get to them. So, our main problem is accessing the medical services we urgently need,” says Olena.

As part of the project, Zoia received a hygiene kit, a blood pressure monitor, and financial assistance.

FOSTERING A SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT

As part of our efforts to support older people with serious illnesses, HelpAge has trained their caregivers and health workers in palliative care. Additionally, in order to provide psychosocial support, HelpAge organised a meeting with Father Ihor Boyko, rector of the Lviv Theological Seminary and a leading bioethics expert in Ukraine. Father Ihor shared the history of palliative care development and provided a spiritual perspective on coping with serious illnesses and death.

Despite the delicacy and sensitivity of the topic, it generated great interest among the audience. There were questions about maintaining faith during difficult life circumstances, about resilience and strength in the face of trials, about accepting serious illness, and about supporting loved ones. This meeting became an important step in understanding palliative care as a comprehensive process that includes both medical and spiritual support.



HelpAge team also held a focus group meeting with the project participants to better understand the challenges and needs of older people receiving palliative care as part of the project.

72-year-old Liubov, displaced from Bakhmut: “The biggest problem for older displaced people is housing. My home is destroyed, all my property is gone. Now we are here, but where to next?” she sighs. Liubov says that faith, the people around her, and humor help her stay strong.

78-year-old Alla and her 87-year-old husband Borys were displaced from Kramatorsk. Alla fights serious illnesses every day. After undergoing cancer surgery, she is undergoing chemotherapy. “I practically live on medication; all my pension is spent on it,” she says. “So the financial assistance I received helped me a lot. I think that the main problem for older people in Ukraine is the access to medicines and medical services, which is often scarce for us.”

NOTE:

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Supporting older people in Ukraine:

