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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



"DESPITE CHALLENGES, LIFE GOES ON!"

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine caught Liudmyla in the city of Sloviansk, where she was caring for her husband with limited mobility. In July 2022, five months after the start of the war, the couple was evacuated.

Once in the west of the country, in Lviv, 63-year-old Liudmyla and her husband settled in a temporary residence of the Centre for Social and Psychological Support. Both of them have disabilities. Their two children and three grandchildren live separately.

Liudmyla's pension is 3,650 UAH (67 GBP) and her allowance of 2,000 UAH (36 GBP) is her only source of income.

"As my husband has mobility issues, there is a constant need for personal care products, medicines and bed linen. He also needs round-the-clock care. All these challenges

have resulted in my losing 11 kilograms in six months! I also constantly feel anxious about my family, who are in different parts of the country," she says.

Participation in the project implemented by HelpAge partners at "Help and Hope" NGO, through a small grant from DEC, made life easier for the family through the provision of personal care products.

"Attending activities, where I gained new knowledge and skills was very important for me. For example, I learnt how to use the Internet through the General Digital Education programme. Such classes give me confidence that despite all the challenges, life goes on," says Liudmyla.



SUPPORTING THE MOST VULNERABLE

On 1 October, International Day of Older Persons, a new Community Safe Space was opened in the city of Dnipro in eastern Ukraine, bringing together around 200 older people affected by the war. Here, they will be able to participate in various activities such as art therapy (drawing, knitting, needlework), sports adapted to older people (fitness and Nordic walking), as well as receive psychological support, hairdressing services, etc.

The main goal of the network of such spaces operating in eastern and western Ukraine is to provide psychosocial support and promote social integration of older people who have experienced displacement and war trauma.

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



LEARNING TO LIVE IN A NEW WAY

Olha, 77, a former Ukrainian language and literature teacher from the Donetsk region, survived the horrors of bomb shelters, death and destruction following the full-scale invasion before she and her husband Valentyn decided to evacuate. "We did not believe that this could really happen, we waited and hoped every day that it would end. We left everything behind - our past, our belongings, our comfort, our friends. We had only our mobile phones and pension certificates with us. This feeling is indescribable: fear inside, and outside, as if you were in a vacuum filled with only the unknown," says Olha.

Fate brought them to Chernivtsi in Western Ukraine. However, the stress of the evacuation took its toll: Olha's husband was diagnosed with cancer. Olha realised that she had to be strong for his sake. "HelpAge helped me a lot in this difficult moment. It provided us with everything we needed: a hygiene kit, adult pads, a blood pressure monitor, walking canes... But the most important thing was the psychosocial support. Having someone to talk to and ask for advice is invaluable," she says.

"Social worker Tetiana comes to us regularly and brings comfort to our lives. We have learnt to joke again, smile, enjoy nature and quiet evenings," says Olha. "We are gradually coming back to life and learning to live in a new way."

LIVING IN THE "HERE AND NOW"

HelpAge Community Safe Spaces in the east and west of the country are a place for older people to attend various classes, improve their physical and mental health. As part of the psychosocial support, they can also attend regular sessions with a psychologist. At one of these sessions in the city of Chervonohrad, older people exercised relaxation techniques and had an engaging "fairy tale therapy session" - first they listened to and analysed fairy tales, then they created their own. At the end of the session, there was a candle-making workshop aimed at relaxation and grounding in the here and now. Mental health and

psychosocial support and protection team of HelpAge in Ukraine also took part in the session.

"It's hard to describe how important these classes are for us. We attend them not just "for show" - it helps us, displaced older people who are far from home and do not know if they will ever return. It helps us appreciate life now, here, in this safe space and in the city that has become our temporary refuge. It gives us the inner strength to live and hope," says 76-year-old Zoya, a displaced person from Kupiansk.

Activities like these contribute to the sense of stability and overall well-being of the displaced older people who visit our centres.



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

"MY ONLY PERSONAL BELONGINGS TODAY ARE MY DOCUMENTS."

Before the full-scale invasion, 69-year-old Halyna lived in a cosy village in the Donetsk region near Bakhmut. Together with her husband, she managed a large farm, grew vegetables, and kept livestock. That was until the war came.

Today, after many displacements, the couple has settled in the Kharkiv region. Having lost everything they had accumulated over the years, Halyna faced depression and despair. The only personal belongings she has left are



her documents. The stress has exacerbated her chronic illnesses. Halyna is also battling cancer, which has left her with a disability.

Thanks to her participation in the project, Halyna received hygiene kits and financial assistance. "This was extremely timely, as we were left without any means of subsistence, without belongings, and without the stability that made our lives secure. Receiving such support was incredibly valuable. Our social worker Olha is a wonderful person with a huge heart. She always supports us and provides the necessary information about the services we need. Or she simply asks, 'How are you? Do you need help?' – and it can be so grounding in these difficult circumstances we find ourselves in," says Halyna.

Halyna's most pressing issue today is the deterioration of her health and the lack of a home of her own. "But more than anything, I dream of returning home," she adds.

"HELPING OTHERS IS NOT A DUTY, IT'S A MISSION"

For three years now, 61-year-old Tamara has been remembering the day she left her native Kupiansk under fire. "I didn't just leave the city – I left my past," she says.

Once in a hostel for displaced people in Kharkiv, Tamara suffered from loneliness the most as her children live abroad. Thanks to the support from a HelpAge partner Volunteer-68 in the Kharkiv region, Tamara has found some solace.

Tamara's caregiver Tetiana, also displaced from Kupiansk and a resident of the same dormitory, has become more than just a caregiver. She helps her with her daily routine, buys food and brings her medicines. But more importantly, she brings her much-needed sense of kinship. "Every



visit from her is like a breath of fresh air. I am no longer alone – there is someone who cares about me," says Tamara.

69-year-old Tetiana knows all too well what it means to lose a home. "The war broke into my life, driving me from my home and bringing sorrow and devastation to our land. All my possessions have been lost, along with any hope for

a peaceful old age. The only thing that remains is a small pension that barely allows me to survive," she says.

Settling in a hostel for displaced people in Kharkiv, in a state of despair and hopelessness, she refused to give up and decided to help others. "Although I'm already 69, I have plenty of strength and energy," she said, becoming a caregiver for others as part of the project's programme.

Now, she cares for 15 people who have health issues. She not only helps with cleaning, brings food or medicine, but also offers them support, kind words, and care.

"Feeling the weight of my own fate, I won't allow myself to fall into despair because I know I must be a support for others. This work is not just a duty: it's my mission."

Supporting older people in Ukraine

Supported by HelpAge USA



"I NEVER THOUGHT I WOULD DANCE AT MY AGE"

64-year-old Nataliia from Ivano-Frankivsk leads an active life – she works to support herself and her family, and recently she enrolled in fitness and dance classes. The ongoing war where both of her sons are serving has taken its toll on her mental and physical health, leading to frequent anxiety attacks and sleep disorders.

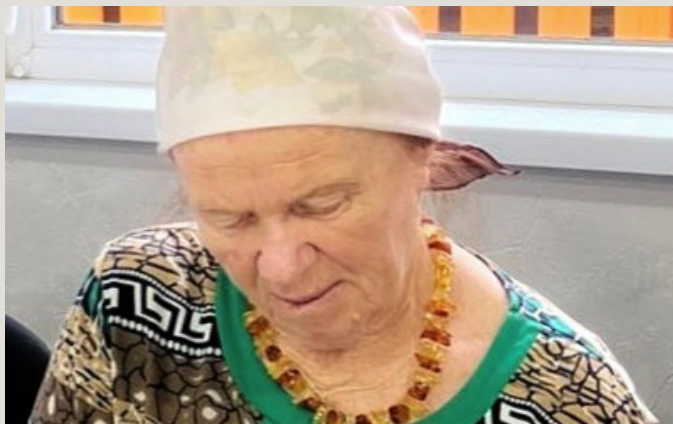
Nataliia says, she has found relief in the activities of a HelpAge partner "Caritas of the Ascension of the Lord" that aims to create space for older people to enjoy sports, culture, and receive information.

"I have always dreamed of engaging in sports, I could never afford these kinds of activities. Here, everything is free," Nataliia says. After trying it once, she has not missed a single session and admits that it has improved her well-being, making her feel more cheerful and energetic. Additionally, Nataliia signed up for a dance group.

"I never thought I would be dancing at my age, but I surprised myself. These classes are an extraordinary relaxation and release!" she says.

Besides physical activities, Nataliia participated in numer-

ous educational events. A lecture by a nutritionist helped her understand the principles of proper nutrition, while consultations with a psychologist provided advice on managing stress and maintaining resilience during the war. Nataliia also acquired new digital skills: through media literacy courses, she learned how to pay utility bills via her smartphone and receive state-issued documents online.



“IT’S INCREASINGLY DIFFICULT TO MANAGE ON MY OWN”

Hanna is 82 years old and comes from the Kherson region. With the onset of the war, she had to leave her home and settle in Prykarpattia. Initially, Hanna rented an apartment, but it was too expensive for her to afford long term. Distant relatives who moved abroad allowed her to stay in their flat, where she now lives alone.

“The most pressing issue for me right now is to survive. At my age, it’s increasingly difficult to manage on my own. Paying utility bills and for medication takes up all my money,” she shares. Her main income is a pension of 4,000 UAH (96 USD) and state support for internally displaced persons of 2,000 UAH (48 USD), which sometimes arrives late.

Hanna suffers from diabetes and a spinal disease that requires her to use a cane. “My vision and hearing have worsened, and I’m experiencing more frequent headaches and tinnitus. I need surgery on my knee and ongoing treatment, but the medication is very expensive – I spend about 3,000 hryvnias on it each month,” she says.

Hanna received assistance in the form of food packages, a medical first-aid kit, and a glucometer. She also happily attends art therapy sessions: “Despite the issues with my right arm, I painted such a beautiful picture! These sessions help me forget about the pain and worries.”

COPING WITH THE HARSH REALITY

66-year-old Olha from Kharkiv was forced to leave her home in March 2022, fleeing the war. Together with her husband and granddaughter, for whom she became a legal guardian, they settled in a collective centre in Drohobych.

Olha’s modest pension of 2,725 UAH (66 USD), along with state allowance for internally displaced persons and a small amount for her granddaughter’s care, is not enough to cover the displaced family’s expenses. Olha faces seri-

ous health issues – her legs are failing, she has been diagnosed with diabetes and several chronic conditions, which require regular medication. However, due to the high cost of some medicines, she often has to go without them. “Not all medicines are available in pharmacies, and I often have to order them online. Some of them are very expensive, and I can’t always afford them, so I don’t get the treatment I need,” Olha shares.



Her participation in the activities at the HelpAge Community Safe Space has been a lifeline for her. “I find incredible peace through creativity – I paint by numbers, create diamond mosaics, and embroider with ribbons. Additionally, thanks to digital literacy courses, I’ve learned how to use a smartphone, and now I can search for and order medicines, as well as find the information I need,” Olha says with joy.

“When we gather at our space – whether it’s painting, or simply having tea and chatting with other displaced persons – it feels like an escape from the harsh reality. We forget about the war, about all the hardships. It gives me immense emotional and mental support,” Olha shares.



CHALLENGING THE AGE STEREOTYPES

Celebrating the International Day of Older Persons on 1 October, the participants of the project proved that they are not only recipients of assistance but also active and important members of society, asserting themselves as individuals ready to challenge age stereotypes.

In Drohobych, they organised and held a festive event for other older displaced persons living in a dormitory, preparing costumes and choreographic numbers independently.

About 80 older people participated in the event, enjoying the wonderful mood, positive emotions, and a sense of their importance in society.

Ludmila, 77, one of the most active participants, is confident that only older people can change stereotypes about age. "Dancing, creating, dreaming – all of this is possible at any age. We are not the ones who need to be taken care of – we can give a lot to society ourselves," she says, setting an example and inspiring others.

In Lviv, an exhibition of paintings by displaced older people participating in the project has opened. The painted artworks and embroidered pieces can be viewed for a month. The works demonstrate that talent, like the desire for creativity and development, knows no age limits.

NOTE:

All photos and stories featured have been obtained with the consent of the individuals involved and are approved for public sharing. Full-quality images can be found [here](#)

Supporting older people in Ukraine:

