

February 24th altered all our lives in an unimaginable ways. As the first Russian missiles hit Ukrainian cities, our team at Charitable Foundation POMAGAEM, realized that very soon we will face waves of IDPs (Internally Displaced Persons) or simply called refugees running from the war, who would need to be helped on their way to safety. We mobilized all our efforts and in 2 days we had opened a shelter for displaced persons which from the beginning of war received and housed over 3500 people, mostly women with children and elderly.



Our shelter is based in the school in a small village, just 20 km outside of Dnipro. All schooling is online since the beginning of war. Over time the capacity to receive people grew from 70 sleeping places to over 300, at times. In addition to housing our shelter provides for people three meals a day, medical care, hygiene items, most needed clothing, means of transportation further west as well as psychological help and support. Our clown therapists have been working there since the very beginning of war and continue to work there regularly till the present day. Some refugees on their way to the west lived in our shelter just for a few days, others stayed with us for months. The operation of our shelter is totally supported by private and corporate donors.

Life at the shelter



Another big challenge was that many Ukrainians living in the war zones had no transportation or financial means to leave those dangerous areas & providing them with the possibility to evacuate became our priority. My first evacuation trip with my 19yo son as a partner, was on the 4th day of the war to Donbas to bring a little family orphanage back to our shelter. It was a 600km round trip thru dangerous areas, where hearing nearby explosions was a new "normal". Since then for the next many months, we would drive daily to front line towns & villages & keep bringing people to our shelter. We got more vans, then thanks to our friends' help we bought an old bus, then another two buses. Team of drivers from our organization would make daily trips to Kharkiv region, Donbas and Zaporizhe region, doing daily 500-700km, or 12000-15000km a month. More than once, our evacuation convoy was aimed at by the enemy with mortars and shells, thankfully we never got directly hit. And most importantly our team was able to evacuate over 8000 persons from the dangers of war.



Some of the places we evacuated people from. Kharkiv & Donbas area

The very first trip to Donbas, a little family orphanage →





Mass evacuation from Lisichansk and Severodoneck



On many occasions evacuations were tense, accompanied by shelling and explosions, I always tried to use humour & my red nose to defuse the stress & tension, nonetheless whenever we got into dangerous area in the reach of mortars & smaller guns we would use body armour & helmet



Elderly and disabled, quite often were transported in the luggage compartments or on the vehicles' floor. We finally got our first ambulance, but it was still not enough.



By the summer time, when Russian the military offensive had slowed down and most of the people who wanted already escaped dangerous areas, our evacuation vans and buses turn into Humanitarian Aid vehicles bringing Aid to frontline towns to people who decided to stay, to thousands of refugees who live in our Dnipro region and also to people living in newly liberated areas, since the brave Ukrainian soldiers pushed back the occupants' army especially in Kharkiv and Kherson regions.





Every month even up to 10.000 people, either those living in the war zones or those who have status of IDP (internally displaced person), receive from our foundation some sort of aid: food, hygiene items, blankets, bedding, heaters, and other very needed household equipment.



Our 2 humanitarian warehouses in Dnipro. We receive shipments from Save the Children, World Central Kitchen, International Rescue Committee, World Food Programme, SOS Children's Villages, & others



Clowns in the war times.

Our hospital clown team since the very beginning of war took a very active part in caring for refugees, especially families with children and elderly. First months we were daily in our shelter where at times over 300 persons lived, then we realized that in Dnipro there are almost 20 other shelters and we started visiting them regularly, doing programs with families and elderly, and since summer we've been sharing our focus between the refugee shelters and children hospitals. Our application of laughter therapy, the moments to relieve the stress & tension, to wholeheartedly laugh, to release pent up emotions plays a very important role in healing war traumas for both children and adults. Clowns provide not only those liberating moments but also a companionship, listening ear, help with caring for elderly. Wherever our team went, hurting and traumatized people were drawn to and clung to that atmosphere & message of happiness & hope clowns emanate.



All the Best to you and your loved ones! God bless you!
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