

REPORT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF A COMPREHENSIVE PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT PROGRAMME FOR CHILDREN "SAFE SPACE" IN THE KINDERGARTEN **KAZKOVI KIDS** (2024)

The project was implemented with the support of Restart Foundation in cooperation with the NGO "Words Help" and the Centre for Mental Health at NaUKMA



Disclaimer

This report was prepared as part of a project to implement a comprehensive psychosocial support programme for children called Safe Space at the **Kazkovi Kids** kindergarten.

The project was implemented with the support of **Restart Foundation** in cooperation with the NGO "Words Help" and the Centre for Mental Health at NaUKMA.

This report highlights the results of the Safe Space programme, which was implemented at **the Kazkovi Kids** kindergarten in Kyiv in July-September **2024**.

The document contains numerous testimonials from participants - parents, educators, kindergarten administrators, and professionals who directly implemented the programme. They share their impressions of how the programme helped children learn to manage emotions, reduce anxiety and overcome aggression, and helped parents and educators to better understand children's needs and support them. The report also highlights the challenges faced by the participants and the team during the project implementation. Particular attention is paid to the unique experience of the interns who learned to work under the programme, gaining new knowledge and tools to help children.

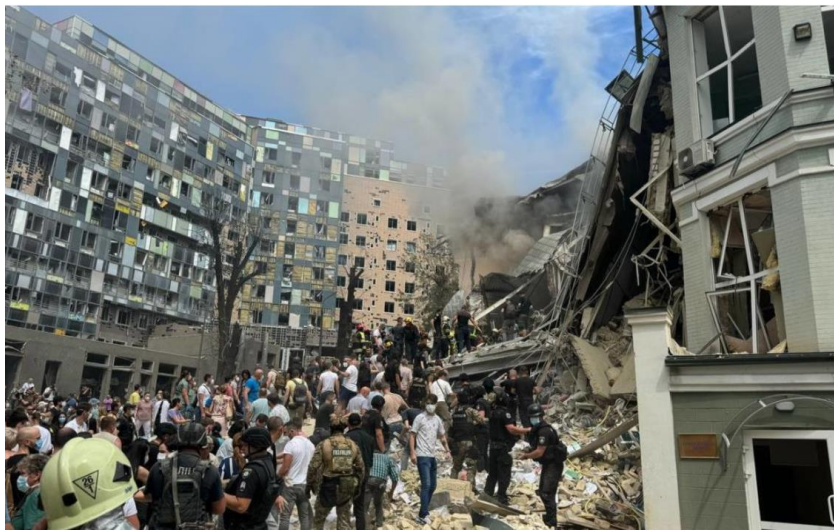
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Contents.

1. Introduction.....	3
2. Information about the programme.....	4
3. Preparatory stage	5
3.1 Observation and work with carers	5
3.2 Working with parents.....	7
4. Implementation of the programme: group work with children	7
4.1 Dynamics of classes	7
4.2 Observations of behavioural changes and diagnostic data	9
5. Interaction with interns.....	9
6. Referral to specialised psychological help	11
7. Impressions of the programme: feedback from participants	11
7.1 Parents' impressions	11
7.2 Impressions of educators	13
7.3 Feedback from the management of the kindergarten	15
7.4 Feedback from interns	16
8. Conclusions and prospects	17

1. Introduction

There are no children in Ukraine who have been spared by the war. Some were forced to flee their homes, some are separated from their parents or have lost them, some will never be able to return to their homes and toys because they were destroyed by a Russian missile, some cannot receive the treatment or rehabilitation they need. And even the requirement to periodically hide in shelters during air raids and passive observation of military events on the news or hearing about them from adults can have a strong impact on children's psyches. Children who are deeply affected by the events of war, for example, say: "Mum, I'm afraid that a drone will hit our house", "Mum, I'm afraid to fall asleep and not wake up", "Mum, I haven't lived at all yet", "I hate Russia because they are firing missiles at us". "Dad, I'm afraid we will be captured and killed"¹. **As of 24 November, 593 children have been killed as a result of Russia's full-scale armed aggression. Another 1707 children were injured. 1933 children are missing**². Children were most affected in the following regions: Donetsk - 598, Kharkiv - 459, Kherson - 187, Dnipro - 190, Kyiv - 133, Zaporizhzhia - 154, Mykolaiv -



Destruction in Okhmatdyt as a result of the attack / Photo: Ihor Klymenko

117. **As of 2024, as a result of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, more than 3,800 educational institutions were damaged, of which about 400 were completely destroyed.** Schools, universities and pre-schools in the frontline regions of Donetsk, Kharkiv, Kherson and Zaporizhzhia suffered the most damage. Significant destruction was also recorded in Kyiv and Chernihiv regions³.

As of today, **1,642 medical facilities have been damaged, of which 214 have been completely destroyed.** These facilities include both general hospitals and children's healthcare facilities. **On 8 July 2024, Russian troops launched a missile attack on Kyiv, which damaged the National Children's Specialised Hospital Okhmatdyt.** At the time of the attack, the hospital had about 600 patients, including children in need of emergency surgery. The attack destroyed the toxicology department, where children with chronic intoxication were treated and dialysis was performed. The intensive care unit, intensive care unit, surgery (10 units), oncology (5 units), operating units, radiology unit, onco-haematology laboratory and other facilities were also severely damaged. Some of the hospital's buildings are in a state of disrepair and are subject to demolition.

Since the start of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, as of November 2024, there have been more than 50,000 airborne alerts across the country. The total number of alerts includes more than 1,300 in the city of Kyiv. But now the alarms are becoming more frequent, with 137 alarms sounded in Kyiv during the project period (July-September) with an average duration of 2 hours and 34 minutes. In November, there were 67 alarms, some lasting 10-12 hours.⁴

¹ Real phrases that children say to their parents.

² <https://childrenofwar.gov.ua/en/>

³ <https://saveschools.in.ua/>

⁴ <https://air-alarms.in.ua/region/kyiv?from=2024-10-23&to=2024-11-23#statistic>

These statistics eloquently illustrate the scale of the war's impact on the civilian population of Ukraine, especially on children who are forced to interrupt their studies, wake up in the middle of the night and hide in shelters.

Despite the constant danger and anxiety, Ukrainian children continue to live with their parents: they learn, play, enjoy themselves and keep the light of life alive. The task of adults is to do everything possible to support children, strengthen their resources and resilience, and minimise the impact of the war on their emotional state and development.

In this context, it is crucial to implement programmes aimed at psychological support, developing emotional resilience and creating a safe environment for children. Initiatives such as Safe Space are essential to help children cope with the challenges of war, and to provide their parents and educators with effective support tools that allow them to maintain faith in the future and restore a sense of security even in the most difficult times.

2. Information about the programme

In July-September 2024, Restart Foundation, in cooperation with the NGO "Words Help" and the Mental Health Centre of NaUKMA, implemented a comprehensive psychosocial support programme for children called "Safe Space" at the Kazkovi Kids kindergarten .

The Safe Space programme was developed in 2015 by the Mental Health Centre of the National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy and aims to increase children's resilience to stressful situations, including in times of war. Its main goals are to create a safe environment for children, reduce the manifestations of psychosocial stress, and support emotional well-being. The programme's objectives include training teachers and psychologists in methods of working with children who have experienced traumatic events, as well as conducting group and individual sessions with children to develop their emotional resilience.

The implementation of the Safe Space programme in Ukrainian kindergartens is extremely important, especially in the context of the war and its impact on children's psychological well-being. A study of the programme's effectiveness in 2023 showed that the percentage of children who reported an improvement in their psycho-emotional state ranged from 37.6% to 68% in primary school and from 45.3% to 60.2% in secondary school. In addition, 64.7% of children reported an increase in resilience. This data indicates the significant positive impact of the programme on the emotional well-being and adaptability of children in difficult life circumstances.

The programme was implemented at the Kazkovi Kids kindergarten from July to September 2024 in the context of regular attacks by Russia, which created additional challenges. In such circumstances, providing psychosocial support to children became critical to preserve their mental health and ensure that they can develop normally even in the most difficult times.

The Safe Space programme was launched during one of the most difficult periods for Kyiv - a time of massive shelling that threatened the city **almost every day**. The day of the first meeting with parents was particularly tragic, when a rocket hit the **Okhmatdyt children's hospital**. The parents who attended the programme's events looked exhausted, apathetic and inhibited, often ignoring their own and their children's psycho-emotional state. These were clear signs of the chronic stress they were under. Therefore, the work with parents had to be organised in stages to provide each family with the necessary support.

The programme also faced additional challenges. Unfavourable weather conditions, including **extreme heat** and significant air pollution, made it difficult to conduct classes, affecting both children and adults. Educators were also in an extremely difficult situation: many of them were in need of psychological assistance due to limited resources for recovery and insufficient training

for working in a war zone. Moreover, many teachers were internally displaced, having fled their homes due to the fighting, which further worsened their emotional state. All of these factors posed significant challenges, but the programme team was committed to supporting each participant, adapting their approaches to the needs of the situation.

The project included the following activities:

1. Meeting with the management of the kindergarten
2. Group supportive meetings with carers
3. Group supportive meetings with parents
4. Group lessons with children
5. Mentor support for interns
6. Supervisory support for interns and project mentor

The project involved 4 specialists:

1. 1 supervisor - **Oksana Zaleska**
2. 1 mentor / psychologist - **Olena Tkachenko**
3. 2 interns - **Anastasia Naumova** and **Natalia Garyachek**

37 project participants received assistance and support during the programme. Quantitative data is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Summary of project beneficiaries

Beneficiaries	Quantity
Children	14
Managers of the kindergarten	2
Educators	5
Parents	14
Interns	2

3. Preparatory stage

3.1 Observation and work with carers

The programme began with observation and work with caregivers to identify the needs of caregivers and their particular difficulties in working with children: difficulties in understanding behaviour, establishing rapport, providing support and containing emotions. For example, teachers were afraid of aggressive behaviour and could not protect other children, did not know how to help a child who was upset, ignored sexualised behaviour of some children, did not understand that a quiet and calm child who does not disturb anyone but does not participate in classes has developmental disabilities and needs special support. It was very difficult for the teachers of this kindergarten to work, as it was difficult for them to understand the emotions and needs of children because they themselves had gone through difficult, traumatic experiences. 90% of the staff were displaced from the occupied territories. Some had lost their homes, some had lost their relatives, and some had loved ones serving in the Armed Forces and on the front line. In Kyiv, most of them did not have their own housing: some rent a room, while others lived with relatives. It was evident that the educators had not yet fully adapted to their new living conditions. Due to these living conditions, it was difficult for the staff to engage emotionally with the children: to play, communicate and understand their



needs. This situation required a sensitive approach to both children and adults to create an environment of support and trust.

That is why we paid considerable attention to supporting the team: working on restoring their resources, taking care of themselves, and developing stress-resistance skills. The first task was to support the adults who directly care for the children, so that they could understand their reactions to stress, cope with it, feel cared for and cared for, and learn new skills to overcome stress and recover. Creating such an experience of care and support. We also worked with carers' requests for interaction with children:

- How to support a crying child
- How to respond to a child's tantrum
- How to deal with aggressive behaviour of children
- How to organise the adaptation process for new children
- How to organise the learning space in groups by zones
- How to provide feedback to parents



Special attention was paid to the organisation of children's stay in the shelter. The main goal of the adults was to create conditions so that the children's childhood would continue even in these difficult circumstances. Boxes with games, creative materials and books were set up for each group. A projector was installed so that children could hear the loud explosions less and be distracted by watching cartoons. We also visually improved the shelter space, making it more cosy and comfortable for the children. Special attention was paid to those children who were afraid, learning how to properly support them in such situations.

These measures are aimed at providing children with a sense of security and preserving their right to happy moments in life even during the war.

3.2 Working with parents

The second stage of the programme is work with parents. The start of the programme coincided with large-scale shelling, including a tragic hit to the Okhmatdyt hospital. Due to these circumstances, it was impossible to gather all parents at the same time, so the meetings were held in stages, in small groups. At the beginning of the programme, parents were emotionally exhausted and had difficulty taking care of themselves. This made it difficult for them to understand that their children's regressive behaviour or whims were a manifestation of an acute reaction to stress, as well as a way of signalling important needs - for safety, unconditional love, and quality interaction through play.

The programme has made a positive difference. By the end of the sessions, most parents had improved significantly, and they began to better understand their children's needs and the importance of quality play. It was especially important to work together with their children. Some parents found it difficult at the beginning, they felt tense, but gradually relaxed and joined in the joint play with their children. At the end of the programme, 6 families were referred to individual psychological support as part of the project.

4. Implementation of the programme: group work with children

4.1 Dynamics of classes

The participants were 13 kindergarten students. Two age groups were formed - younger and older. In total, 11 sessions were held in each group. Each group had certain dynamics. In general, in both groups, there was a high level of anxiety at the beginning of the classes, and even when discussing the rules, children mentioned explosives, that they could not bring bombs or weapons to class. The context of the war was evident in the children's discussions.

Children with adaptation problems attracted a lot of attention in the classroom, but at the same time benefited the most from the lessons. The children of both groups had low emotional competence, poor distinction between



emotions and feelings, and were unable to express them in a socially acceptable way. Therefore, one of the tasks of the work was to deepen the children's knowledge and teach them to express



their emotions and transform them into feelings that can be expressed in words. In the older group, the children showed interest in sexuality, one of the boys showed sexualised behaviour and other children were involved in this, the interns handled the topic sensitively, set boundaries and gradually the situation normalised. One of the challenges was the situation of mastering aggressive behaviour. Several sessions were dedicated to this topic. The children showed impulsivity, aggression towards peers, sometimes towards adults, fights, verbal quarrels. All of this is, at the same time, a

manifestation of reactions to chronic stress, and a child's aggressive behaviour is often a request for help, a manifestation of extreme vulnerability. During the sessions, some children talked about adult aggression towards them, or about their aggression towards their parents, younger brothers and sisters. In working with aggression, firstly, a safe space was created for the expression of frustration and feelings, and secondly, gradually, children were introduced to different ways of managing anger and the ability to express it in words. However, there were also children who lacked aggressive energy or directed it inward, were too quiet, shy, had difficulties with spontaneous behaviour and participation in discussions, and often refused to play and participate in exercises at the beginning. But as the sessions progressed, gradually, thanks to being allowed to safely express aggressive energy in the game, they relaxed, became bolder and even took the initiative in the last meetings. In the sessions on managing anxiety and fear, at the beginning almost all the children showed fearlessness, saying that they were not afraid of anything and had no fears. But gradually, through creative work, the children were able to express their anxieties in a safe environment. They were afraid of sirens, explosions, that their mum would not be there, spiders, etc. One boy made a loudspeaker to sound the alarm and spent the entire exercise doing just that. Gradually, the children's patience increased and they listened to each other's stories with empathy, shared their feelings and the atmosphere in the groups was warm and creative. The children did not want to end the session, they were upset and wanted to continue..



4.2 Observations of behavioural changes and diagnostic data

At the beginning of the project, parents of children who agreed to participate in the programme filled out a child psychological assessment form, which also contained a number of general questions about the child. These questions were used to collect data on the children participating in the programme.

Thus, 14 children aged 4 to 6 years participated in the programme. Among them are 8 boys and 6 girls. Two children are family members of military personnel. There were no children with disabilities among the participants. One child belongs to a family that was in the combat zone, and one child is an internally displaced person. No child was under occupation and no child was directly affected by the hostilities, although all children hear the alarms and explosions in the city.

All parents interviewed said that their children have a supportive and caring environment. However, two parents reported that their children demonstrate serious disobedience or delinquency.

Psychological diagnostics of children was carried out using the [Children's Mental Health Questionnaire](#) and the [Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire](#). The data collected using these questionnaires were not included in the project report, as the number of programme participants who were diagnosed is not sufficient to assess the effectiveness of the programme. However, in combination with the data collected within the framework of Safe Space projects implemented on the basis of other preschool and/or school education institutions, the available diagnostic results in depersonalised form can be further used for research purposes (for example, to assess the impact of the programme on the psychological state of children, identify its strengths and weaknesses, etc.).

The kindergarten teachers also underwent psychological diagnostics. For this purpose, they were asked to answer the questions of the [Professional Burnout Scale](#), the [Educator-Child Interaction Scale](#), and the [Educator Emotions Scale](#). As in the case of the children's diagnostics, the results of these surveys were not included in the report because it was impossible to draw correct conclusions from the data. In total, 8 educators underwent the initial diagnosis, and only three underwent the repeated diagnosis. Therefore, the data obtained does not allow us to provide an objective assessment of the impact of the programme on educators. As in the case of the psychological assessment of children, the data from the caregivers' assessment will be stored in a depersonalised form and can be used for research purposes in the future.

Thus, the small number of participants imposes limitations on the analysis of the programme's effectiveness using quantitative (statistical) methods. Instead, in this case, an extremely valuable source of information about the programme was the feedback provided by those who were involved in one way or another. For example, parents of children who participated in group classes, teachers and management of the kindergarten, as well as interns who worked with children provided feedback on the programme. The survey was conducted by filling out electronic forms and providing public feedback. The feedback received was analysed and summarised below.

5. Interaction with interns

Trainees work alongside an experienced Safe Space trainer in the project, who can be master students doing an internship or psychologists who want to gain new knowledge and tools to help children. Interns work under the mentorship and support of a supervisor. The supervisor provides supervisory support to an experienced trainer and trainees during the programme. This project involved 2 trainees who already work in educational institutions and joined the project to receive a new tool to implement it in their workplace. In this way, we are implementing the goal of

disseminating the Safe Space methodology in educational institutions and working to improve the skills of psychologists in the field of mental health. The trainees worked with a mentor and received weekly supervision. The supervision covered various topics, including:

- Establishing contact
- Creating group rules
- Behavioural difficulties in some children
- Ability to withstand the noise and energy of children without pressure and authoritarianism
- Understanding behaviour and the needs behind it
- Ability to hear children
- Peculiarities of parental support
- Correctly addressing sexualised behaviour in children
- Additional games and exercises
- Adaptation of sessions to the needs of the group and the context of the situation

Each trainee is assigned to a group where he or she is responsible for the process and delivery of the classes. The trainees had different learning rates and needed different levels of support. One trainee found it difficult to adapt to the pace of the group, she had not worked with such young children, it was difficult to adapt to free play, she needed more support and guidance, and more involvement from the mentor. During the supervision sessions, the trainee worked with her feelings and awareness of her role and improved her skills, which in the end gave a good result. In her essay, she writes: *"At first it was difficult, I was afraid to deviate from the class notes even one step. Then I realised that it was not necessary to conduct the lessons exactly according to the plan, but to adapt to children's behaviour, emotions of boys and girls, and to use a wider range of exercises. The children loved it."* The psychologist was so enthusiastic about the programme that after completing the programme, she continued her studies in the Safe Space for Schools programme and is now implementing the programme with schoolchildren. At the end of her essay, she writes: *"The programme has helped me to want to use the tasks and techniques it provides in my work with children. It is with great pleasure that I want to continue working with children in primary school. So I am going to study and work further. If the children like it, I would like to work not for seven lessons, but for a whole year under the Programme. I would like to express my gratitude to the initiators and creators of the Programme."*

The other intern adapted to the group more quickly and seemed to pick up the programme naturally and easily and led the children in a creative, stress-free way. Here is what she wrote about her experience in her essay: *"Just before the programme started, I was both excited and anxious to get started. I was worried about how to organise everything, but the transfer of the leading role went very smoothly. The presence of a mentor who monitored the process, supported, helped and guided me, as well as weekly supervisions where we discussed the classes and certain difficulties we faced - all this gave me peace of mind and confidence in the quality of the result. The classes were very informative and useful for me. It was an extraordinary experience that helped me to deepen and broaden my knowledge and gain new skills. The format of the classes was very interesting, it was hard to notice how the time passed, as all the participants were so immersed in their work. The balance between discussing the topic and physical exercises helped the children to switch in time and not to get tired, the interesting presentation of information through a fairy-tale character inspired empathy and trust, and the rituals helped the children to feel stable."*

A total of 8 supervisory meetings were held with the trainees and the mentor, following which the supervisor provided recommendations, additional literature and methodological materials.

6. Referral to specialised psychological help

Another area of the project's work is a system of referrals for specialised help for children and adults who need more support than group work. These are usually children with symptoms of PTSD, various behavioural disorders, high levels of anxiety, or adults (caregivers) with high burnout scores and chronic stress. Referrals are made to the mental health centres of NaUKMA on the recommendation of the programme's senior trainer, and the child or adult receives 12 free individual consultations with a professional psychologist or psychotherapist. This project referred 6 people, of whom 4 took advantage of this opportunity and received additional help.

7. Impressions of the programme: feedback from participants

7.1 Parents' impressions

At the end of the programme, parents were asked to complete a survey about their impressions of the programme. This survey was completed by 9 people.

In general, parents are satisfied with the Safe Space programme and positively assess its impact on their children. Most are ready to participate in a similar programme in the future, although some say that noticeable changes take more time.

The main points from parents' feedback:

1. **Overall satisfaction with the programme:** The majority of parents express positive impressions of the programme, noting its usefulness for children and parents themselves.
 - *"Interesting, useful for the child and parents."*
 - *"A very in-depth approach. Interested in everyone."*
 - *"I really liked the classes that were held. Especially the game version of providing information, working with the imaginary and the work of psychologists! "*
 - *"I like that the children like it"*
 - *"Interesting and varied classes, delicate communication with children"*
 - *"A lot of good recommendations. I really enjoyed the joint lesson with the children."*
2. **Willingness to re-engage:** The majority of parents are willing to re-engage in the programme and recommend it to others as they consider it important.
 - *"Yes. Because it is useful, it helps to understand the child better."*
 - *"Yes. It is important for the child and for the parents."*
 - *"Yes, to continue to have a positive influence on the child."*
3. **Positive impact on the child:** Some parents have noticed improvements in their children's emotional state and behaviour after participating in the programme.
 - *"He became more energetic."*
 - *"I'm a little calmer now."*
 - *"He started to hear better when you say something to him"*
 - *"Positively, she started talking more about her mood and what she likes or doesn't like"*

- *"The child feels more confident in conflict situations. When someone takes away a toy, breaks a house, etc., he says without fear that it is wrong to do so. He used to be embarrassed, complain to me and start crying."*
4. **Small doubts or imperceptible changes:** Some parents have not yet noticed any significant changes in their child's behaviour or feel that it is too early to draw conclusions.
- *"I can't answer now, because I don't know how these classes affected me."*
 - *"I didn't notice much of an impact, as we missed some of the classes."*
 - *"It's hard to say."*

Public response from Oksana Makovets, Nazar's mother:

When the war began in 2022, and the child was three years old at the time, he did not have such a strong understanding of the concept of war at that time. But now, if we talk about the last year, between his fourth and fifth years, the child is becoming aware of what is happening around him. Unfortunately, he understands what anxiety is. This is the sound that is heard around him when the alarm goes off on the street, when there is a loud sound during the day and at night, he gets scared, and today he just starts crying. The child realises that this is some kind of threat, so he talks about it: "These are flying aeroplanes. Bad people are firing missiles at us." That is, the child is



already aware of a certain danger. At the beginning of the war, we left the city for 2 months, and as soon as our kindergarten resumed its work, we returned. But no matter what, the most important thing is that we are constantly together, support each other, live our lives and keep going. At the kindergarten, we were offered participation in the Safe Space comprehensive resilience development programme. The programme's psychologist Olena explained to us parents the behaviour of children, their emotional reactions, and I began to understand my child and his anxiety better. After the programme, we began to communicate more with our son, hear him better and help him cope with his emotions, especially when he is scared or angry. After completing the programme, Olena gave us useful advice on how to support our child in the future and told us that as part of the programme, she advised us to take advantage of the referral to a child psychologist at the NaUKMA centre to work on anxiety further. "This is our first experience of seeing a child psychologist individually. And it was very positive. Ms Iryna worked with us, and she deepened and expanded the advice and changes that were in the first part of the programme. I got a lot of support as a mother, I learnt what I was doing wrong, a lot of changes happened to me. And the child always ran to Ms Iryna, she created an atmosphere of

trust and used sand therapy in a very interesting way, my son built his own worlds, and it was clear that the situation was changing. And most importantly, we got positive results, the child's condition

improved significantly. And it is very important that the work of a psychologist has results. I am sincerely grateful to the entire programme, to Ms Olena and Ms Irina for their support.

7.2 Impressions of educators

At the end of the programme, three educators answered a questionnaire in which they shared their impressions. They said that they had actively discussed the programme with others, applied the skills they had learnt during the programme and that they would recommend it to other educators. They also said that they would continue to use the skills they had learnt in the programme.

In addition, according to the feedback of educators:

Participation in the programme reduced the number of conflicts with children:

- *"The number of conflicts has decreased"*
- *"We started to hear each other."*

children received emotional support and development:

- *"Children receive emotional support and life skills."*
- *"Emotional development. Support."*
- *"We started to be more observant and learned to cope with emotions."*

the teachers would like the children to take part in the programme again:

- *"Yes. Because it's a great programme with great people."*
- *"Of course."*

The educators also noted the high quality of the organisation and its value: *"it was very valuable for me that our meetings were organised very comfortably for all participants, no one argued and everything was calm and respectful".*

Public feedback from Alina Lazurenko, a kindergarten teacher at Kazkovi Kids:



I would like to express my gratitude to the psychologists for their excellent work with the children within the Safe Space project. Thanks to the professional approach and care of the psychologist, the children have significantly improved their emotional management skills, learned to better understand their own feelings and interact with other children.

After the course of lessons, I noticed how the children's confidence grew, they became more open to new acquaintances and ready to cooperate in a team. It is especially important to note that the classes were held in a friendly and supportive atmosphere, where each child felt important and heard.

Participation in the project was very useful and informative for me. This experience helped me to better understand the importance of managing emotions, identifying them correctly and responding to children's emotional signals. I realised how much emotional

intelligence affects my ability to resolve conflicts, improve communication and build relationships between children.

Overall, this project was an important step in my personal development and provided me with the tools to communicate more effectively and improve my quality of life.

After the children participated in the project, I noticed significant positive changes in their parents. The programme not only affected the children themselves, but also changed their parents' approach to parenting and family interaction. Parents became more aware of their children's emotional needs and learned to better understand what was going on in their feelings and thoughts.

Public feedback from Oleksandra Kochetova, a methodologist at the Kazkovi Kids kindergarten:

As a methodologist of the kindergarten, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the Safe Space programme and all the people who implemented it. This programme has helped our staff and children tremendously.



In this difficult time for our country, the programme has become a real support, helping us to feel our emotions and teaching us to take care of ourselves. It also allowed us to better understand the state and feelings of children.

Special thanks for supporting children whose parents are in the military, and for explaining to the kindergarten staff how to interact with children when they experience certain emotions due to their experiences.

We are grateful for the organisation of meetings with parents and for the sincere and friendly atmosphere of interaction. Psychologist Olena was able to answer all the questions that worried the parents and build sincere communication between the parents.

After implementing the programme, the teachers gained valuable experience that significantly improved the atmosphere in the groups. The children have become calmer and know that they can turn to adults with any questions. They pay more attention to the emotions of other children, understand their own emotions better and learn to control, name and distinguish them.

The programme carries a very important mission for everyone and, in my opinion, should be held in every kindergarten in Ukraine. When the country is at war and adults and children are under constant stress, such programmes with excellent psychologists heal the souls of both adults and children and help them find the right path for further development.

For our kindergarten, Safe Space will become a solid foundation for further work with children.

Such positive feedback confirms the positive impression of educators about the Safe Space programme and its benefits for children.

7.3 Feedback from the management of the kindergarten

The management of the kindergarten was also asked to share their impressions of the Safe Space programme.

Public feedback from Galina Andriukhina, head of the Kazkovi Kids kindergarten:



The outbreak of war was unexpected for the kindergarten, we, like many other kindergartens, were forced to close and started to resume our activities in September 22. Excitement, weakness, helplessness, fear in our eyes - the consequences of endless shelling, prolonged anxiety, emotional stress accompanied us, and we had no experience of working in such conditions. The Safe Space project appeared in our kindergarten when unresolved issues began to accumulate and negatively affect our activities. These were: frequent manifestations of undesirable behaviour in children, lack of understanding of their manifestations by educators, difficulty in controlling children and, as a result, excessive fatigue of educators and staff turnover. Lack of necessary knowledge and skills to create a comfortable and safe environment for children. I am sincerely grateful that this project helped me personally understand the source of the problems with staff turnover, gave me the necessary knowledge and skills to adapt, manage unwanted behaviour and child aggression I am sincerely grateful for the advice on creating conditions for the comprehensive development of children, for

the help and training of educators in the development of emotional intelligence in children. Cooperation in creating trusting relationships with parents. I am sincerely grateful that it was Safe Space that brought the quality of our kindergarten to a higher level!!!

In general, the management was positive about the impact of the programme on both children and staff, and indicated that the programme was appropriate and relevant:

- *"Nowadays, there is a great need for psychological support for children, parents and educators. As for the sessions with children, they love working with a psychologist and look forward to them. Important qualities are worked out in a playful way: patience, respect, the ability to listen and heed. Teachers get practical experience, advice and recommendations."*
- *"Of course. This project is only beneficial"*
- *"Every lesson was desirable for the children, afterwards they would say: no, I don't like it, I'm tired, etc., less aggression"*
- *"I think it's useful for both children and adults, because it's interesting and developmental."*
- *"The classes helped the children to get to know themselves, and the teachers to get to know the children even better. Yes, I would agree. It was fun, interesting and informative."*

The management also pointed out that the programme helped participants learn new skills that they could apply to their work.

The management does not see the need for significant changes to the programme, but believes that it is worthwhile to involve parents more and raise awareness through information campaigns:

- *"Meetings with parents. In my experience, this will be useful for parents."*
- *"We could use more open information and advertising."*

The management notes many positive changes in the emotional state of the children:

- *"I can see more attentiveness in the classroom, a significant reduction in aggression and fights. I am happy when children calmly respond to negative moments with the word "stop" and ask an adult for help. Children are more friendly"*
- *"Children have become more balanced and have learnt to control their emotions"*
- *"The children who participated in the Safe Space classes usually showed a positive attitude as the programme provided them with a sense of security and comfort. They felt calmer knowing that their parents and carers were paying attention to their well-being in the environment. Children became more willing to socialise and play with their peers. In general, children became more energetic and active during classes. The Safe Space classes helped to increase children's participation in various activities. They became more interested in physical games, group activities and creative projects, which reflects an overall improvement in their emotional stability."*
- *"I have more confidence, understanding of my own boundaries, etc., which made the space emotionally non-aggressive and conducive to friendly play."*
- *"I think the children have become calmer, more attentive and listen to adults more."*
- *"The impact on the children was positive. More teamwork, games and a positive mood throughout the day."*

7.4 Feedback from interns

Two trainees were directly involved in group lessons with children. After completing the programme, they provided feedback, sharing their impressions of the work.

The interns are mostly positive about their impressions of group work. They note that the children were open and interested, and that working with them was a pleasure:

- *"I really enjoyed working with the group. From the first lesson, I could see how the children opened up and how comfortable they were. "*
- *"There was an impression and a desire to continue the programme. Each child had their own dynamics. Some children became more aware of their emotions and feelings, others learned to manage their reactions, opened up, and gradually understood that all emotions are important and necessary for us. We learned to build our own boundaries and talk about our needs. "*

Some trainees noted that it was difficult to build relationships with parents, as they rarely interacted with them:

- *"It was difficult to build relationships with parents because I couldn't get everyone together. Only at the end of the programme, when we managed to gather most of the parents for a meeting of children and parents, did I feel a positive contact. At the end of the programme, 11 parents came for individual feedback. "*
- *"It was difficult for the administration to gather parents. We held meetings both online and in person. But not all parents came to the meeting. Different parents came at different stages, so it was difficult to build relationships with parents. "*

Both trainees noted that they felt nervous before starting work, which is natural when facing new challenges, especially in the field of working with children *"I felt nervous before starting work, but it quickly passed when we started interacting with the children. The teachers were helpful and positive. The administration did everything to make the work comfortable. The children were interested and eager to participate in all the activities."*

The interns describe the friendly attitude of the administration, educators and children, which helped them to quickly adapt to their work: *"The kindergarten welcomed us with a warm welcome, and my worries were quickly overcome thanks to the support of the teachers and administration."*

The interns emphasise that working in groups contributed to their professional growth by providing an opportunity to deepen their skills and knowledge: *"It was a very useful experience for me, it was the practical skills that I improved the most."*

Some trainees noted the need to improve their theoretical knowledge and methodological approaches to working with children: *"In certain issues, I lacked knowledge and psychological experience of working with children."*

Thus, interns report a generally positive experience of participating in the Safe Space programme, especially in their interaction with children. However, interaction with parents and certain organisational aspects need to be improved.

8. Conclusions and prospects

The general conclusion about the results of the Safe Space project implemented at the Kazkovi Kids kindergarten is as follows:

1. **Programme participants:** The programme covered 14 children aged 4 to 6 years, including boys and girls. The participants also included educators, kindergarten management and parents of the children. Among the children were representatives of military families and internally displaced persons.

2. **Parents' impressions:** Overall, parents were satisfied with the programme, noting its benefits for their children and their willingness to participate in similar activities in the future. Some parents noted positive changes in their children's behaviour, while others did not notice any significant changes or felt that more time was needed to assess the results.

3. **Management assessment:** The management of the kindergarten positively assessed the programme, noting improvements in children's emotional state, reduced aggression and improved communication skills. The management also supports further implementation of such programmes.

4. **Interns' impressions:** The interns who participated in the Safe Space programme were generally positive about their experience. They noted that the children were open and interested, which contributed to successful interaction and a comfortable atmosphere. Some of the interns said that it was a useful experience for them, which allowed them to deepen their professional skills. However, they felt some anxiety at the beginning of the placement, which quickly passed thanks to the support of the tutors and administration.

Thus, the Safe Space programme made a generally positive impression on all those involved: parents, caregivers, management, and interns who worked directly with children in the groups. Due to the small number of participants, it is not possible to draw conclusions about the impact of the

project on the psychological state of children and caregivers based on psychological diagnostics⁵. However, positive changes in behaviour and emotional state are reported by both the children's parents and the kindergarten management and teachers. This indicates the feasibility and effectiveness of this programme and the need for its further implementation in preschool educational institutions.

In particular, we can rely on the experience of implementing the programme for 10 years and studies conducted in different years, which show a significant improvement in the condition of children after the programme. Due to the fact that the programme is based on the cascade support (care) model⁶, it is characterised by stability and systematic changes. The aim of the programme is to gradually create safe conditions for communication and development of relationships with children in order to minimise the impact of stress now and build relationships based on secure attachment in the future. In the programme, we provide professional support to all participants in the process. We start with adults and then provide support to children.

- care for the educators and administration of the kindergarten, their training, supervision and ongoing support of their ability to create a supportive space for children
- care for parents - training, support and involvement in reflection on their own and their children's condition
- caring for children through a special programme, games, reflections and discussions.
- care for psychologists - training, mentoring, supervision, so that each kindergarten has a professional psychologist and can continue to support the work.

All project specialists receive supervisory support, which improves the quality of services and prevents burnout. We also support specialists who continue to work in the kindergarten after the project is completed with regular supervision.

Thus, the project is really useful and important for supporting the mental health of Ukrainians in difficult times of war. We sincerely thank you for your support.

⁵ The small number of participants was a limitation for quantitative analysis. To determine the minimum number of participants required, we usually rely on statistical guidelines that depend on several factors:

Type of analysis. For baseline comparisons between groups (e.g. pre- and post-intervention, as in this case), it is generally considered that at least 30 participants in each group are required to obtain reliable results.

Expected effect size: If the expected impact of the intervention is subtle, a larger sample size is needed to detect statistically significant changes.

Variability in the data: The more diverse the sample in terms of responses, the larger the sample size required to ensure representativeness.

At the same time, the programme has been studied on large samples of children aged 8-18 (up to 20,000 children) and is a programme with proven effectiveness. Studies of children of this age group have limitations due to their age, so it is more appropriate to rely on observations and questionnaires of parents and caregivers about the mental and physical state of children and adults.

⁶ Effectiveness Testing of a Multi-Layered Model of Psychosocial Support Within School in Conflict-affected Eastern Ukraine / Bogdanov Sergiy, Basenko Oksana, Zaleska Oksana // NORRAG Special issue. - 2019. - № 02. - P. 52-55.