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# **REPORT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF A COMPREHENSIVE PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT PROGRAMME FOR CHILDREN "SAFE SPACE" ON THE BASIS OF THE KINDERGARTEN LA\_MALYUK (2024-2025)**

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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

Kyiv 2025



# DISCLAIMER

This report was prepared as part of the Safe Space psychosocial support programme for preschool children, which was implemented at the LA\_MALYUK kindergarten.

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

The report presents the key results of the LA\_MALYUK kindergarten programme, which took place in Kyiv from November 2024 to February 2025. The document covers the experience of all parties involved in the programme: parents, educators, institutional administration and specialists who directly implemented the classes. They describe how participation in the programme has affected children: it has helped them better understand and express emotions, reduced anxiety, and taught them to cope with aggression. At the same time, adults – both parents and teachers – gained important experience of emotional interaction and support.

A special emphasis was placed on the professional development of the trainees who participated in the programme: they had the opportunity to undergo practical training and acquire new tools for working with children under stress and trauma.

The report was prepared by the project team: Oksana Zaleska (supervisor), Olena Tkachenko (mentor), Alla Yansons (CEO of Restart Foundation), Hanna Bychko (monitoring and evaluation specialist).



# CONTENTS

<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Information about the programme .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Preparatory stage .....</b>	<b>6</b>
Observation and work with carers .....	6
Working with parents .....	7
<b>Implementation of the programme: group work with children .....</b>	<b>8</b>
Dynamics of classes .....	8
Observations of behavioural changes and diagnostic data .....	9
<b>Interaction with interns .....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Referral to specialised psychological help .....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Impressions of the programme: feedback from participants .....</b>	<b>14</b>
Parents' impressions .....	14
Impressions of educators .....	15
Feedback from the management of the kindergarten .....	16
Feedback from interns .....	17
<b>Conclusions and prospects .....</b>	<b>18</b>





# INTRODUCTION

Over the three years of full-scale war in Ukraine, childhood for millions of Ukrainian children has become an experience of loss, anxiety, and destruction. **One in five children in Ukraine reported losing a close relative or friend.** On average, at least 16 children are killed or injured in the fighting every week. The total number of confirmed child casualties since February 2022 exceeds 2,520, a figure that UNICEF says is only the "tip of the iceberg".

The third year of the war was **even more deadly** for children **than the previous one**: the number of deaths and injuries increased by **50%**. At the same time, more than 3,500 educational institutions in the country have been damaged, of which about 400 have been completely destroyed. The World Bank estimates that more than \$14 billion is needed to rebuild the educational infrastructure.

But war does not just hit buildings – it destroys basic feelings of security, stability and trust in the world. Children spend hours in shelters, isolated from friends and familiar social contacts. Parents and caregivers feel exhausted, powerless, and disempowered, which affects their ability to support their children.

## Destroyed kindergarten in Holosiivskyi district

Meanwhile, children – even those who do not yet know how to speak well – already know how to be afraid: of air raids, darkness, separation, loud sounds and... the silence in which everything stops after a shelling.

That is why there is an urgent need to create safe psychological spaces – both in the physical and emotional sense. Where a child can be just a child: play, talk, cry, laugh, relax. And at the same time, receive the support that is so lacking.

The Safe Space programme, implemented in 2024–2025 at the La\_Malyuk kindergarten in Kyiv, was aimed at doing just that: helping children restore emotional balance, learn to better understand their feelings, reduce anxiety, and strengthen their psycho-emotional resources. At the same time, the programme also covered adults, including teachers and parents, who received tools for emotional interaction, self-care and effective support for their children in times of uncertainty.

This report summarises the results of the implementation of the Safe Space programme in the La\_Malyuk kindergarten. It contains psychologists' observations, participants' impressions, survey results and the experience of young professionals.

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<sup>1</sup> One in five children in Ukraine has lost a relative or friend since the start of the full-scale war three years ago  
UNICEF recalls the devastating impact of war on all children in Ukraine. <https://www.unicef.org/ukraine/press-release/3-year-mark-of-war>

<sup>2</sup> 400 educational institutions destroyed in Ukraine as a result of war – MES

# INFORMATION ABOUT THE PROGRAMME

The Safe Space programme, developed by the Centre for Mental Health at the National University of Kyiv–Mohyla Academy, is a comprehensive psychosocial initiative aimed at increasing children's stress resistance, supporting their emotional health and developing self-regulation skills in times of war. Between **November 2024 and February 2025**, the programme was implemented at the La\_Malyuk kindergarten in Kyiv in partnership with Restart Foundation and the NGO "Words Help".

The period of the programme's implementation fell during particularly tense months in the capital. Massive shelling, arrivals and the constant threat of ballistic missiles, hours-long air raids day and night – all this became the backdrop for the work with children, educators and parents. Some sessions were held after nights without sleep, during sirens, or even in shelters. Children became sleepy, excited, emotionally exhausted. Many of them talked about quarrels in the family, fears of losing their parents, and experiences related to the war. Some children did not immediately engage in the lessons, while others were hyperactive or depressed.

Parents were also emotionally exhausted, many of them in a state of chronic stress. Their reactions ranged from indifference to anxious overprotection. As part of the programme, group meetings were held with them, where specialists helped parents recognise signs of childhood stress, respond to challenging behaviour, develop resource rituals at home and re-establish contact with their child. An important part of the work was family meetings, where parents and children created "stones of pleasant memories" together, drew, played, learned more about each other, and built a space of mutual care even in the midst of war.

Special attention was needed for teachers, who were sensitive and overworked, often in a state of resource depletion themselves. They were taught how to identify signs of stress in children, take care of themselves and establish a partnership with parents. Practical trainings, discussions and individual feedback were held to help teachers better understand themselves and children in stressful situations.

A team of four specialists was involved in the implementation of the programme:

- Supervisor – Oksana Zaleska;
- Mentor – Olena Tkachenko;
- Three interns – Olena Mohyr, Natalia Tunyk, and Yevhenia Zavorotynska

The interns conducted weekly sessions with the children on basic emotions (joy, fear, anger), resources, support and difficult experiences. All sessions were flexible and adaptive: for example, if children came in depressed, the topic of the session could be changed to meet the current emotional needs of the group.

It is also important to note the professional development of the trainees: reflection, mentoring meetings and supervisory support became not only a way for them to get new tools, but also a space for personal growth. In their essays, they wrote about how they learned to accept anger, restore calm, build safe contact, and feel boundaries together with children.

The programme covered **86 participants** in total:

- 33 children,
- 16 educators,
- 33 representatives of parents,
- 1 kindergarten manager,
- 3 interns.

Each of the categories of participants received support according to their needs – through direct contact, group sessions or individual consultations. All the activities were built around the main idea: even in the most difficult times, a child has the right to care, play, emotions – and the feeling that he or she is loved and cared for.

# PREPARATORY STAGE

## WORKING WITH CARERS

The Safe Space programme traditionally begins with a study of the needs and condition of those adults who interact with children on a daily basis – the teaching staff. As part of the programme's implementation in the La\_Malyuk kindergarten, considerable attention was paid to the emotional state of the educators, their needs and resources, as they are the ones who determine the quality of daily interaction with children.

The period of the programme (November–February) was difficult for all participants in the educational process. Frequent shelling, nightly alarms, the threat of ballistic missiles and general fatigue from living in war affected the teachers as well. They came to work emotionally exhausted, anxious, with reduced internal resources, often with a high level of responsibility to children and colleagues.

The programme participants noted that it was difficult to focus on the needs of children when their own strength was not restored. This created situations where adults could not fully recognise the signals of a child in need of support, or felt powerless to deal with emotional, aggressive or withdrawn behaviour.

That is why the first step was to conduct a training on stress and self-regulation, during which participants received basic knowledge about the signs of stress in themselves and children, learned about the so-called "red flags" in behaviour, and discussed available practices of self-care in the context of war. Additionally, online courses, films and literature were recommended for self-study.

Over the following weeks, thematic lunch meetings were held on the following topics:

- Adaptation of a child to kindergarten (how to support newly arrived children, work with parents during the adaptation period);
- Contact with parents (how to build trust, give feedback, talk about difficult issues);
- Resourcefulness of the educator (where to find strength in the face of prolonged stress, how to restore oneself during short pauses).

The final stage of the work was an individual meeting with each educator, during which the psychologist discussed the dynamics in the group, provided feedback and recommendations for further work with the children.



## WORKING WITH PARENTS

Another important component of the Safe Space programme was work with parents of children attending the La\_Malyuk kindergarten. The meetings were aimed at supporting adults in the difficult conditions of wartime, as well as improving their understanding of their children's emotional needs.

A total of 7 group meetings with parents were held during the programme. They were psycho-educational, practical and supportive. The formats included conversation, reflection exercises, drawing, and joint play.

Particular attention was paid to the following topics:

- how to recognise stress in a child;
- what is behind the difficult or unusual behaviour;
- how to reconnect with your child through play;
- how to create a space of safety in the family even in a crisis.

An important part was the joint meetings of children with their parents (4 meetings in each group), during which families participated in exercises to build body contact and trust. These activities helped to activate the parents' playful potential and to see interaction with the child not as an additional duty, but as an opportunity for recovery for both.

Some parents were reserved at the beginning of the meetings, unable to engage in the process, feeling ashamed or tired. They tried to be perfect, to say only the "right" things, and avoided discussing problems and vulnerable topics. But gradually, in a safe atmosphere, they were able to relax, feel in touch with their child, allow themselves to play and share their experiences. As a result of the programme, several families were offered individual counselling or referrals for further support, which was a logical continuation of the group work.

During the classes, parents received practical materials to use at home: signs of children's age-related reactions to stress, recommendations for reading and games, and short daily rituals that help children feel stable.



# PROGRAMME IMPLEMENTATION: GROUP WORK WITH CHILDREN

## DYNAMICS OF CLASSES

As part of the Safe Space programme, four children's groups were formed, with a total of 33 children aged 5-6 attending the La\_Malyuk kindergarten. Classes were held weekly for 12 weeks in the format of a therapeutic group, which included playful activities, creative exercises, movements, work with emotions through metaphors and discussions. The work was carried out by three interns – Olena Mohyr, Oksana Tunyk and Yevheniia Zavorotynska – under the guidance of mentor Olena Tkachenko and supervision of Oksana Zaleska.

Each group had its own unique dynamics. At the start of the sessions, all groups experienced an increased level of anxiety, fatigue, and sometimes tension related to the general context of life during the war. In some groups, the children recalled scary dreams, rockets, darkness, and the sound of explosions. It often happened that children could not concentrate immediately, were hyperactive or, on the contrary, were very withdrawn. Air raids and shelling repeatedly interrupted classes, and sometimes occurred right during group work. In such cases, part of the class was held in shelters.

At the first meetings, children actively sought contact, explored the boundaries of what was permissible, and did not always understand the meaning of rules and rituals. They often showed resistance, impulsivity, and a need for control or attention. Some children were in conflict, fought, devalued others or could not find their place in the group.

In the second phase of the programme, after the rhythm of the sessions had stabilised, deeper emotions began to emerge: sadness, fear, guilt, shame. During the sessions on fears, children described nightmares, fears of shelling, darkness, monsters, zombies, spiders.

Gradually, the children began to better understand their emotions, name them, distinguish them, and create their own images of emotions (dragons, monsters, houses, etc.). They joined thematic movements, drew, made up stories, created common rules, and performed the rituals of "candlelight" and "farewell to Puffy".

One of the key challenges was the aggressive behaviour of some children, which manifested itself in throwing objects, physical conflicts, and disrespectful statements. At the same time, some children demonstrated the opposite – a lack of aggressive energy, excessive obedience, escape into fantasies, which also indicated stress and suppressed emotions.

The sessions on anger were very engaging. The children talked about their conflicts with siblings, parents, teachers, and made up stories about dragons that turn anger into strength. In some groups, these sessions were the most emotional and "lively".

Each group had individual cases: children who needed more time to be included, those who did not want to say goodbye to Puffy, or those who showed muted affection or excitement due to personal loss. These children were treated individually, difficulties were discussed during supervision sessions, and understanding of difficult behaviour and tools to help the child were sought.

By the end of the programme, the atmosphere in the groups had changed significantly – it had become warmer and more accepting. The children began to engage more actively in group activities, share their personal lives, show compassion, wait for their turn, and support each other. In the last weeks, children did not want to end the session, asking when the next meeting would be. This was evidence of the trust and stable group dynamics that had been built up. It was very touching for the team to hear from a mother how, after the group, her daughter said that she was no longer afraid and always wanted to go to a psychologist.



## OBSERVATIONS OF BEHAVIOURAL CHANGES AND DIAGNOSTIC DATA

At the beginning of the programme, the parents of children who agreed to participate filled out a questionnaire containing questions about the child's general condition, family circumstances and psychological well-being. Thus, 33 children aged 4 to 6 years took part in the Safe Space programme. Among them:

- 17 boys and 16 girls;
- 1 child is an internally displaced person;
- 3 children are from families that were in the combat zone;
- 1 child experienced serious stress before the outbreak of full-scale war (death in the family or serious illness);
- None of the children is a child with a disability;
- All children have a supportive social circle – according to their parents, they interact with caring adults on a daily basis.

In open-ended questions, some parents mentioned high levels of anxiety in their children, fear of being left behind by their parents, difficulties with adaptation in the team, as well as questions about war, loss, death and security.

Parents of children who participated in the programme filled out two questionnaires: a child mental health questionnaire and a Strengths and Difficulties questionnaire.

The initial diagnosis was carried out on 33 parents. According to its results:

On average, according to the Mental Health Questionnaire, there were about 2 anxiety symptoms per child, the most common of which were fears, agitation, concentration problems, withdrawal or bodily complaints without cause.

The SDQ data indicate a moderate level of anxiety and hyperactivity, as well as well-preserved pro-social behaviour. Average scores by category:

- Pro-social behaviour – 1.19;
- Emotional symptoms – 1.09;
- Problems with peers – 0.87;
- Hyperactivity – 0.71;
- Behavioural difficulties – 0.32.

These results indicate that children are generally emotionally stable, although in some cases they need support in overcoming stressful manifestations.

Only 8 parents completed the repeat diagnosis, which does not allow us to draw statistically valid conclusions. However, at the individual level:

- 5 out of 8 children showed a decrease in the level of difficulties on the SDQ;
- parents more often reported a decrease in impulsivity, anxiety, and problems with adaptation;
- the number of anxiety symptoms on the mental health questionnaire remained the same or slightly decreased.

Thus, even with a limited sample, repeated diagnostics make it possible to trace individual positive dynamics, and the data itself can be used in combination with the results from other stages of the programme.

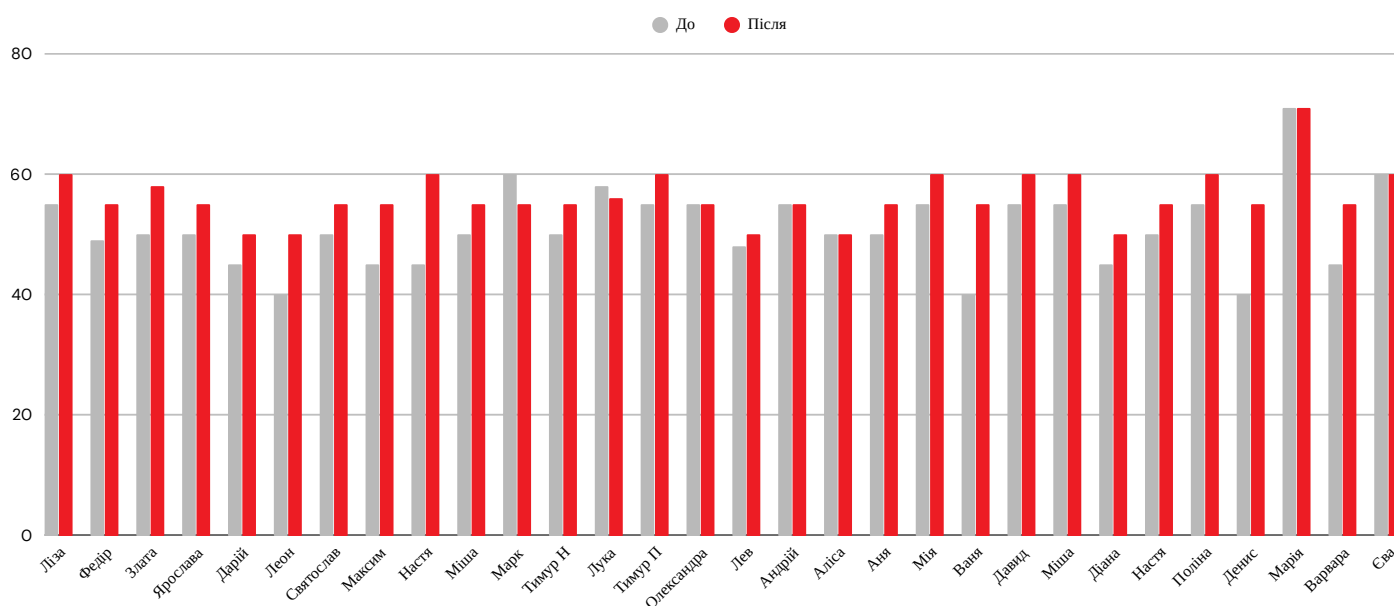
Given the complexity of data collection in this project, we used a tool that allows us to assess changes in emotional regulation that occur in children directly in the kindergarten through active observation by educators. At the beginning of the project, educators filled out a survey for 33 children. The level of preschoolers' self-regulation was recorded using the ERC scale. The Emotional Regulation Checklist (ERC) is an assessment tool used to determine the level of emotional self-regulation in children, including preschoolers. This questionnaire was created by Larry Cummings and his colleagues to assess the emotional competence of children in different social contexts. The study involved 6 caregivers who continuously observed children and filled out the questionnaire based on their own experience of interaction and observations of children's interactions with each other. The educators shared their observations of 33 children before the project (experience of observation and communication over the previous 3 months) and after the project (the project lasted 3.5 months). The post-project sample included 30 children. For the sake of comparability, the data of 3 children who did not have ERC data after the project were excluded from the comparison results.

## GENERAL TRENDS IN CHANGES ON BOTH SCALES

Answers	Before the project	After the project	Dynamics change
never	6%	2%	↓ reduction of negative reactions
rarely	10%	6%	
sometimes	25%	22%	
often	35%	40%	↑ Growth of stable self-regulation
always	24%	30%	

**There is a general positive trend** – the answers have shifted from less desirable ("never", "rarely") to more desirable ("often", "always"). After participating in the Safe Space project, children demonstrate better emotional stability and self-regulation. To measure the direct positive impact of the project, we took data only on the Emotion Regulation (ER) scale, as this scale includes statements related to adaptive emotional skills, such as the ability to express emotions, control oneself, and empathise. This is what we wanted to measure – the extent to which the ability to express emotions to support oneself and others has increased.

## INDIVIDUAL RESULTS OF CHILDREN ON THE ER SCALE BEFORE AND AFTER THE PROJECT



Grey shows results before the programme; red shows results after the programme.

Statistical results: 20 children (67%) showed improvement, a change from +1 to +10 points. Decrease was shown by 8 children (27%), with a change from -3 to -13 points, and no change - 2 children (6%).

### Average values:

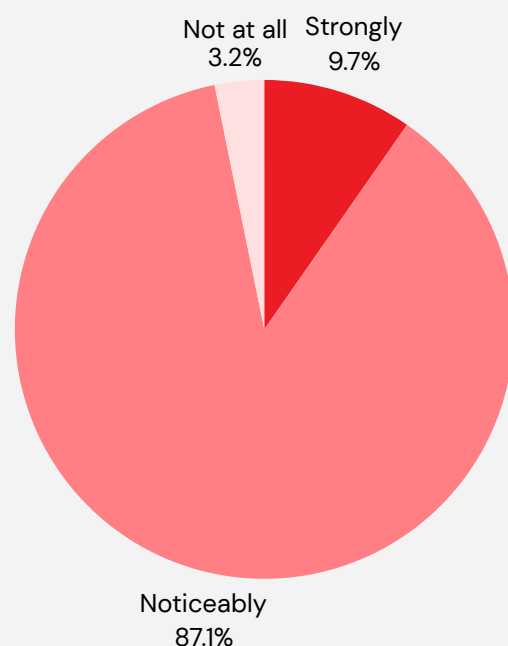
- Average score prior to graduation: 53,4
- Average score AFTER: 54,7
- Average change: +1.3 points

This indicates an overall positive trend, albeit with individual fluctuations. It is worth noting that the fluctuations in at least 3 children may be due to frustration and sadness at the end of the project, which the children openly talked about and demonstrated at the final session.

At the end of the project, 96,8% of educators noted the positive impact of the project on children's ability to self-regulate their emotional states. Blue – strong, Red – tangible, orange – none.

## DID THE SAFE SPACE PROJECT INFLUENCE THE CHILD'S LEVEL OF EMOTIONAL SELF-REGULATION?

The kindergarten teachers also underwent psychological diagnostics. To do this, they were asked to answer the questions of the Professional Burnout Scale questionnaires, which assesses the level of emotional exhaustion, decreased professional motivation and signs of depersonalisation. The initial survey was completed by 18 people. The second survey was completed by 11 people.



**The main results of the analysis are as follows:**

- 9 out of 11 participants reduced their burnout levels;
- The greatest positive changes were observed in those who demonstrated a high level of exhaustion and depression at the start;
- At the same time, 2 participants' scores increased, probably due to additional external pressures or personal circumstances.

**Aggregated, after the programme, caregivers were less likely to say that:**

- feel emotionally devastated;
- lose interest in their work;
- have a sense of disappointment in life.

**At the same time, average scores for statements about:**

- the ability to create an atmosphere of friendliness;
- professional productivity;
- belief in yourself and your plans.

These results show that participation in the programme had not only a therapeutic effect for the children, but also a resource effect for the teaching staff. The anonymous and depersonalised storage of these data will allow them to be used for further monitoring and research.

# INTERACTION WITH INTERNS

The Safe Space programme has traditionally been implemented not only as an intervention for children, but also as a training platform for future professionals in the field of children's mental health. Three interns were involved in this project. Their participation in the programme allowed us to simultaneously achieve the goal of disseminating the Safe Space methodology in educational institutions and promote the professional development of psychologists working with children in war.

The trainees worked under the guidance of a mentor and received regular supervisory support from an experienced programme trainer. A total of 16 supervision sessions and 12 mentoring meetings were held, which allowed them to:

- deal with difficult situations that have arisen in work with children and parents;
- discuss group dynamics, crisis situations and individual characteristics of each child;
- learn to adapt the programme flexibly to the context and needs of a particular group;
- receive feedback and reflect on their own experiences, professional roles and skills.



### **The key topics of supervision included:**

- establishing contact with children;
- work with emotions, fears and "bad memories";
- containment of group anxiety and aggression;
- interaction with parents and ethical aspects of feedback;
- specifics of working with sexualised behaviour;
- boundaries, structure of the session, time for verbal and non-verbal reflection.

The trainees were assigned to groups where they were responsible for preparing and conducting classes. According to their reflective essays, this experience was not only educational, but also personally transformative.

Olena Mohyr, one of the trainees, notes: "I must say that not only the children trained in communication and conflict resolution. I think the trainee psychologists also gained valuable experience."

Oksana Tunik also emphasises the importance of team support: "Ultimately, this experience is priceless. It gave me more confidence and tools to work with anxiety, fears and anger, taught me to accept difficulties as part of the process and to appreciate the power of human support even more."

Yevheniia Zavorotynska shares her impression of how participation in the project has given impetus to her professional activities: "For me, participation was useful in the sense that I gained experience in group work with parents and children and later received offers to work in other kindergartens, it also inspired me to work with adults using certain exercises that are part of the exercises for working with parents, I have already conducted a group session for adults and received pleasure and good feedback from such work."

The staff also point to the high level of intensity of the programme, the constant change of formats and the need for a delicate balance between structure and spontaneity, which is an important component of psychological work with children in war.

Participation in the Safe Space programme has become a field of deep professional growth for the trainees, as well as an opportunity to implement the best practices of supporting children directly in their institutions. Thanks to the support of a mentor, regular supervision and cooperation with experienced colleagues, the trainees were able not only to master the programme methodology but also to integrate it into their own professional identity.

## **REFERRAL TO SPECIALISED PSYCHOLOGICAL HELP**

Another important area of work of the Safe Space programme is the system of referral of participants to specialised individual psychological assistance. Such support is provided to children and adults who need deeper support than the group work format can provide.

### **Typically, we are talking about:**

- children with symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD);
- children with severe behavioural disorders or high levels of anxiety.

The selection is based on the psychologist's observations and the recommendation of the programme's senior trainer. After that, participants are referred to the NaUKMA Mental Health Centre, where they can receive up to 10 free individual consultations with a professional psychologist or psychotherapist. As part of this project, 7 people were referred, of whom 5 took advantage of the opportunity and received additional professional help.

# IMPRESSIONS OF THE PROGRAMME: FEEDBACK FROM PARTICIPANTS

## PARENTS' IMPRESSIONS

After completing the programme, parents of children who participated in the Safe Space group sessions were able to share their impressions and assess the impact of the programme on their child's emotional state, family relationships and interaction with psychologists. A total of 17 parents provided feedback, most of whom noted positive changes in their children's behaviour, communication and ability to express emotions.

**1. Emotional state of the child.** Parents reported the following positive changes:

- reduced anxiety and increased self-confidence;
- improved mood and openness to communication;
- the ability to name their emotions in words: "Mum, I'm sad", "I'm angry now";
- in several cases, children began to use the exercises they learned in the classroom on their own, such as breathing, "pizza massage", and the emotion calendar.

"The child became more confident, was able to see and understand different emotional states, and began to express his or her own opinion, not the opinion of other children."



**2. Relationships with parents.** Most respondents said that participation in the programme had a positive impact on their relationship with their child:

- the number of conflicts has decreased;
- the quality of time spent together has increased;
- mutual understanding and trust have improved.

"The child openly talks about his emotions"

"The desire to spend quality time together"

"The number of conflicts has decreased"

"The child began to talk about fears and emotions"

**3. The child's behaviour in society.** Parents have noticed:

- increased empathy and care for other children;
- greater openness to collective games;
- ability to self-regulate in difficult situations;
- high involvement in the kindergarten process.

"The child has become more empathetic"

"Communication, expression of emotions, empathy, etc."

"The child has learnt to build his own boundaries"

**4. Overall evaluation of the programme.** All 17 respondents indicated that the programme was useful or very useful. Most would be willing to participate in the programme again, and some suggested that it should be longer or more regular.

Feedback from parents shows that the Safe Space programme has had a significant positive impact on the emotional health of children, strengthened the bond between children and parents, and provided effective self-regulation tools that children have begun to use in their daily lives.

All parents who responded positively evaluated the programme, and almost all expressed a desire to take it again or recommend it to other families.

### **PUBLIC RESPONSE FROM VICTORIA TAGMAZYAN, DIANA'S MOTHER:**

The Safe Space Programme came to our kindergarten. Throughout the programme, there were various psychological sessions for children, resource circles for parents and, as a result, a joint session for parents and children.

Thanks to the Safe Space Programme, we, as parents, saw how the child began to open up: she became more confident, open to communication, and learned to express her emotions better. She learned to hear others, interact better with her peers, and most importantly, to be herself without fear of being judged.

At the end of the programme, we had a meeting with psychologists where they told us in detail what tasks the child performed, how she reacted, presented us with beautiful children's works that were collected in a folder and gave us recommendations on education and communication. For us, as parents, this is incredibly valuable. The atmosphere of trust, support and respect that prevailed in the classroom gave her a sense of security that she had lacked before.

Thank you for your work, care and love that you put in every day.



## **IMPRESSIONS OF EDUCATORS**

As part of the Safe Space programme, teachers were also directly involved in the process as participants, partners and observers. At the end of the programme, educators filled out a final survey in which they shared their impressions, assessments of effectiveness, and observations on changes in children's behaviour and personal effects for themselves.

All the educators said that participation in the programme was useful and that the material was clear and valuable. Most of the educators said they would be willing to participate in the programme again if given the opportunity. All respondents answered either "yes" or "probably yes" to the question of whether they plan to use the skills they have acquired in their work in the future.



**Among the aspects that the participants found personally valuable:**

- understanding of children's emotions and skills to help them live with them;
- communication support and exchange of experience with colleagues and psychologists;
- tools to improve the psychological climate in the group.

"The support of the emotional state, the communication moments were [very valuable to me]."

**The Safe Space programme contains many important aspects that can be valuable for teachers, parents and children alike. For me personally, the following aspects are particularly valuable:**

- 1.Children's psychological safety – the importance of creating a trusting environment where children can freely express their thoughts and feelings without fear of judgement.
- 2.Development of emotional self-regulation skills – children learn to recognise and control their emotions, which is the basis for their mental well-being.
- 3.Preventing bullying – the programme helps to identify and prevent conflict situations and to build a culture of mutual respect among children.
- 4.Development of critical thinking – in the modern information space, it is important to teach children to analyse information, ask questions and make informed decisions.
- 5.Practical methods for teachers – the programme contains tools and exercises that can be easily applied in practice to create a safe environment in an educational institution."

**All the teachers noted positive changes in the children's emotional state:**

- children have become more open, calm and emotionally stable;
- anxiety has decreased, and children are more willing to join classes;
- the level of conflict in the groups has decreased, and there is more cooperation between children.

"Almost all the children immediately got involved in the work, they gained a better understanding of their emotions and empathy."

"They became a little more open, calm and emotionally stable."

"They started to listen more and sit down to classes on time. There are fewer conflicts."

"The psychological climate of the group has become a little better, the children have a desire to communicate and play together, not just on their own."



**Most of the educators noted that thanks to the programme:**

- the number of conflicts with children has decreased;
- the desire to spend more time with them has increased;
- the level of trust and understanding in the groups has improved.

"The desire to spend time together has increased."

"Participation in Safe Space group classes has had a positive impact on my relationship with my children.

1. Trust has increased – children have become more likely to share their feelings and experiences and seek support.

2. The number of conflicts has decreased – joint work on the emotional state has helped to better understand the needs of children and respond to their experiences in a timely manner.

3. Interaction has improved – children have become more attentive to my explanations and recommendations, more involved in joint activities.

4. Emotional attachment has strengthened – they are more likely to seek communication, take the initiative in joint games and activities."

**Some respondents noted that the programme should be expanded:**

- more supervision of children outside of class;
- individual work with individual children;

"Add more individual work with each child."

"Observing children outside of class".

Thus, the results of the survey of educators show that participation in the programme has become a resource experience for them, which has contributed not only to a deeper understanding of children, but also to improved teamwork. Teachers highly appreciated not only the format and content of the programme, but also the opportunity to join the change-making process in the children's environment.

All the teachers expressed their readiness to recommend the programme to their colleagues and continue cooperation in the future.

**PUBLIC FEEDBACK FROM OLENA MOHYR,  
A PSYCHOLOGIST AT THE KINDERGARTEN  
LA\_MALYUK:**

*It was an incredible experience lasting several months! 🥰 I believe that our kindergarten was lucky to be able to participate in the programme and engage 33 families in cooperation. 🙏 For me, as a psychologist who supports the educational institution on my own, it was a boost to involve three more psychologists in the work of the kindergarten. This is incredibly valuable!*

*Ukraine has been going through difficult times for four years now... The war has entered the lives of Ukrainians and exacerbated feelings of fear, anxiety, loss, danger... Children fall asleep in a shelter, wake up from explosions 😔*

*This is a generation that is growing and forming, and it needs our support at all levels: at the level of children, at the level of parents, and at the level of teachers who teach and support them. That is why the Safe Space programme should continue and expand, and I, personally, would be very happy to continue cooperation with the project within the school and kindergarten. 🙌❤️*





## **PUBLIC FEEDBACK FROM ZLATA VINYARSKA, A TEACHER:**

*Participation in this programme was extremely valuable for us, an experience that lasted several months. I think we were lucky to not only join the initiative, but also to involve the children's families in the process, which was an important step towards creating a truly supportive environment. Thanks to the Safe Space Programme, children have learnt to understand their emotions better, and educators and parents have been able to understand how children feel in certain situations.*

*In my opinion, a programme like Safe Space is extremely relevant. In the context of martial law and the new reality, it is aimed at supporting all participants in the educational process – children, parents, teachers – and creates a basis for emotional safety and development.*

*I sincerely hope that this initiative will continue and cover even more institutions.*



## **PUBLIC FEEDBACK FROM YULIA SYLKA, A TEACHER:**

*I sincerely want to leave feedback on the Safe Space Programme. As a person whose work is directly related to children, I would like to note that I have adopted some techniques, such as the candle, because it trains children's endurance, concentration, and focus. I also use the ball/toy rule to teach them the skill of listening and waiting for their turn: whoever has the ball speaks. And I can't help but remember the lesson on fears, where we built a shack that gave the children a sense of security and a sign that they could trust me now. Thank you for this incredible experience.*

## FEEDBACK FROM THE MANAGEMENT OF THE KINDERGARTEN

The management of the kindergarten highly appreciated the Safe Space programme both in terms of content and implementation results. In her responses, the director of the institution noted that the programme fully met the needs of the kindergarten, was clear, effective and practically oriented. She also emphasised that she would not hesitate to join the programme again and is ready to recommend it to other educational institutions.

### **The director noted that:**

- almost all teachers were enthusiastic about the programme;
- participants became more attentive to the emotional state of children;
- the team has become even more united, with increased mutual understanding and support among employees.

### **According to the director's observations:**

- the emotional state of the children has improved significantly;
- children have become more open, confident and emotionally stable;
- the programme helped unlock children's potential, reduce anxiety and improve teamwork.

"The programme has opened up a lot of children. It's an incredible experience. They have already had experience of such work with the psychologist of the institution, but working with specialists from outside the kindergarten, with invited people, has the best effect on children."

### **The Director also notes some organisational aspects and recommendations:**

- there was no resistance from parents or staff.
- there were no organisational difficulties in implementing the programme.
- the management believes that the programme is well adapted to the realities of the kindergarten, but made an important recommendation regarding the first meeting with parents: "In my subjective opinion, the first meeting with parents (presentation) should be better conducted in the format of a presentation of the programme and what children will learn during its implementation. The programme itself should be detailed. After all, parents come to this meeting without being asked, and they should leave with a concrete understanding of what the programme will include."

Thus, the feedback from the management confirms that the Safe Space Programme has a powerful positive impact on both children and teachers. It is not only a tool for emotional support, but also a catalyst for changes in communication, cohesion and professional reflection within the institution.



## PUBLIC RESPONSE FROM OLGA PODGOLA, HEAD OF THE LA MALYUK KINDERGARTEN:

*"Safe Space is a unique opportunity for a preschool educational institution. I am sincerely glad that we had the opportunity to participate in such a powerful and professional programme.*

*The events in Ukraine have traumatised children and their parents. We have learnt to "live in war", but the accumulated stress must be released environmentally. Parents in a state of constant fatigue and survival do not notice many "red flags" on their own. The opportunity to be in a circle and experience emotions, even if you are a small participant in the programme and do not understand them, professional psychologists help you do this.*

*The psychologists have become real friends to our students.*

*I liked the meetings with parents, where they had the opportunity to see their children in a new environment, pay attention to their emotions, thoughts and even behaviour. Referrals of parents to the centre were valuable. This is a unique opportunity to start working, and sometimes to hear about the need for this work for the first time.*

*The support and professional guidance of the project curator Olena was especially valuable. The meetings with the teachers were extremely supportive. Psychologists gave advice on how to restore the resource and provided a lot of support. We are glad to meet them, we are grateful for such involvement in the kindergarten's processes. As a manager, Olena's vision of some processes was decisive for me before implementing changes. These changes have been implemented successfully.*



## FEEDBACK FROM INTERNS

Three trainees conducted group lessons with children. After completing the programme, they provided feedback, sharing their experience of participating in the Safe Space programme.

The interns are mostly positive about their impressions of the group work. They note that the children were sincere, emotional, open to communication and willing to share their experiences:

- "Children are sincere and emotional. Most of them are not afraid to express themselves."
- "Their views... were a reminder of the importance of empathy and unconditional acceptance."
- "Children need warm, connected adults and freedom of choice, even in limited matters."

The interns also emphasise that working with group dynamics was valuable, and that the children themselves demonstrated interest, activity and depth of reflection:

- *"When we had a session on 'Anger', the participants had so much to say that the discussion 'ate up' the entire session."*
- *"It was nice to see the children drawing, working with clay, building huts, swinging in blankets, making a paper dragon... It was a completely new experience for them."*

The children were particularly impressed by the dynamic group games, which gave them the opportunity to express themselves and work as a team:

- *"Just six minutes and one big roll of paper – and the children received incredible emotions of sincere joy, and the room remained clean."*
- *"The Panther exercise became a favourite – everyone could be the head of the panther, but at the same time be part of the team."*

At the same time, the interns describe the challenges they have faced. First of all, it is a combination of different roles, organisational complexities and emotional vulnerability:

- *"It was difficult for me to combine the work of a psychologist and an administrator"*
- *"The most difficult moments were physical weakness after an illness and grieving for a friend who died in the war."*
- *"It was not easy to teach in this state, but it allowed me to listen to myself and the group even more deeply."*

The trainees said that they felt nervous before starting work, but were able to overcome it thanks to the support of the administration, tutors and the positive atmosphere in the team:

- *"Before the start, I was worried about whether I would be able to capture the dynamics of the group, keep the structure of the class... But my interest in the work quickly won out."*
- *"The kindergarten welcomed us with a warm welcome, and the excitement was quickly overcome thanks to the support of our colleagues."*

Trainees emphasise the importance of supervision as a support in their work, but stress the need for additional mentoring feedback:

- *"The supervisions helped to dispel doubts and to see the situation from a broader perspective."*
- *"I needed more feedback on how to run the group: where my strengths were and where I needed to stay in shape."*

In their essays, the trainees also draw attention to the context of the war and its impact on children and families. They mention that during the sessions, children shared experiences of loss and anxiety:

- *"During the group sessions, children shared their feelings about their grandfathers and fathers being at war."*
- *"I dream that my dad never fought, and I do too."*

In concluding their reflections, the trainees emphasise the significance of the programme for their own professional development and the importance of continuing and scaling it up:

- *"For me, it was a very practical and very vivid experience of healthy direct communication."*
- *"The project gave me more confidence, tools to work with anxiety, fears, and anger"*
- *"This programme works with the consequences of war. It is important and should live on."*

Thus, the trainees describe their participation in the Safe Space programme as an emotionally intense and professionally enriching experience that opened up new opportunities for working with children and helped them better understand themselves and the meaning of their profession in a difficult time for the country.

## CONCLUSIONS AND PROSPECTS

1. **Programme participants.** The programme covered 33 children aged 4–6 years, as well as 16 educators, 33 representatives of the parent community, 1 head of the institution and 3 interns. Children with experience of loss, life in the war zone, and internal displacement were involved. All participants received support according to their needs: through group sessions, individual meetings, consultations or reflective formats.
2. **Parents' impressions.** The majority of parents reported positive changes in their children's emotional state: reduced anxiety, greater openness, and the ability to name their emotions. The children began to interact more actively with their peers, showed empathy, and learned to talk about their fears and needs. Parents reported improved family relationships, fewer conflicts and greater involvement in joint activities. All respondents found the programme useful and expressed a desire to participate in it again.
3. **Assessment by the management of the institution.** The management of the kindergarten highly appreciated the programme, considering it relevant, professionally developed and practically valuable. They noted positive changes in the emotional state of children, increased cohesion of the teaching staff and increased attention to the emotional needs of children. The programme was organically integrated into the work of the kindergarten, without resistance from staff or parents.
4. **Impressions of educators.** The teaching staff noted the programme as resourceful and enriching. The educators gained a deeper understanding of children's emotional processes, improved the psychological climate in the groups, and increased trust between children and adults. All participants confirmed their readiness to use the tools they had learned in the future and recommend the programme to other colleagues.
5. **Interns' impressions.** The interns positively assessed their experience of participating in the programme. They emphasise that working with children in a time of war was a challenge, but also a source of profound professional and personal growth. In their reflective essays, they describe the dynamics of groups, the value of supervisory support, the complex experiences of children, and the importance of creating a safe space where children can feel and talk about their emotions.
6. **Effects of the programme.** Even with limited re-diagnosis, there was a positive trend in children's emotional stability and a decrease in anxiety. Teachers also reported a decrease in the level of professional burnout, increased confidence and renewed motivation. This demonstrates the overall effectiveness of the programme for both children and adults.

Thus, the Safe Space programme has proven to be a comprehensive model of psychosocial support that works simultaneously with several levels – children, parents, educators and psychologists. Its strength lies in its consistency, stability and adaptability to war conditions. Even in critical situations (air raid, stress, loss), it allows for the creation of a space of trust, development and support.

### **The programme is based on a cascade support model:**

- care for educators and administration – training, supervision, support for resources;
- caring for parents – meetings, reflection, tools for emotional interaction;
- care for children – classes, game formats, self-regulation skills;
- care for psychologists – mentoring, supervision, professional development.

Regular supervisory support is an important part of preventing emotional burnout and improving the quality of care. This aspect is especially valuable in wartime.

Thus, the implementation of the Safe Space programme in La\_Malyuk kindergarten confirms its significant positive impact on the emotional state of children, improvement of family relationships, unity of the teaching staff and development of young professionals. The programme is highly effective and should be scaled up to other preschools in Ukraine. Its continuation is an important contribution to supporting the mental health of Ukrainian children and adults in times of war.