



“Florence Centre”

Family Service and Community Education

Annual Report 2023

Zaporizhzhya, Ukraine

Foreword



CEO
Lucy Romanenkova

The year 2023 was perhaps one of the most dramatic in the life of each of us and our country of Ukraine. We used to know the word “war” from our grandfathers, grandmothers, and relatives. But it was impossible to imagine that we ourselves would become victims of war. Research shows that even a few years ago, if a Russian was asked whether he would kill a Russian or a Ukrainian, the answer would be “no.” And now we live in some kind of surreal world, where your day and hour of life depend on sirens, bombs and falling shells.

In almost every monthly report, we wrote that many organizations, both state and public, providing assistance to children and the elderly are no longer working. Not safe. It seemed completely impossible to imagine that the Florence Centre would not only exist during the war, but also provide assistance to people.

But how and what we are doing now has not only not reduced the number of people we help, but, to our great surprise, has increased thousands of times. The ways of the Lord are mysterious. Many of our children with special needs left the country - and they found our specialists in Poland! We provided methodological assistance to schools, teachers and children - now thousands of specialists, children, families view our publications from different parts of the world, and the head of Facebook of our organization does this from Estonia.

Students used to come to our Centre to study, now we teach students to help themselves cope with PTSD, and help others. Consultations – both in Zaporizhzhya and abroad, thanks to the support of the Florence Centre, are provided free of charge.

The youngest children continue to receive help in Zaporizhzhya. We don’t have a bomb shelter in the building, parents patiently wait for their children in our kitchen, drink tea and support each other with conversation!

Women of golden age join us and happily participate in the educational sessions and trainings. Their involvement in the life of the Florence Centre as clients brings joy not only to them, but also to us, we survive together. And the project is called “I Love Life!”

Our accountant, far from the activities of public organizations, fell in love with us and our activities so much that before Christmas she donated her monthly earnings for gifts for the children!

Miracles happen in life when you cannot expect them. But they happen. We are glad that one of the sources of peace, kindness, love and joy is the Florence Centre!!!

Karina Afonina



Ann Stepanenko

Last year was a year of great changes for me. It gave an opportunity to focus on personal development and achieving the set goals.



The “Kangaroo” Program



Since the beginning of the year, staff has helped over 25 children and their families, and conducted 20 consultations. More than 20 students visited our Centre as part of Students’ Practicum. At the beginning of the year, we added a new staff member - Ann. Looks like she enjoys the work with our small team. Karina successfully defended her master’s thesis and received a second higher education. Parents of our children need our qualified work. Sometimes they seem confused and don't understand our professional approach. We maintain communication with our volunteer from US, who helped before the war; and, grateful for his work.

Some people are surprised and believe that the centre has been closed, but there has been even more work now. We worked hard this year, despite constant shelling. A year in which we faced difficulties, but despite this, our main focus has been providing assistance to children. Plunging into the world of explosions and stress even when we woke up in the morning; within an hour we were already at our place, ready to work.

Our specialists attended more than 15 webinars and courses this year. From the last one, our specialist Ann attended the face-to-face regional forum of correctional teachers, which became the first in Ukraine in this format.

"What do specialists who returned to work after February 24 feel?". "What has changed, how to work, how to set up contact with children with special educational needs, what should be, what techniques to use?". These and many other issues were discussed at this event.



The “Kangaroo” Program



On November 22, we attended another webinar of the same project, where Hans-Dieter Dammering was the speaker. He shared with his Ukrainian colleagues Germany's experience in working with children and adults with special needs and expressed his commitment and support to Ukrainian education.

Two children have gone on to school. We are happy with the parents' feedback that the children can sit at the table, complete tasks, and listen to instructions. It's great to receive such reviews and recommendations. Our group sessions are attended by 4-5 children every day.

We introduced alternative and additional communication in our classes - this is a form of communication using pictures, photos, special applications on the phone and on the computer, which helps the child to adapt in society.

The following topics were considered: "Vegetables and fruits", "Pets", riddles were solved, the children really like the new format, the presentations come to life, children are praised for their work and applauded. We repeat the colors; someone remembers better and helps others.

Boy A has been attending the program for a year, thanks to our efforts he has learned to use a toilet appropriately. Now his mother can go with him in public. We perform articulation exercises; it already allows him to use his tongue to make sounds.

Boy L attends the program for half a year, group classes are very useful, we see how much socialization he gets here. His mother was especially happy when he started making friends with others on the playground. Before, the child played alone.

Boy M has been attending the program for two months and has started using gestures for communication; however, he is becoming more attentive. Still does not pay attention to the target language yet, but we're working on it.

New toys were purchased, a children's playground was installed. Let's work together to achieve our goals!





Olena Dulova

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For me, 2023 is a year of losses, pain, intensive work, learning, growth and active actions. Accepting my power and my powerlessness. And also awareness of the importance of self-care, because only by being in a resource, I can remain productive and useful.

”

Students' Practicum

In September of this year, the educational practice of students of the "Social pedagogy" and "Social work" specialties of the College was resumed. Taking into account the peculiarities of the times and the importance of developing stress resistance and recovery skills for future specialists of the helping profession, it was decided to conduct classes under the program "Teaching healing techniques". Some students show interest and take an active part in discussions and interactive work in the group. In addition, an important component of the practice is familiarization with the activities of "Florence" Centre, programs, as well as the peculiarities of the activities of various organizations of the non-state civil sector.

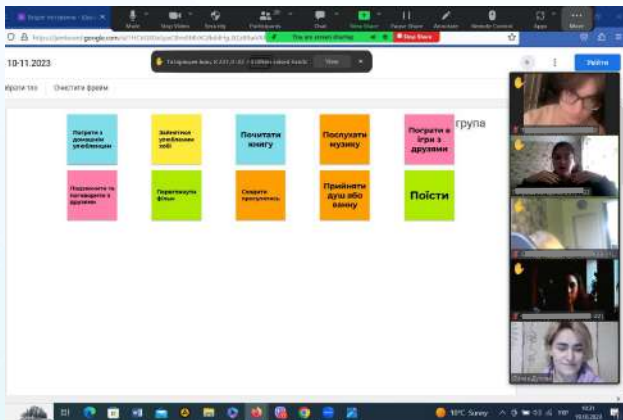
During September, 4 online classes were held. 15 students attend the class.

Professional development and other activities

The challenges faced by professionals in the helping field require rapid adaptation and acquisition of new skills. During the entire time of the large-scale invasion, a large number of trainings were held on the topics: trauma-focused PTSD, working with adolescents and parents, working with stress, working with military traumatic events, etc., "Military Psychology".

Also, together with my colleagues, I participate in various projects of psychological assistance, both individual and group, as well as in the training of specialists in the educational and social spheres.

By helping others, I help myself!



Consultancy

From March 2023, the activity of the counseling program was resumed. Consultations were provided to citizens who suffered from armed aggression. Among the requests were: work with anxiety, work with guilt, work with loss, adaptation in a new place due to forced relocation, work with fears, the topic of self-confidence, relationships with loved ones, burnout. Among the audience are teenagers, forcibly displaced persons, a person with a disability, a family member of a serviceman, the wife of a deceased serviceman.



Counseling is a confidential process that cannot be demonstrative. A person seeking the help of a psychologist is often very vulnerable, sometimes in an acute crisis, so it is difficult, sometimes impossible, to show the results or the process of such work. However, the words of gratitude after the consultation **"I'm going on a trip. I feel calm and confident..."** sometimes after a while **"Time has passed and I can move on. Our work was valuable to me..."**, or a repeated appeal after some time from a teenager with the words **"...I just don't know who else I can turn to..."**, **"I talked about my experiences, but I felt better"** speak of the importance of the existence of such free help for customers.

During 5 months of 2023, 16 consultations were provided for 14 people.

Education of practitioners of the social sphere



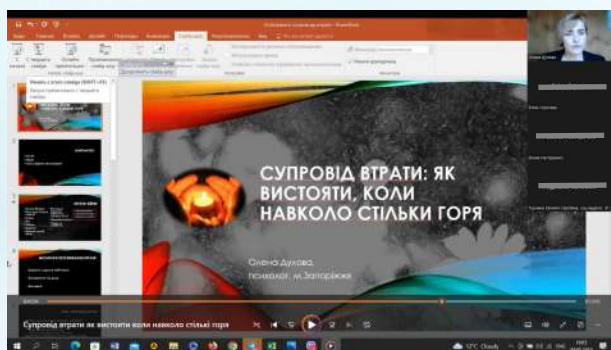
During the academic year, the social sphere practitioners were trained as part of the training course "Practicum on mediator technologies" for master's students of Zaporizhzhya National University.

Active students noted the value of information and skills developed in pairs. 11 classes were held. 15 students took part in them.

In May, a psychological workshop for specialists was held on the topic "Bereavement support. How to persevere when there is so much grief around" within the framework of the All-Ukrainian festival "Psychologist's Space".

Feedback from a participant: **"This is such a difficult topic. Thank you for working with it. There are many families facing loss right now. As specialists who interact with children and families, it is important for us to learn how to support them, how to communicate with them... (when they experience a loss)."**

About 20 specialists were present at the workshop, the video is also posted on the Festival page for viewing, the number of views is 46.





Lucy Romanenkova

This year has changed my whole life and correctly placed the concepts of “life and death”, “today” and never

The Project “I Love Life!”



In fall 2023 we started a new project “I love you, life”. There are two groups, 10-12 women in each group. The age of the participants is 60+. In one of the groups, most of the people are migrants. The main focus of the project is helping people overcome post-traumatic stress disorder. The amount of planned sessions is 10. In our meetings we discussed topics like self-esteem, conflict resolution, stress, relationships with elderly parents and children, positive thinking, leadership, meditation, etc.

On the request of women, we have added the topics related to self-care, dress code, love in old age. And, when we discussed how to be dress properly, the women from occupied territories noticed that all their clothes were left at home. Now they only wear what someone gave them.

Not everyone can come to our sessions all the time: some continue to work and do not have enough money to live on pensions. Some women help their children with their grandchildren or take care of sick relatives. For example, one woman comes to sessions with her husband. He suffered a stroke, does not speak, and is afraid to be alone at home, so he sits outside the circle during our meetings.

Very often during classes people laugh, sometimes cry.

Due to the fact that many participants attend different programs at this senior centre (art, music, dance, English, poetry, history, psychology), they are better able to cope with PTSD. At the end of the project “I Love Life” it is planned to have a concert, where women will be participants.

The classes are fun and very dynamic.

“Thanks to you we feel better. Not only emotionally but physically as well”.

“Your sessions give me hope, I want to live and to do something in life”

“For me your classes are a very good place for communication and they give me joy.”

“Thanks to you I try to look nice!”





Liudmyla Shokurova

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*My phrase of the year: It's cool to grow up.
I recommend it to everyone.*

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The Project “Florence Centre International”

Work with disable children (Poland)



For more than a year now, the Florence Centre International project has existed in Poland - the city of Bialystok. Over the past year 2023, the project provided more than 20 consultations to families with children with special educational needs and more than 400 correctional classes for kids. Thanks to the project, many families from Ukraine have chosen this Polish city to receive qualified assistance.

In 2023, 8 children from Zaporizhzhya, Kryvyi Rig, Rivne, Mariupol, Mykolaiv, and Kharkiv were able to take part in the project. Children have exclusively “severe” diagnoses (cerebral palsy, autism, intellectual disabilities, hydrocephalus, Down syndrome).

Thanks to the project, 5 children started talking this year. Three children were prepared for Polish school. Assistance was provided to 6 Ukrainian children in getting diagnoses in Poland. At the moment, there is a waiting list for those who want to get into the project.

Parents express their deep gratitude for the opportunity to rehabilitate their children for free while in a foreign country!

Parents’ feedback

Ludmila Lysenko (mother). **“I would like to express my huge thanks to the organizers of the project and our speech therapist Ludmila. The whole family hopes very much for the existence of the project next year as well. This is a great psychological support for our family. Because we know that our child is in the safe hands of a professional. We would not have the opportunity to pay for a Polish speech therapist, because it is very expensive, and it would hardly be useful for a child with severe autism due to the language barrier. The child has good results during the classes, and we hope for his speech development in the future. It is difficult to explain what the parents of a child who did not speak at the age of 10, but only moaned, feel. Now the words “mom, give, candy, cookie, let's go, drink, eat, turn on” have appeared. And this is a great happiness for us. Thank you very much and peace to all of us!”**





Olena Rudenko

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I am grateful to 2023 for the fact that all my relatives are alive and healthy; for the opportunity to donate to support our army and benefit people with their work.

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The Project “Florence Centre International”

Management of Facebook of the Florence Centre (Estonia)



Since January 2023, 56 publications have been made on various topics. In the posts, we talked about emotions (anger, anger, fear, etc.) of schoolchildren, teachers, parents. We also dealt with autism, hyperactivity, and Down syndrome. We collected recommendations for daily routines and exam preparation. Another 19 publications are repetitions of previously made posts that do not lose their relevance and need a reminder.

One of the biggest achievements this year at Facebook is the decision to switch from a regular page to a group. This was due to the fact that previously we only saw the reactions of those people who wanted to share our post on their page or like it. However, out of the total number of friends in 1900, we only had a maximum of 1/4 of the reactions to the posts. And now, thanks to Facebook's group policy, we can track the real number of people who interacted with our posts in one way or another: shared, viewed pictures, or just saw them in their own news.

The following publications received the largest number of reviews among readers this year:

- Ways of self-help and supporting others in situations of stress and anxiety (spread – 741, coverage – 64,556);
- Daily planning and is it necessary? (spread – 414, coverage – 58,640);
- Mental health (spread – 372, coverage – 35,529);
- First psychological aid in case of acute stress (spread – 280, coverage – 29,462);
- How to say "No"? (spread – 216, coverage – 29,118).

Many publications have got two to three thousand readers, and some only from 600 to 800 readers. This indicates the most interesting topics for the community.



The Project “Florence Centre International”

Management of Facebook of the Florence Centre (Estonia)



But there are also such publications, which are an answer to the requests of our readers: "Sometimes it is easy for me to do the task by myself than to ask somebody. But we work as a team, I have to give a chance to other members. Does it mean that I do not know how to work in a team? I got an answer to this question on your page. Thank you." (An answer to the post "I could do everything by myself")

Every year from September to December, representatives of schools come to us with a request to conduct classes on various preventive topics. So, this year, we decided not to change an important tradition and help to already overburdened teachers. This is how the idea of a new rubric "Prevention of CF" was developed. Each post (or whole series) is a 70% ready-made lesson that the teacher can use in whole or in part, without changes or with the addition of the information that his students need. Our goal was not only to make the work of the teacher easier, but also to make the lesson interesting, informative and not boring for schoolchildren. In addition to the text and slides, we developed a quiz for almost every lesson to consolidate information.

Also, this year, 11 mini-consultations were held for Ukrainian women who were forced to seek refuge in Estonia due to Russian military aggression. The topics of the conversations mainly related to raising children (dealing with temper tantrums, hyperactivity, the importance of rest for a single mother), dealing with anxiety and negative thoughts, and interacting with others.

Comments

Thank you for the basic information about disease. It is accurate and understandable. Very necessary information in the modern world. (about autism)

Thanks to the developers of the sessions, I tried to do it by myself before giving it to children. Interesting presentation! I will share in my group with your permission. (quiz - smoking)

Nice story! The children really liked it when they played it and thought about it. ("The story told by the wolf" - about the importance of considering the situation from all sides)





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**"For me Ukraine
is my home,
a blue sky
and courageous people."**



2024



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December

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