

The Critical Importance of Summer Camps

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Olenka

Today, the people of Ukraine and its allies have a myriad of priorities to focus on, and the most important one is to do everything possible to ensure that Ukraine stays strong and wins this war.

But there is another imperative that, if not fulfilled today, Ukraine will have no future. And this task is taking care of the health—body, mind, and spirit—of its children and young people.

We extend our deepest gratitude and respect to HART partner churches in Ukraine, who, despite such dark times for the country, remain committed to nurturing the next generation.

For many years now, Ukrainian churches and their dedicated leaders have been organizing a wide array of summer camp programs. The primary aim of this vital ministry is to provide children with the opportunity to encounter God as their loving Heavenly Father, forge meaningful friendships with their peers, and put the Christian principles they have learned into practice in their everyday lives.

There were doubts about whether summer camps could even take place during wartime. However, the Ukrainian church refused to let the conflict stop this vital ministry. In fact, the war may have even opened up new opportunities, as there are now greater challenges and more groups of children in desperate need of care and support.

Many of these campers have experienced the horrors of war firsthand. They have been forced to flee their homes, seeking refuge in safer areas. Some have even lost parents or loved ones who are serving on the frontlines, protecting their country. These children have endured unimaginable trauma at such young ages.

But the reality is that no child in Ukraine is truly safe. Air raid sirens disrupt their sleep almost every night, and school lessons are constantly interrupted as they are ushered into bomb shelters. A recent international study revealed that a staggering 75% of Ukrainian children are now showing symptoms of mental trauma.

Thanks to the generous financial support of HART's donors, our Ukrainian ministry partners were able to organize a wide variety of summer camps for children and youth across the country last year. This included programs in relatively safe regions as well as in areas that had been recently liberated from occupation.

It is impossible to provide an exact total of the number of children impacted by the collective camp efforts of all HART's ministry partners across Ukraine. However, it is clear that these initiatives reached thousands of young people from a wide range of ages and backgrounds.

For many of these children, the camps offered a rare chance to simply be kids again - to play, learn, and grow in a safe space. Amidst the chaos and trauma of war, these programs provided stability, comfort and joy. Most importantly, the campers were able to encounter the love of God and the support of a caring community.



Here are some of the heartfelt messages and letters that children and parents have written to HART supporters who contributed to summer camp programs:

I was really looking forward to this camp, my mom is very sick, so it's not easy for me now, but when I hear about Christ, who can do everything, I pray to Him, and my life becomes easier.

I believe that my mom and I will get through this difficult time for our family. I am grateful to the sponsors for the opportunity to go to a camp. This is the only place where I want to stay for a long time.

Anhelina, 8

Because of the war, our family had to leave our home and move hundreds of kilometers away.

I sincerely thank you for helping us to get positive emotions in this difficult time, to feel love from people and to make sure once again that God still cares about us.

Viktoriia, 12

I am extremely grateful that thanks to your generosity, I was able to go to this camp. Also, staying in the camp gave me peace of mind, because I am very worried about my dad, who is at war. We prayed together for him and for all our soldiers.

Daryna, 10

Vita, a mother of two sons who moved from southern Ukraine to escape the horrors of war, shares the following:

When we were offered to go to the camp, I was not enthusiastic, because war distorts your usual perception of life, but the desire to change our situation and escape from everyday life prevailed, and my children and I went to the camp.

I am very grateful to the organizers for these wonderful days. It was like a breath of fresh air for me and my kids. I will never forget the evenings around the campfire, the heartfelt conversations, the interesting entertainment... Since the beginning of the war, this camp has become my most vivid memory.

Vita

I'm glad I visited such a wonderful camp. Everyone wished me a happy birthday and gave me gifts. It was so nice. I could forget my sadness and grief for a little while. My dad and my uncle died two months ago.

Ivanka, 11

These letters are a powerful testament to the transformative impact that HART's summer camp programs are having on children. Woven throughout these heartfelt messages are two powerful threads - the pain and trauma that these young lives have endured, and the vital role the camps play in providing a rare haven of comfort and stability.

Yet, as heartwarming as these letters are, they also serve as a poignant reminder of the cruel realities these children face. The enemy who invaded their homeland seeks to destroy not only their physical safety, but also the very essence of their childhood - the laughter, the dreams, the carefree days that every young person deserves.

Let us join together in prayer for the children of Ukraine, that they may find the healing and comfort they so desperately need. And let us also commit to supporting the vital work of HART, who is standing in the gap and bringing the light of Christ to those living in darkness. For in doing so, we are not only changing individual lives, but shaping the future of an entire nation.

Please support 2024 summer camp programs in Ukraine! Thank you.

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