

Ukrainian mediators work to bring understanding to conflict despite challenges faced by ongoing war

Training program encourages looking within to find a way forward

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[/EINPresswire.com/](https://www.einpresswire.com/) -- When Ukrainian mediator Tatyana Bilyk approached the Center for Understanding in Conflict (CUC) about conducting training for conflict-resolution professionals still operating in a war-torn country, the organization's co-founder, Gary Friedman, had to pause to consider how to advise mediators working in such a tumultuous environment.



LIMU Mediators in Ukraine

"I was quite intimidated," Friedman said. "I'd never worked on a program with people at war."

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Tatyana Bilyk

Friedman and longtime colleague and Zen Buddhist priest Norman Fischer tried to imagine what it was like in Ukraine and the unique challenges mediators faced while attempting to bring together parties in conflict embroiled in the uncertainty and violence of war.

"We talked a lot about how to humble ourselves," Friedman said. "Besides the agony, they were surely experiencing, we didn't know what the participants would be like or what they already knew. It was a big unknown, so we had a lot of conversations about how to bring ourselves

into the moment and see where it went."

A RELATIONSHIP BUILT ON MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING

Years before, Bilyk, now a mediator, trainer, and supervisor at the Mediation School, League of Mediators of Ukraine, and the Association of Family Mediators of Ukraine, was accredited by the Centre for Effective Dispute Resolution in the United Kingdom as a business mediator and from MiKK eV International Mediation Center for Family Conflict and Child Abduction as a family mediator. In 2010, she began to develop a mediation practice centered on working with families.



Tatyana Bilyk

"Working with families made me realize that the tools I had learned mediating business disputes were not as effective in helping people in everyday life," Bilyk said. "Since family mediation was not as developed in Ukraine then, I began looking beyond our borders for practical training."

Bilyk's search led her to multiple mediation models, including Robert A. Baruch Bush's book *The Promise of Mediation* and the understanding-based approach of CUC co-founders Gary Friedman and Jack Himmelstein in *Challenging Conflict: Mediation Through Understanding*.



Gary and Norman in Talloires, France

The [Understanding-Based Model](#) is an alternative to mediation styles where the mediator may be more of an evaluator or arbiter. Instead, it emphasizes that the people ultimately in the best position to determine the wisest solution to a dispute are those living the problem.

"Thus began my love for Gary's practice," Bilyk said. "At that period of my practice, I had just touched on the issues of self-reflection and understanding, but he already had a whole model clearly explaining the processes."

Friedman recommended Bilyk start by reading his book *Inside Out: How Conflict Professionals Can Use Self-Reflection to Help Their Clients* to begin understanding how a mediator's inner experience, their humanity, was crucial to serving parties in conflict.

Bilyk had planned on attending an *Inside Out: Self-Reflection for Conflict Professionals Intensive (SCPI)* training seminar in Talloires, France, taught by Friedman and Fischer, when war, as it ultimately does, stopped the march of time, and began its all-consuming invasion of her life.

Where many people would abandon their professional development plans in the face of war, Bilyk doubled down and asked if Friedman and Fischer would be willing to bring their program virtually to her group of over 50 mediators in Ukraine.

"Unprecedented crises require unprecedented solutions," Bilyk said. "Mediators now find themselves in a situation of extreme necessity to work with the emotional side of the conflict caused by the parties' stress and trauma before they can discuss the issue's core."

MEDIATING AND TRAINING IN THE MIDST OF CONFLICT

"With the beginning of the full-scale invasion of the Russian troops into Ukraine, we were all horrified," Bilyk said. "We could not believe that this was now our reality. But after the initial shock, we realized there was work to do."

UN Refugee Affairs estimates [that over the past six months, more than 11 million people](#), almost a third of Ukrainian citizens, have fled the country, triggering the largest migration crisis since World War II.

"With that comes acute stress and trauma that has affected family relationships, where children suffer the most," Bilyk said.

By working to unite the efforts of family mediators from different cities across Ukraine into one project called *Family Mediation During the War*, Bilyk has formed a coalition of conflict-resolution professionals dedicated to supporting Ukrainian families and working through disputes caused by the war.

"Many families found themselves separated by distance and alienated emotionally due to overwhelming feelings caused by the horror experienced during occupation and evacuation," Bilyk said. "Being in basements during the shelling, family and friends' deaths, home and job loss, illness, and other stress factors has disrupted social cohesion and broken trust."

Daily psychological traumas across Ukraine have led to increased personal conflicts and broken family relationships, accelerated and deepened by the horrors of war.

"All these factors have influenced the necessity for family mediators to use integrative approaches to working with a traumatized Ukrainian population," Bilyk said. "People who are, at the same time, also providing psychological support to the conflicting parties to help restore social cohesion to work out a mutually acceptable resolution and way out of the conflict situation."

Considering the high traumatization of Ukraine's population, Bilyk said that mediators need to recognize people prone to emotional outbursts and have the skills to work through such states. Working with different aspects of trauma and understanding the level of traumatization caused by events experienced is critical in determining the most effective interventions in the conflict.

"The mediator's success and our survival as a nation are increasingly dependent on our ability to listen with empathy," Bilyk said. "We need these skills to help parties return to non-violent communication, solve problems together, negotiate and reach a settlement in the best interest of all family members."

Full story available at bit.ly/3Pi3iNw

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