

Survey Finds Ukrainian Children's Retreat Improves Hope and Emotional Well-Being, but Worry About War at Home Persists

Survey of 527 children finds improvements in happiness and safety after an 18-day retreat in Poland while revealing the emotional limits of healing during war.

PLYMOUTH, NH, UNITED STATES, August 17, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- For 18 days, Ukrainian children whose parents were killed or remain missing in the war trade air raid sirens for mountain trails, counseling sessions, and the simple rhythm of childhood. They laugh. They make friends. Many begin to feel safe again. Then they go home.

That emotional arc is reflected in a new [white paper](#) released Monday by [Common Man for Ukraine](#), which analyzes voluntary post-program surveys completed by 527 children attending the nonprofit organization's monthly mental health retreat in Zakopane, Poland. The responses represent approximately 89% of children attending between February 2025 and July 2026 and provide an uncommon window into the challenges of supporting these children, aged 8 to 12, while the war continues.

Nearly six in 10 children (59.5%) reported feeling happier or calmer after the retreat. More than half (54.6%) felt safer, half (50.1%) felt more hopeful about their future, and 93.5% said they would recommend the experience to another child. Yet one finding stood apart: only 13.9% reported worrying less about the families waiting for them at home, while nearly one-third said their worry had increased.

The contrast is central to the report's conclusions. Healing is possible, the findings suggest, but it



Common Man for Ukraine's survey of 527 children finds improvements in happiness, safety and optimism after an 18-day retreat in Poland while revealing the emotional limits of healing during an active war.

unfolds alongside an ongoing war rather than after it. Program staff encourage daily communication between children and their mothers or caregivers, recognizing that emotional recovery and concern for loved ones coexist.

“These children remind us that resilience is not the absence of fear. They are learning to experience joy again while carrying worries no child should have to carry,” said Lisa Mure, a public health consultant and one of the four co-founders of Common Man for Ukraine. “That is why this work matters, and why it must continue.”



Up to 35 Ukrainian children attend Common Man for Ukraine's trauma retreat each month, learning how to start coping with the death of their fathers in the war.

The report also found that nearly 58% of participants left the retreat feeling they had more peers they could turn to for emotional support. It further notes that the findings are based on self-reported experiences rather than a validated clinical instrument and outlines plans to transition to a modified PHQ-9 assessment beginning this fall.

“

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*Lisa Mure - Co-Founder,
Common Man for Ukraine*

“We chose to publish these findings because honest evaluation strengthens humanitarian work,” said fellow co-founder Susan Mathison. “Understanding both the gains and the limits of mental health support helps us build better programs for children and families living through extraordinary circumstances.”

Since expanding the mental health retreat program created by their Polish Rotary partners in December 2022, the New Hampshire-based organization has served more than 1,400 children of Ukrainian soldiers killed or declared

missing. In 2025, Common Man for Ukraine and its Polish Rotary partners also launched a monthly, 10-day mental health retreat in Zakopane, Poland, for the widowed mothers of these children—responding to the emerging need for mental healthcare for the surviving family unit.

The white paper is being released one day before Common Man for Ukraine's leadership departs on its next humanitarian convoy to Ukraine, delivering 48,000 pounds of food to 16 villages near the front lines. The nonprofit has completed more than 50 humanitarian aid missions that have

provided more than 4.5 million pounds of food and supplies, hundreds of generators, and more than 10,000 sleeping bags to frontline villages, child safe houses, and orphanages.

“The data show us something deeply human. These children can rediscover joy, friendship and hope, yet still carry an enormous burden for the people they love,” said Mure. “This is the reality of childhood during war. Our responsibility is to keep showing up with compassion, consistency and care.”

The need extends well beyond the children this program reaches. UNICEF estimates that 1.5 million Ukrainian children are at risk of depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder and other mental health conditions. In February 2026, as the war entered its fifth year, the agency reported that more than a third of Ukraine's children — nearly 2.6 million — remain displaced, including more than 791,000 still inside the country.

Common Man for Ukraine’s mental health programs operate monthly and are funded entirely by donations. Visit commonmanforukraine.org to read the white paper in full and learn more about the nonprofit’s humanitarian work.

About Common Man for Ukraine

Common Man for Ukraine is an initiative of the New Hampshire-based nonprofit Plymouth Rotary Foundation, 501(c)(3), EIN 59-3841932. The grassroots organization delivers humanitarian aid, including food and generators, and mental health retreats to Ukrainian children and families struggling to survive this war. Donations fuel the nonprofit’s work. Information about monetary, stock, DAF, and additional types of donations can be found online at commonmanforukraine.org.

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Common Man for Ukraine co-founder Susan Mathison visits with Ukrainian children at the nonprofit's trauma retreat in Zakopane, Poland.

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