



A Voluntary Charity working in Ukraine and Moldova

with roots going back to 1990



Voices from Ukraine – Summer Camps, Where Laughter Still Lives

Summer Camps

We can do so much to help those in Ukraine, adults and children alike. Summer Camps are a wonderful route to escape the daily trauma of life in a warring country. We may not be able to stop the missiles, but we can still have fun.

Even if only for eight or nine hours a day, we can help children escape their thoughts and fears and enter the world of childhood again, running and playing, laughing and joking - just being children.

We are incredibly grateful to all our generous supporters, especially the Calleva Foundation, for making it possible to welcome even more children to our Summer camps in Ukraine this year.

“Where Laughter Still Lives”

Each year, across Ukraine we have arranged Summer camps for children—children who have lived with air raid sirens, grown used to the sight of sandbags and broken windows, and learned too young what it means to wait for news from the front. And one camp for adults, widows, orphans and wives of the missing with their families.

Some camps are held in the quiet hills beyond the reach of artillery, nestling in a patches of forest that still smells of pine and wildflowers, there is a summer camp where laughter lives. It's not the kind of laughter that forgets, but the kind that remembers and heals.



“A Place to Breathe: Summer Camp in a Time of War”

On the outskirts of a town in the east of Ukraine where the days are often interrupted by air raid sirens and nights are spent listening for the distant thud of explosions, something extraordinary happens every summer. For one week, the church grounds turn into a magical world of laughter, games, and sunshine—a place where children can simply be children again.

The war has touched every family here. Fathers have gone to fight. Homes have been lost. Fear and uncertainty fill the gaps where safety once lived. But for one week, from morning until late afternoon, the camp opens its gates and gives these young hearts a break from carrying too much.

CHRISTIAN RESPONSE IS A VOLUNTARY CHARITY AND RELIES ON DONATIONS

If you would like to support this work, please make cheques payable to **cr2ee** or direct transfer to Barclays Bank, Exeter. 20-30-47 account number 20902446

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This camp doesn't have roller coasters or fancy roundabouts. What it *does* have is laughter. Laughter in every corner: in the dusty games of tag, in the shrieks from the games that demand running and laughter and teamwork, screams of joy from the water balloon fights, (no summer camp is complete without getting soaked), and the gentle hush of crafts under shade trees.

For many of these children, life has been shaped by loss and fear. Some have lost their homes, some their schools. Others have lost parents or siblings. Nearly all of them have learned to listen for the siren's wail and know where to run when it sounds.

But here—at camp—they are allowed to be what war tries to steal from them: children.

The children tell each other stories, one girl, eight-year-old Daria, told a story about a sunflower that could fly. "It flew over the war," she said, "and dropped seeds of peace everywhere it went." The group was quiet. Then someone clapped. And then everyone did.

Every morning, they arrive with backpacks slung over small shoulders. Volunteers greet them with welcoming smiles. There's music playing, juice waiting, and chalk on the pavement, inviting drawings of suns and flowers. From the moment they step inside the gates, the outside world recedes just a little.

When nine-year-old Sofia arrived on the first day each morning, she held her younger brother's hand tightly. Their father is a soldier; their mother works long shifts at the hospital. At home, things are quiet—too quiet. But here, Sofia plays hide and seek, sings silly songs, and forgets, just for a little while, to be brave. Her brother draws tanks that shoot out *hearts*, not bullets.

Throughout the week, children paint, sculpt, dance, and learn simple theatre games. They build paper airplanes, eat fruit with sticky fingers, and cheer each other on in the games and races. The leaders, many of them young adults who have lived through their own share of trauma—create a world of kindness and calm, where everyone is safe and seen.



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Aleksandra, ten years old, loves crafts. She spent the first two days of camp making tiny felt hearts—yellow and blue, Ukraine's colours. On Thursday, she handed one to every camper. "For courage," she said quietly. "So we don't forget who we are."

For these children, the camp is not just a place to play; it is a space to breathe. A space to forget about bunkers and blackouts, even just for eight hours a day. And that's enough. That's *everything*.

Parents, many of whom are worn thin from months of stress, say the difference is immediate. Their children come home with flushed cheeks, stories to share, pictures they've drawn, songs they've learned. For the first time in months, some of them sleep through the night.

"This camp saved our summer," one mother said softly. "And maybe more than that."

Behind the scenes, local organizers and donors work tirelessly to make it all happen—gathering equipment, securing food, finding safe spaces. It's not easy. But each child's smile, each unburdened laugh, makes every bit of it worthwhile.

We may not be able to stop the missiles. But we *can* create places where joy survives.

We can offer moments where children are not defined by war, but by imagination and innocence. We can help them remember that laughter still belongs to them, that childhood is not lost, only paused. And we can stand beside them—not only in sorrow, but in celebration, even of the smallest things.



A water balloon caught mid-air. A puppet show on a makeshift stage. A paper flower passed from one small hand to another.

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Hope is a fragile thing. But like these children, it is remarkably resilient. For one week, they have a space to run, to laugh, to heal. For one week, war is pushed to the edges of their minds. They play games instead of calculating danger. They tell stories instead of listening for sirens.

We may not be able to stop the missiles. But we can still give children joy. We can create these bright pockets of peace in the darkest of times.

A summer camp in a war-torn land might seem like a small thing. But to these children, it is everything. Because even in war, there must be places where childhood lives on.

“One Week of Sunshine”

