

Ukraine

Ukraine has had an unstable domestic political situation for several years and in addition to that, more than 100,000 children live in institutions, separated from their families. During 2020, in addition to the political, economic-, and social challenges caused by the conflict, the Covid-19 pandemic has added another dimension of challenges with regards to health that also exacerbates the already difficult economic situation many families live under.

The pandemic has been a major challenge for SOS Children's Villages – as for most others. For many parents the pandemic, in addition to the risk of getting infected, has meant lost jobs and poorer economy, and for the children, that they have not been allowed to attend school. When families have been forced to stay home and indoors during uncertain conditions domestic violence, both against adults and children, has become a bigger problem. SOS Children's Villages started working in Ukraine in the 1990s, and during the current situation SOS Children's Villages' work in Ukraine has been more important than maybe ever before.

Despite the situation with the pandemic SOS Children's Villages Ukraine managed to maintain the quality of their services, strengthen coordination in the programmes, adjust to working more digitally and create new collaborations with authorities. SOS is one of very few organizations that is actively working in areas of eastern Ukraine which have been affected by the conflict.

During 2020, the situation for the deinstitutionalization reform has worsened. The legislation is conforming to the institutions instead of the children, and the moratorium for placement of children under three years of age into children's homes is postponed. Thereto, by the end of this year the Children's Services, that handles child protection measures, will be eliminated. That means that several child related measures will lose their executive body, including adoptions, removal of children from unsafe environments and placement of children into foster families and alternative care. Basic child protection issues will suffer from legal ambiguity.

Programme information

Youth Care in Brovary

Through the Youth Care Programme in Brovary 20 young people who have left care and eight who are preparing for an independent life are supported. Among them, 13 are employed in permanent jobs and have a stable income, six are studying in vocational schools, two took a course with psychotherapists to gain self-confidence and three are regularly attending classes with psychotherapists, two have opened deposit accounts to be able to repair and arrange their own housing and one youth became self-sufficient and is now able to live an independent life.

At the Youth Center, 200 young people receive psychological support, social services and trainings in life skills every month. During the quarantine this was done digitally, so the interaction was maintained effectively. Some classes, group psychological sessions and thematic meetings were held face to face in small groups observing social distance and protective measures.

The Youth Care programme aims at providing a range of living arrangements to suit the specific individual needs and wishes of the youth. This could be either in small group homes or in foster families. Foster families have been provided with computer equipment for online classes, and the amount of support for foster parents has been increased. Risk assessment was carried out and a plan was developed to reduce risks during the pandemic. Implementation of the plan made it possible to avoid too many parents getting ill and the loss of parental care for youths growing up in foster families.

To further develop the Youth Care programme in Brovary and to increase the quality of care for younger children in the Children's Village, a training programme preparing youths for independent lives was implemented for 12- to 16-year-olds in the Children's Village Brovary.

The year in numbers Brovary:

- Youths living within the Youth Care programme **8**
- Supported youths who have left care **20**
- Youths supported through the Youth Centre **200**



Volodymyr and his friends. Photo: SOS archive

Healthy lifestyle, bright future

Volodymyr, or Vova as everyone calls him, is a 21-year-old young man who already is a role model for many children in SOS Children's Village Brovary. The road to where he is now was not easy. Vova had a rough start in life. Shortly after his birth in 1999, his mom became ill, and he had to be placed in an orphanage. Vova never met his father.

Vova's birth mom visited him in the orphanages, but those short moments of happiness couldn't make up for the daily painful experiences. Vova recalls that he would forcibly shove food down his throat because if he refused to eat, he'd have porridge thrown at his face.

When he was five years old, Vova was moved to a boarding school and then to another orphanage. He doesn't have pleasant memories from either.

At seven, Vova came to live in the family of SOS mother Zoya in SOS Children's Village Brovary. There, with Zoya, the boy found all the necessary support, love and warmth he so desperately needed. Vova fondly remembers the many family trips he went on with Zoya and the other children to the countryside and to the seaside – family experiences he never had before.

– But I was a bully when I came, Vova says honestly.

Tormented and traumatised, those first days in the village Vova mostly spent outside. His behaviour got noticed by everyone. Understanding that such behaviour comes from past experiences where you have only yourself to rely on, the village director decided to give Vova a responsible task: the boy was to be responsible for the order in the village.

After that, Vova couldn't allow himself to be mean or behave badly anymore. The other children jokingly started calling Vova "a little director" which he accepted with pride and took the task upon himself with great seriousness and responsibility – traits which remain his characteristics.

After finishing primary school, Vova enrolled to a professional college for auto-repair, followed by a pedagogical college. His plan was to enrol to university studies in Transportation. At home, he was the right

hand of SOS-mother Zoya who couldn't be prouder of her boy. Then tragedy struck. Vova's beloved SOS-mother Zoya passed away. Vova was devastated. After twelve years filled with happiness, care and affection, the then 19-year-old Vova decided that he would not stay in the village with new SOS-parents, but instead move to the SOS Youth Home.

– It was difficult for Vova to get over his loss, Alina, Vova's youth mentor recalls. – But, gradually with the support of me and his friends, Vova coped with the loss and found strength to move on.

Alina built strong bonds with Vova through food. In those first days in the youth home, Alina noticed that Vova's diet shifted to junk food – a fast and easy way to once again bury his grief.

– I'd only have crisps, candies and soft drinks. That was my breakfast, lunch and supper, Vova says.

Alina realised lectures wouldn't work, so she took an unorthodox approach: she offered a challenge to Vova to keep off junk food and eat fresh vegetables, fruits, meat and fish for a month. Being a health-food amateur herself, Alina helped him through the challenge. They cooked together, planned grocery lists together and went grocery shopping together. Vova was planning his daily meals by nutritional value and even took photos to verify his dedication to the challenge.

– I took the challenge because I wanted to prove to myself that I could do it, Vova says adding that the first days were hard. – I quickly developed a taste for fast food, so changing it for porridges, vegetables and fruit was not easy. Not easy at all, he smiles.

The healthy eating habits Vova developed inevitably lead to a healthy lifestyle filled with many outdoor activities. One of them was camping.

– I so much loved the travels with mom Zoya, Vova remembers. – It was so much fun to go camping in the summer. When I came to the youth home, I reconnected with this childhood passion of mine. It's so cool to be in nature, watch the sunrise and the sunset. That's something you can't ever experience in the city. Everyone should go camping.

Vova kept his active healthy lifestyle going by participating in marathons, different camping and rafting trips, and in the in the summer of 2020 stepped up his game by becoming a guide's assistant and mentor for 11- to 14-year-old children on Lake lalyinka.

In the youth home, Vova is the first to volunteer for organising quests, culinary master classes and sport competitions. In the autumn of 2020, he was the initiator and organiser of a slacklining adventure in the local Sky Park. Inna, the youth home leader, remembers that trip well:

– Not only did Vova organise the trip for the young people, but he also motivated me to complete several levels. And I'm scared of heights! We had lots of fun and gained a few muscles. This just shows that we are not only teaching the young people, but learning from them too. It's really motivating and makes going to work a great pleasure.

Alina sums up:

– In the time since Vova came to the youth home, he really has matured. He is a responsible and reliable young man with good organisational skills. He leads a healthy lifestyle and prepares for university. He gets along really well with the teenagers in the youth home who informally, but affectionally call him their mentor.

Over the past year, Vova's success, determination and dedication became a subject of admiration among the young people of SOS Children's Village Brovary many of whom aspire to become "just like Vova". The young man takes being a role model seriously and says:

– I am seriously thinking of becoming a youth mentor.

Financial report

Donated by Akelius University Foundation, EUR	2020 Budget	2020 Actuals	2021 Budget
Running costs youth programme	176 188	151 122	152 298
Total	176 188	151 122	152 298
SEK (using exchange rate at the time of payment)	1 911 639	1 639 670	1 629 587
Average exchange rate	10,85	10,85	10,70
Total budget/actuals, all facilities above, EUR	2020 Budget	2020 Actuals	2021 Budget
Balance from 2020	0	0	-28 931
Investment/Maintenance	3 157	7 074	3 237
Current working expenditures	81 145	51 221	69 129
Personnel expenditures	76 392	50 862	66 358
Other expenditures	6 685	5 080	5 959
Total	167 379	114 237	115 752
Share covered by Akelius	100%	100%	100%

*Remaining amount from 2020 will be used 2021