

Tomasz Polkowski, Child & Family Foundation, Posted 4th March 2022 on Facebook

The first advice for admitting a group of children from Ukrainian orphanages:

1. Children should be placed **in cities where there are adequate resources for care-givers, volunteers and specialists** (including Ukrainian-language psychologists). Children show signs of attachment disorders, often also various developmental and health delays. They need to be diagnosed psychologically and medically. They were often not provided with health services. Therefore, placing these groups outside large urban centers will make the work very difficult.
2. Proper **staff should be prepared** starting with the person responsible for a group from the admitting side, educators (few caregivers come with groups and they often bring their own biological children with them).
3. Volunteers are needed, who will commit to volunteer work on a constant, non-action manner, to **avoid children's constant introduction to new people**. The number of people having contact with these children should be reduced and their relationship-building skills should be increased from the first day of their stay.
4. Small children can be very unsocialized and have **behavioral disorders**. It will take a lot of intensive work of specialists and volunteers to be able to think about their participation in the preschool education.
5. **Teenagers** from orphanages in Ukraine often did not realize their school duties, and therefore they will also require **long-term preparation for school**. Before starting education in local schools, psychological diagnoses should be made in order to accurately define the needs, examine the intellectual and social abilities of children. Intensive local language courses should be provided to children.
6. **Psychologists with knowledge of Ukrainian language** are needed. It's hard to imagine preparing professional diagnoses through interpreters.
7. **Groups should not be big** and the opinion that "big groups should not be divided" is wrong. In Ukrainian children's homes, older children often bully the younger ones, therefore, for example in Lodz city we try to separate teenagers from younger children. Working in smaller, autonomous groups will allow to take intensive actions to meet individual needs. The scale of needs for children from Ukrainian orphanages is far greater than in the case of Polish children and it concerns primarily health, emotional, social as well as accommodation needs. The idea of placing 100 to a few hundred children in one place is considered a big mistake, which causes many educational problems and conflicts, and also causes escalation of difficulties.
8. The biggest problem of these children, in addition to large health and emotional neglect, is the **lack of individual relationships** and, at the same time, instinctive search for such relationships. It is a priority to ensure the most individualized care of stable people that will help Ukrainian children start relationships and go through the adaptation and socialization process.
9. **Remember the needs of local children**. When we place Ukrainian children for example next to Polish institutions, there are already questions of Polish children like "why do you provide them so much and we don't have it"...
10. **It is difficult for Ukrainian children to trust adults**. You can talk and gradually make friends with them, but it takes a lot of attention, focus on them, much individual time for every child. After breaking the ice they may focus very much on an adult who shows interest and respect. This is why people with great communication skills and empathy should work for them. The necessity of overcoming language barriers should be considered here.
11. Ukrainian children should be provided with a plan of **re-educational, social, and adaptive activities**. This requires a precise organization and, once again, local resources. It is also important to plan and consciously organize outings that allow you to get to know a new environment.

12. Remember that some children will need to contact someone important in Ukraine. There is a need to think about **mobile phones** for them.

13. Remember that Ukrainian children have a chance to know a different model in Poland than the typical post-socialist orphanage. Let's provide them maximum cozy conditions instead of long, sad corridors - if possible.

14. Remember that Ukrainian children are and will remain Ukrainians, therefore **free access to their language, culture, art, music and peer contacts should be provided.**

15. The creation of a network of large childcare and educational institutions for Ukrainian children is in contradiction with the laws and standards of care for a child in foster care in Poland and Europe. This is why a plan to place children (especially the younger ones) in **family environments** should be prepared, with the priority to Ukrainian or mixed foster families.

16. **Explaining all legal issues and taking quick action to ensure specialist healthcare is a priority**, as well as making decisions for Ukrainian children related to education and specialist psychological help (enrolment in schools, preschools, courses, extracurricular classes, circles of interest). One has to remember that children come practically with no personal documentation or passport.

How to support

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