



commonmanforukraine.org

## Ukrainian Children's Health Retreat: Post-Program Survey Findings

*Measuring Physical, Emotional, and Social Outcomes Among Program Participants*

August 2026

### I. Introduction

The Ukrainian Children's Health Retreat is an 18-day program held in Zakopane, Poland, for 8- to 12-year-old children of soldiers who have been killed or declared missing in Ukraine's defense against Russian invasion. The retreat was developed by several Rotary groups in Poland and implemented annually as a summer program for children who lost a parent-soldier during the 2014 invasion of the Crimea peninsula of Ukraine. Beginning in December of 2022, the retreats expanded to a monthly program as a result of new funding from [Common Man for Ukraine](https://commonmanforukraine.org/), a Rotary-based initiative in the United States (Plymouth, NH) committed to raising funds for Ukraine's widows, children and vulnerable families most affected by the war.

Children attending the retreat are between the ages of 8 and 12 years old who have been identified by the Ukrainian military as the child of a soldier killed or missing in action. Zamość Ordynacki Rotary Club leader Ryszard Łuczyn, director of the children's retreat program, works with Ukrainian pediatrician Oksana Sambulski, MD, to contact children's families to offer the retreat opportunity. More than 1,400 children have been served by the retreat since December 2022.

### II. Methodology

Funders of the program developed a simple questionnaire translated into Ukrainian by native Ukrainian speakers to assess the children's satisfaction with the retreat program and activities. The survey also included several questions that focused on changes in mental health. The survey instrument was administered online, with most children completing the questionnaire in a group setting but on their personal phones. Children without phones used a counselor's phone to complete the survey. The instrument has had several modifications over the years affecting response rates for each question. A revised instrument is anticipated in the fall using a modified version of the Patient Health Questionnaire for Adolescents ([PHQ-A](#)).

### III. Data

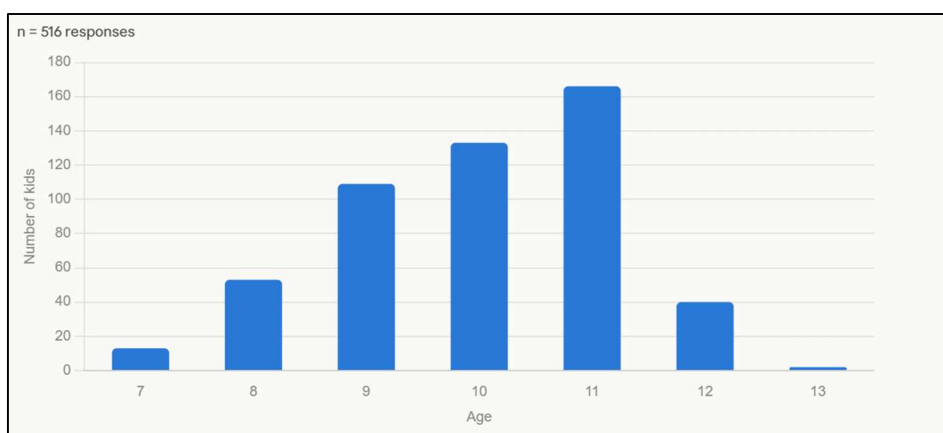
Data provided in this report are from 527 children attending retreats between February 2025 and July 2026, representing approximately 89% of child attendees. Survey data from retreats



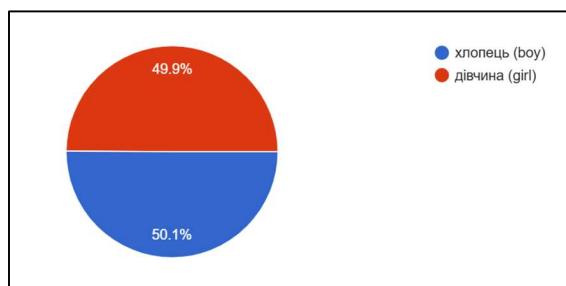
held between spring of 2023 and spring of 2025 are in a different data format and have not been merged with these data. Data collected included the following topic areas: Respondent demographics (age, gender, region of residence); mental health indicators before attending the retreat; mental health indicators since attending the retreat; satisfaction with accommodations and activities; and recommendations for improvements for future retreats. The survey is not required, and children are able to skip questions which results in the number of respondents per question varying between 440 and 527.

#### a. Demographics

*Age of Children Attending.* The children's retreat is designed for children between the ages of 8 and 12, although younger and older children are permitted at times if they are near in age and attending with a sibling. The age range of respondents is depicted in the following chart, with age 11 being the most common age of respondents.



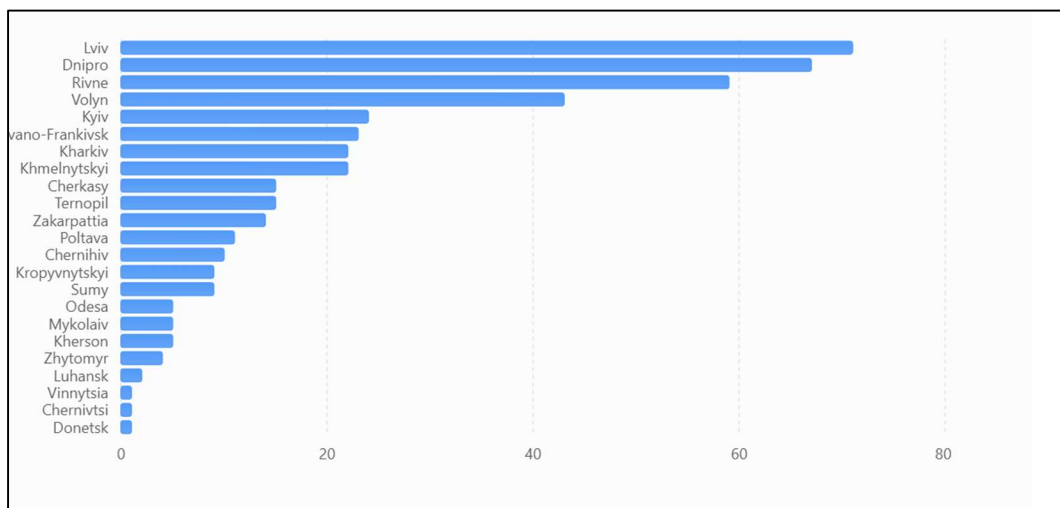
*Gender of Children Attending.* Children of both genders are invited to the retreat, with male and female attendees split evenly at 49.9% (girls) and 50.1% (boys).



*Regions of Residence.* Respondents indicated the region in which they currently live. The region ("oblast") of Zaporizhzhia was missing from the survey for a period of time, underrepresenting the number of children from that region attending the retreats. This error was corrected in early 2026. Lviv is the region that most respondents indicated they are from, followed by Dnipro and

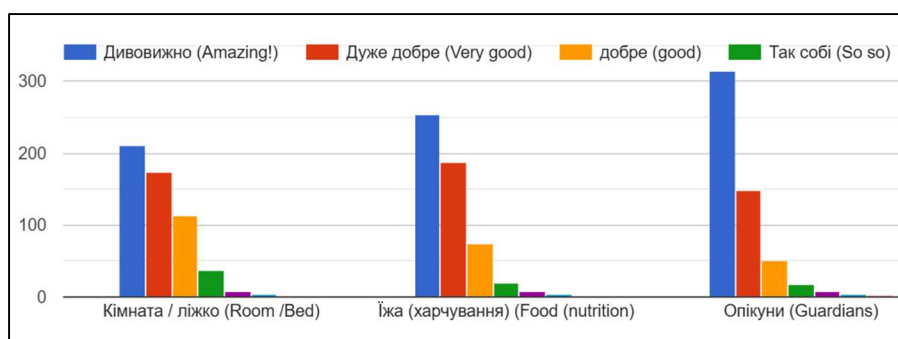


Rivne. The fewest responses were from children from Vinnytsia, Chernivtsi and Donetsk. News sources report up to 85% of the Donetsk region being under Russian control, likely affecting access to the retreat opportunity for children living in that region. Furthermore, anecdotes from children indicate that some children at the retreats may originally be from a region near or in the area of fighting or under Russian control but live temporarily in a safer region.



## b. Satisfaction with Accommodations and Services

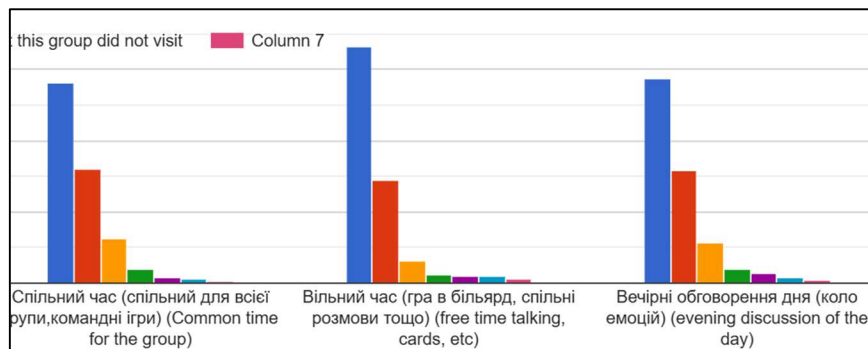
*Accommodations and staff.* Children were asked to rate aspects of their stay based on a scale from “Amazing” to “Did not like it.” Overwhelmingly, children rated their room/bed, meals and guardians as “amazing” or “very good”.



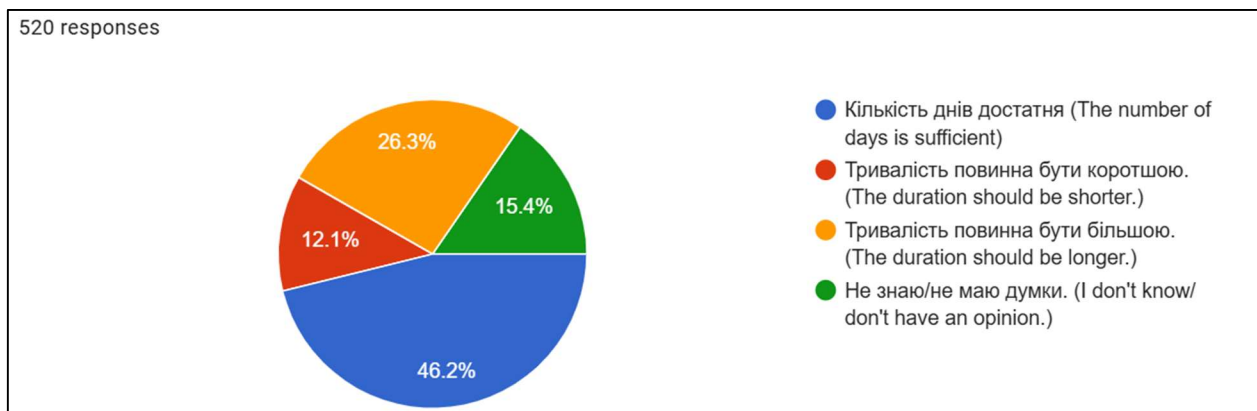
*Therapeutic activities.* Children were asked to rate therapeutic activities based on a scale of “Amazing” to “Did not like it”. Children overwhelmingly rated art-based activities, group activities, and writing sessions as “amazing” or “very good”, with drawing and art receiving the highest marks.



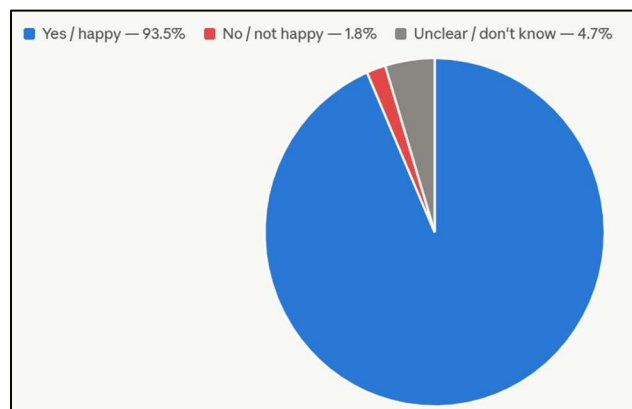
*Free time and group reflection.* Further questioning asked children to reflect on their satisfaction with having common social time, individual play time (e.g. cards, pool) and group talks every evening to review the day. Children indicated high satisfaction with free time, common time to connect, and evening discussions.



*Retreat duration.* Children were also asked if they felt the length of the retreat was too short, too long, or satisfactory. The highest percentage of responses indicated the retreat length was sufficient (46.2%) or should be longer (26.3%). The fewest respondents felt that the retreat should be shorter in length (12.1%).



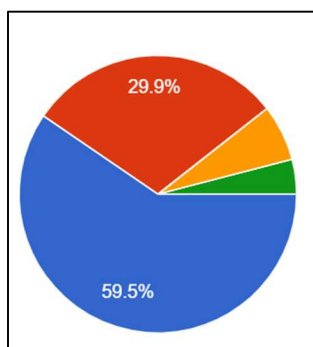
*Recommend retreat to others.* Children were asked if they were likely to recommend the retreat to other children. Overwhelmingly, 93.5% indicated they would recommend a friend attend the retreat, likely indicating high overall satisfaction with the retreat. In a follow-up question for the 1.8% who indicated they would not recommend the retreat, virtually all reported some form of homesickness rather than any negative aspect of the retreat experience.



### c. Emotional Status

Children were asked questions about their sense of happiness, optimism for the future, and other socio-emotional indicators relative to before their attendance at the retreat and then since attending the retreat.

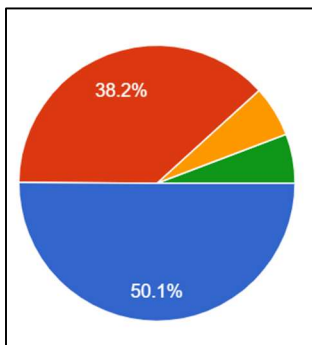
*Sense of happiness.* Most children (59.5%) indicated feeling more happy or calm since attending the retreat than any of the other response categories. Almost 30% of children reported feeling as happy or calm (same) as before camp. The lowest categories of responses were feeling less happy or calm or not ever having the feeling.



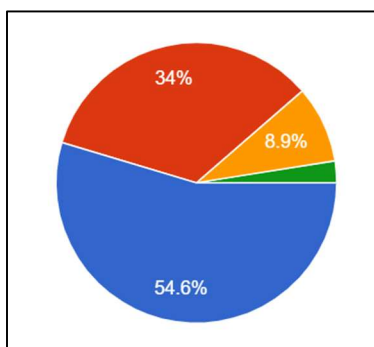
*Sense of the future.* Most children (50.1%) indicated feeling positive about their future more since attending the retreat than any of the other response categories. Over 38% of children



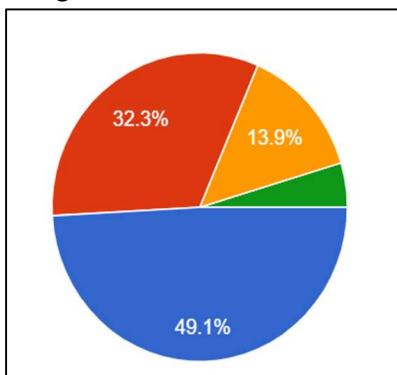
reported feeling as positive about the future (same) as before retreat. The lowest categories of responses were feeling less positive about the future or not ever having the feeling.



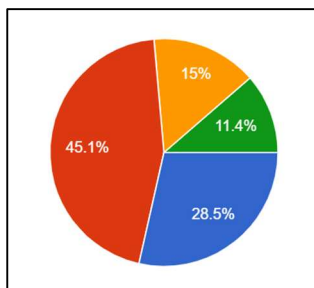
*Sense of safety.* Most children (54.6%) indicated feeling a sense of safety more since attending the retreat than any of the other response categories. Approximately 34% of children reported feeling as safe (same) as before retreat. The lowest categories of responses were feeling less safe than before the retreat (8.9%) or not ever having the feeling.



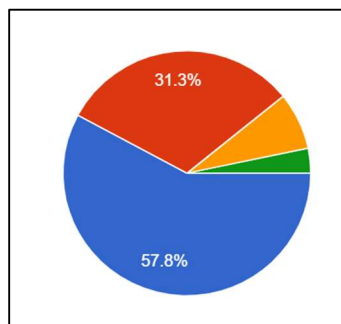
*Worry about family.* In spite of positive gains in a sense of safety, most children reported being as worried about their family and themselves since attending the retreat (same) compared to before the retreat. One third reported feeling more worried about their family since attending the retreat, and 13.9% reported feeling less worried about their family since attending the retreat.



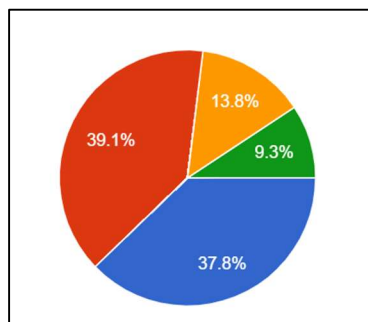
*Worry about the future.* Most children (45.1%) felt the same worry about their future since attending the retreat, while 28.5% felt worry about their future more since attending the retreat. 15% felt less worry about their future since attending the retreat.



*Emotional supports.* Children attending the retreat were also asked about emotional supports available to them before the retreat compared to the end of the retreat. Most children (57.8%) reported feeling that they have peers their own age that they can talk to when they need support more since attending the retreat. More than 30 percent (31.3%) reported feeling about the same since the retreat relative to having supportive peers.

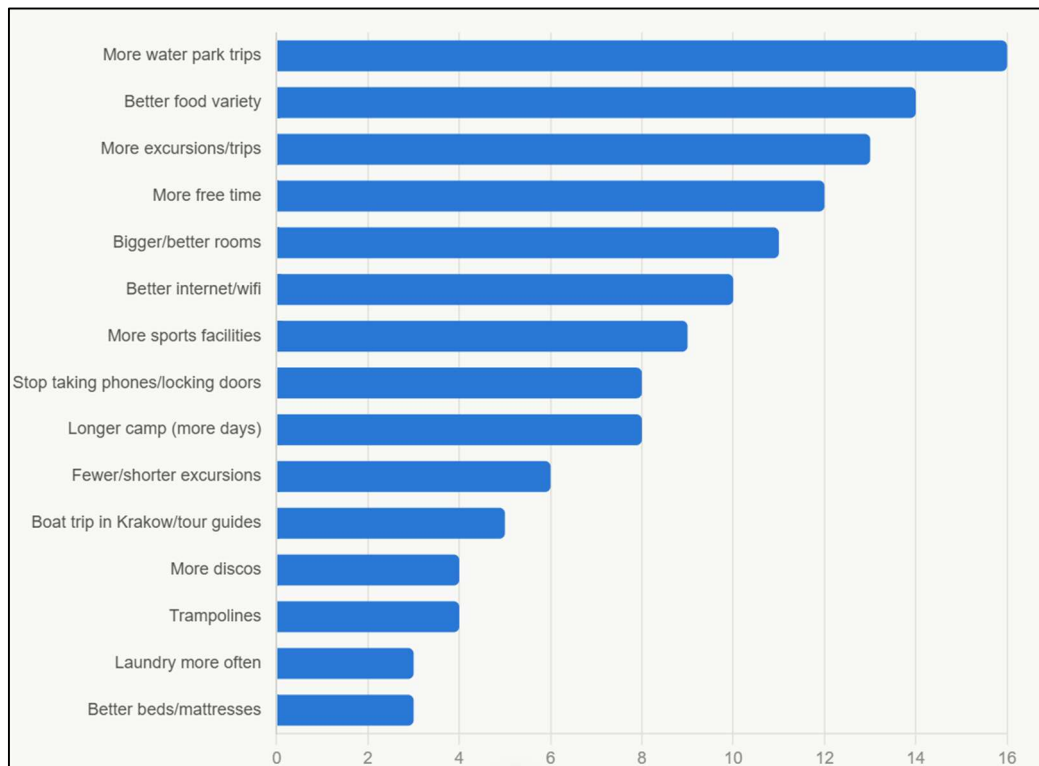


Another emotional support indicator involved whether children knew what to do to help themselves if they were feeling sad or anxious. Almost 40% indicated they felt the same regarding knowing what to do to help themselves while 37.8% felt that they knew what to do if they felt sad or anxious more since attending the retreat.



#### d. Open-Ended Responses

*Ideas for improvement.* Responses were combined into key categories, with recommendations highlighting the popularity of outings such as water parks and improvement to food options and rooms. Children also indicated a desire for more free time during the retreat.



#### IV. Discussion

Data from the post-retreat survey of 8- to 12-year-old children provide a glimpse into a child's experience attending an 18-day retreat outside of their home country and away from their daily life in a war zone. The retreat was designed by Ukrainian staff with medical and counseling backgrounds to provide psycho-social support, trauma relief, and mental health tools and skills to children who have lost a parent to the war (the parent, typically a father, is a soldier killed or missing in action).

Data from these children reveal highly positive satisfaction with the retreat facility, staff, and outings as well as positive change in several emotional status indicators such as a sense of safety and a more positive outlook for their futures compared to before the retreat. Data also reveal, however, that children maintain a sense of worry while at the retreat in Poland, likely for their family and home while they are away. One of the greatest benefits of the retreat, according to staff, is the peer support that emerges as children meet each other from other parts of Ukraine with the shared trauma of losing a parent. Data reflect that most retreat participants (57.8%) do sense more peer support since attending the retreat. For the 31% who indicated the same level



of peer support, follow-up questions may help retreat staff understand if they feel this due to strong peer supports at home or if they feel this due to being unsure if their peer connections during the retreat will be maintained after they return home.

One of the most important indicators in the survey related to whether children felt they knew how to help themselves if they were feeling sad or anxious. Response categories of feeling their knowledge of what to do was the same as before the retreat versus their knowledge of what to do being more since attending the retreat were similar (39.1% vs 37.8%). Follow up may be necessary to determine if the question is being understood clearly by respondents and if staff are articulating to children that the therapeutic activities at the retreat (e.g., art and music as calming techniques) are tools for them to use after the retreat to support their emotional and mental health.

## V. Limitations

Several limitations of these data exist. Children may experience difficulty answering sensitive questions in a group setting, even though answers were only visible on their own phone. A child's age and reading ability – particularly given the significant limitations on Ukraine's education system due to the war – may also limit comprehension and responses. Limitations also exist in that the survey does not rely on a research-based data collection instrument. Data are also likely affected by children responding to these questions after what may be a very impactful retreat experience, yet also as they prepare to return to an active war zone.

## VI. Next Steps

These data confirm a strong satisfaction with the retreat among children attending, with positive change reported in some emotional status indicators. However, data also appear to reflect a reality of providing trauma support during an ongoing war. Children reported little change in their worry about themselves and their families, with some indicating their worry increasing. This may be due to the separation from family while attending the retreat. Staff, also living in the war zone, are sensitive to this dynamic and encourage daily communication between mothers/caregivers and children.

Next steps recommended are to continue to hold listening sessions with mothers/caregivers inside Ukraine to understand longer term impacts of retreat attendance as well as to understand unmet needs of families for future program development. Focus groups with children before leaving the retreat and at intervals after the retreat are likely to bring more context and meaning to the information gathered from the survey. This data should also continue to be used by program and facility staff to support future improvements to the retreat experience. Program leaders may also consider using a research-supported data collection tool to better understand the psycho-social and emotional well-being of children before and at regular intervals after the retreat.



### *About the Author*

Lisa Mure, MEd, is a public health consultant and former educator who has worked in the mental health arena for over two decades. As a former senior consultant with JSI Research and Training, Mure developed and designed program evaluations, best practice trainings, data reports, state strategic plans, white papers, and systems analysis among other work areas to improve mental health practice at the local, state, and regional level. She has led many qualitative and quantitative data collection, analysis and reporting projects and has consulted for multiple state public health departments in children's and adult mental health. Mure co-founded the nonprofit Common Man for Ukraine in 2022.

### *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 provides mental health retreats to Ukrainian children and families struggling to survive and cope with the war. Public donations fuel the nonprofit's humanitarian work.

Learn more about and connect with Common Man for Ukraine at [commonmanforukraine.org](https://commonmanforukraine.org).

