

Ukraine: Light of Hope's Work Improving Social Services For Marginalized Groups

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OVERVIEW

Light of Hope was founded in 1999 as a charity association with the mission of helping people living with HIV. Over the course of more than a decade of work, Light of Hope has expanded its services to reach people with substance abuse problems, newly released prisoners, and the homeless. This case study looks at the opportunities that Light of Hope has been able to provide through its Social Adaptation Center, and draws lessons from this experience for other civil society organizations (CSOs), particularly those that wish to work in a partnership with local authorities.

During its 15 years of working in the social sphere of the city of Poltava and Poltava region, Light of Hope has helped rehabilitate more than 10,000 people, assisting them to gain access to social services. It has also fostered strong partnerships with international and national organizations. With an annual budget of about Ukrainian Hryvnia (UAH) 25.5 million (USD \$1 million) mostly from donations and grants, and with 90 members of staff, Light of Hope has become one of the biggest service-delivery CSOs in Ukraine.

This case study examines the Light of Hope campaign to establish the Social Adaptation Center in Poltava and secure funding from the local government for its operation. It gives details about how Light of Hope managed to successfully launch a facility to deliver services to ex-prisoners, drug users, people living with HIV, and the homeless — vulnerable sections of the community that often lack access to social services and benefits.

Light of Hope's work focused on drug users, former prisoners, and HIV-positive people. While many of these people lack a permanent residence, Light of Hope only took up homelessness as an explicit focus area in 2011. It was clear that addressing the needs of these populations was not a priority for city authorities, so Light of Hope decided to found a center that would serve these marginalized groups and seek municipal finance for this effort.

The research for this case study made use of written materials including publications in local media, Poltava city government documents, and Light of Hope documentation; as well as a series of approximately 30 interviews with local politicians, administrators, sponsors, partner CSOs, and Light of Hope management (see Annex 1 for a list of interviewees).

THE PROBLEM: MARGINAL COMMUNITY GROUPS LACK ACCESS TO SOCIAL SERVICES

The Constitution of Ukraine formally grants many social rights to its citizens, including the right to employment, social protection, housing, and free health care. However, the state does not allocate sufficient resources to fulfil the social needs of the country; in particular not enough is spent on vulnerable groups such as ex-prisoners, drug users, homeless people, and people living with HIV. Such groups have no influential advocates at either the national or the local level, are not politically organized, and Ukrainian society generally considers them to be responsible for their own situation.

Many Ukrainians have a long experience of low wages, unemployment, and a resultant poor quality of life. Drug use, especially among under 35-year-olds, is a common route of escape. Economic vulnerability also drives many into prostitution. There are no government-funded campaigns to educate and protect sex workers and the few CSOs engaged in this work are often harassed by a suspicious, ill-informed police force. In 2012 Ukraine had the world's fastest accelerating HIV infection rate, driven by intravenous drug use and unprotected sex.¹

There are many reasons for the high rate of HIV infection in Ukraine. But much of the population remains ignorant as there is little in the way of effective information and few education campaigns. The government does not provide sufficient funding or support for campaigns. HIV is stigmatized in the minds of most of the population. Most Ukrainians do not see HIV as a problem that the government should spend money on.²

Homelessness is also a serious problem in many cities in Ukraine. Many people move to cities hoping to find employment and better opportunities and many end up living on the street and face very harsh living conditions. According to the health ministry, more than 6,500 people asked for help because of extreme weather conditions in the winter of 2010/2011 and 4,200 needed hospital treatment. The cold took the lives of more than 400 people that year.

Along with substance abuse and HIV infection, homelessness is a social problem that needs government intervention. Only 25 percent of those who become homeless ever return to normal life and the longer one remains homeless, the smaller the chance of reintegration into society.³ Apart from the personal and social struggles of homeless people, the structural and administrative obstacles to improving their situation are significant and discouraging. Economic problems in Ukraine and the closure of many enterprises has increased the number of unemployed and homeless people. This

¹ See <http://www.theapricity.com/forum/showthread.php?62239-Ukraine-Prostitution-Drugs-Poverty-and-HIV-%28caution-disturbing-photos%29>

² *ibid.*

³ See <http://life.pravda.com.ua/society/2011/07/6/81276/>

problem needs a more serious public response because of the severe social consequences of being homeless.

People who are dependent on drugs, or who have recently been released from prison, often lack access to healthcare and other social services. Furthermore, many of them do not have any form of permanent residence and are regarded by the state as homeless. These groups are particularly vulnerable to tuberculosis and HIV infection. The government of Poltava is not addressing their needs. While policies supporting the provision of social services for homeless people are in place, these are inadequately implemented. For example, in 2011, the only form of government support was two warming stations installed by the Ministry of Emergencies near both railway stations in Poltava, where the homeless could have hot drinks and meals, but were not permitted to shelter there for the night.⁴

The number of people without permanent homes has increased significantly. In 2009, about 10,000 people were registered as homeless; in 2011, that figure reached 11,500.⁵ This was only the tip of the iceberg, as most homeless people are not registered. In 2009 the total number of homeless people in Ukraine was estimated by the criminal justice authorities at 30,000 of whom 75 percent dwell in the national capital, Kyiv.⁶ Even among the registered homeless, about two-thirds avoid the social care of the state. War in the East of Ukraine caused about a million people to leave the conflict zone, which significantly increased the number of people needing shelter.

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

LEGISLATIVE INITIATIVES

In the last decade, national authorities have begun to pay attention to these vulnerable population groups. This emerged not so much out of a sense of social responsibility, but more because of growing rates of crime and, especially, infectious diseases. As a result, two significant laws were adopted in 2005 and 2011. They were aimed at the homeless and those released from imprisonment.

⁴ According to Nina Cherniak, First Deputy Head of RSA Department of Labor and Social Protection, there used to be a Reception Center in Poltava that dealt mostly with the homeless. It was part of the regional Ministry of Interior Affairs. Its capacity was 30 beds, and the turnover was about 300 persons a year. This institution was shut down in 2006, so since that time there have been no inpatient institutions for the homeless in the city. Admittedly, the RSA as a state body responsible for implementation of the national social policy in the region tried to find some solutions to the homelessness problem, but several rounds of discussions at the regional level (nine in 2009-2011) had not led to any practical results. Only after the very timely Light of Hope initiative did the issue move toward a solution.

⁵ See <http://life.pravda.com.ua/society/2011/07/6/81276/>

⁶ See <http://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/1873206.html>.

THE LAW OF UKRAINE NO. 2623 OF JUNE 2, 2005: “ON FOUNDATIONS OF SOCIAL PROTECTION FOR HOMELESS PEOPLE AND CHILDREN.”

This legislation recognized homelessness as a social problem of public concern. According to this law, local authorities were to register the homeless and grant a renewal of their documents. Article 17 of this law mandates a range of services that local authorities must provide for the homeless: temporary accommodation; social, medical, legal, and educational services; and rehabilitation services that could help them reintegrate into society. The law obliges local authorities to establish night shelters, reintegration centers, and social hotels that could be merged into a single complex to provide integrated services. The costs of social care for the homeless was to be funded through state and local budgets, along with other sources of funding. The law allowed for the possibility that local governments might outsource these social services to CSOs, such as Light of Hope.

THE LAW OF UKRAINE NO. 3160 OF MARCH 17, 2011: “ON SOCIAL ADAPTATION FOR PERSONS WHO ARE SERVING OR SERVED A SENTENCE IN THE FORM OF PERSONAL RESTRAINT OR CUSTODY FOR SOME PERIOD OF TIME.”

This law outlines the public services that are to be provided to people released from prison. This includes temporary shelter; social, medical, legal, and educational services; and rehabilitation services. Shelters are considered a responsibility of local authorities, but they can make use of CSOs in organizing and operating them. The law also contains specific provisions concerning how public money should be allotted through competitive bidding, after which local government will sign a contract.

The adoption of this law was a significant achievement for Light of Hope and the other Ukrainian CSOs that had contributed to its final shape through engagement with the Ministry of Justice, including drafting of the text of the legislation. These national laws established the responsibility of local government for funding the services.

According to Article 91 of the Budget Code, expenses on establishments for social protection of the homeless, and centers for social adaptation of those released from prison, must be funded from the fiscal resources of local authorities.

THE AUTHORITIES IN THE CITY OF POLTAVA ARE FORCED TO RECOGNIZE THE PROBLEM

City government officials in Poltava preferred to downplay the social plight of marginal groups such as ex-prisoners, drug users, and the homeless. Elder Frank Chihowski of the Born Again and Salvation

Church, who had a long history of helping the homeless in Poltava through the church community, said in an interview that “until recently, the city authorities felt awkward in admitting the presence of the homeless in the city.”

Light of Hope and other CSOs tried to move this problem from a taboo topic to an open public issue. They made efforts to convince the community and the city authorities that the problem needed to be confronted. However, up until 2010, the city was able to ignore the problem because the territorial centers reported only an insignificant number of homeless individuals (in 2010, only six in Poltava city and 21 in the Poltava Region). In addition, social protection of the homeless was low on the list of the city government’s priorities, and action was unlikely politically benefit those in office. The Mayor of Poltava city was also not happy that the national government left it to local authorities to fund social services for marginalized groups.

When a new mayor was elected in 2010, and some CSO representatives became city council members, local authorities slowly began to acknowledge the problem and try to arrange partnerships with socially-active CSOs.⁷ The new government of Poltava had only a vague idea of the number of homeless persons who needed shelter. Initially, they thought the number was relatively low and did not warrant emergency action. Moreover, caring for the homeless was not in demand with local citizens, who favored focusing on other issues, such as families, orphans, and the disabled.⁸

However, the city authorities and the public were forced to take the problem of homelessness seriously during the harsh winter of 2010-11; six people in the Poltava Region froze to death, two of them in Poltava city. A specific trigger of Light of Hope’s active engagement on the issue was the case of a young homeless woman with a history of drug use, Inna, who disappeared one day in February 2011. She failed to show up at the community center for addicts or at the substitution maintenance therapy point that she visited daily. She was found frozen to death after sleeping out in the open. Inna’s case served as a starting point for the Light of Hope’s active campaign to create a facility for people like her in Poltava.

Some charitable foundations, such as the Red Cross, and some church communities offered clothing and meals to the homeless, and one church group provided shelter. However, there were few such shelters in the entire region and none in Poltava. Without adequate government support many

⁷ The new Mayor, Oleksandr Mamai supported Light of Hope’s initiative. His predecessor focused the city’s efforts on mentally impaired children. It attracted so much of the city’s resources that there was no possibility of realizing the initiatives of other CSOs. Mr. Mamai’s predecessor also received proposals to open a shelter for the homeless, but his answer was, as his former advisor Dionisii Kaplin stated, “If we had such a facility, all the tramps from the region would gather in Poltava City.”

⁸ No public polls were undertaken in Poltava concerning local priorities in social care, but a study done by local CSO Institute of Analysis and Advocacy in 2014 concerning Poltavites’ opinion on Light of Hope activities demonstrates the following: when asked “What issues of social sphere should charitable organizations deal with?” only 2 per cent noted “the homeless,” Institute of Analysis and Advocacy, “Analytic Report on Results of Opinion Survey ‘Public Opinion of Poltavites Concerning Activities of the Charitable Organization Light of Hope’” July 7-14, 2014, Poltava.

homeless people and ex-prisoners turn to CSOs for help. The Poltava region has the largest number of institutions that give help to the homeless in Ukraine, about 20 out of 90 in the whole country. In 2011, for example, some 280 people from this population applied to Light of Hope for assistance.

Poltava officials came to agree that the city needed a special facility for the homeless so that such incidents would not be repeated, as well as to respond to recent changes in legislation. But it turned out that to launch a Social Adaptation Center as a communal institution could be politically risky and would place a heavy fiscal burden on the city. So when Light of Hope stepped forward with its initiative to bear full responsibility, the local authorities lent their support.

THE LIGHT OF HOPE CAMPAIGN FOR SOCIAL SERVICES FOR MARGINAL COMMUNITIES

The experience of Light of Hope in Poltava provides an example of a successful strategy for a CSO partnership with local government. In 2001, Light of Hope opened a Social Adaptation Center in the city to help victims of substance abuse and HIV, and soon expanded to assist other vulnerable groups in the community that were not receiving social services. The association was given premises at a nominal rate by the city government.

Since its formation, Light of Hope has expanded its activity to offer a wide range of services. In 2005 it started a budget advocacy campaign to press for the allocation of government funds for the purchase of infant milk formula and medicines for HIV-positive mothers. Light of Hope also managed to open the first and only day care center for HIV-infected children in the region. While implementing substitution maintenance therapy for those with substance abuse problems, Light of Hope involved social workers in support of its clients, and it now serves the whole of the Poltava region.

In 2009, Light of Hope initiated a project for the social rehabilitation, care, and support of prisoners. The project served 118 individuals, 58 of whom were HIV-positive, and received public funding. In recognition of Light of Hope's expertise in engaging with the social problems of the city, the Mayor appointed Light of Hope's Deputy Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Nadiia Tymoshenko as an adviser to the city government on issues of gender and family.

In 2011 Light of Hope began conducting educational activities in five prisons, with an emphasis on building the social interaction skills of the soon-to-be-released prisoners. In the same year, Light of Hope expanded the scope of the Social Adaptation Center to that it could also cater for the homeless and those recently released from prison. Through the Social Adaptation Center, homeless people received integrated support services with access to accommodation and meals, medical services, and substitution maintenance therapy.

In 2012 the Social Adaptation Center obtained funding from the city of Poltava to cover some salaries of social workers, meals, and renovations. The center was also given the right to register its homeless clients so that they could receive access to welfare benefits and pensions. In 2013 Light of Hope was the first CSO in Ukraine to open a Training and Industrial Center for both the homeless and former prison inmates. It is co-funded by regional and local authorities and the profits generated contribute towards the costs of Light of Hope social initiatives. In the same year the city provided Light of Hope with premises for its Woman and Child Development Center, which made it possible to separate families and women with children from single clients.

In 2014 Light of Hope changed its charter as an association and began operating as a charitable CSO as the result of an amendment to Ukrainian law relating to the charters of organizations. These changes allowed the homeless to be included as one of the organization's target groups. In that same year Light of Hope started a Resource Center and began to share its best practices with Ukrainian CSOs active in the area of public health and social welfare. Light of Hope became an implementer of the Regional Target Program against substance abuse for 2012-2015.

LIGHT OF HOPE CAMPAIGN FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A SOCIAL ADAPTION CENTER

GOALS

The Light of Home campaign had two goals. The first was to obtain premises for the shelter from city authorities and secure vital services for the clients (night shelter, temporary accommodation up to six months, meals, medical tests, and treatment, etc.). The second was to try to secure public funding for the operation of the institution. It was most important to secure premises for the Social Adaptation Center from the city, and to have it operated by Light of Hope. The issue of funding, while important, was not critical. Light of Hope was prepared to use its own resources (staff and volunteers) and to attract sponsors. The strategic approach used by Light of Hope with regard to these two goals was to make the first goal of opening the Social Adaptation Center the explicit focus of the campaign, and make the second goal of achieving public funding implicit.

After rapidly reaching the first goal and partially reaching the second, Light of Hope realized that merely giving shelter and meals to its clients was not enough for their full integration into society. Granting temporary registration to the homeless was essential in their steps to secure employment or a place to live. Giving a CSO the right to offer registration was something new in Ukraine, so it took special effort to persuade the authorities to grant this. Light of Hope then raised the question of giving required work skills and a first job to its clients, as well as separating the women with children from the others in another facility. These two goals took much less effort than the first one, and in 2013

Light of Hope opened a Training and Industrial Center for those wanting to obtain or upgrade their work skills and find a job. In the same year, Light of Hope also opened a women's and family center.

STRATEGY

After the opening of the Social Adaptation Center in November 2011 and observing the scope of work undertaken by Light of Hope within the following months, the Deputy Mayor of Poltava noted "When we opened the center I had no idea that so many people would use its services. Time has shown that in Poltava many people need such assistance." But from their own previous experience with socially deprived people like those released from prison, Light of Hope staff knew that there was a large need for such a center in the city. Nevertheless, they too were surprised by the response.⁹ In February 2012 the CEO of Light of Hope, Maksym Demchenko, remarked "When we, jointly with city authorities, decided to open this center, we had no idea that it would be so heavily used. The number of those needing support appeared much higher than we can serve."¹⁰

In order to establish the Social Adaptation Center as a service to a variety of marginalized and vulnerable social groups, and to do so with local government support, Light of Hope employed a specific strategy. The CSO was very aware that it would be easier to win public and political support for providing social services to the homeless, than for groups such as ex-prisoners and drug users.

As mentioned, the case of the young woman Inna enabled Light of Hope to raise the issue of opening a shelter for homeless people who might freeze to death out in the open. Using the issue of vulnerable homeless people, Light of Hope sought to include the provision of temporary dwelling for people released from penal institutions and offering a shelter for drug users. Light of Hope initially intended to open a center for the drug users, but the city considered it more important to have a facility for the homeless. Light of Hope saw the opportunity for synergy between its original intentions and the aims of the city and reframed its goals so that it would create a facility for rehabilitating the homeless that would also cover the needs of Light of Hope traditional target groups.

Maksym Demchenko explained this strategic shift as follows: "We had to change our charter and include the homeless as a separate category.... As for us, persons released from prison with no documents or shelter, as well as the drug users who are hiding from police or creditors, or those who had sold an own apartment and have no place to live, are also homeless. We wanted to institute a service for them. However, the local authorities did not count them as homeless; the homeless for

⁹ As Roman Drozd, Light of Hope Deputy CEO and AC director, noted in his interview, based on his extensive experience in social rehabilitation of prisoners: Out of approximately 600 former prisoners released each year in Poltava Region about 60 percent will have lost their social contacts. Many of them will become homeless in the best case, or hardened criminals, in the worst. Breaking of social contacts and a deeply-rooted natural fear of communicating with public authorities make these people very vulnerable and unprotected.

¹⁰ Author's interview (see Annex 1 for a full list of interviewees).

them only refers to those who pass the night in the train station and dig in the trash bins. We also needed to have a facility to give night shelter to those with whom we conduct therapy. They don't even have a place to store pills; in order to restore documents, they need registration. And the Social Adaptation Center could give such a possibility.”¹¹

LIGHT OF HOPE TACTICS AND THE UNFOLDING OF THE CAMPAIGN

THE RIGHT BALANCE OF SKILLS, EXPERIENCE, AND KNOWLEDGE

Light of Hope has accumulated extensive experience in the organization of campaigns and interacting with official authorities. In fact, some city and district officials had been active in the CSO. For example, Maksym Demchenko was a member of Kyiv District Council.¹² Other officials in the incoming government had worked for Light of Hope for more than a decade. Light of Hope appointed Krystina Kryzhenko, an experienced journalist, as its public relations manager in 2014, thought she had collaborated in their media campaign since 2010. This kind of managerial staff composition was a good prerequisite for campaign work. Deputy Mayor Borysenko pointed out that Light of Hope had extensive experience working with vulnerable and marginalized populations and included highly qualified specialists among its personnel.

ENCOURAGING REGIONAL POLITICAL PRESSURE ON THE CITY

The provision of shelter for the homeless is a regional responsibility, and only recommended for the cities. However, the cities are responsible for providing premises, so clearly the two levels must cooperate. In 2010, the political party Conscience of Ukraine achieved a victory in Poltava, gaining the mayor's office and 34 of 50 seats on the local council. Meanwhile, the national elections of 2012 saw the Party of Regions taking charge in the Poltava region. With the city firmly behind the Light of Hope campaign and responsible for providing premises, the Poltava region needed to show its concern for vulnerable populations, such as the homeless. The regional government was a useful source of support as Light of Hope pressed the matter of getting premises for the Social Adaptation Center. In its campaign tactics, Light of Hope made use of its knowledge of national legislation and local regulations, power relations, decision-making processes, and relationships with key decision makers at the regional and local levels.

¹¹ Author's interview (see Annex 1 for a full list of interviewees).

¹² Local councils in Ukraine are the legislative bodies elected by the local community that decide about the most important issues vested in them by the Law of Ukraine on Local Self-Government. To these belong property transfer issues, adoption of the local budget and respective amendments, local development, etc. Members of the local council are not hired by the local government (they retain their previous occupation) and should not be considered as government officials. Poltava is divided into three urban districts, each of which has a district council elected by the district community. Poltava has four local governments – the City Council and three subordinate district councils with respective executives.

LOBBYING CITY OFFICIALS

Light of Hope applied the tactics of personal engagement in its quest to obtain premises for the Social Adaptation Center. It began by working with executive department heads of the city government who are responsible for submitting approvals of requested actions to the city council or mayor. The objective was to gain the support of department heads, without this no action would be taken. Before submitting an official proposal to the city authorities, Light of Hope engaged with the heads of the Department for Communal Property Management, the Department for Health Care, and the Department for Family, Youth, and Sports to win their approval for the proposal.

Light of Hope chose personal lobbying instead of organizing public actions so that officials could be informed privately about the benefits of the Social Adaptation Center, both for the city's vulnerable populations and for themselves as public officials. They could be instrumental in bringing about benefits for the community and secure their positions by assuming the same priorities as the Mayor.¹³ This approach was also successful because Light of Hope intended to bear all the organizational costs associated with instituting the Social Adaptation Center and wanted only a partnership and some support from the city authorities.

USING THE MEDIA TO PUT PRESSURE ON THE CITY

Light of Hope used local media to influence the opinion of the citizens of Poltava and to influence the city administration. The CSO used the media to exert a mild, but constant pressure on government authorities, encouraging support for their commitments, rather than openly criticizing them. Informing the community about the progress and making details of the private meetings publicly available compelled local administrators to keep their word.

Light of Hope needed to persuade city authorities of the need for the Social Adaptation Center. They suggested to journalists that they develop stories on the topic that would capture the attention of the public and evoke sympathy for the people deprived of shelter. Journalists were encouraged to meet the homeless, to get to know their life stories, and to relate stories of how they had ended up in such a miserable state.

Many members of the public were initially against having shelter facilities in their neighborhoods.¹⁴ However, the personal stories narrated by TV, radio, and print journalists helped to overcome

¹³ It should be noted that it is not a tradition of Ukrainian politicians at both national and local levels to do everything to get popular endorsement of their policy in order to be reelected. Mostly, officials seek endorsement of their superiors – in this case the mayor. Community endorsement is less important. Anyway, solving the problem of homelessness was something new for Poltava. This is why it appeared to be an attractive reason for any official “to answer the call” as a socially responsible manager.

¹⁴ One of the reasons for this attitude was a misunderstanding: the locals mixed up the SAC clients with visitors to the substitution maintenance therapy point because the buildings were adjacent to each other. That is why Light of Hope put some efforts (several meetings with local residents) into making it clear that its new facility (SAC) would not increase

prejudice. The public increasingly began to see homeless people as in need of help rather than a source of trouble. Thanks to these reports, a campaign against locating the Social Adaptation Center in the middle of the city exhausted itself within half a year.

To facilitate its media campaign, Light of Hope informed journalists about the most burning issues, organized press tours for them, and set up interviews with the homeless.¹⁵ The aim of their messages was not only to deliver factual information, but also to develop a tolerant attitude toward marginal social groups. The message that was communicated by the media was that not all homeless people had chosen that way of life and that many had been forced out of society by unfavorable life circumstances such as receiving a harsh sentence after committing a minor crime, becoming sick, or losing their documents. Given the opportunity, these people would return to normal life.

The local Poltava TV station Misto and the FM radio station Ltava, which both have the highest ratings, were especially active on the issue. According to a study by the Institute of Analysis and Advocacy (IAA), a Ukrainian think tank, more than 40 percent of Poltavites rely on Misto and Ltava for local news; 65 percent of those surveyed indicated that they got information about Light of Hope activities from these two sources.¹⁶ In addition, the Mayor and other city administrators regularly watch local news to keep track of the issues of the day. Light of Hope also involved journalists from the local Internet media of Kolo and Poltavshchyna to contribute to the campaign. However, according to the IAA research cited above, their reach is substantially lower.

Many journalists were socially motivated and eagerly wrote articles and broadcast programs about homelessness. Krystyna Kryzhenko, a former journalist and Light of Hope public relations manager, explained that you “just want to write about it because it is interesting and really important; you make more effort because you observe the benefit that your material could bring.”¹⁷

In general, the result of Light of Hope’s effort to disseminate information was very positively received, both the authorities and the community began to better understand that the homeless belong to the Poltava community and are need public attention. But some journalists portrayed things in a different light, which generated tensions with regard to the campaign’s primary goal. For example, the Deputy Mayor, who in fact did a good deal to facilitate the allocation of suitable premises for the Social Adaptation Center, felt insulted when a journalist in an Internet article accused her of “being dressed like Sharon Stone when the homeless have no shelter.” However, this was the exception. Diana Lytvynenko, chief editor of Misto, emphasized that “there was no reason for critical messages.”

inconveniences for local community arising from gathering of dozens (sometimes hundreds) of substitution maintenance therapy-seeking persons in one place.

¹⁵ Light of Hope arranged a press tour to local prisons, social patrols, the SASC etc.

¹⁶ Institute of Analysis and Advocacy, *op. cit.*

¹⁷ Author’s interview (see Annex 1 for a full list of interviewees).

Journalists were also regularly invited to Light of Hope for briefings on the progress of the search for premises, and made this information publicly available. Light of Hope also encouraged journalists to ask “inspiring” questions, such as, “Dear Mr. Mayor, a week ago there was a discussion in the City Hall dedicated to searching for the premises for the homeless adaptation center. Could you tell us about the progress in solving the problem?” The sensitivity to media was predetermined by the declared official priorities in the city’s social sphere. The Mayor felt compelled to fulfill his earlier promise to open a shelter for the homeless.

FINDING PREMISES FOR THE SOCIAL ADAPTION CENTER

Light of Hope’s managers identified individuals that could assist securing a shelter for the homeless. They sought advice from legal experts to understand which regional and city officials could help them achieve this goal. The regional authorities were responsible for most social activities in the region and could exert pressure on city authorities, while the city administration was responsible for the stock of city premises.

According to Light of Hope projections, the ideal premises should be designed for up to 20 residents and located in close proximity to other facilities frequented by people seeking shelter and services, such as early disease detection establishments, substitution maintenance therapy points for drug users, etc.¹⁸ Cost efficiency was one of the most important concerns for both the city government and Light of Hope when choosing the appropriate premises. The most suitable option proved to be the premises of the territorial center for social services in Kyiv District, which was the appropriate size and adjoined the Poltava substitution maintenance therapy point operated by Light of Hope.

In the summer of 2011, Light of Hope proposed that the regional authorities carry out an audit of the Kyiv territorial center in order to see if it was already offering services to the homeless. The audit team consisted of the Regional State Administration (RSA) Deputy Head, Poltava and district executives, a specialist in social issues, and the Light of Hope CEO, who knew what kind of questions to raise in order to show that the territorial center was not serving the homeless. The audit found that the territorial center did not render any services to the homeless and that its premises were too small to provide services to vulnerable population groups throughout the district. On the basis of this audit, the authorities decided to move the territorial center to a bigger facility and transfer the premises to Light of Hope on a long-term lease contract at a symbolic rate of one Ukrainian Hryvnia (UAH) a year.

¹⁸ Light of Hope understood that city authorities would not be eager to fund the SAC to full capacity to cover the existing needs, so it has to count on own limited resources. Despite uncertain funding prospects, Light of Hope insisted on launching an adaptation center, not an ordinary night shelter. It was assumed that capacity of this scale (up to 20 persons) could be bearable for Light of Hope until the city would decide to fiscally support the center, or until other possibilities were found. As subsequent events have shown (see description below), Light of Hope expectations were very close to what actually happened. Moreover, current demand greatly exceeds the SAC capacity because of the need to render assistance to internally displaced persons seeking shelter in Poltava Region.

Light of Hope emphasized its ability to provide services to the homeless and also the financial advantages of it running the center. Together with the city finance department, they estimated that it would cost about UAH 1.4 million per annum to launch a public facility for the homeless at the desired location, which seemed unbearable for the city budget. By comparison, another city from Poltava Region, Kremenchug, allotted UAH 300,000 to its homeless shelter and UAH 700,000 in annual maintenance costs.¹⁹ The high cost led Light of Hope to decide that it would maintain the center for about UAH 300,000 with no public investments. Light of Hope achieved its goal by offering the city a significant saving and by attracting investors to provide the needed equipment and help with renovation. This financial calculation persuaded the city authorities to let the premises to Light of Hope at a token rate.

SECURING FUNDING FOR THE SOCIAL ADAPTION CENTER

One of the problems which Light of Hope faced after opening the Social Adaptation Center in November 2011 was a lack of funding. Being a well-known CSO with a well-developed sponsor network meant that Light of Hope needed to persuade city authorities that it would not be able to maintain the Social Adaptation Center without an injection of public funds. As mentioned above, Light of Hope did not intend to seek premises for the center from the city at the same time that it was trying to obtain public funding. Light of Hope believed that, once the Social Adaptation Center was shown to be feasible, the city would agree to support it.

Until the matter of public funding could be settled, Light of Hope had to use its own human and fiscal resources and launch a campaign to attract sponsors and volunteers. Media outreach played an important role in publicizing the fact that the center had been launched but had no money to maintain its activity. Several groups of volunteers were organized to collect food and clothing for the Social Adaptation Center clients. Light of Hope also reached out to local university students, who launched a campaign called “Kindness for Small Change” (which has since become a permanent drive) dedicated to collecting food for the homeless.

According to Ukrainian legislation, budgetary funds for 2012 must have been allocated in the previous financial year. For this reason Light of Hope could not expect immediate city funding. At the same time, city authorities expected that a well-established organization with many international donors, such as Light of Hope, would be capable of bearing the full costs of facility maintenance.

The campaign was implemented through personal influence and targeted the Mayor and his Deputy for Activities and Development of the Humanitarian Sphere. Light of Hope made several arguments in favor of public financial support for the Social Adaptation Center. First, supporting it was in line with

¹⁹ See <http://poltava.to/news/12133/>

the official policies of the city administration and also had a very good chance of success given the involvement of a CSO with a solid track record. Second, the problem of homelessness was extremely topical and a current priority at the regional level.

However, the city could not pay additional expenses at the end of the budget year or in the first quarter of 2012 as all the expenses had been scheduled in advance. Even if money had been available in the city budget, Light of Hope would not be entitled to use it. In order to legally obtain funding from the city, Light of Hope needed to forward a “social request” to city authorities, as specified in the Law of Ukraine No. 966 of June 19, 2003 “On Social Services.” But a social request for specific social services from a CSO, or for securing funding from the local budget, was unprecedented in Ukraine.²⁰ Developing this mechanism took several months.

Rather than depend on the bureaucracy to set up the procedure, Light of Hope took the initiative. Staff and external experts from other CSOs developed a procedure which consisted of the following sequence of steps: 1) creation of the city’s request for bids to provide social services; 2) approval of the statement by the city executive; 3) public announcement of the tender; 4) receiving the bids; 5) decision of the city council commission on social affairs; 6) decision of funding of the specific social services by the city council; 7) instruction of the mayor to allot money to the winning bidder; 8) issuance of the power of attorney to sign the contract for social service delivery with the CSO; and 9) signing the contract. These steps took the better part of a year and the contract with Light of Hope was signed on August 21, 2012.

Not everything went smoothly. Some members of the city council questioned whether there were not more important social needs than homelessness and substance abuse. The most active opponent among them was head of the city maternity clinics. Light of Hope neutralized her opposition by including her in a group that made a study visit to Salzburg to get acquainted with the Austrian experience in dealing with drug users and homeless people. After the trip, she completely changed her mind and became a strong proponent of the Social Adaptation Center and a supporter of other Light of Hope initiatives.²¹

One of the unexpected results in this campaign was the actions Poltava city authorities took in support of the Social Adaptation Center. The Deputy Mayor appealed to the Entrepreneurial Council of Poltava to support the new initiative, leading to several socially-responsible local businesses providing free equipment and materials for renovating the facility. The Deputy Mayor became personally engaged when she visited the Social Adaptation Center for the first time and was deeply

²⁰ The current mechanism of placing a social request is prescribed in the Regulation of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine No 324, “On Adopting the Order of Social Request Placement for Budget Funds,” April 29, 2013.

²¹ Similar tactics were employed with a few other important persons in Poltava. It was done with the goal of changing a person’s mind and showing the best European experience in dealing with the homeless and those newly released from prison. These study visits were funded by international and national technical assistance organizations.

touched by the life stories of its first residents. She used her authority to provide the Social Adaptation Center with what it needed during the time when the city government was not yet in a position to provide funding.

As a result, the center successfully made it through its most difficult time, and Light of Hope finally became a beneficiary of the Poltava city government for maintaining the Social Adaptation Center, receiving UAH 123,132 (USD \$4,821) in 2012, UAH 74,345 (USD \$2,910) in 2013, and 163,000 (USD \$6,382) in 2014. Nevertheless, funding remains an issue because the money comes from non-secured local sources in the framework of the city's target "care" social program expenses and is subject to revision every quarter.

In 2013 there were problems with the payments. In the first quarter they received no money from the city. This was due to problems with the national budget process that defined the city's budget.²² Under these circumstances, maintaining the center became a serious challenge.²³ In some cases local media exaggerated the issue with claims that city neglect had depleted the center's food stores, leading to tension between the city and Light of Hope.²⁴ But the attention did pressure the Deputy Mayor to persuade local businesses to donate food. In a further effort to remedy the shortage of city funds in 2013, Light of Hope launched a mini-campaign which resulted in a quick decision by the city to allocate money to Light of Hope. In order to make the city keep its promises, Light of Hope called on the help of its partner the IAA.

LIGHT OF HOPE'S ALLIANCE WITH THE INSTITUTE OF ANALYSIS AND ADVOCACY

Light of Hope avoided direct confrontations with the city. The organization received funding from the city and regional governments for its activities, so it did not want to jeopardize that relationship.

On the other hand, the IAA positioned itself as a fully independent CSO and could more openly campaign for civil rights.²⁵ It rented its premises at a commercial rate and received no money from the public authorities. A partnership with the IAA proved to be beneficial to Light of Hope. Maksym Demchenko, the Light of Hope CEO, explained the role of this partner in the following way: "We used such tactics When some Social Adaptation Center issue with negative reference to city authorities

²² Despite the formal independence, the city's budget policy is greatly dependent on the national one. For example, the city budget could be approved only after the national budget.

²³ Among Poltava CSOs a story is told about how Maksym Demchenko made city authorities keep their promises concerning fiscal support of the SAC. It was said that if the city did not open funding in order to pay for utilities, Light of Hope would send its clients to seek shelter in the City Hall.

²⁴ An article posted on the Poltavshchyna website is cited here (<http://www.poltava.pl.ua/news/20616/>). Actually, as Roman Drozd stated, this information was entirely accurate, and a picture in the article was not really an "empty kitchen."

²⁵ IAA sees its mission as the development of the civil society and community empowerment concerning public authorities' policy implementation at the regional and national levels. Specific IAA objectives include: facilitating the practice of social accountability; increasing transparency and openness in authorities' practice; conducting research and process analysis; budget monitoring; securing rights and liberties of a human and a citizen; counteracting corruption; policy development at the regional and national levels; and sociological research and public opinion study (information from the IAA website).

became public, we immediately got an angry call from Deputy Mayor Borysenko. We were in hot water. But when IAA (instead of us) raised some problem to be solved, and we just use the outcomes, we do not risk losing our facility, our funding, or anything else. They are independent. We are in a situation where we need to open a discussion, but with somebody else to do it on our behalf. So the IAA makes a study of an issue, and we use the results for our advocacy when talking to authorities. ... This approach minimizes our risks and opens some possibilities with no direct confrontation.”

In response to an IAA request, the city provided data on budget appropriations for year 2013. After analyzing the document, the IAA found that the city planned to spend much more on a dog shelter than on the Social Adaptation Center. The results were presented in a leaflet (see Figure 1). When visiting the city hall the next day, Light of Hope CEO Demchenko put this leaflet on the table and asked whether everything was in order with the city’s spending preferences. Within a couple of days the city allocated money to the center from the city reserve fund.

FIGURE 1: LOCATING INFORMATION FOR GETTING FUNDING FOR THE SOCIAL ADAPTATION CENTER



Source: A leaflet from an IAA iconographic.

SECURING THE RIGHT TO REGISTER HOMELESS PEOPLE AT THE CENTER

Achieving the right for Light of Hope to grant registration to its clients was a challenge because there were no precedents in Ukraine for a CSO to do this. The problem was that government registration

authorities did not want to register the homeless in Poltava, so Light of Hope sought the right to register them at the Social Adaptation Center address. After the center was fully operational, obtaining the right to register clients became a primary goal.

The function of registration belongs to the state (Ministry of Interior Affairs) and not to the local self-government authorities; the respective local registration department branch head became a campaign target. The issue also became a subject of discussion in the media. And, as a result of an extensive study by Light of Hope and external experts, legal clauses were found that permitted state authorities to delegate this function to Light of Hope. After half a year of meetings and many rounds of submitting the legal conclusions on the issue to the state authorities, Light of Hope at last persuaded them that it was legal to be given a registration right. As a result, all Social Adaptation Center clients with temporary stay of up to six months could obtain registration at the Social Adaptation Center address and improve their chances of obtaining employment and improve their general life prospects.

NEGATIVE RESPONSES FROM OTHER CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS

One unanticipated problem appeared after the Social Adaptation Center received city funding, and that was the negative response of other CSOs. Some 400 organizations are registered in Poltava. They assumed that if the city started to fund Light of Hope activities, it would drop its support for the others. At that point, Light of Hope and the Red Cross, both with extensive records of service to citizens, were the primary recipients of city support. The active opponents from the CSO community assumed that the simple fact of registration must make the city their benefactor.

ACHEIVEMENTS OF THE LIGHT OF HOPE CAMPAIGN

SOCIAL ADAPTION CENTER SERVICES AND SUCCESSES

On 16 December 2011, the Social Adaptation Center was opened in the city center on the premises of the former Kyiv District Territorial Center for Social Services. On this first day it took in its first clients: a 38 year old man and a 78 year old woman, both homeless.²⁶ Table 2 shows the full array of services provided by center, from temporary accommodation to assistance from social workers and a psychologist.

²⁶ Kolo website, December 22-28, 2011.

TABLE 2: NUMBER OF PEOPLE WHO RECEIVED SERVICES OF THE SOCIAL ADAPTION CENTER

Service	2012	2013	2014 (10 months)
	<i>Number of people who received services</i>		
Temporary accommodation	182	163	241
Registration as homeless	26	130	214
Registration of residence	18	98	161
Documentation renewal	10	63	78
Job offer	38	71	124
Meals	233	274	356
Receiving state benefits for child birth	0	8	6
Disability registration	0	1	7
Documentation for placement in a geriatric institution	0	2	3
Social recovery	15	21	18

Source: Data provided by SAC administration.

Since 2012, the number of those who got shelter for quite a long period (up to six months) rose from 12 to 42 clients. Since the outbreak of the war in the eastern regions of Ukraine, families with children arrived in Poltava seeking shelter, and many of them found a temporary dwelling in the Social Adaptation Center. About 80 percent of clients have also found jobs through the Social Adaptation Center.²⁷ By comparison, the homeless center in the second-largest city in the Poltava region, Kremenchug, gives shelter to 52 homeless people and has only managed to find jobs for four people.²⁸

During a roundtable discussion at the city hall on 13 September 2013, Poltava city officials noted that from the time that the Social Adaptation Center started its operations, not one person had been found frozen to death in the streets, the tuberculosis morbidity in the city had decreased, the crime rate had dropped, and the social adaptation rate of the homeless and persons released from prison had significantly improved.²⁹ The Light of Hope initiative broke local stereotypes about the homeless and helped Poltavites understand that these are people who have been socially marginalized, not provided with state services, and who need care and support. The growing number of volunteers from different social strata, demonstrates how public views have changed.

One of the biggest challenges for clients is finding a way to make a living. Most of them have no special skills which makes it difficult to find a regular job. They work hard as unskilled manual workers in odd jobs without any job security or protection. Even though they work hard, they receive only a fraction of the remuneration offered to other workers.³⁰

²⁷ See <http://www.poltava.pl.ua/news/17713/>

²⁸ See <http://www.poltava.pl.ua/news/12133/>

²⁹ See <http://www.rada-poltava.gov.ua/news/7959671/>

³⁰ See <http://www.poltava.pl.ua/news/29361/>

To help remedy this the Social Adaptation Center established a Training and Industrial Center (TIC) in 2013. The Regional Employment Center, which sought public work projects that would be funded by state grants on a 50/50 basis with city authorities, became a partner in this effort. For years the city of Poltava authorities had failed to claim the city's share of funding for public works. With the institution of the TIC, it became possible to obtain additional funding from the state for salaries of the social workers and to provide jobs and training to clients. The Regional Employment Center successfully persuaded city authorities to spend money on public works organized by Light of Hope.

The positive results and measurable outcomes have made it possible for Light of Hope to be more successful in implementing its other social initiatives. The practices employed by Light of Hope and implemented in Poltava have proved so effective that in 2014 a Resource Center for the Ukrainian CSO sector was created within Light of Hope in order to disseminate proven best practices across the nation.

SECURING MORE PUBLIC FUNDS

As Table 1 above demonstrates, Light of Hope succeeded in receiving public funding for the Social Adaptation Center, but funding fluctuated from year to year and covered only the minimum cost of utilities, meals, and salaries for several social workers. Light of Hope has a goal of securing more stable funding from the city and attracting additional funds from the regional authorities who have so far have made no financial contribution to Social Adaptation Center.

The prospects for achieving this are good. Svitlana Piven, Director of Poltava Region Center for Social Services, indicate that "Funding from the regional budget would be logical and fair because the center covers needs not only of the city community, but also of the regional one. ... This issue should be discussed in the Poltava Region Council." She went on to say that a regional program exists to fund charitable organizations. While a great many of organizations claim these funds, only Light of Hope operates at a city and regional level. "I think we should have a regional target program specially designed for funding this center," she continued, "because if we do this through competition, then the funding would not be granted. ... I think that all the regional social care authorities and institutions will support this, as well as the members of the regional council."

IMPACT ON THE REGION

Most of the officials of Poltava and Poltava region who were interviewed in the course of this study agreed that the Social Adaptation Center has significantly improved the social and public health situation in the area. For example, Volodymyr Pecherytsia, Chief Physician for the Poltava Region, said "As the homeless belong to a significant risk group with regard to tuberculosis, the Social Adaptation Center allowed us to start systematic work with this population category. ... It was very

important for the community because we removed them from the streets, from the children's playgrounds, from the entrance halls of apartment blocks where they used to find a night's shelter. The center contributed to their social recovery, and this is also important."

CONTEXTUAL REASONS FOR THE SUCCESS OF THE LIGHT OF HOPE'S CAMPAIGN

Alongside the strategies and tactics of the Light of Hope campaign were a number of contextual factors that made the establishment of the Social Adaptation Center possible.

First, changes in Ukrainian legislation placed the obligations concerning the homeless at the regional level. This development turned regional authorities into proponents of the social initiatives that Light of Hope was offering, and made them eager to work with city authorities to make changes that could improve the regional situation. For example, after several people died of exposure during the winter of 2011, the Deputy Head of Poltava Region State Administration "recommended to executive committees of Poltava and Kremenchug city councils to take some steps to establish institutions of social protection for temporary stay of the homeless."³¹

Second, there was a political change at Poltava City Hall. As Light of Hope managers have admitted, they would have had little chance of realizing the Social Adaptation Center project if there had not been a progressive change in city authorities through the local elections of 2010. The new Mayor was a socially-responsible entrepreneur and had contributed greatly to the charitable organization *Nash Dim Poltava* (Our House Poltava). His administrative team shared his views on social issues and he considered an enlightened social policy was a way to distinguish Poltava city policy from the other big Ukrainian cities. The ideas planted by Light of Hope found fertile soil.

Third, the lack of experience among the Poltava city authorities in delivering social services to marginalized groups, and absence of trained staff, coupled with pressure from higher-level government bodies, meant that city government was happy to outsource those services to an experienced CSO such as Light of Hope. In addition, Light of Hope's willingness to assume the initial costs of setting up the Social Adaptation Center made this cost-effective solution to the city's problem extremely attractive.

³¹ See <http://www.poltava.pl.ua/news/7413/>

LESSONS FROM THE LIGHT OF HOPE EXPERIENCE

THE VALUE OF EXPERIENCE, REPUTATION, AND FOCUS

Light of Hope's long-standing positive reputation was one reason for success in this campaign. As Svitlana Piven, Director of Poltava Region Center for Social Services, put it, "This organization stays two steps ahead [in comparison to the authorities] as concerns the issues of vulnerable population groups. ... Their actions were extremely convincing and high-impact; they had extensive experience in collaboration with the local authorities; all the things they started, they finished. ... A lot of other charitable organizations jump from one issue to another trying to work on issues that could bring publicity, but not Light of Hope. ... Light of Hope always reaches the goals of its projects." Such a positive evaluation of Light of Hope was widely shared and persuaded the city administration that the project would be handled well.

This case shows how important it is to remain focused on realizing the primary mission when embarking on a new project. Light of Hope had considerable experience rendering a complex of services to marginalized population groups, such as HIV positive adults and children, ex-prisoners, and drug users. Extending its services to a new target group (homeless people), whose needs the state viewed as more pressing, enabled Light of Hope to find the right "link in the chain" to launch a facility in Poltava that covered the needs not only of the homeless, but also of the marginalized groups that were traditional targets for Light of Hope.

THE VALUE OF A COOPERATIVE STRATEGY

The Light of Hope campaign shows that an advocacy strategy directed at government authorities need not be restricted to confrontational demands to be successful. It can be pursued through a cooperative strategy. A CSO must not only criticize the authorities and persistently demand improvements, but can also make efforts to solve a problem. Light of Hope's engagement with the city authorities might be described as a critical partnership in which the organization pushed the government to take action, all the while offering collaborative solutions.

The efforts of Light of Hope to nurture the support of regional and local authorities led to the opening of the Social Adaptation Center for the homeless and newly released inmates. As Monica Beg, Chief of HIV/AIDS Section of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, stated in the course of her visit to Poltava in July 2013, "The cooperation between authorities and a CSO which was realized in your city is the best in the world. Such implementation of social policy in a city deserves to be a benchmark for other regions."³²

³² See <http://www.rada-poltava.gov.ua/news/36659670/>.

THE VALUE OF USING A VARIETY OF TACTICS

Light of Hope's success depended on a variety of advocacy tactics: media outreach, budget analysis, personal lobbying, playing on the interests of different stakeholders among regional and city officials, and developing partnerships with the authorities. This led to Light of Hope acquiring a suitable facility in a good location within about a year of launching what was expected to be a three-year campaign.

To persuade the Poltava city government to provide the premises and to allocate resources for its operation, staff at Light of Hope personally engaged influential politicians and administrators. To win over officials as active proponents of its initiative, the CSO exposed them to best practices by involving them in study visits abroad and showing them how the city could benefit from such a center. Light of Hope did not demand that the authorities find solutions for the problem; it promoted its own expertise and services.

To make private discussions with city officials fruitful, Light of Hope used budget analysis and cost-efficiency arguments to show that the city really did have enough money to maintain the center. Not all of these issues were made the subject of public discussion. If they had been, these arguments could have been used by opponents to challenge those in power for their incompetence. This would have jeopardized the partnership that Light of Hope was seeking to build with the authorities in order to achieve its goal.

Yet the Light of Hope's media campaign was an essential element in the success of the campaign. It served to change public opinion from hostility or indifference to support for the Light of Hope initiative and, with growing public awareness and support, to put pressure on the government authorities. Before opening the center, Light of Hope encouraged journalists to present personal stories of homeless people in order to attract public sympathy. After the center opened, Light of Hope created regular informational events to let the community and politicians know how things were going in the center.

THE VALUE OF ALLIANCES AND COMMUNITY SUPPORT

The Light of Hope campaign demonstrates the importance of building alliances. Deliberately encouraging and nurturing the concerns of regional authorities gave Light of Hope an additional tool of persuasion in their interaction with city authorities. Using international sponsors to emphasize the needs of specific beneficiaries of local social policy made city officials proud that they were contributing to a widely recognized good cause. Light of Hope skillfully developed an alliance with the IAA, a CSO that could apply a more aggressive strategy that served as a perfect complement to the persuasive efforts of Light of Hope.

Finally, the Light of Hope case shows that, in order to be successful, an advocacy campaign must direct itself at the wider community. Raising public awareness and building public support, rather than just relying on insider persuasion of decision makers or simply expressing vocal criticism and demands, is essential in any CSO's effort to achieve a valuable social outcome.

ANNEX 1: INTERVIEWEES

Name	Position/Organization
Maksym Demchenko	CEO, Light of Hope
Roman Drozd	Deputy CEO, Director of Adaptation Center, Light of Hope
Nadiia Tymoshenko	Deputy CEO, Light of Hope
Krystyna Kryzhenko	PR-manager, Light of Hope
Sergii Zhuk	Advocacy manager, Light of Hope
Valentyna Shram	Social worker, Light of Hoper
Olena Chekurova	Social worker, Adaptation Center
Olha Borysenko	Poltava City Deputy Mayor
Nina Chernyak	Deputy Head of Labor and Social Protection Department, Poltava Region State Administration
Svitlana Tryhubenko	Head of Kiev District Council, Poltava City
Sergii Syniahivskiy	Head of Children Service, Kyiv district, Poltava City
Dionisii Kaplin	Former Poltava City Vice Mayor, current member of Poltava Region Council
Nataliia Bondarenko	Head of Social Development Department, Poltava City Executive Committee
Svitlana Piven	Head of Social Center for Families, Children and Youth for Poltava Region
Iryna Plyusnina	Member of Poltava City council

Volodymyr Pecherytsia	Chief Phthisiologist, Poltava region
Mykola Isaiev	Head, Authority for State Penitentiary Services in Poltava region
Nataliia Suk	Executive Manager, CSO “Nash dim Poltava” (“Our home Poltava”)
Yurii Nestulia	CEO, Institute of Analytics and Advocacy, Poltava City
Ekaterina Lukicheva	Program Officer, Public Health Program, Open Society Foundations, Washington, D.C., USA
Yulia Bobyr	Volunteer, manager at Poltava Regional Youth Center, local coordinator of CSO “Student Republic”
Rev. Frank	Missioner, Salvation Church
Hanna Dovhoshei	Journalist, Internet-portal “Poltavshchyna”
Olena Vakhnytska	Presenter, Public Poltava Region TV & Radio Station “Ltava”
Diana Lytvynenko	Editor-in-Chief, Radio-station “Misto”
Oksana Marchuk	Volunteer