# Ukrainian teenagers find hope and healing during UK respite trip amid ongoing war



They look like ordinary excited schoolchildren visiting London. But these are war-weary Ukrainian teenagers on a break from the horrors of their homeland – ten days which could scarcely be more precious.

These 24 teenagers, aged 13 to 17, many of whom have lost a parent fighting Putin’s invasion, have spent the past week in the UK recovering from this ongoing hell. Their life-changing rehabilitation trip was made possible thanks to the kindness of Daily Mail readers who donated to the Mail Force Ukraine Appeal. Organised by the London-based St Mary’s Ukrainian Trust and funded by Mail Force, the programme offered the children trauma workshops, the chance to form friendships, and a rare period of respite away from sirens and shelling.

The youngsters, who came from the eastern frontline city of Kharkiv, spent time in the peaceful English countryside of Kent before concluding their trip with sightseeing in London. Highlights included visits to St Paul’s Cathedral, the Tower of London, and a memorable tour of Downing Street where they met Prime Minister Keir Starmer. The Prime Minister praised the children’s courage and thanked Daily Mail readers for their “unwavering support for Ukraine,” acknowledging that “these children are the future of Ukraine, and in the shadow of war, their courage truly shines through.”

The emotional weight carried by these children is immense. Fourteen-year-old Dasha Kuzhietsova, who lost her mother in a bombing far from the frontline, spoke about the strength she has had to find within herself and her family’s grief. Her mother was killed when two Kremlin bombs struck their building. Dasha’s father said the first bomb put her to sleep, but the second killed her instantly. Such stories, once unspoken, are shared here with newfound trust and support from trauma experts.

Sixteen-year-old Ksaniia Zhylka revealed she has not seen her soldier father since January 2023 and carries the constant anxiety of his uncertain fate. She said, “I haven’t told my horrible story to anyone until now,” as tears welled in her eyes. The teacher assisting with translation also became emotional, underscoring the deep trauma these children hide. The rehabilitation trip has created a rare safe space for them to express their fears and hopes.

The experience has deeply affected the children and organisers alike. Inna Hryhorovych, executive director of St Mary’s Trust, described the ten days as “transformational.” She reflected on how the children spoke of their parents in the present tense before catching themselves—a poignant reminder of their losses. Away from the war, the children were able to enjoy simple pleasures like dancing together, something impossible in their war-torn city.

Many of these children come from broken families due to wartime casualties. Maria Tietierina, 14, remembers the exact date her father was killed by a landmine, while 13-year-old Sofia Babenko is proud of her father, a fireman who risks his life clearing bombed rubble. Despite the horrors they face, Sofia expressed hope in Ukraine’s army and the eventual victory. Similarly, Yana Shevets said the UK visit has made her feel more positive about her future and that of her country.

The UK has increasingly opened its doors to vulnerable Ukrainian children affected by the conflict. Recent government announcements have eased restrictions for unaccompanied Ukrainian teenagers to enter the UK safely, aiming to reunite families and provide protection. This comes amid mounting concerns about children left in limbo under earlier schemes that required them to travel with a guardian. Advocates, including doctors and campaigners, have highlighted the emotional and physical risks faced by these unaccompanied children if they remain in the war zone.

The British government has also been involved in humanitarian efforts beyond emotional support. For instance, 21 Ukrainian children with cancer were recently brought to England to receive free NHS treatment, underscoring the UK’s broader commitment to aiding vulnerable young Ukrainians. Additionally, the UK supports children who have suffered severe injuries in the conflict, providing prosthetics and rehabilitation for those who have lost limbs.

The situation for Ukrainian children is further complicated by the ongoing desperation in Russian-occupied territories. Many young people there face systematic persecution for maintaining their Ukrainian identity, enduring bullying, threats, and forced military conscription attempts by occupying forces. The evacuation and rehabilitation of children from such occupied areas remain critical components of the humanitarian response.

For these 24 teenagers, the brief escape in the UK has been a vital breath of fresh air and hope amid ongoing tragedy. As Vitaly Viechorkin, 14, poignantly put it: “London is big and beautiful, and it is a place without sirens and bombs and drones. But Kharkiv is my home and, even during war, nothing beats home.” With further trips planned but reliant on continued funding, the need for support remains urgent to help more children break away from war’s shadow and rebuild their futures.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1-5 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-15062843/Ukrainian-teenagers-children-heroes-break-war-thanks-Daily-Mail-readers.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[2]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-15062843/Ukrainian-teenagers-children-heroes-break-war-thanks-Daily-Mail-readers.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490)
* Paragraph 6-8 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-15062843/Ukrainian-teenagers-children-heroes-break-war-thanks-Daily-Mail-readers.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490)
* Paragraph 9-11 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-15062843/Ukrainian-teenagers-children-heroes-break-war-thanks-Daily-Mail-readers.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[3]](https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-61887136), [[5]](https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-61808784), [[6]](https://euromaidanpress.com/2025/08/02/ukrainian-teenagers-escape-russian-reeducation-camps-and-forced-military-conscription/)
* Paragraph 12-13 – [[4]](https://www.thenationalnews.com/world/uk-news/2022/03/13/ukrainian-children-taken-to-uk-for-life-saving-treatment/), [[7]](https://www.express.co.uk/news/world/1869018/UK-supports-Ukrainian-children-lost-legs-prosthetic-limbs), [[6]](https://euromaidanpress.com/2025/08/02/ukrainian-teenagers-escape-russian-reeducation-camps-and-forced-military-conscription/)
* Paragraph 14 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-15062843/Ukrainian-teenagers-children-heroes-break-war-thanks-Daily-Mail-readers.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[2]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-15062843/Ukrainian-teenagers-children-heroes-break-war-thanks-Daily-Mail-readers.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490)

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-15062843/Ukrainian-teenagers-children-heroes-break-war-thanks-Daily-Mail-readers.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-15062843/Ukrainian-teenagers-children-heroes-break-war-thanks-Daily-Mail-readers.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - A group of 24 Ukrainian teenagers, aged 13 to 17, who have lost parents in the war, were given a ten-day rehabilitation trip to the UK, funded by Daily Mail readers. They attended trauma workshops, forged friendships, and visited landmarks like Downing Street, where they met Prime Minister Keir Starmer. The initiative aimed to provide respite from the ongoing conflict and support their emotional recovery.
3. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-61887136> - The UK government announced that unaccompanied Ukrainian teenagers fleeing the war would be permitted to enter the UK under new rules. Previously, about 1,000 unaccompanied minors were left in limbo due to the Homes for Ukraine scheme requiring young people to travel with a guardian. The change aims to reunite families and provide safety for these vulnerable individuals.
4. <https://www.thenationalnews.com/world/uk-news/2022/03/13/ukrainian-children-taken-to-uk-for-life-saving-treatment/> - Twenty-one Ukrainian children with cancer arrived in England to receive free treatment through the National Health Service. The UK government, in collaboration with Polish authorities and doctors, facilitated their transfer from Poland. This initiative underscores the UK's commitment to providing medical care to vulnerable Ukrainian children amid the ongoing conflict.
5. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-61808784> - Dr. Catherine Hillman, a hospital consultant in Worcester, has been advocating for unaccompanied Ukrainian teenagers to join their parents in the UK. Despite having power of attorney, the Home Office has denied entry due to safeguarding concerns. Dr. Hillman emphasizes the emotional and physical risks these children face if they remain in war-torn Ukraine.
6. <https://euromaidanpress.com/2025/08/02/ukrainian-teenagers-escape-russian-reeducation-camps-and-forced-military-conscription/> - A group of Ukrainian children escaped Russian-occupied territories, where they faced systematic persecution for maintaining their Ukrainian identity. The children endured bullying, threats, and forced conscription into Russian military service. Their evacuation represents ongoing efforts to return Ukrainian children from occupied areas, highlighting the challenges of preserving cultural identity under occupation.
7. <https://www.express.co.uk/news/world/1869018/UK-supports-Ukrainian-children-lost-legs-prosthetic-limbs> - The UK is providing support to Ukrainian children who have lost limbs due to the conflict, offering prosthetic limbs and rehabilitation services. Yana Stepanenko, a young girl who lost both legs in a bombing, is training to run the 2024 Boston Marathon. This initiative highlights the UK's commitment to aiding child victims of the war in Ukraine.