

"You make lives of these girls normal."

**MESSAGE FROM SISTER VERONIKA KHYTRA, SSMI
DIRECTOR OF HOME OF HOPE, LVIV, UKRAINE**



As the war persists, its presence has become entirely woven into the fabric of Home of Hope's daily life. Where there's a siren, there's a prayer; where there's shelling, there's Hope.

Updates from the Home detailing the achievements of our girls are juxtaposed with reports from the occupied territories. Images of newborns belonging to our former residents mix with invitations to the funerals of friends from the frontline. This is how life goes on now.

The life of Home of Hope goes on, too. Our doors stay open, made possible through your unwavering support. We express our gratitude to you, and to God for opening your hearts to us as we continue our mission. Love, hope, and faith can save the world.

I'm not sure how much you know about our mission in Lviv, except that it is a place for girls in difficult life circumstances and at a vulnerable age. Today, I want to share with you what these words truly mean.

Among our girls are those who have been self-reliant since the tender age of 12 – those who became orphans despite having living parents. It is scary to even think about it, but "status orphans" (children who have lost their parents) have at least financial support from the state. Orphans with living parents have nothing but extreme amounts of pain and the hope of being loved one day.

Some of the girls have loving parents, but had to flee from the war, or financial difficulties do not allow them to settle in a new city where they come from little villages to study. They are looking for a supportive community in order to enter adulthood in a warm environment, learn to interact, find lifelong friendships, and open their hearts to God.

Each girl has her own motivations. Yet our singular aim remains consistent: cultivating a sanctuary of safety, familial warmth, and domestic tranquillity. We want to be their Home, not an institution, and we do everything we can to provide that loving place.

We recognize that our girls are still children yearning for the tender embrace of maternal love – longing for the luxury of sleeping in, relishing freshly prepared meals, and feeling shielded from harm. The luxury of living a normal life, having clothes and food, going out to the theatres, hiking, exploring, having tutors and classes for their talents' development. These are luxuries they have been denied, their childhoods stolen away.

Yet, we stand by them, offering silent solace and attentive ears. At first, they romanticize and idealize their past lives. Then, they jest about their transient homelessness. But eventually, as trust blossoms and fear subsides, they begin to share their stories with candour and vulnerability...

My parents sent me to a boarding school* when I was seven. They promised to take me home every weekend, so I stood outside waiting every Friday. It seemed they would open the door the next second and pick me up in their arms.

How could I not believe my own mother? But weekend after weekend passed, and they never showed up. Eventually, I stopped waiting.

Sometimes, they would come to visit me. Every time that happened, I expected to be taken away for at least a few days. I just wanted to go home, and it didn't matter to me that they were drinking vodka, smoking, and cursing each other for whole days. I craved nothing more than just to go home – to my mom and baba, whom I loved so much.

But that never happened.



I lived in a boarding school for 11 slow, difficult, painful years. I still have this pain in my heart – how could they leave me and not even think of me? I lived the paradox of being an orphan with living parents, forced to fend for myself even for basic school supplies, resorting to work after sixth grade just to afford a pen and notebook. Then, my parents started talking to me, mainly to find out when I got my salary. They were only interested in my hard-earned money.

In 2015, I finished the 11th grade and had to leave the school. I knew about Home of Hope but harboured reservations about residing among nuns. Yet, God always leads us to a better place – that's how I walked through the doors of Home of Hope on June 31, 2015.

Here, I learned everything my family had not taught me: cooking, cleaning, having faith, praying, thanking God and always hoping for the best.

I appreciate this place for being safe and not judgmental. No matter what time I returned home, I always knew they were waiting for me. I could write a few more pages about funny and not-so-funny stories, exciting learning experiences and trips the Sisters organized for us, and many other things. But I just want to thank them and all the good people who taught me to love, believe, and hope.

On October 20, 2018, my dear Sisters married me to my beloved husband, Maryan.

Home of Hope will forever remain in my heart; I bow in thanks to all who create and maintain this extraordinary place.

**Apparently, you don't have the same type of schools in Canada. This kind of boarding school is not a fancy private one. It's a government-run school where parents who don't want their children anymore can get rid of them.*

Victoria, 27

I spent the first month of the war in the city where I was born – Mariupol.

It was a long month under fire, without any means of civilization or communication. I don't want to describe this month in detail because it causes too much pain...

On March 17, 2022, I managed to leave the city, thanks to my neighbours. The road was extremely tough, long and dangerous. So, I ended up in Lviv,



where I continued my studies. Now, I am a student at the Lviv College of Music, majoring in violin, and I plan to study at the Kyiv Music Academy after.

I am incredibly grateful to the donors who support Home of Hope because, thanks to you, I can take additional lessons from tutors to enroll in the academy.

I have a good relationship with my family, I miss them a lot. My dad worked at the Chornobyl Nuclear Power Plant and is now retired. My older sister is a theatre critic, and the younger one is preparing to enter a sports college.

I am grateful to the Home of Hope for creating a sense of security, peace, and comfort for me. After moving here, I noticed that I became more responsible, got rid of deep anxiety, and gained peace in my heart.

The opportunity to live in the Home is a great gift for me. I imagined it as a harsh monastery, but it turned out to be *the warmest place after back home*. Thank you, Sisters and donors, for this ministry!

Alice, 18

Hi, I'm from Donetsk region.

I have been living in Home of Hope for about a month. I hardly communicate with my family. I have three siblings I love very much. I don't have a dad, only a stepfather but we don't talk.

I love my stay at Home of Hope because the Sisters love me, take care of me, and teach me to do good for others even though they don't know me at all yet.

The war affected me a lot. Leaving my hometown hurt, and getting used to Lviv took ages. Two years have passed since the full-scale war started, I still cannot believe that all this is happening in our country.

It hurts me a lot that our defenders pay with their lives just so that I can live peacefully in Lviv. I hope the war will end soon and never happen again.

I have no plans for the future, if I'm being honest. I am still studying to be a cook, but I want to change my profession.

I really appreciate Home of Hope. Good people live here; they always support me. The Sisters give us the opportunity to take therapy and organize various educational events. I look forward to our excursion outside of the city. It gives me Hope, and I feel like I can enjoy my normal life. Thank you for these opportunities.

Karolina, 16

*M*y family is large, with many children. I am the seventh born, but I also have a younger brother. Both of our parents struggled with alcoholism, which ultimately led to us being placed in an orphanage. As horrible as it sounds, I never stop thanking God that they sent me away. While maintaining contact with my siblings, I constantly heard that they lacked food and clothing. All the money was spent on alcohol. So, I consider myself lucky.

Miles Jesu in Ukraine chose me as one of their first five girls around the time I was meant to transition to an orphanage school after completing kindergarten. Later, in 2015, after finishing secondary school, I pursued a university education, facing the challenge of housing, which Home of Hope graciously provided.

Living at Home of Hope has transformed and strengthened me. The Sisters there taught me essential life skills such as cooking, cleaning, budgeting, fostering relationships, taking ownership of my life, and appreciating the value of friendship.

It was there that I experienced love and acceptance for the first time in my life.



Prior to that, I had felt like a mistake of nature.

The Sisters' nurturing approach and their dedication to creating a semblance of normalcy showed me that I am inherently valuable and unique. Never did they view me or any of the other girls as mere victims of our circumstances.



While Sisters provided occasional therapy sessions, I believe regular counselling would greatly benefit all the girls, as we all carry a burden of pain and trauma.

Presently, I serve as a Sister in a convent and feel fulfilled in my role. Assisting the community during these challenging times brings me immense joy. My hope is for the war to end soon and for kids to have reunited happy families. I envision a future where soldiers return home from the frontlines and mothers with children can return home from abroad.

Although I no longer reside at Home of Hope, I am grateful to the Sisters for instilling in me the courage to embrace the unknown and to learn from my mistakes, as everyone deserves the opportunity to make them.

I extend my heartfelt gratitude to all the donors who generously support Home of Hope in various ways. Your contributions are deeply appreciated.

With Prayers, Sister Pia, SSMI, 26



Lubov – which means love in Ukrainian – was founded to help support the ministries of the **Sisters Servants of Mary Immaculate** (SSMI), whose mandate is to serve where the need is greatest, and who believe that “To Serve is to Love.” SSMI ministries educate the young; provide spiritual comfort to those in need; nurture the lonely; care for the sick and elderly; bring hope to vulnerable girls and young women in Ukraine; and provide an atmosphere of compassion and education for vulnerable girls in Ukraine.
www.lubovfoundation.ca

Your love can do more than you know

Will you support Home of Hope in Lviv?

As you have read, your generosity makes an incredible difference. Today, your impact is even greater than you may imagine!

It costs **\$100 every day** to run Home of Hope. So for \$100, you are giving 19 girls stability, confidence, security, and a warm and loving home **for an entire day**.

Your love can become flour for varenyky, a bus ticket to school, fresh bedding, a visit from a therapist, a hearty meal, and many other essential things that will give the girls **a normal life under abnormal circumstances**.

Would you like to become a monthly supporter?

For **\$10**, the Sisters can cook a **hearty dinner** for all residents in the Home! As a donor of **\$10 each month**, at least 12 dinners per year on their table will be the embodiment of your love.

Thank you for your love and support!

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