



VILSHANY ORPHANAGE: FILLING WITH NEW CONTENT, CREATING BETTER CONDITIONS, IMPROVING QUALITY



ABOUT NEW CONTENT

In 2025, the Medical Aid Committee in Zakarpattya celebrated its 25th anniversary... And if we were to choose a geographical reference point, it would probably be Vilshany and the institution located here. I will not dwell on memories, but rather talk about the changes. We were inspired by the children themselves – their progress, resilience, and abilities. We gained additional knowledge, education, new experience, and skills. All this was done to ensure that the residents of the institution and other children and adults with disabilities have decent living conditions and the necessary services, and that the system changes both within the institution and at the state level, because we are involved in the history of changes and reforms of state institutions.

The Committee team did everything possible, and often seemingly impossible, to bring about change in Vilshany. We built workshops here, carried out repairs, and created conditions so that various specialists, including foreign ones, could work with the children and exchange experiences with their Ukrainian colleagues. We are continuing to do all this now, and we have already reached the other side of the Tereblya River. There will be three additional buildings of the orphanage, where we will develop a service of transit supported living, and the youngest residents will be able to live in improved conditions. We also dream that social services for people with disabilities in the community will become more accessible and closer. Well, as we dream, we build again...

In December 2023, we opened an inclusive café-shop «Kosytsia» in Vilshany. It's hard to miss. And if you look at Google Maps, it might seem like there's nothing else around here except «Kosytsia». But that's not true. There is a team of caring people here who love their work and their wards. The Committee is always here. Even when we are physically elsewhere, processes are continuing in Vilshany that are part of our long-held dream of change, which we have managed to turn into a concrete plan of action.

For me personally, Vilshany needs no explanation, because everyone around me knows what it is – I am talking about an orphanage, a place of pain and strength at the same time. For the Committee, it is a child whom we would like to help become independent. And independence means a capable institution that provides decent, high-quality professional services to children and adults with disabilities.



Nataliya Kabatsiy,
*Director of Charitable Organization
«Charity Fund «Medical Aid
Committee in Zakarpattya»*

SYNERGY, MOTIVATION, ACTION

We have been familiar with the Medical Aid Committee in Zakarpattya since 2009, and since then we have been moving in the same direction, because from the very beginning of our cooperation we had a common understanding of the need to develop an open institution. Today, we can say with confidence that the Vilshany Orphanage is an open institution: open to the community, to the development of its residents, and to deepening cooperation with governmental and non-governmental institutions.

Today, the orphanage is home to 189 children and adults with severe mental and physical disabilities, some of whom have been deprived of parental care. The staff of the institution systematically works to ensure the comprehensive development of the residents, their integration into the community, and decent living conditions, leisure activities, and access to vital services. At the same time, we have many needs that require additional funding and professional support. These are provided by our long-standing partner, the Medical Aid Committee in Zakarpattya. For example, during our cooperation, the Committee has provided the institution with millions of hryvnias worth of much-needed humanitarian aid.

Among other things, with the aim of implementing the concept of «Transformation/Reform of the Vilshany Orphanage into a Center for Comprehensive Social Services», the Committee found donors and completed major repairs to two abandoned buildings of a former psychiatric hospital, where modern supported living facilities for six residents and palliative care for 18 young people with severe disabilities have been created. Renovation work is currently underway and resources are being sought to equip a third building for additional departments and the provision of social services in the community.

Despite all the challenges of today, the partners from the Medical Aid Committee in Zakarpattya are not stopping their work in wartime conditions. And this approach is motivating, and our residents notice and feel their attention. This synergy is visible to the naked eye; you only need to come to Vilshany.



Bohdan Kykyna,
*Director of the Municipal
Institution «Vilshany Orphanage»
of the Transcarpathian Regional
Council*

STEPS TOWARDS QUALITY TRANSFORMATION

since
1995

- participation of the French humanitarian organization «Comité d'Aide Médicale» in the development of the institution

1996

- repair of sanitary facilities with the support of French partners

1997-
2000

- launch of the educational process in the institution: work of French volunteers and specialists, arrival of the first full-time teachers
- kitchen renovation and change of approaches to organizing meals for children
- overcoming the consequences of the massive flood of 1998, which destroyed part of the institution's buildings
- current repairs to buildings were carried out

2001

- the first performance of the orphanage residents' group «Hutsulyk» outside the institution at Uzhhorod National University

2002

- former storage rooms and administrative offices were converted into a school for the residents; beginning of group classes at the newly established school
- a practice of exchanging experience between staff members of the Vilshany Orphanage and their colleagues from neighboring European countries was initiated; such exchanges have become regular and continue to this day

2004

- development of a concept for a future center aimed at supporting residents of the institution who have achieved significant progress in their personal development has been initiated

2006

- a location was selected and a plot of land was purchased for the construction of the future center
- the first international performance of «Hutsulyk» took place during a charity tour in Switzerland



STEPS TOWARDS QUALITY TRANSFORMATION

- 2009 • opening of the Youth Department of the Vilshany Orphanage in Tyachiv – the future Municipal Institution «Social Habilitation and Rehabilitation Center «Parasolka» of the Transcarpathian Regional Council
- 2011 • major renovation of day-care rooms
- 2012 • one of the boilers in the heating system of the institution and the roof of the school building were replaced
- 2013 • a rehabilitation room was put into operation
- 2014 • major repairs were carried out in the school classrooms
- 2015 • machines were delivered from Switzerland to the weaving workshop
• some of the rooms for residents were repaired
- 2016 • additional staff were recruited to work at the institution
- 2017 • construction of a guest house began
• development of a system of workshops for engaging the institution's residents in vocational activities was launched
- 2018 • a guest house was opened, which is used to attract specialists, interns, and volunteers from outside the orphanage
- 2019 • completed renovation and repair of the laundry room
• opened candle, weaving, ceramics, and felting workshops
• created conditions for agricultural work



- 2020 • a woodworking workshop was equipped
- 2021 • the first introductory visit of students from Uzhhorod National University was organized as part of the practical training of future specialists
- 2022 • continued to support the operation of the workshops
- 2023 • built and opened the inclusive café-shop «Kosytsia», which became another workshop for residents
• began major repairs of additional buildings of the orphanage, where it is planned to introduce the transit supported living service and improve living conditions for the youngest residents of the institution
- 2024 • began major repairs to another additional building, which in the future will become the base for developing a system of social services in the community
- 2025 • organized a study visit for specialists from the Vilshany Orphanage and the Drahovo Inclusive Resource Center to social institutions in Switzerland, which is a continuation of systematic measures to improve the skills of Ukrainian specialists
• together with members of the Association «Parasolka», an open-air common space called «Kolo» was set up for the recreation of the institution's residents
• signed a memorandum of partnership and cooperation between the Charitable Organization «Charity Fund «Medical Aid Committee in Zakarpattya», the Transcarpathian Regional Council, the Municipal Institution «Management of Joint Property of Territorial Communities», and the Municipal Institution «Vilshany Orphanage»



HOW DREAMS BECAME REALITY



The first photo shows the bustling festival «Vilshanska Spivanka» (2006). Nowadays, in place of the stage, there is an equally bustling café-shop «Kosytsia». Life does not stand still – we learn, unite, and create...



And here, in the first photo, systematic preparation of the residents is underway for their further relocation to the future Center «Parasolka» — a goal that will require two more years of hard work. At the same time, new spaces for the comprehensive development of the wards are being developed in the orphanage



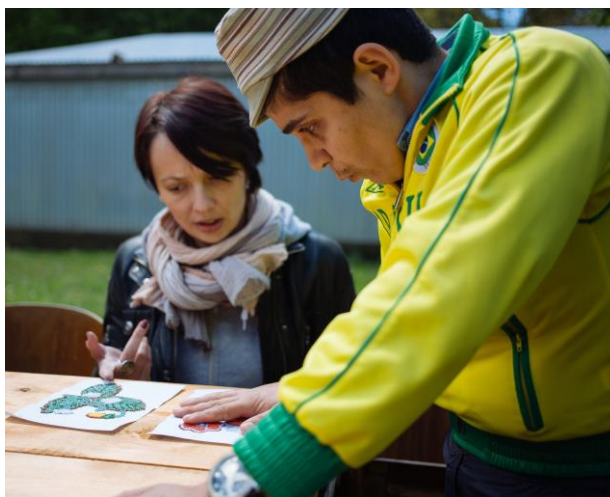
Thanks to the coordinated work of the Committee team and the staff of the Vilshany Orphanage, it has been possible to create conditions for engaging the children in creative activities, crafts, education...



The Committee has always prioritized building relationships: between Ukrainian and foreign specialists, the staff of the orphanage and their wards, and between the residents of the institution. Only harmonious interaction brings positive results!



Vilshany Orphanage is a space with many purposes. To fill this place with right meaning, we have been building and improving it for 20 years. In this brochure, you can see what the school building looks like now (photo in the center)



And above all, our Vilshany is a place of mutual support, understanding, and respect!

18 YEARS WITH THE ASSOCIATION «PARASOLKA»

Building something new is difficult, and transforming an old system that has been in place for decades is even more difficult. In this situation, we were greatly helped by Switzerland's experience, with the Association «Parasolka» acting as a guide for Ukrainian specialists. Since 2007, members of the Association have been helping the Committee to implement qualitative transformations in social institutions in Zakarpattia. Together, we have established the Center «Parasolka» in Tyachiv and are continuing to develop the orphanage in Vilshany.

Our cooperation is about experience-sharing – specialists from Zakarpattia have the opportunity to see with their own eyes how the Swiss model of institutional care functions during training and familiarization visits to local social institutions. At the same time, experts from Switzerland work systematically in Vilshany – together with the institution staff, they take care of the wards, repair assistive devices for them, conduct trainings for local specialists, etc.

Our cooperation is about solutions, including infrastructural ones. We have built a network of workshops for residents, a guest house for visiting specialists; since 2023, we have been drinking coffee at «Kosytsia» during our meetings, and starting in 2025, we can enjoy the comfort of «Kolo» (you can see it in the photo below).



A BOLD STEP – AN IMPORTANT BEGINNING

The achievements of the residents of the Vilshany Orphanage inspired us to take further action – to search for a format for a new institution where the potential of young people with disabilities could be revealed even more fully and broadly. Thus, more than 25 years ago, the idea of creating a specialized center for the residence of young people with disabilities was born. Between 2007 and 2009, the concept for the institution was approved, a location was selected, land was purchased, and the first phase of renovation work was completed... On October 16, 2009, we opened the Youth Department of the Vilshany Orphanage in Tyachiv, which in 2018 became an independent legal entity – the Municipal Institution «Social Habilitation and Rehabilitation Center «Parasolka» of the Transcarpathian Regional Council. Twenty-five people with disabilities live there, mostly graduates from Vilshany. In the new institution, they engage in crafts and creativity, learn independence, and have made significant progress in integrating into the community. The music group, originally founded in Vilshany, receives ovations at festivals in Fribourg (Switzerland), Budapest (Hungary), Pelhřimov (Czech Republic), as well as on domestic stages – at the «Colours of Life» festival in Kyiv, «Golden Bird» in Vinnytsia, and at numerous events in the Zakarpattia region.

Center «Parasolka» has become a pilot project for the practical implementation of deinstitutionalization reform goals, an example ready to be scaled up across the country. It is also an example of a comprehensive approach to transforming social protection for vulnerable groups in the community, as the Center has established an early intervention department, provides social services, launched a «School of Supported Living», and is preparing to open an inclusive café and pastry shop.

And despite the fact that the realization of a dream is the result of long, painstaking work and joint efforts of many caring people on both sides of the border, we never give up on them, because the goal justifies all the difficulties.



DEVELOPMENT OF WORKSHOPS – THE PATH TO SELF-DEVELOPMENT FOR WARDS

Only a meaningful life brings satisfaction and awareness of one's value as a human being. In an orphanage, this meaningfulness is achieved through the development of a system of workshops. Why? Firstly, because it is about keeping people busy – everyone who works in the workshops has a schedule for each day and knows what they are doing and when. Secondly, it is about a sense of capability – the residents see the results of their work, have the opportunity to show it to others, and positive feedback encourages them to improve their skills. Thirdly, it is about communication – working in groups united by common interests improves communication skills among wards and develops trusting relationships with staff.

Products from the weaving, felting, ceramics, candle-making, and card-making workshops can be viewed — or even received in exchange for a donation — by anyone interested at the inclusive café-shop «Kosytsia». These craft products are also taken to exhibitions and presented at charity auctions. Our wards are very skilled and talented, and we want as many people as possible to know about this.



WELCOME TO «KOSYTSIA»!

Inclusive café-shop «Kosytsia»:

- one of the workshops of the orphanage, where residents learn the skills of waiters, baristas, and sales consultants. Both the technical and main entrances to the building, as well as the restroom, bar counter, and main hall, were designed to be convenient for all residents and visitors. It is a safe, comfortable, and inclusive
- a space for the professional development of young people from Vilshany and for their mutual socialization with community residents. The glass doors and facade of the building embody the idea of openness and barrier-free environment
- an important and special place on the community map (and if you open online maps, you will see for yourself) — a place for meetings, delicious coffee, and more, because the residents of the institution already know how to make crispy waffles for every taste
- a dream come true, which the Committee has been working towards for 15 years



@kosytsia_shop



Medical Aid Committee
in Zakarpattya



DEVELOPING COMPETENCIES, DEEPENING EXPERIENCE

In 2002, Ukrainian specialists, including those from Vilshany, visited foreign social institutions for the first time (the first ones were in Romania) to study the specifics of their functioning. Thus, the Medical Aid Committee in Zakarpattya and foreign partners at the time laid the foundation for systematic exchanges of experience and the involvement of teams of Swiss specialists and volunteers from other countries in the work of the Vilshany Orphanage. It is important to note that the Committee's staff constantly deepened their own expertise in the areas of social protection, rehabilitation, public health, and more – all with the aim of taking a more informed approach to qualitative changes in the ecosystem of services for people with disabilities.

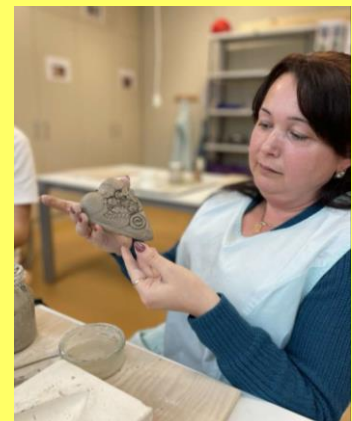
We have been fortunate to establish both professional and friendly relationships with specialists from foreign social institutions, that have become a model for the integration of best practices in Ukraine. Thanks to our partnership with the Association «Parasolka» (Switzerland), we have been able to organize introductory and training visits to the institutions «Buechehof», «Rüttihubelbad», «Humanushaus», «Arkadis», a specialized school in Biel, the SSBL Foundation's facilities for independent and supported living, the «Brändi» Center, Weidmatt Wolhusen, and others.

Foreign specialists have repeatedly worked at the Vilshany Orphanage, conducting master classes and training sessions for Ukrainian colleagues, as well as working directly with the children as physiotherapists, occupational therapists, speech and language therapists, social and special education teachers, early intervention specialists, technicians for setting up and repairing assistive devices, etc.



Together with the local team, instructors from Switzerland launched a network of workshops in Vilshany – they trained staff, provided technical equipment, and helped the orphanage residents learn new skills. These processes continue to this day. In 2025, Ukrainian specialists expanded their skills in the areas of «Employment, work, and residence of adults with disabilities» and «Education and pedagogical support of children with developmental disabilities» while on a study visit to Switzerland. At the same time, Swiss specialists shared their experience with colleagues at the Vilshany Orphanage in the areas of alternative communication, physiotherapy and rehabilitation, and employment of residents.

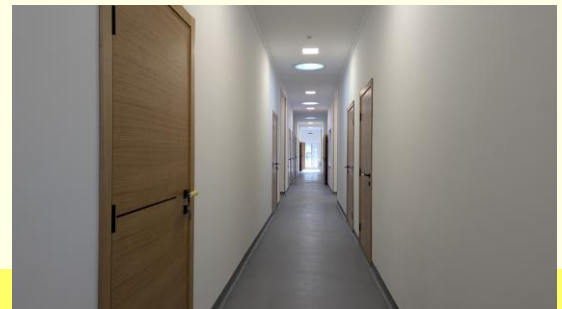
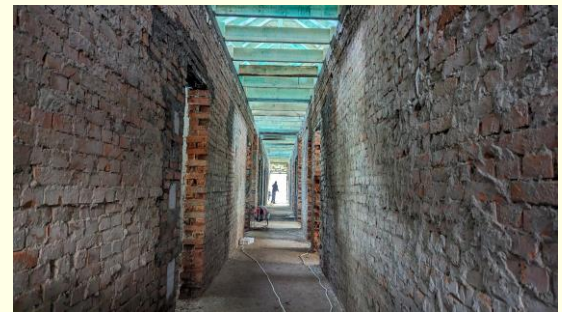
Overall, mutual exchanges and training have helped to form a holistic vision for the development of the social institution, accurately assess its own resources, and determine priorities for seeking external assistance. Today, we can talk about progress in ensuring an individual approach to working with wards, creating conditions for them to acquire self-care skills, engaging them in employment, and more. Local staff saw firsthand how the foreign system of working with people with disabilities works from the inside and realized the important role of teachers, instructors, doctors, and nursing assistants for children and adults who, for objective reasons, constantly need additional attention, care, and support.



NEW WALLS – NEW QUALITY OF LIFE

In the summer of 2023, with the support of the organization «terre des hommes Deutschland e.V.» and funding from the German Federal Foreign Office, the Medical Aid Committee in Zakarpattya launched a large-scale project «Improving the Protection of Children in Emergencies in Ukraine by Providing Safe Shelters, Food and Non-Food Items, and Psychosocial Support». The infrastructure part of the project involved the development of the Vilshany Orphanage.

The buildings, which are new to the institution but old in terms of age (they were built in the 1960s), have undergone major renovations. The communications have been completely replaced with modern ones that take into account the specifics of the area, a new roof and windows have been installed, the walls have been insulated, and many more. The infrastructure of the complex fully complies with the principles of inclusivity, accessibility, and energy efficiency. The design of each building was developed by experienced domestic architects in collaboration with Swiss specialists. Therefore, everything has been taken into account in the design and, consequently, in the premises themselves – the width of doorways, the height of windows, the size of showers and toilets, the angle of ramps, and even the direction in which doors open. In the two new buildings, adult residents will continue to learn independent living, and comfortable conditions have been created for the youngest wards in rooms for 2-3 people.



As part of the continuation of the project, the renovation of a third additional building has begun, designed to develop a community-based social service system and create appropriate conditions for the residents of the Vilshany Orphanage.

The advantages of the institution in Vilshany, including the new infrastructure, are the surrounding landscapes of the Carpathian Mountains and mountain rivers, the moderate climate, and the friendly community. The downside is logistics, which is complicated by sections of broken road surface. These are aspects that neither the institution nor the Medical Aid Committee in Zakarpattya can influence. However, we can still help improve the conditions for the development, living, care, and education of the children. The Committee has been working long and hard to implement this plan, which has become even more urgent due to the transfer of evacuated children from other orphanages in the combat zone to the institution.



OUR PRESENT



In this brochure, you will find photos of what these buildings used to look like. They have changed not only their appearance, but also their purpose. Nowadays, the wards study there, organize concerts, and even work in workshops



The workshops are developing – they are now not only about teaching the orphanage residents, but also about meeting the needs of the institution, improving its material and technical base, and fostering self-sufficiency



The processes of learning and improving skills are harmoniously synchronized – trainers and teachers deepen their own competencies, and wards gain new experience at school and in the workshops



The wards learned skills for independent living – in everyday life, in interacting with each other, in planning their activities and leisure time

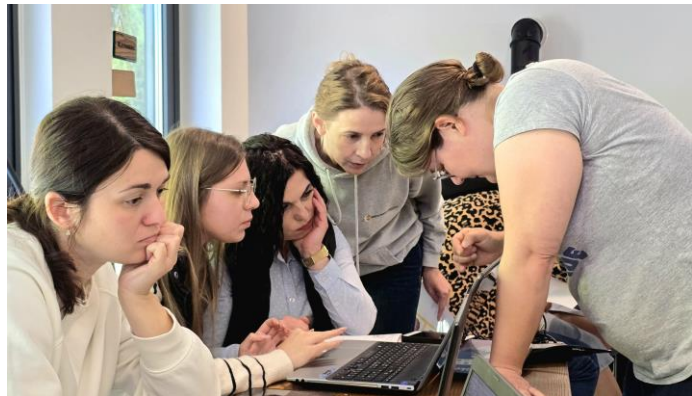


These photos are often sent to us in private messages by clients of the Vilshany Orphanage with comments such as «This is our first borscht!», «Now we know how to cook deruny (hash browns)!», «We made salad today!»



Now, all the independence skills acquired by the wards can be further developed in the renovated and adapted building. They're trying their hand at making their place cozy, comfortable, and nice. We believe they'll do great!

OUR PRESENT



Diagnostics, an individual approach to the rehabilitation of our clients, and the involvement of additional foreign and domestic specialists are our priorities in working with people with disabilities



We continue to build. It is a very difficult and expensive undertaking, but it is extremely necessary to improve the quality of life of our wards



Each member of CAMZ team has their own history with Vilshany – of varying lengths and with different focuses, but today we are all volunteers and ambassadors for this place on the map that is so important to us



**CHARITABLE ORGANIZATION
«CHARITY FUND
«MEDICAL AID COMMITTEE
IN ZAKARPATTYA»**

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**Medical Aid Committee
in Zakarpattia**

