

Warsaw, August 24th 2022

We've proven ourselves in the uprising, now it's time for strategy.

It's hard to believe, but the war in Ukraine has been going on for nearly six months. The Universal Reading Foundation has been involved in helping Ukrainians from the very beginning. We have succeeded a lot but the enormity of the need remains immeasurable. We describe our journey as an example of what we all experienced: an unheard of, magnificent mass relief spurt in which nothing was impossible and a thousand things happened simultaneously. It is good to remember that we are all capable of such wonderful actions.

So, from the point of view of the Universal Reading Foundation:

We launched a call for help asking for books for Ukrainian children in Poland and funds to help publishers in Ukraine on the second day of the war. Being immersed in research around reading, we see these topics sharply: regular reading with mom, grandmother or aunt (the men are elsewhere...) will be the foundation for rebuilding the sense of security and self-esteem of these children and families. The survival of the Ukrainian publishing industry will be the foundation for the future of democracy in Ukraine. It was clear to us that help in these areas must be organized.

Publishers and distributors responded immediately: Platon and Motyle książkowe distribution companies agreed to handle the logistics and warehousing our operations at no cost, many publishers began donating books to us; Nowa Era publishing house offered to distribute books throughout Poland.

At the same time, illustrators responded immediately - Katarzyna Bogucka shared a drawing of a speeding bicyclist on her page, she allowed us to use this image, and thanks to this we came up with the idea to ask illustrators for graphics to help raise funds. We started getting a lot of moving pictures.

At the same time, already in the first week of the war, we were approached by a Swedish writer and illustrator thanks to publishing house Zakamarki: they had several thousand euros for us from raises they had already organized within friends. Inspired by this example, we wrote a letter in English to international publishers, which, thanks to the contacts of publishing houses Dwie Siostry, WoltersKluwer, Rebis and CHBeck, was distributed widely among international publishers.

This set off an avalanche: Publishers' Weekly came forward and wrote about us, then the Washington Post and The Christian Science Monitor, renowned American illustrator Sophie Blackall created an illustration urging people to donate to our cause and uploaded it to her social media. We started getting contributions from all sorts of places around the world.

From the beginning, we asked Polish publishers for picture books for young children, with little text, but at the same time, thanks to Krakow Festival Office, we contacted Ukrainian publishers, offering them to send us books, although at that stage we did not yet have funds to support the publishers. We met with a wonderful response - we received a total of nearly 30,000 books from Ukraine, which arrived in Poland in two trucks. The organization of the aid going the other way than all the big aid traffic going into Ukraine (because our trucks were supposed to come to Poland from there!) proved to be surprisingly difficult, especially since we had to organize everything for free. We managed to find two warehouses in Lviv that

Fundacja Powszechnego Czytania

ul Przyokopowa 33, 01-208 Warszawa, NIP 7010891702 KRS 0000756841

www.fpc.org.pl www.KsiazkaNaRecepte.pl sekretariat@fpc.org.pl

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agreed to collect books from publishers, then, thanks to the help of KBF, Caritas, the Polish Book Chamber, the Customs Department at the Ministry of Finance, the Marshal's office and the Ukrainian House - the two trucks arrived.

At the same time, Polish printers Totem, Druk-Intro, Interak, Sowa, who managed to come to an agreement with Ukrainian publishers and started printing children's books from files obtained from them, also started coming to us very early - our logistical capabilities were an ideal path in their incomplete distribution chain. We received more than 30,000 books in Ukrainian from the printers.

We contacted our friends at the Children's Metropolis Foundation, which at one point launched a raise for a similar purpose - we agreed that we would split the recipients: they took care of the shipments to libraries, we did the rest. Thanks to the incredible commitment of Nowa Era publishing house, Platon distribution, Motyle książkowe, DPD and Inpost (we got the shipments for free), we have distributed nearly 100,000 books to date. We hope to distribute another 50,000 by the end of the year.

Very quickly, writers began to ask how they could participate - and the idea came up to add texts to the illustrators' pictures. That's how "Books Against War" began to emerge.

In the meantime, the raised funds enabled us to offer assistance grants to Ukrainian publishers. We had to act quickly, and thanks to the pro-bono help of the law firm Barembruch and Partners, we managed to efficiently draw up and announce the grant system, to which more than 50 publishers applied. The jury, composed of representation from the Polish Chamber of Books, Krakow Festival Office, Universal Reading Foundation and the Association of Ukrainian Publishers and Booksellers, awarded grants to 51 publishers meeting the competition's requirements (e.g., no financial ties to Russia) for a total of \$150,000 (!). Courtesy of BNP Paribas, we were able to do the transfers and currency conversions at no cost - all the funds went to the publishers. The wife of the President of the Republic of Poland assumed honorary patronage of the contest.

In the meantime, writers sent us their texts, renowned graphic designer Dorota Nowacka did the first typesetting of the book, and we decided to consult psychologists about the content. Thanks to an incredible coincidence, we managed to show the book to Konstanty Gebert (aka Dawid Warszawski), who, in his deep wisdom, pointed out to us that war is, of course, a total evil, but we must not offer children a book from which it would appear that war is our whole world. A parent or guardian should be given a tool to talk courageously about war, but a tool that at the same time shows that the world remains beautiful, that evil has not and will not prevail. We listened to the sage and asked the artists for additional texts and illustrations. This is how we came up with "The world is beautiful. A book against war," which will have its premiere on September 15th in Warsaw.

In the meantime, Polish publishers printed their books in Ukrainian and began offering them to us for distribution. We received books (Polish and Ukrainian) from the following publishing houses: Adamada, Agora, A ja czytam, Bosz, Dwukropek, Flosart, HarperKids, Insignis, Mamania, Media Rodzina, Media Service Zawada, Muchomor, Olesiejuk, Powergraph, Poznanskie, Widnokrąg, Wilga, Zakamarki, Znak.

It was all absolutely amazing and beautiful. A state of elation that collectively we probably won't experience again anytime soon. Each of us has strong, uplifting memories of those first months of the war. This will be a generational memory.

Today, we've gotten a little used to it; we've cooled off. Now is the time to build further long-term and strategically thought-through help, which is still and will continue to be vitally needed. Ukrainian publishers are continually coming to us with requests for help. It is also in our own interest to save them. The strength of Ukrainian democracy is in our and the world's vital interest.

So: If you are still reading this and agree that the issue is important, we invite you to help us www.fpc.org.pl
You can support the Foundation's activities [HERE](#).

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