

Mitigating Collective War Trauma Through Expressive Arts Therapy

运用表达性艺术治疗缓解战争集体创伤

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Abstract

Mitigating the consequences of the collective trauma of war is a challenge for Ukrainian society. This article is the result of the work that has been done in Ukraine during the war and emanated from panel discussions from art therapy conferences in which the authors participated in March 2023, 2024, and 2025. These international, interdisciplinary, scientific, and practical conferences were held within the framework and sponsorship of the All-Ukrainian Art Therapy Association, together with First Aid of the Soul and the International Association for Creativity and Arts in Education and Therapy. The article contains a reflective analysis of using art therapy toward mitigating the consequences of collective traumatization of the Ukrainian people due to the war. Trauma in this context is considered as a systemic phenomenon, and the bearer of trauma is not only an individual experience but also extends to a social group—all of those who have experienced collective trauma over several generations.

Keywords: collective trauma, war in Ukraine, art therapy, expressive arts, trauma awareness

摘要

缓解战争带来的集体创伤，是乌克兰社会面临的一项挑战。本文基于战争期间在乌克兰开展的工作，源于作者参与的2023年3月、2024年3月和2025年3月艺术治疗会议中的专题讨论。这些国际性、跨学科的科学性和实践性会议，在全乌克兰艺术治疗协会的框架和赞助下举办，联合主办方包括“心灵急救”组织以及国际创造力与教育治疗艺术协会。本文对运用艺术疗法缓解乌克兰人民因战争而遭受集体创伤进行了反思性分析。在此背景下，创伤被视为一种系统性现象，创伤的承载者不仅是经历的个体，还延伸至社会群体——即跨越数代共同承受集体创伤的所有人。

关键词: 集体创伤, 乌克兰战争, 艺术治疗, 表达性艺术, 创伤意识

Introduction

Every Ukrainian, wherever they may be, within or outside of the country lives in a state of war. Ukrainian society is exposed to collective trauma. War touches all

people, including those afar that have been displaced. Information and communication technology reaches everyone. Everyone becomes a witness and in effect must deal with some sort of “survivor trauma.” The frontline demographic is exposed to a particular amount of suffering as well as being exposed to shelling and the constant threat of shelling, which means this is everyone living in Ukraine, as Russia conducts mass shelling of all parts of Ukraine. These life changes of living within war may stay within Ukrainians for a long time since the entire social system has been destabilized, where meaning and purpose in daily living have been upended, personal identity injured, and the line between good and evil has become blurred. Taking into account the genetic transference of emotional experience across generations, suffering from the delayed effects of “post-memory” is highly likely. In the landscape of our informational society, collective trauma is supported and deepened by the dint of various forms of representation and is spread via mass media. As a result of reporting within the media space, traumatization is reinforced.

Hence, it is paramount now to manage this collective trauma, including issues around bereavement and acknowledgment of pain. The authors believe that a revitalization of mental health is necessary and achieved by the sharing of difficult emotions and collective experience and that the challenge of this war is to find ways of legitimizing collective traumatic experience so that the collective mental health of the people can be addressed.

The goal of this article is to provide a description of methods of working with collective trauma that takes into account the challenge of working in a “war zone” and the extended trauma that exists across the society due to the long duration of the war. After an analysis of some of the components of trauma, the main principles and common features of effective models for helping a traumatized person are identified as follows: a comprehensive approach based on using the arts and the use of play as a means for expressing difficult emotions; working with symbolic images and narratives; strengthening belonging to the community and involvement in the arts. Art therapy in this context is defined as a psychotherapeutic method that includes all of the arts and actualizes the factors of symbolism, harmony, and beauty toward healing. The use of the expressive arts allows a person to release emotions and helps them to connect to the symbolic level needed for trauma reprocessing. Receptive art therapy methods are considered important for mitigating the consequences of trauma. This includes engaging with the fine arts through activities in museums, theaters and street theater, music and concerts, film as a multimodal art, media art therapy, as well as the use of the arts with modern information technologies.

An important principle for mitigating the consequences of collective trauma is co-creation, that is, to build, create, and restore together. New approaches for involving people in art and art therapy projects are forms of joint collective cooperation that could help to mitigate the consequences of collective trauma, which in turn contributes to the formation of a new shared collective memory based upon pride, respect, and mutual support, thus restoring hope for the present and for the future. Such an approach proposes that there needs to be a full and total trauma awareness within society, that it be a “trauma-informed society” that reaches all sectors and all groups in relationship to all organizations and all families. Engagement of mass media is considered a necessary aspect for this kind of educational outreach.

We will utilize the following structure in this article:

1. An explanation of our understanding of collective trauma within the Ukrainian context
2. An analysis of the use of the arts in working with trauma
3. Overview of some known arts-based practices toward mitigation of the consequences of war trauma
4. Other aspects of working with the arts toward trauma mitigation during war
5. Conclusions.

Understanding of Collective Trauma within the Ukrainian Context

The relationship between Ukraine's traumatic historical experiences and contemporary identity struggles is extensively explored by Głowacka-Grajper and Wylegała (2020), who argue that events such as the Holodomor and Stalinist repression have profoundly influenced collective memory, leading to internal "memory wars" in post-Soviet Ukraine. Their work focuses primarily on how memory was shaped, fragmented, and politicized in the aftermath of totalitarian regimes, rather than providing detailed historical chronologies. To fully contextualize the depth of Ukraine's historical trauma, however, broader historical research is essential. Scholars such as Applebaum (2017) document the catastrophic human toll of the 1932–1933 Holodomor, estimating over 7 million Ukrainian deaths due to state-induced famine. Luckyj (1990) highlights the systematic destruction of Ukrainian cultural elites during the so-called Executed Renaissance of the 1920s and 1930s. Studies of linguistic suppression (Bilaniuk, 2005; Moser, 2016) further reveal a prolonged effort to *russify* the Ukrainian population through educational and cultural policies. Forced migrations orchestrated by Soviet authorities, outlined in works like Snyder (2010) and Plokhy (2015), show demographic engineering as an additional tool of domination. Even after Ukraine's independence in 1991, Russia's continued intervention, analyzed by Wilson (2014), took the form of economic coercion through gas, trade, and political pressures. When placed together, these historical traumas not only devastated Ukraine's demographic and cultural fabric but also continue to shape contemporary collective memory.

The authors believe that Ukrainians are one of the most unwavering and resilient peoples. There is no doubt as to the strength, patriotism, and readiness of Ukrainians to fight for their freedom as a people and as a nation. However, the collective traumatization caused by the modern-day war is ongoing, as is the war. It is important in this context to mention that we view this trauma as a systemic phenomenon, especially when it is a collective trauma. Collective trauma concerns not one person but a large group, members of which may be related and/or unrelated to each other. They may be strangers to each other, but they are connected by shared experiences that are traumatic in nature. Effectively, the matter in question concerns large social groups living in the same areas and having ethnic kinship and/or a sense of national identity. The size of such a group may possibly equate to the entire population. Furthermore, even though parts of society may not feel directly endangered, living in constant threat of war reaches all areas, plus the unification of cultural experience and territory provides for the expansion of

traumatizing experiences within the society. Through the process of natural empathy for the suffering of people bound by a shared culture and communication channels, the contamination happens even to the parts of the society that have not been exposed to the threats.

Collective trauma is the generalization or compounding of individual traumatic experiences shared with the whole or the majority of society (Starovoytov, 2023). It becomes individually relevant due to the fact of a person's belonging to a social group. The systems of collective trauma share characteristics of blurred temporal and spatial parameters, allowing for intergenerational and trans-territorial trauma to emerge. The carrier of collective trauma is not only an individual subject but can also be an entire social group that, in the temporal aspect, may include a few generations. The life story of this group may span decades. Furthermore, the people who have gone through the shared traumatic experience may appear to be distant from one another due to migration processes (i.e., they may be displaced persons living in different countries, which ensures the exterritoriality of collective trauma). As a result, trauma may spread its influence on other social groups and in other countries.

According to Starovoytov (2023), alongside national and ethnic belongingness, people with collective trauma are bound by shared traumatic experiences from war. The experience of perceiving and living through intensity-varied threats binds disparate people into one symbolic organism within which an intuitive understanding of the nature and content of such suffering and grief is experienced by another person or part of the group. Collective trauma touches profound levels of the human psyche and questions the existential status of one's life and individual experience, as well as one's right to belong to a certain social group and the right to live in accordance with what is possible and needed. At the base of collective trauma is the suppression of the right to self-determination and the right to one's freedom.

Freud (1960) proposed the concept of a collective soul. Starovoytov (2023) expands upon this idea and posits that this soul is the inner, hidden part of the societal psyche that ensures societal unity and is at risk from traumatic influence. Since the collective soul is symbolic in nature, traumatic experiences can lead to traumatic distortion of our inner symbolic structure, that is, our collective soul, our familial soul, and the individual soul of a person.

Regarding "healing" from collective trauma connected to the war in Ukraine, it is important to emphasize that the challenges of working within the combat theater zone are enormous and call for support from large numbers of people. Concurrent long-term acute stress in both clients and clinicians is present as a form of shared realities. Everyone is affected by the circumstances of war, which can include hiding in bomb shelters from missile attacks, surviving on the frontlines, hearing constant air raid sirens, serving in the army, and living and working in darkness when the bombardments of infrastructure lead to blackouts and power outages throughout the country. This current time period may be identified as an absolutely new era of human experience for the Ukrainian people. This includes the time period of life before, during, and after the COVID-19 pandemic as well as life during the ongoing war, within a country that is exposed to a horrific full-scale invasion.

Using the Arts in Working with Trauma in Ukraine

Ukrainian art therapists are experiencing, together with their families and clients, everything that is happening during the war. A dialogue between an art therapist and a client could be characterized as follows, where the psychotherapist inquires, “How are you?” and the client responds, “It does not matter. How are you?” This is a new norm in the reality of psychotherapeutic practice in Ukraine. The situation in Ukraine is so complex because the lives of people are under constant threat. The uniqueness of the current situation, while tragic, lies in the fact that a continental war and social crisis directed toward European culture have transformed the understanding of psychotherapy and the specifics of its practical applications in this context. A major component of the psychotherapeutic process deals with creating a safe space for the client and therapist to work in; however, at this time in Ukraine, there is no safety. Boundaries and conditions of psychotherapy, also known as “the psychotherapeutic frame,” have widened. Effectively, psychotherapy has “stepped out of the office” where therapy usually occurs and where safety can be more easily applied. This has led to innovative adaptations of the therapy hour, such as at times providing support services to individuals and groups in “intermediary spaces” (i.e., in walking together to a bomb shelter or continuing with a session in a bomb shelter). We may strongly assume that many people are suffering both individually and collectively, and that we are doing everything possible to help ourselves and support others. We may also note that irrespective of the theoretical model of a professional, “the best method” is the one that can be adapted and used in work situations under tremendous stress and pressure.

Today, each mental health specialist, including art therapists, psychologists, and artists working in Ukraine, and also with displaced persons outside of Ukraine, is developing mental health practices that comprise practical models and methods based on observations and assessments that could be deemed as “best practices.” This is why learning from one another is the best model right now. Irrespective of a theory or model used as a foundation, this approach will ensure the “best most viable” result. Wartime also can be considered as an opportunity for learning and for undertaking research to help determine which practices are effective before they are officially proven over time. Over time, it will become clear what is important, what is problematic, and what warrants further understanding in connection to the possibility of planning, as well as what can be learned from the unplanned.

According to Assman (2006) and Voznesenska and Sidorkina (2016), it is important to create a space for mourning and witnessing one another during and after collective trauma. The strategy for processing collective trauma should include a process for the legitimization, acknowledgment, and release of traumatic experiences and a coming together in shared spaces so people can share their experience and find safe outlets for emotional expression. Collaborative creative practices can assist with this. Teaching mindfulness practices is also deemed important for establishing moments of calm and for understanding new meaning for the development and progress of society (Assman, 2006; Voznesenska & Sidorkina, 2016). Working with collective trauma entails applying a systemic approach that takes into account the

interrelatedness and interdependence of the individual, the family, the social group, and society as a whole.

Overview of Some Known Arts-based Practices Toward Mitigation of the Consequences of War Trauma

We consider it important to provide an overview of some models that have been used with persons exposed to the trauma of war, that are considered to be effective, and that include art in the process of working with stress to prevent illness. These models have been developed for working in crisis situations. Each of these models uses art as a foundation. These include the work from Marcow Speiser and Speiser (2005, 2018), Macy et al. (2003a, 2003b), Ruf (2012), and Usiskin and Lloyd (2020). The main principles and shared characteristics, as proposed by each of these models, draw upon an integrated arts approach, the use of play and embodiment, and the expression of emotion through action. They all share the idea that the creative process and expression through images are integral in communication and necessary for rebounding through reflection and hence for understanding and processing reality. They are based upon the idea that images can develop into stories and that even the process of telling partial stories during crises constitute an opportunity to express difficult feelings. In the end, all models achieve the point of “telling the story both metaphorically and reality based.” During crisis, the brain becomes overwhelmed, and the ability to verbalize and share stories often becomes impeded. The creation of images that can lead to the sharing of stories that can begin the process of moving toward “understanding” the unintelligible that has been breached by trauma. This includes moving from fragmented inner experience toward finding a “lifeline” that can help re-establish coherence. Thus, each model, by employing play and the arts, encompasses positive movement toward a shared “resonance” that becomes a “moment of belonging” to and engagement within a community leading toward health and giving hope for the future.

Since the war in Ukraine is ongoing, trauma is increasing, growing, and proliferating. Leading to an increased need for support and assistance. We suggest that mental health specialists working with trauma during this ongoing crisis should have flexible and creative working models and develop these according to the current needs of the victims of the war. An important feature for working with clients now is the need to develop group therapy skills and understand group dynamics. Group work breaks isolation and allows for shared common experience to be expressed. This brings forward reflection about societal emotional states. This common ground creates a shared flow of experience and can contribute toward finding strategies for continuing life during these war-time conditions. The creative art therapies, as a method, allows for flexible reactions to the emotional states of those participating. As previously mentioned, the “aperture” for all mental health professionals should be an openness toward adaptation and constant change so that they can better adjust to the needs of the moment.

The following elements are important in this work. Collaboration and the ability to use each other as a resource is a paramount consideration. We believe that it is important to find a sense of belonging and connection with people in order to mitigate

the horrors and consequences of trauma. Additionally, this work necessitates the utilization of constant curiosity, care, reassessment, questioning, learning, forming, and ongoing personal self-development. We suggest that such an approach is founded also on working with trauma in culturally sensitive ways, including the use of holistic approaches. We have observed that engagement through expressive arts therapy creates the feeling of containment in a natural way and thus helps to promote self-expression. This takes the emphasis off of only using verbal processing. Therefore, no set recipe, scenario, method, or approach must be utilized.

Moreover, according to Głowacka-Grajper and Wylegała (2020), expression through creative activity renews the feeling of dignity, respect, and control even when the human being may feel completely powerless. Using play practices helps renew inner strength and human connection with others. This can lead to lessening the effects on the emotional consequences of war. At the same time, working with images and foundational symbols that touch the systemic nature of collective trauma is most effective when working with collective war trauma. Art therapy draws upon the use of a variety of materials, images, forms, and objects that can be used for the purpose of engagement and connection to the object, self, and others. Anything that can be used as a therapeutic object has the capacity to impact consciousness, feelings, and behavior. Starovoytov (2023) describes art therapy as a psychotherapeutic method that includes symbolism, harmony, and beauty as important factors for overcoming the destructive and disharmonious potential of trauma upon the individual and the society.

According to Summerfield (1999), the experience of war and anxiety are so extreme that they lead to traumatization as well as suffering. He believes that there is a universal human reaction to emergency stress events captured by the Western psychological models. This is based upon the belief that people feel better if they release emotions and “process” their experience, and that some particularly vulnerable groups and individuals require special psychological help.

Furthermore, it is posited that rapid response may help prevent the development of serious psychological issues (Summerfield, 1999, pp. 1449–1462):

Our observations during these past three years of living with war lead us to agree with Summerfield. We believe that Ukrainians are more liable to resolve inner psychological conflicts not through rational thought alone but also by engaging emotionally imaginative experiences. Since time immemorial, many activities of the Ukrainian people have been accompanied by cultural art practices, including dancing, singing, egg decorating, embroidery, and other forms of creative expression. This long tradition partly explains why methods such as expressive arts therapy feel particularly natural and resonant for Ukrainians today.

Drawing upon the seminal work of Judith Herman (1992, p. 1) the central paradox inherent in working with trauma is “The conflict between the desire to object to horrible events and the desire to pronounce them out loud lies at the center of psychological trauma dialectic.” We believe that the use of the expressive arts in therapy can allow for the externalization of inner thoughts and feelings while containing emerging emotions.

Additionally, art strengthens the resilience of the individual and community, builds connections, and helps reduce compassion fatigue and burnout.

As previously stated, objects can function as a source of renewal to the self and also to the symbolic world of the individual. According to Starovoytov (2023), this can include images of the individual, images of the body, images of the family, the image of the home, the image of nature, and the image of the country. In these domains especially, symbolization takes place to create symbolic “buttresses” of the soul. We believe that therapeutic practices should be oriented toward the restructuring of traumatic experiences and, when we begin a process of creating and sharing these images in groups, to enter a process of what we are calling “creative collective cooperation.” As previously stated, we authors believe that the path for mitigating collective trauma and its consequences is through engaging in various artistic forms leading to some sort of creative collective cooperation.

Since the aggression of war can be thought of as a manifestation of collective trauma, mutual understanding can be enabled through the language of art. Collective trauma can be likened to a maelstrom of disunity, engulfing all parties in the conflict including individuals, group, and larger social communities. According to Hornostay (2023, p. 21), it is art that allows one to enter the symbolic level of trauma and help move toward “overcoming ultraliminal breaking on the level of collective psyche.”

Nathalie Robelot-Timtchenko (2024) writes about her work with Ukrainian displaced persons and migrants using play, expressive arts, and mask-making. Drawing from her clinical experience, she writes about how expressive arts therapy can be particularly effective in bridging high levels of cultural and linguistic differences. Her goal as an expressive arts therapist is to help participants cultivate a sense of belonging, dignity, and respect, notwithstanding the challenges they face. The arts become a primary mode of communication in these contexts. Her work with people living in war zones is based on techniques such as breathing and grounding exercises, shared singing and dancing, and the teaching of self-calming strategies, primarily through mirroring. Art and mask-making is also used as a means to hold space, foster connection, engage the imagination, and express somatic experience. Irrespective of differences in country of origin or variance in personal histories, her work illustrates how art therapy promotes belonging, acceptance, community, and interpersonal connection. The arts can serve as a critical resource for individuals and communities facing collective trauma, enabling self-expression when verbal communication is insufficient.

Other Aspects of Working with the Arts Toward Trauma Mitigation

The authors believe that during war, the sense of individual and collective meaning, belonging and life vision changes fully. According to Voznesenska and Sidorkina (2016), a person’s perspective changes. Dignity and respect get taken away by force. The arts and creative process can help in the restoration of a sense of meaning and purpose. In a creative process, there is no right or wrong. The art therapist carries the mantle of cautious caring and compassion, showing ways, through art expression, of how hope and strength can be maintained with each person. Moving from individual work toward

working with larger community, expressive forms can further help toward mitigating the consequences of collective trauma. This can include creating symbolic representations that connect to life such as monuments, memorial images, creative writing and poetry, photo exhibitions, literary works, songs/concerts, and movies. This can also serve as a way of witnessing the collective memories of the individual, group, and society.

Moreover, the authors believe, as previously stated, that many different forms of art have the potential to heal. Thus, connecting art expression with the reality of life in war can be expressed in many different kinds of venues. For example, these kinds of manifestations in visual media can be witnessed on graffiti walls in the streets, in bomb shelters, in storefronts, galleries, museums, and alongside monuments. In addition, theater and, especially, improvisational street theater, as well as community playback theater have healing potential. Theater allows large groups of people to come together, share their experiences, and express complex and difficult emotions. The use of street theater can engage those who cannot visit exhibitions or formal theaters. Cinematic art as a multimodal art form can also be used toward expressing the stories and experiences. Similarly, music can have a profound positive effect on the individual, group, and society. Using beloved songs such as “Swimming Duck” and “The Red Guelder Rose,” which has a profound meaning for Ukrainians, can be used to unify and heal. Today, children in all corners of Ukraine sing “The Red Guelder Rose,” and when a person hears the first few chords, they often spontaneously begin to sing: “We will bring joy to our glorious Ukraine...”

The use of museum spaces for holding expressive arts groups and various creative performances and modern art exhibitions can contribute toward mitigating the effects of collective trauma. Works of art and activities used in this regard can connect the participants with the stories and experiences of what they have endured throughout this war. Responding to various themes such as grief, resilience, hope, and survival could be thought of as effective ways for honoring the memory of those who have been lost. However, this work must be done with great care and be conducted by professionals who are attuned to working with sensitive topics within the community. Otherwise, the risk for re-traumatization may occur.

Thus, the authors believe that to mitigate the consequences of collective trauma, it is paramount to employ co-creativity, that is to create, build, make, and renew together. Co-creativity could be done on a larger societal scale, using various kinds of media and art forms. New approaches need to be used and are called for to try to engage people in art-making and art projects, such as street art demonstrations, flash mobs, street theater, and others. These forms should include participatory opportunities in order to engage and unite people. Art demonstrations could take place in the main squares of the city so that people can take part in them. Voznesenka (2020) describes an example of this by the artist Yoko Ono in her installation called “Add Color or the Refugee Boat.” Ono placed an empty white boat in a public space with blue paint and brushes inside and invited visitors to express their thoughts, ideas, and hopes on the walls and floor of the boat using the paint.

Another potential method for processing collective trauma on the societal level is the use of media art therapy, comprising art and modern informational technologies.

There exists now the possibility of placing artistic expressions, arts projects, and works on the web that tell one's story and that allow for receiving feedback and support from people worldwide as one further example for mitigating the consequences of collective traumatization (Voznesenska, 2020). For those using media art, it is an opportunity to share meaningful personal and societal experience, and perhaps release suppressed feelings, and build connection to others.

Media art therapy in the form of animated movies by way of stop motion filming can be used by children and teens. Animation allows for the utilization of resources toward creative process, as well as a way to process personal experience, safely release anger, renew mental health, and receive support through praise and commentaries after having posted the movie on the web (Voznesenska, 2023).

Currently, during the war, art has also entered the field of mythogenesis, whereby modern myths have the possibility to contribute toward a foundation of shared value and meaning making toward a new Ukrainian future. Our observations lead us to believe that already today in Ukraine, art is providing a new foundation for strengthening the values of mutual support, steadfastness, firmness, self-sacrifice, heroism, and more. Moreover, it might be useful to consider national projects such as art marathons, using a determined or free subject matter, where people might create and share their creations on the internet, which could also be considered part of media therapy.

Conclusions and Prospects for the Future

We posit that there are periods best suited for working with collective trauma. The first period is right now. The reason for this statement is that by continuing to provide as many opportunities for connection, compassion, and empathy as possible, this creates opportunities for the mitigation of trauma. This includes the use of the arts in self-care, and as a means for combatting stress and grief. In addition, providing arts-based psychosocial support is a means to help to mitigate the consequences of trauma and its transgenerational transmission.

The second period will come after the war is over and when the Ukrainian people begin to rebuild their country. In this period, a well-coordinated creative collaboration all over the country would be necessary. However, for this collaboration to begin, the trauma awareness of society on the level of relationships of disparate groups, of relationships inside organizations, in families, and in mass media needs to be highlighted. Owing to the lack of understanding of the action pathways of trauma during the ongoing armed conflict as well as the lack of safety for civilians, this makes for the possibility of re-traumatization to occur. We ask ourselves whether the traumatized mental health worker and psychologist, one who has lived through and processed their trauma, can be helpful to others? And we answer yes, of course, they can. We ask whether they will continue to risk developing vicarious trauma? And we answer, yes, they will. And lastly, considering the intergenerational impact of trauma, it should be noted that trauma drastically distorts the perception of time. In the current situation, trauma has "reset" the past and shaped a form of hyper-variability of the future. For many, opportunities have arisen that many would have never dared to

seize before. Alongside the irredeemable losses, and in its “shadow,” collective trauma conceals the resource of a growth opportunity in personal life and life of the society. Intergenerational preconditions have been assembled, yet whether they will come to fruition depends on how people and society allocate their future resources.

Of great importance is the resounding help received by the Ukrainian psychotherapeutic community from the international community. Professionals from all around the world, spanning the USA, Canada, and Europe to Australia and Japan, recognizing the gargantuan, ever-growing needs of Ukraine, especially in supporting the mental health of the population, have embarked upon this journey as volunteers. Following the outbreak of the full-scale invasion, the directors of First Aid of the Soul (FAS) recognized the urgent need for psychosocial support. On February 25, 2022, one day after the invasion began, they issued a call to action, resulting in the recruitment of over 450 mental health professionals from around the world within the first week (FAS, 2022). Since that initial outreach, the organization’s clinical database has expanded to include over 1,000 volunteer professionals dedicated to supporting Ukrainians in crisis.

A major part of the work of FAS lies in serving and supporting mental health specialists on the frontline in Ukraine. As we have stated previously, specialists who continue to work in Ukraine experience emotions similar to those faced daily by their clients. This reciprocity of trauma underscores why international support provides a vital lifeline. In the current situation, it is impossible for clinicians to continue to help others without receiving external support from colleagues not embedded in the trauma environment. Through its initiatives, FAS offers Ukrainian mental health specialists access to educational courses, support groups, clinical supervision, and therapy (FAS, 2022). Our international colleagues volunteer their services and thus show their support for the Ukrainian people. Concurrently, they understand that the price and burden of doing psychological work in Ukraine is heavy and sometimes feels unbearable to carry alone.

We believe that the consequences of collective trauma can be mitigated by specialists connected to the arts, including media (radio, TV, and social media), arts therapists, psychologists, and artists, including musicians, visual artists, journalists, and specialists in psychological and somatic health. Furthermore, help and support could be drawn from engaging religious institutions and clergy, teachers, and educational representatives. All of these professions interact with the symbolic, cultural content and understand “the language of symbolic communication,” which is the language that the individual and collective soul “uses.”

We believe that it is possible to organize a form of joint creative collective cooperation to mitigate the consequences of collective traumatization, which in turn would promote the formation of a new collective memory: one encompassing pride in caring for one another, revitalizing communities, and instilling new hope for today and tomorrow. The panel discussions at the All-Ukrainian Art Therapy Association conferences in March 2023, 2024, and 2025, along with guidance from our esteemed international advisors, scientists, and specialists, have served as the springboard for the genesis of this article (All-Ukrainian Art Therapy Association panel discussions, personal communication, March 2023, 2024, and 2025). These ongoing conversations

have been highly inspirational, and it is hoped that the co-creativity thus generated will, over time, contribute to mitigating the effects of collective trauma through mindfulness and expressive arts processes, ultimately fostering the establishment of new meanings and offering society new opportunities for development.

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