

### **Daryna: “I have an income from a job that I love”**

Daryna, a former HR specialist, fled Ukraine with her mother, Iryna, when the war escalated in spring 2022. In Lodz, two hours from Warsaw, Daryna and Iryna now work at one of the nine Spynka day care centres which are being supported by Plan International in partnership with the Foundation for the Development of Children (FRD).

The centres provide care and educational support for Ukrainian and Polish children in Lodz province. In Ukrainian, ‘spynka’ means spine or chairback, and in Polish, something that connects things together. Both of these meanings resonate deeply with the children and families attending the Spynka centres.

At Spynka, Daryna and Iryna are not only able to work with children, something they love – but also, more importantly, they were able to retrain by joining one of courses offered by Plan International’s local partner to re-qualify refugees from Ukraine to teach in Polish kindergartens.



“I arrived in Poland on 23 March with my mother. My father is in Ukraine. On our way to Poland, as we were fleeing from the war in our country, we witnessed many terrible things.

Eventually I found myself here in Poland and started to learn Polish. I gained some experience working in Polish kindergartens and I now work with my mother, Iryna, here at Spynka day care centre in Lodz after we both completed the education programme for future teachers in Polish kindergartens. We work full-time, so regular eight hours per day from 9am until 5pm.

My mother is 51 years old, and has an education in psychology, but was working as a bookkeeper in a military factory in Ukraine before fleeing. When I found the course, it fitted perfectly for both of us. I saw an advertisement on Facebook for it and sent my CV. After a few weeks I received a call explaining the programme further. I was interested, especially regarding the practical experience of working in Polish kindergartens. My mother and I were both accepted to enrol onto the programme.

The training programme consisted of five days of in-person education. In parallel, we had to do online learning in 16 different topics, such as food, hygiene, and so on, and how to work with children in the Polish context. And then we had one day offline training in situations where first aid would be necessary.

This experience gave me a good foundation in working with children. We also got to experience practical work in a Polish kindergarten. After completing the programme, a friend of mine connected my mother and I to other Polish kindergartens where we could get work experience, prior to working at Spynka.



It is interesting to work with children because they have different levels of development depending on their environment and experiences. They have different family dynamics, they have different fathers and mothers for instance. Right now, we have a boy who is one year and four months, and a girl who is also one year and four months old – they are the same age, yet are at vastly different stages of development. Unfortunately, this is the reality for so many children coming out of Ukraine.

For me, it's not difficult to work with Ukrainian children. We try to help them grow through learning regardless of their age. At Spynka we work with children who have faced a lot of difficulty and trauma and this is reflected in their development milestones. There are so many children from Ukraine who need a lot of support. We create a routine for them which helps to stabilise their life. We dance, sing, draw, and so on. I enjoy it a lot.

We also do different kinds of activities with the children, many of them involving art. We play games with them and sing songs about numbers and colours – depending on the mood of the children. We have a good team with good communication between team members, including more technical-minded individuals like me and more artistic people like my mother.

It feels good to make my own money again here in Poland. After receiving our first salary on 7 December from Spynka it was a great feeling, as we had started from zero again here in Poland. The first thing I got for myself was perfume.

Centres like Spynka help mothers adapt to their new lives in Poland. I have noticed positive developments in the women who come to the centre in terms of trust, confidence and finding work. I also finally have some stability in my life again. My family is safe, we are all under one roof. I have an income from a job that I love. This stability is making sure that I can be there to work with and support these children. We are shifting their lives in a positive direction.”