

# TISUK BLOG- Lithuania Visit

*TISUK Directors Julie Harmieson and Julia Bird recently flew to Vilnius, Lithuania to work with Domus Solis and Gravitass Schola, who evacuated an entire school community of 300 children aged 5-18, their families and their teachers from Kharkiv, Ukraine. They have since been joined by over 150 additional children from all over Ukraine. Julie tells the story of their trip-*

Julia and I were hugely honoured to be invited out to Vilnius, Lithuania to work with Domus Solis, and Gravitass Schola. Our role was to work with Domus Solis and the temporarily displaced Ukrainian teachers, training the adults to work in ways to support recovery and healing from trauma.

One of the challenges we faced was how to communicate our understanding from English to Russian, Ukrainian and Lithuanian language speakers, whilst

maintaining connection, relationship and respect of the lived experience and ongoing trauma in the room! Such a huge responsibility that felt heavy at times.

Our deepest thanks go to Catherina, Laura, Maria who stood beside us, absorbed the content, and actively translated it, with authenticity, integrity, and such passion. Sometimes there was translation, discussion, clarifying, and re-interpretation going on in 4 languages simultaneously!

Teaching and learning are reciprocal processes and a meeting of hearts and minds. The universal language of love and humanity, standing together. I had tears in my eyes on many occasions, and each time, they did not belong to me, they belong to these remarkable individuals, who strive to be the container and emotionally available adult for the young people they work with, whilst also being directly impacted by the very same ongoing, traumatic experience.

The capital city of Vilnius is cosmopolitan, vibrant, welcoming, charming in its beauty and feels so safe. I have fallen in love with this small, feisty, loyal, outward looking, utterly beautiful, green, and ornate capital of a nation of 11 million. Never have I felt so humble and ignorant in equal measure as I was surrounded by such wonderful people!

With the safety of distance, we are blindsided by the difference of a cognitive understanding of the war from what we see on the news, to the visceral response of hearing the story of a survivor from Mariupol as she spoke of her experience of watching 90% of her city be razed to the ground. Of living for 3 months in the basement of her home with no electricity, water, heating in temperatures of -15 degrees. No capacity for connection to the outside world and the ongoing pain that loved ones remain in that situation. I cannot even begin to imagine let alone comprehend how this must be.



Being there on Ukrainian Independence Day we witnessed this lovely and compassionate nation stand resolutely by the side of their neighbour to support their ongoing independence and ongoing fight. Such loyalty and solidarity.

We were privileged to experience a virtual reality, immersive experience into the art and music of a much loved and celebrated Lithuanian artist, poet, and musician, Čiurlionis - it blew my mind and made me cry (again)! We had the honour of meeting

his great-grandson, the world famous Lithuanian piano player, Rokas Zubovas and were guests at a cultural event of Lithuanian and Ukrainian families discussing the significance of language. The two countries share a history of invasion and suppression from Soviet Russia and the suppression of their culture. Both won their independence, but in Ukraine the Russian language prevailed. Identity for Lithuanians is something they fiercely protect. The common language for both is Russian and yet there are such powerful connotations for both in using it.

We talked of the other languages that are available - the language of love and the language of common share human experience. Whatever divides us, there is always so much that brings us together, let's not lose sight of that. Whatever else we are, we are, first and foremost, human! And when we bring our humanity we bring compassion, understanding, care, connection, and relationship. We are stronger together.



It was an incredible, extraordinary three days in this remarkable country - small in area but huge in heart and we were hugely grateful for our very own Emilija Cekaviciute – who walked with us through our time in her home country. Although we said farewell, it was not goodbye, just see you soon! Never have I met such a group of strong, steady, open hearted and inspirational women who have the capacity to change the way the world works. We were so deeply touched by the Ukrainian teachers that we worked with, who trusted us with their hearts and who's words and gifts as we left will stay with me always. We left Lithuania with hope and love, having left a little bit of hearts behind.

Our thoughts have now turned to how we can support the team to provide what is most needed now and how to support those schools in the UK who have accommodated Ukrainian children - to maintain connection with their peers and to preserve their cultural identity. This work starts today, and the responsibility feels huge, but oh my goodness do I feel privileged to be here, alongside the wise and steady Julia Bird, with my heart absolutely brim-full.

What seems to be so important is that this community know that they matter, that the world holds them in their hearts and minds. We've been exploring the possibility of our UK based schools adopting a class, to connect, child to child and adult to adult to show that they matter. Other initial thoughts are around providing storybooks in English for all ages, fund raising for school resources via a just giving page and a linking of UK Schools who are supporting Ukrainian children directly to Gravitas Schola, for teachers and children in both locations.

Special thanks to The Ivybridge Bookshop who have already collected hundreds of books which are on their way to Lithuania this week. If you would like to work with us to support Domus Solis, please do get in touch by emailing [micki@traumainformedschools.co.uk](mailto:micki@traumainformedschools.co.uk)



I cannot find the words to describe how profoundly this visit impacted on us, and I am so thankful for the warmth, grace and care that was shown by our Lithuanian hosts. Agnė Klimčiauskaitė Inga Tarakaviciute, you and the team are an absolute inspiration - you have our hearts Trauma Informed Schools UK.



You can read more about Gravitas Schola on their inspirational facebook page here- <https://www.facebook.com/GravitasSchola/>