

## SWITLO

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# Myroslava Nazaruk's story: Teachers from Ukraine's frontier communities travel 60 kilometres just to meet face to face

**Myroslava Nazaruk** is an English teacher at a lyceum in Volyn Oblast with three decades of experience. In February 2024, she became the lead of a Teacher Activity Group (TAG) for nine English teachers in her hromada (a local community, an administrative unit in Ukraine). Since then, members have built and strengthened a professional community, learned to tackle challenges together and, just as importantly, to listen to one another. They have also practised techniques to support children living with war-related trauma and to build healthier relationships in the classroom.

Despite the risks – Volyn Oblast borders Belarus – the group chose to meet in person.

Their commitment is clear: some travel as far as 60 kilometres to attend the meeting. If there's no car or the bus is late, they hitch a lift.

*"Sometimes I teach a lesson at the lyceum, take a fixed-route minibus to the TAG meeting, then come back and teach a few more lessons," Myroslava says. "Twice we met with*

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**Teachers, especially in rural areas, need face-to-face contact. Not everyone has the time or access to English-speaking groups or native speakers, and after lessons there's still a lot of work to do at home. Because we meet in English and during the working day, they can practise the language, talk through different topics and share their experience. Teachers want to be heard and supported, so we listen and look for answers together**

**MYROSLAVA NAZARUK**

*no electricity. Luckily, everyone had charged laptops and I brought plenty of handouts. It wasn't easy, but it was engaging."*

After Russia's full-scale invasion, with more displaced families and so much bereavement, trauma became an urgent topic. At colleagues' request, Myroslava devoted two sessions to it, using resources from the first Skills and Well-being in Teacher Learning Opportunities (SWITLO) event in Kraków in January 2024.

The theme struck a chord — for students' care and for teachers' own wellbeing. They talked about the experiences of displaced families and students, trying to understand behaviour and triggers.

SWITLO – and leading the TAG – has also prompted Myroslava to rethink moments from her own teaching past.

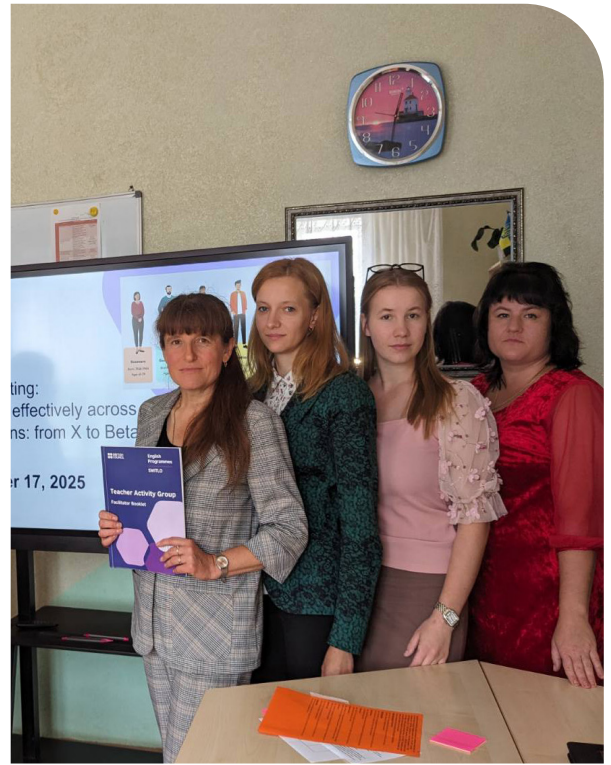
*"Years ago, I had an 11th-grader whose father left the family. He became very aggressive and said he hated his mother. I found a way to reach him then, but today I would handle it a little differently."*

Since the full-scale invasion, five students from Mariupol and Kherson Oblast have joined Myroslava's class.

*"They talked about their problems and fears. I could see they were traumatised. Through SWITLO, we've learned to speak the same language. For example, if a child had a dog they couldn't save, that can be a deep trauma. So when you come to that vocabulary, you avoid the topic, choose something imaginary or fairy-tale to practise, so you don't retraumatise them. I used to rely on intuition. Now I have a clear, effective approach."*

Interest has begun to spread beyond English. A school IT specialist once joined a session; she didn't say much, but she loved it.

*"Other teachers ask about our meetings, though they haven't joined yet. They're curious about what the English group is*



**MYROSLAVA NAZARUK WITH COLLEAGUES**

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**We drew conclusions together about how to help and support. We realised that when a child is in fight-or-flight mode, they won't be able to learn,"** Myroslava says. **"Teachers began using the techniques in class and have already seen results. Everyone who walks into a classroom – even the teacher – reacts to what's happening, and we need to take that into account. A real breakthrough was realising you have to help yourself first, before you can help others**

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*doing – they know we always try something new,” Myroslava says. “It even motivates some to learn English. A few maths and IT teachers at the lyceum often speak to me in English.”*

For Myroslava, one of the biggest strengths of the meetings is not only the chance to share experience, but the fact that the community is led from within. The leader knows the people, their needs, their pressures and what they can realistically take on, which helps create a warm, supportive atmosphere.

*“Teachers are used to being judged in staff meetings about teaching methods; everyone is nervous. I said straight away: there are no right or wrong answers here. No one is being marked or assessed. They liked that. Over time, we’ve become like one family.”*

## Advise

Stay close to people, try to sense what they need and offer support. Be welcoming, create a space where participants can talk about what matters to them and listen to one another.

[More about the programme.](#)