

# SISTER CITY RELATIONSHIP

## Annual Report 2023

Milwaukee and Irpin, Ukraine signed a formal Sister City agreement to foster friendship and collaboration between the two municipalities on March 15, 2018.

**Anya Verkhovskaya**

[anya@friendsofbeanangel.org](mailto:anya@friendsofbeanangel.org)  
[www.friendsofbeanangel.org](http://www.friendsofbeanangel.org)



Milwaukee, USA



Irpin, Ukraine



Organization



## Sister City Relationship Annual Report\*

City Clerk's Office  
City Hall, Room 205  
200 E. Wells Street  
Milwaukee, WI 53202 PH: (414) 286-2221 WEB: [www.milwaukee.gov/sistercities](http://www.milwaukee.gov/sistercities)



APPLICATION ORGANIZATION		
Name: Friends of Be an Angel		
Mailing Address: 11520 N Port Washington Rd #215 Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 53092, USA		
Website: <a href="https://friendsofbeanangel.org">https://friendsofbeanangel.org</a>		
PERSON IN CHARGE OF ORGANIZATION FOR MILWAUKEE		
Name: Anya Verkhovskaya	Phone: +1 (414) 688-68-65	
Mailing Address: 11520 N Port Washington Rd #215 Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 53092, USA	Email: <a href="mailto:contact@friendsofbeanangel.org">contact@friendsofbeanangel.org</a>	
SISTER CITY		
Name: Irpin	Country: Ukraine	Population: 60 084
PERSON IN CHARGE OF ORGANIZATION FOR SISTER CITY		
Name: Oleksandr Markushin	Phone: +38 (04597) 61-407	
Mailing Address: Shevchenko Street, 2A, Irpin, Kyiv region, 08200, Ukraine	Email: <a href="mailto:irpin_mvkh@ukr.net">irpin_mvkh@ukr.net</a>	

### Updated information about the sister city:

#### Areas of mutual interest and involvement between Milwaukee and Irpin in the areas of culture and business:

##### Culture:

Arts and Music Exchange  
Language and Education Programs  
Culinary Exchange and Food Festivals  
Historical Preservation and Heritage Promotion  
Community Engagement through Cultural Events

##### Business:

Trade and Investment Opportunities  
Entrepreneurship and Innovation Collaboration  
Tourism and Hospitality Promotion  
Sustainable Development Initiatives  
Networking and Business Events

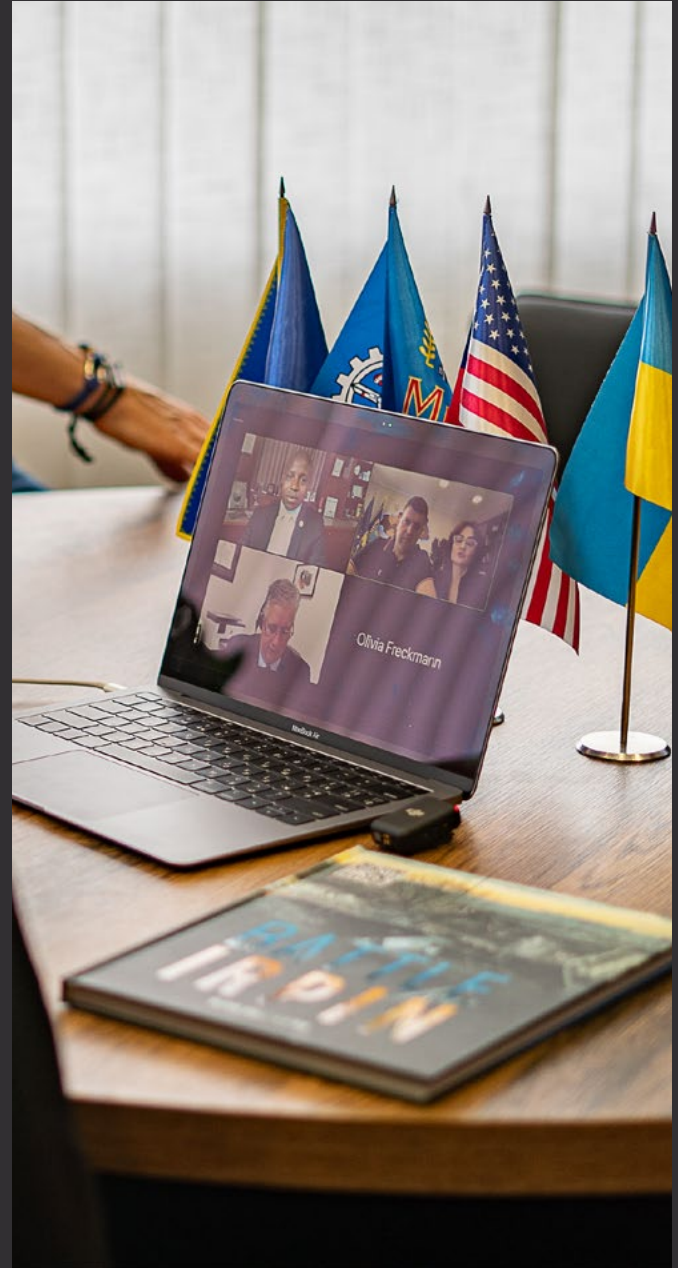
# Intro

*"I mentioned before, and it remains to be true today, that Milwaukee, the state of Wisconsin, the United States, and folks around the world, have found a renewed sense of patriotism because of the work that you and so many Ukrainians have done over the past year defending your homeland against the Russian invasion,"*

— Mayor Cavalier Johnson

## Annual Report 2023

This annual report outlines the progress made in expanding cultural, educational, and community connections between Milwaukee and Irpin, highlighting the collective efforts that have brought our cities closer together. As we reflect on the year's achievements, we look forward to continued collaboration, deeper cultural appreciation, and shared growth in the years to come.



### City of Milwaukee

Cavalier Johnson took office as acting Mayor of the city of Irpin in 2021.



### City of Irpin

Oleksandr Markushin took office as acting Mayor of the city of Irpin in 2020.







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# Who We Are

## Friends of Be an Angel



Friends of Be an Angel is a 501(c)(3) charity dedicated to providing humanitarian aid, medical evacuations, and support for refugees and internally displaced people (IDPs) in Ukraine. Initially focused on delivering urgent medical supplies, food, and other necessities during the full-scale invasion, the organization has since expanded to include medical evacuations for complex cases, educational platforms for war-affected children, and the rehabilitation of critical infrastructure.

Headquartered in Milwaukee, USA, Friends of Be an Angel operates with a network of employees and volunteers across the U.S., Europe, and Ukraine. Led by director Anya Verkhovskaya, a seasoned human rights advocate, the organization draws on her longstanding work in refugee and IDP rights to deliver effective aid. Through her leadership, the organization has established partnerships that allow it to reach the most vulnerable communities in Ukraine.

As the U.S.-based sister organization to Be an Angel, founded in Berlin during the 2015 Syrian refugee crisis, Friends of Be an Angel benefits from a global network. Be an Angel began by offering housing, food, legal aid, and medical support to refugees in Germany, eventually expanding to aid in challenging environments like refugee camps in Belgrade and Moria. Since the invasion of Ukraine, the network has focused on evacuation routes and humanitarian aid for IDP camps and hospitals.

Through its partnership with Be an Angel, the organization has opened offices in Chisinau, Moldova, and Odesa, Ukraine, focusing on evacuations from cities like Mykolaiv and Kherson. Friends of Be an Angel now emphasizes medical evacuations, reconstruction, and long-term support, continuing to deliver life-saving aid to those affected by war and displacement.

## Board of Directors



**Anya Verkhovskaya**

*Director  
CEO of Class Experts  
Group*



**Ganna Yudivska**

*Board Member  
UN working group on  
Arbitrary Detentions*



**Stella Ayzinger**

*Secretary of the  
Board of Directors*



**Jennifer Spinner**

*Vice President*

## Sister City Leadership



**Anya Verkhovskaya**

*Project Team Lead  
Sister City Relationship  
anya@friendsofbeanangel.org*



**Boris Nayfish**

*Project Coordinator  
Sister City Relationship  
boris.n@friendsofbeanangel.org*



**Boris Nenide**

*Project Administrator  
Sister City Relationship  
boris@friendsofbeanangel.org*



**Dr. Douglas Davis**

*Project Ambassador  
Sister City Relationship  
douglas@friendsofbeanangel.org*



**Nikita Pirnach**










*Project Administrator  
Sister City Relationship  
nikita@friendsofbeanangel.org*



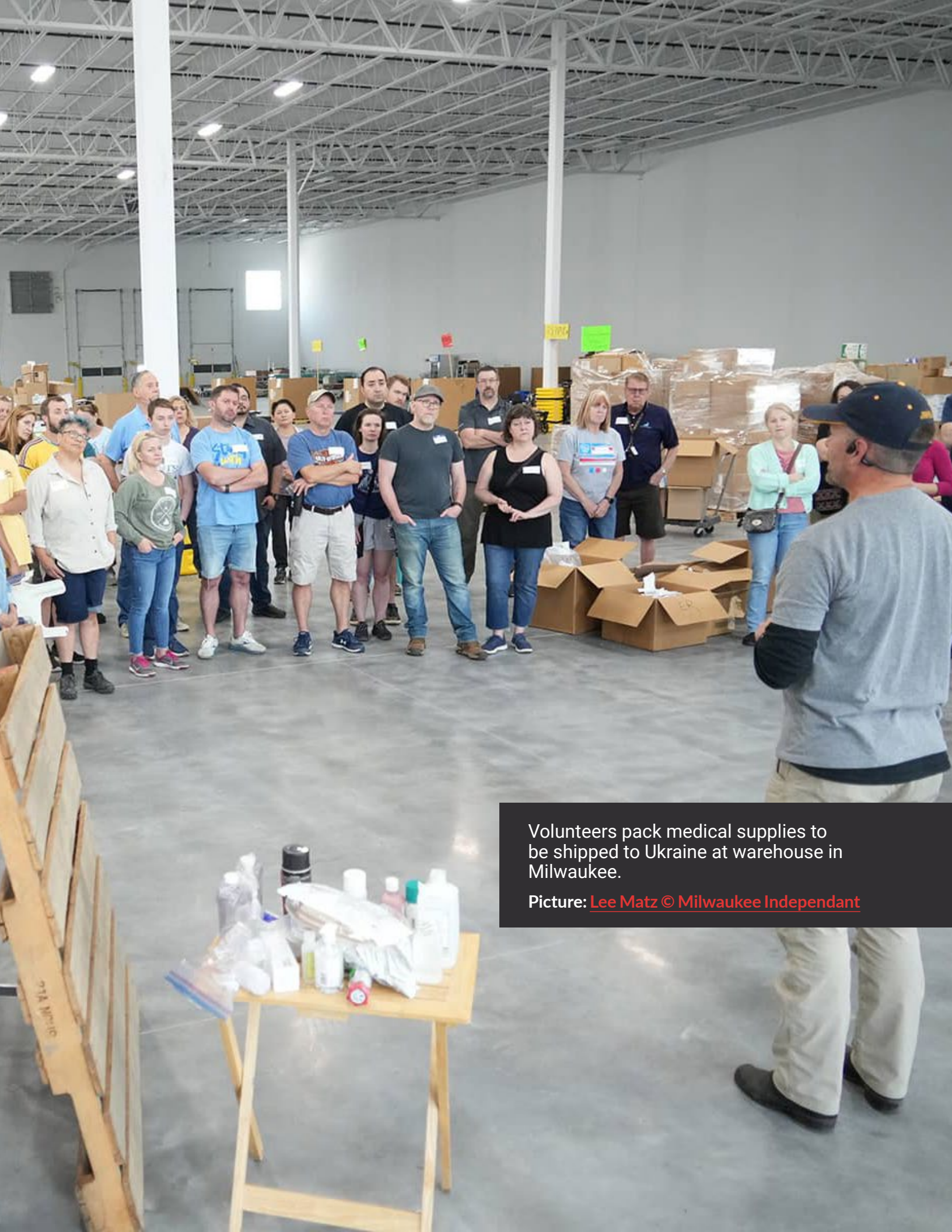
**Yan Nenaydykh**

*Project Accountant  
Sister City Relationship  
accounting@friendsofbeanangel.org*

## What We Do

<b>&gt;5,500</b> refugees supported from their initial registration up until their first employment opportunity 	<b>4</b> HQs in Germany, USA, Moldova and Ukraine 	<b>6</b> countries of operation 
<b>&gt;800</b> refugees supported with applications to the social court to receive welfare benefits	<b>47</b> children with life threatening diseases evacuated and provided treatment 	<b>23,500</b> people evacuated from frontline and crisis areas and brought to safety 
<b>~100</b> refugees a year receive a full consultation throughout their asylum registration process	<b>4,923</b> tons of humanitarian aid organized and distributed in crisis zones 	<b>222</b> buses of fleeing civilians evacuated from Ukraine
<b>20</b> ambulances donated to hospitals	 <b>&gt;1,300,000</b> people who have received aid from us worldwide	
 <b>1,715</b> generators distributed in Ukraine during the energy crisis	<b>3</b> emergency medical flights to evacuate critically injured people to safety 	





Volunteers pack medical supplies to be shipped to Ukraine at warehouse in Milwaukee.

Picture: [Lee Matz](#) © [Milwaukee Independent](#)

# Delegation Exchange

## Visit to Irpin

On June 27, 2023, Milwaukee Mayor Cavalier Johnson and Irpin Mayor Oleksandr Markushin held their third collaborative discussion as part of the ongoing Sister City Relationship between our two cities. This meeting was held virtually and served as a continuation of the strong ties built over the years since the partnership was formalized in 2018. The conversation, facilitated by Friends of Be an Angel and its director, Anya Verkhovskaya, was an opportunity for the Mayors to discuss mutual projects and initiatives aimed at strengthening community, cultural, and business connections.

Mayor Johnson reaffirmed Milwaukee's steadfast support for Irpin and praised the city's resilience in the face of the Russian invasion, highlighting the solidarity felt in Milwaukee and across Wisconsin. Mayor Markushin expressed deep gratitude for the ongoing support, including the crucial fundraising and awareness efforts by Milwaukee during the early days of the invasion.

Friends of Be an Angel is proud to have facilitated this important meeting, continuing our mission to support Irpin and foster cooperation between our two cities. This partnership, supported by local businesses and community



leaders in both Milwaukee and Irpin, remains a shining example of international collaboration in the face of adversity. We look forward to furthering these efforts in the coming years as we continue to stand by our friends in Ukraine.





## Facilitation of Syracuse Exchange

We sponsored and organized an official visit of the Irpin Delegation to Syracuse, NY, aiming to establish a sister city relationship. This effort also included appeals for urgent assistance and continued support for Ukraine amidst ongoing challenges.

Our facilitation of this exchange was successful. As of April 14th, 2023 Mayor Markushyn and Syracuse Mayor Ben Walsh signed a Sister City Cooperation agreement.

### In the news

Irpin deepens cooperation with American Milwaukee (video)

[Click here](#)

Mayors of Milwaukee and Irpin expand Sister City cooperation after visit by nonprofit delegation

[Click here](#)

Exclusive: Mayor of Irpin, Ukraine, Syracuse's new sister city, talks of war and hope

[Click here](#)



# Cultural Exchange

Cultural exchange is the mutual sharing of traditions, customs, arts, and values between communities, fostering understanding and appreciation of diverse cultures. It plays a crucial role in sister city relationships by building strong, people-to-people connections that transcend geographical and political boundaries. For Milwaukee and Irpin, this exchange deepens the bond between the cities and encourages a spirit of unity and solidarity, especially during challenging times. Friends of Be an Angel has actively promoted cultural exchange by organizing events like the Ukrainian Independence Day celebration, coordinating the donation of Ukrainian children's books to the Milwaukee Public Library, and hosting delegation visits between the cities. These initiatives have helped bridge cultural gaps, enrich both communities, and strengthen the sister city relationship through shared experiences and support.

## Milestones:

- 100 children's books were donated from the city of Irpin towards the Milwaukee Public Library
- Ukrainian Independence Day celebration and raising of Ukrainian flag at the City Hall of Milwaukee



Lee Matz © Milwaukee Independant

## Ukrainian Independence Day

August 24, 2023

In celebration of Ukraine's Independence Day on August 24, Friends of Be an Angel played a key role in organizing events that highlighted Milwaukee's ongoing support for its sister city, Irpin. Mayor Cavalier Johnson, a strong advocate for the Ukrainian community since the start of the Russian invasion, sent a video message to the residents of Irpin, which was broadcast on local television. In his message, Mayor Johnson reaffirmed Milwaukee's solidarity with Irpin, recognizing the city's strength and resilience during the war, and honoring those who have fought for Ukraine's independence.

As part of the Independence Day celebration, Friends of Be an Angel worked alongside city officials to organize the ceremonial raising of the Ukrainian flag at Milwaukee's Frank

P. Zeidler Municipal Building. This event, symbolizing Milwaukee's unity with Irpin and Ukraine, included remarks from Anya Verkhovskaya, Director of Friends of Be an Angel, who emphasized the importance of continuing to raise awareness about the war and the hardships facing the people of Ukraine. Verkhovskaya's message reminded Milwaukee's citizens of their vital role in supporting Irpin through ongoing humanitarian efforts and maintaining the strong sister city bond.

Milwaukee raises national flag of Ukraine on its Independence Day in solidarity with Sister City of Irpin

[Click here](#)



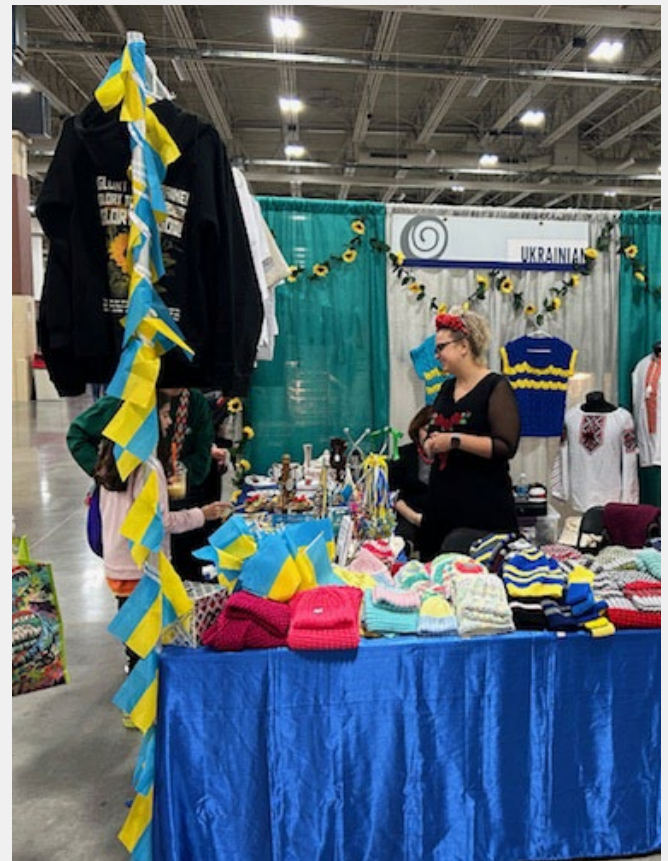
Lee Matz © Milwaukee Independent





## Holiday Folk Fair International

The Holiday Folk Fair is an annual cultural event in Milwaukee that celebrates diversity by showcasing traditions, arts, and crafts from around the world. This year, Friends of Be an Angel played a significant role in the event, with Boris Nayflish and Anya Verhovskaya dedicating their time to manning the Sister Cities Exhibit Booth. They highlighted the strong bond between Milwaukee and Irpin, sharing the story of our partnership with visitors and promoting awareness of the shared efforts to support Ukraine during these challenging times.





## Mural for Milwaukee Intl. Airport

July, 2023

In July 2023, the City of Irpin announced the creation of an inspirational mural as a symbol of its strong international friendship with Milwaukee, to be displayed at Milwaukee Mitchell International Airport. This initiative was inspired by murals installed in war-damaged areas of Irpin by international artists, including Banksy, and was further motivated by the controversy surrounding a Soviet-era mural donated by St. Petersburg. The Russian mural had been displayed at the airport since 1989 but was covered in 2022 following protests against Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The Irpin mural project aims to shift attention from the controversial artwork and celebrate the Sister City relationship between Irpin and Milwaukee, highlighting

their bond through a powerful visual display. The mural concept centers around artwork created by the children of Irpin, symbolizing resilience and unity. The project, which may include both physical and digital installations, seeks to engage Milwaukee's diverse art community while promoting cultural exchanges between the two cities. There is also potential for rotating mural displays and reciprocal art exchanges, with artwork from Milwaukee artists showcased in Irpin. This initiative not only serves as a testament to the lasting connection between the Sister Cities but also opens the door to future creative partnerships, such as the Milwaukee Bucks supporting the rebuilding of a basketball court in Irpin.



# Humanitarian Support

## Rescuing Vulnerable Children

A year and a half after the Russian Federation invaded Ukraine, Ukrainian hospitals continue to suffer from significant shortage of doctors, medicine and medical supplies. Many doctors are sent in rotations to frontline hospitals to assist with the high casualty rate, leaving a shortage of staff in every hospital. In addition, the consumption of medicine and medical supplies has increased immensely, leaving a scarcity in all regions of Ukraine. The unavailability of numerous treatment options has created a dire situation, especially for children suffering with severe medical conditions. Among the treatments sorely lacking in Ukraine is the medication required for treating Spinal Muscular Atrophy (SMA).

### 01. The Problem

Tragically, the mortality rate for infants suffering from SMA has soared to over 80% due to the ravages of war and the severe shortage of available treatment options in Ukraine. The only chance of hope for these infants is their evacuation to countries that provide the needed treatment necessary for their survival.

### 02. Our Solution

Our organization provides medical evacuation, resettlement, and facilitates treatment options for the child and their immediate family. We support the family by finding them treatment locations, provide case management, organizing staff, equipment and medical transport for the evacuation out of Ukraine, assist them with visa applications, document translation, find them a sponsor and provide them a place to live.



## MILWAUKEE COMMUNITY JOINS FORCES TO SUPPORT UKRAINIAN CHILDREN

In May 2023, the Milwaukee community came together to support 20-month-old Oleksandr "Sasha" Kutarenko, a Ukrainian child diagnosed with Spinal Muscular Atrophy, who fled the war in Ukraine with his family in search of life-saving medical treatment. With the assistance of Friends of Be an Angel, the Milwaukee community and close neighbors, they arrived in Milwaukee through the Uniting for Ukraine program, where they were met with immediate support from local organizations and medical professionals.

Sasha's condition required urgent care, and thanks to the swift response from Children's Wisconsin, his medical review began just days after arriving. The community's efforts, including financial aid, logistical support, and medical expertise, provided Sasha with a fighting chance at a better quality of life, underscoring the deep bond between Milwaukee and Ukraine.

Sasha was evacuated to Milwaukee, Wisconsin in August, 2023. Within the first few months of treatment, he was able to walk stand for the first time.



## Business Community of Milwaukee helps to provide tens of thousands of Ukrainians with heat and electricity.

In the fall of 2022, the armed forces of the Russian Federation carried out targeted missile attacks on critical infrastructure in Ukraine, resulting in one of the worst humanitarian disasters since the beginning of the full-scale invasion. The collapse of the power grid left millions of innocent Ukrainian civilians without water, heat and electricity during the coldest months of the year.

In anticipation of these attacks, Be an Angel launched a preemptive action by building a coalition of 42 organizations, charities and donors to provide 1,715 generators to the Ukrainian people.

In a short space of time, more than 17 million people across Ukraine were without electricity and heating. Generators were in extremely high demand, which led to skyrocketing market prices in a global economy that was already suffering from high inflation. Generators were sold out in many large cities. Even in Europe, many businesses had created a waiting list for emergency power generators.

To overcome these challenges, our US team devised an alternative solution: to order large quantities directly from the manufacturers. This allowed us to not only provide a large amount of 1,715 generators, but also purchase them at wholesale prices.



There was just one catch: a large advance payment had to be made, which was beyond our budget. The solution? We joined forces with 42 organizations to cover the down payment. Thanks to our partners in Ukraine, most of the generators could be delivered free of charge to frontline areas. This pragmatism enabled our coalition to avoid market prices, which had risen by up to 80%. This strategy allowed us to save a total of 1.2 million USD in additional costs.

The **Milwaukee community** played a vital role in making this project a reality. The **Rotary Club of Milwaukee** contributed over \$100,000, and the local business community rallied to provide financial and logistical support, demonstrating Milwaukee's deep commitment to its Sister City, Irpin, and to Ukraine as a whole. This collaborative effort, which brought together businesses, nonprofit organizations, and local leaders, ensured that the generators reached more than 150 hospitals, 478 refugee centers, and numerous schools and community spaces. The collective action of the Milwaukee community has directly impacted over 20,000 people, providing them with heat, electricity, and hope.

The success of this initiative, recognized with the prestigious Gold Award at the 3rd Annual Anthem Award in the category of Humanitarian Action & Services: Partnership & Collaboration, showcases the power of global partnerships. Friends of Be an Angel, alongside its partners and the Milwaukee community, not only provided critical resources during a time of crisis but also symbolized solidarity and resilience. By working together, they delivered more than just generators—they restored hope to a nation in need.



## Medical Shipments & Volunteering by the Milwaukee Community

On June 10, 2023, volunteers from across Wisconsin gathered at a Germantown warehouse for a “sort and pack” event, organized by Friends of Be an Angel, Wisconsin Ukrainians Inc., and the Ukrainian Medical Association of North America (UMANA). Over three shifts, volunteers worked tirelessly to prepare medical supplies for shipment to hospitals in Ukraine, focusing on field, military, and community care in occupied areas. The event was filled with a shared sense of purpose, as healthcare professionals guided volunteers in sorting, cleaning, labeling, and packing essential items like surgical gear and medical equipment. The supplies were sent to a warehouse in Lviv, Ukraine, operated by Friends of Be an Angel, to support those affected by the ongoing war. Dr. Douglas Davis of UMANA highlighted the importance of these efforts, calling them a “lifeline” for those in need. Despite the challenges, including a decline in donations, the event showcased the resilience and compassion of Wisconsin's community in its ongoing support for Ukraine.





## Donation of 840 Wi-Fi Access Points

July 26, 2023

In July 2023, Advanced Wireless, Inc. (AWI) made a significant contribution to support the rebuilding of Irpin, Ukraine, by donating more than 840 site-survivable Wi-Fi access points to the city's schools and bomb shelters. This initiative, coordinated through the Milwaukee-Irpin Sister Cities program and supported by Friends of Be an Angel, is aimed at restoring critical educational infrastructure damaged during Russia's invasion. The Wi-Fi access points will allow students in Irpin to continue their education both in classrooms and in bomb shelters during air raids. AWI's President, Darryl Morin, emphasized the vital role education plays in rebuilding Ukraine, stating that the donation will help nurture the next generation of leaders, doctors, engineers, and teachers. Alongside

the equipment, AWI is also providing technical support and training to ensure successful implementation, further demonstrating their commitment to the city's recovery.

This donation, the result of discussions that began during Irpin Mayor Oleksandr Markushin's visit to Milwaukee in May 2022, highlights the strong bond between the two Sister Cities. AWI's contribution, valued at over \$2 million, is part of a larger effort to ensure that Ukraine's students have access to quality education despite the ongoing war. The project also reflects the shared commitment of Milwaukee's community to support Irpin's recovery, with logistical support provided by Friends of Be an Angel and Wisconsin Ukrainians Inc.



Lee Matz © Milwaukee Independent

The trauma of living:  
When being killed is  
the preferred choice to  
being disfigured from  
battle

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Freeing Freddie:  
Educational program  
aims to reduce PTSD  
for Ukraine's war-  
weary children

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Combat surgeons  
pioneer advances  
in maxillofacial  
reconstruction of  
Ukraine's injured

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Milwaukee donors  
cover cost of  
reconstructive surgery  
for American volunteer  
wounded in battle

[Click here](#)

Lviv warehouse  
serves as vital link in  
medical supply chain  
from Milwaukee to  
frontlines

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Aid from Milwaukee  
is providing internally  
displaced people in  
Ukraine with food and  
clothing

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Being Friends of  
Angels: The Milwaukee  
nonprofit saving lives  
and offering hope in  
Ukraine

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Interview with  
Tom Barrett: U.S.  
Ambassador to  
Luxembourg reflects  
on ties with Irpin

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Advanced Wireless  
to donate 840 access  
points to rebuild Irpin's  
citywide Wi-Fi network

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Children of Irpin begin  
planning mural for  
Mitchell Airport to  
showcase Sister City  
friendship

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# Relationship news

Former Vice President Mike Pence visits Irpin during unannounced campaign trip to Kyiv

[Click here](#)

Milwaukee offers Ukrainian refugee family life-saving treatment for son's genetic condition

[Click here](#)

Wisconsin volunteers sort and pack donated medical supplies for use in Ukraine's hospitals

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Nikita Pirnach: Irpin student hopes to help his country after finishing education in Milwaukee

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Return to Ukraine: A trauma loop of travel from Milwaukee to a country still at war a year later

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Sick children wait for overseas medical treatments as a new generation is born in Ukraine during war

[Click here](#)

Wisconsin Ukrainians host annual fundraising picnic to support homeland on 500th day of war

[Click here](#)

Iryna Suslova: The superwoman saving Ukrainian children abducted by Russia

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Irpin is not forgotten: Residents thank Milwaukee Independent for reporting on their "Hero City"

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Reps from Milwaukee's sister cities gather for meet and greet at City Hall

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## 📍 Be an Angel e.V.

Yorkstraße 4-11  
10965 Berlin, Germany



Phone: +49 (0) 30 902982870

[www.be-an-angel.org](http://www.be-an-angel.org)  
[info@be-an-angel.org](mailto:info@be-an-angel.org)

## 📍 Friends of Be an Angel

11520 N Port Washing Rd #215  
Mequon, WI 53092 USA



Phone: +1 414-628-3826

[www.friendsofbeanangel.org](http://www.friendsofbeanangel.org)  
[contact@friendsofbeanangel.org](mailto:contact@friendsofbeanangel.org)

## 📍 Be an Angel Moldova

Chişinău, Moldova



Phone: +380 48 708 0234

[moldova@be-an-angel.org](mailto:moldova@be-an-angel.org)  
[be-an-angel.org/moldova](http://be-an-angel.org/moldova)

## 📍 Be an Angel Ukraine

Odesa, Ukraine



Phone: +380 48 708 0234

[ukraine@be-an-angel.org](mailto:ukraine@be-an-angel.org)  
[be-an-angel.org/ukraine](http://be-an-angel.org/ukraine)