

## “It is somehow more pleasant to live in a society that does not hide its children from my child.” – The story of Anna and her daughter Oleksandra

### Introduction of Anna and Oleksandra

Anna and her daughter, Alexandra, lived in the heart of Kharkiv. Anna's world revolved around Alexandra, or Sasha as she affectionately called her. At first glance, Sasha seemed like any other child, but as months passed, Anna's heart sank with the realization that her daughter's development was different. "Until she was 4 months old, I thought I had a normal child", Anna recalls.

### Struggles of day to day live with a disabled child

Life in Kharkiv was a daily battle against a world not built for Sasha's needs. Every outing became an expedition, every appointment a test of endurance. "Even the rehabilitation center had no ramps", Anna says, the frustration of those years still evident in her voice. Their fourth-floor apartment, once a haven, became a prison of sorts. Eight flights of stairs stood between Sasha and the outside world, and the physical toll on Anna's husband carrying Sasha up and down was immense. Despite the challenges, Anna and her husband poured their love and energy into Sasha's care.

### Reaction of society in Ukraine towards Anna and Oleksandra

In a society where difference was often met with fear, Anna felt the sting of rejection. "Sometimes children would come up to Sasha, and even the parents would say: 'Stay away from the girl, don't touch her,'" (Иногда к Саше подходили дети, и даже родители говорили: «Не подходи к девочке, не трогай ее»") she recounts, the pain of those encounters still fresh.

### Start of the war in Ukraine and the story of Anna and Oleksandra fleeing Ukraine

Then came the unthinkable. War erupted, turning their already challenging life into a nightmare. The sound of low-flying planes sent Sasha into panic attacks, her inability to move independently magnifying her terror. Anna's voice trembles as she remembers those dark days, "I realized that I couldn't hold out for long like this. I needed strength for Sasha, and I realized I couldn't take it anymore." Their escape from Kharkiv was a harrowing odyssey. Trains packed with frightened families, hours of waiting in cramped buses, and the constant fear of the unknown.

## Arrival of Anna and Oleksandra in Germany and description of the new life

But amidst the chaos, a glimmer of hope emerged. Germany offered not just refuge, but a chance at a new life. For two years now, Sasha has been coming home from school with a face that, as Anna describes, "simply says 'I have everything, I feel good!'" In this new land, Anna has found more than just accessibility ramps and elevators. Filled with gratitude and hope, Anna has discovered a society that embraces Sasha, that sees beyond her disability. As they navigate their new life, Anna sees Sasha blossoming. The curious girl who loves books and drawing, who delights in using her eye tracker, is finding her place in the world.

Their journey from the war-torn streets of Kharkiv to the welcoming embrace of Berlin is more than a story of escape. It's a testament to a mother's love, a family's resilience, and the transformative power of acceptance.