

# PSYCHOSOCIAL ASPECTS OF IMPROVING THE EFFICIENCY OF REHABILITATION OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES IN COMMUNITY DURING WARTIME

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**Abstract.** *In the article, the problem of increasing the effectiveness of rehabilitation of persons with disabilities in the community in wartime conditions is updated and substantiated at the theoretical, legal, and empirical levels. On the basis of a focus group survey, the importance and failure to fully realize the problems of rehabilitation of persons with disabilities in the community in wartime conditions were proven. It was established that according to the opinion of persons with disabilities and their parents, the problems of rehabilitation of persons with disabilities are solved to a greater extent by local authorities and local self-government bodies, social services and health care institutions, etc.; there is a need to create a permanent supportive and developmental environment in the community; there is a problem in the organization of work, employment, opportunities to get to work; a violation of the feeling of security is noted, there is a feeling of powerlessness, irritation, misunderstanding of the nearest prospects; fixed need to be listened to and heard, to regularly communicate with specialists. The foreign and Ukrainian experience of psychosocial aspects of increasing the effectiveness of rehabilitation of persons with disabilities in the community is analysed. The author's social project "Different and Equal" is proposed, aimed at improving the efficiency of providing rehabilitation services to persons with disabilities in the community in wartime conditions. The main feature of this social project is that it is maximally focused on integrating the efforts of community members, persons with disabilities and their family members to promote social adaptation, strengthening the resources of persons with disabilities to overcome the challenges and threats of war.*

**Keyword:** *community participation, focus group survey, persons with disabilities, rehabilitation, social project, wartime conditions.*

## Introduction

Statistics of the war in Ukraine show a significant increase in the number of people with disabilities. As the Minister of Social Policy O. Zholnovich testifies, the number of people with disabilities in Ukraine increased by 300,000 during the one and a half years of the war to 3 million people (Zholnovych, 2023). Therefore,

solving the problems of rehabilitation of persons with disabilities is relevant today and requires a conscious and purposeful integration of the efforts of various branches of government, public organizations, territorial communities, and persons with disabilities themselves to improve and increase the effectiveness of the provision of rehabilitation services in wartime conditions.

The regulatory framework for the rehabilitation of persons with disabilities in Ukraine consists of a number of laws and by-laws (the Law of Ukraine "On the Basics of Social Protection of Persons with Disabilities in Ukraine", 1991; the Law of Ukraine "On the Rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities in Ukraine", 2006 and etc.), in which persons with disabilities are guaranteed equality and respect for rights and freedoms, their social protection, the opportunity to participate in various spheres of society, and discrimination is prohibited. Understanding the current trends in revising and amending Ukrainian legislation on social protection and rehabilitation of persons with disabilities in Ukraine, taking into account the challenges of wartime, we consider it appropriate to direct efforts to justify ways to improve the effectiveness of rehabilitation and psychosocial support of persons with disabilities in wartime, taking into account the possibilities of the immediate environment their livelihoods and community potential.

The purpose of the article is to analyse the system of rehabilitation of persons with disabilities and substantiate the possibilities of increasing its effectiveness in the community in wartime conditions.

To achieve the goal of the research, the following methods were used: theoretical (analysis of scientific and regulatory sources, generalization, modelling); empirical (focus group survey); data processing. In the process of the empirical part of the research, 34 people were involved, including 25 people with disabilities, mentally preserved, including those who move on carts; 9 people are parents of persons with disabilities. The age range of the participants of the focus group survey is 21-55 years.

### **The theoretical background**

Various aspects of the problem of observing the rights and freedoms, social protection and rehabilitation of persons with disabilities in Ukraine are presented in such works: M. Buk (2020), D. Kiblyk (2021), I. Molochenko (2021), T. Perehudova (2015) and others. Features of the organization and provision of services by types of rehabilitation for persons with disabilities were revealed by Yu. Bezsmertny, G. Bezsmertna (2018), Yu. Bryndikov (2018), G. Leshchuk (2017), K. Chupina (2020), and others. The foreign experience of rehabilitation of persons with disabilities and the conditions for its optimization was studied by O. Halytskyi, R. Hryshova (2019), T. Peregudova (2015) and was presented in the works of N. Grills (2019), A. Tsaloglidou (2015), A. Wilmowska- Pietruszyńska

(2023) and others. Scientists and practitioners tend to endow the process of rehabilitation of persons with disabilities with features of a complex, systematic, and consistent nature. The idea that now there is a direct need to provide an interdisciplinary approach to the provision of rehabilitation services to persons with disabilities, to include in this process specialists with different professional activities (psychologists, doctors, physiologists, teachers, social workers, etc.) (Buk, 2020; Kiblyk, 2021; Molochenko, 2021; Grills & Varghese, 2019). In the format of the rehabilitation process, several interrelated types of rehabilitation for persons with disabilities are combined: psychological (restoration and/or correction of lost personal capabilities, mental functions, increase of its adaptation potential); social (restoration of lost functions and connections with the social environment, social status of the individual, promotion of social adaptation and social integration into the community); medical (prevention of disability due to restoration of impaired body functions, work capacity); pedagogical (restoration of spiritual and moral harmony, development of creative abilities, promotion of opportunities for self-realization); legal (restoration of a person's legal rights, if they were alienated or violated); physical (restoration of physical health, leading a healthy lifestyle, assistance in stabilizing health and working capacity); professional (combination of the components of career guidance, professional choice, retraining or advanced training, rational employment) and others (Bezsmertnyi & Bezsmertna, 2018; Bryndikov, 2018; Leshchuk, 2017).

In a number of laws of Ukraine, the rehabilitation of persons with disabilities is defined, in particular, as: a complex of organized measures that are necessary for a person who experiences or may experience restrictions in everyday functioning due to the state of his own health in interaction with the environment (the Law of Ukraine "Basics of legislation of Ukraine on health care", 1993); a system of medical, psychological, pedagogical, physical, professional, labour, physical culture and sports, social and household measures aimed at providing assistance to individuals in restoring and compensating for impaired or lost body functions in order to achieve and maintain social and material independence, labour adaptation and integration into society, as well as providing persons with disabilities with technical and other means of rehabilitation and medical products (the Law of Ukraine "On the Rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities in Ukraine", 2006). According to the Law of Ukraine "On the Rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities in Ukraine" (2006), the concept of "person with disabilities" is used in relation to adults with stable limitations in life and for whom disability has been established in accordance with the procedure determined by the legislation. According to the Law of Ukraine "On the Status of War Veterans, Guarantees of Their Social Protection" (1993), persons with disabilities as a result of war are recognized as persons with wounds, contusions, mutilations, diseases, other health impairments as a result of service, as well as protection of the national security of the Motherland, participation in elimination

of nuclear threats, participation in deterring the armed aggression of the Russian Federation, participation in the Revolution of Dignity.

In the countries of the global community, at the level of the main regulatory and legal documents, common ideas with Ukrainian regarding social protection and rehabilitation of persons with disabilities sound (Halytskyi & Hryshova, 2019; Perehudova, 2015). Given the scientific article's purpose, we consider it appropriate to mention the key principles of the "social model" of disability in Poland, which provides for the creation of full opportunities to promote the social integration of people with disabilities in life, as well as focusing on the realization of their abilities, creative development, group work and leisure. A. Wilmowska-Pietruszyńska emphasizes that the main goal of the rehabilitation of persons with disabilities is to enable them to live their lives according to their wishes, accepting the inevitable limitations in activities that have arisen as a result of injuries, illness or trauma. This goal can be achieved by combining the following actions: elimination or reduction of dysfunctions; elimination or reduction of obstacles to participation in the life environment; support for social reintegration of a person with a disability (Wilmowska-Pietruszyńska, 2023).

The concept of "autonomous life" by A. Tsaloglidou promotes the principle of equality and emphasizes the importance of removing barriers that arise in the daily life of people with disabilities (Tsaloglidou, 2015). The author considers employment, social protection, inclusion in cultural activities, provision of assistance services, and support of their family members to be important components of psychosocial rehabilitation of persons with disabilities.

In the GBR N. Grills, J. Varghese model, emphasis is placed on the capabilities of communities in providing full and comprehensive support and rehabilitation of persons with disabilities, the key principles of which are defined as: respect for dignity and individual autonomy; lack of discrimination; full and effective involvement in society; respect for the peculiarities and acceptance of people with disabilities as a component of human diversity and humanity; equal opportunities and gender equality; availability, etc. (Grills & Varghese, 2019). In order to implement the model and optimize the provision of rehabilitation and other services to persons with disabilities in the community, N. Grills, J. Varghese considers it necessary: a mandatory study of their real needs based on a reference group survey or a "joint assessment group"; uniting as many stakeholders as possible, producing effective connections between them to strengthen community resources; maintaining a constant dialogue with community leaders, persons with disabilities and their families; modelling a therapeutic community of community members to raise awareness of issues and protect the rights of persons with disabilities, provide them with effective psychosocial support, etc.

Therefore, on the basis of the conducted theoretical analysis of the sources, we consider it appropriate to single out several key characteristics of the system of rehabilitation of persons with disabilities in modern conditions:

implementation of a comprehensive approach and maximum adjustment of rehabilitation of persons with disabilities to the usual rhythm of their life in the community; focus on ensuring the rights and freedoms of persons with disabilities and their real individual needs and requests at the level of the immediate environment (family, support group, specialists of special services, the entire community); meeting the needs of persons with disabilities, taking into account the specifics of their health, life restrictions, the potential of the living environment and the community; directing the implementation of psychological, social, pedagogical, medical, physical, professional, labour rehabilitation measures, in particular, with the involvement of community members; observance of important principles of rehabilitation of persons with disabilities (early start of rehabilitation, comprehensiveness, continuity and continuity, individual approach, social focus); promoting the integration of persons with disabilities into reference communities (by age, interests, abilities, professional orientation, etc.), as well as increasing the level of their independence in such integration.

### **Methodology, organization and result of the research**

Considering the results of the theoretical analysis of the problem, an acceptable idea of creating a new social project was determined, which would meet the challenges of the time, take into account the requests and peculiarities of the target group, would have the opportunity to mobilize and maximally use the resources of the community to increase the effectiveness of the rehabilitation of persons with disabilities in the wartime conditions. The work with the social project united several successive stages: the first – determination of the theoretical and methodological basis of the project based on the analysis of current regulatory and legal sources, the study of modern domestic and foreign experience in organizing the rehabilitation process of persons with disabilities; the second is to conduct a focus group survey of persons with disabilities and their family members in order to study their opinion regarding the potential for increasing the effectiveness of rehabilitation of persons with disabilities in the community in wartime conditions; the third – definition of the purpose and tasks of the social project, coordination of its directions, methods and forms of work, necessary professional and resource support; the fourth is the implementation of a social project based on the public association of persons with disabilities.

In order to clarify the subjective expectations of persons with disabilities and their family members regarding the forecasts for this social project, as well as factors that may affect its course or results, we conducted a focus group survey, which involved 34 persons, including 25 persons with disabilities, mentally preserved, including those who move on carts; 9 people are parents of persons with disabilities. The age range of the respondents is 21-55. Participants from among persons with disabilities formed two focus groups, parents of persons with

disabilities entered one focus group. During the focus groups, the principles of informed voluntary consent, confidentiality, the ability to stop participating in the discussion, etc. were observed.

Questions for discussion by focus groups related to the assessment of the degree of satisfaction with the process of providing rehabilitation services to persons with disabilities in the community in general and in war conditions in particular; expressing an impression regarding the created opportunities for social integration into community life; announcement of wishes to improve the rehabilitation potential of persons with disabilities in the community in wartime conditions. We will analyse the trends revealed in the answers of the participants of the focus groups.

The first trend is the closedness of the problems of rehabilitation of persons with disabilities. Only a small number of specialists in the social sphere know about such problems, and the majority of such persons are involved in the provision of rehabilitation services to persons with disabilities. Accordingly, the problems of rehabilitation of persons with disabilities are solved to a greater extent by local authorities and local self-government bodies, social services and health care institutions, etc.

The second trend is the temporary regulation of the rehabilitation process of persons with disabilities. It was about the fact that persons with disabilities generally positively evaluate the rehabilitation services received in rehabilitation centres for children and youth with functional limitations, rehabilitation centres, health care institutions, social services, etc. Although they indicate that there is sometimes a long pre-rehabilitation process associated with the preparation and submission of all necessary documents, waiting, etc. There were thoughts that it would be good to have a constant opportunity to be involved in various types of rehabilitation and not only within the formally organized rehabilitation process.

The third trend is that the war affected the possibility of undergoing rehabilitation, especially at its very beginning. Among the respondents there were persons with disabilities from the number of internally displaced persons, who pointed out the difficulties of their forced resettlement from their usual living conditions. This significantly increased the need for psychological support, legal assistance, provision of information and other consulting services. In addition, there were difficulties in adapting to new living conditions, it was necessary to understand how the system of social protection in the host community was established, the provision of rehabilitation services and to integrate into this process, etc. Volunteers, social service specialists, acquaintances and relatives helped in this.

The fourth trend is the need for constant communication and inclusion. At the beginning of the war, the usual circle of communication was significantly disrupted, as families made decisions about security, tried to understand all the threats, so they began to communicate less, there was less attention from friends

and relatives, and less family holidays. It was quite unpleasant. Also, the number of classes, workshops, excursions and other community initiatives has decreased significantly. Now this situation is more or less being restored. Persons with disabilities and their family members said that it would be good if a permanent supportive and developmental environment was created in the community. In particular, if we talk about children with disabilities, young people with disabilities, such an environment could create an opportunity to develop their abilities, join creativity, have the opportunity to communicate, exchange experiences, etc. And it should have a systematic nature, be within the maximum proximity to the housing of persons with disabilities, so that no additional restrictions appear.

The fifth trend is leisure and work. Persons with disabilities and present parents said that they were really interested in participating in various activities for the organization of meaningful leisure time. Such events are held in rehabilitation centres for children and youth with functional limitations, organized by public organizations and the city council. However, they are episodic and people with disabilities spend most of the time at home, these people are not busy, or their free time is related to reading books, watching TV, and going for walks. In the conditions of the war, it became even more difficult. Only a small percentage of people are satisfied with the opportunities they have for performing work (some have found employment on the Internet, perform tasks at home). There is a problem with full employment, as well as opportunities to get to work, although the working conditions are generally satisfied for persons with disabilities. Those who travel in wheelchairs complain of anxiety, the need to quickly gather and go down to the shelters. The same was mentioned by those persons with disabilities who do not work in institutions and organizations.

The sixth trend is that the war changed the usual daily routine. It was necessary to adapt to the conditions of the war, the environment changed. There was more anxiety, there was a feeling of powerlessness, irritation, misunderstanding of what would happen next. The sense of security was violated. Health problems worsened. In the first days and months of the war, the fear that life could end at any moment was especially acute. People with disabilities said that it was scary for them to stay at home alone even for a short time; when there was an alarm signal – a state of panic appeared. It was difficult, and sometimes impossible, due to the inadequacy of the common rooms, to go down into the storage rooms, the "rule of two walls" or simply the corridor saved. Parents of persons with disabilities said that it would be good if someone was always present with their child, even an adult child, or there was a place where they could be constantly safe and under supervision.

The seventh trend is that all persons with disabilities must be heard again. The war changed the rhythm of life, added threats, dangers, experiencing the trauma of losing friends, loved ones, and relatives. It is high time and very

necessary to provide constantly available psychological rehabilitation, psychological counselling, and specialized psychotherapeutic assistance to persons with disabilities and their family members. To be listened to and heard, to regularly communicate with specialists – this was very often mentioned by respondents during focus groups. As the parents said, it is important both psychologically and socially to support children and youth with disabilities, not to take a break during the war regarding cultural events, excursions, meetings, sports competitions, and joint leisure time. According to those present, the more contacts there will be with the environment, the greater the opportunity to restore something similar to the pre-war rhythm of life. For this to happen, it is necessary to speak about the needs and be heard by everyone, who can help to overcome the many challenges and threats of war on a daily basis.

### **Substantiation the key principles of the social project "DIFFERENT AND EQUAL"**

So, the understanding of the need to implement changes in the rehabilitation process of persons with disabilities, the presence of specific expected requests from the target group, the presence of some contradictions between the requests and the real conditions of providing rehabilitation services to persons with disabilities in the conditions of war prompted us to substantiate the social project "DIFFERENT AND EQUAL". Our efforts were focused on two key points: focusing on the actual needs of people with disabilities in war conditions, as well as finding ways to involve the community in solving these problems, providing psychosocial support; diversification of measures, forms, methods of rehabilitation of persons with disabilities by members of the community together with other formal (official, authorized) subjects. The purpose of the social project "DIFFERENT AND EQUAL" was to promote the improvement of the effectiveness of the rehabilitation of persons with disabilities in the community in wartime conditions, and as its priorities and tasks: focus on social integration and self-realization of persons with disabilities in the main areas of their life in the community in conditions wartime; provision of favourable conditions for the rehabilitation of persons with disabilities in various spheres of life in the community, taking into account the peculiarities of wartime; reducing the negative impact of war factors on the effectiveness of rehabilitation of persons with disabilities in the community and providing support to their family members.

The social project "DIFFERENT AND EQUAL" was based on several key provisions: 1) mainstreaming of disability, as the implementation of a comprehensive approach, thanks to which it will be possible to take into account the diverse interests of persons with disabilities and provide them with equal opportunities to ensure the desired inclusion in various spheres of life of the territorial community in conditions of war; 2) personalization, as a social

approach, focused primarily on the characteristics of each person with a disability who will receive rehabilitation services or psychosocial support and will have the right to choose and control the process; 3) public participation at the level of informing, consulting, ensuring dialogue and partnership for: developing a community strategy and action plan in the scope of rehabilitation services; ensuring equal participation of all subjects; creation of maximum accessibility and inclusiveness of rehabilitation policy and services; monitoring how policies and services of the social project meet the needs of persons with disabilities.

We also assumed that increasing the effectiveness of the rehabilitation of people with disabilities in the community in wartime conditions will be facilitated by the joint efforts of various people from among community representatives – psychologists-practitioners, psychotherapists, specialists in social work, masters of folk art, athletes, travel agents, tour guides, students and other socially active members of the community, in particular on a volunteer basis, as well as persons with disabilities themselves and their family members. It is the joint efforts of all participants of the social project, their performance of socially significant activities in the context of the rehabilitation of persons with disabilities, that will strengthen the processes of mutual integration, mutual understanding, mutual respect and tolerance in the community at both the informal and formal levels, will lead to an improvement in the quality of mutual support of community members in difficult conditions wartime (Sarancha & Hilya, 2020).

When substantiating the social project, attention was focused on the formation of a multidisciplinary team to optimize the processes of solving organizational, technical and other issues, the implementation of methods, forms and means of work within the main areas of the social project with the use of modern information and communication technologies, due to the maintenance of a flexible Internet system communication, which is especially important in wartime conditions (Kolomiets, Palamarchuk, Shulga, Kolomiets & Gaba, 2019). In the design of the key principles of the social project "DIFFERENT AND EQUAL", foreign experience regarding the bases of organizing social rehabilitation of persons with disabilities was also taken into account: the focus of rehabilitation on overcoming psychological barriers, involvement in community life at the local, family and professional levels (Rejman & Błażejowski, 2020); providing access to comprehensive rehabilitation services in the community (Umunnah, Adegoke, Uchenwoke, Igwesi-Chidobe & Alom, 2023); taking into account the peculiarities of psychological counseling of persons with disabilities and their family members (Stuntzner & Hartley, 2014).

Taking into account the conducted analysis of the available foreign and Ukrainian experience, based on the requests received from persons with disabilities and their family members in a focus group survey, the main directions of the social project "DIFFERENT AND EQUAL" were determined:

psychological support – the possibility of receiving affordable permanent psychological / psychotherapeutic help for persons with disabilities and their family members;

meaningful leisure time – designing an environment for the restoration of mental and physical strength, raising the cultural level, manifestations of personal activity, creativity and self-realization, organization of communication, recreation, sports for persons with disabilities and their family members;

joint stay – creating opportunities for people with disabilities who are at home and are alone to receive support during the day, periodically on a schedule during the week.

The intended directions, methods and forms of work in the format of a well-founded social project are presented in Figure 1.

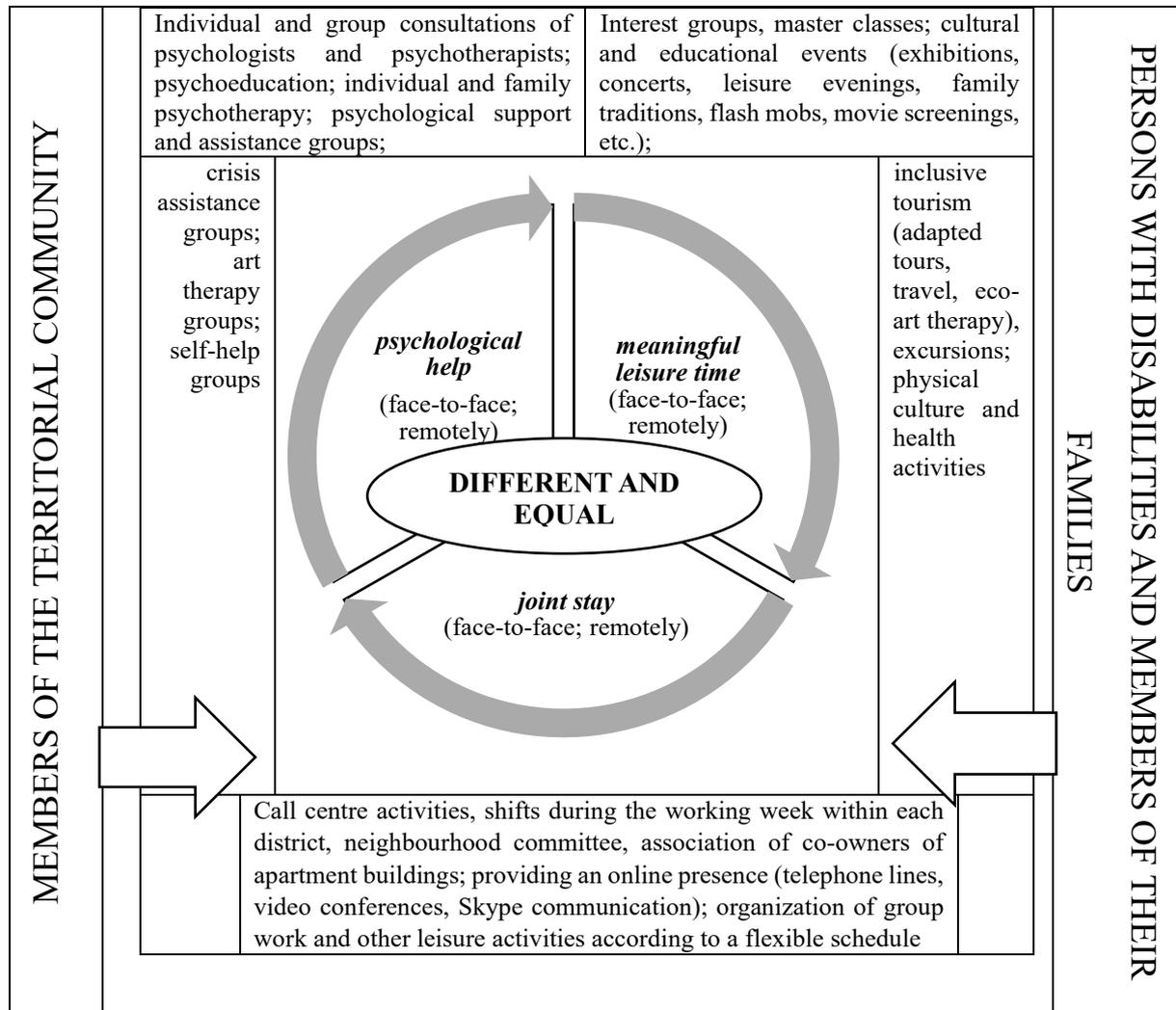


Figure 1 *The essence of the social project "DIFFERENT AND EQUAL"*

Thus, the substantiated social project "DIFFERENT AND EQUAL" is designed to increase the effectiveness of the rehabilitation of persons with disabilities in the community in wartime conditions. The main feature of this social project is that it is maximally focused on integrating the efforts of community members, persons with disabilities and their family members to promote social adaptation, strengthening the resources of persons with disabilities to overcome the challenges and threats of war. The need for its implementation within the boundaries of a specific territorial community in wartime conditions is obvious, which is determined by the fourth stage of our work with the social project. The public organization Vinnytsia City Organization of Social Development and Formation of Individual Underprivileged Categories of Youth "Parostok", which takes care of the satisfaction and protection of legitimate social, economic and other common interests of its members, will be the basis for the implementation of directions, methods and forms of work within the social project "DIFFERENT AND EQUAL", people with disabilities, people living with HIV/AIDS, cancer patients and other socially vulnerable categories of youth and adults by creating for them the conditions of a positively oriented social personality, its full self-realization, which will contribute to increasing the level of social adaptability of these categories of youth and adults in society.

### **Conclusions**

Wartime conditions in Ukraine aggravate the emergence of new risks for persons with disabilities, as they have an additional negative impact on the existing limitations of life activities. The number of people with disabilities in Ukraine is rapidly increasing due to injuries received by citizens in civilian life, as well as due to participation in hostilities; the quality of life decreases, psychotraumatization increases, there are more conventions in the possibilities of maintaining an appropriate level of life activity and receiving rehabilitation services by persons with disabilities due to objective circumstances.

Within the research problem and in modern conditions, one of the effective ways of managing and supporting social processes, achieving effective changes at the level of communities is the technology of social design. The justification of the social project "DIFFERENT AND EQUAL" was based on the subjective expectations and requests of persons with disabilities, as well as their family members, regarding factors that can positively affect the quality and scope of rehabilitation services in the community in wartime conditions.

The social project "DIFFERENT AND EQUAL" is aimed at the target group of people with disabilities aged 18-35. Within the social project, all members of the community can participate in solving the problems of people with disabilities. It is aimed at improving the effectiveness of social, psychological, physical, social and household rehabilitation of persons with disabilities. The priorities of this

social project are promotion of social integration, socio-psychological adaptation, self-expression of persons with disabilities, development of their personal and social potential as members of the community.

The philosophy of the social project "DIFFERENT AND EQUAL" is built on the basis of mainstream disability, ideas of tolerance, respect for honour and dignity, reduction of stigma and devaluation of the problems of persons with disabilities in the community, increase of responsibility and readiness of community members to come to the aid of persons with disabilities, taking into account the difficulties of the war time.

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