



This newsletter I wanted to take a moment and highlight a special project that one of the organizations I work with here in Romania has been working on for the past 6 months. It was a pleasure to help work on the book and to attend the event last week. If you would like to see more of the photos from the book and read these amazing stories, you can find them at <https://www.facebook.com/MeetingPointRO> (there should be a “see translation” option at the bottom of the post which will change it from Romanian to English for you).

## Faces of Courage

In the fall of 2023, 17 women working in various capacities on the frontlines, or with soldiers on the frontlines of the war in Ukraine gathered together in Cluj-Napoca for two weeks. The goal was to provide an experience where these fierce, passionate, loyal, determined women could have a space to breathe, to reflect, to heal, to share, to process, and to re-energize. Women came together through the guidance of specialty trained trauma therapists and explored their experiences, thoughts, feelings, and questions from not only the last couple years but from their whole lives. In addition to this processing, there was a chance for each woman to tell her story and to represent it with face/body paint and a photography session. Art has such a way of expressing and healing.

These stories and photographs were then collected and bound together to pass their stories along in a way that draws in potential readers and then captivates them to know what is going on and to connect with these women in profound ways through their stories and the art that was created. On Saturday, February 24th, 2024 - the 2nd anniversary of the most recent invasion of Ukraine and the subsequent war that has persisted - an exhibition was launched in Cluj-Napoca to share and reflect on these stories and the process of connecting. Between 100 and 150 people gathered together at a local area movie theater lobby to see the 17 portraits and hear from women who were at the two week gathering the previous fall.

There was talk of how stories were gathered and the impression that each of these women left on the interviewer. There was an interpretive dance presentation that allowed the audience to engage in the struggle and the the

commitment of Ukrainian women. But the theme that underlined the entire event as well as all of the stories was that of the power of hope. Time and time again throughout the stories from women who have lost husbands, been imprisoned, started war aid non-profits, lost colleagues who were driving across the country providing for those on the front lines, faced health concerns personally or within their families, were displaced and isolated the culmination of their stories were looking on the positive side, finding purpose and hope in what can be seen as despair, and choosing to hope for what tomorrow can bring. Their stories are difficult to hear about and imagine but these women represent even more than their stories - they represent all that they have risen through to keep moving, keep fighting, keep providing, keep holding on. Though just a small portion of the Ukrainian population, their stories and their art represent a far greater picture - hope is an ally in all situations.