



**We will never forget you**





## Dear students and staff, dear friends of Charles University,

A year has passed, but these words still do not come easily. It was before the Christmas holiday, on 21 December 2023, that the Faculty of Arts at Charles University became the site of an unprecedented tragedy. On that day, twelve of our students and two teachers lost their lives in a school shooting.

The attack brought profound sorrow and left us heartbroken. Even now, it is hard to believe something like this could happen. The pain of that day is still with us, and we will never forget those we lost. This edition of the university magazine is dedicated to them, with tributes from their families and those who knew them best. We extend our deepest compassion and respect to them as well as to all those who were injured in the attack.

The journey to recovery has been difficult – especially for those who lost their loved ones. At the University, returning to daily life and restoring a sense of normalcy has been slow and challenging. While badly shaken, we have remained resilient. Together, we have drawn closer as a community,

offering strength and support to one another as we move forward.

In response, Charles University has committed itself to better understanding the risks we face, strengthening support systems, and ensuring that no one is left to struggle alone. To this end, we established the CU Resilience Centre to provide well-being support to all members of our community, helping us navigate even the most difficult moments.

As we remember those we lost, let us hold their memory close. May it inspire us to continue moving forward with care for one another, hopeful in building a future where such suffering is not repeated.

**Milena Králíčková**  
Rector of Charles University





## Let us be kind to one another, let us be considerate and support one another

*Speech by the rector of Charles University, Milena Králíčková, at the funeral service for those who lost their lives in the school shooting, held on 23 December 2023 at the St. Vitus, Wenceslas and Adalbert Cathedral in Prague*

President Pavel, bereaved relatives, students, colleagues, and Your Grace,

On behalf of the whole academic community, all members of staff and students, as well as myself, I express my heartfelt condolences to all those who are mourning the loss of a loved one.

When a person needlessly loses their life, it takes a very long time before we are able to accept the tragic news. When it's a close relative, a fellow student or a colleague, sometimes even a whole lifetime isn't long enough for us to comprehend the loss.

By its uniqueness, the life of every person enriches and becomes part of us, and is therefore irreplaceable. The life of a young person represents the unfulfilled potential to do good for others, and for this reason the violent ending of such a life affects us all the more. If they are people who we encountered in the corridors or lecture halls of our university, then their deaths affect us even more deeply.

I wish to express my gratitude to all those who, in these difficult days, are sending us words of support, be they from the Czech Republic or abroad. I would particularly like to express my gratitude to those who are providing active assistance – to all volunteers, wherever they are: at the university, outside the Carolinum, those who are providing psychological support, those who are sending donations and all those who are currently organising this comprehensive effort to provide support. I wish to thank all components of the emergency services and all healthcare workers who are caring for the wounded in the hospitals of Prague. I am extraordinarily grateful to the dean's board of the Faculty of Arts, whose exceptional commitment on the spot saved many more lives.

We continue to help one another. Let us be kind to one another, and let us be considerate and let us, please, support one another. In these difficult moments, none of us should be alone. Thank you.

**Milena Králíčková**  
Rector of Charles University

## The wind is rising! We must try to live!

*Speech by Eva Lehečková, Dean of the Faculty of Arts at Charles University, from the balcony of the Estates Theatre on 4 January 2024*

Rector Králíčková, dear Colleagues,

I am extremely grateful for the opportunity to speak to you today on behalf of the Faculty of Arts. I will not talk about grief and feelings of devastation; these cannot be talked about in a loud voice on the square. Instead, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the student associations who have made it possible for us to gather today and silently honour the memory of the victims. Thanks to them, we can support each other in coming to terms with what happened before Christmas, and for which we are still finding the right words. Here, I want to speak about something different. The world of universities, the academic world, sometimes seems like it is in its own world, a world of education and research, with its own rules, separate from the outside world. The events in December taught us several crucial

and, if I may say, positive, lessons about our university world. I would like to talk about two of them.

Charles University is one community. The management of the university, the crisis staff and the other faculties of our university are there for us. At this extraordinary moment they are seeking, together with us, paths to return to academic life and renew it as soon as possible, including at the main building on Jan Palach Square. Without their astounding level of help and dedication we would not have been able to manage the situation, either so far or in the coming weeks. It is not, therefore, merely a formal act for me to stand here today by the side of Rector Králíčková; it is confirmation of the real support given to our faculty by the University and confirmation of my gratitude.

The “academic community” is a phrase that is frequently used in various official documents and speeches, and it is not merely an empty phrase, used out of tradition. Behind it lies a real, existing, living community of people with shared values; a community of empa-

thy, support and solidarity. In many of the rituals of academic life we espouse the general principles of the University: we have the education that we have acquired, what the University gives us and makes possible for us to use for the good of humanity and human beings. I want us to come away today in the knowledge that we know and live our lives by this promise. It speaks well of us and of our world.

In conclusion, I would like to ask one thing of you all. Let us stand together – not only in the days but also in the weeks and months ahead. We will need each other. Let us all play a part in restoring and reviving our academic life. Despite the many feelings and thoughts that are overwhelming us at this time, let us also speak to one another about the future and about hope. As the poet Paul Valéry succinctly put it in his famous poem: The wind is rising! We must try to live!

**Eva Lehečková**  
Dean of the Faculty of Arts at Charles University

## The academic community is wounded, but not broken

*Speech by the rector of Charles University, Milena Králíčková, from the balcony of the Estates Theatre on 4 January 2024*

Dear students and colleagues,

On behalf of all of us who have met here today, I would like to express my sincerest condolences to all bereaved relatives and all those mourning a loved one who died at the Faculty of Arts on 21 December. We have met here today to honour their memory, and also to symbolically carry the light of a flame from the Carolinum to the Faculty of Arts building on Jan Palach Square. Our procession will make its way through the streets of Prague city centre to the Faculty of Arts. And, just as the light of the candles will shine, so will pure hope and energy shine in all of you, students and

employees, because it is as our colleague from the Third Faculty of Medicine, Marek Orko Vácha, wrote: there, where hate multiplies, love multiplies, too, to a much greater degree. Speaking for myself, I am encouraged by the words of students when they say that hate shall not win. We will live on and continue our studies. Our academic community is wounded, but not broken. And our journey through the streets of Prague to the Faculty of Arts today will symbolise our journey towards healing.

I wish to thank, from the bottom of my heart, all those who have helped and are helping. I wish to thank those who devote hours, days and weeks to ensuring that we return to the work that we love. That we go back to studying in the lecture halls, study centres and libraries. I also wish to thank all those who sup-

port us, send energy to all of our volunteers, all those who provide psychological support, those who send donations, and all those who provide any other kind of assistance. Here, I would also like to thank Dean Eva Lehečková and the whole management of the Faculty of Arts for their hard work and unstinting efforts to ensure a gradual return to normal academic life.

Thank you for coming today and making it possible for us to convey the light together, as well as bring hope for those who can no longer bear it on their own. We must be strong in the coming days. Let us listen to and help each other. I know that we can get through this together.

**Milena Králíčková**  
Rector of Charles University



# We will never forget

Dear readers,

On the following pages we remember the lives of the fourteen people who we lost on the fateful day of 21 December 2023. I express my profound sorrow about their loss and my sincere condolences to their loved ones.

On that day we lost fourteen irreplaceable human stories, fourteen hearts filled with the desire to study, teach and help others. All of those we lost that day had before them a future filled with light, joy and optimism. They had dreams, wishes and the potential to bring positive change to the world around them. Their loss is incomprehensible and the emptiness they left is incalculable.

We, the members of the Charles University community, express our sincerest condolences to all the bereaved. The loss of any one of us is a loss for all. That day, even those who did not know any of the victims personally lost something precious. We all lost the chance to meet amazing people, we lost the

chance to experience their joy, wisdom and willingness to help others and we lost the chance to live in a world that is richer for their presence.

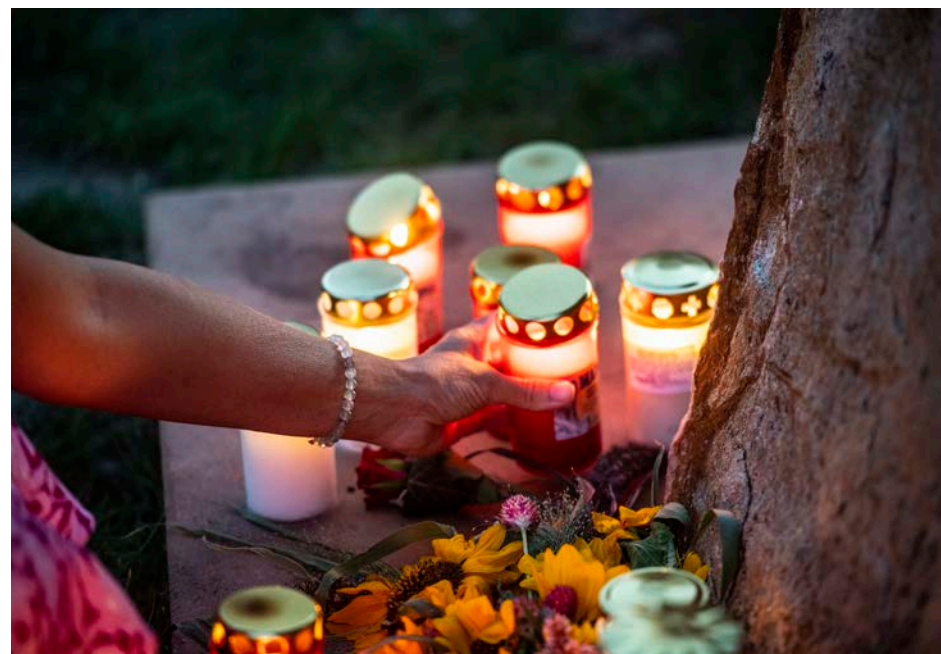
Their legacy lives on. Their stories, which we remember here through the memories of their loved ones, show us the importance of being kind to one another, caring for others, inspiring others and being inspired in return. We will never forget Eva, Jan, Ad, Lucie, Lenka, Klára, Adam, Magdalena, Sára, Agáta, Aneta, Tereza, Eliška and Lucie.

It falls to us, who have survived, to continue their legacy and carry the torch for those who no longer can.

On behalf of the crisis management staff of Charles University

## Lenka Henebergová

Member of the Rector's Board of Charles University for Social Affairs and Sustainable Development



## A word of thanks

On the day of the 2023 winter solstice, a horrifying event occurred in the lives of us all. We, who were bound to those we lost by ties of love, understanding and mutual generosity, and with whom we created our own, unique microcosms – parents, siblings, partners, classmates and friends – will bear the consequences of this evil for our entire lives.

In the quiet of the dark night in which we searched for and could not find our loved ones, thousands of minor streams combined to form a river of good. Thousands of people wanted to help us.

Here, we would like to express our appreciation for the assistance given to us by the university, from which we receive sensitive, empathetic support. Yes, the first few hours were stressful. The student community helped to keep the list of missing persons up to date. We know that many people from the University sacrificed their Christmas holidays to help those in need. For this, the University

drew on, and continues to draw on, its intellectual capacities and the assistance it provides is of a high professional standard. We thank all those who are helping us for their time, dedication, dealing with practical matters, and the emotional commitment in sharing in our grief.

- the Čáp family (Ad's family)
- Marie Dlasková (Jan's mother)
- the Fribert family (Lucie's family)
- the Hlávka and Mráček families (Lenka's family)
- the Holec family (Klárka's family)
- the Jaroš and Brož families (Evička's family)
- the Jurák family (Adam's family)
- the Křístek family (Majda's family)
- the Lidický family (Sára's family)
- the Michal family (Agátka's family)
- the Porubek family (Aneta's family)
- the Skolek family (Tereza's family)
- Petr Šimůnek (Eliška's father)
- the Špindler family (Lucie's family)



# Eva Brožová

## First-year student of Deaf Studies at the Faculty of Arts

(20 years old)

Eva came from Říčany. After graduating from Voděradská Grammar School in Prague 10 she was admitted to the Faculty of Arts. Her hobbies included reading books, playing the guitar, singing, tai chi, contemporary dance, drying and growing flowers, handicrafts, hiking and writing texts and poems.

*I see silence when I close my eyes as  
it flows through my heart.  
I can hear your beautiful eyes  
whisper love.*

*I can feel the light – it's where you are and around about,  
darkness  
Now I'm holding your hand.*

She had a feeling for language. She had a good memory for the words of songs, people and books – she looked for herself in them. She created her own alphabet, experimented with wordplay...

From the age of eight, she was a member of the Woodcraft League ([www.ligale-snimoudrosti.cz](http://www.ligale-snimoudrosti.cz)). Later, she tried to pass on the best of her knowledge to younger children, including her brother Jakub in the Beaver Tribe ([www.kmen-bobru.cz](http://www.kmen-bobru.cz)) in the good faith that they would do the same when they got older. She enjoyed creating puzzles, maps and treasure hunts, and discovering new things.

She organised a camp in the Banat region of Romania for the children of the Czech minority there.

She enjoyed handicrafts: she made jewellery, collected and dried flowers, sewed clothes, and practised embroidery. She burned decorations into wood. She enjoyed small things, such as any old cans she could get hold of that had a history, or “soul”.

### **Eva as remembered by her mother:**

- Evička loved people and always looked for the good in them.
- When you were in her company the world was beautiful and she always managed to put a smile on everyone's face.
- She was incredibly perceptive and empathetic, full of love, non-judgemental, and open to other opinions. She had a strong need to help those around her. She saw things that others don't.
- She loved flowers in the meadow, walking barefoot and dark chocolate.
- She had a beautiful ability to create warm memories from little things. She was constantly educating and working on herself. She was a fighter: she didn't give up.
- She was interested in philosophy. She believed that it deepened wisdom and helped people to rid themselves of disinterest in the world around them and become receptive, satisfied, kind and willing to help.
- Recently, among other things, she was enthusiastic about her sign language studies. She felt that she was useful. We often went to performances of children's plays that were interpreted into sign language. Eva watched the interpreters with interest; she was fascinated by it.



# Jan Dlask

## Head of Finnish Studies at the Department of Germanic Studies

(50 years old)

A native of Pardubice, after graduating from the local grammar school he studied for a master's degree in Finnish and Swedish, which he obtained in 2000 following the state final examination and his defence of his diploma thesis. Two years later, he started his doctoral studies in Germanic literature and wrote a dissertation on the comprehensive mapping and analysis of the debate between two Finnish-Swedish authors: Christer Kihlman and Henrik Tikkanen. He defended his dissertation in 2010.

Starting in 2002, Dlask taught courses in Finnish literature and translation seminars at the Department of Finnish Studies, first at the Institute of General Linguistics, and from 2015 at the Department of Germanic Studies. He had been head of Finnish Studies at the Department of Germanic Studies since September 2023. He approached students with the same honesty and openness as he did his own research topics. He was systematic, meticulous and helpful at all times.

He supervised dozens of bachelor's and master's theses on various literary and cultural and literary topics, and also wrote a number of reviewer's opinions on final theses.

He edited two highly successful student anthologies of short stories: *Lesní lišky a další znepokojivé příběhy* (2016) and *Za letních nocí se tu nespí lehce* (2019). He was also part of a larger team that, under the leadership of his former pupil Michal Švec, translated and prepared for publication an anthology of Finnish song lyrics entitled *Bílé preludy na vlnách* (2022). He also considered the popularisation of his field through reviews of translations of Nordic fiction and non-fiction, various news and studies, which he regularly published in magazines such as *Tvar* magazine, in the *Souvislosti* review or in the iLiteratura.cz online magazine, to be a very important part of his work.

In addition to literature and politics, he was a proud native of Pardubice and liked trains, music by the band Mňága a Žďorp, Finnish tar pastilles and cakes of all kinds. From the number of reactions, expressions of participation and memories sent not only in the Czech Republic, but also from colleagues at many Finnish, Swedish, Polish and German universities, and from both graduates from many years ago and current students, it is clear that he will continue to be an important member of the Finnish family and (not only) the wider North Germanic academic community.

On behalf of his colleagues and friends,

Lenka Fárová, Michal Kovář, Viola Parente-Čapková





# Ad Feynmann

**First-year student of Deaf Studies  
at the Faculty of Arts**

(20 years old)

Ad completed primary and secondary school at the Nový PORG school in Prague. He enjoyed sign language immensely; it was a field in which he found himself. He chose the field because he wanted to help others. He discovered a hidden talent within himself. He was great at sign language, even though he only started it in the summer of 2023. Ad also attended a course organised by Tichý svět, o.p.s., where he learned sign language “in advance”, even before he started studying at the Faculty of Arts. He wanted to become a sign language interpreter.

Ad was gifted in languages. He spoke English like a native speaker, had excellent knowledge of French and was learning Spanish. He was also incredibly talented at art and was very good at drawing and painting.



# Lucie Fríbortová

**Student at the Institute of Czech and Deaf Studies at the Faculty of Arts**

(23 years old)

Lucie was born on the magical date of 12 December 2000. From her first year of primary school onwards, she attended art and piano lessons at the Strakonice Primary Art School. She continued to study art throughout her time at secondary school, and she obtained her school-leaving certificate in the subject. She graduated from the eight-year grammar school in Strakonice with distinction. After leaving school, she started Czech Studies and added Deaf Studies at the Faculty of Arts.

Ever since secondary school, one of Lucie's passions was writing poetry, and her love for the Czech language and feeling for wordplay and rhymes was vital to this. One of her favourite authors was J. H. Krchovský. She published three collections of poetry on the Wattpad platform under the pseudonym *singinwolf*. We honoured Lucka's memory by publishing a book of her verses in November 2024.

Her whole life, Lucie admired the beauty of nature, from which she drew not only energy, but also inspiration. In her free time, she took loving care of her pets and her ever-expanding collection of flowers. While she was doing this, she liked to listen to her favourite bands.

Another priority for her was her interest in sustainable fashion, which she loved to wear. It was important for her that people not be indifferent but have respect for the environment and her desire was to make the world a better place.

Lucie always wanted to help others and make their lives more beautiful, including through education. She was the most tolerant, inspiring, kind, self-sacrificing, loving, sensitive, and lovable soul her fellow human beings could wish for. She shared her meaningful hobbies and interests with her loving family and boyfriend.

The Fríbort family





# Lenka Hlávková

**Musicologist, Director of the Institute of Musicology,  
Faculty of Arts**  
(49 years old)

Lenka Hlávková (née Mráčková) was born in Louny on 17 August 1974. After graduating from secondary school in Most, she studied musicology at the Faculty of Arts, Charles University, earning her master's degree in 1998 and her PhD in 2004. During her studies, she completed internships in Cork and Utrecht, and in 1999–2000, she was a DAAD scholarship holder at Humboldt University in Berlin. At the Institute of Musicology at the Faculty of Arts, she worked as an assistant professor specialising in the history of music before 1600 and music paleography. She served as the Institute's director twice, from 2012 to 2015 and from 2021 to 2023.

## **A memory from her husband:**

Lenka always knew she wanted to dedicate her life to music. As a pre-schooler, she joined the Kvítek choir in Louny, later adding violin lessons to her activities. She frequently participated in events organised by *Hudební mládež* (Musical Youth) and attended the Summer School of Early Music. Once she discovered musicology, her path was clear. She prepared meticulously for the entrance exam, completed both her master's and doctoral studies, and then joined the Institute of Musicology as an assistant professor.

Her family was always a great source of support: from enabling her to write musical notations for her thesis on a computer at the Počerady power plant, to varnishing the piano, sewing her graduation dress and other elegant outfits. Lenka's determined nature meant she didn't worry much about financial constraints or minor obstacles. For instance, when her university salary didn't cover living costs in Prague, she commuted from Louny without complaint. Later, the two of us lived in a rented room in Holešovice and eventually managed to purchase and renovate a home of our own.

Many of Lenka's colleagues have shared their memories in publications such as *HIS Voice*, *Deník N*, *Deník Referendum*, *Hudební věda*, and *Cantus*. They unanimously praised her scientific and organisational contributions, which she complemented with her legendary conference refreshments—mulled wine or apricot dumplings. For concerts and choir events, she prepared plum millet cakes, apple strudel, or blackcurrant desserts, depending on what was in season from her garden. At a conference in Brussels, she persuaded the local Czech Centre to provide a few bottles of Moravian wine, using them as both a promotional tool for Czech wine culture and early music research – otherwise, she typically funded such treats from savings from her own travel allowances.

Late into the night, she could often be found in the kitchen with her laptop, coordinating conferences, concerts, grants, student exchanges, or CD recordings. She always found the right words for the occasion, whether drafting grant applications, concert programmes, invitations, thank-you notes, or reviews.

Lenka was full of ideas, which she pursued with determination. Besides her love for choir singing and her professional focus on early music, she was deeply passionate about jazz. Many years ago, she co-founded Jazz Club Louny and helped organise successful jazz concerts. I suspect she arranged most other concerts and social musical events simply to meet friends and sing together, though she claimed it was all to promote the Institute and musicology studies. To advocate for early music and musicology, she also arranged and recorded several programmes for Czech Radio and even appeared on the cover of Charles University's *Forum* magazine.

Lenka could discuss virtually anything with enthusiasm and insight, from history and literature to pedagogy, botany, chemistry, and medicine. Alongside her vast cultural knowledge, she had a lively interest in fine wine and cuisine, cooking, gardening, preserving, and other practical activities. If she couldn't find a suitable, practical shopping bag, she'd knit one herself in the evenings.

A surprising passion of hers was karate, introduced to her by her younger brother, as she otherwise had little interest in sports. Over the past 15 years, she may have gone ice skating once, skiing twice, and cycling three times. She took up karate primarily for health reasons and pursued it with her characteristic full commitment.

Lenka is deeply missed by us all. I know no one with her unique energy, dedication, and organisational talent. Even with our limited abilities, we can strive to embody her motto: "I research, I research, I don't slack off!" (which she used as her screensaver). Let us avoid idleness, not complain about misfortune, follow our path, and work towards what we consider important, without undue concern for personal comfort.

## *Recipe for Lenka's apricot dumplings:*

*Prepare dough using a suitable amount of quark, semolina or coarse wheat flour (spelt is ideal), eggs, and a pinch of salt. Wrap the apricots thinly in the dough and boil them.*



FOTO Luboš Wiśniewski



# Klára Holcová

## Second-year student who was pursuing a degree in Archive Studies and Auxiliary Historical Sciences as well as in the Czech Language and Literature at the Faculty of Arts

(20 years old)

Klára loved her studies: she found her place there, full of enthusiasm, always smiling and brimming with energy, bringing joy to those around her. A beloved daughter and sister, an outstanding athlete, and a devoted friend. Let us start at the beginning.

Klárka (30 May 2003–21 December 2023), baptised as Klára Zdislava, was born in Prague into a family of naturalists, the youngest of four sisters. Her native languages were Slovak (after her mom) and Czech, which she spoke fluently. When she was a year old, her family moved to Brandýs nad Labem, but their connection to Prague remained strong. Klárka commuted to St. Štěpán Primary School in Prague 2 and later attended the Archbishop Grammar School in Prague.

Her Christian faith was shaped by the Brandýs parish priests Jan Houkal and Josef Hurt. For her confirmation, under the guidance of her favourite Dominican chaplain at the Archbishop Grammar School, Hyacint Ullmann, she chose the name Ester.

From a young age, Klárka spent a lot of time with her family in the countryside and on trips across the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Europe. Her mother encouraged her love of sport, teaching her to ski proficiently and enrolling her in swimming and basketball lessons. Klárka's determination and exceptional strength led her to join the Stará Boleslav Athletic club at the age of 13, where she specialised in the shot put, discus, and hammer throw.

She trained under Jiří Kreuter (2016–2018), then Stanislav Pluhař and his wife Jindřiška (2018–2023). Over the last two seasons, she trained the spin-put technique in Pardubice and Hradec Králové with Milan Brzek. Klárka earned nine medals at national championships in youth categories and represented the Czech Republic in two international competitions. Her personal best in the adult shot put category was 14.23 metres.

Klárka's first taste of academic research was preparing a study titled *Reflection of the Pan-Slavist Movement Based on the Literary Legacy of Pavel Jozef Šafárik*, which earned her eighth place at the national competition of Students' Professional Activities (SPA). She also worked part-time as an assistant at the Institute of Geology and Palaeontology at the Faculty of Science of Charles University.

At grammar school, Klárka preferred humanities and languages, particularly literature, history, German, English, and Latin. After careful consideration, she chose to study archival science and Czech language studies at the Faculty of Arts. By her second semester, she was actively involved in the Prague

student section of the Czech Archival Society and began working at the Prague City Archives under Zora Damová's mentorship. There, she processed her first – and sadly, her last archival collection (The German Men's Gymnastic Association in Prague, 1888–1939). In her second year, Klárka began studying Hungarian, which would have greatly benefitted her archival career.

In 2020, Klárka discovered a passion for archery, training at SK RAPID Prague under Václav Luňáček from 2021 to 2023. She competed in four tournaments and achieved national rankings before deciding to pause the sport due to a lack of time, intending to return in veteran categories later in life. In the final year of her life, Klárka excelled in weightlifting, setting a national record in December 2023 for the under-23 category in the Sokol Vyšehrad section with a 100 kg overhead lift.

Those who knew Klárka remember her as smiling, witty, empathetic, calm, and kind. She had a natural ability to bring people together and was surrounded by friends. Among her many hobbies were baking, sewing, and reading. She preferred traditional books and worked her way through all her required school reading, favouring Čapek and Kafka. During the holidays, she devoured fantasy novels.

Klárka supported her favourite athletes, followed public affairs, and loved sleeping in. She disliked conflict, mathematics, long hikes and cycling. Despite wearing braces for many years and having a congenital eye defect that affected her spatial vision, Klárka faced her restrictions with patience.

In summer 2023, she moved back to Prague with her sister Tereza, her long-time athletic partner, to be closer to her university and part-time jobs. Klárka had bold dreams: to study law and philosophy, participate in Erasmus in Germany, achieve a stable national level in her sports, and perhaps one day compete at the Olympics in weightlifting. She looked forward to a future with a husband and children, though she was not in a relationship.

The final farewell to Klárka took place on 5 January 2024, with her family, friends and many others present, at a mass in the Church of St Ignatius, Prague, led by P. František Hylmar SJ, who had baptised her there 20 years earlier. Her remains are interred at Vyšehrad Cemetery.

*Klárka, we miss you terribly. The murders committed by the young student at the Faculty of Arts weigh heavily on all of us. Even though we live, we too are victims.*

*The Holec family*



FOTO Kristýna Jakl Ansoňová



# Adam Jurák

## Student at the University of Vienna, Erasmus intern at the Faculty of Arts

(34 years old)

Adam Jurák's life began on 20 May 1989, when he was born prematurely in the sixth month of his mother Bohuslava's pregnancy. At birth, he weighed barely one kilogram and was greeted by his father František and his older brother Ondřej, who was two years old. Despite the early challenges, Adam thrived thanks to the devoted care of his mother, who looked after him at home for seven years, ensuring he grew into a healthy, lively boy with a passion for life.

Adam spent his childhood in Suchdol nad Lužnicí, South Bohemia. His curiosity about people and places grew during his secondary school years in the Austrian border town of Gmünd, where he attended *Schulzentrum – die Fachschule für wirtschaftliche Berufe*, a vocational secondary school. Prior to taking his high school leaving exams and earning his diploma, his inquisitive nature led him to take a gap year to improve his English at Cambridge University before continuing his studies.

After completing high school, Adam enrolled at the University of Vienna, where he pursued a degree in the Czech language, linguistics, and cultural studies. He graduated in 2023 with a bachelor's degree and began his master's in Slavonic Studies, focusing on Czech at the same university. During the summer holidays, Adam furthered his education by studying Latin and Greek in Germany. His master's studies took place at the Institute of Slavonic Studies and the Centre for Translationology at Vienna, where he was also offered the chance to study abroad as part of the Erasmus program, which brought him to the Faculty of Arts at Charles University in Prague for one year.

Unfortunately, Adam's time in Prague was marred by health complications. He underwent knee surgery on 27 November, followed by a serious diagnosis of deep pulmonary and vascular embolism due to poorly managed post-operative care. He described this near-fatal experience to his family, writing on 13 December 2023: "I escaped the gravedigger's shovel." Adam was discharged from the hospital just before Christmas but was still weak. Despite this, he visited the Faculty of Arts on 21 December to take care of some academic matters. That proved tragically fateful, and Adam's premature departure from life mirrored the circumstances of his birth.

Faith played an integral part in Adam's life. Influenced by his grandmother and his family's religious background, he was baptised and confirmed as a young boy, grounding his life in Christian values. His commitment to these principles was reflected in his actions, and he tried always to live by the Ten Commandments, always seeing the good in others. Adam was

known for his kindness, his ability to bring joy, and his willingness to help others. He was greatly liked for his character and had friends in many different countries. His family and friends were paramount in his life, and he was always striving to create harmony among those around him.

Adam's actions are not only a reflection of his education, but above all, of his personality and his character. He was very kind-hearted and affectionate. Who among us always thinks of others, even though they often do not receive the same in return? How many of us help the sick and elderly, and how many are able to accompany them on their final journey? With joy, he was the lead altar server during services at his church in Vienna. There was no solemn mass in which he did not carry the censer or lead the procession with the cross. During parish festivals, he always made sure the mood was merry and treated everyone to Czech beer or homemade punch. Parishioners remember him as a good man and friend. One obituary described Adam as "Czech by birth and Viennese by choice."

*In one Viennese song, it is sung:  
At parting, say a quiet "servus,"  
Not goodbye, not adieu,  
– These words only hurt.  
But that little word "servus"  
Is a kind last greeting when one must say goodbye.  
"Servus, Adam! Thank you for your wonderful friendship and for letting us be with you."*

Our dear Adam made a final sacrifice on his final journey: donating his organs, he saved the lives of five other people. On 22 December 2023, we had a final chance to say goodbye to this kindest of angels who flew to heaven. We bid Adam farewell and ask the Lord to bless his soul forever.

The Jurák family





# Magdalena Křístková

**First-year student of Deaf Studies  
at the Faculty of Arts**

(20 years old)

## **Memories of her teachers and classmates from the Lauder Schools**

When Majda first began attending the Lauder Schools, we called her Mája. It was like a name for a fairy. Mája liked to laugh. She asked intelligent questions. She often questioned what the teachers said. And she never, ever, offended them with the wording of her objections. At the school, we valued her straightforwardness and courage.

She often talked and wrote about her parents and sisters, trips to the mountains, orienteering... She talked about the books she was reading. She also listened to what others were saying. She was happy in her relationship with Tonda. She joked and was cheerful.

She was changing the world around her for the better. She started first with her immediate surroundings: she was interested in classroom relationships, she spoke up when any of us behaved unfairly (she really did!), she took care of children... and she also did manicures for old ladies in a social care home as part of her volunteer work.

To her classmates she was a friend and the one to open up new opportunities. "Mája, I will always associate you with snow, mainly because of your love for cross-country skiing. I will never forget the time when we were together in the mountains and you took me cross-country skiing for the first time. Even though I was extremely bad at it, you didn't give up on me, and you tried very hard to make sure I enjoyed it. I am really grateful for having the opportunity to know you and spend time with you. No words can express what I would like to say to you, but I hope it's snowing wherever you are."

To her loved ones, Majda offered real friendship that can still be a source of gratitude. "Mája was my best friend. I'll remember how she would wave at me from the platform on the metro. She was always standing there, waving and laughing. She was the best, best friend I could have wished for in my life. I could tell her everything, and she never judged me. She was special, she was just always real, and I really appreciate that, because it's incredibly rare, and I'm grateful to have met and known her. I see her standing there waving and her blonde hair getting messed up by the wind. Then we say goodbye and I wave back."

Majda remains an inspiration to all of us. May her soul to be accepted into the union of the living, and we be blessed by her memory.





# Sára Lidická

## First-year student of Deaf Studies at the Faculty of Arts

(19 years old)

Sára, a girl with a name and a life marked by fate. Anyone who knew Sára knows that she was a model daughter, friend, girlfriend... the kind of person you want to have next to you. Receptive, sincere, affectionate, empathetic, with open arms and her heart on her sleeve.

She was happy when she was with her loved ones, and had a very strong bond with her sister. She liked people, her friends and children, with whom she spent a lot of time. She loved being in nature and this meant that she went on a lot of day trips and, above all, looked forward to summer camps she took part in every year, where she most recently served as a supervisor. She enjoyed working with children, who trusted her completely and were drawn to her. She was able to live in their world and make them enthusiastic about anything she thought up.

In her spare time, she liked to travel and explore new places. She liked going on tours of castles and chateaux – especially those where fairy tales or films and TV series had been filmed. She never missed out on the family holiday, even as an adult. She loved the mysterious world of fantasy and fairy tales. She liked to curl up in a corner with a book, or even a tablet and a film or series. Recently, she had become fond of K-dramas (Korean soap operas), but she didn't turn her nose up at old films, either.

She was very fond of playing computer games, and was most interested in *The Sims* or *ZOO Tycoon*. These helped her to unwind and forget about the outside world when she thought it had been unfair to her. However, while the modern, electronic age is making many people isolated, she was able to maintain a balance between the real-world self and its mediated copy in cyberspace.

She always looked forward to Christmas; she literally created a Christmas atmosphere around her. From the end of the summer holidays, she would count down the days and think about what presents to give; she would then make them herself. We will truly miss her imagination.

Everywhere she went, she was full of light. She was a keen, energetic perfectionist, who didn't give up until she was satisfied with the result. She wanted to be the best, the fastest, the most beautiful, the smartest and the most amazing in everything – and she usually succeeded.

She wielded wit, was enthusiastic in using words to spar with anyone who dared, but she was also accommodating, didn't impose her intellect on anyone, didn't bother people, didn't promote herself, always had a kind word and a radiant smile, and knew how to have fun at the right level so that

everyone enjoyed being with her. She liked sarcasm, which she used brilliantly. It was a discipline that, together with her sister, she was unbeatable in.

Although she attended secondary school at the Business Academy, she never stopped thinking about a career as a teacher or educator, and eventually chose to focus on the specific field of sign language. She had received offers to study at three universities, and chose to study this field at the Faculty of Arts. She enjoyed her studies immensely, although there were a number of courses she respected rather than enjoyed. She had a talent for the gestures required for sign language and an excellent memory, and her enjoyment of sign language shone through whenever she talked about it. She also had a great group of classmates, with whom she also met outside the classroom.

While it may seem that she didn't have any cares in the world, Sára, like all of us, also faced her share of personal challenges, some of them really difficult. But, as was her habit, she didn't give up and performed all of them to the best of her abilities. Fortunately, she was never alone; she had her family and her devoted boyfriend, Dominik, who was always ready with a warm embrace and an inexhaustible amount of patience for the times when Sára stopped believing or was struggling with her flaws. He was an invaluable support for her at moments when the sky was overcast and the sun wouldn't rise.

She was troubled by the tension between the high bar she set herself in everything she did and what she thought was her own weakness, imperfection and vulnerability. Sometimes she doubted herself; sometimes she was afraid of being accepted. She was the person you'd least expect to feel that way and the one who had the least reason for it...

Sára was the sunshine in the lives of her grandmothers and grandfathers, with arms full of kindness and warmth. She was a shining star, pure and bright, fragile and vulnerable, who passed through their lives and who, suddenly and without warning, disappeared into the never-ending darkness in a single, tragic moment... But despite all this, despite the endless cruelty of one single moment of evil, her light shines silently on and on from the darkness, for everyone.

There are few people who can stand face-to-face with eternity so proudly, with a settled heart, after a life filled with so much love, goodness and light. We thank her for every moment she was with us. We will never forget her and she deserves our deep respect, because in her last moments she faced fate the same way she had done all her life. She didn't give in to evil, she succumbed to it defenceless, but unbowed.





# Agáta Michalová

**Second-year student of Czech Language  
and Literature at the Faculty of Arts**

(21 years old)

Agi was a very special person. She was a great sister, daughter, friend, classmate and more besides, because she was able to pack so much into her busy calendar. Her life was chaotic, but Agi, as a true positive live-wire, took firm control of it and bent the chaos to her will.

Order was the contrast to this in her life. Everything had to be carefully arranged and organised – things simply had to go according to plan. It should be added, however, that she always found time for her family and friends, for whom she would give anything. She was able to listen to anyone, give them the support they needed and get them back on the right track. You'd definitely never be bored with her, and she could always put a smile on the face of her loved ones, be it because of her occasional awkwardness or her humour.

She kept her room very tidy, and would spend hours in it reading. No one was allowed to disturb her, or things would get bad. She was also tireless in motivating everyone around her to read, which not everyone appreciated at the time, but Agi didn't give in. Her love for literature and the Czech language led her to study at the Faculty of Arts. As she herself said: "The only thing I know from secondary school is Czech, so I'll study Czech". Czech was also briefly part of her working life when, as a journalist, she boldly roamed the streets of Prague looking for interesting stories to write about. This work was incredibly fulfilling for her, and it was work in which she finally found herself.

Volleyball was also a major part of her life; she had been into it since she was a child, and she kept it up at secondary school in České Budějovice, where the school's orientation towards sport allowed her to devote herself fully to it. Among her greatest sporting achievements was finishing in the top six in the junior category at the 2021 Přerov Grand Prix. In the same year, she also won the prize for best blocker at the 12th edition of the České Budějovice Grand Prix. However, she was involved in volleyball not only as a player, but also as a coach for little girls.

It hasn't been easy to cope with Agátka's passing. The world has lost a promising journalist, trainer, amateur traveller, lover of the colour yellow and tulips, and a companion whose kindness, humour and determination will be impossible to replace. But, at least to her loved ones, she will remain an inspiration: nothing is impossible – it just has to be properly organised!

Petr Polák





# Aneta Richterová

## First-year student of Deaf Studies at the Faculty of Arts

(20 years old)

Aneta grew up in the village of Litíč near Jaroměř with her mother, her brother Ondra and her grandfather. As a child, she devoted her free time to oriental dance and playing the flute. She attended Na Ostrově Primary School in Jaroměř and continued at the Jaroslav Žák Grammar School, also in Jaroměř, from which she graduated with distinction in 2022. After graduating, she went to Prague, where she began her studies at the University of Economics and Business. Her first choice was tourism but she didn't find it fulfilling, so she improved her knowledge of English and applied to the Faculty of Arts. She really enjoyed Deaf Studies, which also met her expectations of a meaningful profession.

At primary school, she was a member of the Malaika dance group for eight years. And from her childhood she had gone to the young firefighters' camp in Kamenec, where she would always enjoy returning to. She gradually progressed from the role of a small (then toothless) summer camp girl to the position of instructor, supporting the next generation of "Kameňáci" in their summer activities. Thanks to the summer camps and the friendships she had, she also became a member of the Velichovka Volunteer Fire Brigade, where she focused mainly on working with children, helping at joint events or representing the fire brigade at firefighting competitions.

Anyone who had the opportunity to get to know Aneta better knows that, while you couldn't get her to go on a mountain hike or a trek in the hills, she liked to travel and discover new regions, their culture and customs. She also liked peace and quiet, reading books, painting, listening to music, and watching films and fairy tales. Christmas was always her favourite time of the year and she couldn't imagine it without the Grinch and Frosty the Snowman. Not many people know that she also enjoyed watching Formula 1 races.

She was a young woman with a big heart, and one who thought of others. Her willingness to help could be seen in all the things she did. When she joined the fire brigade, it was because she wanted to help others in difficult situations. When she started learning about deaf communication, it was because she wanted to help people with a disability to communicate and make their life easier. She offered her big heart to everyone around her.

### **Aneta's favourite things:**

- season: winter, especially Christmas
- TV series: Normal People
- colour: purple
- pet: her dog, Bady
- place: around a campfire with friends
- song: Noah Kahan – Stick Season
- food: spaghetti carbonara with mushrooms





# Tereza Skolková

**Student of Czech and French at the Faculty of Education, and Translation from French and Deaf Studies at the Faculty of Arts**

(23 years old)

Tereza attended the J. A. Comenius Primary School in Blatná, where her family lives. From the age of 14 she attended the six-year Grammar School Písek, where she started studying French. After graduating from secondary school, she enrolled in Czech and French at the Faculty of Education of Charles University. Thanks to the Erasmus programme, she was able to spend the winter semester of the 2022/2023 academic year in France. After her return she completed her course and started Translation from French, supplemented by Deaf Studies.

This exactly matched her nature; she was intelligent and eager to educate herself so that she could help people...

Since she was a child, she was extremely curious, versatile and gifted and loved books. For many years she attended art school, where she played the drums and learned about art. At the age of 10, she participated in the Lidice Rose art competition, in which her drawing won an award, finishing ahead of more than forty thousand other images. She was always able to win over everyone around her with her immediacy, direct action and optimism. She was able to start a conversation with anyone, and she always had something to say to them.

Even when she was still at school, she was always able to unite the team and stand up for those who were weaker. It was an honour for us, her parents, to hear that when Terka was in the class, everyone would have someone to support them.

She loved her family. Her older brother Ondra was always a role model for her, a companion while she was growing up and a great dad to little Dominik, to whom she was a proud aunt. She was understanding to her grandparents, enjoyed visiting them, and helped them when they needed it. Her words to us, her parents, that "I'm so glad to have you!" have always been a comfort for us.

She loved travelling, she loved travelling with her parents, and she had no problem picking us up at the airport and being our guide in France. Nothing caught her by surprise, and she found a solution for everything. She gave us all joy and a feeling of well-being.

We will all miss her eternal optimism, joy of life and eternal smile. But this is how we remember her.

Terezka – the sunshine that never goes out... Terezka – a love that lasts forever...

We are proud to have been your parents!

Talented  
Empathetic  
Radiant  
Energetic  
Zestfully principled  
Keenly communicative  
Always in our hearts...





# Eliška Šimůnková

**First-year student of Deaf Studies  
at the Faculty of Arts**

(20 years old)

Until she was 12, Eliška was immersed in books on nature, palaeontology and the universe; later, her interests expanded mainly to biographies and specialist publications, and also sci-fi. She preferred books in English, as well as watching news, documentaries, series and films. She was fluent in English and studied French at a multi-year grammar school. She was learning Norwegian in her free time.

After secondary school, she studied for a year at the Faculty of Humanities, but after a few months of study she decided to apply to the Faculty of Arts. Her decision was motivated primarily by her love of languages and the varied possibilities of communication. At the same time, she wanted to contribute to an inclusive, intersectional, sensitive and equal society.

She became intensely interested in connecting the language of the deaf with teaching and wanted to help revitalise the ossified structures of the Czech educational system in the context of supporting the deaf. In addition to her studies, she was also interested in queer activism and women's rights issues. The fight for equality and equal rights are undoubtedly Eliška's greatest legacy. She always showed care and respect in her interest in the lives of those around her, creating a safe environment at the most everyday level.

**In the words of her mother:**

- She loved nature and everything associated with it.
- She loved people, she loved animals, she loved the world.
- She was very happy and often, just for joy, as she always said, she gave people handmade gifts. She liked to give gifts and didn't feel comfortable accepting gifts from others.
- She could make SOMETHING out of nothing! From a piece of wood, she was able to carve a figurine or a flower, and she always wrapped and decorated so beautifully that the packaging itself was a gift. No one wanted to ruin the beauty by unwrapping it. Elinka always made a box and a gift bag at the same time.
- She made beautiful jewellery that was inspired by nature. Birds, foxes, mushrooms, pumpkins – she loved them for their shape, colour and symbolism.
- She painted beautifully on canvas. We have everything on display at home.
- She loved cats. She longed get a black tomcat, which she would call Fík (Fig in English). She wanted to start living with her partner and get a cat called Fík.





# Lucie Špindlerová

**First-year student of Deaf Studies  
at the Faculty of Arts**

(20 years old)

Lucie was born on 21 June 2003 in Prague, where she lived and studied until the fateful moment. Lucie went to secondary school at the Budějovická Grammar School and then decided to continue with Czech Studies at the Faculty of Arts. She always enjoyed studying Czech, but her interests lay much more in linguistics than in literature. Therefore, after her first semester, she decided to change fields. In those few weeks, she had really enjoyed her studies.

From an early age she loved to dance, first in junior ballet at Prosek Primary Art School, then in contemporary dance at the InDance dance school. She was later accepted into the Pop Balet dance ensemble. She always danced with a fascinating grandeur. Her experience with dance meant that she had a well-developed memory for movement. This was just one of the factors in her growing interest in learning sign language; others included her sense of detail, her meticulousness, and her dream of helping others.

On her 15th birthday she played one of the main roles at the premiere of the *137 úhlů pohledu* dance show at the Hybernia Theatre. The show had several successful reruns. A few months later, her dance partner also became her boyfriend. Their relationship had lasted for almost four years and would undoubtedly have lasted much longer...

She grew up with her parents and her younger sister Zuzana, and also with several adopted tomcats and one dog. Sharing one room with a sister two years younger sometimes led to arguments; we always said that this gave her the opportunity to test her communication tactics in the safety of home. But they always stood together and supported each other in all the different situations they faced in life.

She was kind, thoughtful, and extremely empathetic. At first glance she was an inconspicuous girl who wasn't looking for lots of company, and when she found herself in it, she would rather make herself invisible. However, she always had a few really good friends, ones that she chose with her heart. She was willing to help and was always ready to hear about the joys and sorrows of others. She was able not only to listen, but also to give sensible feedback.

She showed us the power of gentleness. And she looked out for others more than herself. We sometimes reproached her for that.

She respected the rules, whether it was a matter of life and death, or spelling. Lucinka was unusually modest by modern-day standards. She appreciated things, especially things she was given, even if they were just small things. She always used them for as long as they could be used. Until then, she didn't need or ask for new ones. Compassion and respect for all life led her and her boyfriend to become vegetarians at the age of 18. For many people, it was her beautiful, warm and sincere smile that stuck in their memory the most.

She liked to spend time with her boyfriend. They liked to cook together, listen to music, and sometimes they danced, just for themselves. At home while studying, she often had a growling tomcat on her lap. In the summer, she liked camping in the South Bohemian countryside with family and friends.

As a student, she earned extra money in the proofreading room of the Lidové noviny newspaper, where she could apply her knowledge of spelling. She enjoyed correcting mistakes and enjoyed being there.

Gabriela and Pavel Špindler, parents





# The geranium: A symbol of renewal

**“Our academic community needs empathy and time,” the Dean of the Faculty of Arts, Eva Lehečková, said in her speech on 9 April 2024 at the formal meeting marking the 676th anniversary of the founding of Charles University. Here is an abridged version of her speech.**

Dear colleagues,

It is a true honour for me to speak on behalf of the Faculty of Arts on the day on which we celebrate the founding of Charles University. I do not say this merely as the obligatory introduction, like in other speeches: ever since I first entered the Great Hall on my matriculation, the first from both sides of my family to do so, I have honoured the University’s rituals ... I am grateful to the institution that has given me so much. I endeavour, as much as I can, to apply what I have gained from it to help it develop.

However, as we all know, I am not speaking to you today because of my gratitude to Charles University. I am speaking to you because of the event, the essence of which many of us, even three months later, are unable to put into words. We resist it, even though words are our “daily bread”. It is like a healing wound that we touch on in our thoughts – sometimes involuntarily, as if by mistake, and at other times forcing itself upon us, even with the most innocent associations. I am often asked how the Faculty of Arts is coping and what we need. After three months, I believe that what our academic community, our staff and students, need most of all is empathy and time. These give

people, as members of a diverse community, the opportunity to apply their talent and ideas, each at their own pace and in their the way that suits them best, to studying the humanities and social sciences at our faculty; this is why my colleagues originally chose the faculty. At the current time, their subject areas can, in addition to their professional commitments, give them the necessary confidence in their own ability and control over at least part of the situation. The situation is best reflected in the following act: during the Four Weeks for the Faculty event in January, students and teachers, particularly from the language and communication for the hearing-impaired subject area, together with their supporters and friends, created a work of art depicting a geranium, a plant that grows in burnt areas. This geranium, which is lit up every day on the first floor of the newly opened main building, is a symbol of the resilience of our faculty in the revival of its academic life.

#### **The experience we gained from the tragedy**

I would like to talk about the experience that we gained while dealing with the consequences of the tragedy in December. I would like to offer them to you as an opportunity, one that we can all focus on in the future and where we can do something

beneficial, as it is not within the power of a single faculty to evaluate and transfer such experience into preventive measures. This is a task that concerns both higher education and regional educational institutions, politicians and organisations working in the relevant fields.

Together with the management of Charles University, we have repeatedly expressed our appreciation for the key role played by the emergency services in the immediate response to the attack, as well as the outstanding coordination of psychological and social assistance in the acute phase immediately following it. The psychologists coordinating these teams according to their methodologies have gathered important statistics: on the day of the attack, around 700 people were present in the main building. With 8,000 students and staff members at the Faculty of Arts, a minimum 9,000 people were directly (emotionally) affected. However, 40,000 people were indirectly affected, and many more in less definable ways – be they students from other universities, parents of future applicants or the whole of the large community of alumni of the faculty. These numbers confirm that it really was necessary for the acute phase, coordinated by the emergency services, to last for the whole of January, when the risk of the development of post-traumatic disorders was greatest. However, on the other hand, the numbers showed the extent of the reach into various communities, even for a “localised” event. The most important sources of support during the renewal period were alumni communities, family and friends of students, employees, co-workers, course participants and professional

**The geranium, which is lit up every day on the first floor of the newly opened main building, is a symbol of the resilience of our faculty in the revival of its academic life.**

organisations... All of these groups sent support or renewed their social ties and, in both major and minor stories, with greater or lesser contributions to the CU Endowment Fund are helping to renew our community, as well as help those most affected. At the faculty we can observe this positive phenomenon in an increase in activity by student associations, with many new ones being created, existing ones renewing themselves, expanding their activities and seeking ways for them to be a space and place of support in the period of uncertainty following people’s return to the faculty. I am convinced that the support provided by the community-based approach is of key importance for recovery and that we can support this ability to act together in response to a crisis in the future, too.

#### **Study in the period following the tragedy**

As the attack occurred before the end of the winter semester, we had to resolve complicated issues affecting study quickly so that every student of the ↪





**Right at the start, psychologists specialising in similar events gave us a valuable piece of advice: This is not a sprint – prepare for a marathon.**

faculty was able to fulfil their study commitments as far as they were able to, despite the impact of the attack. We re-introduced some procedures that had been in place during the coronavirus pandemic, for example, extension of the maximum duration of study. For other students, bespoke solutions were found, for example, by adjusting the requirements for progress to the next year of studies. In all cases, success was dependent on rapid cooperation between the faculty, the University and the Ministry of Education. It is thanks to the cooperation at these levels that our students are able to again fulfil their commitments at their own speed and in their own way, without secondary stress factors.

The key factor in ensuring a beneficial solution was the rapid agreement reached on the principles for the approach to be taken with students under the circumstances and the utilisation of all legal measures available.

One of the meetings organised by Charles University was addressed by one parent who had lost a child at the Faculty of Arts on 21 December 2023. The mother of the student appealed for us to devote attention within the university environment to supporting the psychological wellbeing of both students and employees, which would create possibilities for preventing similar events in the future. It is not my place to describe the specific experiences of members of our academic community. I would only like to state my belief this appeal was a relevant one and that building psychological resilience is one of the best investments in the future health of our society. Based on the experience of the past few weeks, too, I believe that this topic is a shared goal of the faculties that are preparing to engage clinical and educational psychologists.

Chronologically, the final step in the renewal process was the issue of protecting soft targets. This issue has become ever more crucial following the re-opening of the main building of the Faculty of Arts. We agree with the path established by Charles University. This consists of the training of specialists, managers and rank-and-file members of the academic community, modifications of premises to increase the preparedness of buildings and institutions for diverse situations, various types of drills, and possibly even amendments to the rules on restrictions on bringing weapons into Charles University buildings. Many of our historical premises do not permit the proper deployment of security features and the related infrastructure. For this reason, the chosen path can realistically prepare our institution for various situations and provide a

feeling of safety without the need to sacrifice the very basis of public higher education – the principle of openness and the accessibility of knowledge for diverse groups from both the Czech Republic and abroad.

#### **A marathon, not a sprint**

Dear colleagues, I have summarised our experiences in four areas – work with the community, preparedness for non-standard situations, psychological wellbeing and security – as we see them, three months after the attack. It was not my goal to compile a list of tasks for the months and years ahead; my wish is for the extraordinary community spirit between Charles University and other universities, partners and affiliated institutions to be preserved so that, in the future, we can address these issues and contribute to finding a solution. The events at the Faculty of Arts showed that these topics do require our attention.

Right at the start, psychologists specialising in similar events gave us a valuable piece of advice: “This is not a sprint – prepare for a marathon”. What they were saying was that the response to the impact of the event and the changing needs of students and employees will probably have to last for at least a year, and maybe even two or three. Rather than a marathon, what we are running is a never-ending “orienteeing run”, during which we – sometimes, and when under stress – turn the map in the wrong direction.

To conclude, I would like to thank the dean’s board of my faculty and all employees and students of the Faculty of Arts for their bravery, support and resilience. I would also like to thank those of you who have supported us over the last few months and helped us to plot a course, find a path, refresh ourselves – and find the courage to carry on.

My greatest thanks must go to the Rector and her team, not only for their continuous assistance and cooperation from the first hours following the attack, but especially for the speed and ease with which we reached agreement on the principles on which we would base the renewal of academic life... at the faculty and the University. Charles University is, beyond question, a community of seventeen faculties with diverse specific aspects; however, in critical situations it is easy for us to find consensus in the same, enduring principles.

In my opinion, this is a good thing that we can celebrate together. And we can also hope that Charles University continues to nurture this harmony in key issues and critical situations in years to come – not only as a response at moments of crisis, but also as a *modus vivendi* for the academic community.

**Eva Lehečková,**

Dean of the Faculty of Arts at Charles University

# Preserving their legacy, always

**The tragedy of 21 December 2023 was a painful, indelible blow to the Institute of Czech and Deaf Studies at the Faculty of Arts. Several first-year students, together with Professor Alena Macurová, found themselves in the wrong place at the wrong time.**

TEXT Collective of teachers of Deaf Studies, Faculty of Arts

PHOTO Martin Hundák



The field of Deaf Studies, as offered at the Faculty of Arts, is unique in the Czech Republic. Although various medical, pedagogical and social disciplines deal with hearing disabilities and their communication, Deaf Studies is the only one that builds its approach on cultural-linguistic principles. Our students often have a well-developed interest in society and its otherness, in the best sense of the word. During its existence the department, at which hearing and deaf people study and work together, has significantly contributed to the formation of interpreting and translation services for the deaf in their present form and to fundamental changes in the education of the deaf, including a system of advisory and support services in primary, secondary and tertiary education. The department is a flourishing centre for linguistic knowledge of Czech sign language and other sign languages and their roots, structure and functioning; on a global scale, it is an extremely

valuable centre for the study of languages and communication.

The tragedy of 21 December 2023 was a painful, indelible blow to the Institute. Several first-year students, together with Professor Alena Macurová, who founded the programme in 1998 and is still one of its key members, found themselves in the wrong place at the wrong time. Nine students died and 12 people were injured, most of them very seriously. At this moment, the world stopped and changed forever for all students and teachers, but also graduates and other people associated with the field, including many members of the deaf community.

After a brief period of paralysis, we raised our heads and began to actively participate in the restoration of faculty life; for example, we oversaw the creation of the geranium that is exhibited in the corridor of the main building. Since February 2024, our teaching facilities have been located outside the main

building of Charles University. “Our rooms” on the fourth floor of the main building are what is known as the Quiet Place. With the sincere commitment of all students, teachers, and interpretation and transcription assistants, and with the support of the faculty and the University, the department is gradually healing as well as it can. We will carry the legacy of those we lost that afternoon within us forever.

We are not relaxing our efforts. We continue to fulfil our mission, do research, educate interpreters and other experts in the field and try to raise awareness, step by step.

# The **Resilience** Centre: Strengthening all of us together

**One of the goals that Charles University has set for itself in the coming years is the development of resilience. The tragic events of 21 December 2023, as well as the stressful situations in connection with the coronavirus pandemic and the war in Ukraine, have shown how important it is to work on one's own crisis preparedness.**

TEXT Jan Tesárek PHOTO Hynek Glos

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Resilience is the ability to return to constructive functioning after a crisis or stressful experience. This can include both relatively common life crises, such as a difficult exam or a breakup with a partner, as well as tragic personal events, such as the loss of a loved one or a catastrophic social, or even global, event.

In order to develop resilience in the summer of 2024, a new CU Resilience Centre was established as part of the Rectorate of Charles University. Its main task is to develop the available services and resources for psychosocial assistance provided by the University so that they are accessible to support students and staff during crises. Its tasks also include education and preventive measures. It is a unique initiative within Czech academia.

"Resilience is not only an unchanging character trait of an individual, it is a whole set of resources, competences, skills and information that an individual or community has at its disposal to

enable it to deal with crises or stressful events," explains Jan Tesárek, coordinator of the CU Resilience Centre. The promotion of resilience through education, personal growth and awareness-raising campaigns at the University are to be at the core of the entire centre's operations.

"One of the University's missions is lifelong learning, and in this regard, the CU Resilience Centre is another step towards supporting students and staff with the skills, knowledge and support that will help them face difficult situations," explains Lenka Henebergová, a member of the Rector's Board for Social Affairs and Sustainable Development, who was also behind the establishment of the CU Resilience Centre.

The centre organised its first activities already in the 2024 autumn semester. Members of staff were able to attend first aid courses, workshops and training courses on various topics such as de-escalation of conflict, conducting a

constructive conversation and psychological first aid. Activities organised by CU Point will also give students the opportunity to learn first aid, emotional hygiene techniques and how to work with stress. During the autumn semester of 2024, an open support group was also organised, to be available to members of Charles University for support during stressful situations.

The CU Resilience Centre cooperates with a number of external partners, including the Probation and Mediation Service, the Czech Red Cross, the Czech Institute for Psychotraumatology and specialists in EMDR. Its activities also include cooperation with partners abroad. The centre currently cooperates with the Norwegian Centre for Violence and Traumatic Stress Studies, which focused on research and assistance following the attacks in Norway in 2011, and the Belgian organization V-Europe, which provides care for those affected by the terrorist attacks in Belgium.



**Jan Tesárek**  
Coordinator of the CU Resilience Centre

# Trust in security is essential



**Vít Kluger**  
Head of the Security Department at the  
CU rectorate

**Following the tragic incident on 21 December 2023, Charles University introduced a series of measures to ensure greater security for students and staff in all its buildings. The aim of the measures is to ensure that everyone feels as safe as possible while on university premises and is able to concentrate on their work and studies without fear.**

TEXT Lucie Přívětivá  
PHOTO Veronika Vachule Nehasilová

Since August 2024, Vít Kluger has headed the security department at Charles University. "I appreciate this opportunity. Leading the security department after the tragic event in December is a major responsibility. Security isn't just about rules and measures, but above all about people and working together. Teamwork is the basis of any effective security strategy, and we now ensure this at the University through a team of experts who do their utmost to ensure security," he says.

"After the tragedy, which shook the entire academic community to the core, we are aware that security issues will now be more complex and sensitive than ever before. Although many of us were not directly involved in the events, they affected us more deeply than we would like to admit," he explains.

According to Kluger, the main goal and desire of the University is to ensure that everyone on campus feels safe, so that students, staff and visitors can focus on their activities without worrying. The measures that the University is gradually putting in place according to the plan approved in January 2024 include, in particular, crisis training, the assessment and, if appropriate, modification of rooms in all buildings to provide more effective hiding places, the establishment of an alert system for all students and staff, the creation of a central operational centre for the University, the professionalisation of security management across the University and the enhancement of the capacity of the management of faculties and units to effectively coordinate the situation following a serious incident. These

measures are being introduced gradually at individual faculties. An example is the Faculty of Arts, which, in cooperation with the University's security department, prepared a detailed SWOT analysis on which a further range of new security measures is based.

"Our experience shows that, among other things, it is crucial for the restoration of a sense of security that our staff and students are given the opportunity to acquire new practical skills for crisis situations. This applies, for example, to the first aid courses that the First Faculty of Medicine has been so helpful to organise for our members of staff this year, and which we will also offer to students in another form. Behavioural training in crisis situations in the context of our buildings, training in anti-conflict communication and the piloting of the functionality of the KISS system (or Departmental Information System) at our faculty will also have a significant impact. We are grateful that, thanks to our cooperation with the CU rectorate security department and other institutions, we are able to offer all of these tools at our faculty this year," says the dean at the Faculty of Arts, Eva Lehečková.

"Confidence in security measures is critical. That is why, together with the faculties, we are working to ensure that our measures are transparent and that everyone understands why we are introducing them," emphasises Kluger.

He believes that joint efforts will lead to Charles University being not only a top academic institution, but also a safe place and a stable environment for all those who work or study on its premises.

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Otomar Sláma and Zdeněk Kalvach with the Dean of the Faculty of Arts Eva Lehečková, and the Rector of Charles University, Milena Králíčková, during a media meeting on 4 January 2024.



# Responding to an unprecedented crisis

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**From the first moments after the mass shooting at the Faculty of Arts at Charles University, Zdeněk Kalvach and Otomar Sláma stepped into crucial roles on the university's crisis team. They had to provide stability at a moment of unprecedented tragedy. "Crises can be approached either as purely destructive or as a stepping stone for development, providing a deeper sense of purpose," they agree.**

TEXT Lucie Přivětivá PHOTOS Vladimír Šigut

## What was your role at the university after the attack?

**Otomar Sláma:** I was trusted with leading the central crisis team. In practice, I coordinated all activities related to the tragedy on behalf of the university. In the initial moments, it was crucial to figure out what had actually happened. Our task was to inform students, staff, the public, and the media in a relevant manner, and to work with emergency services to handle everything necessary, including ensuring the university could resume operations. Thankfully, I could rely on the people in the crisis team, who did incredibly selfless and excellent work.

## Zdeněk, had you ever had a similar experience before the attack at the Faculty of Arts?

**Zdeněk Kalvach:** Certainly not with the intensity and complexity that the December tragedy brought. But I had encountered many of the components of this situation in my life, and perhaps that's why I wasn't caught off guard, frightened, or paralysed. On the contrary, from the very first moments, I had a strong feeling that I was in the right place and knew what needed to be done. I realise that my professional knowledge of crisis management and safety procedures was just the

basic groundwork, but I felt a responsibility to be available. Like in any profession, you need to know which tools are used and with what effect. The most important thing is understanding the situation, the needs of those directly affected, sensing the potential of the people around you, and being able to work with the crisis team. It's not just about knowing what needs to be done but also being able to support others in their roles, helping them find courage, and not acting out of fear...

## What moments do you personally consider the most difficult?

**ZK:** From a professional standpoint, the hardest moments were when I saw the huge expectations from those around us, expectations that we couldn't disappoint. We were vouching with our names and the name of the university. The situation kept evolving, with changing needs and growing numbers of people on the team. In the early, chaotic moments of the crisis, you do only what makes sense and you know works. But then comes the time when you need to stabilise and take a more structured approach, which may not always be the most time-efficient but is necessary for long-term effectiveness.

**OS:** For six months, I couldn't sleep without waking up at night. I still wake up from nightmares. I saw the state of the Faculty of Arts building after the shooting. I experienced the despair my colleagues and I faced in the crisis management team. The hardest part for me are the stories of those we lost. As a parent, it's incredibly difficult to look the parents of those who didn't survive in the eye, to feel their pain, and to witness their grief. It's profoundly painful.

## In the midst of everything, was there anything that surprised you in a positive sense?

**ZK:** Definitely the people I had the opportunity to work with. The moments when you come together, take the right decisions, take responsibility, face fears, distrust, and criticism, but you push forward together because you feel it's the best thing to do and you will stand by it. I had it easier in the situation as an independent consultant to the university, but I really value the colleagues in the crisis team who carried the enormous burden of leading the university, maintaining its reputation among colleagues and before the world, which was watching closely.

**OS:** Without a doubt, the solidarity and willingness of people to help. Through this tragedy, I met many wonderful people with whom I formed deep personal connections. Meeting close colleagues in such emotionally charged situations really brings you together. There are also many stories of people who came to help selflessly, and I'm still learning about some of them. For example, I was at physiotherapy and found out that my physiotherapist had been volunteering for the Czech Red Cross. These people deserve our immense thanks.

## How prepared do you think one can be for such an event? And what are the most important pillars of a safe school?

**ZK:** The primary concern of the entire academic community, in cooperation with security services, should be fostering awareness, mutual trust, respect, and a sense of belonging to the university. Such an environment does not breed hatred, but rather detects it early, mitigates it, and can provide necessary support. Additionally, when a community like this is formed, it's much better equipped to absorb the impact of any incident. At the same time, of course, we must make sure that both students and staff are prepared for incidents, have practised what to do, and that we can warn people as quickly as possible when a situation like this develops. Therefore, I see the key pillars of a safe university as: first, a supportive environment with a focus on mutual care; second, professionalism and credibility of the university's security team; third, preparedness of students and staff to respond in case of incidents; and fourth, the readiness of university leadership to coordinate the situation after an incident.

## How can we evaluate whether a school is truly safe? Are there specific criteria?

**OS:** That's difficult. I can give you an answer based on the textbook of security planning, where the first step is to identify, analyse, assess, and then address risks. We do all of that in the security department, and you can't establish security without concrete data. I often ask my colleagues, and we have critical discussions with Zdeněk, whether we're setting up measures correctly, whether the steps we're taking are adequate, and whether we're missing anything. To the best of our knowledge and conscience, we're doing everything we can, honestly, systematically, and with purpose. However, I'm talking about measures that increase real safety, which may not always be visible externally. But a completely different topic is the sense of safety felt by our students and staff. The feeling of safety is something that concerns me, and it's something we're working on diligently with Jan Tesárek from the CU Resilience Centre. Our joint goal is for the academic community not only to be safe, but to feel safe as well.



Otomar Sláma, Head of the Central Crisis Staff at Charles University



Zdeněk Kalvach, security expert

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# Addressing profound loss

## What were the circumstances of your involvement in assisting the Faculty of Arts on 21 December 2023?

I remember the moment exactly. It was just before the Christmas break, we were talking at work, the next day there was supposed to be just a Christmas meeting and most of us were supposed to have time off and go on holiday... so there was a very relaxed atmosphere. Suddenly, my phone and my manager's phone rang, thirty seconds apart, and we were notified of the event by the National Operations Centre. I then went to its premises, where we monitored developments. I contacted Julia Gábrišová, the coordinator of the City of Prague's crisis intervention team, who was on site. Furthermore, I was working with a colleague from the Czech Ministry of the Interior, Štěpán Vymětal, who is responsible for the public presentation of our psychological services and communication at the ministerial level during such events. We also quickly linked up with Kristina Najbrtová from the Psychological Counselling Centre at the Faculty of Arts.

## So one of your tasks was to coordinate the work of experts providing psychological assistance.

Exactly. At that moment, I usually make phone calls, identify needs and connect people who are competent to deal with those needs. In my work I mostly draw on my personal knowledge and experience with the work of specific organisations. Julie Gábrišová and her team dealt, for example, with people in the evacuation centre. Other colleagues were on the so-called perimeter, which is the boundary between the public and closed areas, where people came looking for their children and asking for information. In the hours afterward, it was also necessary to coordinate work between colleagues in the regions of the Czech Republic in order to notify the relatives of the victims. At that

**“In these types of situations, it's impossible to do everything right, but we always try to use every event like this to improve,” says psychologist Simona Hoskovcová, who leads the crisis intervention group at the Police Presidium of the Czech Republic.**

TEXT Jitka Jiříčková PHOTO Simona Hoskovcová's personal archive

time, in cooperation with the National Institute of Mental Health, I also negotiated with various organisations that offered and were able to provide high-quality assistance and acute psychological care to persons affected, and we listed their offers in the virtual assistance centre on the institute's website.

## Can you remember the first moment you were able to catch your breath?

A week later, on 28 December, I let my colleagues take over for five days. This is standard procedure: in tense situations that continue for a number of days, you need to take turns. We also recommended this to those involved in dealing with the situation at the faculty and university level. After my return on 2 January, extreme commitment was no longer required; a lot of things had stabilised and they didn't require attention for 18 to 20 hours a day.

## What was the most difficult thing for you?

It was certainly the fact that I had personal ties to the Faculty of Arts. I taught there for 14 years, so I knew the people there, and also had meetings with them in the days and weeks following the event.

My daughter is studying at the Faculty of Arts, so of course I realised that it could also affect her. You can't completely cut yourself off from those feelings and impressions. I had to seriously consider whether I would be able to work under those circumstances. I utilised supervision, as well as various emotional hygiene procedures, to help me manage my work.

## Is there anything you would have done differently in retrospect?

You will never do everything right in these types of situations. But that's part of it. That's why, together with our team and other key people, we spent many hours analysing certain moments that were not handled the best they could have been. Our work involves making mistakes. It's part of the job. However, we can also praise ourselves for things that worked out well. Based on this experience, a number of proposals have been prepared for changes and measures, such as the establishment of an Assistance Centre (discussed by Julie Gábrišová in an interview on page 44 – editor's note). We try to use every event like this to improve.

Overall, we managed the coordination of psychosocial assistance very well. By the end of January, we managed to coordinate psychosocial assistance for about nine thousand people. We also have an international comparison, where we not only draw on international experience, but now we are also being invited to various professional meetings and share our good practice. One strength of the Czech Republic, for example, is the excellent coordination between the emergency services. Psychological services within individual components of the emergency services work together according to the same rules, which makes it possible to react extremely quickly and in a coordinated manner.

## Did you speak directly to the bereaved? What can you say in such a situation?

Communication with the bereaved and relatives of the victims was mainly overseen by Julie Gábrišová

and her colleagues from the regions, as the victims came from different parts of the Czech Republic. Lenka Henebergová from Charles University also did a great job here. She was able to communicate with the bereaved in an extremely human way without much preparation. I personally met with bereaved persons who came to the Police Presidium of the Czech Republic with a complaint. It was a highly specific type of situation. I assisted at meetings between the management of the Police Force and relatives of the victims, representing an institution about which they had huge reservations at the time.

However, I'm no stranger to even these tense situations. And I know that they require some internal preparation. You have to maintain control of yourself and be aware of your position and the limits to the help you can provide. Subsequently, you have to unload the burden somewhere and not keep it inside, because all of these meetings are with people who have suffered a profound loss – they are in the most serious situation that can happen to a person. It is therefore imperative to treat them with deep respect for their situation. Listen a lot, because you can't bring their loved one back. You're just treating a huge wound.

**Simona Hoskovcová, PhD** is a graduate of psychology from the Faculty of Arts of Charles University, where she also taught for 14 years. She researched the development of the mental resilience of preschool children. She currently works at the Police Presidium of the Czech Republic, where she manages the crisis intervention group and oversees methodological management of the crisis intervention system. She manages the Police Force of the Czech Republic's Crisis Helpline, which serves not only members of the security forces, but also the public. She is also in charge of the collegial support system, the system that provides psychological support for members of the police force.





# Speaking honestly with survivors

**“People often wonder whether they should broach the subject, whether they should start behaving differently, or whether they should talk about the event at all. It may sound simple, but for some people, it can be incredibly difficult,” says psychologist Julie Gábrišová, deputy head of the Department of Psychological Services of the Police of the Czech Republic and coordinator of the City of Prague Crisis Intervention System, who was part of the crisis response team at the Faculty of Arts.**

TEXT Jitka Jiříčková PHOTO Hynek Glos



## **What was your task on 21 December 2023?**

My task was to activate the City of Prague Crisis Intervention System team and go on site. Our operations centre asked us to help the evacuees, and we also prepared to help all other people affected – the injured and survivors – because by that time, we already had information that people had probably died in the attack. An equally important task was also to calm the situation on site. We know that during such events, which fortunately we mainly know from training exercises, evacuees are very often distressed, both from the situation itself and because of practical issues.

For example, they need reassurance that they will get back the things they left at the scene. We try to contact families so their loved ones know that they're safe. This is also important from a preventive point of view, because family members do not tend to go to the site. Of course, we also calm people with acute mental states. At the same time, we are there for the police, because they too are experiencing challenging situations, and it is necessary to ensure that those who need it are the first to receive some kind of treatment.

## **How was the intervention on the spot different from the model situations from training exercises that you mentioned?**

One difference is that the training exercise ends when the perpetrator is caught, the evacuees are checked and the site is marked as safe. In contrast to this, a real situation continues, and continues to develop, even after the end of the response. This typically includes, for example, participation in eyewitness interviews, reporting bad news, and handing over personal belongings to the bereaved. In this case, however, everything was all the more challenging due to the large number of people involved in the event. We found out only gradually where things were different from training exercises and where there were gaps.

## **What did this involve and how did you learn from it?**

There were a lot of small things, but in the end, they can significantly affect everything. Today, we know that, as support staff, we did not initially account for how evacuees are often distressed by the police's actions themselves. The police's primary concern at the time of the intervention is the safety of people on the spot; they don't have the opportunity to explain their procedures. Of course, it's different when a police officer calmly asks for your identity card than when they take you out of the building with your hands over your head, and sometimes even when they are injured... We also confirmed the need to establish an Assistance Centre, which would be activated during these kinds of intense unexpected events. This centre would act as a central point for information from the emergency services, the injured, the stricken, relatives, or peo-

ple searching for their relatives. An expert team would be present at the centre to look after those in need and, above all, have access to comprehensive information to pass on.

On the other hand, we were surprised by the high level of mutual cooperation between those who witnessed and survived the event, who behaved considerately and looked after one another during the evacuation. This was another thing we hadn't been expecting and it made our work much easier.

## **What would you recommend to people who come into contact with those who experienced something as terrible as this?**

I think that many people are familiar with this from their everyday lives and not just from such extraordinary events. If something bad happens to a loved one or friend, for example, someone close to them dies, we often wonder how to broach the subject, whether we should start behaving differently. Should we talk about the event? Should we be careful or not mention it at all? It depends on the individual.

We recommend asking the person affected directly. And please note: it can be really difficult. Even though it may seem simple to go and say, “I really don't know what to say or do. I care about you, and I don't want to act differently from before, nor do I want to pretend nothing has happened. Can I ask you: Is there any way I can help you? Do you want to talk about it? Or do you want to talk about something completely different?”

I say it very simply because it's crucial to be authentic. Often, people look for similar advice on the internet, and although there are plenty of high-quality websites for the bereaved and their loved ones, there are also sites that describe specific things you can do to help and what exactly to say, which, however, isn't always helpful. We don't know what will help a particular person. Assuming something based solely on “I read it on the internet,” or “it was like this for me,” or “it was like this for my loved one” is not appropriate. It is always better to ask and speak frankly.

## **Julie Gábrišová**

A graduate of the Charles University Faculty of Arts, Julie Gábrišová worked on the First Psychological Aid Helpline in the *Cesta z krize* organisation. She now works as a police psychologist and crisis support worker in Prague. She also works as a volunteer in the *Bílý kruh bezpečí* organisation, which supports victims of crime and violence.



# Vulnerability is what makes us human

**During the terrorist attacks in Brussels in March 2016, 32 people died and 340 were injured. One of those who lost their loved ones as a result of the attacks was Zora Vansteenkiste, who was born in the Czech Republic. Together with her husband Philippe, she subsequently founded the non-profit organization V-Europe, which helps people affected by terrorist attacks.**

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TEXT Jan Tesárek  
PHOTO Zora Vansteenkiste's personal archive



Zora Vansteenkiste, née Hloušková, graduated in psychology from the Faculty of Arts of Charles University. Although she has been living with her husband and children in Belgium for many years, she still has a strong bond with the Czech Republic. However, the life of the whole family was changed by the terrorist attack at Zaventem airport in Brussels on 22 March 2016, during which Fabienne, Philippe's sister and Zora's sister-in-law, died. What followed motivated Philippe and Zora to found a non-profit organisation, an association of victims of terrorist attacks. Today, V-Europe has several hundred members and six permanent employees. Its activities have resulted in the passing of several new laws to protect the rights of survivors of terrorist attacks.

## How did you come to found V-Europe?

We certainly didn't plan it, it happened spontaneously. Just after the attack, we as a family had to deal with a lot of things that we were not the least bit prepared for. Not only do you have to cope with the loss of a loved one, but your life is invaded by journalists, the police, judicial procedures... At the same time, however, you have to deal with a lot of practical issues. The experience that we were not alone in this was also crucial for us. AfVT and 13onze15, which cared for people affected by the 2015 Paris attacks, invited us to their first anniversary meeting. It was extremely relieving to talk to those people, with whom we suddenly felt "normal". When you experience a situation like that,

it tears you out of society, you find yourself in a kind of parallel reality. You're asking questions that most people don't.

We felt that we needed to process the whole event in such a way that we could find at least some meaning in it. We wanted to make sure that no one else would have to experience similar pain and disappointment because if there had been someone available to our family in Belgium in 2016 who knew how to handle us, how to help us, our whole journey would have been easier.

## What was your perception, from the perspective of the Belgian experience, of what happened in Prague at Charles University?

It resonated with our experience immediately. I try to follow what is happening in the Czech Republic and I have seen both a number of similarities with our experience in Belgium and a number of differences. Our situation was different in that we experienced a terrorist attack in the traditional sense of the word, which had an obvious ideological and political aspect.

However, what both attacks had in common was that they were tragic events of great magnitude. The people attacked by the perpetrator were randomly selected. The goal of the attackers in Brussels and Prague was the same – to provoke fear and to strike as big a blow to society as possible. It was a premeditated, deliberate act, which is one of the things that makes such a tragedy extremely difficult to process.

## Because it is caused by another person?

Exactly. When you experience a natural disaster, it's terrible, and nothing will bring your loved ones back. A tragedy that is deliberately caused by other people in order to do as much harm as possible will shake your trust in human beings and society in general. In my experience, this is ultimately what keeps you awake at night, even after years have gone by. From birth, or at the latest from nursery school, we try to build the idea that the world is a safe place that is worth discovering. Suddenly, that's gone. It is very difficult to rebuild a sense of security and trust.

## An event like the one in December 2023 at the Faculty of Arts will never disappear from the life of our university. Do you have any advice for us going forward?

I wouldn't dare to advise anything. I can only share my own experience and personal and professional insights. It is good to bear in mind that it is a process, a "marathon". Try to be kind to both yourself and others.

After such an event, the present can be so overwhelming that it simply isn't possible to think further ahead, to plan. Although it may seem unbelievable now, the situation will evolve and change. Gradually, other things will come into your life and the tragedy will no longer dominate it. It will not disappear, it will not get smaller, but the proportions will change. It takes time, effort and care. It is necessary to work with the trauma, to try to stay, if possible, open to what is to come. Personally, nature and art help me a lot. If I can, I go out into the

countryside to observe the little things, to look for tiny glimpses of beauty and joy around me. This "better" future is not only made up of great deeds, but is usually put together slowly from fragments of persistent, simple, and sometimes even insignificant everyday things.

## Why do you think it is important not to forget and to remember painful memories, too?

I know that there are people who do not want to hear about such things, which is natural. At the same time, however, we know that remembering is very important. People think it doesn't apply to them, but that's not true. The reality is that we are never completely safe, and something similar can happen anytime, anywhere. Remembering is something that helps us strive to ensure that things like this happen as little as possible. It warns us against lack of regard for each other, tolerance for violence in society and creeping radicalisation. But I think that the memory should be vivid and authentic. It is not about going to monuments and laying wreaths, as my generation knew from totalitarianism. What is important is a real and honest debate, not empty gestures. Let's try to find the courage to listen to those who have experienced such situations: they have paid an extremely high price for their experience.

Their stories offer us something very important, they force us to ask fundamental questions, to review our values. What do we do to ensure that such events do not happen often? How can we help each other more? How do we cope with the pain and uncertainty in our lives? Does it teach us to be considerate of ourselves? How do we perceive other people? Are we also interested in what is happening around us (or just what is happening in our household)? How do we raise our children, how much time and attention do we really devote to them? How far has the limit of what is acceptable been pushed? These are the basic topics that concern all of us, questions about coexistence with people, mutual respect, the fragile nature of democracy itself.

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Zora Vansteenkiste



# Experience from Norway also helps in Prague



The Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Norway, Maria Varteressian, lays a wreath in front of the Faculty of Arts building in April 2024.

**The attacks in Oslo and Utøya on 22 July 2011 were the worst in Norway since the Second World War. However, experts there continue to share the experience gained following the tragedy. The information they pass on also helped after the attacks at the Faculty of Arts in December 2023.**

TEXT Jan Tesárek  
PHOTO Martin Hundák

A total of 77 people, many of them teenagers died in the attacks in Oslo and on the island of Utøya. One of those who was intensively involved in caring for the victims after the attacks was professor of child psychiatry Grete Dyb, who works at the Institute of Clinical Medicine at the University of Oslo and is also the scientific director of the Norwegian Centre for Violence and Traumatic Studies (NKTVS). Together with her team, she devoted the next eight and a half years to the survivors of the attacks on the island of Utøya and researched the consequences of the tragic events. Today, the collected data help other people affected by similar attacks around the world, including those in the Czech Republic.

Grete Dyb and her colleague Synne Stensland, a researcher from the NKTVS, came to Prague in April 2024 to share their experience with Charles University. Thanks to their expertise, the university was able to verify that it had not neglected any important steps in its approach and was doing its utmost to alleviate the consequences of the tragic event of 21 December 2023. The Norwegian experience also served as a “compass” for Charles University in the following months as to how post-traumatic stress can develop over time and what needs to be done to mitigate the worst consequences.

This cooperation between the NKTVS and Charles University was followed by a new project, starting in

October 2024 and financed from the Norway Grants, with the aim of further strengthening cooperation between the two institutions. The NKTVS is a top research centre involved in the long-term study of post-traumatic stress and the consequences of violence.

The aim of the current project is not only to exchange experience in the field of care for those affected after the attack, but also to prepare a long-term plan for the further addressing of the needs of those affected and to share good practice and experience with professionals. In addition, the expertise of NKTVS will serve as an important source of knowledge for the future activities of the new CU Resilience Centre. The plan also includes the formulation of possibilities for further research to describe the changing situation and experience following the attack. The project will last until March 2025.

As part of the project, several seminars with Norwegian experts will also take place at the beginning of 2025. These will be aimed at other Czech universities, as well as other professionals. As research by the NKTVS shows, one of the important steps that must be taken after these types of attacks is to focus on developing preparedness. This is the only possible way to restore the social trust that is undermined by similar acts. Long-term cooperation with the NKTVS will help to ensure that Charles University also makes its contribution in this regard.

# Czech Red Cross: We always welcome new volunteers



**Due to its focus and expertise, the Czech Red Cross was most intensively involved in the acute phase of assistance following the tragedy. Immediately following the event, it provided facilities and support for units of the emergency services involved in the intervention and assistance to those evacuated from the faculty building.**

TEXT Jan Tesárek PHOTO Vladimír Šigut

But the help provided by the Czech Red Cross (CRC) did not end there. Its crisis support staff were involved in the newly established crisis helpline, and health workers and persons trained in the provision of psychosocial support participated in the procession of remembrance and symbolic embrace of the faculty at the event held two weeks after the tragedy. They also helped during memorial ceremonies on the fourth floor of the Faculty of Arts building.

“The help we provide covers all areas of activity: from direct medical assistance, through psychosocial support, to practical assistance with organisation. We always welcome new volunteers who want to get involved in helping others,” says Eva Bernatová, director of the Regional Association of the Czech Red

Cross Prague 1, who coordinated all activities.

## You too can become a volunteer or member!

If you want to become a member of the CRC, it's easy. Just print out your application and visit a local CRC group in your area. Contact details can be found in the directory on the Czech Red Cross website at [www.cervenkykriz.eu](http://www.cervenkykriz.eu). After you become a member, following agreement and on an entirely voluntary basis depending on the time you can spare, you can become involved in the activities of the Czech Red Cross: providing medical assistance, representation, training and first aid courses, humanitarian assistance, social activities, and more.

If you want to find out about the Czech Red Cross first and get to know

its activities without active membership, you can join as a volunteer. The contact details are the same and all information can be found at the CRC website. You can also contact the CRC headquarters directly by e-mail at [chcipomahat@cervenkykriz.eu](mailto:chcipomahat@cervenkykriz.eu).

Volunteer work for the CRC is open to natural persons who are not members of or employed by the CRC, but identify with the principles, goals, tasks and mission of this humanitarian society and are ready to actively contribute to their fulfilment on the basis of a concluded agreement. Because helping makes sense!





# We are **supported** by the good things we store in our minds

**Since the tragic events of December 2023, clinical psychologist Zuzana Čepelíková has been one of the people helping others to cope. So far, she and her colleagues have cared for over four and a half thousand people through group or individual therapy.**

TEXT Tereza Kůstková PHOTO Martin Jedlička, NMDS

## **How soon did you get involved and what form did your involvement take?**

In both emergency medicine and emergency psychology, the principle of “the sooner the better” applies. In the first hours to days, the memory is extremely flexible, so not only the bad things that we have experienced, but also the good that we put there, can be imprinted in it very strongly. That’s why I try to be on site within a maximum of 36 hours. When the event happened, I immediately provided support to colleagues who had been there from the first moments and I was on the phone to my first clients four hours after the shooting. We started the first group on 23 December.

## **Does the therapy you provide mostly take the form of group therapy, or are there more individual sessions?**

What defines a mass event is the fact that more people are affected than can be accommodated by

the capacity of the care system. Therefore, there is a massive requirement for group activities that provide therapy to a large number of people. We work with methods that are neurobiologically effective and facilitate treatment of an overwhelming, dysfunctionally recorded experience in the nervous system. The therapy is very safe – if there’s something you don’t want to talk about, you don’t have to. Even within a group, the work is highly individualised. Even so, it may happen that there are some people whom the group format doesn’t suit. People who feel they need more intensive support can switch to one-to-one therapy. In the first month, we provided individual support to 500 people. Our data shows that, when therapy is given immediately, an average of 3.8 sessions is sufficient. On the other hand, if you start six months later, you may then need to attend therapy for a longer period of time.

## **You work with a method called EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitisation and Reprocessing). Can you briefly describe what it is?**

EMDR is a method that, along with cognitive behavioural therapy, was recognised by the World Health Organization in 2013 as one of the most effective methods for dealing with post-traumatic stress disorder. Just as we have self-healing mechanisms in the physical body – when we cut ourselves, platelets begin to clean the wound, a scab forms and the wound heals – the same happens at the level of the psyche and at the level of unpleasant experiences. EMDR activates self-healing processes: all memories that have been stored dysfunctionally are re-stored in a format that no longer carries such an emotional charge.

## **The EMDR method helps to promote resilience. What does this mean, exactly?**

Resilience is about recovery, the overcoming of an experience that is beyond your capacity to deal with, and returning to the flow of life with your

## **Zuzana Čepelíková**

studied psychology and art at the Faculty of Education of the University of West Bohemia in Pilsen and clinical psychology at the Faculty of Arts of Charles University. She has worked in acute admissions at a psychiatric hospital, and for the last 12 years she has been working at the Department of Anaesthesiology, Resuscitation and Intensive Care and the Department of Palliative Medicine at the General University Hospital in Prague. In her own outpatient clinic, she applies her experience of working with children from children’s homes or foster care. She travels to countries affected by war or natural disaster as a humanitarian worker and psychotraumatologist.

hope, faith and abilities. Michael Ungar, a Canadian psychologist who has been researching resilience his whole life, extends the concept even further: he perceives resilience as a dynamic process that is dependent on the cooperation of the individual with the environment. There are many resources in our environment that we can utilise when we’re in a difficult situation, and on an individual level we are capable of finding these resources and to use them and get help, or to not be alone. If we don’t have these external resources, it’s like having a surfboard, but no sea to surf on. We may have an excellent ability to cope with situations, but we are able to use it to only a limited extent. When serious mass emergencies occur – be they a tornado or the shooting at the faculty – we have observed a tremendous degree of social belonging. And this activates a high level of hope and the feeling that you are not alone and we are all in it together. This extremely strong positive connection activates self-control mechanisms within us.

## **Why is it important to process trauma?**

At this point, I should specify exactly what we mean by the word “trauma”. When I go to a country where there is a war and I experience very unusual and intense things there, it does not mean that I have experienced trauma. Trauma occurs only when it is overwhelming for me and there are consequences. There are many people who have experienced a very serious car accident, but they can still get in a car and are able to drive. They have had an intense, unpleasant experience, which their brain did not process in a dysfunctional way, but which they managed to recover from. If this is the case, we do not regard as a traumatic experience. Trauma, however, occurs when everything that we have experienced has consequences for the present. So, when someone asks if it is meaningful to use the term “trauma”, I would say: Yes, if we value ourselves and do not want to bear the consequences, either in the present or in the future. It should then also be said that ninety percent of stressful experiences can be processed by the brain itself.



## **That’s optimistic.**

Yes. We are born with the ability to cope with difficult things and live a good, happy life, even when we have had unpleasant experiences. When something is blocked, this is often because we have not had sufficient external support and the brain has absorbed too much information and stimuli at one time, to the extent that it is unable to sort and process it properly. Our neurobiological makeup also plays a role: for example, our brains have a different biochemical structure and a smaller capacity to cope with loads. But the fact that neuroplasticity works all our lives, and the fact that we can learn new things, gives us hope for our resilience and stability.

## **The groups continue. Is it still possible to join them?**

The groups will run until January 2025. Sometimes people need to manage the situation on their own before asking for support. In addition, these late stages of therapy are largely aimed at promoting resilience. The groups also incorporate targeted psychoeducation as part of the effort to develop a trauma-informed society. All information can be found at [www.emdr.cz](http://www.emdr.cz), where new dates are posted at regular intervals. The same information is posted at the Charles University website.



# You're not alone



**Students of psychology at the Faculty of Arts did not remain on the sidelines. Immediately after the tragedy, they began to think about ways that they could provide assistance. This is how the Peerko association, based on peer help for students, came into being, as explained by student Jáchym Valeš, one of its founders. For their initiative, the Peerko team received the Jan Palach Award.**

TEXT Helena Zdráhalová PHOTO Peerko

## **You became involved in helping those in need almost immediately. How did things come together?**

The idea of Peerko, i.e. student support based on student-to-student interaction, came about on the day the tragedy happened. It proved necessary immediately. As future psychologists, we are prepared to offer immediate assistance in the event of an emergency. This was the case, for example, during the Covid pandemic, when psychology students helped on crisis helplines.

During the Christmas holidays we brought together psychology students who were trained in crisis intervention. We drew up a structure and basic rules for assistance. We felt that we could not provide “pure” psychological help; after all, we had been affected by the situation ourselves, which could be reflected in our work. Therefore, we decided to combine crisis intervention with so-called “peer support”, a concept used by firefighters and police officers among themselves. The concept is based on one person helping another in a situation that he or she has also experienced.

## **How specifically did you help the people who contacted you?**

Our first major involvement took place on 4 January, during the procession of remembrance and embrace of the faculty. At that time, we saw that the concept we had developed could work in the long term. It met with a good response, not only from students and teachers, but also from other people who took part in the procession. At the beginning of the semester, we moved from Jan Palach Square, where we worked during the Four Weeks for the Faculty initiative, to the main faculty building, and later to room 113 at Celetná 13, where the Faculty of Education provided us with facilities.

We felt that there was a need for us to be at various events for all those affected by the tragedy. These didn't include only those who were in the Faculty of Arts building, as the Academy of Arts, Architecture and Design (UMPRUM), the Rudolfinum, and many residential buildings are also located in and around Jan Palach Square. In addition to them, it also affected many people who have various kinds of ties to the Faculty of Arts. We wanted to offer help to all of them. Over time, it was mainly students who contacted and there was increased interest from teachers and other members of staff when we moved from Jan Palach Square to the main building. Every person has very specific and unique needs. For some, it was enough to share their feelings, talk about them briefly or, for example, vent their feelings of fear at returning to the place where the event happened. Some people required more. For some, the event reawakened memories of traumas they had previously experienced and which they needed to process. When we saw that this was necessary for the person concerned, we gave them contacts for various crisis intervention centres or additional psychological or even psychiatric assistance.

## **Initially, you were available on a daily basis. How did the members of Peerko keep each other going and support each other?**

It was a real challenge, in the early days in particular, because we were testing the situation and finding our own limits and boundaries. One big advantage is that we are very open and supportive of each other. When it was clear that an intervention had not worked for someone, or that they were too tired after two weeks of spending time on such an intense activity, we discussed it as a group and agreed that it would be good for them to take a break for a while. At the same time, we organised a number of joint relaxation events and went to sit somewhere, which probably worked best for us as our own psychological hygiene in January and February. We jointly supervised and continuously planned what we had to do and didn't have the strength to do at a given moment, and what we would like to do.

## **At the faculty, you then offered help throughout the spring semester. What form did that take, and did it change in any way?**

The more time passed since the event, the more we observed that the topics with which students come to us also changed; for example, individuals only wanted to discuss their studies or issues related to family problems or other psychological/psychiatric problems that they were experiencing. As a result of this experience, we feel that we will need to transform our focus in the future.

## **Does Peerko plan to continue providing its services?**

We would like to keep Peerko running. We are now thinking about exactly what form our assistance will take in the coming academic year. As in the summer semester, the priority is to meet people's needs and adapt the range of services to them. For example, we thought about organising educational events and workshops aimed at increasing resilience or mindfulness and relaxation techniques. Crisis intervention and peer support will always have a place at the university.

## **What is peer support?**

- A way of helping and supporting people in the same or similar situations, who share their similar experiences or problems.
- “Peers” can share their experiences and advice, provide understanding and emotional support, share useful information or tips, and offer encouragement and hope.
- This support can help reduce the feeling of loneliness associated with certain situations or problems.
- Examples of peer support include various forums and groups for people with the same life experience.

Source: Peerko Student Psychological Help



# We are **always here** for those affected by trauma

**Established immediately after the tragedy on 21 December 2023, Univerzita is a team of eight people who reached out to offer support to all who had suffered trauma and shock. It is led by Jana Mottlová, head of the Prague regional branch of the Probation and Mediation Service. A graduate of the Faculty of Education, who also teaches at the Hussite Faculty of Theology, she explains how the team helps victims cope with the aftermath.**

TEXT Helena Zdráhalová PHOTO Michal Novotný



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## **What is the mission of the Probation and Mediation Service?**

Our primary focus is working with perpetrators and victims of criminal offences. The aim is to involve victims in dealing with a situation so that they can express their feelings, requirements and needs. We also work with people who have been sentenced to community service. We are a free, nationwide service under the Ministry of Justice.

## **You also helped the victims and bereaved of the tragedy of 21 December. How, specifically?**

At first, it looked as if we would work mainly with the bereaved. However, gradually we helped many others as well. We offered to accompany the bereaved to the fourth floor of the Faculty of Arts. I did this with one of my colleagues; both of us are trained in crisis intervention. The moment a parent sees the place where their child died or was shot is a very difficult one for them. However, some parents needed to experience it, and they also needed to share this experience, and that's why we were there with them.

We also offer mediation, i.e. mediation for conflict resolution. We sought, or are still seeking, a way to reach an agreement between bereaved parents who did not raise their child together; perhaps there were some disputes between them.

We also helped the bereaved with filing applications to the Ministry of Justice for assistance for victims of crime. This is also connected to the fact that we help victims to accept financial donations from, for example, the CU Endowment Fund, something that is very difficult for some of them. They see it as completely inadequate. Our task is to explain to them that the money is intended to help them overcome the terrible pain they are feeling and to fulfil the dreams and goals they shared with the one they lost, or to use it to support other family members, such as their other children.

## **Do you also help the injured?**

We interviewed the injured to map their current needs and the treatments and surgical procedures they have undergone. We determined the losses they had suffered in connection with the event and unforeseen expenses they had suffered. What we

were interested in was in what kind of help they were using – not only physiotherapeutic and medical, but also psychological or psychiatric help. We also mapped future developments and possible needs. Some of the injured will bear the consequences for the rest of their lives. We can repeat this mapping at any time, if necessary.

## **In addition to heading the Prague branch of the Probation and Mediation Service, you also lecture at the Hussite Faculty of Theology. How do you transfer your practical experience in such a demanding field to students?**

The subjects I teach focus on social pathology, the prison system, the implementation of community service and the Probation and Mediation Service in general. Students learn to orient themselves in the field in general or individual specialisations. I also teach about access to those they want to care for. It is no coincidence that I work at the Hussite Faculty of Theology, because that is where people who have chosen to help others apply. My job is to teach them to help effectively and in a way that does not harm them.

I met my students in the first week of January and it was immediately obvious that they needed to talk about what happened in December and what they or their friends and loved ones were afraid of. They wanted to know what they could do and how they could contribute to making things safer. We need to address all of this with them. I teach them, and not only in connection with the events

at Charles University, but generally, not to be ashamed of the emotions they experience.

## **What are the tasks for the Probation and Mediation Service in connection with the events at the Faculty of Arts going forward?**

We are passing on our experience, together with a risk assessment, to the Rector's Office and the university as a whole. We do this for every client in the course of our day-to-day work. We constantly remind people that the need for help following the events in December can occur at any time, and not just immediately after they happened; it can be triggered by anything and at any time, even 20 years after the event. The Probation and Mediation Service is here at all times and in all parts of the country for those who feel victimised. Our task is to listen to everyone who needs it, even over an extended period of time, and help them find someone else who can provide help for their specific problem.

## **Jana Mottlová, PhD**

is a graduate of the Faculty of Education of Charles University, where she studied special pedagogy. She is currently the head of the Prague regional branch of the Probation and Mediation Service. In addition to this, she lectures at the Hussite Theological Faculty of Charles University and acts as a crisis interventionist. Together with her team, she was involved in helping many people who were affected by the shooting at the Faculty of Arts on 21 December 2023.

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# Monty, Stella and Snow: **Four-legged healers** spread joy and happiness

**56** **The Faculty of Arts has some fascinating new “residents”. Alongside students and staff, there are now some delightful animals spreading smiles and a sense of calm.**

TEXT Marcela Uhlíková PHOTO Martin Hudák

After the tragedy last December, it took considerable time for regular life to return to the Faculty of Arts located on Jan Palach Square. Even now, there are moments when the air feels heavy, and the mood is sombre. Still, time passed and by late spring the halls were once again occupied by students rushing to take exams. Many of them would pause to pet a group of new visitors they had gotten to know over difficult months: Monty, Snow, and Stella – four-legged helpers whose presence

works wonders for wellbeing. With the new academic year in the autumn, Monty, Stella, and Snow returned once again, ready to bring joy to all people they meet at the historic building.

#### **Going where they’re needed**

Monty is a four-year-old miniature horse whose owner acquired him less than a year ago. “I’ve loved horses since childhood, and my dream was to have a ranch full of them, she says. “I got Monty purely for the joy he brings to me and my family. He has seven stablemates, including his best buddy, Picasso, a Shetland pony,” the owner explains. Her ambition was to have a horse small enough to take to visit hospitals, care homes, social centres, and schools. “We go wherever we’re welcome and needed. Early in 2024, I reached out to the Faculty of Arts and the interest was mutual,” she adds, while Monty cheekily investigates a nearby bag, hoping for a treat.

The mini horse isn’t picky – if there are no bananas, he’ll settle for hay from his special cushion or try to open a box of dried vegetables. On campus, Monty has mastered a number of

“It’s the best thing the faculty could have done for us. The dogs and Monty, a miniature horse, lift people’s spirits. Personally, their presence helps me a lot!”

impressive feats, including walking up and down stairs with ease and is known for poking around drawers, a habit he picked up during hospital visits. Faculty staff also often catch him begging for cucumbers at the campus café. Calm, curious, and friendly, Monty’s “job” is simple: interacting with passers-by, whether they’re students, staff, or visitors. Those willing to engage with him, who let him close, will find him resting his head in their lap, big eyes looking upwards, bringing smiles all around.

#### **Nuzzling their way to happiness**

Stella, a five-year-old flat-coated retriever, has a perpetually sunny disposition. As a certified therapy dog, she’s well-versed in sharing her joy with people. Her owner recalls, “She’s my first dog, and she was quite wild as a puppy. I knew this breed was good for working with people, and over time, Stella began preferring human interaction to playing with other dogs.”

Stella loves her treats – sausage or a slice of ham will win her over instantly – but nothing beats a good scratch behind the ears. Her charm lies in her persistence: with her puppy-dog eyes, she’ll nudge even the most reluctant people into giving her attention. She often visits a nearby care home for seniors, but she’s always had her sights set on the Faculty of Arts. Living not far away, Stella frequently passed by its entrance and tried to approach the students chatting outside. “So much so that even when we aren’t working, she is able to turn aside on a walk and pull me in front of the main entrance in hopes that we will go inside,” the owner says. Even during her days off, Stella insists on detouring to the faculty’s front door.

#### **A true team player**

Snow, a six-year-old Bernese Mountain Dog, is the veteran of the group. Known for her intuitive and calm nature, Snow quickly adapted to life at the faculty. Her work began in February when she accompanied students and staff with a basket of so-called “snow-coffee” and a sense of security during a difficult time.

Snow has free rein on campus, deciding whether to visit the study rooms, library, or offices. Her handler ensures Snow doesn’t overdo it, saying, “I can tell when she needs a break.” Like Monty and Stella, Snow also brings her empathetic skills to hospitals and therapy sessions, where her calm presence is as effective as it is on campus.



When Snow, Monty, and Stella meet in the corridors, they decide *together* where to go, who to greet, and who to please. “It’s the best—the best thing the faculty could have done for us. The dogs and Monty lift people’s spirits, and personally, their presence helps me a lot,” says one student, stopping to give her furry friends a pat.



# Remembrance expressed in music

**Two composers, two compositions. Martina Vídenová, a doctoral student from the Institute of Musicology at the Faculty of Arts of Charles University, and composer Miroslav Tóth, are preparing a musical project entitled *Rok poté (One Year Later)* to honour the memory of those who died. Works by both composers will be performed at the Church of St. Salvator in Prague on 21 December 2024, the first anniversary of the tragedy.**

TEXT Ondřej Dufek PHOTOS Josef Hejný, Dagmar Hujerová

58 Martina Vídenová graduated in Musicology from the Faculty of Arts, where she is also currently engaged in her doctoral studies. The institute is located on the fourth floor of the main building on Jan Palach Square, the site of the tragedy last December; its director, Lenka Hlávková, was one of the victims. Severely shaken by the event, Martina Vídenová began a work that she decided to dedicate to the victims.

“I was inspired to create a composition to honour the memory of those who died and to express sympathy for the bereaved. In the past, I wrote a requiem for the forests of Portugal and dedicated the work to the victims of a large forest fire that broke out in the Pedrógão Grande area in 2017,” she explains.

Because she does not specialise in composition, she consulted Miroslav Tóth, a composer who was independently working on his own work, also dedicated to the victims of the December shooting. “Without his support, I probably wouldn’t have found the courage to embark on such a difficult

task. Our joint project gradually came into being. Our idea was to organise a concert at the Church of St. Salvator on the day of the first anniversary, where both of our compositions would be performed,” says Martina.

The work of both composers is connected by its activism. In their compositions, they reflect on socio-political issues and environmental problems. Martina Vídenová describes her work as a minimalist piece for choir, string quartet and several double basses. “Although it is a musical work created to honour the memory of the victims, it is not a traditional requiem, such as we might encounter in a religious, liturgical context. The author of the text for the composition is Dominika Moravčíková, a writer and doctoral student who works at our department. I wanted to work with someone who had a close relationship with our faculty,” she says.

Miroslav Tóth’s composition is for string quartet and was written specially for the renowned *Dystopic Requiem Quartet*. “The piece is a clear statement and expresses the wish of not only my-



**Miroslav Tóth** is a composer, saxophonist and sound designer. He holds a doctorate in the field of Composition and Theory of Composition from the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague (HAMU). He has written several operas and music for a number of documentaries and feature films. He is the author of the *Extended Tentacles Quartet* for the Kronos Quartet, which he dedicated to the memory of Ján Kuciak and Martina Kušnírová.



**Martina Vídenová** is a musicologist and composer. She is a graduate of the Faculty of Arts of Charles University, where she is a doctoral student at the Institute of Musicology.

self, but also of the *Dystopic Requiem Quartet*, that the victims not be forgotten and to give people an opportunity to reflect. In addition to the string quartet and ambisonic electronics, the composition itself will have a special section for simultaneous interpreters, where the flow of music will stop for a while, and in the silence three sentences for the

victims will be translated into sign language.”

The project also began to incorporate other activities. It will include a public collection to support the *Všech pět pohromadě (Keeping It Together)* educational programme, which focuses on mental health literacy and social and emotional learning. It was created by the Child

and Adolescent Mental Health Research Working Group, which is organised by the National Institute of Mental Health. “This is our way of supporting the discussion on the need to pay more attention to mental health of children and young people... Problems such as these must be addressed in time,” Martina Vídenová says.

## A memory woven from threads

**The solidarity awakened by the shooting at the Faculty of Arts has taken many forms. Zuzana Vacek, a Canadian artist of Czech origin, created a tapestry which reflected on the tragedy. The work was also displayed at the faculty.**

TEXT Michal Otáhal, Štěpánka Zelenková Semecká  
PHOTO Martin Hundák

The painting, titled *Tragic Shooting at the Faculty of Arts, Charles University, 21 December 2023*, was loaned to the Faculty of Arts, Charles University, until the end of 2024. The tapestry was exhibited in the main building of the Faculty as a gesture of solidarity with the faculty community, employees, and students. “This work is not only a reminder of a painful event for us but, above all, a testimony to the strength and unity of our community,” says Michaela Slussareff, Vice-Dean for External Relations and Continuing Education. The painting was originally part of an exhibition of

tapestries by Zuzana Vacek, titled *Fragile Strings of Freedom*, shown at the Senate of the Czech Parliament at the end of August and the beginning of September. “What happened at the Faculty of Arts was a huge shock for me; I didn’t expect anything like this in the Czech Republic. The painting is a tribute to those who died and their families,” says the artist. Vacek, who has lived in Vancouver, Canada, since her youth, has long drawn inspiration from Prague’s cultural wealth. Her artistic journey began with formal education in the visual arts, focused on textile creation, which

gave her a solid foundation in painting, drawing, and textile techniques.

Her tapestries reflect current social issues, such as social politics and media influence, incorporating traditional quilting techniques that reflect the sensitivities of the time. “Through my tapestries, I try to capture the complexity of our contemporary world. Each stitch, every thread, every layer of fabric is a commentary on the social and political issues that shape our lives,” Zuzana Vacek said when her works went on display in the Senate.





# A unique message about healing

**The terrible event that shook the university and the whole of society on 21 December caused incredible heartache for many people. But it also provoked a wave of solidarity and kindness. Director Markéta Oddfish Nešlehová, a graduate of Charles University, made a documentary about the healing process since.**

TEXT Helena Zdráhalová  
PHOTO Markéta Oddfish Nešlehová

## **Why did you decide to make a documentary about what happened?**

I am interested in the possibilities of the human psyche and its tendency towards a positive attitude. An act of evil occurred on 21 December. My goal is to show that, despite what happened, something new can sprout again, a new plant can grow from burnt ground – a symbolic geranium. I want to show that evil can never win. This is the main leitmotif of the film.

We talk about 14 victims, but in fact, there are many more at the secondary or tertiary level. Thousands of people were directly affected; the tragedy resonated across the whole of society. I wanted to make a film that would act as a kind of pill to help heal both the university and the whole of our so-

ciety, which had not been exposed to a horror like this in recent history.

My documentary is a message about the depth and strength of human solidarity and kindness. The environment and culture at the faculty, the rectorate and the university as a whole was a significant factor in this. When I saw the women who were in charge, how authentic they were, and how compassionate and kind the environment at the university was, I said to myself I wanted to be part of it when the university and the bereaved were recovering, because it could bring a unique message about healing.

Another reason for me to make the documentary was the conviction that the event and the victims must not be forgotten. It was intended as a film for the bereaved, who would have the opportunity to share their feelings.

## **Who will appear in your documentary and who did you reach out to while filming it?**

My documentary follows several storylines. I wanted to be part of the changes in the atmosphere and energy at the faculty. I follow the creation of the Quiet Place (memorial at the Faculty of Arts – editor's note), its changes and the increasing number of messages there, and the powerful meaning of the place.

The second storyline follows the story of the commemorative stone on Jan Palach Square. I thought it was important to tell its whole story, from the genesis of the idea itself to the rawness and symbolism of the monument.

I also began to follow the dean and the rector in their day-to-day activities, during which they also had to deal with the impact that the event had on them. They didn't have a team of crisis interventionists to come to their rescue, take their places and crisis-manage the faculty and university. All this had to be handled by the women in leadership

roles, including Lenka Henebergová from the Rector's Board and Vice-Dean Andrea Hudáková of the Faculty of Arts.

It was also a strong wish of mine for the parents of the victims to appear in the documentary, too, and for them to share their thoughts with me. I was in contact with six families who wanted to share at least a fragment of their memories or their experiences from the healing process following the death of their loved ones.

I wanted there to be a spiritual level in the film. In the film I also speak to a Catholic priest, Marek Orko Vácha; the aim was to ask him about where people can find strength after such an event.

## **You are a graduate of Charles University yourself. Isn't this too personal a topic for you? How do you maintain professional distance from such a tragic event?**

Well, this tragedy is a personal issue for every one of us: all of us went to a school where we all felt safe. As I see it, this has a personal impact in that this could have happened anywhere and to anyone. In addition, all the victims were exceptional people, with goals in life, with many ideals and talents... I am also affected by this, too. And what's more, when you want to make a documentary that will touch the viewer, filming must become a personal thing for you. You just put yourself into it, you root for your beloved "heroes", you empathise with them, you accompany them for part of the journey,

**Markéta Oddfish Nešlehová is a practising Buddhist. Meditation and spiritual practice give her the strength to tackle emotionally demanding topics in her work.**

**Markéta Oddfish Nešlehová is a graduate of the former Faculty of Journalism of Charles University. After working as a reporter and journalist for various newspapers and magazines in the Czech Republic, she later moved on to directing and screenwriting. She has filmed a number of documentaries. She is interested in Roma, ethnic issues and the Third World.**

you think about them, you write to them, a bond develops between you. Not only do they open up to you, but you also open up to them, you give each other what is needed at that moment. The film is personal. And as far as Charles University is concerned, now I am especially proud that I received my master's degree at the Carolinum.

## **When will the documentary be released?**

The film will be broadcast on Czech Television on 17 December. During every second of filming, I sought to tell the whole story as sensitively and truthfully as possible and with respect to all those who feature in it, even if they are now watching us from another place.





# An anthology with three Rs



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**Lecturer David Vichnar and student Tomáš Hercík are both from the Faculty of Arts, but were only brought together following the tragic event on the afternoon of 21 December 2023, when they were in the building. The horrific experience inspired them both to record their memories, as well as the memories of other contributors in a new anthology.**

TEXT Jiří Novák PHOTO Michal Novotný

**How did your idea to compile an anthology come about?**

**David Vichnar:** I am one of the organisers of the annual Prague Microfestival art retrospective. Through social media, I am connected with many well-known poets who, although in most cases they were not present at the location of the tragedy, had and have a relationship with the Faculty of Arts. These poets, you could say, wrote spontaneously to help them cope with the trauma: poems and occasional texts about what they felt began to appear. We at English Studies organised a workshop where students could write a poem or prose text about the topic to help come to terms with what had happened.

We then began to put all these texts together and in January Tomáš and I appeared in the Seznam Zprávy podcast, where we announced our intention to prepare an anthology.

**So, the initial concept was that it would contain reflections by people who had some**

**association with the faculty and memories of people who were there when the tragedy occurred?**

**DV:** We conceived it as the three Rs: reflections (texts that are reflective, essay-like and non-literary), reports (texts by people who were inside the building when the tragedy was happening), and reminiscences (memories of the bereaved).

**If I focus on the reports, what were the first reactions of the respondents?**

**Tomáš Hercík:** Diverse. When my colleague David Vichnar and I announced our intention to compile an anthology, they were rather cautious; after all, the trauma was still too fresh for them. But as time passed, many people reached out to us to say that they wanted to contribute so that they could, for example, explain to others what they had experienced and witnessed. At the same time, it was, in a way, their own way of coming to terms with the event. Then there was a group of people who wanted more time and told us that they would contact us in the future, and of course there were also people who told us flat out that they didn't want to participate in the project.

Over time, some changed their minds and contacted us themselves, and sometimes the opposite occurred: some declined to contribute, even though they had originally wanted to. I also received long accounts of memories, but which the authors did not wish to have published.

**DV:** While our intention is certainly not to retraumatise people and remind them of the horrors of that day, it did seem appropriate to ask direct witnesses of the event. For example, over the Christmas holidays, Associate Professor Daniela Tinková from the Institute of Czech History sent us a sort of report in which she gave a minute-by-minute account of her experience on that crazy afternoon and the events in the building from her point of view. It was the power and authenticity of these memories that convinced us to include them in the anthology. We also thought that they should be included in view of the various conspiracy theories that appeared in some media after the event.

**How was it for you personally to return to the Faculty of Arts building after what happened?**

**DV:** I didn't have to be here every day last semester, but I was in contact with several of my students, whom I asked about it, of course. And, for the most part, they had this strange feeling – like, things were basically the same as before, but something was a bit different. For example, there were details like someone arriving a bit late for a seminar and entering without knocking, and people kind of gulped – that didn't happen before... We have

**As time passed, many people reached out to us to say that they wanted to contribute, so that they could explain to others what they had witnessed.**

experienced something here, lived it, and now we have to somehow deal with it.

**TH:** I talked about it with my classmates from history at the first seminar after the resumption of teaching, and some teachers asked me about my experiences, so I tried to tell them about it while leaving out the unpleasant details. After that we didn't talk about it in class, just individually rather than in groups.

**At what stage is the anthology now and in what form will it be published?**

**DV:** We received contributions to it in different waves, depending on how people found out about our plans. We received a lot of texts in January and February, when we also gathered posts from social media. People promised to send us more material, and reports in particular, after the summer. We have to admit that some of the direct witnesses don't have great writing skills, and we don't want to push them into it. It is logical that many needed time to recover from what happened.

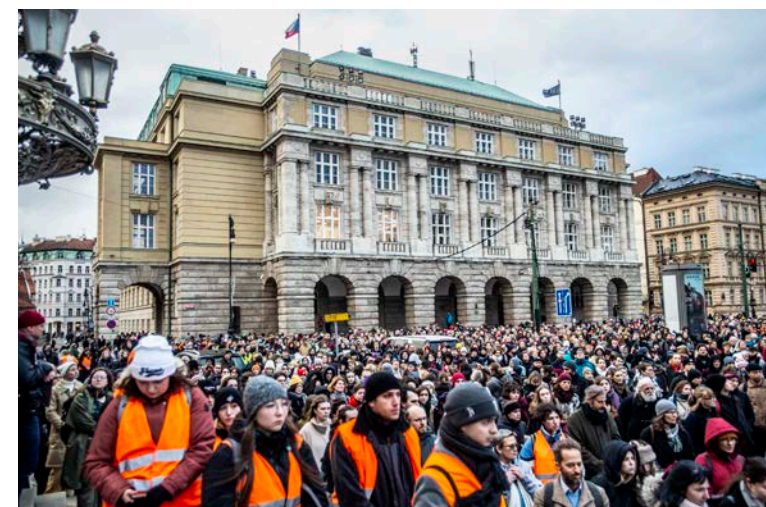
We don't primarily want to print the anthology, but rather publish it as a free downloadable PDF, a kind of e-book, which the faculty has promised to disseminate on its website. We're also considering a voluntary donation option, which would go to the victims. We are certainly not trying to publicise the tragedy, let alone profit from it. A further added value of the anthology will be the English translation, because it is undeniable that the event has, unfortunately, also elicited a global response.

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22/12 & 23/12/2023 The days after the tragedy at the Faculty of Arts of Charles University, people gathered and lit candles, with their numbers steadily increasing at both the Carolinum and in front of the Faculty of Arts building on Jan Palach Square.



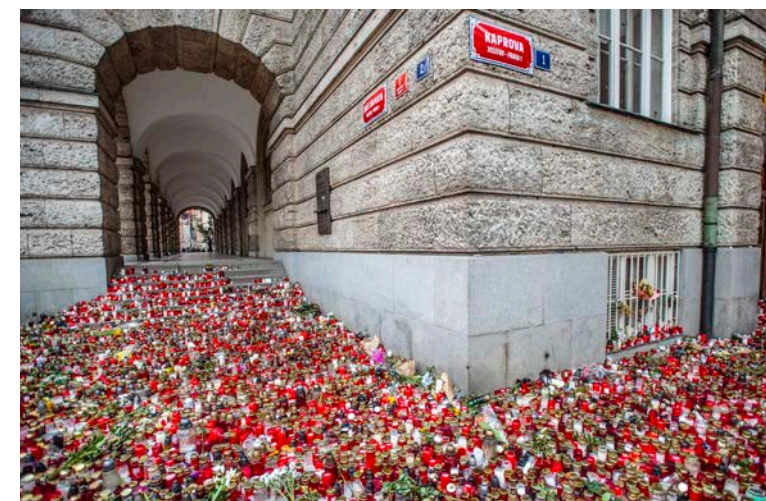
# Testimony



23/12/2023 Attendees mourned the loss of 14 people – students and teachers – who died in the school shooting. A requiem was held in their honour at St. Vitus, Wenceslas, and Adalbert Cathedral in Prague.



4/1 Thousands took part in a memorial procession, including a symbolic embrace of the faculty and the lighting of a flame on Jan Palach Square. This solemn gathering marked the start of Four Weeks for the Faculty, a time for reflection, solidarity, and the beginning of recovery.







**21/1** A month after the tragedy, students and staff returned to the main building of the Faculty of Arts of Charles University. Short lectures and a book exchange took place. On the advice of psychologists, academic life gradually resumed in the building, strengthening the bonds of the community.



**March & April** Those who died in the tragedy were honoured by world leaders. Flowers were laid at the Faculty of Arts building by French President Emmanuel Macron (5/3), outgoing Slovak President Zuzana Čaputová (18/3), and German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier (29/4).

**January 2024** The wax from thousands of candles lit for the victims of the tragedy was gradually transformed into a temporary memorial installation. President Petr Pavel took part in the casting.



**30/1** Extinguishing the memorial flame.





5/3 A lecture titled "The Academic Community: Hurt, but Not Broken" took place at the Carolinum, for all members of the academic community. Together, the speakers and attendees focused on the theme of support and coping with the tragedy at the Faculty of Arts.



24/5 Some of the faculty staff returned to their offices on the fourth floor of the main building of the Faculty of Arts of Charles University. In the most affected wing, the Quiet Space was created – two rooms and a corridor between them, temporarily dedicated to memorial. A ceremony using water symbolically marked the period of transition, from the tragedy to renewal.

The Quiet Space is accessible on weekdays from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. and is primarily intended for the memories of those directly affected, including the families of the victims, the injured, staff, and the academic community of the Faculty of Arts of Charles University. The connecting corridor is adorned with notes, pencils, and hanging canvases, where messages can be attached. Fourteen stones are placed in the corridor, in memory of those who died.



18/6 The mass shooting affected students most profoundly in the Deaf Studies programme, founded by Professor Alena Macurová. In June, she was awarded the title of Professor Emeritus.



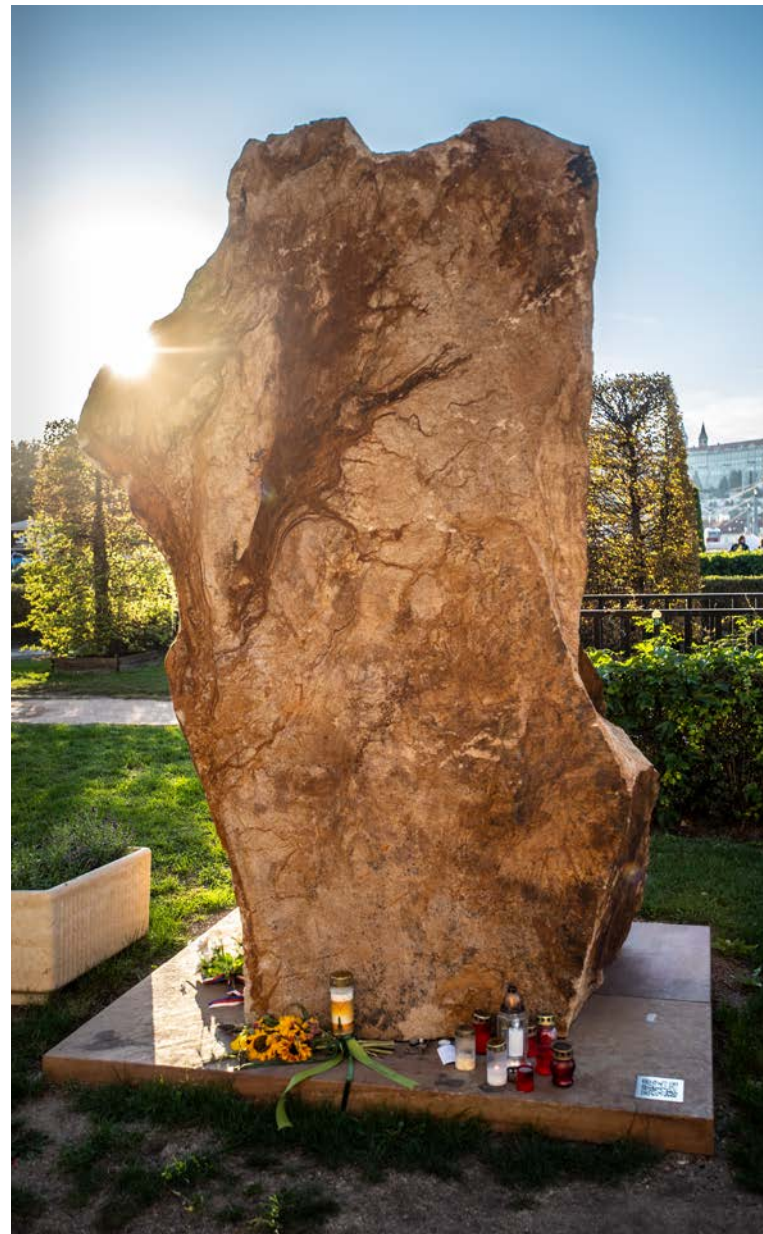




**January** On the first floor of the Faculty of Arts building, a lit installation with paper geranium flowers was created under the guidance of the Institute of Czech and Deaf Studies in collaboration with artists. The Czech geranium, the first to grow on scorched earth, symbolises the renewal of academic life at the Faculty of Arts of Charles University.



**21/6** Half a year after the tragedy, Charles University announced the founding of the CU Resilience Centre. You can read more about the project on page 38.



**21/6** A temporary memorial, a raw and imposing sandstone monolith, was unveiled on Jan Palach Square, honouring those who lost their lives. It will be available to the bereaved, the academic community, and the public until a permanent memorial to the victims of the tragedy is created. The stone is minimally artistically reworked, and by agreement with the bereaved, may evolve over time.



**26/6** Five days after the unveiling of the obelisk as a memorial site in front of the Faculty of Arts building, the new President of Slovakia, Peter Pellegrini, paid his respects.



**15–19/7** The restoration of academic life at the Faculty of Arts was also affirmed on an international level by the International Congress for the Study of Child Language. The organisers dedicated a condolence bouquet to the faculty, which was displayed in the main building's hall throughout the conference.



# Out of evil, a chance for **good** to prevail

**The attack that forever changed Charles University on 21 December 2023, shocked both the university and broader society. A deep sense of sorrow and feelings of helplessness affected everyone; no one was untouched.**



TEXT **Marcela Uhlíková** PHOTO **Vladimír Šigut**

The area in front of Carolinum, once filled with a pre-Christmas atmosphere, was quickly transformed in the evening hours of 21 December into a place of remembrance. People came in silence to spend a moment, light a candle, or lay a flower to honour the students and staff who lost their lives at the Faculty of Arts. The wave of solidarity that spread through the university, its community, and all affected families was immeasurable. Alongside practical assistance, funds began to be collected in support of the bereaved. Even those who had little themselves, expressed solidarity through their donations. Within the first two days, institutions and companies – both domestic and foreign – and private donors, contributed nearly twenty million crowns to the Charles University Endowment Fund. The sense of solidarity from the public never ceased and

instead grew stronger with each passing day.

Ultimately, more than sixty thousand donors contributed, and the total amount raised for the Charles University Endowment Fund reached 87 million crowns (as of October 2024). Charles University Rector Milena Králíčková repeatedly thanked all the donors: “The families of the deceased will not be left alone in their sorrow. Even when faced with great evil in life, the opportunity for good to prevail is always present.”

Many volunteers, including students and members of the broader public, gradually helped in the restoration of academic life. People from across the university – those connected to the Faculty of Arts, the rector’s office, and other faculties – selflessly offered assistance. They acted with one shared thought: to

overcome the feeling of powerlessness and find a way to address the consequences of this unprecedented tragedy.

The memory of those who lost their lives that terrible day has not been forgotten. In the months following the tragedy, a memorial sports event took place in their honour, a collection of poems by one of the deceased, Lucie Fribertová, was published, and the first annual memorial ascent to Sněžka was held. Their memory lives on. “There is no greater pain in the world than the loss of a loved one. The immense wave of solidarity that arose in connection with this tragic event cannot erase the pain in our hearts. However, it helps us to believe again that there is more good in the world than evil,” one of the surviving family members said.

Charles University expresses its sincere and heartfelt gratitude to all supporters, donors, individuals, and organisations who, in the difficult moments following the tragic events at the Faculty of Arts, demonstrated their solidarity and offered their help. Your invaluable support played a crucial role in managing the aftermath of this tragedy and in providing care for our university community. Your generosity and willingness to stand with us allowed us to better face the unexpected situation and continue our mission with renewed strength and determination. We thank you for being there for us during these challenging times.



On 21st December 2023, we lost fourteen unique human stories, fourteen hearts filled with a desire to help others. However, their legacy lives on. We will never forget Eva, Jan, Ad, Lucie, Lenka, Klára, Adam, Magdalena, Sára, Agáta, Aneta, Tereza, Eliška, and Lucie.



**Charles  
University**