

VISIT TO UKRAINE (FALL 2004)

Olga Danylak

President World Council of Ukrainian Social Services Ukrainian World Congress

In October 2004, Irene Waschuk, a representative of Ukrainian Women's Organization of Canada to the World Council Ukrainian Social Services (WCUSS) and I planned a trip to Ukraine, primarily to take part in the presidential elections but also to take advantage of the time between the election tours to address social service issues.

The role of the WCUSS is to co-ordinate the work of charitable organizations and committees in the Diaspora and to encourage the development of social services in Ukrainian communities. In the 90's we assisted young volunteers in Ukraine to organize Social Services of Ukraine (SSofU), a voluntary charitable organization whose membership includes representatives of various community and church organizations. Since its' founding over 100 branches have been established throughout Ukraine. In the beginning we organized training seminars for the volunteers, introducing them to the role of a social services organization. The branches have developed a range of programs depending on the needs and resources in their community. Assistance from the Ukrainian Diaspora community has been significant in helping this new organization find its place in Ukraine's young democracy.

Social Services of Ukraine Annual Meeting

In November '04 the SSofU National Executive held its annual meeting with oblast presidents, in Kyiv. During the meeting, branch presidents provided an overview of their work during the past year. Following are some highlights.

Kamyanets-Podilskyj – V. Porchynska: "Our Branch held a successful working bee project. We held hearings with our people to determine the needs and functioning of our community. We would be pleased to share our findings with other branches."

Poltava – H. Kyiashchenko: "Our Branch has carried out several projects, currently; we have a task force looking at citizens' rights. The grant we received from the Canadian Embassy was used to publish a booklet called 'Your Rights'. It is most important for people in our community to know and protect their civil rights."

Vynnytsia – H. Chaikivska: "I would like to point out that in our work we come into contact with other community organizations. At our "Good Neighbour Centre" we have a clothing bank and volunteer doctors who come to see patients. Those who use our services are invited to become members by paying a small membership fee. The income from the fee helps us to buy milk for needy children and the elderly. "

Kherson – L. Lytvynenko: "In the south eastern part of Ukraine our work is somewhat different. We have a data bank, which includes a list of people with special needs. When we receive humanitarian aid, we distribute it to those on the list according to their needs. We celebrate religious and national holidays and are planning to organize Ukrainian classes for the children."

Uzhhorod – C. Petryshche: "Our main program is a Food Bank but we also collect clothing and household goods which we distribute to the needy. We commemorate historical holidays and last year with help of local sponsors were able to hold a special event in memory of the "1933 Ukrainian Famine".

Ternopil – D. Bohun: "Our most active and longest running programs is "Faith and Light" but we also continue to send Ukrainian literature to centres in the East. This coming year we plan to become involved with a rehabilitation centre in Ternopil which work with trafficked women returning to Ukraine.

Zaporizzha – V. Filipenko: "During the year we receive humanitarian aid from the USA and financial assistance from the Brotherhood of Veterans of the 1st Ukrainian Division of the UNA in Canada. The funds received were used to send children to camp and to organize a camp exchange with the Truskavets Social Services Branch in western Ukraine. Last year 24 children participated in this program."

Zhytomyr – H. Bahovska: "We received a grant and with the funds were able to organize a program for talented youth. We also appeal to local businessmen to help us in our work and with their assistance have been able to provide a meal program for the elderly in our community".

Luhansk – K. Filimonenko: "In our community it is difficult to get funds from local businessmen for our programs, since most are indifferent. Our cities in the east definitely need more attention, especially where the mines have closed and people are living below the poverty level. Two of these cities are Zorynsk and Teplohorsk. We hope that more attention will be given to helping us in the East."

Kyiv – O. Bukovska: " Our programs include "Families helping Families", "Food Banks" and "Camping". We invite representatives from other community organizations in Kyiv to help us with these programs. Our Branch also participates in a radio program called "Black on White" which encourages young people to use the Ukrainian language. We provide a camping experience for the contest winners.

Joint Plans WCUSS and SSofU In August 2005, the Ukrainian World Congress will be holding a Directors' Annual Meeting, in Kharkiv. During this time WCUSS jointly with SSofU plan to hold a workshop on social services. The aim is to encourage Ukrainian organizations, especially in those countries, which surround Ukraine or are part of the eastern Diaspora, to learn how to organize a voluntary social service sector and develop programs for their communities.

We thank all donors for contributing to the Dollar Fund. Your donation helps Social Services of Ukraine to reach out to those in need.

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