

General Description

After spending four years in California I still follow political and social news in my native country, Ukraine. According to UNICEF the number of homeless children in Ukraine increased greatly during the past two decades of independence. One of every 90 children in the country, a total of 100,000, is an orphan or emancipated. 65,000 live in state-run children's institutions such as orphanages, boarding schools, and shelters. When these children reach the age of sixteen the government terminates the guardianship. Teenagers are left to the streets where they face the risks of drugs, prostitution, and crime. Some of them become part of international human trafficking schemes.

Only private contributions and non profit organizations keep orphanages functioning. Those who compassionately contribute to the orphanages help financially by providing the institutions with televisions, toys, and occasionally sweet treats. What children need the most is day to day care that will partially make up for the lack of family support. My main goal is to raise awareness of the issue of marginalization in the orphanages and to involve the public in direct work with children. I would like to give the children of Orphanage 1 in Kherson an opportunity to be creative and build their future through education. To achieve this I will encourage community members to become mentors, tutors, and inspirational figures for the children. I also intend to seek fundraising sources and in-kind donation opportunities from local organizations.

Description of Activities and Results

Two hundred and forty girls and boys from the ages 6 to 16 are spending their childhood in the underserved environment of the orphanage. They live and study behind a ten foot high fence (See appendix 1). Children leave school grounds seldom and only with social workers or teachers. Children wear donated clothes, most are malnourished, and some have mental disabilities.

My mentor Larisa Salko is deeply involved with the children at the Orphanage. She is an educator involved with children from problem families and orphans in public schools of Kherson and at the Orphanage 1. My major role will be extending Ms. Salko's program by assessing each child's educational needs level and finding the right community mentors for them. Along with facilitating educational mentoring, I plan to assist volunteers with preparation in classes I am competent and in: English, Russian, Ukrainian, Computer Science, Math, and Art.

Besides organizing volunteering at the orphanage I want to spearhead extracurricular activities and events that will broaden the limited world experience these children now have. I will plan four trips to Kiev because I believe that every person deserves to see the capital of their country (See appendix 2). I will set up tours for the children to the two major public universities in the country, Shewchenko National University and Kiev Polytechnical Institute, walk children through historic and cultural places, and give them a feel of Kiev as an intellectual and political center of their country. I will also take children to four local public universities to make them aware of the possible secondary education in Kherson. The trips will raise social awareness among university students and encourage them to volunteer at the orphanage.

I believe that education has to be connected with career training. I will introduce basic understanding of a market place to the children and engage their creativity. I will encourage the mentors to introduce their drawing, wood carving, photography, and knitting skills, because I love art and believe that art education is substantial for cognitive development. In order to unite the creativity of the art making and the basic entrepreneurial skills training students will sell their crafts at a local bazaar under my supervision. Presence of the children at the market will raise awareness of the orphans' marginalization. I will produce flyers about volunteering at the orphanage that will be given to the customers with every purchase.

Today one can only find the physical address of the Orphanage online; there is no names, numbers, or images available to the public. All three components of the program, recruiting mentors, field trips, and market days, will be thoroughly documented through photography. They will become the main element of a new interactive web-site. The photographs will also become a part of the promotional campaign as I will publicize the issue of marginalization through the media.

Timeline with Academic Quarters 2010-2011, Ukraine

August Preparation. Purchase of digital camera, tripod, and photo software in the U.S.

I) 09.01.2010 – 10.21.2010

September Establishment of the connection with community partners, ongoing. Extensive preparation for fall selling event. Supervision of the art projects. Composition and production of volunteer flyers. Market space rental. Purchase of a market tent. Establishing cooperation with legal offices to establish the volunteers screening system.

October Market days Oct. 9, 16, 23. Purchase of tutoring supplies, books, computers, and a printer. Planning first trip to Kiev Oct. 25 for 13-14 year old children.

Fall break 10.22.2010 – 11.03.2011

November Market days Nov. 13, 20, 27. Cooperation with local newspapers, radio stations, and web-sites with advertisement offers. Printing flyers. Editing photos

and gathering information for the web-site. Find a web designer and a hosting company.

II) 11.04.2010 – 12.28.2010

December Market days Dec. 4, 11, 18, 25. Purchase gift wraps. Design and production of holiday cards and holiday invitations for the volunteers.

Winter break 12.29.2010 – 01.15.2011

January Continue recruiting volunteers through media and community outreach. Planning visits to Universities in Kherson.

III) 01.16.2011 – 03.12.2011

February Planning second trip to Kiev, Feb.5 for 15-16 year old children. Trip to Kherson State Agrarian University, Feb 18. Trip to Kherson State University, Feb 25.

March Planning third trip to Kiev March 12 for 11-12 year old children. Launching web-site.

Spring break 03.12.2011 – 03.20.2011

IV) 03.21.2011 – 05.25.2011

April Trip to Kherson Technical University, Apr. 09. Trip to Kherson Maritime Institute, Apr. 23.

May Planning fourth trip to Kiev May 14 for 9-10 year old children. Finalizing and making the project sustainable: appointing people to keep the project active after my time in the orphanage is over.

Description of Continuity and Preparation

I was born and raised in Ukraine. I watched my country go through numerous changes in the 1990s and witnessed social injustice every day. I recall impoverished pensioners begging in the streets with tears in their eyes and runaway children turning into gang members. I remember walking with my grandmother by the orphanage where I intend to volunteer. I asked what was happening behind the fence and tried to visualize life for those children. This sight was one I couldn't forget; it made me realize how challenging childhood can be and made me want to transform this situation.

Though all orphanages in Ukraine are in similar impoverished condition, I would like to put my energy in the Kherson Orphanage 1. This will be a pilot program that will continue to work without my direct involvement after my nine months of engaging volunteers and can be used as a template program in other institutions.

I decided to take on the challenge of working in social justice programming after taking Ananya Roy's class *Global Poverty: Challenges and Hopes in New Millennium*. This course made me see struggles in Ukraine from a scholarly perspective. I have learned about international financial organizations and the processes of global markets that shape economic conditions in Ukraine and beyond. I realized that the grassroots methodology, working directly with the orphanages is the most impactful way of approaching social problems in a developing country. My architectural courses made me a socially and environmentally aware designer. This enhancement program will provide insights on the needs of the orphans. In the future, I see myself designing sustainable transitional housing in Ukraine.

I plan to launch a web-site where potential donors will have an opportunity to learn about the life at the orphanage, buy children's arts, and make contributions. The web-site will also be available for the public to learn about becoming a mentor at the Orphanage 1 and will allow volunteers to sign up for a shift in an interactive schedule. I will make the web-site an ongoing project and allow the orphanage staff to update it.

This experience will provide me with enough fundamental knowledge in orphans' needs and experience that will allow me to make an ongoing impact in my career. I want to become an expert social work for the orphans and young children transitioning into the broader society. In addition to the direct impact on students, I will formulate ideas about in how to design buildings and create spaces that will provide rehabilitation, interaction, education, and integration the orphans of my country. I will know that my project was a success when I see that children in the Orphanage 1 are more creative and eager to learn and when public service and volunteering become common practice in the community.