

8 -7- 2014

Wow...Thank you so much! Your efforts are really highly appreciated. Ella from Lugansk was so touched by your trying to help that she wrote you a letter.

In the meantime here is a short update:

This morning Alyosha (our former driver who now works for a national TV station) went to Slovyansk with a group of reporters. This was very unexpected but Alyosha decided to jump at this opportunity to deliver food, medicines and money to Valentina - our contact person at Mykolaivka Orphanage. There is no other way to do it right now. Mykolaivka and Slovyansk have been severely damaged by the military fighting and people have had no electricity, no gas and no water. Children are in a safe area in a summer camp but the orphanage workers and orphanage graduates are in the military zone in complete isolation. With many of their houses ruined or damaged. I managed to talk to Valentina for 1 minute (the connection is very bad plus they have no way to recharge their phones) and she gave me a list of things they need badly (medicines and food). We loaded Alyosha's car with medicines and canned food and he left. He will not be able to deliver everything himself because the only road to Mykolaivka is completely destroyed but one of the reporters will be going to Mykolaivka on a military vehicle, so she will deliver everything. At least this is our plan. We will know if it worked or not tomorrow. Getting help to Donetsk and Lugansk regions is very difficult right now because there are no buses or trains going there, postal services are not working and banks are closed. I am glad we could send something with Alyosha.

The other good news is that Fedia and his family managed to leave the war zone today and they are now on a train on the way to Kiev. Two handicapped people, with a wheelchair, bags and a 3-year-old child. Going through military blockposts, bombings, etc. You can imagine how difficult this was....I just hope tomorrow they will arrive safely. There have been many cases recently when train tracks have been destroyed. And Fedia is having serious health problems right now. The train is supposed to arrive at noon tomorrow but trains from Lugansk have been arriving 4-6 hours late because of the war. In general, I see two directions in which we can help children in Eastern Ukraine:

1) Helping orphanages and orphanage graduates in Eastern Ukraine (particularly our sponsored orphanages in Mykolaivka, Donetsk and Lutugino). The need is enormous but getting help to them is very difficult right now. If not impossible. We will have to wait until communication with those regions is restored so we can evaluate the needs. In the meantime we use every opportunity we have - like the one with Alyosha - to deliver help to them.

2) Helping young people from Lugansk and Donetsk Regions who come to Kiev. This we can do and we are already doing. Right now we have several such youngsters staying at Orphanage No.12. We buy food for them, medicines, pay for their transportation and help them in other ways. However, they will need to move out before September when our children are back for school. Maybe we can rent an apartment in or near Kiev for them? I will look into how much that would cost. We all hope the military fighting will end soon but....It doesn't look like it is coming to an end.

3) Helping young people from Lugansk and Donetsk Regions to move to other regions for some time. For example, to Kherson. I think it will be cheaper than Kiev. Unfortunately, the government is not doing a good job helping the people from the East. Ella, for instance, called the hotline for refugees and they said they will call her back. That was a week ago. She is still waiting for their call. You can imagine if she didn't know anyone in Kiev...

This is in short update on what is going on. We continue our work and I will keep you updated on how things develop.

Bogdan

Lugansk and Donetsk Update (9-7-2014)

Well, Fedia and his family made it to Kiev. I am very relieved. We spent 150 euro getting them here. The armed men from the so-called 'People's Republic of Luhansk' are

charging people who are trying to leave towns under their control. They take money even from handicapped people like Fedia. Unbelievable...There were no train tickets to Kiev so Fedia and his family spent the night in the train conductors' tiny compartment. It was barely enough for them to sit in. Stuffy and hot. 24 hours on the road and they are finally in Kiev. They were exhausted but VERY happy to finally be in a safe place. They are now at Orphanage 12. They told me lots of terrible stories of what life is like in their town. Very sad.

Alyosha and the TV crew didn't make it to Mykolaivka. The road to Mykolaivka is badly damaged (on the photo) and there are too many bombs hiding in the fields and in the bushes so the Ukrainian army first needs to clear the way. Alyosha left the food, meds and money with a woman who will be going to Mykolaivka as soon as the Ukrainian army clears the way. Hopefully in the next several days. He met her in Slovyansk and it turned out that she knew Valentina from Mykolaivka Orphanage very well. Alyosha, too, was horrified by what he saw in Slovyansk. Destroyed houses, destroyed roads, destroyed factories and the most tragic - lots of destroyed lives...

So far our news... Bogdan

Op 16-7- 2014 werd Jet van Bennekom gewezen op een bericht op de website van Trouw waarin stond dat kinderen uit een weeshuis in Donesk tegen hun zin, gedwongen werden om naar Rusland te evacueren.

Het antwoord van Bogdan: (16- 7-2014)

This situation sounds very familiar. Two days ago armed pro-Russian men came to Donetsk Orphanage No.1 (which is one of our partner orphanages) and told the director to prepare children for evacuation to Russia. The children protested and said they would not go to Russia. The men accused caretakers of 'sabotage'. They were convinced that the children do not want to go to Russia because their care takers told them not to. The men said that sabotage is punished by death during war times and the director said 'well, you can go ahead and kill me and the other ladies that work here'. They left but the director had a heart attack. She was back at the orphanage the next day. Up to this very minute the authorities of so-called "Donetsk People's Republic" are trying to threaten the orphanage director to convince children to go to Russia.

In the meantime, we are evacuating orphanage graduates from Donetsk. 2 youngsters arrived today, tomorrow we have 7 more coming, including one with a 30-day-old baby. It has been very difficult to find train tickets for them - everyone is trying to get out of Donetsk...We already have 5 youngsters from Lugansk and 9 youngsters from Donetsk regions at Orphanage No.12. We are trying to find alternative placements for them. For example, we found relatives in Belarus for one of the boys and he will be going there with another boy on the 17th.