



Les Amis de Svieta

Travel report

Françoise Hürlimann, the president of the Swiss association Les Amis de Svieta, traveled with her husband Christophe and her adopted son Sergey during the Easter holidays from April 1st to 8th to Ukraine.

"It was an opportunity to verify that the association's projects were well realised and that the money sent was used according to the instructions.

We also used the trip to introduce our son Sergey to his country of origin. We had not returned since having adopted him in 2005 and have now seen many gratifying changes.

Arrived in Kiev, we discovered a city in full development, which opens to the west.

The purpose of our trip was mainly to visit three orphanages in Nikolaiev and Kherson. Vika, the local director of the association Les Amis de Svieta, accompanied us all week.

On Monday morning April 2nd in Kiev we boarded the train to Nikolaiev at 7:30AM, a good 7 hour drive for a distance of 500 km. In the early afternoon we arrived well in Nikolaiev.



Nikolaiev Baby House (NBH)

Tuesday morning we visited Nikolaiev Baby House (NBH), on which Les Amis de Svieta has been concentrating since its founding 18 years ago.



Much to our surprise we discovered a colourful and inviting building. All walls have been insulated and are repainted, which yields considerable savings in heating.

Director Olga Ivanovna welcomed us in her office and thanked us and you the generous donors, for the continued financial support we were able to provide in recent years. She told us that the building has won an European Environmental Award, an award for the

entire exterior insulation of the various buildings.

She gladly showed us the different therapy rooms, the bathrooms, the speech therapy rooms and the quarantine rooms for children with infectious diseases. She proudly showed us the last project, where six mothers with their infants can be admitted directly after the maternity ward.

We met a mother who gave birth to twins. She decided to give up a child because it was born with a slight handicap. Olga Ivanovna convinced her to stay with her two babies for a month, so that professional staff could show and teach her the right treatment for the "other" child. The program is a complete success. This mother too decided, as all who benefited from this help, not to leave her little boy. This department has been operational since August 2017 and has already saved twenty children from being left abandoned to live in an orphanage. The program also lets these mothers use the facilities of the NBH and be trained by its staff 1 to 2 times a year, depending on the child's pathology.



The success is so great that the director is planning an enlargement and expansion to be able to offer 8 additional places. The costs have been estimated at US\$ 25,000. Thanks to your donations, Les Amis de Svieta will participate in the project.

Boarding school in Zurupinsk (ZuBS)

On Wednesday, our third day in Nikolaiev, we drove with Vika in her car a good hour to the boarding school Zurupinsk which is located in a suburb of Kherson. At the end of a dirt road we discovered a dull building with bars on the windows. The entrance is closed by a gate and is guarded by an old man. This orphanage is home to around 200 children aged 5 to 18, all of them are disabled.



The director Tatyana Grigorjevna showed us the children in different groups. Here, the residents are not grouped by age, but by degree of disability. The rooms are quite clean, but 50 years old and therefore in a respective condition.

We visited a bathroom where heavily disabled children are bathed or showered. The toilets also require a renovation, so they will be wheelchair accessible.



We already had a broken heart, but the worst was yet to come. The director then brought us to a group of severely disabled children. None of them can walk, they have all been in their beds for years, some of them cannot eat with a spoon and need to be fed on a feeding tube.



In tears, we leave this unit, knowing that we cannot do much for them. The only way that we can improve their living conditions a bit, is by developing optimised rooms that enable caregivers to better care for them.

It is important to know that people with disabilities in Ukraine are generally not accepted and therefore people with disabilities are often being hidden. Ukraine is not built for the disabled. There is nothing to facilitate the integration of disabled people and it is difficult to obtain special equipment for the disabled.

Since we can do nothing without additional donations, we left ZuBS. But first we drove to a nearby shopping center in Kherson and bought "Pampers". Many ZuBS residents use diapers, often cloth diapers. And we ordered Vika to buy gastric tubes because a nurse had told us that it was difficult to get them in Kherson.



We returned to Nikolaiev, shocked and marked by these children. We promised the director Tatyana Grigorjevna to ask sponsors of Les Amis de Svieta to help.

At the time of publication of this travel report, Vika was back in ZuBS accompanied by construction workers. A cost estimate for the renovation of the first bathroom was made. The work will cost about CHF 6'000.- (6,000 US\$).

We sincerely hope that your help will enable us to raise enough funds for this renovation.

By visiting Zurupinsk's boarding school, we became more aware of the usefulness of the LAdS association. By covering the costs of traveling to a hospital and accompanying children with malformations, sick or disabled, we avoid them to be placed in Zurupinsk later. The progress made before the fateful age when they must leave NBH may allow them to join other more welcoming structures, such as the boarding school N° 2 in Nikolaiev.

Boarding School N° 2 in Nikolaiev

We also visited Anatoliy Igorevich, the director of boarding school N° 2. Children with slight delays age 5 to 18 are living here. We found out with great satisfaction that these children are very well supervised; they live in buildings that are well maintained. Renovations are being carried out by older residents themselves. They can put into practice the skills acquired in their professional training, like carpentry, mechanics and sewing. Sport occupies a large part of their spare time and regularly, athletes participate in national and international games to the great satisfaction of their teachers.



Yaroslav

Thursday night we returned to Kiev by night train. We took the 5-year-old boy Yaroslav, who has already undergone two cardiac operations, with us to Kiev. A control visit at Kiev cardio center (KCC) was organized for Friday morning.

Despite the Orthodox Easter weekend, nurse Irina from NBH had agreed to accompany Yaroslav. We are extremely grateful to Irina, as after the last operation of the boy, (new mitral valve) she stayed two and a half months at his bedside in hospital, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to feed, care and wash him. Despite two cardiac arrests during his last hospitalization, Yaroslav is doing well today. However, due to a lack of growth he will certainly have to undergo further tests.



Political situation

Life in Ukraine is normal, except for Donetsk and Lugansk regions in Donbass. But only the cities of Kiev and Odessa benefit from touristic activities. Nikolaiev remains a rather poor city, where wages are half lower than in Kiev. Thanks to this situation with low wages in Nikolaiev and a favorable exchange rate, we can carry out large projects with low financial resources.

We thank you in advance for your support!

Christophe et Françoise Hürlimann, Epauvillers"

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