

## Ukraine July 2017 Trip Report Charles Kropke, Board Member



Once a great trading city on the Black Sea, Odessa perches above that legendary body of water like a Slavic Paris. The architecture of the city is majestic, its people proud and industrious. Ukraine is a poor country by western standards. Social, medical and psychological ills are statistically worrying. Scores of children fill the city's orphanages and refugee camps.

I arrived wide-eyed and curious to Odessa, eager to see first-hand the transformative work of the organization whose mission and philosophy have enveloped me. I wasn't disappointed. In fact, UAC Ukraine has pulled me in deeper. I am about to tell you why.

UAC is lean. Its staff are few but powerful. At the airport, Susan McPherson and I reunited with USA-based Executive Director, Irina Tishchenko Lujan. There to meet us was other members of the Odessa team, All Belaya, Maxim Kondritsky and Vera Holostenko. Later, we met the rest of the team, Alexey Tishchenko, Helen Chursova, Dr. Gennady Gladkiy and Alexander Ishchenko. Our airport greeting was very warm and included a local band, flowers and a traditional Ukrainian pretzel bread. Two orphaned teens recited a rehearsed greeting and presented us with welcoming gifts. These were the first of dozens of beautiful young people that we came to meet during this trip.

I am acutely aware that UAC Scholarship Program is saving the lives of orphaned and displaced teens and young twenty-somethings. Statistics don't lie. An unacceptable percentage of Ukrainian orphans end up in prison, dead on the streets, in human trafficking and every other form of exploitation. UAC wraps its protective arms around these young people and gives them a bright future.

Meeting my two sponsored teens was the highlight of my journey. These young men were polite, well-mannered, healthy and grateful. They told me over and over again how I changed their lives. I could actually feel their growing sense of confidence. This is what happens when a successful adult shows interest and attention to an orphaned child.

Clara Pascal opened her heart to this city decades ago. Her love echoes through every mission that UAC takes on. Now that mission includes refugee camps and beleaguered military hospitals. Clara has brought us to this point in the organization's history. Now it is our turn to pitch in. Commit to or continue to help us. It is worth asking, will that be you?