

Highlights of TOUCH 6 Delegation's Trip to Ukraine

September-October 2006

Twenty-five members of the TOUCH 6 Delegation traveled to Ukraine in late September. Here is a complete list:

Summer Barnes	Glenna Carter	Janelle Freeman	Els Lofgren	Alice Rampton
Andrea Bartnett	Nora Eaton	Peggy Giles	Joan London	Mark Rampton
Julie Berry	Heather Finch	Roy Hart	Sanny McCann	Elaine Rea
Nancy Boom	Elaine Forrest	Anne Hart	Jenny Nafziger	Beverly Smith
Mike Boom	Lisa Freeman	Sabra Killen	Judy Norman	Russ Smith

The delegation included nurses, librarians, a doctor, retired teachers, homemakers, a high school student, a university professor, university graduate student, social workers, retired sheriff's deputy, small business owner, juvenile counselor, and foster care providers for those with disabilities. The majority of the delegation was from Oregon, but California and Utah were represented, as well. Everyone paid for his or her own food, airfare, lodging, and transportation.

TOUCH delegation members carried more than 1500 pounds of humanitarian supplies in their suitcases including 20 quilts, 500 pairs of socks, 220 school kits (each containing a notebook, pencil, colored pencils, sharpener, eraser, ruler and scissor), 80 teddy bears, 10 jackets and 10 t-shirts, about 280 letters from sponsors, ostomy supplies, acupuncture needles, hats, hundreds of writing pens, 90 colorful flannel pillowcases, books and tapes, baby clothes and blankets for the Uzhgorod Children's Hospital, 38 puppets, paints, markers, crayons, clay, beads, and other craft supplies. A donated ultra sound machine was taken as excess cargo on the plane, also.

One of the highlights of the delegation's trip was viewing the newly remodeled 11 classrooms at the Chaslivtsi Orphanage. The new rooms were bright and cheery, the desks were sturdy and clean, writing on the new blackboards was visible, the windows were leak-free, and the children and teachers were delighted with the results. Nu Skin Enterprises Force For Good Foundation covered \$35,236 of the expenses and sponsorship donations to The TOUCH Project helped cover approximately \$6000, which was required to complete the extensive project. Zita Batori-Tartsi, our TOUCH Coordinator in Ukraine, did a wonderful job of overseeing the entire project. Delegation members also took 100 children at the orphanage shopping for school clothes and to a puppet show in downtown Uzhgorod. In return, the children at the orphanage put on a concert for the delegation.

Another highlight was participating in a "Disability Awareness" March through the center of Uzhgorod with a marching band and police escort. TOUCH-6 Delegation members helped push children from the Rehab Center in their wheelchairs while waving to the many onlookers. Later in the day delegation members, children and their family members enjoyed an amusement park. This was the first time that many had experienced a mini roller coaster and other amusement park rides. Children in wheelchairs in the public are new sight in Uzhgorod and additional wheelchair ramps are being built each year. The first child with disabilities was mainstreamed a few years ago into the public school system. This year, 14 children from the Rehab Center for Children with Disabilities were allowed to attend public school. TOUCH funds helped cover some of the expenses of the International Conference on "Inclusion of Children and Youth with Special Needs" sponsored by the Rehabilitation Center. Individuals from all over Ukraine attended the conference including the U.S. Ambassador who lives in Kiev.

Children in the New Family Program asked the delegation members to attend a church service at the Russian Orthodox Church with them and afterwards, the children displayed their talents with a concert of singing and dancing. Delegation members took approximately 40 children in the New Family Program on a shopping trip to the local open-air bazaar. During the annual "City Days" celebration of Uzhgorod's birthday, New Family Program Director, Valentina Chervnookaya, received a special award from the mayor for her work with this program. We were happy to see that Valentina had recovered from some health problems which had plagued her most of the summer. Many of the youth in the New Family Program have moved on from high school to employment or studying at college and technical institutes. Due to the need for continued financial support, we will encourage the renewal of TOUCH sponsorships for these young men and women.

One of the new sponsorship programs in The TOUCH Project is Public School #14 in Uzhgorod. The principal of this school approached the TOUCH Project in regards to supporting this school. This school is largely Roma (Gypsy) population and, in fact, is one of the oldest Roma Schools in Europe having been built in 1926. The school is very under funded, lacking in many of the basics, and most of the children attending the school live in impoverished situations. TOUCH sponsorship funds are providing breakfast each morning for the children. In addition, one of the delegation members, Elaine Rea of Portland, gathered individual donations from friends and with these funds was able to purchase a keyboard, an accordion, tambourines, triangles, and other musical instruments for the school. Presently, school attendance is low and the children come from very transient settings. Therefore, it was determined that it would be best to sponsor the entire student body of the school rather than individual children. Sponsorship funds will be used to improve the conditions at the school, purchase new textbooks and school supplies, and to provide breakfast throughout the year to all children who come to school.

The young women, orphanage graduates, who now live at the Pavlovo Farm Home were taken out for pizza and ice cream. There are 8 young women at this home, but the home is being remodeled and may be able to provide for up to 20 young women. The young women are working at various jobs including a clothing factory, a hotel, and they also continue to take care of the farm and garden in Pavlovo. TOUCH partnered with Zonta International to purchase a grass cutting implement for the tractor at Pavlovo.

Many of the young men who graduated in the spring from the Chaslivtsi Orphanage are living at a facility called the German Shelter, which is organized under the guidance of a Baptist congregation from Germany. Though The TOUCH Project does not maintain sponsorship of these young men, we were able to connect with many of them during the trip. One discouraging fact was that the training to become wall painters or brick layers has been discontinued for the time being due to lack of government funding.

Delegation members also used their free time to participate in individual activities and projects while in Uzhgorod. Two members, Mike and Nancy Boom, both Corvallis RNs, attended a meeting for individuals with ostomy needs in Uzhgorod. They had carried ostomy supplies in their suitcases and were able to distribute them during that meeting. Dr. Mark Rampton spearheaded many shipments of medical supplies to Ukraine. In 2005, three mammography units were sent to Uzhgorod as part of the Corvallis Sister Cities Association's Aid To Uzhgorod-5 project. Rampton was able to attend the ribbon cutting ceremony at the opening of the first mammography center in this part of Ukraine. An ultra sound machine for the new center in Uzhgorod was donated by Good Samaritan Regional Hospital in Corvallis just in time for this equipment to accompany the TOUCH-6 Delegation members on their flight as excess baggage. Jenny Nafziger, juvenile counselor, spoke at a Social Work Conference and presented information on how to provide a positive institutional environment for youth. Dr. Judy Norman and BYU Social Work graduate student, Summer Barnes, presented the results of a comparison in the emotional stability of children who live in orphanages and those who live in families. Children at the Chaslivtsi Orphanage were part of this study, which was done in conjunction with the Uzhgorod National University's Dept. of Social Work. Other delegation members volunteered time at the public schools, met with their sponsored children, represented the Corvallis-Uzhgorod Sister Cities Association at Uzhgorod's City Days Birthday Celebration, attended a concert of the Cantus Choir, traveled to nearby Mukachevo, enjoyed shopping in Uzhgorod's Centrum, and visited the Uzhgorod Castle and outdoor ethnic museum.

We were very fortunate to have the services of several teen volunteers as our interpreters. These teens study at Public Schools #1 and #3 in Uzhgorod. Along with Zita, these teens are our "voices" during our stay in Ukraine and facilitate conversations with the children and our friends in Ukraine.

Though our Ukrainian was minimal, we were greeted with English phrases including "Hello, how do you do?" from numerous children who benefited from the instruction of Eastern Oregon University intern Ashley Brooks and TOUCH Project sponsor Bonnie Jackson and her friend, Pat Fahlbusch. The fruits of their labors were quite noticeable.

It was a great trip. Much was learned and much was accomplished.