

Blessings Through Service

■ Dan and Cindy Harper returned to Vinogradov, Ukraine, this summer to serve at the second English summer camp program at the Light of Love mission for street children. The program was sponsored by LifeNets.

by Cindy Harper

Over the last two years my husband Daniel and I have been blessed with the opportunity to travel and volunteer in countries in Eastern Europe and Africa. This summer we returned to Africa to help with United Youth Camps and to western Ukraine to take part in an ESL (English as a second language) program for street children for the second year in a row.

In June 2006 we were living in Augusta, Georgia, when we received an unexpected call from someone urgently requesting that Daniel interview for a job for which he had never applied. What made this job opportunity so unique was that it was in France. We had been looking for an international opportunity to volunteer or help serve others in some way, and it seemed our prayers to God were being answered.

Through a series of miraculous events, Daniel was hired and accepted the position, which started in December 2006. I joined him in April, immediately after finishing a master's degree in teaching languages. We had prayed for two years for these opportunities, but we didn't know they would come about through living and working in France. We realized that God does not always answer prayer in the ways we expect, but we constantly have to be prepared to answer the call saying, "Here am I! Send me" (Isaiah 6:8).

Finding Opportunities to Serve

The move and job change placed us strategically in Europe with more vacation time than we would ever

have in the States. As we prayed for God to show us how to use the time and opportunities He was laying before us, the possibilities began to open up. We began to integrate ourselves into life in France as well as the work of the Church in Europe, England, Ireland and Africa.

We heard about a LifeNets project in western Ukraine, a place Daniel and I never really imagined ourselves going. We were able to accompany Vic and Bev Kubik on a trip to visit the people and to see the progress of the work going on in Vinogradov.

and Stefan Saxin from Sweden, joined us; and we collaborated on ideas and ways that each of us could contribute. During our first visit in December, we learned about the children's ages, educational levels and their interests, which included a love of singing.

We later incorporated this interest in music with a program that taught English in part through songs, which I was excited to find. It all came together in June 2008, when the four of us traveled to this little town in the mountains of western

ing down their lives for others every day. At the end of the two weeks, we left hoping that somehow we had made a difference in the lives of these children, whether through English or through our love, care and positive examples. We left knowing they certainly had made a difference in our lives.

Returning to Teach

Through generous sponsors and the work of LifeNets, we were able to hold the English summer camp program for the second year in a row during the summer of 2009. Ken Zahora returned to serve, this time bringing his wife, Cherie.

Again, much time and energy went into lesson and activity planning, both for English classes and ways to interact positively with the children during the rest of the day at camp. I wasn't sure what to expect on our return. Would they remember us or what we had taught them? Had we made any impact the summer before? Was all of this worth it?

We decided to divide the 40 students into two classes: one of new students and one of returning. Daniel and I led the class of returning students. I was ecstatic when we started to introduce a song from the previous year and most of the stu-

ware because we had been able to give the children a good foundation in English as well as stir their interest and motivation in learning the language.

A Lasting Effect

A wonderful feeling of relief washed over me as I realized that the time, effort and energy that we put into the previous year's program did actually make a difference in the lives of these children. This experience helped to lead me from a self-centered point of view to one of more outgoing concern for others. I now see that by building our empathy for others through visiting them, serving them and intertwining our lives with theirs, we are able to develop true godly love for one another.

I also found that volunteering and integrating myself into the lives of the people has made me more sensitive and aware of the needs of others. National news reports of power, food and gas shortages are more personal to me, because I now know first-hand the beautiful people who are affected by these problems. It makes my prayers for them, for the world and for the Kingdom that much more fervent and real.

Through our work, we deepened our relationships with both the children and staff this year and we left truly thankful yet again for the opportunity to be a part of the program and the work of the Light of Love mission.

Serving has brought a sense of purpose and meaning to our lives. We never expected to feel so abundantly blessed through these experiences and opportunities to serve others in various ways.

Through traveling and participating in various projects, we have met many people and learned a lot about the challenges, shared struggles, hopes and dreams of our brothers and sisters all over the world. Their lives and examples have taught us in so many ways that we could not have imagined. **UN**

For more information about LifeNets projects, go to www.lifenets.org.



During our visit we were very impressed with the service

of Vasyl and Irina Polichko and their volunteers at the Light of Love mission for street children. Their full-time volunteer work was making a real and obvious difference every day in the lives of many children. We sat down with Vasyl Polichko at the end of our visit to see if there was any way Daniel and I could help them. We were surprised to learn that they wanted help teaching the children English. We were happy to work with them to set up an English program during their summer camp the following summer.

Beginning the Program

Putting together the first program was a challenge. Two more volunteers, Ken Zahora from Indiana

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Ukraine. It was two weeks of hard work, triumphs and challenges.

Immersed in Ukrainian culture and time, we struggled to communicate and be effective as we implemented the program, figured out their pace and way of life and worked to teach and mentor the children both in English and in Christian values. We learned to be flexible, to slow down, to work together, to compromise at times, to stand firm on important things, to handle behavioral issues and to communicate in ways other than words.

We were all touched by the faith of the Sabbatarian volunteers and the selfless service they gave to these street children every day. They were a wonderful example of love and lay-

dents were able to finish the words completely on their own!

Over the next two weeks, many of the children made significant efforts to use the English they were learning to communicate with us. A major goal for the program was that the students would be motivated to learn and actually use English. We knew that this could lead to a language advantage in their schooling and eventual employment.

Given their difficult, often traumatic backgrounds, these children need all the help and advantages they can get. We set up Rosetta Stone (a language-learning software) at the center for continued English learning after our departure. It was a good time to introduce the soft-



Cindy and Daniel with campers



Ukrainian and American volunteers with some of the campers



Afternoon activities included sports and free play