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## Family first: Mission helps orphans experience family life

By Bob Keeler  
10/29/2008

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Stephen and Iryna Yagilnicky stand outside their home in Franconia. The Love Cradle Mission has programs to help the 100,000 orphans in the Ukraine and is part of efforts to help the estimated 143 million orphans in the world. SPhoto by KEN ZEPP

Malnutrition has led to deteriorated eyesight for many of the 100,000 orphans from the Ukraine.

A trip to the United States would allow humanitarian aid, including eye, dental and other medical care, but giving the children a chance to stay for at least a month with an American family and make new friendships that continue after the orphans return home would give an even more long-lasting and needed change to the children's future, according to the president of The Love Cradle Mission.

"One of the things that is really important about this program is that these children will get an opportunity to be with a loving family," Franconia resident Stephen Yagilnicky said. "It's really about instilling and giving hope to these children." Many of the orphans have never had the chance to see what life is like with a loving, functional family, he said.

A majority of the girls will become involved in the sex trades, he said. Statistically, 10 percent of the orphans will commit suicide, while 40 percent end up in prison and 40 percent will have a lifelong battle with mental health problems.

"Basically, one out of 10 will kind of make a life for themselves," Yagilnicky said. Educational and other programs at the orphanages end with graduation at 16. Many of the orphans purposely fail in school to continue getting aid for another one or two years, but must still leave the orphanage at 18.

Without the help of friends, family or mentors, the orphans have a bleak future, said Iryna Yagilnicky, Stephen's wife and Love Cradle's founder in 2000 in her native Ukraine.

The orphans have not had a chance to learn needed social skills, she said. "They don't have survival skills. They don't have skills to develop relationships like families or work relationships," Iryna said.

Iryna, a nurse, was in better financial condition than many people she saw around her after the Ukraine economy collapsed in the aftermath of the Soviet Union's fall, but she was moved by seeing people begging on streets and the plight of the orphans.

"God put on my heart that something needed to be done," she said. She realized she wouldn't be able to help all the orphans, Iryna said, "but maybe I will be able to help one child at a time."

In 2002, Love Cradle was registered in the Ukraine, followed by registration two years later in the United States.

Iryna and Stephen, whose family came to North America when his grandparents on both sides moved in the early 1900s to Canada from the Ukraine, married, and after spending 2006 in the Ukraine, moved to Pennsylvania, where some of Iryna's family already lived.

The program includes foster and adoption information, but the orphans cannot be brought to the United States specifically for adoption, Stephen said.

Instead, the hosting program offers a chance for the orphans to make friends and see life in a family, he said.

Not enough host families signed up to have a planned visit by orphans starting in December, but there are now plans to have the hosting program start next summer.

Love Cradle also has existing programs that have started in the Ukraine and has sent mission groups from this area to help at orphanages in the Ukraine.

People with a variety of skills, including in construction, music, sports, crafts, education and medical care, are needed for the mission trips, which also help the participants learn more about a world that is different from their own, Stephen said.

"I call them discovery mission trips because it's about discovery of a culture, of a different way of living, and also helping to improve these orphans' lives," he said.

Another of Love Cradle's programs collects good condition warm winter coats to send to the orphans in the Ukraine, where winter temperatures can hit 20 below zero.

The orphanages are in old buildings, with antiquated heating systems and broken windows, the

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Yagilnickys said.

"You walk into those orphanages, they're like ice boxes. You can see your breath in there," Stephen said. "That's the one thing that can give that child a little comfort is to have a warm coat that they can wear inside the orphanage."

The Love Cradle Mission is also part of a forming coalition of organizations in the area helping to raise awareness of the needs of the estimated 143 million orphans worldwide.

"Without help of friends, family, a mentor - someone close who would really care for them - they have a really bad future," Iryna said while describing the orphans Love Cradle tries to help.

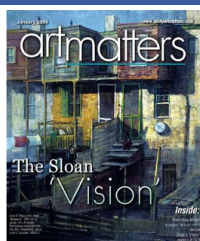
"Here, a whole future can be changed," she said.

For information or to donate to The Love Cradle Mission, see [www.lovecradleint.org](http://www.lovecradleint.org), e-mail [lovecradle@verizon.net](mailto:lovecradle@verizon.net), or call 215-723-0263 or 215-723-7826. Donations may also be mailed to: The Love Cradle Mission, 276 West Cherry Lane, Souderton, PA 18964.

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