

Sponsorship Brings Hope to Needy Families

Murrieta, CA – Zach Bell, the mission team coordinator for Mercy Projects, together with fellow sponsor Tom Roth from Oregon, visited their respective sponsored families earlier this year in Ukraine.

“My wife works with kids with special needs here in California. Over the years, we’ve developed a special place in our hearts for these kids and their families. Our hearts broke when we learned about Kolya and his mom Tetyana so we definitely wanted to sponsor them,” explained Zach, who together with his wife Caitlynn began sponsoring the Shevchenko’s in 2011.

Kolya, who has cerebral palsy, is in his late 20’s and can not walk, feed himself, or sit up on his own. His remarkable mother Tetyana receives a meager salary as his full-time caregiver. Kolya relies on his mother for everything.

Zach continues, “Something about their story made us want to not only help financially, but get to know this young man and his resilient mother. He was unable to go to school, so teachers would come to their home to tutor him. He excelled as a student and even graduated from high school. He is able to talk but speaks with difficulty.”

“My first visit with them was very challenging to be honest. After walking past the playground in their courtyard, I was saddened to think that Kolya grew up seeing this equipment but had never used it.”

The Shevchenkos live in a four-story, older brick apartment building. It has no elevator, no handicap access, and feels like a prison for someone who must be carried everywhere. Despite their hardship, Tetyana is kind, grateful, and not bitter about their circumstances.

“We climbed up the stairs and noticed that there was no elevator. I wondered to myself, how did Kolya’s mom get him down these stairs if he is in a wheelchair?” Zach said.

“After entering the apartment, Tetyana quickly offered us some tea. She was very hospitable and kind. We sat in the living room which also served as Kolya’s bedroom. These walls are his whole world, I thought.”



Zach shares pictures from his boys with Kolya and his mother.



Playground by the apartment.



No elevator in their building.

Zach then shared, “The first time we visited them many years ago, we walked away with a conflicted sense of despair and excitement. Despair because of the reality they face: little income and no medical solution. Excitement because we would now get to be a part of each other’s stories.

“Now that I have visited several times, however, I feel that despite their desperate circumstances, I think our friendship does make a difference. Each time I bring pictures my kids drew and everyday stories from our life. I hope it gives them a sense of connection to us and some normalcy to their life.

“I love to see how Kolya smiles and gets excited when I get there and ask him questions. Any relationship takes time to build but I’ve seen it grow through our letters and meetings. I think with each interaction Tetyana feels she is an extension of the family and that they are not forgotten. I want them to understand that a family far away in California sees them and cares for them,” Zach said.

People with special needs such as Kolya live a very difficult life in Ukraine. Sponsorship funds are used to provide medical treatments and other needs as expressed by Tetyana. Sponsors impact families like this more than they will ever know.

Longtime Sponsor and Retired Oregon Firefighter Visits His Sponsored Family

Oleksiy and Lesya Blaschynski, who live in a small two-room apartment in Kiev with their three children and grandmother, have faced many struggles, and hopelessness. After years of drug and alcohol addiction, Oleksiy was dealt a devastating blow when a debilitating condition caused him to become wheelchair-bound.

In 2004, Oleksiy found the Lord, started attending church, and was completely rehabilitated from drug and alcohol abuse. He met Lesya at church and they were married and then blessed with three children, daughters Angelina and Ulyan, and their young son Phillip.

Recently one of their sponsors, former firefighter and paramedic Tom Roth from Salem, Oregon was able to visit the family for the very first time. He says it was amazing to see first-hand the hope that sponsorship brings to families like these:

“It was very special just to be there and see them face to face. I loved their smiles and our conversations. I really feel a connection that I could never have gotten just through letters.

“Their hospitality was amazing and it just showed their appreciation for their sponsorship. They are really grateful for the small amount they receive from us. Oleksiy is doing his best to be a faithful father and husband. He designs websites for a living. This makes it all the more special to support a family like that.”

Tom concluded by saying, “I knew there were a lot of needy families in Ukraine, but I didn’t realize how far the small amount I give goes. Mercy Projects is bringing good news to the poor, caring for widows and orphans, and helping those who are needy. This reflects God’s heart, and that is why we have supported this ministry for so many years. I think they are responding as Jesus would!”



Tom Roth with his sponsored family. The father Oleksiy is in a wheelchair.



Hope, love and joy happens when a sponsor visits their family.