



## SOROPTIMIST INTERNATIONAL SWITZERLAND

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### Dear Soroptimists – dear interested friends!

Once again, Past-President SI Union Switzerland Annelies Debrunner travelled to Ukraine for us to visit various projects in Lviv/Lviv with the Soroptimists on site, as well as to support them in their indescribably demanding situation. In this news she talks about her experiences of the days at the end of March in Lviv.

Catherine Schuppli, President SI Union Switzerland 2023 - 2024

Unbelievable what woman can pack into a week! On Thursday I travelled by train via Vienna to Lviv and am now – less than a week later – on my way home. My goal was to visit the most important projects of the Soroptimists in Lviv and to make the support from Switzerland transparent. Once again, I was staying with President Nataliya and had the opportunity to attend a club meeting. However, I will inform in particular about the work of the Soroptimists in times of war and about the status of the projects.

## **THE "NORMALITY OF EVERYDAY LIFE" IN TIMES OF WAR**

First of all, I would like to make two important points: firstly – in contrast to my visit four months ago, when the streets were deserted – the people of Lviv have adjusted to normality in times of war. In the city, for example, many people walked, the churches were full on Sunday, many people sat in the opera. This was especially true at weekends. At the same time, the city center is strongly influenced by the presence of the military, often very young men, perhaps 18- to 20-year-olds. Secondly, we must also bear in mind that Ukraine has a post-Soviet past, despite the 30-year struggle for independence, democracy, economic progress and against corruption. It is not only the damage of this thirteen-month war, but the communist past shines through and this in all areas of life. Positive factors are women's emancipation and the self-evident nature of popular education. On the negative side, it still shines through that most people were just waiting for orders, everything belonged to everyone. They did not personally take care of the obvious, but delegated them to the state. It is precisely for these reasons that we Soroptimists of the Swiss Union have been working for almost 25 years, together with the Ukrainian clubs, to build a state according to Western standards, above all the Clubs Rapperswil and Kreuzlingen.

## **VISIT TO THE VISUALLY IMPAIRED WOMEN AND THEIR FAMILIES**

Chauffeured by Nataliya, we drove into town with Valentina, Olha and Irina Motta. A visit to the visually impaired women was announced. They showed me the house and the most urgent construction work. The first floor has already been expanded, while the second is still in need of renovation. It is mainly the floors, the lack of space and the generally poor condition of the interior. About 20 people live in this house, partly families with children. They share the four communal kitchens.



Unfortunately, the disability pension has been the same for more than 15 years, namely just under 100 Euros per month. I was spontaneously allowed to hand over 500 Euros to a Swiss Soroptimist as an Easter present. On the one hand, we were spoiled with singing, because many of the visually impaired women sing in a choir that has existed for a very long time. We also got fine cakes, and the women talked about their everyday lives.

## **VISIT TO THE ORPHANAGE LYUBIN VELKY AND CLUB MEETING SI LVIV**

We had started punctually at 10 o'clock, had only bought here in the supermarket, especially healthy food for the orphanage. It's like last time in November: five Soroptimists go to the supermarket, get advice from a saleswoman, buy as many dairy products as possible, especially yogurt, then stow the goods in the trunk of Nataliya's small Ford Escort – and off they go through the city, then on the country road towards Velyky. This time it is a little different, because the meeting also includes a club meeting and the exchange with Serhej from Hilfwerk Ukraine and his crew. We arrive at the orphanage with three cars and are 14 people.

There we are warmly welcomed by Director Stepan, who has been managing Lybin Velyky for 17 years. First, Serhey and his crew, architect Ramon and practitioner Ywan, give us various insights into the planned program, namely

- 1) the renovation of the outbuilding and
- 2) the construction plans for hippotherapy.



## REBUILDING AND RENOVATION OF OUTBUILDINGS

The insight into the construction work in the outbuilding, which was built at the end of the 19th century and dates back to the Soviet era, takes place on site. Here, therapy rooms for light and color therapy are to be built on the ground floor. First the work progressed, then came a rainy season, and a month ago it surprisingly turned out that the roof is not tight and also the rainwater seeps away from the gutter in the ground and undermines the entire subsoil of the house. Unfortunately, the house has no basement and mold attacked ground floor and individual ceilings on the 1st floor. First of all, complicated renovation work on the foundation and roof must be tackled. – A cost estimate already exists, but the financing has not yet been resolved.

## CONSTRUCTION PLANS FOR HIPPO THERAPY

What was first explained four months ago is now present on Ramon's plans and on other project plans of a graphics office. On site, Serhey first shows me the area behind the count's seat. There is an area with many trees – an actual park, about 2 ha, and also a stable where an old horse is housed. The stable is to be renovated. In addition, a vaulting facility, a garden hall and a barefoot path are to be built and the playground between the houses is to be renovated. – Later, Serhey also shows me the aforementioned plans for the project drawn up by architect Ramon. If possible, the financing should be provided by a cooperation of Soroptimists SIE and Relief Organisation Ukraine.



## CLUB MEETING

Now to the edifying part: This was followed by the club meeting with eleven women – many of whom know Sylvia Rölin, Dorothee Glauser and other club sisters, of course Käthi Streuli. Serhey with his crew and the director also attended the meeting. I was allowed – with coffee

and cake – to hand over the check of 2000 Euros of the Kreuzlinger Soroptimists and bring greetings. The joy about the earmarked donation – for trauma management was huge!

### VISIT TO THE MAIN BUILDING

In the main building, we then met many children and young people who have been living here for several weeks or even years. It was impressive how familiar the children are with Director Stepan. They also like Serhey's crew and the Soroptimists. Everyone regretted that they could not be here more often. Of course, our visit was a welcome change for the children. I was particularly taken with a little boy who held his stuffed animal with a lost look.



### VISIT TO THE WAREHOUSE

With Olha and Irina Motta, Nataliya and I drove to the warehouse, which has hospitality rights at the company Prawlplug. Serhey was waiting for us. Here is the transshipment point and here both the Soroptimists and the relief organization Ukraine of Jürg Streuli have hospitality rights or are rented free of charge. The storage room measures probably about 600 square meters of floor space and is a high room of several meters to the ridge.

We were allowed to visit everything. There are also two other men often at work here, who are actually employed by the company. Irina Motta is the administrative director of our two aid organizations. It keeps the statistics, the inputs and outputs in the nearby office or from home. It seemed to me that she was right in her element here.

In front of the warehouse stood the Mercedesbus Sprinter, half of which was purchased by Relief Organization Ukraine and Soroptimist Union Switzerland, and is now well maintained by Serhey and his crew. In the meantime, I had met several helpers of Serhey's crew, such as the architect Ramon, the practitioner Ivan and Juri. There were also two more men at work yesterday in Lyubin Velyky. I was also allowed to help pack nasal sprays and learned where the 16 generators were delivered at the end of February.

We were then received by General Director Oleh Hanish in his office. His mother is a Soroptimist. He has also been a friend of Serhey since her teenage years. Oleh told us about the

company's history and the cooperation with two aid organizations. This, of course, with coffee and chocolate. Also the obligatory photo could not be missing. I am amazed at the networks that are now extremely helpful in this sad war situation.

In summary, I can say that this visit gave me a deep insight into the work of the Soroptimists in Lviv. They support vulnerable women and children in particular, which is certainly in our interest. Of course, I learned details about

the use of our donated funds. In addition, there was open discussion about remaining financial and organizational uncertainties. Again and again I became aware that nobody knows what the future will look like in this war-torn country, when the reconstruction work can be tackled even more.

News 14 from Ukraine will be published at the beginning of May and will provide insights into aid projects of individual clubs.

On our Website <https://swiss-soroptimist.ch/solidaritaet-ukraine/> you will find the blog about the Ukraine war and short news!

Contacts to the Ad-hoc Commission: [ukraine@swiss-soroptimist.ch](mailto:ukraine@swiss-soroptimist.ch)

We are looking forward to echoes of this news from Ukraine Ukraine 13.



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