

Two Aid Organizations with Similar Goals

Journey of Jürg and Katharina Streuli and Annelies Debrunner to Lviv / Lemberg in Ukraine with a visit to the projects of Hilfswerk Ukraine and the Soroptimists of Club SI Lviv 11 – 14 July 2023

11. – 14. July 2023

It was lean travel preparations, namely a meeting with Jürg Streuli's crew, the consultation with the ad-hoc commission of the Soroptimists, the short-term commitment of Katharina Streuli, the visit of Jürg Streuli to us in Winterthur and a program proposal by Serhej, Jürg Streuli's manager in Lviv. Afterwards, on Tuesday, July 11th, the three of us flew via Vienna to Krakow. There we were taken by a taxi to the Polish-Ukrainian border in Przemysl right at the airport. What a pleasure to be picked up by Roman, the architect from Serhei's crew! We set off, joined the waiting queue at the back and after a little more than an hour we had already completed all the formalities, crossed the time zone and were then at Ukrainian customs.

There, on the other hand, we were immediately confronted with the reality of war, because parallel to our queue there were young soldiers in combat gear. They probably came from a training camp somewhere abroad. This confrontation with the future fighters, each carrying two huge military bags, immediately immersed us in an incredibly shocking reality of this war-torn country. Young men with an uncertain future, who, on the other hand, radiated more confidence, but were already extremely physically challenged, more than a hundred in number! None of them had a view of the surroundings, so busy were they with their load



Jürg Streuli and his mother Katharina



Soldiers of the Ukraine

Roman had parked the car just across the border. After a short visit to the toilet, we drove off, with a mindful chauffeur. Also, here in Ukraine warm summer weather. Everywhere we saw villages. Simple houses, some not quite finished. But most of the time, a front yard with lots of blooming flowers, often roses and a vegetable garden, overlooked the perhaps prevailing neediness.

Welcome in Lviv

Roman took us to the Hotel Liions Castle in the noble quarter of Lviv, but not far from the defense center and university buildings, where a week ago Russian cluster bombs had exploded and ten people were killed. Of course, we had heard about this terrible event in Switzerland, and it had influenced our upcoming trip by thinking even more about the circumstances under which an immediate interruption

of the trip – at whatever point in time – would have to take place. We had only just arrived, had briefly seen the damaged buildings for the first time. I will come back to this at a later date.

For a short time, we had the opportunity to move into our magnificent rooms, where we were allowed to stay for three nights. After a short refreshment stop, Roman drove us to Serhej and his partner Soriana, where Nataliya, president of the SI Club Lviv, as well as Serhej's mother, was also waiting for us. – Soriana, lecturer in arithmetic at the university, would also accompany us in the next few days.

Upstairs, on the fifth floor in the couple's attic apartment, we were warmly welcomed. In the next few days, Jürg Streuli, who had never been to Ukraine before, would have the opportunity for the first time to visit the most important projects of Hilfswerk Ukraine with his managing director Serhej and to exchange ideas directly with him. Katharina Streuli, his mother, who has known Lviv and other areas of Ukraine for 30 years, and who had done a lot of development work with the Soroptimists, had not been to Ukraine for five years.

First, however, the focus was on a joyful encounter, and we were spoiled in the most delicious way with Ukrainian specialties, with caviar rolls, borscht and a fine dessert! Serhej had already sent us the program for the next three days. Now, for the first time, we had time to discuss details and exchange our opinions on the war and geopolitical situation. Thoughtfulness or despair had little place here in these hours of togetherness. This catches up with us all again and again anyway.

12. Juli –Visit to the Hospitals, Storage Room at Koelner und Soroptimist Meeting

Dr. Jürg Streuli, physician and specialist in pediatrics and palliative medicine, pursues various projects in hospitals and orphanages in Lviv. For the next few days, we would be accompanied by the photographer Bogdan, who also works for the medium "Free Ukrainia", as well as by an interpreter.



Dr. Uliana Dorofeyeva, Dr. Jürg Streuli, Dr. Annelies Debrunner



Serhej, Uliana und Jürg

First thing in the morning we visited the **4th City Hospital**, which is run by Dr. Uliana Dorofeyeva. We were warmly welcomed by her and her crew. Here, the inspection of the renovation as well as the visit of the palliative center was announced. Serhej pointed out in advance that they would like to set up a rehabilitation center.

For more than a year, this large, four-storey building has been undergoing renovations. There are also plans to expand the attic as a large space for further training. We had seen how necessary this is on site, because a group of nurses was sitting in a corridor where their training was taking place. In general, the rooms in the multi-storey building have already been renovated or are nearing completion. It is striking how soft pastel colors almost give the hospital atmosphere a cheerful ambience. In particular, this is also the case because paintings and art are hung everywhere. This almost made us forget that in many rooms sick people are fighting for their lives or preparing for the last journey. As a surprise, Dr. Uliana had prepared a short meal for us – including cherries, strawberries, and coffee. – I was very happy to see Uliana and her crew again after a quarter of a year. In addition, I was able to notice with my own eyes the progress of the renovation. It's just a shame that I stumbled over a landing and cracked my foot.

Shortly before noon, we visited **Maternity Hospital No. 1**, where a large generator does important work during power outages. Here we were also welcomed by Maryana Svirchuk, the Executive Director of First Medical Union, as well as the leading staff of the hospital.

Afterwards we had a short opportunity to visit the houses, some of which were badly bombed, the student dormitories and the **"Center for Refugees"** of the Polytechnic University. The blessing in the misfortune of all this horror was that most of the students were already on their semester break. It's hard to imagine what would have happened a few days earlier during the semester! However, the material damage is immense. Within a radius of one square kilometre, most of the glass panes were destroyed by the scattering bodies. This is what happened in the nearby apartment of Ivan, a construction worker from the crew of Hilfswerk Ukraine.



In the afternoon, Jürg Streuli and his crew visited the **8th hospital**, where his parents had been working for many years. Katharina Streuli and I had on the agenda to visit the **"Improvement of Living Conditions"** sponsored by SIE, the residential home for visually impaired and blind women and their families. However, I had to withdraw to take care of my injured foot.



Together we went on in the evening to **visit the warehouse**. The trans-shipment point is located in the building of the Koelner company. Since the beginning of the war, the owner has been working to ensure that both the Ukraine relief organization and the Soroptimists have enough storage space in his warehouse, as well as that the administrative work can be done in the office space. There, in particular, Soroptimist Irina Motta is responsible for careful customs clearance of imported goods. It is not uncommon for the patron, Serhej's friend since his youth, to provide manpower free of charge – depending on how the need requires!

While Jürg and Serhej finally had more time for a strategic exchange, Katharina Streuli and I drove to the **music conservatory**, where the Lviv Soroptimists were waiting for us for a club evening. We spent a heart-warming evening with exchange, words of thanks and greetings while enjoying pizza.



President Nataliya brought us back to the Hotel Liions Castel in time. We wanted to round off the day with an aperitif outside in the garden of the

restaurant. However, it took a while for the waiter to understand our request to drink a gin and tonic.

Was it the lack of knowledge of English, the different aperitif culture or even a still translucent negligence of the former communist system?

13. July: Visit of «Chernobyl Hospital» and Orphanage «Lyubin Velyky»

Already in the course of the second day we had to decide to check out at the hotel this morning, because the unpredictable situation at the border had to be considered for the journey between Lviv and Krakow. In the meantime, Serhej had already booked rooms for us, the three guests from Switzerland, in a hotel in Krakow.

But we still had two important visits ahead of us. We drove to the "**Chernobyl Children's Hospital**" at nine o'clock. Since the beginning of the war, Prof. Dr. Ulrich Exner has also been working here (in the picture on the next page). Shortly after the beginning of the war, he traveled to this hospital to work in surgery. It was very moving to see the young chief physician and head of the hospital, Roman Kizyma, 37 years old and wearing a bun, with his crew. In his own introduction, he pointed out his young age and the unusualness of this position.



There were also inspiring and clarifying short conversations with all the other doctors about their situation, the status of the equipment and their expertise. Last but not least, it was extremely interesting to gain insight into the existing emergency scenarios.

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Last but not least, it was extremely interesting to gain insight into the existing emergency scenarios. Jürg Streuli received a diploma of gratitude for the support he has received over the years. Much has been made possible thanks to the support of Hilfswerk Ukraine. In addition, further support was agreed.



The visit to the **orphanage Lyubin Velyky**, located a few kilometers outside of Lviv, took place in the afternoon. But on the way we were confronted with the soldiers' graves in the venerable cemetery of Lviv. For me, it was also frightening how much the graves had multiplied since November!

This time, the children and adolescents were not to be found, with the exception of one autistic girl who enjoyed the situation of being alone among adults. Nataliya had made it possible to raise money for the holiday camp in the Carpathians. This time it will not be six weeks, but three. Director Stepan was also absent. We were greeted by his deputy and entertained in the friendliest way.

The **"Hippotherapy" project**, a suggestion by Serhej, which had given rise to many discussions in both aid organisations in advance, was discussed in particular between Jürg and Serhej. It was decided to wait and see. For the time being, a concept for the entire use of the environment is to be created. But this is not in a hurry. The Soroptimists want to stay out of this regard. I was particularly amazed at the beauty of this environment. It is worth passing the ball to those responsible for Lyubin Velyky and letting them develop pragmatic ideas. When it was pointed out that a vegetable and flower garden would be interesting, Katharina and I were astonished by the women of the SI Club Lviv. This idea seemed to them to be something that all the people of Ukraine would already be doing. Gardening is part of folk culture. The pedagogical or even therapeutic benefits would still have to be demonstrated.

An important part of the tour was the renovation of the outbuilding, the "psychological and medical rehabilitation center", where new rooms for rehabilitation, light and color therapy will be created in the basement. Here, too, I was able to see the progress of the renovation work. "Work in progress" – we were convinced of that, because the craftsmen were at work.

But soon it was time to say goodbye to these courageous, helpful, and determined people in this war-torn country. I was shaken by emotions. Let us hope that this horrible war will soon come to an end!



Serhej with his crew and the guests Jürg Streuli, President Hilfswerk Ukraine, and Annelies Debrunner, SI

We are pleased to receive echoes of this report on my visit to Ukraine.

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