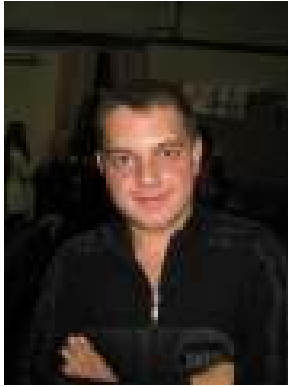




ACET's Toyka Club reaches out to young people in Odessa, Ukraine.

Alan Bain - November 2009

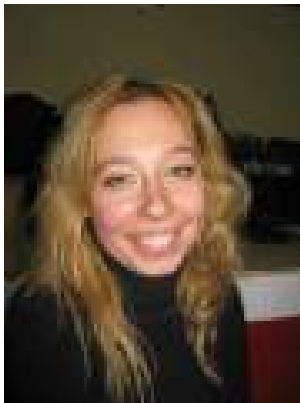


Sasha Alexandrov enjoys ACET's work in the weekly "Toyka" club; It's aim - to take young people further in their understanding of HIV and God.

Meeting in a theatre, doubling as a church on Sundays, the club is one of six the ACET team run each week in Odessa, Ukraine. The clubs draw in 2,500 young people each year from local schools.

Sasha said, "I came to the club because there are many people the same age as me. It's always a very interesting time with very joyful people and leaders. I like the atmosphere and everything about this club. I think it's right that they talk about God here and I think it's important that every person should have their own opinion about God."

Sasha finds Toyka interesting with its topics, discussion and questions ranging from sexual behaviour to how God works and he concluded, "I think that ACET is a very good organisation and there should be more like this. This organisation should develop their action. So I'm going to keep coming to this club whenever I have free time."



Tihaya Oksana is 22 and helps with the organisation of the Toyka club. For her, the club helps young people to understand the meaning of their life as well as have a good time.

She says "I think it's very important to educate people about the dangers of AIDS because it's a big problem now. Some of the young people understand what we're talking about but some need to information more and more and maybe for some of them we have to tell them more than once. But I think this is very important. It's our dream and we'd very much like them to become Christians by coming to this club but we know this won't be everybody but we pray about this. I enjoy this club because I was also this age and I know it's very important for them."



Marin Volva, seen here on the right is 20 and it's his first time at Toyka. He plans to organise another of ACET's clubs in the region and he says; "I've come here to learn from Toyka so that my team can form another ACET club next December."

Volva has been a Christian for 13 years since he was twelve after both him and his parents became Christians.

He continued, "I went to church with my family and invited Jesus into my heart. I think this club is fun and very interesting for guys who don't believe in Jesus. I think it also has great potential; In fact, I think in the future it'll have so many people that there won't be anywhere to sit. I'd like to see more young people coming to Christ in Odessa. I try to give out what I have that Jesus gave me

to do to make this happen."



Nastja Marcus is 15 and has been coming to the club since September. She is an MC of the club together with youth pastor of the church, Igor. Her bright and bubbly personality combines well with the fun-filled activities of the club intertwined with more serious subjects.

Marcus said “I developed here in Toyka and learn about all sorts of things that are important in my life. I became a Christian at this club.”

Nasja first attended the club after ACET lectures at her school and has become a firm member of the team since then. She said “

Before I lived like other teenagers not behaving very well but now my life is full of God, His kindness and all the things that God gives me. I’m a leader and I’ve very interested in my faith now and would like to do more.”



For **Katya Kirichenko**, seen here with ACET Ukraine leader Svetlana, the club is an exciting place to be. This is her fourth time and she has become a good friend of the ACET leader. She describes the club as “very interesting and fun”.

In a club evening that contained a fun-filled, dramatic enactment of a parable of a man who would not be persuaded to give up sitting on the beach and work harder to make money, she said “ I enjoyed the story best tonight . I like the lazy man! I’ll keep coming. The leaders are very interesting and joyful. I’ve heard about church even though

I’ve never been.”



(Bashan Koilia ?)has been coming to the club for 2 months and he enjoys the fun and teaching which draws out a more serious side to his nature.

He said “The club gives me advice on how to live and it has helped me to see this world in a more positive way, so I can be more content in life.”

“ I have discovered that God is real and know that God loves me.” On ACET’s work with HIV and AIDS he concluded, “ The training lectures make me think again about this world and the problems in life and helps me consider a very different side to the problems of life. “



Drijinsky Alexandrina begun coming to the club as a member but now has landed one of its most important jobs – registration. It’s a task that suites her, as well as being useful to the organisers.

She explained how the club has helped her; “ my life changed very much after coming to the club. I had some bad habits before the club - I smoked, but now I don’t any more. I became a brighter person and God opened up my talents. I knew about God but I wasn’t a Christian in the full meaning of this word. I visited different churches in other cities but now I’m looking for a church in Odessa. My world has been changed through the ACET programme and it

has shown me how to overcome my problems.”



Marina Igrina Orovich, seen here at the rear of the picture is 16 and has been coming to the club from the beginning. Marina goes to church with friends who told her about ACET. Marina thrives in the club, and said “ it’s very interesting to me because I love people and love helping people.”

Marina is already a leader with the ACET team helping with the audio-visual presentations and she explains why the work is so important to her . “This group is valuable because people need the information it gives. Young people in Odessa don’t know about God, smoking and sex . I think many have come to Christ through

this club because when we have a big heart we can give to these people and show Jesus.” Marina goes to the local church which meets in the same building as the club, concluding “ it’s very good and I love it here.”



Marosa Miclovich is 18 and has attended Toyka just twice.

Marosa’s a very active young man, full of life and fun. He says, “I like the atmosphere here and it’s a very cool time. I can just pour out all my energy here.”

Marosa goes to church on his days off and holidays. Questioned further on the message he receives in the club, he continued, “The topics about AIDS and drugs don’t worry me and I like the information that the Club

gives us. The information they give us about God here is very clear.”



(Grinskovsky Olivovich ?) Really enjoys the different programmes and contests in the fun times in the club. He laughs long and hard during the comical fun times.

But, for him the club has a deeper side, as he explains; “ I like the atmosphere here and the advice they give. It gives me solutions for many branches of my life, and though I could not previously understand myself, now I find I can.”

For Grinskovsky the church has become important because of the club,

“Sometime I visit the church and by speaking with God I gain peace in my heart. The ACET AIDS care and training is also very helpful for me. I’ll

continue coming here to the Toyka club.”.



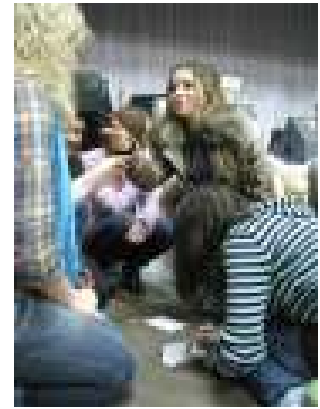
By the end of the evening at Toyka its time to consult the postman. His job has been to scour the hall for questions that the typical Odessa teenager is asking.

Then it’s the turn of the panel of experts who answer the difficult ones; which range from God and the Universe to AIDS and how I should find my next boyfriend.

It’s a sure way of finding out what’s on the mind of the club members and of giving wise answers; especially so for Igor (panel-left) whose single status draws many enquiring questions from the young girls and causes many an embarrassed laugh!.



The club evening is a good combination of fun and seriousness with members being encouraged to join in the activities.



Meet the ACET, Odessa, Team

Alan Bain – November 2009



Svetlana Olich

"I'm 29 and coordinator of ACET. I've been involved with ACET for 6 years and the youth movement for 12 years. I train my team to teach educational programmes and I coordinate the working of the clubs and the main branch for me is the youth movement.

When I saw that the church was separated from the rest of the world I wanted to change the situation. I got acquainted with the ACET programme and knew this is what I had been looking for. It's my destiny not just my profession.

I think that we bring to young people the right moral position. I know that the sexual question is the main thing for teenagers but we tell them about God's will for the sexual lives of families and children.

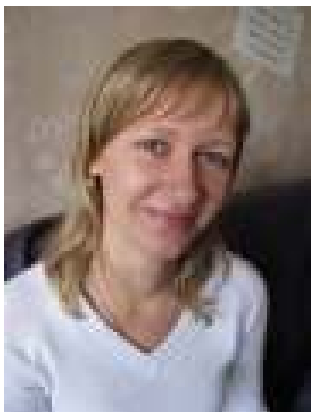
I would like to see everybody who hears our lectures become a Christian and I know that this isn't the reality but I believe it's possible. Sometimes we have petitions from parents of the government because they don't understand what we do, but we have God's protection. I get my energy from God and I believe that I'm doing the right thing.

It's exciting when I see how young people come to know God and how their lives change. It's also interesting to work with a team and see how new leaders grow up and become stronger."



Igor Kostin (right) is the heart - throb of the club. As compere of the evenings and youth pastor of the church, his single status, amongst so many young single girls, means he is often put on the spot at question time. It is not unknown for some to enquire about a possible date later!

Igor is good humoured and brushes it off with a flourish " I am one of the organisers of this club. I love God very much and I know that this club is a way to reach people and tell them about God." Igor is also part of the ACET team and teaches in the schools on HIV and AIDS. He says, "It is very important to do the AIDS training as well as tell young people about God. I'm a Pastor here and I have seen see the results in my church with people visiting the church, coming to repent and having their lives changed. Many people have joined the church from this club and have come to Christ because of it."



Tanya Marchuck

"I'm 25. I do lectures about AIDS, drugs, values, marriage and different priorities in their lives. It was hard for me to speak in public but once I began it was OK. I don't talk about God during the lessons but in private conversation I try to say that God can change everything and he can solve your problems. The children have different reactions but I didn't have any situation where they had bad thoughts about God.

I haven't seen people come to faith yet because I've just started working with the team but I have faith that I will see this work. It's so exciting that I can come to children and speak about these important things. I see that it's important for them and I see that they enjoy this club. It's so exciting."



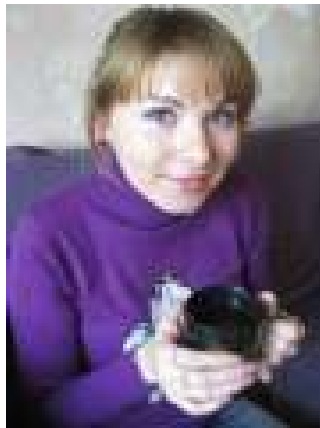
David Sviontet

"I am 18 years old. I do most of the video stuff for ACET, the graphic stuff and most of the presentations that they make. It's important work because they show the truth about the youth right now and what the situation is.

Young people right now are really hungry for something new and through ACET they can really understand the fullness of life and become Christians.

I think that the role of ACET is really big because through it we can bring people to God. AIDS training and talking about God is a good combination because Odessa is the first place in the Ukraine which has AIDS in the Ukraine and the Ukraine is the 3rd country in Europe to have AIDS. The children and the kids get to know all about AIDS and they deal with it.

That's the main thing about it. I guess about 3 people came to church about 2 weeks ago through this work. I'm going to continue working with ACET. It's really fun and I like working with the youth."



Katya Chisolova

"I'm 23 and a school teacher. I help my friend in ACET to do clubs and camps. We meet with the children and help them to talk about the morals of this life and to see how their lives need change. I think that I can help and I want to do this.

I'm a part of the ACET Schools team and we sing songs, play games and review moral topics with the children. The children listen attentively and I hope we can sow seeds in their hearts and they will remember the bad things about drugs and smoking. I also hope they will remember about their lungs and what will happen with their lungs when they smoke.

I hope we teach them about God too in many different ways. We have one girl and 2 boys who have begun to attend our church because of coming to the Toyka club. We see the fruit of our work and it's so good to see that it's not useless. One boy is not a strong believer in God but I see some change in his life now and as we continue working with him we'll see more change in his life."



Zhanna Saytarly

"I'm 26 and live in Odessa. I realised that children were in bad condition and need change. You always do something when you see that they need this. I try to teach them to take the right steps in their lives because I show them that everything in their lives has a reason and they must think about and choose the right steps in their lives.

I have good opportunities when we talk about marriage and sex before and after marriage. Many children think that sex before marriage is not bad and then we ask them what religion is in our country and they say they are Christians. Then we ask them is it good for God to see that they have sex before marriage and they have different thoughts about this. I also tell them that God created sex for marriage and in this way I continue speaking about God.

We have 2 children from the orphanage that came to our church through ACET. I know one girl, I met during lectures at her school and I told a story that was important for this girl. Later I had an opportunity to meet with this girl and was able to give her some testimonies about God and build up my connections with her.

This is hard work but it's great to see results from the work. The world has different values so we want to give it Christian values. It's great to meet young people with open hearts who will see and hear different aspects of life."



Olga Pobereshaya

“I’m 24. I help to organise the ACET clubs. I organised these kind of clubs before I worked with ACET and I was interested in such organisations that worked with children. I didn’t know of any other organisations apart from ACET that worked with children that’s why I started to work with them.

It’s important for the young people to hear about HIV & AIDS at a young age. I don’t go to schools or colleges to speak about God but during the clubs I try to show them another side of life because some people think that believers are boring and they can’t have fun. I want to show them that we have an interesting life and they have this life too.

Before ACET came to Odessa we didn’t have any fruit from our clubs, but now I have seen 2 people who are in church because of the programme. I have worked with ACET for about 2 years and I want to be able to continue working with them and to have more responsibilities in the club.”



Victor Lazarevich and Lebin Alexey

Victor (left)

“I speak about God during my private contact with the young people in the club because we have no rights to talk about this at schools and colleges during our ACET lectures. But when children come to clubs we can speak about God easily and we do this.

We have much fruit from the work with more than 25 people becoming Christians in a mission in the city of Tipladar in the Ukraine.”

Lebin – “We have training camps and we camp every summer when we go to the forest. Also we have lectures every week and football matches and we give interesting stuff for the children to use. We teach about HIV and AIDS with the help of lectures, training and private conversations.

We have 3 people who came to our church through summer camp and we had one girl who had problems who had Christ in her heart. We don’t hide that we’re Christians. We talk about scripture in our club and are free to talk about God. We have fruits from our camps every year. “



Svetlana’s apartment, doubling as office, common room, planning centre and social gathering place for the ACET Odessa team.



The ACET Odessa team



Svetlana in her office/apartment



Stalwarts of the ACET Odessa team,
Olga, Katya and Tanya.



Young people in the Toyka club



In the Toyka club



Svetlana in the hot seat



Toyka club