

OM Shows Unwanted Children Christ's Love

Anastasia is her name. "One day in church a man came up to me and told me about her," said Alexander Ivanov, who has been working with OM Russia's ministry Children at Risk for several months now. Together with his wife Marina, Alexander also works to organize Christian camps and this year they decided to take along some of the children who live in difficult situations.

The man who approached him in church asked him if they could take Anastasia to the camp. "I know one girl who is living in terrible conditions and I'd like you to take her on the camp," he said. "The problem is I don't know how to approach her mother about this."

Alexander and Marina are working with children who, for one reason or another, have ended up on the street. They don't all live on the street—some of them have one of their parents—but for the most part these are unwanted children. Unwanted by their parents and by the government. "But we believe that these children are wanted by God and are important in His kingdom," said Alexander. "That is why we work with them."

After talking to the man in church, Alexander decided to go look for Anastasia together with him. "She lives in an area in which I also lived when I was a criminal," he shared. "It is a place of alcoholics and drug addicts. Many people know me there, or at least know the 'old me.'"

As soon as they drove in, it was clear to Alexander that the place hadn't changed. Here, drug addition, alcoholism and crime are passed down from generation to generation. "As we drove through crowds of drunken teenagers, men and women stared at us and followed us," he shared.

They stopped outside a block of apartments and a half-dressed, drunken lady came out onto the balcony. Out of hers crawled a couple of naked children; the music inside was loud. She told the men that Anastasia lived with her mother, two uncles and her grandfather, who all drink. One of them only recently got out of jail.

They looked around the yard and found her grandfather. He was drunk and asleep in his own puddle of urine. They decided to leave, and returned about three hours later. Anastasia wasn't home, so they drove around the area, asking for Anastasia's mother. "After only 10 minutes we found her," shared Alexander. "She recognized me and the other man from church."

Nothing to Wear

The men met Anastasia, and Alexander told her about the camp. "I said that to go on the camp of course costs money, but that someone else would pay for her," he recalled. "At this news her mother became more interested and gave her blessing to [go on] the trip. However, we soon found out that Anastasia didn't have anything to wear, let alone pack for the weeklong camp. I said that we would pray and think of something. We also talked about Jesus and how He is able to change lives. Her mother knew us before we became Christians, as criminals and sinners, and she saw the change in our lives now."

After they had left, the church member who had introduced Alexander to Anastasia looked at him through tears. "With a tremble in his voice he told me that she was his daughter, and that he simply didn't know what to do."

Alexander had known this man for a while, from before they had both become Christians, and knew that he now had two sons with his wife. Anastasia had been born when he was dying in his sins and he never knew her.

"I didn't know what to say," recalled Alexander. "But after a minute I told him that this child isn't responsible for the

fact that she is living in such conditions. And that God had touched his heart to show her the way out.”

He replied that he didn’t know what his wife would think about all of this and suggested that they both go to talk to her. “It was a long and complicated conversation,” said Alexander. “Many fears were faced and many decisions were made.” In the morning his wife met Anastasia and took her to the shops to buy some clothes and shoes for the camp.

A Different Life

Anastasia enjoyed the camp. She saw a different life, different families, different values and priorities. “Now she spends most of her free time with her father’s family,” said Alexander. “And every Sunday she comes to church where she hears God’s Word. These seeds which are being planted will surely grow.”

Alexander is still concerned, however, that Anastasia has to go back every evening to the conditions in which her mother is living. “There we can’t change anything, but I hope that one day we will be able to have a refuge center for children like her, where Christians will care for children in need of a safe place.”