

Youth Leader Gets a Kick Out of Ministry

Andrei Taranenco, a 27-year-old Moldovan, leads OM Moldova's Next Generation department. Here he shares about progress and challenges in pursuing the vision to see Moldovan churches reaching hundreds of teenagers through sports.

OM Moldova: Can you briefly describe the ministry of the Next Generation department?

Andrei: Our aim is to reach the young generation of Moldova for Christ. At the moment we are mainly using sport. Over the last few years we have built a Christian football league for two age groups, made up of 24 teams in connection with about 20 churches. Every team is trained by a local believer who meets them regularly and has the opportunity to build trust and speak into the lives of these boys.

We as OM oversee their work, provide further training for the trainers, visit the teams regularly and organise sports camps and championships where teams from the different regions compete against each other. During the winter months we organise indoor football and table tennis events to help maintain the relationships with the children throughout the season when it is not possible to play regular football.

OM Moldova: How did you become involved in this ministry?

Andrei: From a young age I have always liked football. As a student I was invited to a conference at the OM base where I saw this ministry, which at the time was just starting. I returned to my home village and started a football team with some local children. Over time this awoke in me a desire to get more directly involved in missions, and I participated in OM's Challenge into Missions programme with the aim of later joining the team and helping develop ministry through sports.

OM Moldova: What do you enjoy most about your work?

Andrei: I like the interaction with the children: joking and discussing with them, seeing them run after the ball, their joy when they score a goal, their enthusiasm at winning a cup or a medal. Most of them come from villages and have few possibilities for achievements. Most of all I am happy when I can help them understand that faith is not a set of rules and traditions, but freedom and joy.

OM Moldova: What are the challenges you face?

Andrei: The biggest challenge is to mobilise churches for a ministry involving sports. Many churches in Moldova are very conservative; they might not agree with this idea or simply not yet see that sport can be a great means for sharing the gospel. Sometimes it is also a lack of people, when churches have caught the vision but do not have anybody to do it. Generally it is hard for those who are involved because they cannot dedicate their whole time to this but try to fit it in with an ordinary job. Some have had to move abroad to find work and left their teams behind.

OM Moldova: What is your vision for the future?

Andrei: My desire is having a team around me who will dream big and help develop this ministry into something where sport is just one way of reaching children and youth. We want to win children for Christ! Please pray for this!

Personally I am learning new things every year, often through mistakes. I want to continue growing—in vision, in wisdom and in my abilities. I am so thankful for leaders who were an encouragement to me. I am so thankful to OM for investing so much into my life and want to pass this on. I want to help others grow and invest in them like OM has invested in me.