We asked Alex Faiman to let us have a report on the B'nai B'rith humanitarian activities in Ukraine

Written by B'nai B'rith Europe

In the West, we talk of our quality of life. In the Ukraine, including both Kiev and Lviv, we have to talk about survival. The situation for the poor is indeed heartbreaking.

We concentrate on two items – food and medicine and we have to cope with day-to-day problems.

The system in the Ukraine is very bureaucratic and of course we have to obey all the rules. The authorities request a full list, every day of the people receiving any benefit from our programme.

We operate only in Kiev and Lviv because these are the only two cities where we have B'nai B'rith Lodgers with dedicated teams of volunteers doing outstanding work to keep up with all the necessary administration of the programmes.

Kiev

Since March 2001 we have been providing hot three course meals, six days a week. By now the number of people we assist with food dropped from 160 to 112 due to natural process of passing away. This help is essential as our recipients totally rely to sustain themselves on our food programme. Their meagre pensions after paying for household bills etc does not leave room for feeding themselves. They cannot rely on state subsidies/benefits, which exist in the West.

Medicine We run a weekly surgery with a professional doctor prescribing medication which we purchase wholesale and provide free to our recipients as the prices of medication are absolutely beyond their financial means.

Lviv
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The general situation is like the one described in Kiev and we concentrate on the same type of programme. Food and medical programmes in Lviv are far larger than in Kiev and have been existing since 1994. We help feed 45 people in Lviv itself.

- A medical centre with ECG equipment, a cardiologist, a medical practitioner and a pharmacy.
- A dental laboratory producing dentures
- A hygienic programme – laundry service for elderly
- Shoe repair service
- Financial help for food and medicine in the provinces for about 245 people.
- Supporting a kindergarten with 24 children ages 4-5, paying a share of the salaries of two teachers and covering the cost of food and maintenance of the building.

10% of recipients of our food programmes in Kiev and Lviv are righteous gentiles.

Twenty years ago we all in the West were involved with the aim of getting the people out from the Soviet Union. The slogan was: "Let our People Go." To our satisfaction we have achieved that aim and as a consequence a number of elderly people for various personal reasons are left to live out their lives in Ukraine. We owe it to them, that so long as they are alive they have a certain quality of life. That is our duty. That is our Aim.

By Alex Faiman.