

Elizabeth Ann Kober: Why I came to Ukraine



OLYMPUS DIGITAL CAMERA

For a long time I have wanted to spend time abroad and learn about the social services systems in another country. For the past few years I have been very involved with working directly with children and families. My areas of experience have centered on work both in public and private agencies. I completed a six month internship working in a county child protection agency as a social worker. I provided services and investigated cases of abuse and neglect involving children from the ages of birth to around thirteen years old.

The next experience I participated in was as a group leader for children who had experienced family violence and as a result had to leave their homes and live in a shelter. The groups consisted of both boys and girls that were in kindergarten through eighth grade. We did many activities with them to increase respect, learn values, and teach them safety. A final experience that I have had is working with parents of

children who have been physically or sexually abused. The agency where I worked interviewed children and while the child was being interviewed, I would meet separately with the parents of the child. I would answer questions they had, discuss counseling options for their family, and serve as a support for them in this difficult time. I really enjoyed the work that I did with these parents because I felt that I was a useful resource to them.

By my own good fortune I was directed to Norma Berkowitz and made aware of her work with FOCCUS. I have always been interested in traveling to Ukraine since I was young, and so I was very interested when I heard about Norma's involvement in Ukraine. After meeting with Norma we decided that it would be very useful for me to be able to spend some time in each of the centers that FOCCUS supports in order to learn more about service provision in another country. Although this trip was made possible because of the connections FOCCUS has, I am doing my own independent study affiliated with the university that I attend. I am currently working on my Master's of Social Work at the University of Wisconsin, in Madison. Before this I received my Bachelor's degree from the University of Wisconsin- La Crosse in Sociology. The University has provided me with a small amount of money which covered the costs of the credits to enroll in the independent study.

Overall I am very grateful to everyone involved in helping to make this experience possible. I have only been in Ukraine for about one week, but the hospitality I have been shown and the hard work all of the dedicated people that I have seen has been truly inspirational.