

Transitional living program keeps teen orphans from falling through the cracks

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By George Henson

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CHISNAU, Moldova—Children's Emergency Relief International wants to find adult sponsors not only for young children living in orphanages, but also for teenagers who have aged out of the institutions and have no place to go.

Children typically leave Moldova's orphanages at age 16, at which point they are expected to find a place to live, secure a job and manage their own finances. When many find the challenge too difficult, then end up on the streets or in jail.

CERI is expanding a program designed to help those orphans with the support system they need to succeed in life.

Clay Palmer
from Bethel
Baptist
Church in
New Caney
places new
winter boots
on the feet of
a child in an
orphanage in
Transnistria.

For a number of years, CERI has helped orphans get a start through its independent living program. That program will soon be greatly expanded, said Tatiana Ceban, director of the transitional living program.

"We are currently working on the curriculum and hope to begin in March," she said.

CERI's central Moldova office works with three orphanages in the region. In those three orphanages, 199 will age out and will need to live on their own in the coming months.

A key component will be life-skills training—helping the young people know how to fill out a job application, budget their money, develop interpersonal skills, provide for their health and safety, and plan for the future. Gender education also will be a part of the program.

"They really have no role models for how men and women are to act," Ceban said. "We will help them to see how to act appropriately."

Their education will include information about the dangers of human trafficking—a major problem in eastern Europe. Teenagers also will learn

computer and written communication skills, complete exercises to enhance their creative thinking skills and study the Bible.

CERI staff members are interviewing orphans who soon will be on their own so that they can adapt instruction to their individual circumstances, Ceban said.

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CERI will help create a circle of support for each young person. Staff will seek to find a family member with whom the teenager can make a connection, as well as link the young person to a teacher, a mature friend, an advocate, a social worker, a mentor and a sponsor.

Mentors will be Christian young adults 21 to 23 years old from Moldova's churches. The mentors will be carefully selected, trained and encouraged,

Ceban said.

The program will begin by meeting in churches, but Ceban hopes donors will help the young people survive by providing for a building for the training.

Financial support for individual young people also is needed. Many have no family whatsoever, and without financial support, their options are limited.

But with help, success is possible.

Sisters Lilia and Elena were orphaned as young children. When they left the orphanage, CERI sponsors enabled them to share a 4-by-4-meter room and attend school. Now, both are approaching graduation. Lilia will graduate soon as a licensed nurse. Elena will graduate from the university and be an elementary school teacher.

Alisa is another success story. Her parents are still living, but both are alcoholics, and she asked to be removed from the home to escape the abuse there. She attends a school that will allow her to work as a police officer, notary or some other profession related to the law. Her sister, Luminita, attends hairstyling school.

Their two younger sisters, Doina and Anisia, live in an orphanage during the week but stay with them in a small room on the weekends.

The need for sponsors in the transitional living program is great. The amount varies but typically is between \$85 and \$150 per month and usually involves a one-year to four-year commitment. For more information, contact CERI at (281) 360-3702 or visit www.cerikids.org.

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