

Update from Oksana, Max and Alisa

Temporary Protected Status - Through contacts at Celebration Church in Blountville, Oksana was able to complete and submit the TPS application on January 16. That application is currently in process. Associated with that, Max was requested to appear at the Immigration Application Support Center in Greer, South Carolina on February 22. He had to appear in person, so they could collect identifying biometric data based on his physical traits, including fingerprints, photographs and signature. Oksana was fearful about his being interviewed alone, but when the agent called Max in, she also invited Yelena as his interpreter, Oksana and Alisa to join them. Everything went just fine. (TPS will provide an 18-month extension to current status.)

Asylum - At the end of January, FPC agreed to provide Oksana monetary assistance, so she could engage an immigration attorney to prepare and submit an asylum application for her, which includes Max and Alisa. Oksana will be working with Mrs. Abigail Peterson, a partner in the law firm Elmore and Peterson in Ridgeland, Mississippi. (Mrs. Peterson and Cindy Sharitt are cousins.) Following their kick-off meeting in early February, Oksana and Mrs. Peterson have had two or three zoom meetings and have exchanged multiple documents with requested information and supporting evidence. The application is coming together well and will be ready to submit by the April 7 deadline.

Work Authorization - On January 31, Oksana was surprised to receive notice from Immigration Services that her work authorization request from July 15 was approved. (Apparently Yulia Wright prepared that application for her, and Oksana did not specifically remember it.) That approval was met with great jubilation from Oksana. She immediately started investigating the process to become certified by the State of Tennessee to practice commercial manicure services. A few days later, she received a new card from Immigration reflecting the work authorization approval beginning January 31 and expiring April 7. (One year from entry into US.) With such a short window of authorization, the manicurist hopes were temporarily put on hold. Her friend Yelena, who works at The Blake on Fort Henry Drive, approached her manager about hiring Oksana for an open position in laundry operations working from 3 PM to 8 PM Monday through Friday. The manager agreed. Yelena and her mother will tag team to provide transportation for Oksana to and from work. They will also care for Max and Alisa as needed until Oksana has transportation of her own. A recent announcement from Biden administration automatically extending Humanitarian Parole status to 24 months, is expected to apply to Work Authorization status also. That is expected in the next few weeks!

Living Situation – 1) Oksana has made several friends among participants in the Uniting for Ukraine program at Celebration Church. She enjoys friendship with other Ukrainian refugees in Tri-Cities area. Likewise Max and Alisa enjoy playing and being with other Ukrainian children there too. They have been attending worship services there recently as well. 2) Oksana is still participating in English as Second Language training through the Literacy Council of Kingsport. She's also practicing translation skills using a Google app on her phone to translate and study the Tennessee driver license manual. She's been allowed to take the driver license test a couple of times to gain testing experience and familiarity with the testing procedure. She says she learns more each time she takes it! 3) For several months now, Oksana has been trying to find a place for her and the children to live on their own. When a mobile home came available for rent recently in North Kingsport, she was all over it! A very important feature is its location near Yelena's mother. She is pursuing rental assistance from the Bridge organization for the deposit and first month's rent. By the second month, she expects to be working at The Blake to have sufficient income to pay for rent and utilities. She moved into the new home on Monday, March 13. She completed orientation at The Blake on March 17, and expects to begin work on March 20. This is obviously an exciting time for her!

Please continue praying for Oksana, Max and Alisa along with others who are supporting them. If you are interested in making a donation for their well-being during this time of great change, it would certainly be helpful and very much appreciated. Please contact Bev Johnson for assistance.

March 17, 2023