

OUR IMPACT

Overseas Stories:

A Long Road to Israel From Ukraine



Oksana and Vyacheslav Zolodayev wanted to immigrate to Israel several years ago.

“We wanted to sell the apartment in Lugansk, so that we can come to Israel with some funds,” said Vyacheslav.

The Zolodayevs sent their daughter Aleksandrina ahead of them on The Jewish Agency program Selah (Selah—an abbreviation for “Students Before Parents”). Aleksandrina came to Karmiel Absorption Center, where she studied Hebrew intensively and prepared for higher education and integration into Israeli society. There she joined a *Tzabar* military prep program, a program of the *Tzofim* (Youth Scouts) Movement and The Jewish Agency.

Then in the second half of 2014, heavy fighting erupted in eastern Ukraine. Lugansk was heavily bombed, and the entire city and its entrances were ridden with ground

battles. The Zolodayev family hid in the basement of the house with limited provisions, and lived in terror for two months. They had no way of contacting their daughter Aleksandrina in Israel. “I was terribly worried, I almost went crazy,” said Aleksandrina.

The family ultimately decided to escape Lugansk, taking as little as possible with them. The road to Kharkov was a long one. “We were surprised to receive such a warm welcome from members of The Jewish Agency in Kharkov. We were very touched by the concern of total strangers, people wanting to help and support us. It’s moving, it made us happy,” Oksana tells. The Jewish Agency got in touch with Aleksandrina Zolodayeva in Israel—and by the time that the Zolodayevs’ plane landed in Ben-Gurion Airport, Aleksandrina was there, waiting to greet them.

Vyacheslav and Oksana are now residing in an Ulpan program at an Absorption Center, where they will be for half a year. Artur is studying at “ORT-Polytechnic”, a Jewish Agency

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program in Nahalal, and Aleksandrina is awaiting her draft into the IDF in an absorption center in Raanana, as a participant in ‘Tzabar’. “We’re able to really invest ourselves in studying Hebrew,” Oksana says. “We receive absorption benefits and focus on studying. We thank The Jewish Agency for taking care of our daughter; it was through her that we were introduced to The Jewish Agency.”

Aleksandrina is excited to be reunited with her family. “It’s a dream for a person from Lugansk to come to this place, to Israel. And not everyone is blessed with this opportunity. Only those who have the right to make *Aliyah*,” says Oksana. She smiles, “This is our home, our one and only home.”