

Local residents connect ahead of upcoming mission to Ukraine

By Brock Weir

A chance meeting at Alliston Pentecostal Church has led to two local residents joining forces on a mission to Ukraine next month.

Carolyn Garton and Eve Quinn will be 'roomies' this September as they undertake a mission trip to the European nation through the Christian organization Loads of Love.

On this, her second trip to Ukraine, Ms. Garton has, quite by chance, been paired off with Tottenham student Ms. Quinn, 17, and they had their first chance to meet this past week.

After being laid off from her job this past winter, Ms. Garton made her first trip to Ukraine with Loads of Love this past July with Pastor Darryl Price of Alliston Pentecostal. While there, they toured a number of institutions for individuals living with developmental delays, as well as orphanages and children's hospitals. Their mission was not only to learn, but to construct a playground for children living at one of the facilities.

Her first task, she says, was learning the local language. If she was visiting hospitals and orphanages, it was important to her to speak at least a little bit of the language to build connections with the people she interacted. She began to study the language online, grappling with an alphabet that was unfamiliar to her. She soon broadened her scope, seeking native Ukrainian speakers here at home to help her get a handle on it ? to no avail.

Luck, however, intervened in May when she went to the Employment Insurance office in Barrie and heard a number of people speaking in another language. Sensing an opportunity, she asked one woman if she spoke Ukrainian. No luck. She got the same answer from the second woman. But, after she asked the second woman, a third came forward.

'I speak Ukrainian,' she recalls the woman saying. 'I asked her where she was from. She explained that her family had recently moved to a small village from Toronto ? Everett. 'What? I'm from Everett!' I exclaimed. She said she heard me ask a Polish woman earlier what language they were speaking. I explained to these ladies that I was going to Ukraine on a mission trip, so the Ukrainian lady asked which church I was going with. When I told her Alliston Pentecostal Church, she was in awe. She said her family attended the Ukrainian Pentecostal Church in North York and we excitedly embraced each other as sisters in awe of God's handiwork in our meeting.'

The luck didn't stop there ? the woman, Alona, just happened to be Ukrainian language teacher.

?She came to Canada when she was 20 and during her 20 years living here in Canada she said no one had ever approached her (in Toronto) to teach Ukrainian. She moves to a small village and encounters ? in Barrie ? a stranger from the same small village wanting to learn her native language. She was a tremendous help in preparing for this trip, translating materials and teachings from English to Ukrainian and sharing history and details about her country with our team.?

Fate has also intervened in bringing together Carolyn and Eve.

?I've always been interested in travelling and helping people, especially children, because my family has done things like that before with the same charity, so when Ed Dickson came to my church for a year, I realized that I wanted to go and volunteer at the orphanage in Ukraine.?

Her top goal, she says, is to ?help the orphans there and show them kindness and love.?

?To prepare for this trip, I have been trying my hardest to learn some of the Ukrainian language so that I can communicate with people there,? she says. ?Although I will have a translator for a little while, it would be nice to understand and communicate some myself. I hope to learn more about the Ukrainian culture, so I know what life is like outside of Canada and I'll have a greater compassion for others.

?I feel really good about having Carolyn as a roommate because she has already been to Ukraine before and has experienced it all before, so I'll be able to learn from her ? and she's very sweet, so I know it will be good to have her around and I know I won't get lonely!?