

MISSION MOMENT: UKRAINE

"I was living a normal life," eighteen-year-old Dmitry recalled. "I was studying logistics and marketing and playing football. I wanted to be a professional footballer, and had a contract with the Mariupol junior football team."

Anna, also 18, is from Donetsk, and had already moved because of the earlier war (2014, when Russia annexed Crimea). Now in Mariupol with Dmitry, "I was studying law, wanting to become a lawyer."

The young couple's dreams of football and law were interrupted when they woke to a call from Dmitry's parents telling them that the war had started. They quickly made sure they had cash on hand in the first few days. Battles started in the suburbs of Mariupol; Dmitry and Anna lived near the city center, but days later, fighting started near their flat, and for the next month, they stayed in the middle of the war zone, afraid to leave the city.

As the violence escalated, it became almost impossible to safely move around Mariupol, or even to be in touch with friends like Kristina, who lived just in the next yard. "We had no electricity, no information, no internet," Dmitry said. "The only information we could get was from Russian soldiers, who told us Kyiv, Mariupol, and Odessa were all under Russian control."

Eventually, Dmitry and Anna decided that the risk of fleeing was less than the risk of staying. "Mariupol was on the front lines," Dmitry said. "Donetsk was under Russian control. The only way to escape was through Russia."

So the two left together for the Russian border. After hours of security checks of their phones and few belongings, Dmitry and Anna were finally able to purchase train tickets to St. Petersburg. Their plan was to go to Hungary, where a friend was living. A Russian vlogger, supportive of Ukrainian refugees, gave them the phone number of a staff member at Hungarian Interchurch Aid (a Week of Compassion partner).

As part of the relief and transition stations established at the borders, Hungarian Interchurch Aid (HIA) supported Dmitry and Anna as they came through their five-day journey to Budapest. Since then, HIA has helped them find shelter, food, connections with a local football club, and help in finding jobs.

This is where suffering is alleviated and transformed. This is how, in the midst of grief and anxiety, hope can **RISE UP ANEW**. Giving to Week of Compassion means providing new



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Simon Chambers/ACT Alliance*

possibilities in desperate times. Partnerships and generosity make it possible to see God's mercies made real every day.

Soon after arriving in Budapest, Dmitry and Anna were able to get in touch with their friend Kristina. A rocket had landed in their yard, wounding a woman. "We went to shelter in a school, but after an unexploded bomb was near the school, we went back to the flat. We were so scared we could not sleep." The next day, she lost her phone connection, the day after that, they lost power.

Eventually, bringing Anna's mother with her, Kristina drove to Donetsk, and from there the two repeated Dmitry's and Anna's journey across Russia, and the friends finally reunited in Budapest.

Happy to be in Europe now, the teenagers worry about their family at home. They want to see their families reunited, but "I don't see a way back to Mariupol," Dmitry said. "The city is ruined, it will take a long time to rebuild." Anna agreed, "I can't see going back."

"If I can organize my life here, I will stay," Kristina said; her friends agreed. They don't know if Budapest will be their permanent home, but your offerings to Week of Compassion, when shared through partners like ACT Alliance and HIA, mean that Dmitry, Anna, and Kristina have choices, opportunities, and hope - to rise up anew and rebuild their lives.