



# TENT SCHOOLS INTERNATIONAL

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## Ukraine's New Reality

Teachers rush to connect with students online after their lives are disrupted

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE: U.S. Students Raise Funds for Syrian Kids in Lebanon

# UKRAINIAN SCHOOLS PICK UP THE PIECES

When Russia invaded, Ukrainian teachers and students scattered. Since then, they've found ways to connect online. We interviewed a school director about her experience since that day in February, and how supporters like you are helping.

More than 14 million people have fled their homes since Russia's invasion of Ukraine on February 24\*. Tent Schools International (TSI) is partnering with Academy of Wisdom, a Christian school based in the city of Bucha that serves 330 students ages six to 15. TSI's Emily Klooster recently spoke with Alina Tolbas, director of the Academy, who was forced to flee Ukraine along with most of the staff and student body.

**Q: Can you describe the events that took place in Bucha when the invasion began, and how that affected the Academy?**

A: On February 24, I sent a message to parents that there would be no classes because of the attack on Bucha. We could see the helicopters and the soldiers. Families [fled] to western Ukraine or

\*Source: UNHCR

"We could see the helicopters and the soldiers... All of our teachers, students and parents survived and have now been located, but many of their relatives and friends were killed."

- Alina Tolbas, director of the Academy of Wisdom in Bucha, Ukraine

abroad. From that day until March 14, we could not have classes or online lessons because parents were stressed and we couldn't get everyone online right away. By March we could connect with the children to lead the lessons, or we got the lessons to them in different ways.

All of our teachers had to flee Bucha to western Ukraine. They took only a little luggage and some food. Some of them couldn't take computers or other materials because there was so little space on the busses, and

they decided to leave most of their things behind. [After arriving safely], teachers started leading lessons using their cell phones.

Our school wasn't protected during the invasion, and soldiers broke doors down and took our computers and other things. I was able to return to Ukraine for three weeks recently and visited our school. Anything that was left was broken.

**Q: What was the first step for teachers as they tried to reconnect with students?**

A: It was a task for our teachers to find their students, and if we could not connect quickly we asked other school families; maybe they would know where to find them. We collected cell phone numbers and we found everyone. Parents could text their location whenever something changed. It was a hard time because we could not find everyone [at first]. We prayed daily that they would be found. All of our teachers, students and parents survived and have now been located, but many of their relatives and friends were killed. The son of one of our teachers was killed in Bucha and her home destroyed. We offered her a room on our campus and she lives there now.

Academy of Wisdom students and staff, before the Russian invasion on February 24.



**Q: Do teachers and students now have safe spaces where they can instruct and learn?**

A: Yes. Our families are now in Spain, Italy and America. Most of the teachers stayed in Ukraine.

**Q: Are the children ready to learn, or do they need emotional and spiritual support along the way?**

A: Some of our students do need help from a psychologist and a chaplain. We asked our parents about this and they said, yes, some of their children need to talk with someone. We had the opportunity to help with that. Teachers made lessons easy at first and gave children only a little homework. All of our primary school kids were online quickly, but about half of the secondary students don't connect

to online lessons. Some of the students may not have the desire at this point, or parents haven't made the effort yet because their kids may not be ready.

At the end of the school year we gave every class a final exam. It was not a difficult test, and all of them passed it. Now it will be possible for them to continue to the next grade level.

**Q: Is there any hope of a return to Bucha in the future?**

A: [For those who] went abroad, they should stay abroad because if something like this happens again they cannot leave if they come back to Ukraine. It will be difficult to return because the war is ongoing. Some of the children and parents who decided to stay in western Ukraine have already returned to Bucha, but they live in waiting and they are ready with their

luggage, just in case. We know that three of our teachers will not return to Ukraine. And other parents say that if the war is not over by September, they will stay where they are and their children will go to public schools in these new nations. The attitude is: We only have now. We only have today. •

**TSI donors have sent \$7,000 so far in support of Ukrainian schools, which urgently need our love and support. Additional funding will cover teacher laptops and lost wages so they can continue to reach students. Thank you for being a part of this important work!**



Academy of Wisdom director Alina Tolbas (right) with her family. They now live in Germany in housing for displaced families.

## UNITED STATES

### MICHIGAN TEACHERS SET THE SCENE FOR A REFUGEE SCHOOL

Northern Michigan Christian gave its students an eye-opening experience while raising funds for TSI

A school community in Michigan recently raised over \$5,000 to support a mobile school in Lebanon through Tent Schools International. Staff made a day of it by bringing a semi-trailer onto the campus of Northern Michigan Christian School (NMCS) and simulating the learning experience of displaced Syrian children living in the camps of Bekaa Valley. TSI staffer, Rawan Haddad, who is originally from Jordan, enriched the students' experience by giving them basic lessons in Arabic, a first language and key subject for Syrians. The event was capped off with an all-school soccer game, a favorite sport in refugee camps around the globe.

"Thank you for opening their eyes and ears to the big picture of this complex, diverse world we need to shine our lights in," wrote alumnus Mary Zuiderveen in support of the fundraiser. •

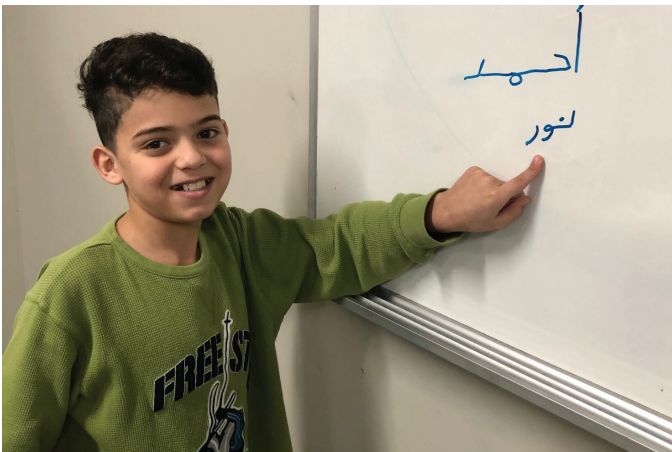
**Curious about the refugee experience and how your school or church can help? Learn more on our website!**





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INTERNATIONAL

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## BACK TO SCHOOL.

Your support gets refugee kids back in school. For them, this represents a return to safety, normalcy, and the chance for a bright future. Thank you!

TentSchoolsInt   

**LET TENT SCHOOLS COME TO YOU!** TSI staff visit churches, schools, and Sunday Schools to share the ways education restores hope among refugee families. To learn more, call (616) 531-9102 or email [info@tentschoolsint.org](mailto:info@tentschoolsint.org).



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#### OUR MISSION

TENT SCHOOLS INTERNATIONAL demonstrates the love of Jesus Christ for displaced children by making education accessible. We exchange chaos and loss for peace and opportunity.

TENT SCHOOLS INTERNATIONAL is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization and a proud member of ECFA, the Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability (ECFA.org).