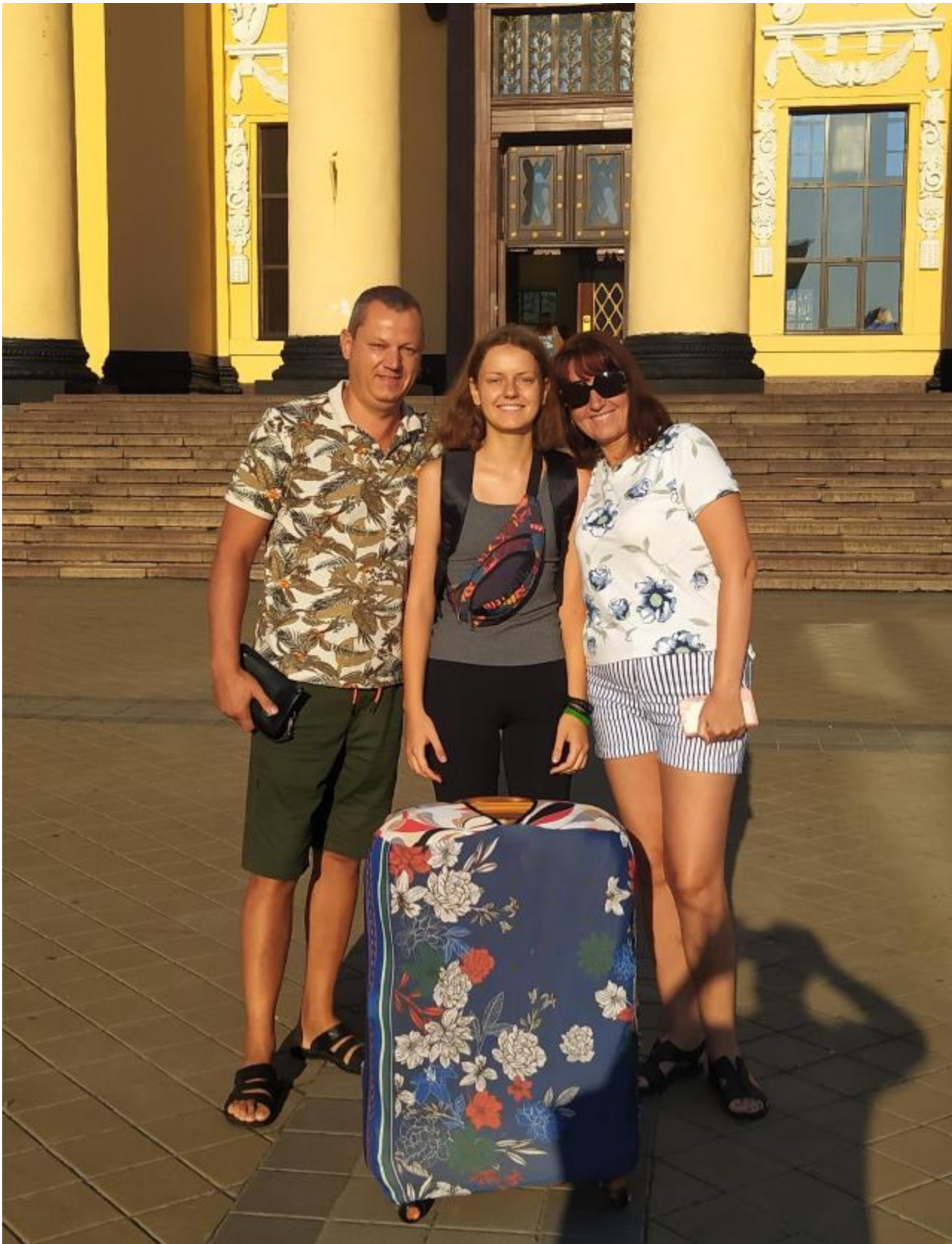


Teenager Is Proud Of Her Country: Jersey Has Exchange Student From Ukraine

by Carla Newton
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GRAFTON - When Kateryna Savienkova was 9 years old, her family fled their home town of Luhansk, Ukraine. The year was 2014. At that time, the self-proclaimed Luhansk People's Republic, backed by the Russian government, was embroiled with Ukrainian people in armed conflict. Since then, Kateryna's family has made their home

in Kharkiv, Ukraine's second-largest city. Since the Russian invasion just over a week ago, Kharkiv has been under attack.

Today Kateryna (Katya) is an exchange student at Jersey Community High School. She is a junior and lives with her host family in Grafton. Almost 3 years ago, she learned of a program that offers scholarships for Ukrainian exchange students. After a lengthy application process, she was awarded the opportunity of a lifetime from the Future Leaders Exchange Program in cooperation with the American Councils.

Scheduled to attend the 2020/21 academic year, her plans were delayed due to the COVID-19 Pandemic. Determined to make her dream of coming to America a reality, Katya did not give up. Finally, in August 2021, her adventure began. Katya explains, “I was so persistent on making the trip. This was a unique opportunity to exchange cultural experiences, to learn about American culture and to educate others about my country as well.”

For Katya and her parents, leaving home at 16 years old was difficult. English is taught from a very early age but speaking it exclusively in America would be a challenge. As an only child, Katya’s parents were very stressed to see her go. Although her time in America would be a brief academic year, the distance apart would be great. Despite everyone's fears, her journey to America would take place and her dream of experiencing life as an American teenager came true.

Once in America, the challenges were significant for Katya even before the Russians declared war on Ukraine. So many little things were different, the timing of a daily schedule, family duties and expectations or simple everyday tasks all had to be learned.

Fortunately for Katya, her host family had been through the experience of initiating a new family member three years prior. Carla Newton convinced her husband, James, and daughter, Roanna, to take on the amazing opportunity of hosting their first exchange student during the academic year of 2018/19 when Maria Antonia Florit Amengual from Maorca, Spain, joined their family.

“People are often surprised or astonished when they learn that we have taken in a student for the 9-month duration,” Newton explains, “but the rewards outweigh any inconvenience of having an addition to the family. We love learning about their home and exploring the cultural differences but adding a family member for life is our greatest reward. We may live on opposite sides of the world but we all are beautiful humans inside.” These important lessons are why the Newtons committed to hosting their second student this past August.

The recent events in Ukraine have been the main concern for Katya and everyone living at the Newton home, “I can't stop thinking of my family and friends. Fortunately, my parents recently packed up our belongings and fled to a smaller, neighboring city. But every day I am able to check in with them. It is very challenging for me to be so far away while my heart wants to be with my country.”

In the wake of the Russian invasion, Katya says that she is very proud. “Ukraine is so small compared to Russia, but in the past week, my country has astonished the world. To see other countries stand up for Ukraine and protest the war makes me very happy. I hope the movement will educate the world on how catastrophic the problems with Russia really are. Often these social movements can quiet down as fast as the start up.

"I urge the world to stand up to Russia, not just today but for as long as it takes.”

When asked, what do you hope your country can achieve once the war is over? Katya answered, “I hope Ukraine will be able to keep growing as an independent and indivisible country. These events united all people as nothing ever did. So I pray that our cultural values will become stronger as well. I hope we will finally be free from any Russian threats and we can move towards integration with friendly countries. Ukrainian people never give up. We are the most giving and caring nation for our friends, and we are the most strict and brutal nation for our enemies. Glory to Ukraine! Glory to the heroes!”

How to help the people in Ukraine go to:

<https://savelife.in.ua/en/donate/>

For more information on how to host an exchange student go to:

<https://borderlessfriends.org/>



