

OSELYATA

Documentary photo project by photographer Robin Alysha Clemens and writer Lisa Weeda

"Here at Oselya no one will ask what you did before. It does not matter who you were. If you follow the rules, if you are nice, if you want to work and stay in the community, you are welcome"

Fifteen years ago, a group of men and women built a house on Ivana Franka street in the Ukrainian town of Vynnyky. The house was created in order to help the homeless, and people with a history of substance abuse. There is room to sleep, to eat, to bathe and to work. The community calls itself 'Oselya', or 'Оселя', meaning home. The residents of this place call themselves the 'Oselyata'. Right now, around twenty men, three women and two children - one born on the premises - live in the home of Oselya. They live together in harmony, share bedrooms, have breakfast, lunch and dinner together. They are not allowed to drink or have sex. They work, they follow the daily schedule, and they have a weekly meeting every Monday morning. Oselya is part of the international Emmaus network, a solidarity based movement that consists of multiple residential communes and second hand stores all over the world. Nowadays, Oselya is well known in the area and the whole of Ukraine. The community organises a yearly Christmas dinner for the homeless in Lviv and has an extra shelter where people who live on the street can shower, eat something and get a fresh outfit. Oselya collects clothes from big clothing bins in the city of Lviv. These bins have been placed in the city by the initiative itself and were the first ones in the whole of Ukraine. The collected clothes, refurbished furniture and all sorts of other items are sold in the second hand store. The Oselyata run most things by themselves. This gives them a sense of strength and responsibility as a group. Oselya is a great example of social change in Ukraine, a country in progress.