



INTERNATIONAL
EXCHANGE

NAME

HALYNA KURYLO

FROM

UKRAINE

TO

USA

PROGRAM

Global UGRAD



0123456789



On Recovery and Reaching Out

It's One Thing to Know You Need Support and Another to Ask for It

Halyna Kurylo applied to the U.S. Department of State-sponsored Global Undergraduate Exchange Program (Global UGRAD) program twice. After not getting selected the first time, Halyna, who was severely underweight at 80 pounds, went into treatment realizing that her eating disorder was limiting what she wanted to do.

The next time she interviewed for the Global UGRAD program, Halyna explained one reason she wanted to go to the United States was to see how education about anorexia works; she wanted to set up a non-governmental organization (NGO) related to eating disorders in Ukraine. This time she was accepted.

“The exchange experience not only helped me grow professionally. But personally it was also a major stepping stone in my recovery, which I see in retrospect.”

As a foreign language interpreting major, she chose the American Studies program at the State University of New York (SUNY) in Oswego. The whole exchange experience was life altering, she says, and it was

especially helpful to move away from her family to live on her own for a year.

“Anorexia is usually a family-related systemic disorder. You don’t recover from an eating disorder right away – I had gained weight back but my thoughts had not changed.”

Unsure and afraid that a new place would trigger her behaviors, Halyna made friends abroad but still found herself struggling. She spent a lot of time preoccupied with studying and restricting herself from eating American food.

When she went to the on-campus medical center to seek out counseling, it turned out one counselor was in the process of writing a doctorate about eating disorders. Halyna started to talk with the counselor, and it seemed easier for her to open up and share in English.

“Expressing my emotions in a foreign language didn’t seem as exposing, even though I was saying the same thing. When I’m speaking English, I’m taking on a different personality.”

Halyna continued her counseling throughout the academic year, and when her program ended, a handful of the over one hundred Global UGRAD fellows were allowed to secure an internship and receive a visa extension. Halyna's desire to gain practical experience at an NGO earned her an internship in the Chicago area with The National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders, Inc. (ANAD).

The internship in the United States helped Halyna to see the gap that existed in Ukraine. It is not in psychological or medical health, as there are specialists. It's the social component – the awareness-raising about eating disorders, information on where to locate specialists, connections with parents, and education about secondary conditions.

After returning from the United States, Halyna finished her undergraduate degree and then moved out of her hometown to Kyiv for a graduate degree in Social Work and Social Policy.

Eager to do something similar to ANAD, Halyna also applied for and received a U.S. Department of State Alumni Small Grant to set up a school prevention program for 16 year old girls. The Ukrainian schools had seminars on drug addictions, alcohol, and safe sex, but nothing about eating disorders. Youth are more likely to develop eating disorders, as was Halyna's own experience, so she really wanted to reach this age group.

"I talk with them not about if they have a problem, but if their best friend has a problem."

While working the hotline during her internship in Chicago, she realized it was often the friends or family who were calling to find help for someone they cared about. When Halyna was in school, she said it would have been very easy for her friends and classmates to have noticed her classic anorexic behavior.

If there was such a place to go and be heard when I was younger, maybe I would have gotten to the doctor, not when my BMI (body mass index) was 12, but before. It would be easier and not take so many years to recover. I also think if I did not go to the United States, it would have taken me longer to recover; for me it was very helpful.

The experience also propelled Halyna to follow through and start her NGO on eating disorders and other psychosocial disabilities in Ukraine, and now it supports other women in their own awareness and journeys forward.