

# UKRAINE: Group raises awareness

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orphans. "Traffickers are getting this information on when these kids get released and then they target them. We want to seal this information so it's not available," Wisner said.

He added, "It's not just Ukraine. It's all over, but we're targeting this information specifically to Ukraine."

In terms of abuse, the committee is currently creating a plan to gain access to orphanages in order to monitor what happens inside and tackle abuse where present.

Within two years, the committee will put its plan into action through awareness and education. Awareness includes prosecution, counseling and media. Education includes sexuality (both social and moral repercussions), health issues like sexually transmitted diseases and birth control.

Why the committee has spent and continues to spend time carefully planning is because they are dealing with a very complicated situation.

First, Wisner said there is the problem of entering orphanages. Many orphanages have closed doors whether they be physical or social obstructions. Children may be able to go out but outsiders may not go in — though orphanages usually welcome persons bringing supplies such as school items and clothing.

And once inside, completing social work as a teacher, doctor or missionary remains very difficult. Wisner said if an orphanage notices an outsider trying to monitor orphans that person will no longer be welcome.

Despite obstacles, though, Wisner said the situation has improved.

"More and more doors are opening and you can get in if you have the right authority and the right government backing," he said.

When the committee identifies an instance of child abuse, Wisner said they take action.

"The biggest difficulty is evidence," he said. "Look at the orphanage situation. Who is going to believe the

orphans? A lot of the time, the doctors looking for physical proof of abuse work for the orphanage."

He added that people who are able to help are sometimes connected to the person responsible for the abuse. Also, because orphanages are so close-knit, disconnecting these individuals in order to uncover the truth is not an easy task.

But in spite of all of this, Wisner said he does not want to paint a negative picture of Ukraine.


"It's a wonderful country and there are some incredibly wonderful things happening," he said.

He added, "You've got a country that had a huge political transformation from communism to democracy in 16 years. People are banding together and there's a lot of progress being made as far as demanding social reform."

To learn more about Wisner's mission, visit [www.chx-fof.org/michbridge.htm](http://www.chx-fof.org/michbridge.htm).

Louise Nelle can be contacted at 439-9339, or [lnelle@petoskeynews.com](mailto:lnelle@petoskeynews.com).

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