

# "Appreciate what you have!"

*Karina and Denys are refugees from Ukraine. They have been at Durendael for a few weeks now and have been placed in the third year of the bilingual pre-university education class, which suits them well. We spoke to them about their flight from Ukraine, their experiences with the Dutch education system and their plans for the future.*



## **On the run from the war**

“I was working in Aruba in an exchange program as an interpreter/translator for Russian-speaking business people,” says Denys, “when the war broke out. We all thought it wouldn't be long, but things turned out differently. My mother called me to arrange a ticket. Not home, but to Amsterdam. She and my sister Karina had also arrived there in the meantime.’ Karina continues: ‘We fled via the border with Moldova. The air-raid siren went off constantly, which was very frightening. In Moldova we could stay with family. We stayed there for a week because we had to wait for the airspace to open. We then traveled to Bucharest (Romania) by bus. And from there we were able to book a flight to Amsterdam.’ In total we were on the road for about two and a half weeks.

## **Contact with the home front**

‘It is fun with our host family in Oisterwijk. It's a big house and we have two rooms to ourselves, which is nice. The host parents are also very nice and help us to build a life here. I am also very happy that I can just go to school. And we have become a member of the Tilburg Open Rowing Association (TOR). That offers a lot of distraction from the war. Every day we call daddy to see how he and our other family are doing. He's fine and he's safe. Fortunately, he works far from the front. We can communicate well with each other via Starlink\*. Our house is in the center of Kiev, there is no real fighting there. That was more on the outskirts of the city. But of course you never know.’”

## **Good match with bilingual education**

Karina and Denys are now both in the third year vwo-tto at 2College Durendael which has turned out to be a good match. Denys: 'We were actually immediately included in the class. When we entered the first class, they were preparing the science fair in chemistry. The students all worked in small groups, Karina and I were also divided. Since our classmates speak English very well, we can understand each other very well. In fact, I think our presence forces them to always speak English in class," he chuckles. That way the knife cuts both ways.’”

## **Another education system**

Although their classmates regularly complain when they have a lot of homework or a difficult test, Denys sees it differently. 'The education system in the Netherlands differs a lot from that in Ukraine. You really do have a separate department for each level. That doesn't exist with us. In our country you are simply classified by age. Everyone follows the same program and the same subjects. You don't have a choice and you just have to see that you make it. Here is much more personal attention. Appreciate what you have' he concludes. And by that he doesn't just mean freedom of choice at school.

## **"I'm very happy here"**

For Karina it is the first time that she attends physical secondary education. Recently, she had online school for two years because of corona. She therefore finds it very important to keep in touch with her friends who she knows from primary school. Because of the war, they are now spread all over

Europe. "I am very happy here," she says. "Even though I'm far from home, I can see the benefits of staying in the west. I would also like to study here. But I'm not just in charge of course.' Denys also sees a future in Europe or possibly even America. "My work in Aruba has already opened my eyes."

### **Future in the West**

"But now we're going to enjoy the May holiday first," the brother and sister say when I ask about their future plans. "Maybe the war will last another four or five months. Then we'll look further. We have adapted very quickly here, so we will succeed in the future. Karina doesn't know what she wants to study yet, she is only 14 so she has the time. For now she is very happy with the guitar that her host mother gave her. She likes to play on it. Karina: 'I am a creative person and I do see a future for myself in that direction, something with music or drawing.' Denys has plans in IT. Is he not afraid that he will be called up for military service? "I won't be 18 until August and maybe the war will be over by then. Otherwise I'll hide in Aruba. If I have to, I'll fight, but I'd rather not!"

*\* The Starlink satellite network of the company SpaceX of Elon Musk provides more than 5000 locations in Ukraine with internet.*