

## Miss Ukraine California Takes a Stand

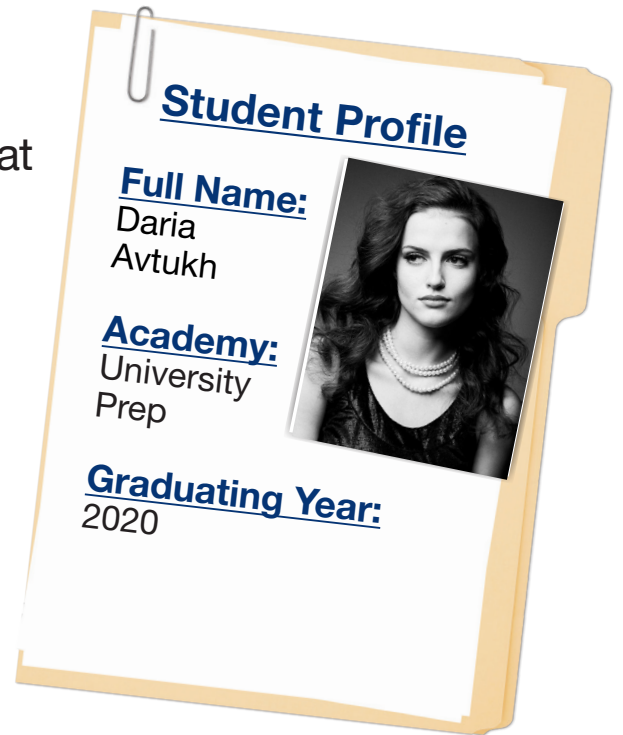
Pageants never really interested me,” says Daria Avtukh, winner of the [2023 Miss Ukraine California Pageant](#). A full time community college student and an early graduate of the Visions In Education Class of 2020, she was at first a little hesitant to participate in the Miss Ukraine California pageant.

“One of the organizers of the pageant reached out to me and said that they got a recommendation from someone to invite me as a possible candidate,” says Daria. “The determinative moment was when my mom (my best friend and biggest supporter) strongly advised me to participate, after I told her about the invitation that I received. I thought that it would be a great opportunity to draw more attention to my country and the current situation there.”

Even as a Visions student, Daria was driven to pursue her personal goals. Looking for a way to **graduate high school** early and move on to the next phase of her life, Daria came to Visions in 2019 where she found support in her teacher, Julie Szukalski.

“My relationship with my teacher was great and full of mutual respect and support,” says Daria. “I was so lucky to have her as my teacher and I’m immensely grateful for all of her feedback, care, and support that she’s given me throughout my days at Visions. Years after my graduation, we’re still supporting each other in our both little and big life celebrations.”

At Visions, Daria was able to get her high school work done while also balancing her hobbies and work as a dance instructor. *(continued on page 2)*



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## Taking the Stage, Taking a Stand

After graduating Visions in 2020, Daria has attended community college with the intent to transfer to a university in Fall 2023. Since she graduated early, she had plenty of time to pursue her passions like ballroom dance, theater acting, modeling, and more recently championing the Ukrainian cause.

“I never thought that there would be a full-scale war in my homeland,” says Daria. “And that I would have to become an activist in order to help save lives and the culture that’s so important to me.”

Inspired to lend her voice in support of her home, Daria put her name forth for Miss Ukraine California consideration and was part of a panel of twelve competitors that would go on to the final competition. Daria trained for six weeks, refining things like speech and poise, representing Ukraine in a promotional video, while also choreographing and executing solo performances. At the final competition, Daria’s talent, articulation, and poise carried her to the finals and ultimately **won her the title of 2023 Miss Ukraine California!**

Unsurprisingly, winning the competition has only inspired Daria to take on more challenges and risks in the future. When asked if she had any advice for students today, she stressed the importance of remaining open-minded and flexible to continue to meet life’s challenges.

“It’s important to stay true to yourself, while keeping your mind open,” says Daria. “Open for new opportunities, new ways of thinking, different opinions, new skills, and new goals. Your life has a purpose, and figuring out what that purpose is might be a lifelong journey.”

