

– *focus on children* –

Fostering: what's that?

For anyone working in Eastern Europe or Russia, the socio-demographic profile of Belarus will hold no surprises (see table overleaf). But, unlike its neighbours, Belarus has not benefited from significant Western investment. Between 1990 and 2000, the rate of admission of children to orphanages had doubled. The unregulated development of a market economy was creating an increasing gulf between rich and poor and the numbers of families falling into poverty was rising. Inflation seemed out of control. In addition, the political situation was not promising. A difficult record on human rights and an uncomfortable relationship with large philanthropic institutions created some hesitancy from would-be supporters.

Superimposed on this was the huge effect that the 1986 explosion of the nuclear reactor at Chernobyl had on the health of the nation.

After an upsetting visit in 1998 and an initial emotional response to the situation – involving a drive across Europe with material aid – I began to think about what might be of longer-term benefit. Orphanages seemed the obvious target, but the idea of piloting a

fostering project initially received a distinctly chilly

by Margaret Bamford

response. So, with a small grant from DfID, we invited a delegation of senior Government officials to West Sussex to visit childcare facilities and talk to foster carers. They were clearly impressed and a partnership was established.



Training has been cascaded throughout the country

Focus on children

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FOSTERING IN BELARUS

West Sussex Social Services would provide technical expertise; DfID agreed to fund the UK costs and UNICEF the Belarus costs; and the Belarus Ministry of Education committed itself to changing the legislation.

Three years later, over 1,000 children have been placed in foster families and 750 foster families recruited. With single-minded support from our Belarus colleagues and the expertise of four magnificent and committed West Sussex trainers, we have trained over 160 participants from all areas of Belarus in 12 one-week sessions. Training, roughly based on 'Choosing to Foster' programmes, has been cascaded throughout the country. Articles have been written in professional journals and a number of feature articles have appeared in local newspapers.

BELARUS STATISTICS FOR 2001

- Population 9.9m and falling
- Child population 2.5 m
- 33,000 children in orphanages. Rate of admission rising (now beginning to fall)
- Death rate exceeded birth rate by 111%
- Life expectancy falling
- Birth defects increased by 161% in the last 9 years
- Abortion rate 50% of all pregnancies
- 75% marriages end in divorce

Sources: Ministry of Education annual returns;
Ministry of Health annual returns;
UN/UNDP National Human Development Report

Advertising videos have been promoted on national television, and interest sustained by local radio stations in Belarus. The legislation has been changed to make fostering legal and to provide cash allowances for foster carers. In addition, with help from the West Sussex Foster Care Association, and Families for Children (a West Sussex-based fostering agency), the Belarusian Association of Foster Carers has been created.

We have learnt many lessons, including:

- * Thorough preparation and clear communication between all partners cannot be over-emphasised. Writing and rewriting many drafts of a project proposal to which all partners could subscribe was tedious but invaluable in ensuring engagement and ownership. But visiting each of the partners separately to do this turned out to be enormously

time consuming and unnecessary. A management/steering group would have been much better!

- A contract setting out what each partner agrees to do, while not legally binding or enforceable, is a demonstration of goodwill, promising that each partner will endeavour to live up to their clear and separate responsibilities.
- Sound in-country administrative and interpreting arrangements are essential. Interpreting is definitely an art and considerably more than the spontaneous translation of words that can otherwise emerge as an incomprehensible jumble. There is no doubt that the skill and commitment of our two interpreters added greatly to the success of the project.
- Evaluation is so important, but regrettably we have no qualitative assessment of the effectiveness of our project. The qualitative data is powerful enough with many heart warming individual stories but it would have been good to have had a quantitative perspective overall.

Moving on

We have undertaken to demonstrate that, given practical assistance, friendship and access to specialist help, including periods of respite care in foster homes, many mums can be helped to keep their babies. With full funding from the Community Fund we have appointed two Belarusian social workers to work in two maternity hospitals in Minsk and will provide early years training for groups of professionals in Belarus. The grant will also provide for the development of parent support groups and respite care.

Working with colleagues from another culture has been a hugely rewarding experience for all involved. There is no monopoly of wisdom; rather, the mutual exchange of ideas and shedding of preconceptions. Together, we have been able to begin the process of securing a better life for vulnerable children. We were fortunate to be in the right place, at the right time and to meet the right people. Together, we have made a difference.

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Children's rights in Russia

*Daryl Hardman, Director,
The BEARR Trust*

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is the most widely ratified treaty in the world. It promises children the right to life, liberty, education and health care. In addition to many other fundamental protections, it also provides protection to children in armed conflict, protection from discrimination, protection from torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, protection within the justice system, and protection from economic exploitation. In the light of this Convention, the countries of the former Soviet Union, whilst having taken several steps in the right direction, still have some way to go.

The ravages of poverty

Paradoxically, in a country that now boasts the largest number of millionaires in the world, poverty in Russia is on the increase. Poverty leads to family break-up, to children taking to the street and not attending school, or being sent to orphanages. It leads to substance abuse, to poor health – including a staggering rise in HIV/Aids – to crime, and to a society in which abuse of the underclass is the norm. It is estimated that between 1 and 2 million people in Russia, many of whom are teenagers, are HIV-infected. The country's epidemic remains one of the fastest-growing in the world.

A step in the right direction

Russia's reform of its narcotics law in May this year is a positive contribution to the defence of children's rights. It means that individuals charged with possession of small amounts of narcotics will be subject to administrative, but not criminal penalties – i.e. not prison. This will have the dual benefit of encouraging drug users to come forward for needle exchange programmes and making it less easy for corrupt elements in the police to bribe the individual users while ignoring the dealers. The Russian government still needs to take measures that would ensure all injecting drug users have

good access to sterile syringes and opiate substitution therapy. Unfortunately, the latter is still illegal. Among the young, the tendency is to substitute drugs for the abuse of alcohol, sadly endemic in the older generations.

Caring for children with disabilities

Even if the family has no social problems, children with even minor disabilities are still routinely taken away from their families at an early age. Margaret Bamford's report on developments in fostering in Belarus shows what a struggle it can be to keep children with disabilities at home. In Russia too, families are led to believe that they will be ostracised for raising an abandoned or disabled child at home. The result is that abandoned children are consigned to the status of 'orphan' and, owing to their background, labelled in their medical charts with physical and psychological 'risk factors'. Children in orphanages become victims of long-held prejudices that abandoned children are in some way 'defective'. Many are simply classed as mentally deficient.

BEARR shows the way

Looking back on BEARR projects and BEARR supporters over the years, it is gratifying to see how many are concerned with improving the lives of children in Russia and the former Soviet Union. Many projects have been adopted at local or federal level as models. BEARR's long-time partner in Moscow, the OZON Child Protection Centre, has been instrumental in getting Russian legislation amended, raising the age of consent.

This current edition of the BEARR Newsletter gives a flavour of some of the other work being done. Sadly, we do not have room to include everything.

CHILD PROTECTION IN RUSSIA

Children need parents

The number of children in residential institutions in Russia is variously estimated at between 650,000 and slightly over a million. NGOs can make no more than a small impact on this enormous problem by direct work. A partnership between the Early Intervention Institute in St Petersburg, EveryChild and HealthProm are therefore seeking to mobilise the Russian regional and federal governments to devote more resources and energy to keeping these children with their families. Stewart Britten, writing on behalf of the partnership, tells of its work.

*Stewart Britten,
HealthProm*

The most common perception of those with responsibility for these children is that, within the baby homes where they are placed until their fourth birthday, they are warm and well fed. There is little understanding, however, of the pain and damage that results from their separation from their parents and that, indeed, these children are harmed by the institutions – in a way

separation from their parents had only a gradual, slow impact on state care for children. Two powerful films made in Britain by James and Joyce Robertson had a much more rapid effect. One of these, 'John', led to closure of residential nurseries in Britain and in the many other countries in which it was shown. Our partnership has dubbed 'John' into Russian.

municipal levels and those who make decisions on putting individual children into institutions.

At the outset, we met with and obtained the full support of the Russian Federal Ministries of Health and Education, UNICEF and the World Bank in Moscow, all of which are very worried about this problem. Audience research – to learn about the attitudes which the film will need to address – was then contracted. On the basis of this, the team decided to make a film which will show a small child being restored to his or her parents after a period in a baby home. The main message will be that useful work can be done to help parents care for their children.

The first of three shootings of the film has been completed in Sverdlovsk Oblast and found its own focus, the shortage of housing; the main baby subject of the film so far is in a baby home because his devoted mother has no housing. There will be two more periods of shooting to show changes in the children filmed.

The films' producer and director is BBC-experienced and fluent in Russian and has made a number of films in Russia. EveryChild provides able management and has strong links with the child care administration in Sverdlovsk Oblast, which has



Photo: still shot taken from the film

which impairs their capacity to form lasting relationships and which may therefore lead to them becoming poor parents. This would seem in part to be a continuation of Soviet thinking, that the state was a better parent than natural parents.

In the West, research on the effects on children of prolonged

Because our partnership believes that making a powerful film is the best way to change perceptions and mobilise government to rethink how children should be cared for, we have also ventured into film making ourselves. The priority targets are those who make policy at federal, regional and

The future of the world begins with our children!

by *Lia Saralidze*

In every country and historical period, child abuse and neglect have always been widespread and the issues relating to them controversial and tabooed. Georgia is no exception.

But during Georgia's communist era, even the term 'child abuse' did not exist. Therefore in Georgia's medical, legal, and social state systems there has been no education on the significance, forms, results and ways of responding to child abuse. As a result, childcare specialists, parents and the children who themselves face abuse are not able to identify it or get appropriate support or treatment.



Photo: courtesy Lia Saralidze

The Child Support Centre staff

Purpose and goals

In 1999, a group of pediatricians established the Public Health and Medicine Development Fund of Georgia (PHMDF) to promote public health, further the development of medicine, disseminate the principles of a healthy lifestyle and support health, social and environmental protection systems.

Currently, the Fund's main objective is to establish a child protection system in Georgia, in order to protect children from all forms of violence and rehabilitate the victims of abuse. Between 1999 and 2002, the Fund implemented several projects, which provided opportunities to study the spread of child abuse in Georgia, to monitor children's rights in institutions working with children, to establish regional child protection centres for specialists working with children and to run educational seminars on modern approaches to bringing up children and on identifying and preventing abuse.

Tbilisi's Child Support Centre

The Tbilisi Child Support Centre for abused and neglected children was set up in 2002, supported by PHMDF thanks to funding from CORDAID (Netherlands). Its main objectives are to:

- raise awareness
- de-stigmatise abuse and neglect
- strengthen target (child) groups and thereby further protect their rights
- support victims of abuse
- improve existing legislation.

The multidisciplinary team at the Tbilisi Child Support Centre serves children from birth up to the age of 18, as well as their family members. Beneficiaries are provided with medical care, counselling, psychotherapy and psychosocial and medical rehabilitation involving both victims and abusers. All consultations and therapy sessions are confidential and free of charge.

CHILD PROTECTION IN GEORGIA

Since March 2002 the Tbilisi Child Support Centre has given psychological and pediatric support to more than 800 children. Over 200 families have received legal and psychological consultations, and at least 200 professionals have benefited from individual consultancy. So far, around 285 children from different institutions and families have participated in the Centre's educational seminars on abuse, children's rights, substance abuse and the peaceful resolution of conflicts. 223 specialists, volunteers and parents have attended training courses on similar topics.

Laying foundations for the future

The Child Support Centre is the first and the only centre of its kind. It works alongside other governmental and non-governmental organisations in the field of abuse and neglect to meet the

increasing demand for its services, all of which are provided in the best interests of Georgia's children and their families.

Child abuse and neglect is a field that requires systematic, persistent and qualified work from the specialists involved. All this work should be covered by legislation. Therefore we seek to collaborate with partner organisations to improve the legal foundations and build a system of child protection that meets the needs of all children and families who are victims of abuse.

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By Lia Saralidze is Executive Director, Public Health and Medicine Development Fund of Georgia

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located suitable children and parents to film. The psychologist and pediatrician from the Early Intervention Institute play a key role in ensuring that the film is a genuinely Russian film that responds to the information needs of the Russian childcare establishment, and that children and parents filmed are supported during and after filming.

The new film and 'John' will both be accompanied by written materials. The films should stimulate and affect audiences, and the written materials should tackle their information gaps, views and concerns and provide material for viewers of the films to pass on, as well as providing choices for

action. Both should inspire and equip target groups to campaign for change for many years to come. We expect them to be completed early in 2005 and dissemination, through NGO networks and federal and regional ministries, will start thereafter. We anticipate the need for a long-term and committed campaign by many dissemination partners to overcome resistance to change.

The Health & Social Care Programme of the Department for International Development provided a grant of £44,750 and the World Bank has contributed \$7,500, but the film is being professionally made and even with all the project's partners

giving much time free, there is still a considerable shortfall.

Until the need for broad-based policy change is widely and deeply felt, including by those with power to shape policy and strategies at all levels, large numbers of children will continue to enter institutions. That is why, for probably all of our team, this is the most important piece of work we have ever undertaken.

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The BEARR Trust endeavours to include as wide a debate as possible in the Newsletter to capture the diversity of NGO work in the UK and Russia and a range of opinions. However, The BEARR Trust cannot be held responsible for the views expressed by authors in their articles.

DISABLED CHILDREN IN ST PETERSBURG

Perspectives

'Perspectives' is a UK registered charity set up in 2002 as a sister charity to 'Perspektiven' e.V. (Germany 1992) and 'Perspektivy' (Russia 1999). The charities share common aims: to work with socially disadvantaged, neglected and physically and/or mentally disabled people, particularly among children and young people in St Petersburg. Chairman, June Taylor and volunteer, Lucy Goodhew, describe here the charity's work and the difference it is making to children's lives.

*by June Taylor and
Lucy Goodhew*

The Children's Home in Pavlovsk is a state-run residential home which houses around 600 children between the ages of 4 and 18, the most severely disabled in House No 4, where we work. The rooms contain up to 15 beds or cots and are staffed by one untrained carer (sanitarka) who works a 24-hour shift, cleaning, washing, feeding and changing the children, which leaves little time for playing with them or giving them individual attention.

The charities aim to improve upon the basic minimum provided by the state by supplying additional helpers, therapeutic and care materials and equipment designed for the disabled.

Initially it was only possible to work with the aptly named 'lying groups': the most disabled children, deemed 'not worth educating', who lay in bed six days out of seven, only being taken out once a week to be bathed. Now there are people working in each of the eleven groups, dressing, feeding, caring for the children and taking them out. Thanks to the long-term financial support of the German charity 'Kindernothilfe' e.V. a school for 12 children and a kindergarten for 30 children have been established. A major triumph has been the setting up of two 'Adaptatsia' rooms in which the weaker children moving from the infant home are supported and taught, as they adapt to their new surroundings. The death rate amongst new arrivals is now less than a quarter of what it was.

Psycho-Neurological Internat in Peterhof

At the age of 18 the Pavlovsk residents are moved to this adult home, remaining there for the rest of their lives. This understaffed facility – one sanitarka looks after 30 residents – houses 1000 disabled, mentally ill, formerly homeless, and old people in cramped conditions. The buildings are in a very bad state and the residents have little or nothing to occupy their time. From 1999, Russian staff regularly visited our 'Pavlovsk Children' and since the year 2000 staff and volunteers have been working with around 70 residents, providing clothes, a laundrette, a variety of workshops, an art studio, an educational centre and a café. A part-time masseur has been employed to help alleviate the pain that some residents suffer after having spent years lying in one position.

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Photo courtesy June Taylor

Volunteer with a child at Pavlovsk.

BOOK REVIEW

Anand Shukla, Business Development Manager at Allavida, reviews *Stalin: the Court of the Red Tsar* by Simon Sebag Montefiore

We are still some way away from understanding the true nature of Stalin's regime.

One obvious puzzle is trying to work out what made Stalin tick. As Orlando Figes has noted, 'it is hard to tell when insane paranoia supplants scheming rationality'. Another basic question is more tangible – just how did he manage to control the Bolshevik Party?

It is to Simon Sebag Montefiore's credit that, in this highly original account, he succeeds in throwing some light on these murky issues. Rather than provide another standard Stalin history, he has written an intimate account of Stalin and his court, showing how they ruled and how they lived – an unapologetic study of high politics.

Sebag Montefiore has based his work on extensive primary research, making the most of his access to the newly opened personal files of Bolshevik leaders that were transferred to the Russian State Archives in 2000. The book also benefits from his interviews with relatives of the key figures from the time – the Mikoyans, Berias and Malenkovs.

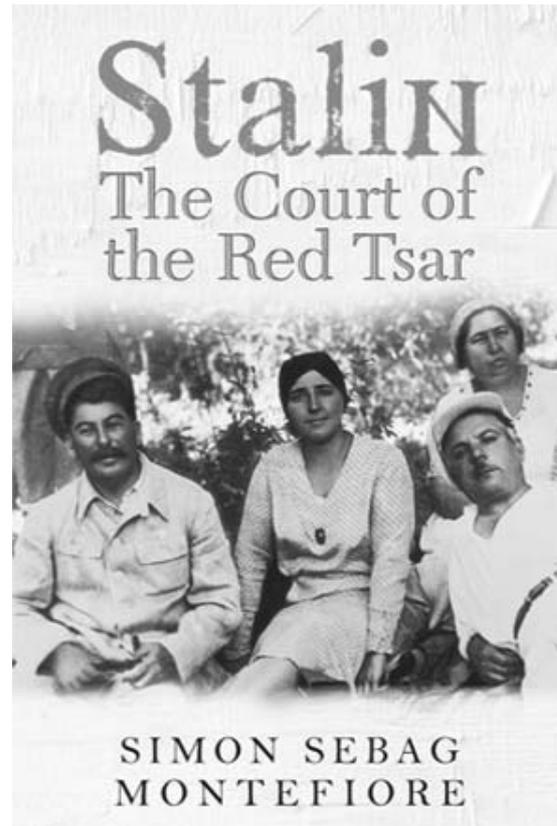
His most significant achievement is to provide a fully-rounded portrait of Stalin. While the despot's malice lurks in every page of this book, Sebag

Montefiore is anxious to avoid the clichés of Stalin as 'enigma', 'madman' or 'evil genius'. So, as well as the vindictive murderer, we also come to know Stalin the flirt, the jovial and gregarious party host, the lover of literature (he claimed to read up to 500 pages daily), the fine singer and movie buff. A man whose standing in the party relied upon charm, not fear, he is far removed from the one-dimensional machine politician so disdained by Trotsky.

As with the individual, so with the Kremlin, which is also far removed from its grey and terrifying image. 'Oh what a wonderful time it was ...', Voroshilov's wife remembered, 'What simple, nice, friendly relationships.' The atmosphere only changed – decisively – after the murder of Kirov in 1934.

While examining the motives behind the purges of the 1930s, Sebag-Montefiore concludes that they were 'not just a consequence of Stalin's monstrosity'. They were also a reflection of the systematic nature of murder in Bolshevik Russia which began in 1917 and did not stop until Stalin died.

I find this unconvincing. It is undoubtedly true that organised



murder of the Bolsheviks' perceived enemies was a state industry. But it is the assault upon fellow Bolsheviks that is the crucially different element behind this particular campaign. It was Stalin's vindictive and malicious aggression towards all perceived opposition to him personally, whether fellow Old Bolsheviks or army officers, that spurred on the terror. And when a man fell, Stalin ensured that all those connected to him, friends, family (including children), lovers, proteges and acquaintances fell as well.

Stalin drew up quotas for killings in the regions. No names were specified – simply an order that allotted numbers to be killed in what Sebag-Montefiore describes as a 'lottery of slaughter'. Even within the murderous context of Bolshevik Russia (and the local momentum which the purges undoubtedly took on in the regions) it is hard to imagine the

CONFERENCE

irrational cruelty of the purges occurring under any other Bolshevik ruler. Responsibility lies firmly at Stalin's door.

It is more comforting, by far, to reside in the belief that Stalin and his henchmen were simple madmen. What *The Court of the Red Tsar* shows is just how the

capacity for evil is able to co-exist with charm, kindness and generosity. This intimate history is,

at its heart, an insight into the human condition – and an extremely unsettling one at that.

Stalin: the Court of the Red Tsar (720pp), published by Phoenix, costs £9.99

BEARR's launch of *Stalin: The Court of the Red Tsar* in paperback, held at King's College, London, on 21st June 2004, raised over £2600 to support the work of The BEARR Trust.

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Family Project

The Family Project supports families who wish to keep their disabled children at home rather than bow to pressure to hand them over to the state. The project started in a small way in 2000, providing families with material and emotional support, but last March we opened our first day centre, as a pilot scheme, with one full-time social worker and volunteer and part-time visiting therapists and teachers.

A volunteer for Perspektivy reports back

Lucy Goodhew has spent four months working as a volunteer for Perspektivy in the Pavlovsk Children's Home. She writes:

'The Family Project works with children whose families, usually single mothers, have had the courage to bring up their disabled child at home. I divide my time between seven families; my presence mainly allows the parents some time to themselves: to go out to work, or generally just get things done without constantly having to care for their disabled child.

'Often these families live in one or two room flats high up in an apartment block, with no lift. Because of the 'around the clock' attention these kids need,

the families can easily become isolated and the parents need a break of some sort just to remain sane and motivated. The volunteer is a fresh face for both the child and the parents.

'The Family Project year culminated in a three week summer camp when nine volunteers and two lots of seven children lived together in a wooden dacha in the beautiful countryside outside St Petersburg. There, we played and did exercises with the children, splashed around in the paddling pool, went for long walks around the lakes and swam from our small private beach. The children ate well, had a consistent routine and an overdose of clean, fresh air. Although the days were very long, we were a super team and I remember taking full advantage of relaxing in our private banya (sauna) at day's end.

'What made it absolutely worthwhile was seeing the warmth and happiness with which the parents received their children at the end, having had a good break to recharge and begin again.'

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Come to the ...

Friday 19 November 2004 at the Charity Centre, London

BEARR Trust Conference on 19 November 2004

'Successes and Failures in Promoting Change: Health, Social Care and Human Rights Projects in Russia and the Region'. With government and other grants dwindling for work in Russia and the region, The BEARR Trust Annual Conference this year takes a critical overview of European and Russian NGO health, social care and human rights projects past and present to see what lessons can be learned for the future. Guest speakers include Oleg Zykov – Director of 'No to Alcoholism and Drugs' (NAN), Mary McAuley – Head of Ford Foundation Moscow (1996-2002) and Robert van Voren – General Secretary of the Geneva Initiative on Psychiatry (GIP).

Discount rate for Friends: £30. Non-members: £35. (includes lunch)

CHILD MENTAL HEALTH CARE IN TBILISI

The making of our 'Open Studio'

by *Teona Kacheishvili*

In the corner of a dark, locked room at a special school, there stood a piano. 'Let me play for the children and sing to them', my mother suggested, but her request was denied by 'the authorities'. Other parents were surprised: 'Is music not permitted for our children?' they asked.

Soon after this, a small group of parents of disabled children began holding music lessons every weekend at the Tbilisi Youth Palace, the place where my daughter Maka's grandmother worked. But these lessons had to be held 'underground' because the authorities were against it. They didn't like the 'look' of these special children.

The power of music

At the lessons, our children studied simple vocal exercises and sang songs. We discovered that these developed the children's sense of rhythm and helped their concentration; speech problems were fewer. The positive environment also gave the children a great deal of happiness. And all this made us, their parents, more enthusiastic and more powerful. Very soon we held our first concert. A volunteer psychologist and art therapist joined us. The number of parents wishing their children to join grew.

Music lessons were gradually transformed into music therapy, and our volunteer grandmother enrolled on a music therapy course at the Borozdin School. We also started art therapy, and an

exhibition of our children's paintings was accompanied by music. Very soon we realised that we needed to work every day, not only at weekends. We also needed more working space.

Winning support

Some other parents and I established the NGO Parents' Bridge and we started to fight. I was everywhere: at the Town Hall, at the State Chancellery, in ministries. I spent a whole summer knocking on doors. At last I achieved success: the authorities gave us two empty, dilapidated rooms, without a toilet or wash basin, within the official school for children with disabilities. We needed a lot of money for renovation works. I prepared a project plan and started to apply to different funds and organisations. Then God sent me the Tbilisi Office of Geneva Initiative on Psychiatry (GIP), and its Head of Mission, Mr. Jan Vorisek.

Setting an example for the Municipality

GIP financed our project and helped me with recommendations on how to work, making it possible for twenty disabled children to get permanent help for a whole year. We renovated and redecorated our space ourselves. It seems that this

shamed the Municipality into renovating the playground in the yard of the school.

That's how the 'Open Studio' Rehabilitation Centre for disabled children was created. For children with disabilities, its doors are always open. Now the Centre has 19 members – children and youth with disabilities – who take regular courses in music therapy, art therapy, physical therapy and drama therapy.

Plans for the future

Time is moving on. My disabled daughter Maka is growing up and so are her friends. But there are so many new things we still want to do:

- enlarge the 'Open Studio' and broaden the work there
- work in greater depth with parents and get them more involved
- assist in developing curricula for special schools
- create a centre for non-formal, inclusive education
- set up a 'House of Hope' model of social therapy (there is only one house of social therapy in Georgia and all places are taken).

So many ideas still, and so little time. But, as the old Chinese proverb goes: 'Even the longest journey starts with a single step'. We have taken it and are ready for the next one.

Teona Kacheishvili is the mother of 14 year-old Maka and founder member of the Tbilisi Open Studio

Reaching out to Russia's railway children

by *David Maidment*

The Railway Children was founded in 1995 from within the UK railway industry to raise funds for partner local NGOs. These, in turn, reach out to runaway and abandoned children living around railway or other transport terminals worldwide.

This focus arose from a simple risk assessment of street children, undertaken by the Consortium for Street Children, that highlighted the causes and consequences of being a street child. A review of the member NGOs' intervention strategies indicated a lack of emphasis on the first few days when a child was on his or her own – seen as the most critical time when the child was most vulnerable to abuse and exploitation and also the best opportunity to help reunite the child and his or her family.

Acting quickly to curb gang culture

Further work both at the Consortium and within Amnesty's Children's Human Rights Network identified street children – particularly those who have little or no parental contact (varying from 3% to 10% of those classified as 'street children' under the UNICEF definitions) – as some of the most vulnerable of all children. Half of

the articles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) are regularly violated for street children. Because of their isolation from society, which sees them at best as nuisances and at worst as vermin to be eradicated, rejection is all too often followed by society condoning abuse in the name of security.

This is particularly apparent when children have spent some time on the street and form gangs for mutual support and protection. It is therefore all the more important to try to make contact with these children as early as possible before they become embittered and unable to return easily to a more structured and positive lifestyle.

Working with partners across the globe

Railway Children's first partner project was at Bucharest station in Romania, and most of the initial projects were in India where the vast railway network is home to thousands of children, some as young as four or five. In 2002, Railway Children entered into two new partnerships serving street children in Russia – with Aid to Russia and the Republics in Chita, Siberia, and with Love Russia in Moscow. In Chita, the British NGO partner was funding

a Russian NGO that provides food, clothes, counselling and support to children living around the station – an important junction on the Trans-Siberian Railway.

Pilot project under way

In May 2003, the Moscow Area Head of Railway Police, Colonel Nikolai Zacharov, took a Love Russia/Railway Children party to see the child reception arrangements at Moscow Kursk station. Colonel Zakharov indicated that between 300 and 500 unaccompanied children a month were arriving at Moscow's railway stations, all of whom are running away from abuse or neglect at home. The resources available to the police to work in a helpful way with these children were woefully few.

The Railway Children is currently carrying out a pilot project with the Moscow Railway Police at Kursk station. The project recruits volunteer 'champions' from universities and churches to befriend the children as they go through the bureaucratic and frightening experience of being picked up by the authorities on station platforms. If this is seen to be successful, the Railway Children will pursue extensions of the project to other

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STREET CHILDREN IN UKRAINE

'Flowers Don't Grow Here'

BEARR volunteer, Tim Woodhead, records his interview with two independent filmmakers, Sarah Tierney (Producer) and Shira Pinson (Director), whose forthcoming film 'Flowers Don't Grow Here' sets out the problem of street children in Ukraine. Here they share the film's beginnings, its purpose and progress to date.

by Tim Woodhead

TIM: Where did the idea for this documentary come from?

SHIRA: I wanted to dispel the traditional view that severe social problems only occur in regions such as Africa and Asia. Few people are aware of the issue of street children in Eastern Europe, and I was surprised to learn that a problem of such scale is so poorly reported.

TIM: Why is the problem so widespread in Ukraine?

SHIRA: Since independence from the USSR in 1991, Ukraine has been striving for economic and social stability. The rapid change from communism to capitalism has brought significant unemployment and poverty, resulting in alcoholism, violence, crime and the disintegration of families.

TIM: How will the film address the problem of street children?

SARAH: Our film aims to present the issue as honestly and simply as possible. Too often documentaries become a string of 'talking-head' interviews, with each politician or delegate passing blame, and with the real story – in this case the individuals who face life on the streets – becoming a side-issue. We wanted to give street children themselves a chance to tell their own story, in their own way, and their own words. We believe this will produce the most emotive and empathetic result.

TIM: What do you hope to achieve with the film?

SARAH: We are hoping to raise awareness of what is a huge, but under-reported social issue right here in Europe. Although estimates vary, it is thought that up to 800,000 children across Ukraine face life on the streets.

The power of well-constructed documentary film is that it looks past race, background, accents, surroundings and even horrible hardships, to show that, at heart, these people are not so dissimilar from ourselves.



Home for four kids

SHIRA: One of the human tendencies is to divide the world around us into what and who we include and exclude, and determine our feelings accordingly. For instance, when I tell you 'I like you', what I am really saying is, 'I (am) like you' and 'you are like me' or 'we (are) like each other.' I want the audience to see themselves in the kids. Once they can relate, they will care.

TIM: Why the title. 'Flowers Don't Grow Here'?

SARAH: We plan to finish the project with a winter shoot, filming in -20°C weather, following the kids down into the city's sewers where they shelter from the elements. The title reflects this barren, underground environment and a social problem that gives these children little chance of positive growth and a successful future ...

TIM: The production is in touch with a number of charities and NGOs. How effectively do you think the problem is currently being addressed?

SHIRA: There are a number of dedicated charitable initiatives operating in Ukraine. For example, 'Hope & Homes' – a Ukraine-based, UK-originated charity, working with local families to set up foster homes – is doing an excellent job in offering effective and long-term solutions to the problem.

STREET CHILDREN IN UKRAINE

Sadly, there are other organisations that either do not take this long-term approach, or simply use the issue for an 'easy ride'. Furthermore, government initiatives are often poorly run and under-funded, and few children remain in the state orphanages for long. Also, most initiatives focus on younger children, or those that have spent less than two years on the street. This means that a huge number of kids are being overlooked.

TIM: Does there seem to be a common story of how these children end up on the streets?

SHIRA: The most familiar story is one of alcohol abuse, and all its associated issues, leading to the disintegration of families. The other main reason is increasing poverty, particularly in rural areas. Rural families fail to support their children, so they leave, hoping for a 'better life' in the cities ...

TIM: What were the major difficulties you encountered in making this documentary?

SARAH: The major obstacle has been finance. In the current climate of celebrity-driven reality television, attempting to gain a broadcast commission for a programme on a 'difficult' issue is very hard, and more so because we are relatively new film-makers.

We are making the film on a very small budget, funded through a bursary from the 'One World Broadcasting Trust' and donations from the charities Hope & Homes (Ukraine) and 'New Beginnings' (UK), as well as sponsorship from numerous other sources. We are indebted to an awful lot of people ...!

TIM: Finally, where might people be able to see the documentary?

SARAH: The answer at the moment is 'watch this space'... Initially we will target the film festival circuit but we will also be pushing for international broadcast in order to reach the widest audience possible.



Photo: Shira Pinson 2003

Giving a voice to Kiev's street children.

See the production website www.streetkidsdocumentary.co.uk and Clarity Productions website www.producingclarity.com for updates.

Russia's railway children *continued from page 11*

stations in Moscow. The Railway Children will also visit the project this September to meet with the Railway Police and the Deputy Minister of Railways. This is with a view to exploring ways in which the UK railway industry can work with the Russian railway and police authorities to implement the CRC articles for these desperate children.

The Railway Children has also decided to research ways in which it can support NGOs that focus on street children throughout Eastern Europe and, in particular, the opportunities for early intervention in the best interests of the child. Activity in Russia is likely to be a priority within this research. The Railway Children would be keen to hear from British or Russian NGOs that are

working with street children around transport systems, particularly where efforts are being made to contact and help runaways and newly arrived children on the street.

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TAGANKA CHILDREN'S FUND

Developing family support in Moscow

When the Taganka Children's Fund (TCF) began its activities in 1991 it was one of the first NGOs in Moscow to provide services to families-at-risk.

The original focus of the organisation centred on the provision of humanitarian aid, educational support and extra-curricula activities to impoverished children to prevent their involvement in antisocial or criminal activities. Since 1996, TCF has worked in partnership with the UK charity, Quarriers, to develop and improve family support and social care services, reaching out to some of the most vulnerable and excluded sections of the population through the organisation's Family Centre.

A wide range of services

Established in Moscow in 1998, the Centre was initially funded by the UK Community Fund. TCF staff now provide a comprehensive range of services that aim to decrease the risk of child neglect or abandonment by improving self-esteem, social inclusion and disposable income. Its services include psychological consultations, legal advice, vocational training, employment support, cultural programmes, community development and humanitarian aid.

TCF continues to offer educational classes for children in English language and computing. It also organises a busy timetable of extra-curricula groups, including choir, art, dance and poetry clubs. New social

by Kathryn Lockett

integration programmes at the Centre include a drop-in for children-at-risk, social rehabilitation groups for disabled or seriously ill children who are unable to attend school, Women's Forums and a Sponsor-a-Child scheme.

Through all these services, TCF now provides intensive support to over 580 single-parent families, including over 900 children. Many of these families struggle to cover the costs of basic necessities, such as food, clothing, medicine and educational materials. They also suffer from related mental health problems.

Lone female families hit worst

There are currently one million children classified as being 'without parental care' in Russia. They are often housed in large institutions or sleep rough. Of these an estimated 95% have one living parent. Single-parent families have been particularly hard-hit by Russia's transition to a free-market economy. Recently described by the World Bank as the 'feminisation of poverty', in Russia up to 70% of households headed by a lone female (such as single mothers or



Children at the TCF Family Centre proudly display their pictures painted in art class.

FUNDING DATES

grandmothers) live below the poverty line. Economic conditions are exacerbated by a lack of state benefit, difficulties in obtaining alimony payments from estranged fathers, childcare responsibilities and related difficulties in finding well-paid employment. It is crucial that the Centre's preventive, early intervention approach is developed to support the most vulnerable families and tackle the core causes of child abandonment.

The search for funds

As with most NGOs in Russia, TCF is working hard to generate sufficient funding to continue its activities, following the completion of a five-year development project supported by the UK Community Fund. The organisation receives support from a number of individuals, and grant-giving and non-profit organi-

sations, both in Moscow and the UK. It also works in close co-operation with the British Business Club and the Russo-British Chamber of Commerce to develop their corporate partnerships. Honing fundraising skills has been an important part of the growth and sustainability of TCF, and local staff persevere in their efforts to generate new interest from potential donors and supporters.

The Taganka Children's Fund will continue to develop its family support programmes in Moscow and hopes to begin new pre-school, childcare and social integration projects to meet the growing needs of single-parent families. As new and challenging issues, such as domestic violence, growing abortion rates, gender discrimination in the workplace, and increasing numbers of drug users are brought into focus on Russia's socio-political agenda,

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TCF will seek to develop its services to meet the needs of the local communities. In this way, TCF hopes to ensure that more children stay within the family unit where they can reach their full potential in a nurturing environment.

* The Feminisation of Poverty, World Bank Report, Moscow 2000. For more information see: <http://www.worldbank.org.ru/ECA/Russia.nsf/0/D606F1D62AB61204C3256CD1005EF695>

FUNDING CLOSING DATES**DEPARTMENT FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT (DfID):****CIVIL SOCIETY CHALLENGE FUND (CSCF)**

DfID have decided to re-assess the scope of the Civil Society Challenge Fund with a view to widening the remit of the Fund to include innovative service delivery. In order to consult on this, they have agreed that the CSCF full proposal deadline will be extended until 31 October.

This is not a fundamental review of the criteria and the CSCF will retain an overall rights-based approach. DfID wish to widen the criteria in order to make the CSCF flexible enough to meet the needs of communities in developing countries, particularly in environments where service delivery by governments is non-existent or particularly problematic. DfID are primarily consulting on preliminary changes to the CSCF guidelines.

If you wish to submit a proposal for a project focusing on innovative service delivery, it is advised that you wait until the consultation meeting on 8 September for confirmation of the new criteria. Concept notes will then be accepted until 30 September for a full proposal deadline of 31 October.

For more information, contact the Deputy Programme Manager, Steve Nally, on +44 (0) 1355 843199. Details of all DfID schemes are available from DfID's Public Enquiry Point

WESTMINSTER FOUNDATION FOR DEMOCRACY

WFD funds organisations and projects that aim to build pluralist, democratic institutions abroad.

Deadlines for applications	Board meetings
16 August 2004	19 October 2004
19 November 2004	25 January 2005

Enquiries: 020 7930 0408 or visit their website: www.wfd.org

The BEARR Trust diary

July 2004

Pervouralsk: Civil Society Master Classes 'How to Raise the Profile of Local Problems and Present Solutions', 'PR for projects' and 'Emotional Burn Out at Work: how to prevent it, how to deal with it' at the Uspekhn Centre in association with the Union of Entrepreneurs.

August 2004

Publication of training manual 'Psychological Well-being in the Workplace' by E. Vikentieva, T. Emelianova and D. Ridley. Tver: 2004.

September 2004

Moscow: Continuing development of Child Protection website based at the Foundation for the Protection of Children from Abuse. This site will contain up-to-date information and training materials for Russian-speaking professionals with child protection interests. It will provide facilities for discussion of child-protection issues and related legal issues with professionals. Watch this space for further information

Nizhny Novgorod: Launch of training manual at training seminars for teachers of mainstream schools from the city and region, followed by round table for local authority

representatives to discuss the integration of deaf children into mainstream education.

forthcoming

October

15th: Konevets Quartet perform in aid of BEARR at Pembroke College, Oxford.

November

Friday 19th: The BEARR Trust Annual Conference 2004 will be held at The Charity Centre, London: 'Successes & Failure in Promoting Change: Health, Social Care and Human Rights in Russia & the Region.' More details on page 9.

BEARR member news:

The translation of Andrey Platonov's novel SOUL (Harvill, 2003) by Robert and Elizabeth Chandler et al. was shortlisted for this year's Weidenfeld European Translation Prize – as was their translation of Platonov's HAPPY MOSCOW (Harvill, 2001) two years ago. Their translation of Platonov's unfinished 'The Macedonian Officer' was awarded joint second prize in this year's John Dryden Translation Competition, run by the British Comparative Literature Translation.

About The BEARR Trust

Patrons: The Duchess of Abercorn, Vladimir Ashkenazy, Elena Bashkirova Barenboim, Lady Fall, Myra Green OBE, Professor Geoffrey Hosking, Lady Hurd, HE Sir Roderic Lyne KBE CMG, Dr Jonathan Miller CBE, Anthony Oppenheimer, Rair Simonyan, Sir Andrew Wood GCMG, Sir Norman Wooding CBE

The BEARR Trust is a British registered charity. It was formed in 1991 to act as a bridge between the welfare and health sectors of Britain and the former Soviet Union (FSU). It has four main aims:

- to collaborate with British organisations working with the voluntary, social welfare and health sectors in the FSU, particularly in order to provide information and advice;
- to be a clearing house for information about British activities in the FSU and, where appropriate, to make this information public;
- to bring British and FSU organisations together for the transfer of information, skills and material aid;
- to initiate projects that will strengthen the FSU's voluntary, social welfare and health sectors.

Trustees: Michael McCulloch (Chairman), John Church, Professor Michael Holman, Marcia Levy, Ann Lewis CMG, Nicola Ramsden

Staff: Director: Daryl Hardman; Information and Projects Officer: Rachel Watson; Finance Officer: John Kidd

Volunteers: Sara Pfaffenhoefer, Alena Ryzhikova, Natasha Sturgeon, Imogen Wade, Vaughan Webber, Tim Woodhead

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Become a Friend of BEARR and receive the Newsletter as well as details of our events throughout the year.

- I wish to become a Friend of The BEARR Trust. Minimum gift £30 per year.
- I wish to renew my Friend's subscription and enclose a cheque for £30.
- I wish to make a donation and enclose a cheque for £.....(pay to The BEARR Trust).
- I wish to make a regular donation by banker's order.

Name

Organisation:.....

Address.....

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Tel Fax

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Contact details may be made available to other voluntary organisations working in the former Soviet Union, unless you tick this box to indicate that this information is confidential.

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