

LOOKING AHEAD – WHAT’S NEXT?

In January 2008 our grant from the Big Lottery Fund will come to an end, so this year has been one of intense creative thinking about our next steps—both for Ecologia Youth Trust and the growing Kitezh-Orion Network. The five years’ funding support has enabled Kitezh to bring its therapeutic education methods into the wider society with great success. From a handful of dedicated foster parents living in a charming rural village it is now becoming a professional therapeutic network of children’s villages that will affect orphans all over Russia.

Kitezh is now the place to whom others turn for advice: the Committee for Foster Families in Kaluga Region looks to Kitezh for support and training for the 400 foster families in the region that have appeared in the 15 years Kitezh has existed. It is no coincidence that Kaluga Region is the first in Russia to announce they are phasing out children’s homes in favour of foster care. Nor is it surprising that NGOs and individuals from regions as far afield as Samara and Novosibirsk turn to Kitezh for advice on how to build communities of supported foster family care, and work therapeutically with orphans.

These 15 years of collective experience has at last become relevant to main-stream society. 5,000 copies of Dmitry Morozov’s ‘New Generation Kitezh’ are in Moscow bookshops. Next year the book will be distributed in the provinces. It may be published in English the following year thanks to our many volunteers who have translated and edited numerous versions as Dmitry’s ideas were refined.

The volunteers programme has improved and expanded. Young teachers in Kitezh and Orion are keen to offer more courses next year. In July and August 2008 at Orion we will run two intensive Russian language courses: one for beginners and another for intermediate students. Dmitry Morozov will offer a one-to-one personal and spiritual development training. 2008 will also see a Summer Sports Camp offering martial arts, running, swimming and of course the Russian banya. All these courses include participating in the working life of the community with the option to stay on as a longer-term volunteer.

Our current challenge is that success breeds the ambition to do more. The more accomplished our Kitezhans become, and the more they see the results of their efforts, the more they want to grow. They want to take in more children

and improve their facilities. They want to build more houses and villages. The vision and ambition of the Kitezh parents and teachers to transform the lives of all children in Russia, not just the few, simply grows with success. The young team of specialists and foster parents are eager to learn everything there is to learn about therapeutic care, art, play and drama therapy. They want a dance and martial arts studio, they want ponies and animals for the children, they want to build a sports centre – they even want a swimming pool! And it’s ALL for the children. They are all so busy with lessons, mentoring groups, education council meetings, individual therapy with children, rehearsing for the play ‘Master’ in English, training the break-dance team for a regional competition, how can they find time to raise money on top of all this?

That’s why we are here. With the Kitezh Centre actively raising funds in Moscow and Ecologia Youth Trust doing the same from abroad, the Kitezh and Orion parents and teachers can do their part raising and educating the children. The kids grow up, finish school, rebel, reform, go to university or college, find jobs, husbands, wives, have babies... Six Kitezh students have successfully completed their first year at college and university, supported by the Berr Trust and Baker-Botts in Moscow. Another has graduated as a psychologist after five years of study. Maybe one or two will return to work at Kitezh-Orion. Maybe one or two will thank us for our efforts. But most will simply become good people, with a better chance of success in life than their counterparts who grew up in orphanages. That surely is reason enough for us to continue our efforts to support the Kitezh-Orion initiative.

Liza Hollingshead



Kitezh Children’s Community Network in Russia is an innovative approach to the therapeutic care of orphans. Foster families in Kitezh and Orion villages take children out of orphanages and raise and educate them together in a supportive rural community environment. Ecologia Youth Trust has supported the development of Kitezh since it began in 1992, providing professional training, raising funds to build the villages and running a programme for international volunteers of all ages to teach English and take part in every day life in the communities.

REFLECTIONS ON A YEAR IN KITEZH

Andrew Aikman, master carpenter and English teacher, spent the past year living in Kitezh. With no Russian and no previous experience of Russia, this intrepid traveller shares his perspective on the Kitezh experience. To read his full account, visit www.ecologia.org.uk

“This habit of putting milk into tea, and not jam? And you westerners have such beautiful level lawns; but then England is such an organised place and you are all so polite.”

I arrived at a moment of change. I had expected to find a group of enthusiastic pioneers, hewing logs for their firewood, and carefully counting the kopecks; something that wouldn't have looked out of place in an Oxfam newsletter. I discovered that Kitezh is not destitute; food is not gathered from the land; the children are not dressed in threadbare. But neither are they displaying the latest fashion, there is no 'bling', no designer labels. Their new winter coats are donated, and other clothes are bought in the weekly local market. But this gives a false picture: Kitezh is financially and in other ways, insecure. In the west, we are accustomed to continuous gradual change. It's hard for us to comprehend the profound insecurity of Russian society, where power is exercised capriciously and change has been abrupt and drastic. Half of Kitezh's income comes from the West. The other half comes from the Russian state, often two or three months in arrears, sometimes longer; and there are moves afoot to reduce expenditure on education and social services.

The histories of the children here contain everything you would want to protect a child from, and probably nothing that is unique to Russia. What is special and unique here is the meticulously constructed holistic care and rehabilitation of the children which has been developed over the past 15 years. Almost all the children who come here are under 13 years old when they arrive. Kitezh is a very small society, and sets out quite intentionally to present one consistent view of the world. They don't claim to have all the answers, and the issues of the teen years and how the young 'graduates' integrate into the wider world are much debated at this time.

The most remarkable aspect in this community of children is the absence of bullying, malicious teasing and fighting, and social stratification. Young children interact, play and tease the older ones, playfully; battles occur as a trial of strength where the weaker calls 'enough' and is immediately released. Older children who have graduated to Mentors (the highest status within the therapeutic program) have specific responsibilities to help the younger. Patience is part of the culture. Of course fights, tantrums and foul-mouthed abuse occurs sometimes but it is quickly curbed. For this and other misdemeanours, a court of children and Kitezh parents is convened, usually after supper, in which the conduct is discussed and a suitable 'compensation' or sanction is decided.

Not long after I arrived, a small eight-year-old boy was briefly the centre of attention for some disciplinary matter. It was suggested that he might be interested in woodwork. For some weeks, nothing happened. One day when I thought he had got used to seeing me around, I invited Vadim to come to the workshop. His eyes lit up, a little warily. I asked him again the next day, and he came after lunch. He appeared to have no previous experience of woodwork, but with a few

words and gestures, we got stuck into making a box. I was amazed at how quickly he grasped the techniques I was showing him, and how much real determination he had to 'get it right'. "Iss no good", so I'd try to do it for him. "No! I, I, I," pointing at himself.



He made his box and sold it at the internal Kitezh 'market', and he got the admiration of his friends. He soon gathered a little stack of orders; a box for his mother, one for the recorders, a tool box. Out of such a small thing grew shoots of self-confidence; and for me it was an extraordinary pleasure to see the characteristics of determination and meticulousness that make a master craftsman in such a young child. I call him 'Moy malinky droog' and he gives me such a wonderful hug whenever we meet.

One of the most heart-warming experiences of spending a year here has been to witness the changes in children who arrived during my stay. To see a frightened, defensive 10-year-old grasp his 'new' mother as if he was afraid of losing her, to see him giggle like an infant when his new father scoops him up under his arm as he comes into the house, brings tears to the eyes. The child sucks in the affection of his foster parents like one drowning and gasping for air. To see the fear in the eyes gradually fade, and to see him risk just a little cheeky remark to one of the bigger boys is much more wonderful than watching the magic of flowers opening in the spring sunshine.

Then begins the trouble. I have been told it can sometimes be as long as two years of constant testing the new parents with defiance and non-cooperation until the child feels secure enough to trust completely. The bond of love is created through fire, and this I have seen too; the real love between foster parent and teenager/young adult. This ability to truly love a child who is not your own but has come to you by this tortuous route takes much courage, patience and dedication. It is for these reasons and more that this work is undertaken in a community designed to give mutual support, to provide a holistic and 'total' supportive environment. It is simply too demanding, too testing for most mortals to undertake alone.

Continued opposite

BECOMING A FOSTER PARENT

Masha Krivenkova is 23 and has lived in Kitezh for three years. After some trepidation she decided to become a foster mother to 11-year-old Sasha Eryomin. Sasha had come to the summer camp at Kitezh and he and Masha 'clicked' from the beginning. If she had not taken him, he would have had to return to the orphanage.

In Autumn 2006, I became a foster mother. It happened very quickly and I wasn't expecting it. I felt that that under no circumstances should Sasha be sent back to the orphanage, and later I began to feel that I could be a mother to him.

Sasha told me that he would like to stay in Kitezh with me. The first month was scary for both of us. For me the fear was of taking on such a huge responsibility over a long period of time. For him it was that he could be sent back to the children's home. But our fears subsided as we proceeded to carve out a relationship of open communication and activity.

My starting point was moving into a new home as in my previous home there hadn't been a separate boy's room. Sasha always helped me. It was then that I really saw him as an independent, active, motivated person. I understood that I could always count on his support. The time came when I decided to tell him about my past, and find out about his. As he recalled difficult times and his real mother, Sasha became a tiny child again and began to cry. He had been tramping from city to city with his alcoholic mother, begging and starving.

I then fully understood that I was taking a child into the family—a small, frightened child who had already been through a lot and from then on the responsibility that had previously frightened me filled me with strength. I didn't insist that he call me 'mama', but told him that I was someone who would love him, care for him and help him to become strong. From then on our relationship became very warm. School brought out new and interesting qualities in Sasha: independence (he does his homework quickly and doesn't need someone to stand over and help or hint), punctuality (he gets really wound up if he's late for anything), responsibility (if we've once made an agreement on something, I can be sure he won't forget it). After relatively little time, I have realised that having Sasha in my family is a gift.

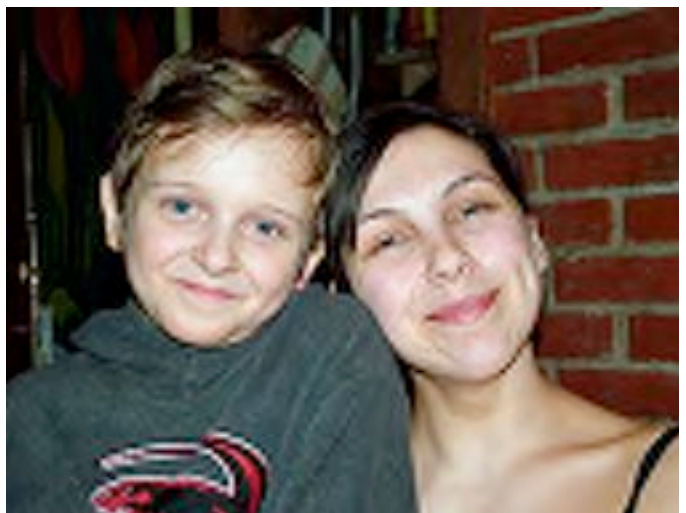
There came a point when I noticed that Sasha didn't feel like he had equal rights as a member of our household, that his image of a bedroom was still that of a ward in an orphanage. In a trusting conversation with him I asked whether that was the case. He admitted that he still didn't feel that he was a man of the house, that he didn't think he 'had the right' to ask for anything. To this I answered that he was in fact my son, that I was not just a nanny in an orphanage, and that it

was precisely thanks to him that we were in this new house, that his room was specially for him.

After that I asked him for help, so he could become a man of the house with the same rights as everyone else. It seemed that our conversation has appeased his doubts and given him a sense of manly status and made him feel that our home belongs to him.

There was also a problem of jealousy: it seemed to Sasha that I was spending more time on Sandra, who lived with us at that time, than on him. He began to ignore me. He didn't react when I said his name, passed me by, and answered tetchily when asked to do something. Evidently Sasha wanted to give me a taste of my own medicine, to show me how he feels when I 'don't notice him'.

That evening I spoke very affectionately with my child. I explained the difference between a personal relationship between mother and son and a professional relationship between child and carer. I asked him to trust me and ask me if he was ever in doubt. Sasha answered this by asking me to leave him to independently work through his feelings of hurt, and not ask any questions for the moment. That was the first serious agreement that we had come to. This helps us trust each other, share our worries, and ask each other for help. For now, we study geography, English, IT and play sport together. As for what the future holds...we shall see!



I would like to extend a huge thank you to everyone who donated to the tool fund which brought about a total transformation of a miserably un-equipped shed to a pleasant, productive, reasonably well-equipped workshop. We have been able to produce doors, windows, staircases, shelves, boxes, cupboards, a bed, swords, bows and boats. We might get a lathe next year and I am hoping for a new workshop where woodwork can be taught safely to more than one or

two students at a time. My star apprentice, Dima, has decided to train next year to become a master craftsman with the aim of setting up his own business. He says proudly, "I will be the first craftsman in my family!"

I return to Scotland in June, but for me, this is the beginning, not the end. I intend to return for another year, the second of which I hope will be many. I might even learn to speak the language!

Rosie hits Chicago

By the time you read this Rosie will have run through Chicago and is only about 1000 miles from the Atlantic. She is in the home stretch of her extraordinary journey around the world and in terms of how far she has come, it is just a skip and a hop from home.

Rosie has two god children at Kitezh, Nellie and Marina, and has asked for photos of them to be put on her web site. They often ask about her and are astonished to hear that she is still running. In their short lives, four years is a VERY long time. Running for four years is a long time in anyone's life but Rosie has remarkably retained her energy, enthusiasm and open-heartedness towards all the people she has met along the way.



From her web site, www.rosiearoundtheworld.co.uk: "As I've often said I have no corporate sponsor and entourage. Instead the whole world is my wonderful entourage. The whole world is my family and has also become the family of my family back home in Wales, Scotland, England, Ireland, EVERYWHERE!"

To honour her achievement, done in part, to help Kitezh, and her incredible spirit, please continue to support her.

A BIG THANK YOU!

This year the congregations of four churches were inspired by our supporters and volunteers to give donations to Kitezh. John Lyons who volunteered at Kitezh in 2006 sent us £520 from Marley Grange Parish Church in Dublin. Inspired by Brenda and David Surtees, who have visited Kitezh twice, St John's Episcopal Church in Rothiemurchas, Scotland raised £750 for the carpentry workshop. Catherine Addison, a dear friend of Rosie Swale Pope, sent us £900 from the congregation of All Saints Church in Fulham, London. And Rosie Tweddle, a 2006 volunteer who is returning for a second time in September this year, raised £710 from her church. What is more, Abbey National, where Rosie's mother Nina works, agreed to match this amount bringing the total up to £1,420! Thank you all for your contributions. They are welcomed and very much appreciated by all at Kitezh.

GIFT CERTIFICATES

For £10 (or more) you can send one as birthday or Christmas gifts to your friends and family and they will know they have sponsored a child in Kitezh. Each gift card has a photo and description of an individual child and picturesque rural Kitezh on the back.



By receiving this card you have sponsored a child in Kitezh Children's Community in Russia. Thank you.

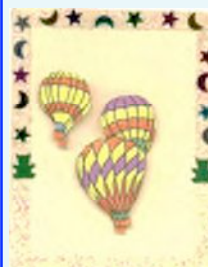
Wishing you
a very Happy Christmas
and
a Joyful New Year
from

Marina Sinko (19.12.95) is one of seven orphan children from one family who all are fostered in Kitezh. Marina is always smiling! She is always ready for a cuddle and she likes to have pretty things in her hair.

Greeting Cards for all occasions

Handmade by the children of Kitezh

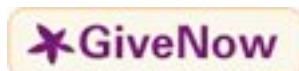
Pack of five £7



Each pack as individual as
the child who made it.

Price per card £2.00

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