

Findhorn –Kitezh Youth Exchange Exceeds Expectations

After more than a year of preparation and enthusiastic fundraising, the Findhorn–Kitezh Youth Exchange has happened. In July 2009 twelve excited members of the Findhorn Youth Project arrived in Russia followed by a reciprocal visit to Findhorn by twelve young Russians, in October, to undertake a life-changing journey in friendship and cultural understanding.

Kitezh Welcome

Before travelling to Kitezh from Moscow, the Scottish group had the chance to see Red Square where they got a taste of the dazzling gold onion domes, and saw the highly choreographed changing of the guards.

After a long journey, the youth group and their leaders, Gabrielle, Ruby, Ruairidh and Hony, with Liza as a back-up, arrived at their final destination—Kitezh. They were welcomed by the whole community with a song and dance in traditional Russian costume and the traditional loaf of black bread. The teenagers were then bundled off by their respective families for their first experience of the Kitezh ritual of tea and conversation and to settle into the homes that would be theirs for two weeks.

Findhorn Welcome

Following high drama over delayed passports—two boys got their only hours before their visa interviews—the young Russians all arrived in Findhorn late at night after a 32-hour journey that included a day in London. They received an exuberant welcome from the Youth Project with a candle-lit path across the Green and then went to the families of the Scottish teens they had met in Kitezh three months before.



What they did at Kitezh

The main activity was the Role Play game, an opportunity to find their inner ‘Rus’. Set in the tribal epoch of ancient Russia, or Rus, the game led them through tribal feuds, battles against common enemies (Tartars), a journey to see the Vikings (at a nearby lake), and choosing a common religion. From being in separate tribes, they eventually moved towards working as one united people. Due to language barriers it was sometimes hard for everyone to understand exactly what was going on but in the end everyone got involved in some way or other, in talent shows, battles, or being village elders.

What they did in Findhorn

In the first week the Russians were treated to Youth Experience week with team building games, dances, sharings and working in the community. They learnt about the ecovillage and permaculture and on one rainy evening made music in the Earth Lodge (a special ritual space). A visit to Cawdor Castle and a morning on Findhorn Bay learning how to sail were highlights. On a fluke summery day they went to the beach where many revealed swimwear and gleefully jumped in. A man watching the seals through a telescope was glad to share it and impressed them with a Russian *priviet*.

After a wild night of ecstatic ceilidh dancing, the group piled into two buses at 5:00am for a long and bumpy ride to the West Coast, where kitted out in wellies they waded out to the Isle of Erraid where they would stay for the week.

/cont. page 2



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.

Findhorn-Kitezh Youth Exchange . . .

The adventure of exploring the small but sometimes treacherous island with its rocky coves, hills and bogs was exhilarating and there were many soaked and laughing teenagers. More than a few sank up to their thighs in the marshes while trying to help others out. At the end of the day, smiling, rosy-cheeked, welly-squelching youths gathered around fire places in the cottages to dry out. On one sunny day they visited the Isle of Iona and lit candles for silent wishes in the serene abbey

The island worked its magic on the youngsters who left it in closer friendship and as more self-aware individuals than when they arrived.

What they Learned

An important part of the exchange was the time the Scottish and Russian youth spent living and hanging out together. In Kitezh, seeing the two groups move past their initial shyness to girls walking arm in arm, or everyone playing football together was a great inspiration for the youth leaders. Certain cultural differences were a challenge such as different food, or less free time than normal, but these difficulties were all overcome in one way or another. Izzy Hadley from Scotland said: "I've learned a lot! I've learnt that I can adapt to different climates, cultures and situations better than I thought I could." For Nelly Pichugina, from Kitezh, overcoming the cultural differences was worth every bit of effort: "At first it was difficult, but then everything became wonderful. The guys and girls were very merry and sociable, so together we even forgot that they came from another country. It was really cool!"



The Grand Finale

To a packed audience in the Universal Hall, the youth shared an amazing wealth of cross-cultural talent. They sang and danced together and through their performances demonstrated the common unity of their cultures and their friendships. Together they presented a play, *Master*, written by a young Kitezhian, on the theme of seeking the meaning of life, where Scottish and Russian youth played the parts of Doubt,

Everyday Life, Holidays, Business. The final line of the play sums up the spirit of exchange: "Brothers and sisters, take me into the circle of your community!" Zhenya Ryazhskaya, Kitezh youth leader views theatre as an excellent activity for an exchange as it "develops so many skills: creativity, responsibility to learn their lines, working as a team and in the end the satisfaction of achieving a masterpiece together."

This youth exchange has changed lives and created friendships across cultures that will last a lifetime. As Kevin from Scotland said, "We started as people from different countries, and now we are just people, and we will always be friends."

A huge thank you to all those who made it possible: to Youth In Action, the Youth Project and their parents for raising the extra funds, and to the Findhorn and Kitezh communities for hosting a fantastic adventure for all!

Gabrielle Hamm, Hony Pern & Liza Hollingshead



New Farm at Kitezh

At Kitezh, we have the beginning of an enterprise, the new farm. In a former time it was considered a punishment to be sent to 'work on the farm' but not now. When it comes time to arrange the community work hour, there are far too many asking "Can I work on the farm? Can I . . .?" At this moment we have three big soft cows and soon, a calf. The loft of the cow shed is stuffed with hay and the calf pen is being insulated. Since last May, the shed has been renovated, the paddocks have been cleared of rubbish, old timber, chicken wire and fenced with big posts and rough planks, like a western corral. We now have a small supply of our own milk, and our own eggs. The children collect the eggs and feed the chickens, and stroke our patient cows. Twelve-year-old Marina Sinko has already done the milking several times, and said that she enjoyed it. Three kittens are the cows' devoted companions and sit around the cows during the milking, purring and snuggling up to their muzzles.

All this and more came about through a government grant. The plan is to gradually grow our own herd, become

self-sufficient in milk, cheese, yoghurt, smetana (a Russian sour cream used in soups, salads and lots of other things) and tvorog (cream cheese). In time Volodya, our farmer, plans to get sheep and rabbits as he says the children will enjoy tending to them. Our therapeutic advisor recommended we had animals here. Traumatized children can find it easier to form relationships with animals than with people. They become the first step in beginning to trust 'another'.

Our grant also included three greenhouses, designed to be insulated and heated as our new gas supply will soon be up and working. We are still harvesting our green salad and excellent carrots. Next spring we should have early salad, and later, our own tomatoes and cucumbers. As we have wonderful currants and a young orchard, Kitezh is gradually moving towards food self-sufficiency—organic food! The children directly experience producing the food they eat.

Andrew Aikman

Datuna goes to Edinburgh



with Dr Irma Gotsiridze

Many of you may be wondering what happened to Datuna, the little social orphan boy who lives at the Temi Community in Kakheti region in Georgia. He had sustained terrible injuries in a fall when he was two which left him paraplegic, and was urgently in need of medical treatment to save his life. His spinal injury required treatment unavailable in his country, so Madge Bray, and physiotherapist, Fiona Lindsay, began the long process of trying to obtain life saving treatment for him in Scotland.

First, they had to locate the mother, who was on the street herself. Finally the Ombudsman's Dept got the police to intervene and she was located. She consented to allow him have treatment and travel to Scotland. A British documentary team is filming the process.

Now, some 18 months later, we have lift off! On 12th October Datuna arrived in Edinburgh with his doctor Irma Gotsiridze to begin a journey back to balance and health.

We will bring Datuna and Irma back to Edinburgh in November for the next round of tests and treatment at the Edinburgh Sick Children's Hospital. Following that, he will return again for a major operation to his spine. This will be a lengthy and costly process, at least two years and tens of thousands of pounds to cover medical costs, travel, accommodation and rehabilitation. This optimistic, joyful child with a zest for life needs your help! Your donations, however large or small, will be much appreciated.

Datuna's Journey (in his own words)

On Monday I left my Family Community at Temi, in Kakheti, Georgia full of anticipation and resolve. My mother came to the airport, with my sister to see me off. She never visits me in Temi. Then I was on the plane with Madge and my doctor, Irma to experience biggest journey of my life!

Later on I went to Thornlie Primary School in Lanarkshire. The children there raised a lot of money to help me. I went bananas with joy in the school—especially when I saw the school football field. I asked my Doctor "Can I live here?" Madge told me I'm a bit like an ambassador for my country as well as someone who needs doctors' help.

I have to have surgery within a year, because my spine is getting much worse. They have to put a rod through it, but they want to delay as long as possible so my lung can



mature. Both my lungs don't work. Just one. I have to come back again many times. My wound has opened up again, and the plastic surgeon said I



Here's me at Thornlie with my mates.

have to lie on my stomach for 90 minutes twice a day, to clear it before surgery. In orthotics, I chose a spiderman brace. Next day they said I had been so amazing they decided to donate it to me.

Good, Eh! People have noticed feeling in my leg. So next time I have to see a neurosurgeon and a urologist, so that my incontinence can be sorted. I don't have a proper wheelchair because my new one throws me out.

Madge was driving past the big church at the end of Princes Street in Edinburgh. "That's where we will be doing a Christmas benefit concert for you," she said. "Will you beg?" I asked. I know all about begging because for three years I was on the street. Madge said she does it too—so that people like me can have operations.

People said I'm very smart. Madge thinks I may be a gifted child, but for me, that's a big problem because disabled children usually don't get an education in Georgia.

No need to feel sad for me... I'll survive. Just help me a little to use the potential I have and watch me take off!



This is me arm wrestling with Fiona my physio. I'm very, very good.

Love, Datuna

Tsunami – Five Years On

On Boxing Day 2004 the tsunami that caused massive destruction and over 200,000 deaths hit South-east Asia. On the Thai Andaman coast villages, tourist resorts and communities were devastated. The thousands of Burmese migrants working in the fishing and tourism industries were hit particularly hard.

Five years on, many Thai people have built new homes but the migrant workers still live in desperate conditions often without running water or electricity. They do the dirty, difficult and dangerous jobs and have limited rights and few opportunities and are often victims of racism and abuse. Thanks to Ecologia Youth Trust in partnership with SNF, a Thai NGO, the plight of migrant workers in the Andaman area is now being addressed.

Our three-year project works with migrant workers and the Thai community to change deeply rooted attitudes. Forty-five ethnically diverse young people have participated in twenty-day peace camps. Group challenges help bond the youth together regardless of racial and religious backgrounds and working closely to achieve difficult goals creates strong connections and friendship. Exercises that encourage both groups to reflect on the positive aspects of their cultural and religious roots and their prejudice towards others helps the



minority Muslim Thai and migrant workers appreciate and articulate the values of their own background. This gives the majority Thai Buddhist participants a chance to look at their prejudices and appreciate other cultures. The young people learned to live, work and play together and became friends as well as developing leadership skills.

Now, many of the youth maintain their friendships and become engaged in community activities.

Some give talks in their communities about reconciliation and non-discrimination. Two tsunami orphans are very active in helping run the centre for orphans. Others get together for environmental mangrove reforestation and refurbishing learning centres. Many are involved in inter-ethnic takraw (ball game), football matches and celebrations or are involved in a memorial to mark the five years since the tsunami.

There is a long way to go before migrant workers enjoy the same rights and opportunities as the majority Thai. However, it is heart warming that the young are taking small but significant steps to cooperate with and accept one another. The youth of today will be the leaders of tomorrow and thanks to initiatives like the Peace Camps the next generation will be more tolerant and accepting of each other.

SNF-EYT also run programmes for adults in leadership training, advocacy, human rights and entitlements for migrant workers and peace building between ethnicities. The UK Big Lottery Fund generously supports this project. However, the fall in the value of the pound over the last year leaves us with a £25,000 deficit. In the current economic climate it is a challenge to fill the gap. If you feel drawn to support this cutting edge work, perhaps make a donation to Ecologia Youth Trust as a Christmas present to a friend to mark the tsunami anniversary we would very much appreciate it.

Jane Rasbash

Why not consider doing some of your Christmas shopping with us this year?

Our NEW ONLINE SHOP has many Gift ideas to choose from



New items include a Classical Music CD, Rosie Swale-Pope's new Book, Handmade Crafts & Luxury Cards from Kitez and Russian Jewellery & Crafts.



All these plus Gift Certificates and the Kitez Book can now be purchased online via Paypal at www.ecologia.org.uk click on **Gifts From Kitez**

All profits support Ecologia's work providing a stable future for the Children of Kitez

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