

Empowering Young People to Meet the Challenges of the Future

Ecologia's staff and Board of Trustees recently met for our annual AGM, where we renewed our commitment to empower young people to meet the challenges of the future.

Ecologia has made a difference to so many children's lives through its projects at Kitezh Children's Community in Russia, and more recently in Georgia and Thailand. Young people from Kitezh who started off in life with little hope for the future are successfully studying, working and raising their own children. A Georgian boy whose life is threatened by damage to his spine is due for his life saving operation this year. Young people from Burma and Thailand are building bridges of peace and friendship together. All thanks to the support of our donors, funders and volunteers from all over the world.

The cost to run Ecologia is only £65,000 per year. We run a very tight ship and unexpected donations continue to arrive for which we are very grateful. However, we have a £20,000 funding shortfall to run the Trust next year, which we need to secure in order to continue our work. This comes at a time when our efforts are greatly needed—not only by the children at Kitezh and Orion, but by our partners in Georgia and Thailand as well.

The Education Centre will enable Kitezh to become a

support centre for children and families, their contribution to solving the problem of orphans in Russia. The population of abandoned children in Russia is enormous, the interest in fostering is there, but experience is thin on the ground. Kitezh is already a well-known and well-regarded centre of excellence and expertise that is ready to share this with others. We are committed to continue our support for Kitezh in the future and to assist them as they become a renowned authority for foster families in Russia and abroad.

All our projects require us to attract significant funding and our survival in the long term is essential, for without us this work could not be done. We are developing a strategy to secure funds, increase our volunteers and support for our existing projects, as well as identify other similar worthwhile ventures to partner with.

We need your help to achieve these ambitious goals. To sponsor a project or get involved in another way, please visit www.ecologia.org.uk.

We hope you enjoy all our news, and thank you for your support, past, present and future.

Liza Hollingshead

Education & Family Support Centre Appeal

We have already raised £60,000 of the £500,000 needed to build the Education Centre.

The Centre will expand the educational potential of Kitezh, for their own children and others, as well as providing excellent facilities for the training and development of foster parents in Russia and internationally.

Moscow architects have developed the final design, a beautiful, organically shaped circular building around a central open-air courtyard with trees and a pond for a summer playground and winter skating. It includes classrooms for up to 100 children, art and play therapy rooms, a fully equipped theatre, a sports hall and conference space and accommodation for visiting foster families.

We're looking for major support for this project that will enable Kitezh Children's Community to become a leading authority for successful fostering, so if you can help or know of anyone who might, please get in touch. Email us at admin@ecologia.org.uk.



Visit Our New Website



We're delighted to announce the launch of our new website. Please visit www.ecologia.org.uk and take a look. After a lot of hard work, we're very happy with it and hope it will help to significantly raise Ecologia's profile and the valuable work we do.

Here you can easily find out how to Adopt a God Child, join our Volunteer Programme, support our Education Centre Appeal, or buy a gift from our shop, with just a few simple clicks. You will also find five new photo galleries full of wonderful images of the people and places where we work. In the banner, there is a newsletter signup link, and we invite you to join today to receive all the latest updates on our work electronically.

We are also on Facebook. Please look for Ecologia Youth Trust and 'Like' us. It raises our profile in the world and it's fun to communicate with each other in a more informal way.

Drinking Tea and English Breakfasts – a Volunteer’s Experience

I arrived in Kitezh minus something ridiculous degrees, and mountains of snow, but I am now wandering around in my T-shirt in the warm spring breeze. Along with the change in weather, the work going on around the community changed focus to fit. My first month involved a lot of ironing and staying indoors, drinking tea. With the sun out, the community is full of busy bees rapidly rebuilding the roofs and tending the gardens, raking the soil, pruning bushes and planting tomatoes. Now the village is full of the sounds of children running about and telling each other how to do their job better.

My introduction to Kitezh began with what I soon discovered to be possibly the most important activity here: drinking tea. I have drunk great quantities of hot sweet tea during my stay, and found it to be a great help in getting to know the Kitezhans better. I spent my days at Kitezh teaching English in the morning, then filled my afternoons working in the woodshop, washing dishes, playing strategic warfare games in the snow, making music, translating for the Kitezh website, digging in the garden, visiting the goats, walking, and steaming in the banya. All in all, every day was different, and there is something for everyone.



I was joined for two weeks by Liz, from the UK, who came to Kitezh last year—another person crazy enough to be studying Russian at university who came back to polish up on her language before the finals. We were asked to create some sort of English Week and we set about the project with great enthusiasm. We held an English Tea for which the children helped us cook cup cakes, scones, brownies and cookies, all served up at 4:00 pm. Although they were tasty treats, I can’t say they were entirely representative of English cooking, as

somehow, Russian ingredients and Russian ovens destroy any attempts of making fluffy cakes, moist cookies, or anything at all like scones. None the less, the effort was appreciated, and we adorned the *stalovaya* with English words on every available space, so if nothing else, the children know how to say ‘teapot’ and ‘table’ and the adults have hopefully picked up some useful phrases like ‘furthermore’ and ‘marvellous’. We ran an Easter egg hunt, played English games (like scrabble), and learnt some jive dancing—not strictly English, but great fun! The Easter egg hunt was devised with clever clues and tasks, which were all ignored within the first five minutes of the hunt but we at least managed to have children running around for an hour or so, and they have learnt what a double decker bus is.

Our biggest feat was to cook English breakfast for all the Kitezhans—about fifty people. Never again will I agree to fry sixty eggs at once. We left out the sausages as the only ‘meat’ available to us was *kalbasa* which I am hesitant to actually call meat, and we sufficed with tomatoes, sautéed potatoes and eggs—a change from good old porridge!

In terms of Russian practice, I had three months of daily speaking and listening practice in meetings, social situations, watching films, listening to the radio, and ample chance to read books, plus the occasional lesson in Russian grammar, and help in comprehension whenever I needed it. In my English lessons I learnt as much Russian vocabulary as the children have English. Believe me, the children are just as quick to correct my Russian as the adults! I also found that by teaching English grammar to Russian children, I gained an understanding of the similarities and comparisons of how the two languages work in relation to each other. Every day is more practice, and you learn something new.

I want to really encourage anyone thinking about going, or indeed anyone who wasn’t until now. It is definitely a situation of the more you put in, the more you get back, and there is so much to be gained during your time here. I had such an enjoyable time, spending lots of time outdoors being hands on, getting stuck into teaching and just spending time in the environment of friendly and extremely welcoming people. I am already applying for my next visa to get back out here in June.

Rebecca Gosling
University College London

Invest in the Future – Educate Foster Parents

The teachers and foster parents are eager to educate themselves further in preparation for the big step up that the Education Centre offers to them. Maria Shurova (28), foster mother of three boys as well as her own son, has asked us to help her fund a three-year post graduate degree in psychology to qualify her to train other foster parents. This further education is an important addition to the practical experience the Kitezh foster parents have acquired.

Maria says, “Everybody is inspired by the idea of building the Education Centre. We talk a lot about it, and the most important step for us now is to attract both adults and children. That is why we are going to universities in different towns, inviting people to Kitezh, organising trainings, and establishing new connections with orphanages. By studying, I will be able to teach parents and organise trainings, and spread our experience. Thus the prestige of Kitezh will grow. Other Kitezhans need to study too. Our question is: is it possible to find a sponsor who could support one or two teachers and foster parents education?”

To contribute to our Training Fund for our foster parents please see the Get Involved page on our website.



Springtime in Kitezh

It's spring and the forest is full of flowers and loud with bird song and blue frogs; but soon, the dreaded mosquitoes will hum and zing in your ear. At the end of winter, the grey sky is pulled back and even before the flowers, the children come out to play. The Russian winter is beautiful and sparkling, but after four months, it gets boring. So it's wonderful to be able to be outside without a hat and gloves and a thick coat. Time for games outside: hopscotch, roller-blading (*rolliky*, as they call it), football, cycling, and skipping. No wonder our children are fit! As soon as the temperature rose above freezing and the snow had finally melted, the men were out at dawn stripping off the old roof from one house and recovering it, all in a day.

The Mayday holiday is a joyful busy time when lots of our friends come for a long weekend to work and help the building programme. Families came and children played fabulous role-play games.

The elves fought off the orcs and found the fairy folk who guarded the lake where lay the magical silver weapons. Men and boys dug the foundations and drain trenches for a small extension to the school. At a metre and a half deep, it was quite a challenge for some, but working with the men gives the boys status! The women and girls with spades and rakes and many barrow-loads of 'muck', created a new vegetable garden. What more could a carrot ask for?



In mid May two girls and two boys from a children's home came to visit Kitezh for the weekend, to play games and have a holiday. If there is a good connection they will be invited to live here. The process by which we find and take in new children is a careful one; it must work for all. From the outside it looks so simple, like a fairytale, how it should be to a child; the reality is a paper-chase, a bureaucratic labyrinth. When a child comes to live here then begins the adventure into the unknown.

This summer we have a very full programme of events, workshops and games, back to back, from now until September. We are working very hard to attract new children and adults to Kitezh and Orion. This year we will not only run role-play games for older children, but also for the younger ones aged five to eight, and we plan to run three camps in summer. At Kitezh and Orion we will host children from prestigious schools in Moscow and Kaluga, as well as run Open Days with workshops and lectures for foster parents who come to Kitezh for advice and support. You could say that Kitezh is becoming a centre for conscious parenting in Russia (and perhaps even internationally).

This is an exciting time of new beginnings...

Andrew Aikman

Thailand Project – an Outstanding Success

In 2007 Ecologia Youth Trust entered into a partnership with Thai NGO Sathirakoses-Nagapradeepa Foundation (SNF). Supported by the Big Lottery Fund, our three-year joint project aimed to restore livelihoods and empower communities of traumatised and marginalised Burmese migrant workers and their families. The success of the project far exceeded our expectations, and we are proud of the accomplishments of our project team, headed by Ame Janchun.

The project focused on three areas: human rights and advocacy, peace-building through youth empowerment, and community self-reliance. Working at a grassroots level to empower people to create their own sustainable projects in their communities was the underlying principle of the project.

Some of our success stories:

We gave legal help to the families of the fifty-four victims of the notorious death-truck case who suffocated in a closed truck while being trafficked from Burma to Phuket that led to the families receiving compensation—with far reaching implications for the Thai legal system. By the end of the project our legal experts were being consulted by the government and NGOs as well as by the migrant workers themselves.

Peace-building work led to inter-ethnic youth camps where young people overcame mistrust and became

friends. Thanks to our project 96 Burmese children started to attend Thai schools. Women's groups emerged and for the first time Burmese women took part in events with Thai women.

Through the Grassroots Leadership Training, many community-based small projects and inter-cultural activities were created. One example, the Southern Migrant Centre, was created in a library as a social gathering place where people come to share experiences and information, take computer classes and English lessons. The young are glad to have a place to meet their elders who can talk with them and give them advice. They also have a football team, who were allowed to compete in the King's birthday match, a significant marker of progress, as formerly only Thai teams competed.

Many other small but significant steps towards building peace were made—a day care centre, a Buddhist dharma group, a youth group who started a fish farm, among them.

As the project drew to a close, the team were already planning the next steps to expand the peace-building work. As our new funding application is still in process, we can only say now that we very much hope to be able to continue to support it.

A heartfelt Thank You to the Big Lottery Fund for their support—it is a great organisation to work with!



Datuna is Getting his Back Fixed



I have wonderful news to report about Datuna, who now wants to be called Dato, as he's growing up, a big boy of ten. Datuna is Georgian for little David. He is now big David.

I returned from the orphanage yesterday, with a heart full of joy. Dato is as well and happy as I have ever seen him. He has made excellent progress on all

levels, and now he can read and write. He very proudly read me his favourite bible story 'The Wisdom of Solomon' that I filmed for David Hughes, head teacher of Thornlie School. I told him he will need to apply the wisdom of Solomon to his fragile back after the operation, with no wheelies and fearless body lunges as he pushes his rickety wheelchair to its absolute limits in his inimitable style.

His emotional development has moved on hugely, largely due to the influence of a very important, deepening father-son relationship with a sensitive and intelligent young man, Zura who he opted to call 'dad', and who is honoured to fulfil that role. Zura has worked firmly and lovingly with him, through tantrums and resistance, and educationally, Dato is making up for lost time fast. He now washes and toilets himself. He is a boy with great potential.

He will be coming to Scotland in the summer for his major spinal surgery, and will need to stay here for four months in order for his very fragile back, newly bolted with a titanium rod, to mend enough to be allowed home.

Dato can't wait to come to Scotland with his doctor Irma and carers Nato and Zura. He is very inquisitive about the

operation, and ready and prepared for it. His first question was "When can I go to Thornlie school and can Jamie come to see me in hospital?" Then lots more like "Will they wear gloves and masks? How long will I be in bed?"

David Hughes writes from Thornlie School: "Our children have a deep gladness at the news that Dato will be coming to Scotland in early August. Friends is the key word. For my children at Thornlie this work is not about a pitiable object of charity—as they have said themselves, once you have met him, there is nothing very pitiable about Dato! He's too busy, interested, curious, active. The ongoing relationship between Thornlie and Temi has now included children from both organisations making very profound journeys to visit their partners on the opposite sides of Europe, and we will be delighted to welcome Dato back."

In a letter to the school, First Lady of Georgia, Sandra Roelefs wrote, "I was deeply moved when I heard that the children of your school had embraced Datuna's problem so warmly and decided to form the Georgian Harmony choir at Thornlie Primary." She went on to wish them success in their "responsible and noble mission."

Next we will fundraise to build an adapted prefabricated eco-house for him in the grounds of Temi community, where he is now so settled. The thirty precipitous stairs at Temi orphanage to Dato's bedroom are a logistical nightmare, and out of the question for him until his back fully mends, which will take a year. He sleeps upstairs because next to his room there is a toilet and a rudimentary hosepipe he can use to shower himself.

We are absolutely indebted to everyone who in small and big ways are making a normal lifespan possible for Dato.

Due to the need to respect personal privacy, we will not be reporting again until the operation is over. Watch this space for a further bulletin before Christmas!

Madge Bray



Help the children of KitezH by supporting our online shop where you will find books, seasonal handmade greetings cards, gift certificates and more.
www.ecologia.org.uk



Traditional Handmade Crafts



Cards – Six per Pack

Ecologia Youth Trust is an international charity that empowers young people to meet the challenges of the future. It supports the KitezH Children's Communities, therapeutic foster family villages for orphans in Russia, as well as other youth projects in Georgia and Thailand.

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