



In 1995 Ecologia Trust was registered as a Scottish charity. For the previous eight years Liza Hollingshead, the founder and current director, had been organising adult citizen diplomacy tours, youth exchanges and students' ecology education field work in Russia.

Liza recalls: "The impulse started in 1988 when I first visited Russia with Danaan Parry, on a Citizen Diplomacy tour. Our first day was a turning point in my life. We joined the May Day parade in St Petersburg and were encouraged to chat to people as our purpose was to make friends with Russians. What a great invitation! We made friends with several students who were delighted to invite us back to their dormitory. What an experience.

The outcome for me was a radical shift in my understanding of the basis of prejudice – that we can't help but believe the propaganda we are fed if we have never actually met a person from the 'other side'. An idea was born – to create an event to bring young people from three very different cultures together, in the wilderness, and see what would happen. One year later 45 young people travelled together for five weeks on a 10-ton truck through the Kalahari and the Okavango Delta in Botswana – 15 Soviets, 15 Botswanans, and 15 Europeans. It was our first International Youth Wilderness Exchange. The following year we all travelled to Russia, to Lake Baikal in Siberia, via Sweden to Britain to the Centre for Alternative Technology, Easterhouse in Glasgow and finally Findhorn, where we worked with Trees for Life at Glen Affric. We learned many, many things, the most significant of which was that now we all had personal experience of each others' cultures. Some people we liked, others we didn't. But at least we could say 'I know Russians, Botswanans, Europeans because I have lived with them, and I know their countries'.



Thus started a flurry of activity: exchanges with Russian teenagers, students, and adults in Britain, at the Findhorn Community and also in America. For seven years we ran Ecology camps for British students who worked in the field with scientists from the Urals Institute for Ecology in Ekaterinburg. These were the heady heydays of perestroika, when all the rules disappeared and before the new ones took hold. Everyone loved each other. It was a romp! However, when the Market Economy came into being in 1990, things settled down into a grimmer economic reality.

In 1993 I was introduced to Dmitry Morozov, the founder of Kitezh Children's Community. We clicked immediately. His aim was an inspiration: to rescue orphaned children from impersonal, Dickensian institutions, and to give them homes, families and education in a supportive community.

I first visited Kitezh in Kaluga Region, 300 kilometers south of Moscow in winter time! 20°C below freezing, deep snow, a howling wind. 90 hectares of land, forest, a lake, land stretching forever,

begging to be used. One small house with a cluster of adults and children living together, children taken from the streets of local villages, adults drawn from all over Russia inspired by the vision of one man. The only source of water was from the well outside, and the toilet was outside too. How could people survive like that? Their hearts opened and drew me in and I returned again, and again. I took others with me, groups of adults and eighteen teenagers from the Findhorn Youth Project. We brought the Kitezh children to Findhorn in 1997. They felt at home and the connection was made. In 1998 Dmitry Morozov was invited to speak at the Findhorn Foundation Sustainable Communities Conference.

1998 was the year of the economic crisis in Russia when all the banks folded, literally closed their doors. "Sorry no money left, it's lost." I was crazy with worry about the children at Kitezh. So Ecologia Youth Trust came into its new *raison d'être*. Fundraising! That year we raised £20,000 for Kitezh. The following year we raised £30,000. The village doubled in size as a result. Our 'Adopt a God Child' idea took off and people from all over the world 'adopted' Godchildren at Kitezh. We successfully applied for funding to run a Social Work, Therapeutic Education and Community Building Training at Kitezh. Play Therapy became part of the Kitezh way of working with children's healing process. We ran a Community Building Workshop every year. The British National Lottery funded a big project to expand the impact of the Kitezh model in Russia. The second Kitezh village, Orion, is being built. DEFRA and the British Council paid for a biological waste water treatment reedbeds at both Kitezh and Orion. The work will not end – first build Kitezh, then build more Children's Villages all over Russia based on the Kitezh model, until all Russian orphanages are replaced by child-centred family communities.

And the children? Over ninety children have benefited from living in Kitezh since it began. As the older children graduate, new children arrive, rescued from orphanages and temporary shelters. They are adopted by the Kitezh families, and embraced by the whole community. Their teachers in the Kitezh school are also their parents, and every aspect of Kitezh centres around them. To create a 'Developing Environment' is the key to their philosophy of education according to the founder, Dmitry Morozov, who says, "The main idea of Kitezh is to create an oasis of love, harmony and co-operation, to give orphan children the feeling of belonging to a family, a community, to give them a good education and to prepare them to go out into the world to become valuable, effective citizens of new, democratic Russia. Kitezh school is a harmonious holistic approach - a School of Life." Four of the first group of orphans have won places at University – an exceptional achievement. The little street boys have grown into strong young men with a light in their eyes. The new children are reaping the rewards of the Play Therapy and other psychological work and have begun to heal the scars of their terrible early experiences. The teachers are experimenting with different forms of education, addressing the needs of the whole child, and the results are beginning to shine forth.

One child's story: Sasha, 13 years old, joined a Kitezh family. When was 8 his mother sold him for 10 roubles (about 20 pence) at a metro station in Moscow. The man who 'bought' him, took him to an orphanage where he lived for four years. The rooms had either no light or no heat, so he lived in the corridor. When he came to Kitezh, the boy had never seen a television, and had huge gaps in his education. He is bright, he is clever, he is interested in anything mechanical. He cried bitter tears in every lesson because he couldn't answer the questions put to children 5 years younger than he. He walked alone along the forest paths because he couldn't make friends with the other children. He had nothing to say, nothing to offer. So they gave him a loving teacher with lessons on his own, his new father took him to work with the bees, taught him how to chop wood, his mother taught him how to bake pies. His eyes brightened when he saw me because he knew how to say in English "Hello Liza! How are you?" This child now has a home, loving parents, he is beginning to be able to study at school with the other children, and to make friends with his brothers and sisters. It will be a long journey for Sasha, but now he has a future, and he will become someone.

Kitezh is thriving! Over ninety children have already benefited from living in Kitezh. Of those, some are married with their own children, others have jobs, and some are studying at college and university with a view to return to Kitezh to use their own experience to help other children.

What can you do? How can you help? Please, become involved! We welcome all suggestions. Fundraising events, car boot sales, tell your friends about it, get schools and youth clubs involved in fundraising. You can also volunteer to go and work at Kitezh. Or simply give a little money from time to time. The door is wide open and we welcome it all.