

IREX/ASSISTANCE TO RUSSIAN ORPHANS (ARO) PROGRAM



Summary:

During the months of December and January, ARO program activities continued, with program staff travelling to the regions for a number of monitoring visits. The end of the year marked a number of trainings as well as the opening of the new telephone helpline for youth in Novosibirsk.

In January, NFPCC's work continued on the development of national standards for social welfare services and they participated in the expert council. In addition, the competition for children's telephone helplines was announced, which generated a lot of interest from organizations throughout the country. In Altai Krai and Tambov, ARO worked a great deal with baby homes, providing specialized training on new technologies. In Novosibirsk region, a total of 11 small pilot projects were approved, totaling approximately \$77,000.

In addition to the program activities, in December and January, there was continued work focusing on NFPCC institutional development and strengthening their capacity to be independent.

ARO Partner to Develop a System for Child Abandonment Prevention and Family Placement in the Republic of Buryatia

NFPCC continues to be a leader in child and family social issues throughout Russia by being selected to implement several projects at the regional government level. In addition to recent cooperation with the government of the Republic of Tatarstan, NFPCC has launched a new 3-year project in the Republic of Buryatia. The project, "Developing a Republic-Wide System of Child Abandonment Prevention and Family Placement for Children in Need" was awarded to NFPCC after an open competition with several other Russian organizations. The project, which began in late 2008, aims to address key issues facing child abandonment and children without parental care in the republic. ▶▶▶



First Coordination Meeting between NFPCC and the Republic of Buryatia.

Program News and Activities • Program News and Activities • Program News and Activities



The Republic of Buryatia is located in Siberia, on the eastern shore of Lake Baikal. The region covers an area roughly the size of Germany and has a population of nearly one million people. For a number of years, the region has seen a sharp increase in at-risk families and children without parental support. There was real need for the development of a system to improve the situation and decrease the number of orphans in the republic. As a result, the Republic of Buryatia government sought experts to solve the problem. The project, developed based on the ARO model aims to address the high number of child abandonment cases and develop a system for family placement of children in need. The NFPCC Program Coordinator, Olya Loburets notes, "It is not simple to come into a new region with different traditions and culture. However, the problem of social abandonment and abuse of children are similarly found in different regions of Russia. It's important that the government authorities were disturbed by these problems. And more importantly, they are trying to solve these problems. The current work of NFPCC in the ARO program helps develop services in the Republic of Buryatia, transferring mechanisms for the prevention of social abandonment and developing the system. We hope that our combined work will be fruitful and provide help to families and children in difficult life situations."

The project, taking place over the next three years, will be implemented in three core three stages. The first stage involves the development of a republic-wide system for interventions in cases of child abuse or neglect, as well as a plan for moving children out of orphanages and into family-based care. The second stage includes the development of a system of preventative services for families and children in order to decrease the number of child abuse and neglect cases in the Republic. The final stage aims to strengthen the institution of the family, to promote family values and healthy family relationships, and to implement various forms of family care for orphaned and abandoned children.

The project is working in close collaboration with the Republic of Buryatia Agency for Families and Children and the administrations in the pilot regions. The collaboration between NFPCC and the Republic of Buryatia demonstrates the willingness of the governments to tackle such key social issues and work with experts to implement systems proven to improve the lives of children in Russia. Larisa Sanhadova, Head of the Republic of Buryatia Agency for Families and Children, notes the importance of NFPCC's involvement in the region and the need for such programs. "There is a slight apprehension that is quite natural because the problem itself is very acute, new and not everything had been presented that concretely needs to be realized. We can talk a lot about prevention of social abandonment but only now will specialists be trained on concrete technology that will have an impact."

Vocational School Students and Staff Combat HIV Together in St. Petersburg

As the senior caretaker at Vocational School #70 in St. Petersburg, where the majority of students come from disadvantaged families or state institutions, Marina Kozhevnikova understands the difficulties facing children whose parents have either abandoned them or have lost custody. Over the years, Marina has watched many of her students grow up, and without the support of a family to help them navigate the transition to adulthood, become engaged in risky behavior. With almost 100 new cases of HIV registered daily in Russia and 80% of those infected between ages 15-30, the choices Marina's students make now can have life-threatening consequences.* As a result of the USAID-funded, IREX-implemented Assistance to Russian Orphans (ARO) Program, Marina now has the tools to empower her students to protect themselves against the HIV epidemic.

While she has long been responsible for HIV prevention events at the vocational school, until participating in the ARO-supported "Cooperation for HIV Prevention in Professional Education Institutions" project, Marina wasn't comfortable discussing the virus. "We only talked about HIV in terms of drug abuse," she said. "It was hard for me to talk about it. I always wanted to avoid the topic." Marina's knowledge of HIV was limited, and she was not always able to make meaningful contact with the adolescents in her care. However, without trust, it is virtually impossible to discuss sensitive topics such as relationships, sex, and health risks. When Marina learned that her school had agreed to take part in the project, she was enthusiastic and eager to get involved.



Participants in HIV Prevention Activities at a Vocational School in St. Petersburg.

Implemented by Stellit, a St. Petersburg NGO, "Cooperation for HIV Prevention in Professional Education Institutions" receives PEPFAR (President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief) funding implemented by the ARO program and promotes abstinence and monogamy to reduce the spread of the virus among vocational school students. Each of the ten vocational

* Statistics courtesy of UNICEF.





Peer Counselors in St. Petersburg.

schools involved formed a working group or “Health Council” of active students and staff, trained by Stellit on HIV issues, to coordinate prevention events. As part of the comprehensive training program, Health Council members learned the facts about HIV transmission, as well as the challenges faced by the estimated 940,000 people living with HIV in Russia.* Stellit provides the tools and methods, while the schools design their own programs to meet their needs. Equipped with accurate information and new teaching methods, participants returned to share this knowledge at their schools. Throughout the project, Stellit continues to work with the Health Councils, by supervising their work, offering support and providing educational materials.

The peer to peer methodology is a key component of the project, allowing students the opportunities to speak with their peers about HIV/AIDS and ask questions they may not be comfortable speaking to adults about. Alyona, a peer consultant from the Health Council noted, “I’m proud to wear my T-shirt with the red ribbon HIV/AIDS logo. I often wear it while walking on the streets of St. Petersburg, and I love when young people come up with questions about my shirt and HIV prevention. I am glad to share my knowledge on the problem with others.”

In order to ensure the Health Councils become institutionalized component in all of the schools, Stellit conducted a training of trainers for approximately 100 caretakers, psychologists, and educators employed at vocational schools and partner NGOs to deliver information about abstinence and monogamy, while providing service referrals to students seeking information about condoms. In addition, 35 city and district education administration representatives were also trained in planning and monitoring HIV/AIDS prevention programs. The Health Councils’ work has been integrated into the vocational schools’ existing life skills classes, custom tailored to best utilize the available resources in each school and meet each school’s needs. As a result, the Health Councils have been institutionalized in all pilot vocational schools and written into the official school guidelines. Stellit is also planning to develop a module of HIV prevention courses for teachers, based on the methods developed during the project.

* Statistics courtesy of UNICEF.

As a result of her participation in the project, Marina Kozhevnikova now feels comfortable speaking frankly about HIV with her vocational school students. Stellit’s training seminars even inspired Marina to write a play about HIV featuring students as performers. The play tells a story about love, faithfulness and personal responsibility to teach students how to effectively protect themselves from HIV. For Marina and her students, a potentially life-saving line of communication is now open.

Child Abandonment Prevention Projects Selected in Novosibirsk

Over the next six months, 11 new, innovative projects aimed at preventing child abandonment will be launched in Novosibirsk region. As part of the ARO program, a grant competition was held for institutions and organizations working with at-risk children in the region. The competition, “Pilot Projects to Create and Develop New Child Abandonment Prevention Services” will award grants of up to \$7500 to child welfare organizations and institutions in Leninsky district in the city of Novosibirsk and the Iskitimsky and Kubishevsky districts of Novosibirsk region. The aim of the grant competition was to develop new activities and replicate successful initiatives with the assistance of small grants from the ARO program.

To prepare potential applicants for the grants competition for child abandonment prevention pilot projects, ARO conducted a seminar on project development and grant writing. In total, 59 participants from 39 organizations attended a seminar from November 13-15th, where they learned how to conduct needs analyses, determine target groups and set project goals and objectives. Of these seminar participants, 19 applicants applied for the small grants and 11 finalists were selected to implement their projects.

The projects were selected by a panel of four independent experts with experience implementing child and family welfare projects. The expert panel prioritized projects that aimed to support for families with children at risk of social abandonment; rehabilitate at-risk children and youth and support social adaptation of orphaned and abandoned children through care and foster family support as well as support to orphanage alumni. The expert panel not only considered the types of projects being proposed, but also the capacity of the organization to implement the project.

The grant recipients each receive up to \$7500 to implement their projects from February to June 2009. Several of the organizations selected to receive grants have participated in past ARO competitions and are experienced in implemented new services aimed at supporting at-risk children and prevention child abandonment. The local social center “VERA” in Iskitim received an ARO small grant in 2007 and again was a finalist in the most recent competition.



VERA's project "Help Me Do it Myself", aims to provide assistance to families having children with congenital development malformation. The aim of the project is to provide information and support to families who have young children born with congenital malformations. By providing early support to both the child and their families, VERA aims to overcome the child's limitations and work towards normal family socialization. The Director of Vera, Aksana Vladimirovna noted, "Now they not only are able to see and understand the family complications but they can also identify the resources...which maybe will save a family. We understand that early intervention with a family in different stages of crisis prevention leads to the prevention of social abandonment and children without parental care."

The selected projects range from support to at-risk children by providing leisure and educational activities at local libraries, to the provision of early intervention technology at hospitals and medical clinics. While the projects vary in their activities, they all employ innovative, effective methods aimed at preventing child abandonment in Novosibirsk.

Grand Opening of Telephone Helpline for Children and Teens in Novosibirsk

December marked the first month of operation of the new telephone helpline for children and teens in Novosibirsk. Municipal employees in the city's Leninsky district, where the telephone helpline is based, had been preparing for this moment for most of last year. In February 2008, the municipality began recruitment for telephone helpline counselors and started setting up the office space where the helpline now functions. The telephone counselors participated in an intensive initial training program, followed by a 5-day training seminar conducted by the NFPCC. NFPCC trainers then provided supervisory support to each counselor during their first day at the helpline.

The newly opened helpline put on an informational campaign in which staff handed out leaflets directly to children and teens, explaining the functions of the helpline and what types of help it provides. As a result of the careful preparation and support from NFPCC professionals, the new helpline will be an invaluable service for children and their families in Novosibirsk. One of the counselors at the telephone hotline noted how operations have been going over the past two months. "On the very first day of work there were many calls. Children who were in difficult situations called to ask what the helpline was and were just interested how the helpline works... Now children understand and know that there is someone who listens to them in whatever situation and will be with them when it is particularly necessary." Such a response highlights the significance and need for such a service in the Novosibirsk region and NFPCC will continue to provide support to the helpline.

Small Grant for Novosibirsk to Create and Develop New Child Abandonment Prevention Services

USAID approved a new small grant for the period of December 2008 – June 2009 to implement the pilot project 'Assistance to Families in Crisis'. The project aims to create and develop new child abandonment prevention services in Novosibirsk region. The project will organize social, psychological and pedagogical assistance for 15 families at risk of child abandonment and 15-20 children ages 5-7 living in these families. The project will be implemented by the Municipal Center for Social Aid to Families and Children of Kuybyshevkiy District of Novosibirsk.



Young boy in a Children's Home – Raduga Jidinki District of the Republic of Buryatia.

Nationwide Competition Seeks Russia's Top Publicity Campaign

The search is on in a nationwide competition among telephone helpline operators to find the best advertising and informational materials. The competition was launched on December 15th by ARO implementing partner, NFPCC and the winners will be announced in mid-February. The aim of the competition is to promote successful advertising campaigns created by helplines aimed at children and teens. The competition is open to municipal, government and NGOs that maintain telephone helplines serving children, teens and families in the Russian Federation. The competition is part of a project funded by the Dutch Embassy. Over 90 helpline services received information from NFPCC about the competition and 21 helpline services from 17 regions submitted their advertising materials. The applicants from throughout Russia sent materials including posters, fliers, stickers, radio announcements and other outreach materials. Program Coordinator, Marina Betretdinova noted that they were impressed by the quality of the competitors and that "We hope that this advertising competition experience is useful and they will become models for more 'Telephone Trust' in Russia." The overall winner of the competition will receive 400 EUR, while the winners for "Best Design", "Best Text" and other categories will be announced on the NFPCC and IREX Russia website.



ARO Continues Work with Baby Homes in Tambov Region

As part of the ARO program in Tambov region, NFPCC experts are providing Tambov regional government and baby homes in order to assist with the standardization of services for early intervention of children age 0-4. The NFPCC Tambov Coordinator, Dmitry Stebakov, noted, "The Tambov Oblast government became interested in early intervention technology in that it improves the quality of services, ...making it possible to increase the benefits of the targeted recipients". As part of this consultation, there was a recent seminar on the implementation of early intervention technologies at the Tambov regional specialized baby home. The baby home staff learned about sensory space technology for children with special needs. The participants also learned new information and skills on how to provide diagnosis and support to the children. The overall aim is that the participants will use these skills to increase their education and ability to work with these children. The ARO program will continue to provide consultation to the Tambov regional authorities and monitor the implementation of the new methods and techniques.

Forum Highlights the Success of St. Petersburg Health Councils

A gathering of Health Councils in St. Petersburg highlighted the success of ARO partner, Stellit, in providing effective tools for HIV prevention education. On December 12th, Stellit hosted a forum to exchange experience on HIV prevention in primary and secondary professional education. In total, over 40 people from 10 organizations participated in the event, which gave participants new ideas on how to effectively work with Health Councils in their schools. The forum brought together Health Councils created in both the previous and existing projects in order to share their experiences and learn effective methods for HIV prevention. Seven schools from the previous project and the three new schools were invited to share their experiences working with Health Councils. This workshop further illustrated the project's success, with examples presented of how the Health Councils will continue to function upon project completion. Alexander, peer consultant: "It was interesting and fun during the trainings. I am graduating from the vocational school this year, but I would like my work on HIV Prevention to be continued, and I am sharing the experience gained in the project with students of the first grade." Such examples of the continued work of the Health Councils both provided new ideas for the forum participants, while demonstrating the sustainability of project activities and their integration into the school curricula. In addition, informative materials published within the project and presented at the forum have been recommended for use by the Committee of Labor and Social Welfare of the St. Petersburg city government.

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News from Our Partner

NFPCC expert Marina Novikova presented a paper titled "A Child After Trauma and an Adult Who Cares About Them" at the 4th All-Russian meeting of Psychologists in the Education System in December. The paper focused on the trauma experienced by a child when separated from their family and placed in an orphanage. Her presentation analyzed the methods of rehabilitation to assist a child and provided recommendations to caregivers, psychologists and social teachers.

As part of the Winter Psychological School held at the Moscow Graduate School of Psychology, NFPCC Telephone Helpline Coordinator, Marina Betretindova led a master class in Moscow called "Hearing Children: Emergency Psychological Support to Youth by Telephone". The master class, held on January 30th, brought together psychologists from the psychological medical social center and helpline consultants to learn the most effective techniques and practices. The class demonstrated specific features of working using helplines with children in crisis and methods of talking with children in crisis. They were trained on how to evaluate the position of the caller through conversation. The participants appreciated the expert training and were interested in learning further about helpline activities. Upon completion of the training, NFPCC plans to utilize some of these consultants to develop emergency psychological consultations if needed.

Upcoming Activities:

February 2-5 (Komsomolsk and Khabarovsk): Project Management Seminar for government representatives

February 2, 4-5 (Barnaul): Working Group and Seminar "Early Intervention Technology and Crisis Support for Families at Risk of Social Abandonment"

February 9-10 (Tambov): Seminar "Development of Family-Based Care for Orphans and Children without Parental Care"

February 10-11 (Tambov): Supervision Visit and Seminar for early intervention specialists at the Tambov Region Specialized Children's Home

February 8-13 (Krasnoyarsk): Monitoring Visit and Seminar for Children's Home Specialists

February 24-27 (Novosibirsk City): Seminar on Early Intervention

February 24-28 (Khabarovsk): Educational Seminar and Supervision Visit "Modern Role Playing Games in Communication Development for Children with Cognitive Difficulties"

