

IREX/ASSISTANCE TO RUSSIAN ORPHANS (ARO) PROGRAM



Summary:

In November, IREX's main implementing partner on the ARO program, the National Foundation for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NFPCC), co-conducted a national conference on foster care with the Ministry of Education. The conference, held November 5-7 outside Moscow, brought together 362 child welfare professionals, including representatives from child protection NGOs, leading foster care experts and officials from state guardianship committees in 25 regions of Russia.

The Ministry of Labor, Employment and Social Protection of the Republic of Tatarstan signed an agreement with the National Foundation for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NFPCC) to partner on the introduction of new services to prevent child abandonment and facilitate the community integration of children with special needs.

Training events on early intervention for children with disabilities continued in Tambov, Altai, Tver and Krasnoyarsk regions. In St. Petersburg, ARO partner organizations Doctors to Children and Bethany Social Services conducted a training for social workers on HIV and a family club meeting for families affected by HIV.

Winners of All-Russian Competition for Innovative Foster Care Models Share Experiences at Joint Ministry of Education and NFPCC Conference

Mechta (Dream), *Aistyonok* (Little Stork), *Raduga* (Rainbow), *Nadezhda* (Hope) – these are the names of just a few of the 4,915 orphanages in Russia, where the government reported over 742,000 orphaned and abandoned children in 2007.* No matter how favorable the conditions or how dedicated the staff, these institutions cannot replace the support of a family. In 2006, former President Vladimir Putin publicly addressed Russia's child abandonment crisis and ordered a comprehensive restructuring of the country's orphanage system. Since this time, the Russian government has prioritized moving children from orphanages and into adoptive and foster families. During this transition, IREX's implementing partner on the USAID-funded Assistance to Russian Orphans Program (ARO), the National Foundation for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NFPCC), has been a leader in establishing standards for foster care and training social service providers to support and monitor foster families. ▶▶▶



NFPCC President Marina Egorova addresses conference attendees. Egorova co-hosted the plenary session along with Ministry of Education official Vladimir Kabanov (left), who heads the department responsible for developing foster care for orphaned and abandoned children.

* Statistics on Russian orphanages can be found at <http://detskiedomiki.ru/guide/child>.



For the second consecutive year, the Ministry of Education and Science and the Federal Agency of Education selected the NFPCC to co-conduct a nationwide project competition and conference, “Implementing the Development of Family-Based Forms of Care for Orphaned and Abandoned Children.” The conference, held November 5-7 outside Moscow, brought together 362 child welfare professionals, including representatives from child protection NGOs, leading foster care experts and officials from state guardianship committees in 25 regions of Russia. Alina Levitskaya, Director of the Ministry of Education’s Department of State Policy on Child Welfare, Extracurricular Education and Social Defense, and NFPCC President Marina Egorova presented on the development and key elements of foster care models in Russia.

As recent changes in legislation passed responsibility for foster care from municipal to provincial Russian authorities, the conference participants, including the authors of the 12 winning regional projects, were able to share their experiences implementing comprehensive regional initiatives to develop foster care. The NFPCC also distributed methodological recommendations on project design and management and the development of regional systems of family placement, based on ARO models successfully implemented across Russia.

To improve the quality of foster care and increase the number of children placed in families, ARO has pioneered the development of new approaches towards the functions of state institutions that provide care for orphaned and abandoned children. A key example is the Zyryansky Orphanage in rural Tomsk region, which now serves as a support center for foster families and regularly hosts study tours, allowing child welfare professionals to observe a functioning model of foster family support services firsthand. The Zyryansky Orphanage has also played an instrumental role in preparing children for the transition to foster families and helping resolve conflicts that may arise in the new environment. ARO’s concept for the development of family forms of care for orphaned and abandoned children was adopted by the Tomsk region Department for Family and Children, and the results speak for themselves – in 2007, the first year of pilot reform in the region, the number of children without parental care decreased by 6% and the number of children in institutions decreased by 5.6%. In addition, 42 children in the region were placed in foster families compared to only two children in 2006 and two orphanages were closed.

Replicating ARO’s successes throughout the Russian Federation will promote systematic reform in the child welfare system and increase the number of orphaned and abandoned children living in families. Through events like the national competition and conference, the NFPCC continues to strengthen its status as a regular partner of the Ministry of Education and Science on child welfare issues.

Regional Government to Support Replication of Assistance to Russian Orphans (ARO) Successes in Republic of Tatarstan

The Ministry of Labor, Employment and Social Protection of the Republic of Tatarstan has signed an agreement with the National Foundation for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NFPCC) to partner on the introduction of new services to prevent child abandonment and facilitate the community integration of children with special needs. The new project in Tatarstan will replicate ARO models already successfully implemented in different regions of Russia.

NFPCC President Marina Egorova and senior staff met with Ministry officials and local child welfare professionals from November 12-14 to assess the needs of the Republic’s child welfare sector. While the Ministry has focused primarily on training programs for child welfare professionals, the NFPCC and ARO model will promote reform by introducing new services for children and families in addition to educational seminars for staff. The innovative ARO-developed services proposed for replication during the meeting include case work with families at risk of child abandonment, counseling for children and teens in crisis and community-based rehabilitation programs (CBR) for children with special needs.



NFPCC President Marina Egorova with Ministry of Labor, Employment and Social Protection representative Tatiana Fomicheva in Tatarstan.

“The NFPCC’s proposed techniques to help children with special needs have opened an unexpected horizon for our organization of social services,” said Tatiana Fomicheva, Director of Public/Private Partnerships for the Ministry. “Introducing CBR in social rehabilitation institutions will significantly raise the level of rehabilitative services for clients who are currently very limited in their access to social opportunities and do not receive rehabilitative assistance. CBR will allow for the provision of rehabilitative services at home, and will raise the quality of life for those with special needs and their families.”



The Tatarstan partnership is the latest in a series of successful ARO and NFPCC collaborations with local authorities in the Russian Federation to introduce new child welfare service, including the governments of Tomsk, Tambov, Altai Krai and Novosibirsk regions and the Republic of Buryatia. By supporting the initiatives of local agencies in the child welfare sector and providing a program of educational support, consultation, and grants, ARO and NFPCC promotes further development of these services and their institutionalization into the regional social protection, health and educational systems.

Khabarovsk Orphanage Staff Learn About Adaptation and Life Skills Programs for Children Aging Out of State Care

According to the Russian Procuracy General, approximately 15,000 teens leave orphanages each year to embark on their independent lives. Within several years, 5,000 will be unemployed, 6,000 will be homeless, 3,000 will have criminal records, and 1,500 will commit suicide.* With the goal of reducing these negative statistics and providing a stable basis for the transition to post-orphanage life, 22 child welfare professionals working at orphanages in Khabarovsk gathered on November 24-26 for a seminar entitled “Creating a Comprehensive System of Adaptation and Support for Children Aging Out of State Care.”

The seminar exposed the threats an orphanage childhood poses to successful community integration and adaptation. Participants then learned the principles of rehabilitative work in an orphanage setting and brainstormed ideas for life skills and adaptation programs for children in their orphanages who will soon age out of state care, as well as recent graduates who need assistance.

Rollout of Early Intervention Assistance for Children with Disabilities Continues in Tambov, Altai, Tver and Krasnoyarsk Regions

In Russia, it is estimated that one-third, or 300,000, of the children in institutions are in state care because they have a disability.** Lacking support from the community and examples of families raising a special needs child at home, many parents of newborns with disabilities give their children up at birth. Some believe that the baby will be better off in state care, while others may be coerced by doctors who encourage them to give up

*Source: *Abandoned to the State: Cruelty and Neglect in Russian Orphanages*, Kathleen Hunt, Human Rights Watch, 1998
 ** Source: *Firefly Children's Network*.

the child and “try again”. In addition, children without disabilities who are given up at birth and raised in institutions are largely deprived of the environment necessary for healthy development. In both groups, the lack of appropriate cognitive stimulation and interaction often leads to the onset and/or worsening of developmental delays.

To counteract these tendencies and improve children's quality of life, ARO has introduced early intervention, a new area of assistance in Russia which targets children with disabilities between the ages of 0-4. It includes early diagnosis of the causes of disabilities and developmental services based on interdisciplinary teamwork, individual case management, and a rehabilitation approach focused simultaneously on the psychological, pedagogical and therapeutic needs of each child. The approach also includes corrective measures to prevent or minimize the effects of serious disabilities and maximize the child's psychological, emotional and physical development and his or her integration into the community (including educational institutions as well as adoptive and family-based care).

ARO and NFPCC seminars train staff of baby homes (specialized orphanages for children 0-4), hospitals, clinics and other institutions in the early intervention approach. ARO also assists non-institutionalized children with disabilities by educating and supporting their families. Last month, early intervention trainings were held in Tambov (November 26-27), Altai (November 5-7), Tver (November 5 and 10) and Krasnoyarsk (November 24-28) regions.

The two-day seminar for staff at the Tambov Regional Specialized Baby Home built on a previous early intervention training conducted by ARO. On the first day, trainers observed the staff in action to provide feedback on the techniques incorporated thus far. The second day introduced new content and the 15 participants were split into groups for hands-on work with the children in their care. A team of three professionals has now been finalized to staff the baby home's early intervention services starting in January 2009.

The Tver region seminars for 22 baby home staff members in Kashin and Vyshny Volochek focused on training employees to create a modern developmental environment for the young children in their care and provide play therapy. ▶▶▶



Young boy from the experimental group “Little Clouds” at the Children's Home #3 in Krasnoyarsk where trainings on Early Intervention took place in November.



Trainers based at the “Lekoteka” or library of developmental games, toys and equipment at the Moscow Center for Psychological, Medical and Social Assistance gave recommendations on how to improve the developmental environment in baby homes.

The Krasnoyarsk training was part of the Global Development Alliance project “Creating a Regional System of Psychological and Pedagogical Support for Young Children Living in Families,” jointly funded by USAID and the government of Krasnoyarsk Krai. The seminar introduced modern approaches to assisting children with severe and/or multiple disabilities to early intervention staff from the Krasnoyarsk Center for Psychological, Medical and Social Assistance and its branches in Achinsk, Kansk, Lesosibirsk and Minusinsk. Participants learned how to plan curriculum for early childhood developmental exercises, evaluate and retain children’s progress and communicate with their parents.

Child welfare professionals in Barnaul were exposed to new technological approaches to helping children 0-3 with disabilities in Altai Krai at the seminar “Computer Technology in Early Intervention Programs: Methods and Techniques for Group Work with Parents.” The seminar was conducted as part of two ARO small grant programs that are introducing early intervention assistance in Barnaul, based at the city’s Children’s Polyclinic #3 and Children’s Infectious Diseases Hospital #2. Participants learned how to manipulate digital images in Adobe Photoshop and how to create developmental programs with Microsoft PowerPoint. These skills will allow staff to help children develop their attention, memory, and imagination by interacting with computer images. Seven parents also took part in the seminar and the child welfare workers in attendance learned techniques for working closely with the families of children with disabilities.

Telephone Helpline Counselors Trained in Novosibirsk

From November 18-22, NFPCC experts trained ten telephone helpline counselors for the newly opened child and teen helpline in Leninsky district of Novosibirsk. Participants learned the basic principles of telephone counseling, the history of telephone helplines, how to structure calls and how to deal with specific topics pertaining to child and teen counseling.

Child Welfare Professionals in Komsomolsk-na-Amure Learn About Early Intervention and Case Work for Families in Crisis

From November 25-28, 22 child welfare professionals from schools, pre-schools and other organizations in Komsomolsk-na-Amure attended a seminar on “Refining Techniques of Early Intervention and Case Work for Families in Crisis” at the city’s Orphanage School #3. The event included a review of several concrete case studies and focused on creating professional connections between different educational and social service providers in the city.

Social Welfare Professionals in St. Petersburg Develop Capacity in Providing Support to Families Affected by HIV



Participants of the “Communication and Counseling on HIV Issues” co-organized by NFPCC in St. Petersburg.

The face of HIV in Russia is increasingly female, with women composing 43% of newly reported cases.* According to the Federal AIDS Center, over 17,000 children have been born to HIV positive mothers in Russia as of May 2007, and approximately 6-10% of these children are abandoned. As the HIV/AIDS epidemic leaves more women unable to raise their children, the responsibility falls to relatives or the state. ARO initiatives engage in preventing this abandonment before it occurs.

The ARO approach integrates medical treatment for HIV with social services that specialize in the specific issues faced by HIV positive women and their children. In St. Petersburg, ARO supports comprehensive assistance to families and children affected by HIV through projects implemented by Doctors to the World and Bethany Social Services. Simultaneously training the social welfare workforce to meet the needs of HIV positive clients and organizing support groups, parenting skills workshops, and parent-child clubs for HIV positive mothers, these initiatives send the message that parenthood and HIV are not mutually exclusive.

On November 26-28, 13 staff members from the Center for Social Assistance to Families and Children in St. Petersburg attended a training entitled “Communication and Counseling on HIV Issues.” Co-organized by the NFPCC and the Healthy Russia Foundation, the event provided an overview of the global HIV epidemic and the specific situations in Russia and St. Petersburg. The social workers and psychologists in attendance learned how HIV is transmitted, which factors affect an individual’s risk of contracting the virus, and the social, psychological and economic consequences of infection. The trainers also defused common myths about HIV/AIDS and discussed issues of stigma and discrimination against people living with HIV. Equipped with this background knowledge on the topic, participants then focused on developing skills for counseling women and teens about HIV.

*Source: UNICEF



On November 28, the Center for Social Assistance to Families and Children hosted another HIV program event, a family club meeting for families affected by HIV. Organized by ARO partner, Bethany Social Services, the meeting provided a safe space for families to network with one another and consult with social workers in a non-threatening setting.

Khanty-Mansisky Region Orphanage Staff Explore Case Management and Foster Care Techniques

Orphanage staff from the Khanty-Mansisky region of Russia traveled to Tomsk region for a study tour November 17-21, where they met with local counterparts and learned about case management for families in crisis and foster care. At the rural Zyryansky Orphanage, the visitors received a comprehensive introduction to foster parenting as a form of care for orphaned and abandoned children. With ARO funding and guidance, the Zyryansky Orphanage has been providing orientation and ongoing support to foster families since 2002 and now hosts study tours for professionals to see functioning foster care services in action.

The Khanty-Mansisky delegation also visited a social rehabilitation center in Asinovsky district, where they learned about early intervention and case management for families in crisis. Identifying troubled families in the early stages of crisis and working to preserve these families when possible is a key element of the child abandonment prevention approach developed by NFPCC.

To conclude the study tour organized by NFPCC, participants discussed and developed projects to introduce early intervention and case management techniques in their home region.

Project Development Seminar Held for Small Grant Applicants in Novosibirsk

To prepare potential applicants for the ARO December small grants competition for child abandonment prevention pilot projects in Novosibirsk, ARO conducted a seminar on project development and grant writing. In total, 59 participants from 39 organizations attended the November 13-15 seminar, where they learned how to conduct needs analyses, determine target groups and set project goals and objectives.

The ARO grant 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.

News from Our Partner: The National Foundation for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NFPCC)

Federation Council to Adopt NFPCC Recommendations

At a meeting of the Children's Welfare Commission of the Federation Council on November 25, NFPCC presented their recommendations on improving legislation addressing domestic violence. As a result of the presentation, the Federation Council voted to adopt the recommendations put forth by NFPCC experts.

NFPCC Represents Russian Telephone Helplines at International Conference in Jordan



Gennady Podolny gave a presentation on NFPCC and ARO achievements at the 2008 Child Helpline International Conference in Amman, Jordan.

NFPCC Director of Finance and Administration Gennady Podolny took part in the November 17-19 biennial International Consultation organized by the Dutch organization Child Helpline International in Amman, Jordan. The conference united 150 representatives of telephone helplines from 100 countries on five continents. Podolny gave a presentation on NFPCC and ARO achievements establishing telephone helplines in Russia. The NFPCC has worked to strengthen existing telephone helpline services for children and teens and has provided methodological support to over 100 helplines. Over the past two years, the NFPCC, with support from ARO, has organized three international conferences for staff of telephone helplines. As a result of these efforts, 21 helplines from 17 diverse regions, from Vologoda to the Republic of Tuva, have joined the Association of Children's Telephone Helplines. The NFPCC founded this Association in 2007 to support and consolidate the efforts of government, business and civil society institutions in supporting the rights of children under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.



News from Our Partner:

The National Foundation for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NFPCC)

NFPCC Staff Provide Child Welfare Commentary on Russian Radio Programs

NFPCC Executive Director Dmitri Lisitsin appeared on the radio program "Parents' Meeting" on the Echo Moskvyy station November 16 to provide commentary on the state of child welfare in Russia. Lisitsin served as a child welfare expert alongside lawmakers from the State Duma and other government institutions. On November 27, Lisitsin was interviewed by Radio Rossiya on the program "Children's Rights," which highlighted the NFPCC's approach to and accomplishments in child abandonment prevention. Lisitsin shed light on the causes of child abandonment, as well as existing child abandonment prevention strategies in the Russian regions, and called for the formation of a unified government strategy on the issue.

On November 30, NFPCC Regional Coordinator Marina Betretdinova was interviewed by the Russian News Service for the program "We're Together" by host Tina Stankevich. Betretdinova discussed the importance of reading for children and how reading books together can strengthen the parent-child bond.

NFPCC to Develop Strategy for Child Abandonment Prevention for Novosibirsk Region

The Novosibirsk Regional Department of Education has awarded the NFPCC a 338,000 ruble (approximately \$12,000) contract to develop a strategy for child abandonment prevention in Novosibirsk region. The scope of work includes conducting an analysis of child welfare legislation, child homelessness, abuse and neglect, foster care and other social services in the region. The NFPCC will present its research at a public discussion and make policy recommendations for the region's child welfare initiatives.

Upcoming Activities:

December 1-4 (Tambov): Seminar on support services for foster families.

December 1-5 (Khabarovsk): Seminar on developing early intervention programs for children 0-4 living in hospitals and health care institutions.

December 2-9 (Khabarovsk): Seminar on assisting troubled families.

December 8-11 (Tambov): Seminar on child abandonment prevention.

December 12-15 (Barnaul): Seminar on counseling children and teens via telephone.

December 16-18 (Moscow): NFPCC independent seminar on working with foster families at various stages in the family placement process.

December 16-19 (Moscow): Study tour on early intervention programs for 6 healthcare workers from Barnaul.

December 20-24 (Ulan-Ude): Seminar on early intervention and case management for families at risk of child abandonment.

December 25-26 (Novosibirsk): Seminar-meeting on current results in Novosibirsk region and consolidation of services for the prevention of social abandonment.

December 23-25 (Vladimir): Study tour on post-orphanage adaptation programs for 8 child welfare professionals from Khabarovsk region.

December 23-25 (Ulan-Ude): Seminar on family forms of care for orphaned and abandoned children.

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