

IREX/ASSISTANCE TO RUSSIAN ORPHANS (ARO) PROGRAM



HIV Prevention Program Continues at Vocational Schools 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 Georgievna Kozhevnikova understands just how difficult it is for children whose parents have either abandoned them or had their parental rights terminated. Over the years, Marina has watched as many of her students have grown up, and, sadly, without the loving care of a family, succumbed to the temptations and dangers facing them as they leave school and transition into the real world, putting them at high risk of contracting HIV.



Marina Georgievna and one of her students perform as part of an HIV prevention activity at Vocational School #70 in St. Petersburg

Summary:

In September, ARO's grants programs in St. Petersburg and Novosibirsk continued their activities and two grantees in Barnaul prepared to launch new programs. The programs support services for HIV prevention and promotion of tolerance towards people living with HIV, early intervention for children with disabilities, and life skills for at-risk youth.

In addition, ARO staff held seminars in Barnaul on early identification of and assistance to families in crisis and at risk of child abandonment, and child welfare specialists from Novosibirsk, Novokuznetsk, and Krasnoyarsk region traveled to Tomsk region on an ARO-supported study tour to study ARO's model foster care services.

IREX's main implementing partner, the National Foundation for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NFPCC), was recently awarded grants for child welfare projects in the Republic of Buryatia, Tver region, and Perm. As part of her job duties, Marina Georgievna was responsible for organizing HIV prevention events at the vocational school, yet "we only talked about HIV in terms of drug abuse. 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 difficult adolescents in her care. However, without trust, it is virtually impossible to discuss sensitive topics such as relationships, sex, and health risks.

When Marina Georgievna learned that her school had agreed to take part in an HIV prevention project conducted by Stellit, a local NGO, with funding from the Assistance to Russian Orphans program, she was enthusiastic and eager to get involved. At her initiative, a "Health Council" made up of active students and staff members from the vocational school was assembled to conduct HIV prevention events and inform students about HIV. "Health Council" members attended training seminars organized by Stellit, where they received important information about HIV and met with representatives from local organizations doing HIV prevention work among youth in St. Petersburg.

Equipped with accurate information on HIV prevention and new teaching methods, the students and staff on the "Health Council" returned to Vocational School #70 to begin working with the students. One technique presented during the training seminars inspired Marina Georgievna to write a play about HIV featuring students as performers. The play tells a touching story about love, faithfulness, and personal responsibility to teach students how to effectively protect themselves from HIV.

With the start of the new school year, project activities are back in full swing. In September, three trainings were held for student peer counselors, as well as a training for teachers and other employees who coordinate methodological work in vocational and technical schools. "Health Councils" at Vocational School #70 and other institutions have begun working on their HIV prevention programs.

"Survival School" Helps At-Risk Youth in Novosibirsk Develop Life Skills

In an increasingly wired world, many parents wish their children would spend more time outdoors and fewer hours in front of the TV or computer. For at-risk youth participating in the Siberian Character Survival School, however, hikes and outdoor sports provide more than just entertainment — they help develop self-confidence and practical life skills. The Survival School, implemented by "Sodruzhestvo" (Community), a Novosibirsk foundation supporting cultural and athletic development, utilizes ARO small grant funds to support young people from families at risk of child abandonment. As a result of the program, young participants have a safe and positive place to spend time after school and on weekends. Parent meetings also provide an opportunity for families to be involved in the program and give feedback.

The Survival School integrates lessons on first aid, food preparation, directional skills, healthy lifestyles, and respect for nature with hiking trips for kids aged 11-15. Sports practices are also held at a local school to teach teamwork, improve kids' physical health, and increase their self-confidence. The Survival School organizers report that participants are exhibiting less aggression and cooperating better with others than at the start of the program in March 2008.

New Early Intervention Projects to Start in Barnaul

Two ARO-supported small grants aimed at improving the quality of life for children with special needs and developmental delays, some of whom are in state care, will kick off October 1 in Barnaul. The projects, based at Barnaul Children's Infectious Diseases Hospital #2 and Children's Polyclinic #3, will train medical workers in early intervention techniques and ways to utilize computer technology during developmental exercises. Both projects will also create individual rehabilitative programs based on each child's particular needs. The project at Polyclinic #3 will assist children with Down syndrome and autism to improve their developmental progress and social skills, as well as providing support to parents of these children and improving parent-child relationships. Additionally, as many orphaned and abandoned babies and toddlers with developmental delays are chronically hospitalized, the project at Hospital #2 aims to form social skills in these children through positive interaction with hospital staff.

Seminars Held on Early Identification of and Assistance to Families in Crisis in Barnaul

On October 1-3, 23 child welfare professionals gathered in Barnaul for a seminar entitled "Working with Families in Need," which focused on methods of early identification of families in crisis and at risk of child abandonment, as well as approaches to assisting these families. Seminar participants reviewed actual case studies and learned how various social services in Barnaul can cooperate effectively through casework with individual



families. As a result, the majority of participants reported a greater understanding of the system of case management and their roles within that system. Following the seminar itself, directors of social services and participating organizations stayed on for a meeting to discuss future plans and the need for coordination between the various agencies in Barnaul.

On October 7-8, 21 participants, including representatives of the city administration, local schools and kindergartens, child protection agencies, and crisis centers, attended a second seminar in Barnaul called "Creating Models of Early Identification and Work with Families at Risk of Child Abandonment in Zheleznodorzhny District of Barnaul." Seminar attendees learned about their responsibilities in the process of identifying families in crisis and instances of child abuse, as well as possibilities for cooperation between various organizations and agencies. At the conclusion of the seminar, attendees developed a plan of action for the next three months and a timeline to implement these new strategies.

Specialists from Novosibirsk, Novokuznetsk, and Krasnoyarsk Region Trained on Foster Care

Four child welfare specialists from Siberia visited the village of Zyryansky in Tomsk region September 24-26 to learn more about the foster care services the Zyryansky Orphanage has been implementing since 2002. Study tour participants received information about the various stages of foster care placement, including outreach to potential foster families, selection, evaluation and preparation of foster families, and preparing children for the transition to their foster families. Participants and Zyryansky Orphanage staff also discussed techniques for monitoring and evaluating children's wellbeing in foster families. At the end of the study tour, the visitors also received electronic versions of relevant documents and a packet of diagnostic materials that are used when working with foster family candidates and children.

News from Our Partner: The NFPCC

Evolution and Philanthropy Foundation to Support Replication of ARO Early Intervention Programs in Tver Region

In September 2008, the NFPCC received a \$40,000 grant from the Evolution and Philanthropy Foundation to introduce early intervention programs for children with disabilities in four Tver region "baby homes." Through the project "Developing the Regional Model of Early Intervention Services," the NFPCC will conduct seminars, trainings, and supervision visits for staff in these specialized orphanages for children ages 0-4.

The project will build on previous ARO successes in Tver region. In 2003, ARO teamed with "Utesheniye" (Comfort), a Moscow-based NGO, to introduce a complex system of early intervention in two Tver region baby homes. With funding from Evolution and Philanthropy, the ARO-developed model will now be expanded to the cities of Kashin, Vyshny Volochek, and Konakovo.

Evolution and Philanthropy was founded by Nikolay Tsvetkov, President of the Uralsib financial corporation. Though registered in Great Britain, Evolution and Philanthropy's mission is to solve global social problems worldwide and in the Russian Federation.

Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to Support NFPCC Telephone Helpline Project

In September 2008, the NFPCC was awarded a \$20,760 grant from the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands for a six-month project called "Telephone Helplines as a Tool for Identifying at-Risk Children and Protecting their Interests." The project will include a training seminar for employees of the city telephone helpline in Perm, as well as the creation of a team of 12 supervisors who will provide support to telephone helplines in various regions of the Russian Federation. In addition, a contest open to child and youth telephone helplines nationwide will highlight the best advertising for helpline services. The contest winner will receive financial support to organize their own information campaign.

Upcoming Activities:

October 15, Moscow:

Round table to commemorate the Day of the War on Poverty, conducted jointly by the NFPCC and the International Labor Organization. **October 22-24, Tomsk:** Seminar on family forms of care for orphaned and abandoned children.

October TBA, Barnaul: Seminar on early intervention and assistance for families in crisis.

October TBA, Novosibirsk Region: Seminar on family forms of care for orphaned and abandoned children.

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