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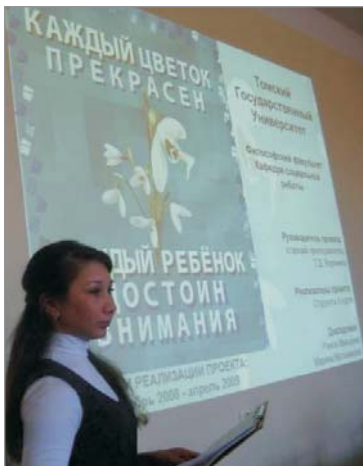
IREX/ASSISTANCE TO RUSSIAN ORPHANS (ARO) PROGRAM



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

University of Alaska Specialists Visit Tomsk State University

A visit from University of Alaska specialists April 18th–28th marked the end of a successful three year partnership between the university and the USAID-funded Assistance to Russian Orphans (ARO) program. University of Alaska social work specialists, Eileen Lally and Yvonne Chase visited, Tomsk with ARO implementing partner, the National Foundation for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NFPCC), to monitor the development of new social work curriculum at Tomsk State University, provide trainings and conduct a roundtable with key local stakeholders.



Tomsk State University student presents new social work curriculum.

The partnership between the ARO program and the University of Alaska School of Social Work began in 2005 with the aim of bringing the best practices of social work from the United States to Russia. Over the years,

the University of Alaska and NFPCC have worked together to bring the most innovative social work methodologies to Russia through study tours and consultations. Most recently, the partnership resulted in the development of new curriculum for students in the social work field and the improvement of coordination between Tomsk State University and the Tomsk Oblast Department of Family and Children's Issues.

Over 90 representatives from Tomsk State University, other Tomsk universities, the Tomsk Oblast Department of Family and Children's Issues and the Alaska partners took part in meetings, roundtable discussions and trainings that focused on the process of developing the new curriculum, lessons learned over the past three years and about future cooperation between key actors in Tomsk. As a result of the partnership with University of Alaska, Tomsk State University and the Tomsk Oblast Department of Family and Children's Issues have begun discussions to provide specialized trainings for Tomsk Oblast social workers on a regular basis to update their skills.

The University of Alaska specialists also monitored the work of Tomsk State University and provided guidance on the final implementation of the new curriculum for social work degrees during the visit. Tomsk State University is currently in the process of having the new, comprehensive curriculum approved by the university administration. Once approved, the university will distribute a guidebook to other universities throughout Russia focusing on institutionalizing the new social work

curriculum. In the future, Tomsk State University plans to assist with the replication and adaptation of the new curriculum in several other universities based on their experience working with the University of Alaska partners.

Over the past three years, NFPCC has learned a great deal from the University of Alaska and both have contributed a great deal to improving the training of social workers in Tomsk Oblast. Although the current partnership is coming to an end, the Tomsk Oblast Department of Family and Children's Issues and the University of Alaska plan to continue their cooperation and maintain the partnerships established within the ARO program if there are available resources. Such future cooperation will work to ensure that the region will continue to benefit from the expert knowledge from the United States.

ARO partner from Tomsk State University, Tatyana Voronina, recognizes the value of their partnership with the University of Alaska. She notes, "The project gives our students and teachers new educational resources to meet the modern needs of the social welfare system. In the project, we had the opportunity to establish cooperation between Tomsk region students, teachers and social welfare specialists. The participation of our American colleagues taught us the best practices in working with children and families and establishing professional dialogue."



Interview with Eileen Lally, Program Director – Family and Youth Services Training Academy University of Alaska Anchorage



How did the partnership between ARO and the University of Alaska begin?

The ARO program was looking for a university in the United States to partner with and IREX contacted the University of Alaska School of Social Work. We began discussions about a partnership and NFPC came to Alaska to visit our university and training academy. Our partnership began soon after and I came to Russia for one year to work on the project.

What has been the overall aim of the partnership between ARO and the University of Alaska?

The overall aim was to reduce the number of children in orphanages and to support at-risk families in Russia. We worked to achieve this by not only supporting foster families, but also by supporting families at risk of social abandonment.

Reflecting on your three year partnership with ARO and Tomsk State University, what have been some of the partnership's major successes?

Three years ago, the view towards at-risk families was much different than it is today. On my most recent trip here, I found a real desire to learn about prevention and the need to work with families, not just remove children from a bad situation. I saw that our partners in Tomsk really believe in strengthening families and providing them with

support. There is no longer the idea that at-risk families cannot change. They recognize the opportunity and responsibility to prevent social abandonment through specialized social services. The broad-based acceptance of such ideas is a wonderful accomplishment.

During my most recent visit, I learned that Tomsk State University plans to make the curricula we developed together available to all universities in Russia. It is my hope that they will work to replicate their experience in other regions of Russia.

What are some of the challenges of international partnerships?

One of the most significant barriers to such partnerships is the language. Even with excellent translators, this can be a challenge. However, it was very useful for me to live in Russia for one year during the project. This gave me the opportunity to break down barriers and demonstrate to our partners that I was committed to the project. It is also important to believe that you can learn just as much from the people you are working with as you are teaching them. A lot of the work that we do in the US is based on the mistakes that have been made in the past and the lessons we learned from them. I came here to share this knowledge with my Russian partners so they don't repeat our past mistakes.

Do you have any future plans for partnering with the Tomsk State University?

We have plans to continue sharing our knowledge and we hope to collaborate on articles in both Russian and American social work journals. I would really like to invite three Russians from child welfare agencies to Alaska to see how we are supporting the cooperation and interaction between universities, social welfare agencies and the government. Such an extensive visit would allow the Russians to experience the practical aspects of the training. Most importantly, they will be able to see how the American child welfare system learned from our past mistakes. The University of Alaska will be happy to continue as a resource for Tomsk State University and I hope that our partnership will continue.



Successful Foster Family Care Model Shared with ARO Target Regions

Social work specialists from throughout Russia are frequent visitors to an orphanage in the village of Zyryansky, two hours from the city of Tomsk in western Siberia. As a result of support from the USAID-funded Assistance to Russian Orphans (ARO) program, the orphanage has become well-known among child welfare specialists as a model institution implementing innovative foster family care programs.

Since 2002, ARO implementing partner, the National Foundation for Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NFPCC), has been working with the Zyryansky orphanage to develop and institutionalize a model for foster family care. The model introduces new methods of developing and preparing foster families and expands the responsibilities of orphanage staff beyond working with the children. With assistance from NFPCC, the Zyryansky orphanage provides support to foster families through trainings and counseling in order to better prepare them to receive foster children. The trainings focus on good parenting skills and the challenges of raising children who have been living in orphanages. These trainings and support increase the likelihood that the children will transition well into new foster families. In addition to the foster family trainings, the model involves partnering with the government agency responsible for placing children with foster families.

The specialists at the Zyryansky orphanage believe it is valuable to share their experience developing and institutionalizing the ARO foster family care model. With a grant from the ARO 3 program, Zyryansky decided to support the replication of their model in the ARO target regions by providing trainings and demonstrating how the model can be practically implemented. In August 2008, Zyryansky began to develop training materials and prepare to host study tours. As a result, specialists from the ARO target regions visited Zyryansky to learn first hand about the foster family care models and receive specialized trainings from orphanage staff. For many specialists, it was the first time they had learned about this type of training and support for foster families. In addition, they witnessed the successful cooperation between the Zyryansky orphanage and the local government. The director of the Zyryansky orphanage, Tatyana Shaído, commented on the value of the project. "The study tours and trainings are not only valuable for specialists in the other ARO target regions.

Through developing and conducting the seminars, our staff can reflect on their work and discuss lessons learned. In addition, in preparing the training materials, we were able to select the best methods and develop a customized training program."

To date, groups from six regions have visited Zyryansky to learn about their work. In February and March 2009, Zyryansky specialists began travelling to the ARO target regions Khabarovsk and Tambov to provide trainings and advise the ARO partners on implementing the foster family care model. They provide trainings and advice to orphanage staff and discuss their work in Tomsk region. In the coming months, Zyryansky staff are planning more trainings throughout the ARO target regions.



Workshop during Study Tour at Zyryansky Orphanage.

With support from NFPCC, the Zyryansky orphanage continues to be at the forefront of innovative foster family care and strives to share their experience in target regions throughout the country. NFPCC Director of Education Programs, Antonia Shepina, recognizes the importance of this project and the successful replication of ARO initiatives. She notes, "The study tours and trainings give specialists the opportunity to visit other regions and see how other organizations work. In addition to this, it is especially valuable because specialists and government officials receive information from people who are directly implementing the activities. They can directly address certain problems and offer practical solutions."



NFPCC Conference Brings Together Specialists from Siberia and the Russian Far East

Child welfare actors from across Siberia and the Russian Far East gathered in Tomsk from March 31 to April 1, for the interregional conference “Implementation of Russia’s Family Policy in the Social Abandonment Prevention Sphere: Siberian Regions Experience.” The conference was organized by the National Foundation for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NFPCC) and the Tomsk Oblast Department of Family and Children Issues in order to discuss their work implementing child abandonment prevention programs. More than 100 senior management staff and specialists from 15 regions discussed their experiences at roundtables and participated in master classes focusing on the early detection of at-risk families, assistance to families and child protection.

Tomsk was selected as the site of the conference because it is known for its child welfare innovations and has a great deal of experience as a partner in the USAID-funded Assistance to Russian Orphans (ARO) program. The main topics of the conference included: the experience developing the child protection system in Tomsk Oblast as well as the creation and introduction of innovative services for children and families at risk of social abandonment developed with support from the ARO Program. In addition, representatives from Khabarovsk and Novosibirsk Oblasts, Altay Krai, Republic of Buryatia, and other regions also presented their experience with social abandonment prevention and engaged in lively roundtable discussions about program methodologies and implementation with other participants. Conference participants took part in a number of master classes conducted by NFPCC experts and also visited sites in Tomsk to observe the theories in practice in Tomsk child welfare institutions.

The conference is the first of three conferences to take place this year as part of the “To Hear a Child” project funded by the federal budget in compliance with a decree from the President of the Russian Federation. The next two conferences will take place in Karelia and Moscow in the coming months. The conference followed a special session of the Russian Federation State Duma Family, Women and Children’s Issues Committee held in Tomsk on March 30th. The interregional conference highlighted NFPCC’s growing reputation as a leader in child welfare

in Russia. The conference received a special acknowledgement from Svetlana Medvedev, the wife of Russian President Dmitry Medvedev and from the Head of the Russian President’s Administration. In addition, there was a great deal of media coverage throughout Siberia about the conference and the special State Duma meeting.

In order to disseminate models and technologies developed in the framework of the ARO activities in Tomsk, NFPCC and the Tomsk Department of Family and Children’s Issues published a collection of articles and legal documents for the meeting titled, “Implementation of State Family Policy in the Sphere of Social Abandonment Prevention: The Tomsk Oblast Experience.” The publication included articles about the introduction of administrative mechanisms for social abandonment prevention, rehabilitation of at-risk families and children, assistance to foster families and social adaptation of children who have aged out of orphanages. The publication was supplemented by a CD containing a set of legal documents, a consolidation of the main mechanisms of a regional prevention system, as well as the results of research conducted by the Center for Fiscal Policy titled, “Socio-Economic Consequences of Family and Childhood Social Protection Reform in Tomsk Oblast and Budget Expenses for its Implementation.”

As a result of the conference, NFPCC and participants developed a resolution stating the most important measures to be taken by relevant federal and regional government authorities. The measures agreed upon by the specialists attending the conference address key issues such as the development of a complex family policy program, improved children’s rights legislation, development of quality standards for social abandonment prevention services, improved case management systems focusing on early detection of at-risk families and the introduction of foster family legislation.

The conference provided the opportunity for child welfare specialists and government officials to discuss key issues in the area of social abandonment prevention. The following two conferences over the next several months will build on the momentum created in Tomsk and will result in a national platform to discuss child welfare issues.



NFPCC trainer Sergei Borzov conducts a master class on early detection technology and case management.



Conference participants work together during the master classes.



ARO Partners Share Experiences During Regional Study Tours

In April, 11 child welfare specialists and heads of agencies visited Tomsk for a study tour in order to learn more about interdepartmental collaboration on early detection and crisis support for at-risk children and families. They visited Tomsk regional institutions and attended sessions to learn about the structure and activities of Tomsk regional specialists on the creation of a social abandonment prevention system. During the visits, the specialists also attended master classes and roundtable discussions at the conference “Implementation of Russia’s Family Policy in the Social Abandonment Prevention Sphere: Siberian Regions Experience.”

Ten orphanage specialists from Komsomolsk-on-Amur and Amursk participated in a study tour at Orphanage #8 in April. Based on Khabarovsk’s experience, the specialists studied how to develop foster care services. During the study tour, the participants gained professional skills related to the development of family-based forms of care for orphaned and abandoned children. NFPCC will work with the study tour participants to assist with the development of foster care services.

In May, 12 specialists from Novosibirsk region traveled to Barnaul to visit three institutions developing early intervention technology in social welfare and health systems. During their visit, they also participated in a roundtable on early intervention, where Krasnoyarsk Krai officials presented their experience implementing early intervention technology in the region.

Trainings in Tambov and Altai

NFPCC recently conducted trainings and two supervisory visits for 84 specialists in Tambov and Altai regions. These events focused on increasing the effectiveness of early detection and case management activities. During these activities, NFPCC experts highlighted the practical problems of implementing early detection and case management programs. The experts provided solutions to these problems and used case studies to work through actual cases. After the training, the experts noted the participants’ improved skills and knowledge working with at-risk families.

Novosibirsk Seminars

In April and May, there were several seminars in Novosibirsk region including: “Experiences of Creating and Working with Foster Families”; “Supporting Children At Risk of Social Abandonment in Social and Education Environment” and “Adaptation and Support for Children Who Have Aged Out of Orphanages.” At the first training, participants received specialized knowledge about the creation of foster family services in orphanages as well as information about the Tomsk region experience with legal issues related to foster family service deve-

lopment. They also learned about how to evaluate foster families and the criteria to use. At the second training, participants learned about recreational and cultural activities for at-risk children. The training covered all stages of implementing recreational and cultural program, from setting up the program, attracting children and concluding the program. During the third training on working with children who have aged out of orphanages, participants learned about the psychological state of such children, as well as both the methods and technologies to assist them. They also learned how to develop programs aimed at the social adaptation of children and how to assess the effectiveness of their programs.

News from Our Partner

NFPCC Supports International Child Helpline Day on May 17th

With assistance from the international NGO Child Helpline International, NFPCC helped introduce International Child Helpline Day to Russia. In early May, NFPCC sent information to all regional governments and their respective child welfare agencies as well as all child helplines in Russia suggesting ways they could draw attention to International Child Helpline Day and support its cause. Child Helpline International declared May 17 International Child Helpline Day. The day is dedicated to celebrating the invaluable work child helplines around the world, which provide help to children with the problems they encounter in their daily lives.

NFPCC has received a large number of responses from government agencies throughout Russia, describing how they publicized International Child Helpline Day in their region. NFPCC is collecting all of the responses and will organize a discussion at an upcoming roundtable on child helplines focusing on activities that could take place during the 2010 International Child Helpline Day.

Child Helpline International works in over 160 countries to provide comfort, help and support to children in need of care and protection. They use information and communication technology to enable even the most marginalized to reach out for help. Every year, the Child Helpline International network responds to approximately 10.5 million calls from children in need.



Upcoming Activities:

Tambov

June 3-4

Supervisory visit and roundtable on foster families

June 23-24

Training for trainers on early intervention

Novosibirsk

June 8-10

Foster Family Seminars

June 17-19

Early Intervention Seminars

June 22-23

Seminar on support for children at risk of social abandonment in the social and educational environment

June 24-25

Seminar on support for children who have aged out of orphanages

Tomsk

June 16-17

Training on institutionalization of standards for specialists from the Department of Family and Children's Issues

June 29 - July 1

Foster Family Seminars

Altai Krai

June 17

Seminar on the development of inter-departmental early intervention systems

Moscow

June 19-21

Third session of the Telephone Helpline Seminar for Supervisors

June 25-26

International Conference "A Childhood Without Abuse: Protection and Support for Children"



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