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News and Updates:
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IREX/ASSISTANCE TO RUSSIAN ORPHANS (ARO) PROGRAM



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

Fairy Tale School Provides a Safe Place for Kids in Novosibirsk

Earlier this year, sisters Masha,* Yulia and Lena were heading down the wrong path and were not receiving proper care at home. They lived in a tiny one-room apartment in Iskitim, Novosibirsk with their mother, father, aunt and 15-year old brother. Neither parent had a steady income and their brother, Sasha, had been convicted of stealing. The girls did not see a problem with their brother's actions and Masha,

age 12, had also started to steal with the help of Yulia, age 8. Lena, age 7, would insult other children and try to take their money. Their mother often behaved aggressively, both physically and verbally, and the girls were not given any supervision. All the girls had emotional problems and difficulties interacting with other children.

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*All names have been changed to ensure confidentiality.

Summary:

In August and September, IREX's main implementing partner for the USAID-funded Assistance to Russian Orphans (ARO) program, the National Foundation for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NFPCC) conducted seminars and trainings as part of wrapping up ARO activities and working towards institutionalization of the services developed within ARO. In addition, NFPCC organized a child welfare conference in Moscow and co-organized one in Krasnoyarsk. NFPCC and IREX continued to work towards the prevention of child abandonment by providing child welfare specialists and professionals with effective skills, knowledge and resources.



Golden Key to the Child's Heart Gives At-Risk Kids a New Start

The Golden Key to the Child's Heart social hostel in Leninsky District in Novosibirsk provides a safe, comfortable place for kids from at-risk families to do homework, receive extra support and feel needed. The program is supported by the USAID-funded Assistance to Russian Orphans Program (ARO), which is implemented by IREX with the National Foundation for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NFPCC). Secondary School #66 ran the program for nine months in order to establish a new service for at-risk children in Novosibirsk. Eight boys and two girls from at-risk families were selected to participate in the pilot project. The children were selected because they had behavioral problems at school and some had had run-ins with the law. They also had poor grades and frequently skipped class. The specialists implementing the program attended training seminars with NFPCC experts on educational support programs for at-risk kids before implementing the project.

The specialists created a special room at the school where the students would feel comfortable, needed and safe. At the room, the children had special art classes, were tutored, both in groups and individually, and had individual counseling sessions. In addition, the group would take trips to the theater and go on other excursions.

The kids eagerly attended program events and their behavior started to improve. The students started to attend class more regularly and received better grades. At the end of this year, they all advanced to the next grade. Their relationships with both their other classmates and teachers improved.

The project not only provided the children with psychological and emotional support, but also gave them school supplies in order to encourage attendance and participation in school. Three siblings involved in the program often skipped school because they did not have the necessary supplies and were embarrassed. After receiving school supplies and gaining more confidence, the children become more involved in their classes.

Secondary School #66 will continue to provide additional psychological support to at-risk children based on the experience gained through the Golden Key to the Child's Heart program. The staff at the school are thankful for the opportunity to partner with IREX and NFPCC and have learned a great deal from the experience.



Natasha*, age 10, had started to slip through the cracks at school. She lived in an overcrowded apartment with six other people and was not given enough attention. Her house lacked indoor plumbing and she spent most of her free time unsupervised. She often skipped school and was failing some of her classes.

Then she started attending Golden Key to the Child's Heart activities. She became very active in the program and especially like the extra Russian classes. A teacher worked with Natasha individually to help bring out her writing talent. After a few months of the extra support, Natasha entered and won a district poetry competition. She also started to attend class regularly and her grades improved.

The poem below is one of Natasha's winning entries at the district poetry competition.

*Spring
The sun sends its bright rays.
And the cheerful call of dripping water.
Spring! Exclaim the trees.
Blooms and smells every day!
Snowdrops bloom.
Spring and the sun sing.
Spring. What a wonderful word.
Spring-this time of year.*

*All names have been changed to ensure confidentiality.



Seventeen professionals, including doctors, teachers, psychologists and child welfare specialists, from six Russian regions improved their skills and knowledge at the event. The purpose of the training was to create a group of skilled professionals with common goals and the ability to effect positive changes at baby homes, thus improving the lives of children.



Participants presented different models for improving work in baby homes, improved their communication and negotiation skills, determined baby homes' primary needs, and created a strategy for communicating with baby home administrations and staff. In working groups, the professionals developed criteria for successful baby homes and helped prepare necessary documents to evaluate baby homes. One of the major documents drafted at the training was the "Criteria for Evaluating Baby Homes," which included medical, psychological and educational perspectives. The training also gave the professionals a chance to come together, share their experiences and determine what skills they need to strengthen. This training was only the first step for the participants and they know that they must attend more trainings and increase their knowledge before leading trainings on their own.

Training of trainers is important because with the increase in the number of baby homes in the Association, NFPCC needs a greater capacity to follow up the innovative activities at each baby home. NFPCC, therefore, decided to create a team of trainers who share the Association's mission and have a common approach to baby home evaluation, support and supervision. The goal of the Association for the Modernization of Baby Homes is to bring together baby homes that have taken initiatives to improve the care of institutionalized children.

Association for the Modernization of Baby Homes works to Expand Membership

In September members of the Association for the Modernization of Baby Homes met to discuss how to further expand Association membership. They decided to prepare a message to be sent to head doctors of baby homes across Russia about the goals and mission of the Association and invite them to start the membership process to join the Association. The messages will be sent in October.

As part of efforts to expand membership in the Association for the Modernization of Baby Homes, NFPCC's coordinator for the Association had a meeting with the director of the Coordination Center for Baby Homes, part of the St. Petersburg Department of Public Health. They discussed supporting Association activities in St. Petersburg and the goals and mission of the Association. As a result of the meeting, the Coordination Center is ready to help support the Association's development and participate in its activities.

Rehabilitative Play to be Institutionalized in Tomsk and Expanded in Novosibirsk

During September, ARO work in Tomsk continued on institutionalizing services developed within the program framework. As part of these efforts, a meeting on institutionalizing rehabilitative play services in Molchanovsk District was held. Meeting participants determined that rehabilitative play is especially useful in rural locations because the method is easily accessible and they would like to have a seminar on rehabilitative play in Molchanovsk District.

NFPCC experts also conducted the final ARO seminar on implementing rehabilitative play in schools Leninsky District of Novosibirsk City and Kuibyshev District of Novosibirsk Oblast, ARO pilot regions in Novosibirsk, for 30 school officials from the regions. The seminar was held to look for ways to reorganize educational and developmental activities at schools in order to improve their social abandonment prevention efforts.

The seminar participants improved their knowledge and practical skills on the following topics: forms of rehabilitative activities at schools; possibilities for including rehabilitative play activities as part of school development; analysis of effective and ineffective ways of preventing social abandonment at schools; and successful examples of organizing rehabilitative play at schools. A supervisory visit is planned for November to monitor the progress in implementing the program in the pilot regions.



ARO works to Institutionalize Services in Novosibirsk and Improve Early Intervention

NFPCC held a meeting with the Novosibirsk Oblast Administration on institutionalizing developed services for preventing social abandonment. Thirty seven agency representatives, including from educational, social protection and public health agencies, specialists from Kuibyshev and Iskitim Districts and Leninsky District in Novosibirsk City, the Oblast's pilot regions, as well as the deputy governor and administration department leaders all participated in the meeting. The participants analyzed and evaluated the results of the innovative activities for preventing social abandonment in the pilot regions; defined the strategy for further developing and institutionalizing the system in the Oblast; and determined their action plan for further steps.

NFPCC experts also conducted the final ARO seminar on Early Intervention Methods and Technologies for 23 specialists working in early intervention in Novosibirsk. Participants improved their communication skills, including the development of early communication and alternative methods of communication. They also learned about implemented early intervention activities, such as play sessions at lekotekas and early intervention services, and mastered the practical skills needed for implementing the early intervention methods and technologies. A supervisory visit is planned for October to monitor how the specialists are using the methods and technologies.

Center in Krasnoyarsk Improves Children's Development



Kolya* was born into a loving family, but had developmental problems. His mother suspected something was not right, so when he was around a year old she took him to the Krasnoyarsk Kray Center for Psychological, Medical and Social Support, where specialists had been trained on early intervention through the USAID-funded ARO

program. At the center, specialists noticed that he did not react when spoken to, rarely made eye contact with people, did not have much control over his behavior and did not fully engage when playing with toys. The specialists determined that his level of development did not correspond to his age.

In order to improve his development, Kolya attended one group lesson per week at the center and also had individual sessions focusing on communication and learning. After 12 individual sessions and meeting regularly with the group, Kolya started to show signs of improvement. He now says hi and bye to people, plays more creatively, and interacts with adults by repeating words and finishing nursery rhymes.

*All names have been changed to ensure confidentiality.

News From Our Partner

NFPCC held a Child Welfare Conference in Moscow

On September 15-16 in Moscow, NFPCC organized the inter-regional conference “The Russian Child Protection System: Key Problems, Experiences and the Future” as part of the “To Hear a Child” program, which is funded by the National Charity Fund. The conference attracted 230 participants, including child welfare specialists, government officials and NGO representatives from over 35 regions of Russia. The participants shared experiences in organizing early detection of at-risk families, worked on developing preventative services for families and children, and discussed proposals to improve federal and regional legislation for early detection and child welfare.



Aleksei Golovan, Presidential Commissioner for Children's Rights, presenting at the conference in Moscow.



Upcoming Activities:

Altay Kray

October 20
ARO Concluding Meeting

Khabarovsk Kray

October 21-22
Seminar on Family-Based Forms of Care

Novosibirsk Oblast

October 21-23
Seminar and Supervision on Family-Based Forms of Care

October 21
Presentation on Technologies for Monitoring Children at Schools

October 25-27

Seminar on Adaptation of Children who have Aged Out of Orphanages

October TBD

ARO Concluding Meeting

Tambov Oblast

October 5-6

Seminar on Family-Based Forms of Care

October 6-8

Supervision of Family-Based Forms of Care

Tomsk Oblast

October 15-16

Seminar for Social Hostel Methodological Hubs

October 22-23

Supervision of Tomsk Foster Family Services

News From Our Partner

NFPCC Co-Organized an Early Intervention Conference in Krasnoyarsk

NFPCC organized the conference “Early Intervention for Families and Children with Special Needs” in Krasnoyarsk on September 22-23 with the Siberian Civic Initiatives Support Center and support from the Krasnoyarsk Kray Ministry of Education and Ministry of Public Health. Over 160 child welfare specialists and government officials from nine Russian regions participated in the conference. At the conference, the participants became familiar with early intervention models, approaches and technologies for working children with special needs that have been implemented in Krasnoyarsk and other Russian regions. NFPCC's experience implementing the ARO program in various Russian regions was highlighted.



Participants at the conference in Krasnoyarsk

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