



# IREX/ASSISTANCE TO RUSSIAN ORPHANS (ARO) PROGRAM



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## Astrakhan Conference Strengthens Russian Telephone Helpline Networks

90 specialists from Russia, Belarus, Ukraine and the United States met in Astrakhan on October 21-23 at the Third International Telephone Helpline Conference "Telephone Helplines: Services for Understanding in Society," organized by the National Foundation for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NFPC) and the Astrakhan Regional Agency for Youth Affairs with support from USAID and Child Helpline International. The conference was a key example of NGO and government collaboration to create a space for exchanging experience and raising the qualifications of children's telephone helpline staff. The NFPC is IREX's key implementing partner on **USAID's Assistance to Russian Orphans Program (ARO)**, which strives to ensure children's right to lead a full life in a loving family free of abuse and neglect. ▶▶▶



Telephone counselors at the training "How to Create Dialogue When Counseling Children and Teens in Crisis"

### Summary:

In October, IREX's main implementing partner on the ARO program, the National Foundation for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NFPC) hosted its Third International Telephone Helpline Conference, which united telephone helpline professionals from Belarus, Ukraine, the United States and across Russia. The NFPC has been a leader in establishing standards of practice for Russian helplines.

In October, the NFPC was awarded a grant from the Russian government through the National Charitable Fund to further strengthen telephone helpline services. The NFPC project "Listening to Children" will receive 10 million rubles (approximately \$360,000) to train staff for 25 helplines in 8 regions from Moscow to Magadan.

Teams of medical college and vocational school students in St. Petersburg participated in a unique HIV awareness event in which they competed for points based on their knowledge of the virus and its transmission. The event was conducted by IREX's implementing partner Stellit, a St. Petersburg NGO, as part of ARO's HIV prevention program for at-risk youth.

ARO continued its efforts to build strong support services for foster families through regional trainings for support service staff in Tomsk and Tambov regions.



The Russian participants represented 26 Russian cities, from Arkhangelsk in the Northwest to Chukotka in the Far East. While the conference's main focus was creating and sustaining dialogue between telephone counselors and clients, elective sessions and master classes gave attendees the chance to further explore topics relevant to their individual work and strengthen their professional skills.

Ekaterina Lykhanenko, Astrakhan region's Minister of Labor and Social Development, opened the conference along with NFPCC President Marina Egorova, who presented a welcome letter from the international organization Child Helpline International. Experts from the Moscow Gestalt Institute, the Leningrad Regional Institute of Educational Development, and the Institute of Existential and Analytical Psychology and Psychotherapy, as well as other institutions, led the master classes.

All 21 of the member organizations of the Association of Children's Telephone Helplines, founded in 2007 by the NFPCC, were in attendance and received certificates of entry into the Association. The NFPCC has been providing organizational and methodological support and training to child helplines in Russia and its Association has established standards of practice for Russian helplines. NFPCC experts have assisted in the creation of over 20 helplines throughout Russia, including one of the first rural helpline networks in Tomsk region and a government-funded network of 10 helplines in Novosibirsk region. The latter initiative was commissioned by the region's governor based on the success of an ARO-supported helpline in the city of Novosibirsk.

As professional "burnout" among telephone counselors continues to threaten the quality of psychological support provided, the conference also allowed helpline staff to share experiences and best practices in the field of telephone counseling.



Dr. Eileen Lally (left) addresses conference participants

Following the conference, 20 supervisors representing Association of Children's Telephone Helplines member organizations in 12 cities stayed on for an additional 3-day training entitled "Supportive Supervision," which equipped them with the tools to effectively support their employees and reduce turnover. The training, organized by the NFPCC, was conducted by ARO consultant Dr. Eileen Lally, Director of the Family & Youth Services Training Academy at the University of Alaska at Anchorage.

In the face of Russia's child abandonment crisis – the Russian government reported over 742,000 orphaned and abandoned children in 2007 – telephone helplines are a vital tool for the early detection of abuse and neglect. Early identification of at-risk families and coordinated support through a system of case management remain at the core of ARO's efforts to stop the unprecedented growth in child abandonment in Russia.

## Game Format Energizes HIV Education Event for Vocational School Students in St. Petersburg

Teams of students competed to win points based on their knowledge of HIV/AIDS at an educational event held at Medical College #1 in St. Petersburg on October 1. Peer counselors from three of the city's vocational schools, trained by the NGO Stellit under the ARO program, manned six interactive stations, where the teams collected points for correctly completing tasks and answering questions about HIV. At the station "Living Together," for example, students had to identify which items, such as a spoon, razor, needle, or handkerchief, could be shared without the risk of HIV transmission. The station "Level of Risk" required students to organize a stack of pictures into three piles, based on the level of risk (high, medium, or none) of the activities depicted. At the end of the game, the team with the most points was declared the winner.

Approximately 90 students took part in the event, which was organized by Medical College #1's student and faculty "Health Council" as part of the ARO-funded project "Cooperation for HIV Prevention in Professional Education Institutions." IREX's implementing partner, the St. Petersburg NGO Stellit, coordinates the program and trained the "Health Councils" and peer counselors on HIV issues. As many vocational school students come from disadvantaged families or orphanages, this population is considered at increased risk of contracting HIV. The competitive quiz and other educational events organized by the "Health Councils" are aimed at promoting healthy lifestyles



and tolerance towards those living with HIV, informing young people about the consequences of risky behavior, and raising general awareness of HIV/AIDS among youth in St. Petersburg.



Medical college students discuss which household items can transmit HIV

## ARO and NFPCC Promote Family-Centered Approach to Child Welfare Work

Many social workers are drawn to the profession by a drive to rescue children from abuse and neglect. Traditionally, according to the US Department of Health and Human Services' Child Welfare Information Gateway, child welfare agencies have addressed allegations of maltreatment by investigating the case, determining whether abuse or neglect has occurred or if the child is at risk, and proceeding with an appropriate intervention. However, evaluating the well-being of individual children as opposed to whole families has its limitations. In the US, many state and municipal child welfare authorities are moving to a more family-centered approach, which focuses on assessing the strengths and needs of the family and child while ensuring the child's safety. Social workers then connect families to community agencies that can provide social services.\*

In Russia, where there are over half a million orphaned and abandoned children, the NFPCC and ARO are also working to introduce family-centered methods of social work.\*\* On October 29-November 1, the NFPCC hosted a training in Moscow on the family-centered approach for its employees as well as 12 regional consultants and partners.

\* Background information provided by the Child Welfare Information Gateway (<http://www.childwelfare.gov/famcentered/overview/approaches/alternative.cfm>)

\*\* 742,000 orphaned and abandoned children were reported by the Russian government in 2007.

Dr. Eileen Lally, Director of the Family & Youth Services Training Academy at the University of Alaska at Anchorage and NFPCC Director of Educational and Regional Programs Antonina Shepina co-conducted the training, which covered family safety and risk assessments, techniques for the identification and assessment of violence and neglect, the role of cultural factors in child welfare work, and skills for interviewing and communicating with at-risk families.

“Most of the time in Russia, social work is more centered on children, especially for those who came into social work with the idea of saving kids,” commented Shepina. “They think that troubled families can’t change.” Regional seminars through the ARO program train child welfare professionals to identify and help families in the early stages of crisis, instead of intervening only to revoke parental rights. Other ARO components, such after-school activity centers for at-risk kids and telephone helplines for children, provide additional methods for the early identification of at-risk families, which is a key aspect of ARO’s child abandonment prevention efforts.

## Foster Family Support Staff Learn about Child Trauma in Tomsk and Tambov Regions

On October 22-24, 20 staff members from 8 foster family support providers in Tomsk region attended an ARO seminar on child trauma issues. Participants received an overview of child trauma and post-traumatic symptoms and discussed methods for working with child trauma survivors. ARO trainers also covered professional “burnout” syndrome and provided tips for managing job-related stress. On October 6-8, a similar seminar was held in Tambov for 14 child welfare professionals. As many children entering foster care in Russia have experienced abuse and neglect, professional training on trauma is vital for foster family support service providers.

## Open House Event Introduces First Foster Family Support Service in Novosibirsk

On October 15, Novosibirsk’s Orphanage #13 opened its doors to the community to showcase the project “Creating Support Services for Foster



Families.” Developed with technical guidance from the NFPC, the project aims to re-profile Orphanage #13 as a support center for foster families and is being conducted jointly with the “Sunny Circle” City Center for the Prevention of Child Abandonment and the Leninsky District Guardianship Committee. The project, which is the first of its kind in Novosibirsk, also received government funding through the regional “Children of Novosibirsk Region” initiative.

Orphanage #13’s project replicates successful ARO experience re-profiling orphanages in Tomsk region, where the Zyransky Orphanage has become a model site for foster family support services. Study tours funded by the ARO program have allowed child welfare professionals from Novosibirsk, Krasnoyarsk and other regions to observe functioning support services in action

before developing and implementing their own foster family programs.

## Multiple Agencies Cooperate to Help At-Risk Families in Barnaul

23 representatives of schools, medical institutions, social services, and regional and city government officials met at an ARO seminar October 7-8 in Barnaul to develop a model of cooperation in identifying and assisting families at risk of child abandonment. Participants left the seminar with a greater understanding of their roles and responsibilities in the overall system of child abandonment prevention, as well as a plan for future interagency coordination.

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

### Round Table Event Promotes Dialogue on Reduction of Child Poverty

On October 15, 35 Moscow city officials, child and family advocates, academics and representatives of the business community convened in the capital for a round table discussion on the theme “Children and Poverty.” The event marked the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty and was jointly organized by the NFPC and the International Labor Organization (ILO).

Alexei Golovan, Children’s Ombudsman for the City of Moscow, spoke on the current situation of families and children in the capital and the measures of available government support, as well as presenting the NFPC with a new collection of international documents on children’s rights. Businesspeople noted that while corporate charitable contributions have become significant in recent years, these efforts remain poorly coordinated and sometimes duplicate government programs. During the discussion, attendees concluded that better regulatory measures are necessary in order to maximize the impact of corporate charitable donations.

Round table guests presented their research on forms of child poverty and its contributing factors as well as Moscow’s most pressing social service needs. Material from the round table discussion will be published in the journals *Social Work*, *Social Service Issues*, and “*Protect Me*.”

### Baby Home Staff Analyze Progress, Plan Further Reforms at Krasnoyarsk Seminar

On October 19-25, staff from two baby homes – specialized orphanages for children under 4 – in Krasnoyarsk and Sosnovoborsk attended an intensive seminar covering best practices in early intervention, a new type of assistance in Russia which targets children 0-4 with disabilities. Early intervention includes the early diagnosis of causes of disabilities as well as 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 NFPC is currently promoting the development of early intervention services in baby homes in Krasnoyarsk Krai as part

of a USAID-sponsored Global Development Alliance program with the Krasnoyarsk Krai administration. Recent program activity also included an October 13-16 training of trainers for early childhood specialists in Krasnoyarsk and surrounding cities to further disseminate early intervention techniques.

In addition to introducing early intervention services, the project seeks to improve the quality of everyday care in baby homes. Due to a lack of personalized attention and interaction, children living in baby homes are at risk of developmental delays and/or worsening of already existing disabilities. To combat this unfortunate trend, the October seminar covered best practices in feeding, changing and putting children to bed, as well as how to comfortably position children with severe motor disabilities without further aggravating these disabilities. Interactive tasks, such as analyzing video footage of children in baby homes where reforms have taken place and hands-on training in performing massage for children with special needs, allowed baby home staff to practice new techniques before implementing reforms in their institutions.



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

### Russian Government Awards the NFPCC \$360,000 to Strengthen Telephone Helplines in Collaboration with USAID-Funded Assistance to Russian Orphans (ARO) Program

10-year-old Tolik\* had already attempted suicide twice when he contacted a telephone hotline for help. Struggling with the reality of his mother's recent death, Tolik had also forbidden himself from smiling, playing and enjoying life. "You aren't allowed to be happy when your mother has died," he told a hotline counselor. "I need to be good and obedient, so that God will give me back my mother." Tolik desperately awaited his mother's return, and decided that if she did not come by New Year's, he would go to her – by making a third and final effort to kill himself. He already had a plan. Telephone helplines are a crucial support service for vulnerable children like Tolik and receive calls from over 10 million children worldwide each year.

IREX's key implementing partner on the USAID-funded ARO program, the National Foundation for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NFPCC), has led the way in developing a sustainable network of telephone helplines in the Russian Federation. Over the past years, 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

\* All names have been changed to protect the privacy and confidentiality of ARO and NFPCC clients.



Participants at the Third International Telephone Helpline Conference in Astrakhan, October 2008

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.

In October 2008, the NFPCC was awarded a grant from the Russian government through the National Charitable Fund to further strengthen telephone helpline services. The NFPCC project "Listening to Children" will receive 10 million rubles (approximately \$360,000) to train staff for 25 helplines in 8 regions from Moscow to Magadan. Outreach campaigns will also be conducted to maximize the public's awareness and use of these services. Under this year-long grant, the NFPCC will also organize several conferences on the early identification of children and families in

crisis and strategies for assisting these clients. Working with at-risk families before problems escalate is a key component of ARO's child abandonment prevention efforts.

The telephone helpline was a source of support and guidance for Tolik and his family as they recovered from tragedy. From the start, the counselors worked to make sure Tolik understood he could talk about anything – even his negative feelings, worries, and suicide plans. Over time, the counselors helped Tolik identify strategies to overcome the traumatic situations he had survived. His relationship with his father, who was also suffering severe grief, improved, and Tolik also began to turn to his favorite maternal aunt for support. Eventually, the little boy no longer dreaded leaving the house and wanted to return to school. Instead of trying to be "good," he started playing, running, and laughing outside with his classmates. No child can recover from the loss of a parent overnight, but with the support of the telephone helpline, Tolik and his family now have a stronger foundation from which to move forward.



## Upcoming Activities:

**November 11-13 (Krasnoyarsk):**

Seminar on foster care for family support professionals.

**November 13-15 (Novosibirsk):**

Project design seminar for child welfare professionals.

**November 17-22 (Ulan-Ude):**

Participation in the President of the Republic of Buryatia's coordinating council to develop a republic-wide system of child abandonment prevention; project management seminar.

**November 17-28 (Novosibirsk):**

Seminar on telephone counseling work with children and teens in crisis.

**November 18-21 (Tomsk):**

Training for child welfare professionals from Khanty-Mansisk region.

**November 24 (Novosibirsk):**

Grand opening of telephone helpline for children and teens in Leninsky district.

**November 24-26 (Khabarovsk):**

Seminar on life skills and post-orphanage support programs.

**November 24-28 (Krasnoyarsk):**

Seminar on modern approaches to working with children with multiple mental and physical disabilities and their families.

**November 25-28**

**(Komsomolsk-na-Amure):**

Seminar on early identification of and case work with families in crisis.

**November 26 (Krasnoyarsk):**

Round table discussion with health care professionals.

**November 26-28 (Tambov):**

Seminar on early intervention for children with disabilities.

**November 26-28 (St. Petersburg):**

Training on communication and consultation with HIV positive clients for social workers and psychologists employed at social welfare centers.

**November 30-December 6**

**(Krasnoyarsk):**

Seminar on early intervention for baby home staff.



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