





IREX/ASSISTANCE TO RUSSIAN ORPHANS (ARO) PROGRAM



Summary:

In April, the ARO Team conducted two seminars in Novosibirsk and Barnaul on the prevention of abandonment of newborns, and ARO expert consultants led a seminar on case management for social workers in Tambov. ARO also conducted two grant competitions in the Tomsk oblast and held a grant management seminar for ARO grant recipients.

ARO Co-Director and NFPCC President Marina Egorova traveled to Dushanbe, Tajikistan in April to participate in a seminar entitled "Social Protection of Vulnerable Children," where she shared the NFPCC's experience implementing child abandonment prevention models and made valuable contacts with delegations from Afghanistan, Iran, and Tajikistan.



NFPCC President Marina Egorova on NTV Program "Nashe vsyo"

Marina Egorova also participated in a television program entitled "Nashe vsyo" (which translates as "Everything Ours") on Channel NTV. The program highlighted the pressing issue of child abandonment in Russia, and Marina Egorova talked about the problem of infant abandonment.

Two ARO grant recipients in St. Petersburg launched HIV prevention projects in April. The projects seek to provide comprehensive support to families and children affected by HIV and to prevent the spread of HIV among high-risk youth studying at vocational schools.

St. Petersburg HIV Prevention Projects Launched

On April 1, the "Doctors to Children" NGO, in cooperation with the Administration of the Kalininsky district of St. Petersburg, launched a project to provide comprehensive support to families and children affected by HIV in the Kalininsky district. The project began its launch, equipping the consulting center, hiring new staff, and holding the first support group for HIV-positive women and their families. Employees at the consulting center also participated in a team-building event organized by ARO.

NGO "Stellit" began work on the next phase of its project to implement HIV prevention programs for high-risk youth at vocational schools in St. Petersburg on April 15. "Stellit" has selected the schools where it will organize a variety of HIV prevention activities and is currently in negotiations with the Methodological Center of the St. Petersburg Municipal Education Committee to develop a city-wide HIV prevention program at schools throughout St. Petersburg.



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Legislative Changes Could Pose Threat to Foster Care in Russia

In early April 2008, as part of President Vladimir Putin's "Year of the Family," the State Duma of the Russian Federation adopted the federal law "On Guardianship and Custody" and a series of amendments to the Family Code that could pose a threat to the development of a viable foster care system for the estimated 700,000° orphaned and abandoned children (188,000° of whom currently live in orphanages) in Russia. A number of child welfare experts and organizations, including the National Foundation for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NFPCC), have expressed concern about how the new legislation could affect the wellbeing of Russia's orphaned and abandoned children.

Key Changes: Federal Law "On Guardianship and Custody"

- In addition to foster and guardian families, the law permits "emergency custody" without background checks (in the event that it is necessary to quickly appoint a guardian) and temporary placement of orphans in host families. The host families would exercise no parental or guardianship rights and would house the children for a maximum of one month (a maximum of three months is permissible under exceptional circumstances). During the first month there would be no monitoring of families' progress.
- Under the new legislation, regional guardianship committees, as opposed to orphanages and foster care centers, would take on sole responsibility for placing orphaned and abandoned children in foster families. While the law permits the guardianship committees to cooperate with other organizations to screen and train potential foster families, it fails to explicitly call for ongoing monitoring or support services. Without support services it remains unclear how the quality of life and safety of foster children would be ensured, given the vital role such services play in keeping foster families together particularly foster families caring for children with severe disabilities.
- The law allows for nongovernmental orphanages that meet the necessary requirements; however, the current legislation currently does not specify these requirements. In addition, the policies and procedures for the screening and training of foster families will no longer be determined at the regional level, but will instead be established by the federal government.

NFPCC President Shares Experience at IREX Seminar in Tajikistan

NFPCC President and ARO Co-Director Marina Egorova traveled to Dushanbe, Tajikistan on April 7-11 to participate in an international seminar entitled "Social Protection of Vulnerable Children" organized by IREX. Marina Egorova shared the NFPCC's experience creating and implementing child abandonment prevention models throughout the Russian Federation with delegations from Afghanistan, Iran, and Tajikistan.

Egorova discussed the general mechanisms involved in the organization of child abandonment prevention models at the municipal, regional, and federal level. Later, she provided a detailed overview of child abandonment prevention services that were of particular interest to the seminar participants; namely, services for at-risk children, services for at-risk families, family forms of care for orphaned and abandoned children, and services for children with disabilities.

The Afghan delegation expressed great interest in utilizing the NFPCC's child abandonment prevention models and invited Marina Egorova to give a similar presentation for local NGOs and government representatives in Kabul. The seminar in Tajikistan proved useful for all involved by providing a unique opportunity to exchange professional experience and establish new partnerships.

Tomsk Grant Competitions for Standards of Service

IREX, in cooperation with the National Foundation for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NFPCC) and the Tomsk Department of Family and Children's Issues, held two grant competitions in the Tomsk oblast in April.

An expert council comprised of representatives from the NFPCC and Tomsk Administration gathered on April 10 to review a pool of grant applications to develop and implement standards of practice for social services (rehabilitative leisure, after-school activity programs, and support services for foster families) in three pilot districts (Kargasok, Kozhevnikovo, and Shegarsk districts of Tomsk); 11 projects will receive ARO-funded grants. The expert council met again on April 30 to review



applications for a grant funded by the Tomsk Department of Family and Children's Issues to develop and implement standards of practice for social services in five districts (Bakcharsk, Parabel'sk, Tegul'detsk, Tomsk, and Verkhneketsk districts of the Tomsk oblast); the council selected 15 projects for funding that will improve services for at-risk children and foster families.

Seminar on Working with At-Risk Families in Tambov

Head of the ARO Expert Consulting Group Antonina Shepina and ARO Educational Consultant Dr. Eileen Lally traveled to Tambov on April 14-17, where they led a seminar on family-oriented approaches to working with at-risk families. The ARO consultants met with a group of social workers and discussed the fundamental aspects of case management from a family-centered perspective with the objective of preventing child abandonment and abuse.

Prevention of Abandonment of Newborns in Novosibirsk and Barnaul

On April 16-19 in Novosibirsk and April 21-24 in Barnaul, an ARO expert consultant from the Moscow Research Center of Psychiatric Health led a seminar for doctors, psychologists, NGO representatives, and local administrators on the phenomenon of women who abandon their newborn children and the subsequent consequences this has on the mother, child, and society. The ARO consultant explained how to identify women at risk of abandoning their newborn children during pregnancy and introduced preventative methods that can be applied in maternity wards.

The seminar also explored emotional child abandonment and temporary abandonment, as well as possible explanations for such behavior, such as postpartum depression and other psychopathologies. The participants learned how to establish contact with at-risk mothers in order to provide medical, psychological, and social support to the mothers and their families. In closing, the ARO consultant discussed ways to create and coordinate interdisciplinary treatment plans for young mothers at risk and how to properly evaluate the safety and developmental progress of children living in families and orphanages

Legislative Changes Could Pose Threat to Foster Care in Russia

The amendments to the law "On Guardianship and Custody" threaten Russia's budding foster care system by depriving foster care centers based out of orphanages of their ability to function properly. The estimated 2,000 foster care centers currently working in orphanages throughout Russia provide a united, comprehensive approach to protecting orphaned and abandoned children. Foster care centers not only locate, screen, and train foster families, but also help foster families navigate Russia's notorious bureaucratic system, regularly monitor children's wellbeing, work with the biological families of abandoned children, and provide ongoing medical, psychological, and social support to foster families and the children in their care. Under the new system, however, these responsibilities would be divided between multiple government agencies or eliminated altogether.

On May 15, 2008, the State Duma plans to hold a public hearing on possible corrections to the law "On Guardianship and Custody." Chairwoman of the State Duma Committee on Family, Women's, and Children's Issues Elena Mizulina is quoted as saying "There should be a system of support services for families with foster children in Russia." While the NFPCC does not anticipate significant difficulties in its work establishing screening and support services for foster parents and children as a result of the new legislation, it has offered to work with the Federal Ministry of Education to create a list of suggestions to make the law more flexible and beneficial to the orphaned and abandoned children it is intended to protect.

Ministry of Health and Social Development of the Russian Federation, Government Report: On the State of Children in the Russian Federation (2006).

Upcoming Activities:

May 12-13 (Tomsk): Seminar on rehabilitative leisure activities for at-risk children.

May 21-23 (Cherepovets): All-Russia Helpline Conference.

May (Tver): Seminar on early intervention.

May (Krasnoyarsk): Seminar on early intervention.

May (Barnaul): Seminar on early intervention.

May (Tomsk): Seminar on standards of practice for social services.

