News and Updates: May 2008



Activities • Activities





IREX/ASSISTANCE TO RUSSIAN ORPHANS (ARO) PROGRAM



Summary:

In May, the ARO Team conducted a series of educational events, including a seminar on providing assistance to at-risk families at the early stages of crisis in Barnaul and a seminar on Early Intervention services for children between the ages of 0-4 in Krasnoyarsk.

ARO organized a study tour for Russian child welfare professionals to the Children's Aid Society (CAS) in New York City in May. The participants had the opportunity to learn about the U.S. foster care model and CAS programs for at-risk families.

The key-implementing partner of the ARO Program, the National Foundation for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NFPCC), the Cherepovets Mayor's Office, and "Voskhozhdenie" Interdepartmental Service for Children and Youth organized the second All-Russia Child Helpline Conference in Cherepovets on May 21-23. The conference included workshops and master-classes on the provision of emergency psychological assistance for at-risk youth through telephone helplines; 80 participants from across the Russian Federation attended.

The NFPCC, in cooperation with the Russian Children's Foundation, held a roundtable discussion with nearly 40 representatives from the academic, business, media, medical, and social welfare communities on Russia's child abandonment crisis. At the close of the conference, participants drafted a joint memorandum with recommendations for government officials on how to improve the child welfare system.

The board of directors of the Association of Baby Homes, founded by the NFPCC in 2007 to disseminate practices for improved care for children ages 0-4 living in state facilities, met for the first time in May to write a professional development plan and determine which baby homes would conduct educational and training events for the Association in the future.

Early Intervention for At-Risk Families in Barnaul

On May 5-7, two ARO experts conducted the final session of a two-part educational seminar in Barnaul on services designed to identify at-risk families and begin work with them at the earliest stages possible in order to prevent child abandonment. After reviewing key organizational and practical aspects of such interventions, ARO consultants presented case studies illustrating domestic problems ranging from alcoholism to sexual abuse. Administrators and specialists from local social welfare agencies participating in the seminar then developed case plans utilizing family intervention services to help the families described in each case.

ARO Study Tour to Children's Aid Society, NYC

On May 5-8, ARO continued its work to promote innovative models of child welfare systems and services in Russia, sending a group of six Russian child welfare professionals to Children's Aid Society (CAS) in New York City as part of a study tour to learn about the US foster care system and to forge new working partnerships.



For over 150 years, CAS has been providing services to underserved children and families and remains on the cutting edge of children's services to this day.

The Russian participants, winners of an all-Russia competition for best practices in family forms of care, represent a diverse cross-section of Russia's child welfare community, including an executive director of a local orphanage, a regional head of the department of education, and a journalist from the Agency for Social Information. ARO's key implementing partner in Russia, the National Foundation for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NFPCC), also sent a program director to enhance the NFPCC's expertise in providing services to at-risk families and children.

Through trainings, discussions, and on-site observation, the study tour focused on issues such as therapeutic and medical foster care, foster home development, post-adoption services, and supervision in social services. Discussions and trainings led by a variety of CAS staff were enhanced by visits to actual foster homes and observations of family team conferencing.

The Russian participants were not the only ones to benefit from the week's activities; CAS employees noted the valuable insight they gained through discussion and comparative analysis of the various challenges and successes of both the U.S. and Russian child welfare systems. In addition to theoretical skills and practical methods gained, ARO participants formed new relationships with international peers in their work to protect and care for children.



Children's Rights Commissioner of the Republic of Karelia Galina Grigorieva and Children's Aid Society Chief Executive Officer C. Warren Moses during the ARO study tour to NYC

Second Annual Child Helpline Conference in Cherepovets

On May 21-23, IREX's key implementing partner of the USAID-funded Assistance to Russian Orphans (ARO) Program, the National Foundation for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NFPCC), held the second All-Russia Child Helpline Conference entitled "Childhood Milestones: Transitional Periods and Emergency Situations" in the city of Cherepovets. Signaling increased government commitment to services for vulnerable youth, the Cherepovets Mayor's Office and "Voskhozhdenie" Interdepartmental Service for Children and Youth worked closely with ARO to organize and co-finance the conference, which drew 80 specialists working with at-risk youth from 20 cities and regions of the Russian Federation. The conference provided a valuable platform for discourse and professional development as Russia works to revitalize its child welfare system and lower its staggering rates of child abandonment.

The ARO Team invited leading experts, including Dr. Vladimir Maralov, director of the Institute of Psychology and Pedagogy at Cherepovets State University, Dr. Elena Morozova, child psychologist and senior lecturer at the Russian Medical Academy of Postgraduate Education, and Andrei Gusev, director of the conflict solution service at Odessa Region Mediation Group, to conduct 10 master classes, six discussion forums, and seven conference sessions. Participants received insightful information and training on a variety of topics ranging from emergency telephone consulting for physical abuse victims to professional supervision of helpline consultants. Marina Safronova's master class on psychological assistance for suicidal teens proved particularly relevant to issues facing contemporary Russia, as the country's rates of youth suicide rank among the highest in the world.

The conference provided ARO with the unique opportunity to share its experience implementing innovative services for at-risk children and families with a new range of child welfare professionals, 72 % of whom were attending an ARO event for the first time. Participant evaluations of the conference attest to its success; 90 % of the participants stated that their expectations had been fully met, and 100% felt that the conference achieved its stated goals.



The significant financial and logistical contributions made by the Cherepovets Administration to the Child Helpline Conference also give hope that productive bridges being built between the government and the third sector will allow for continued cooperation in equipping Russia's child welfare system with effective services and trained professionals.



(from left to right) NFPCC President Marina Egorova, Executive Director of "Voskhozhdenie" Andrei Soloviev, Director of "Voskhozhdenie" Alexandr Vikulov, and Mr. Stavrovskiy from Severstal' at the Child Helpline Conference in Cherepovets

Improving Care for Special-needs Children in Baby Homes

Employees from Krasnoyarsk Baby Home #3 and Sosnovoborsk Baby Home #5 participated in a seminar on Early Intervention in Krasnoyarsk on May 25-29 as part of ARO's ongoing mission to decrease abandonment and disability among children living in Russia's baby homes. Early Intervention involves a team approach to the creation of individual development programs for children between the ages of 0-4 and has proven extremely effective in helping special-needs children integrate into society and achieve self-sufficiency.

ARO expert consultants introduced participants to different poses for children with motor disabilities, physical therapy techniques to help children gain control over their bodies, techniques for feeding young children with severe disabilities, massage therapy, and neurological development therapy. The specialists hope to improve children's chances for family life, reuniting them with their birth families or through adoption, by integrating these innovative techniques into early intervention programs already functioning at their baby homes.

Association of Baby Homes Board of Directors Holds First Meeting

The board of directors of the Association of Baby Homes held its first official meeting in Moscow on May 26. Created by the National Foundation for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NFPCC) in 2007, the Association of Baby Homes seeks to develop and maintain professional standards of practice for Early Intervention services for children between the ages of 0-4 years old.

The board of directors developed a preliminary training plan and determined which baby homes would conduct events for the Association in the future. Participating baby homes were also divided among three membership tiers. Members of the Association of Baby Homes will use their rich experience in the child welfare sector to merge international best practice techniques with those already tested and proven effective in Russia; the NFPCC will also provide ongoing training and guidance to Association members as they implement early intervention programs throughout Russia.

Roundtable Discussion: "Quality of Child Welfare: Problems and Solutions"

May 27, on the eve of the 60th anniversary of International Children's Day, the National Foundation for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NFPCC) and the Russian Children's Foundation hosted a roundtable meeting in Moscow entitled "Quality of Child Welfare: Problems and Solutions," drawing nearly 40 participants representing the academic, business, media, medical, and social welfare communities to discuss the country's alarming rates of child abuse and abandonment.

At the roundtable, NFPCC formally presented the latest addition to its growing library of publications: volume I of the *Field Guide to Child Welfare* by Judith S. Rycus and Ronald C. Hughes. Following opening remarks by Chairman of the Russian Children's Foundation Albert Likhanov and an introduction by NFPCC President Marina Egorova describing innovative models of child welfare systems implemented by the NFPCC in different territories of the Russian Federation, NFPCC psychologist Elena Gurova presented an overview of the unique features and uses of the *Field Guide to Child Welfare*. The first of its kind in Russia, the *Field*



Guide provides a family-centered approach to child welfare practices and was originally published by the Child Welfare League of America to support the education and training of child welfare professionals and social workers. The topics addressed in the Field Guide to Child Welfare are particularly relevant to the issues contemporary Russia is dealing with; extensive guidelines on casework and family placement of children, for example, are essential as Russia introduces family forms of care as a preferred alternative to state institutionalization of orphaned and abandoned children. The Field Guide is also pioneering discussion of topics previously considered taboo in Russia, helping policy makers and social workers properly address issues such as sexual abuse.

Roundtable participants familiar with the *Field Guide* expressed interest in extending its reach; the Ministry of Education's Head of the Department of Social and Legal Work with Abandoned Children, Vladimir Kabanov, said he would like to have the *Field Guide* republished by the Ministry of Education for use in universities throughout Russia. State Social University Provost Dr. Galina Klimantova praised the *Field Guide to Child Welfare* and advised her university to integrate it into their social work curricula.

Discussing the development of Russia's child welfare system, participants compared the merits of different forms of care for the estimated 742,000 orphaned and abandoned children living in Russia a number that has steadily risen since the collapse of the Soviet Union. While family forms of care, including foster and guardian families, have gained in popularity,

changes made to Russia's Family Code in 2008 could adversely affect the establishment a viable foster care system in Russia. Furthermore, the child welfare system lacks a comprehensive system of state-funded support services for vulnerable families, despite evidence that such services are highly effective in preventing child abandonment.

In hopes of drawing greater attention to areas where Russia's child welfare system needs reform, the round-table participants agreed to draw up a joint memorandum with recommendations for improvement to be sent to Russian government officials. The memorandum, which is being compiled and edited, will encourage the state to pass legislation bringing Russia into compliance with the UN Declaration on the Rights of the Child and other international conventions and norms, with an emphasis on family forms of care, education, and child abuse. The memorandum is scheduled for release in early June 2008.



(from left to right) Anton Kabanov, Yuri Bokan (executive director of the Russian Children's Foundation), Albert Likhanov (Chairman of the Russian Children's Foundation), and Marina Egorova (NFPCC President) at the May 27 roundtable on child abandonment in Russia

Upcoming Activities:

June 3-6 (Krasnoyarsk):

Early intervention seminar.

June 4-11 (Novosibirsk):

Helpline seminar and supervision of helpline specialists.

June 6-7 (Novosibirsk):

Seminar on family-oriented approach to working with families in crisis.

June 9-10 (Novosibirsk):

Seminar on family approach to working with families in crisis.

June 9-11 (Novosibirsk):

eminar on preparing abandoned and orphaned children for transfer to foster families.

June 10 (Tomsk):

Project management seminar.

June 16-18 (Komsomol'sk-na-Amure):

Seminar on preparing abandoned and orphaned children for transfer to foster families.

June 16-19 (Komsomol'sk-na-Amure):

Seminar on family-oriented approach to working with families in crisis.

June 17-20 (Barnaul):

Seminar on early intervention.

June 25-28 (St. Petersburg):

International Conference entitled "Children Should Live in a Family."

