

New Project at Gomel Baby Home

During the last ten years we have often supported the Baby Home in Gomel by delivering aid. More recently we have delivered training to staff and brought the director and chief carer to Britain on an educational visit.

As a result the home has radically improved and is now as happy an environment as can be created in an institution. But there are still some 200 children from birth to four years old living in two large blocks, and missing out on the care and attachment they should be getting from a parent or single carer. About 40 children have disabilities, in some cases very severe genetic disorders, but many of the children have only minor health problems.

The Baby Home has been doing a great job in the last couple of years in getting some children back to their natural parents and finding suitable families for others. Their training from British foster care specialists has been a great help to them in this work.



Now we are joining forces with 'Hope and Homes for Children' - a charity which has implemented successful de-institutionalisation and family support programmes in 12 countries across Africa and Central and Eastern Europe - in a new project which should develop family and community based alternatives for babies that cannot live with their parents. As the numbers of children in the Home reduce we hope, with the co-operation of the Health Department, to turn one building into a specialist unit to support profoundly disabled children.

We will work with ante-natal clinics, hospitals and social services to try to prevent babies being abandoned or families failing to cope and having their children taken away from them.

Where the family really cannot cope there will be a need for temporary foster carers, so we will be working with the Education Department to create a bank of

people who will be specially trained for this vital role. And of course we will work closely with the Baby Home and health and social care professionals in Gomel, helping them to place as many children as possible into loving families.

Jean Holt, our Head of Foster Care Training, and Galina Swartz, 'Hope and Homes for Children' Country Director in Belarus, worked together in February to lay the groundwork for the new project. During the visit a 'Round Table' meeting involving many senior medical specialists was co-ordinated by the Deputy Director of Health Care for Gomel Region.



In March detailed discussions about the future of the project will be held involving both our charities and representatives of Health, Education and Social Protection.

A New Start for Alessia

Eight year old Alessia spent her first four years at the Baby Home. She now lives at Rechitsa Boarding school for children with physical disabilities. Alessia has spina bifida and the meningocele on her back has never been operated on. She has mild hydrocephalus and constant problems with her kidneys.

Consultant paediatric neurosurgeon Paul May, based at Alder Hey Hospital has not only offered to operate on Alessia at no charge but his colleagues have found sponsors to cover the whole cost of Alessia's time in hospital. She will also have her kidneys checked out and we hope she will return to Belarus as a much healthier little girl with a bright future ahead of her. We are just waiting for permission to bring her to Britain for the operation which will change her life.

Fantastic Support from Lloyds TSB Team!

We were delighted to receive a fabulous cheque at the Lloyds TSB Business Development Conference in January for £30,000!

Led by Andy Moss and Graham Scott the team had raised a grand total of £120,000 which was split between Barnados, the Lloyds TSB Charity of the Year, and CCP(UK). Fund raising events had included a group taking part in the New York Marathon and many local events undertaken by staff around the country.



The money will be used to support children with disabilities, particularly

those living at Zhuravichi Orphanage. Eight extra staff will be sponsored over a period of two years to work with the most profoundly disabled children making sure that children with severe physical disabilities spend more time out of their cots and receive more individual attention; and that those with severe learning difficulties are given opportunities to develop life skills and to learn through play.

We will also use some of the funds to enable specialists to visit Zhuravichi to share their skills. This spring teachers and a paediatrician from Rodni House school in Manchester will spend two days at the children's home and offer some training to the staff. They will be accompanied by a nurse who is a specialist in spina bifida and hydrocephalus.



Volunteers needed!

This summer we hope to take more volunteers than ever to Belarus to help provide wonderful, happy holidays for children and young people with disabilities.

In mid July there will be a 12 day holiday for young adults with physical and learning disabilities, most living in institutions but a few being accompanied by their parents.

another group will go to Zhuravichi to help to care for and entertain the children who have been left behind as they are deemed too disabled to be allowed to go on holiday.

Finally, at the end of August a group of student learning disability nurses will spend a fortnight on placement at Zuravichi. *Volunteers need to be energetic, hard working, full of fun, willing to work as part of a team and to help with personal care and to raise £400 for their air fare and accommodation at the Holiday camp. Experience in working with children with disabilities is a great help, but not essential. If you think you might fit the bill, please get in touch with Linda Walker on 01457 862112 or complete an application form on the website www.chernobyl-children.org.uk*

Foster Families for Children of Ulookavye Orphanage

Amongst the many training courses we are delivering in Gomel Region is a new programme to help the staff at Ulookavye Orphanage to prepare their children for foster families. The children have mild to moderate learning difficulties and in the past it has been almost impossible to find families for children like this. But attitudes are starting to change and we will be working with the orphanage in a publicity programme to raise awareness of the need for families. Jean Holt and colleagues will work closely with the staff to identify the needs of each child, see whether they might be returned to their own parents with some support, or whether they can be found an appropriate new family. Some of the children who are currently being prepared for fostering, like Youlia and Angela, will come for a holiday this Summer with families in our group in Endon.

Following a very successful training in 'Leaving Care' at Svetlagorsk Orphanage we are now embarking on an extended programme of training at an orphanage in Gomel to prepare young people for leaving care. We will be working in co-operation with 'Forum' an Italian charity. You can read more about training in Belarus on our website.



A Changing Role for Mayflower Centre

The Social Protection Department in Gomel have now taken on a major part of the funding of this respite care centre which we established three years ago. We will still be responsible for all the transportation of children to and from the centre, and some of the other ongoing costs, but our contribution has reduced from 80% to about 35% of the total cost of running the centre, freeing us to support new projects.

When Mayflower was first opened there were many disabled children who did not go to school. But the situation is improving so rapidly that there are now only a very small number of very disabled children who do not attend some kind of school or centre. Mayflower will continue to provide respite care for children who are either not educated at all or those in wheelchairs who receive home education.

This reduction in numbers will leave them free to start providing respite for families whose disabled children are now in their twenties. These families will have coped for all those years with a child constantly at home and needing a great deal of attention, so it will be wonderful to give them a break.

Pat Marsh, from Woodlands Respite Care Centre in Manchester has been a consultant for Mayflower since the beginning. She will visit in April with Liz Cunliffe from Manchester Disabled Children's Team to give training to the staff in aspects of the care and handling of young adults.



A New Home for the Children at Rodni Kut

It is now four years since we moved Anya, Anton, Nazar, Stas and Ira into 'Rodni Kut' a house in Rogachev which we had bought and renovated for them. It is a delightful, cosy home, but the children are growing and approaching their teens, and the house is becoming too small for them. With Anya and Nazar in wheelchairs and Stas using a walking frame they need more space to get around.

So during 2008 we will either be building an extension on the existing house, or we will begin the building of a new house nearby. It should be clear by

April which is the best option, and then our group in Devon, will launch a major fund raising programme to make it all possible. Three of the children stay with families in Devon when they come to the UK and the group have always given wonderful support to the children and the house.



Rotarian Support for School Access Project

Last summer we helped Special School No 5 in Gomel to improve their access to the Sports Hall, so now children in 'our' wheelchair class can join in with all the games and races in the gym.

We are delighted that **Osgoldcross and Elmet Rotary Club in Yorkshire** have agreed to raise the funds to put access into a mainstream school in Gomel. This will mean that bright children in wheelchairs who are currently taught at home, will be able to go to school for the first time. The plan is to put in ramps, wider doors and disabled toilets, so that the whole of the ground floor will be accessible for everyone.

If we can get hold of a stairlift, then we will try to extend the access to the first floor next year. The Yorkshire Club will work with the Rotary Club in Minsk and will apply for a matching grant for the funds they raise. They also plan to sponsor one of our large aid trucks travelling to Belarus later in the year.

Better Aid than ever!

During the last few months we have been offered huge amounts of high quality aid, much of it direct from the manufacturers. This includes disposable nappies, cleaning materials, toiletries, educational supplies and many other items which are in constant demand in Belarus. This fantastic flow of aid has meant that we are cutting back on items such as second hand clothes, and our aid operations in Glossop and Leek will now wind down, focussing most of the collection and storage of goods at our main warehouse near Selby. Funds permitting, we plan to send four convoys to Belarus this year and we have an enthusiastic team of volunteers who give up many of their Sundays to help with loading, and who are more than willing to make the long drive to see the aid safely to its destination.

Mike Allison is the Co-ordinator of our aid programme and he can be contacted on 01977 684632.

Recuperative Holidays 2008

Our first visitors will be a group of young children with disabilities and their mums who will stay in families in **Sleaford** and then move on to the Grosvenor Hotel in **Southend**. Disabled children from the Family Association at Rogachev will be coming to **Blantyre** in June. They will be followed by young children with cancer and their mothers to **Teesdale** and **Glossop** and a group of children from Terekhovka who will stay in **Mid Essex**.

On July 20th our Belavia charter flight will come in to Birmingham with children for all our groups in the Midlands and others will fly in to Manchester.



Teenagers in remission from cancer will stay in **Carmarthen, Aberystwyth** and **Endon. West Pennine** and **Merseyside** also take children with cancer as will our newest group in **Rutland. Buxton** host diabetic children, **Solihull** have teenagers from Svetlagorsk Orphanage, plus a group of younger children and **Monk Fryston** will host village children from Gomel Region.

Catterick, Llandinam & Newtown, Gloucester & Cheltenham, Leeds and **Rugby** are inviting children who come from villages in Gomel and Mogilev Regions. Children of 3 to 7 in remission from cancer will also stay in **Evesham, Crewe & Alsager, Newark & Retford** and **South Manchester**.

The holidays give a tremendous boost to the children's immune systems, helping them to recover from serious illness or to stay healthy in the future. And they go home with memories, impressions and photographs which they will never forget.

Preparation for the holidays this year has been seriously complicated by the introduction of biometric visas and new rules about completing applications.

Since September UK Visas have demanded that all children of 5 years and over coming to the UK for a holiday must travel to Minsk to be fingerprinted and photographed, before they can receive a visa.

Stephen Devlin, the Entry Clearance officer in Minsk is hoping to arrange to collect this data in Gomel and Mogilev in future. He has been extremely helpful in trying to meet the concerns of Chernobyl charities about the inflexibility of the new rules issued by UK Visas. We are also very grateful to Brian Bennett, former British Ambassador in Minsk for his invaluable advice and to Willie Rennie MP, whose adjournment debate in the House of Commons in late February triggered action by the Minister for Europe and the beginning of a consultation process which had been promised by UK Visas and by a Home Office Minister since last autumn.

We have Groups in the following areas:

Aberystwth, Alsager, Blantyre, Buxton, Carmarthen, Catterick, Craven, Devon, Endon & Stoke, Essex, Evesham, Gloucester & Cheltenham, Glossopdale, Leeds, Llandinam & Newtown, Lunesdale, Market Rasen, Merseyside, Monk Fryston, Newark & Retford, Rugby, Rutland, Sleaford, Southend, Solihull, South Manchester, Teesdale, West Pennine

For contact names and numbers please see the website or phone Julie Gater, our Groups Co-ordinator, on 07816 842322 or our office on 01457 862112.

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Or you can make a secure donation on line
through our web site www.chernobyl-children.org.uk

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Peter Marks - Pharmacist
Jean Holt - Foster Care & Child Protection
Ian Fairlie - Radiation issues
Brian Bennett - Diplomatic Affairs
John Costello - Palliative Care
David Walker - Building Projects

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