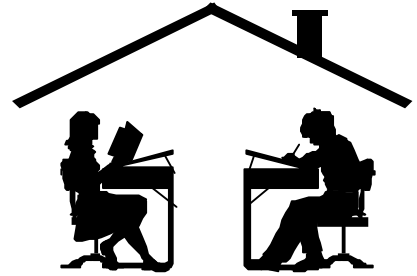


# ROOF-tops



Newsletter of the Russian Orphan Opportunity Fund

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PROVIDING EDUCATION AND JOB OPPORTUNITIES FOR ORPHANED YOUTH IN RUSSIA

## In This Issue

- *Eighteen Students Accepted to ROOF's College*
- *Seminar with ROOF Teachers Uncovers Lack of Communication*
- *Bringing Art and Culture to ROOF Students*
- *New Project!! Orphanage No.15*

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## Seminar with ROOF Teachers Uncovers Lack of Communication

This month ROOF teachers completed a two-week seminar with Antigone Karapetsa of Pecan, Ltd., a charity from the UK that helps adults in difficult social or professional situations organise and plan effectively to get ahead in their careers. The first week's three sessions went more or less as planned, covering motivation, organization, and planning. During the second week, however, what looked to be further planning practice opened a big can of worms regarding



ROOF teachers listening attentively at February's seminar.

## Eighteen Students Accepted to ROOF's College

Twenty-eight students in the Post-Orphanage Education Centre have been working very hard in the past couple of weeks completing their applications to our Post-Orphanage College. The applications they have been doing are very serious (based on the Oxford undergraduate application, in fact) and are the basis for the decision on whether a student moves up from the Post-Orphanage Centre's 'Preparatory' level to the 'College' level. In this second level, students study according to a more subject-focused and time-intensive programme that is designed individually and specifically for that student. Naturally, taking on each Post-Orphanage 'College' student is a considerably greater financial commitment for ROOF than maintaining him or her at the preparatory level, where only Russian, Maths, My Compass and Thinking Skills are taught.

Since the beginning of 2001, all incoming students at the Post-Orphanage Centre have entered at the 'preparatory' level. ROOF management saw the delineation between 'Preparatory' and 'College' level as necessary

because many students just coming to our Post-Orphanage Centre have not understood the commitment and responsibility that goes along with serious studying. This has had a negative effect on the class atmosphere in general and has been a problem for those students who are, indeed, serious.

The first group of applications to the Post-Orphanage College has been reviewed by a commission including Executive Board members and management staff. ***In total 18 students were accepted, ten for university preparation classes, six for further support as they continue their university education, and two for individual study.*** Thank you to all the students who put so much time into their applications and to the commission who reviewed them.

**RT**

communication between teachers and the ROOF administration.

During one of the exercises each of three groups were to draw up a sample 'ideal' record for charting students' progress. One of the groups of teachers disregarded the instructions of the exercise to investigate "something more interesting" (possibly equivalent to a student deciding to do biology in a chemistry class.) This shocked Antigone and demonstrated some general communication problems we have been experiencing between teachers and the administration. Since perestroika school teachers have been allowed much more freedom in lesson planning and record keeping than they were ever allowed before. The reaction among many seems to have been throwing planning and record keeping out the window altogether as something 'soviet' or 'undemocratic' – often creative license with limit (such as doing exercise Y when you have been re-

quested to do exercise X at a seminar!) is seen to be the pedagogues' proper expression of creative freedom. Inevitably this makes working in a group or as a team a rather difficult pursuit.

It was shocking to ROOF's administration that many teachers see their lesson planning as an order from above and not as something that is also helpful in their own work. During Antigone's seminar we uncovered the problem; now we face the difficult task of together (teachers and administration) developing a planning and record keeping system that the teachers want to use because they recognise that it *helps them to help the children more effectively if they are organised.* The extra time it takes to fill out both long and short term plans and report on the results is neither time wasted nor mere 'busy work.'

After these developments, Antigone slightly altered the last two sessions. During the second to last meeting we had role-plays where groups of teachers prepared their ideal candidate for an interview for a ROOF administration position and the administration interviewed them. This began a discussion on what the difficulties and priorities of the administra-

**Seminar** continued on page 2

## Bringing Art and Culture to ROOF Students

Sofia Feoderovna Veto works at ROOF's Post-Orphanage Education Centre as a Social Pedagogue, leading excursions, trips to the theatre, and generally helping groups of kids get a taste of culture. A very well-spoken woman, Sofia lays her philosophy on the table for others to accept or disregard, as they choose. She is the person she is after many years experience and wants to help children as they seek to define who they are.

While Sofia's original education was in engineering, she has been studying art independently for at least 25 years. This long-standing personal interest helps her open up the eyes of the kids she works

*A very well-spoken woman, Sofia lays her philosophy on the table for others to accept or disregard, as they choose.*

with. Her work with orphanages goes back 15 years. She has always been focused on helping children, who have yet to form their own ideas on the world, to grow and learn. With her own children and grandchildren her work and experiences in education don't stop when her workday ends.

Sofia works mainly at the Post-Internat Adaptation Centre of the City of Moscow, with which ROOF's Post-Orphanage Education Centre shares a building. She teaches art history classes, leads cultural excursions, and tries to open up her students through these subjects. Many of the kids she is currently teaching in class are not there just by their own

### **Seminar continued...**

tion are and on the importance of having a unified vision and a centralised method for charting success.

Neither the teachers nor the administration want all of a teacher's time to be taken up filling in forms but some amount of paperwork is necessary. Antigone's seminar opened up some communication channels between ROOF's teachers and administration and clarified to everyone that these issues need to be discussed – together.

While each person is doing his job it seems he is assuming that everyone else in the organization understands what he is doing and the purpose behind it – but this is not always the case. Happily, the teachers are ready to speak freely about what problems they see and how we can improve them as a group. When we can get each individual to see the wider picture and improve communication in general we'll work better as a team.

Each week coming up the teachers from different subjects will be meeting to agree on a common form of record keeping. So far some of the English Language teachers have met and agreed, without too much trouble, to try a new system for a time and see how it works. **RT**

choice, but as part of the Centre's requirements. They do not want to study, have little self-motivation, and have had little experience of beauty in art (or art itself for that matter.)

The challenge in getting through to these kids with art is part of what Sofia loves most about her work. Figuring out the differences between teaching kids from one background and those from another, and comparing these methods with those used in art lectures for adults is a challenge she enthusiastically tackles. She strives to teach each individual to find beauty in the world and looks for what sparks each child's interest. In this way she hopes to link complex ideas of eternity, beauty, and hope to concrete objects and artwork.

As for the activities she leads, these are focused much more on the desire and motivation of the specific group of children. When she began to work leading tours around Moscow and planning events, the students started to become more conscious of what existed in their own city. They had merely been unaware of their options. Now, with her reputation and relationship with many kids firmly established, she waits for groups of children to approach her. She needn't wait long until a small group come seeking her advice. She finds out what they're interested in and helps them plan where they'll go and what they'll do.

Outside of her work with the Post-Internat Adaptation Centre of the City of Moscow and ROOF, Sofia is an accomplished poet with some of her poetry

### **Orphanage No.15**

ROOF's next project looks ready to go. We visited Orphanage No.15 this month and found that, although large, it is run amazingly well and organized with a great staff. Twenty-one of the children who were moved from Orphanage No.1843 (when it became a military school) are now at No.15. Although this is a preparatory school for the circus, the teachers are good about not forcing the children into this career move, as can be seen in where their kids go when they graduate.

They teach the full amount of education here, as required of other state schools, not a limited number of years as many Russian orphanages do. Of the eight kids in this year's eleventh grade class, two are going to prepare further for the circus, two want to go to an academy for customs work, one is planning to go to a managerial institute, one is headed for fine arts college, and two are going into trade schools upon graduation.

The orphanage is interested in classes with ROOF in maths, Russian, computer skills and English for six of these kids. In addition, they have

published in an anthology entitled *The Third Breath*. She explains that she sees a person's lifespan like a pebble being dropped into water. The poems included in this book are divided into seven waves ranging from



Sofia Veto (R) with Misha Manushin during a New Year's skit.

her childhood through her personal life and up to her general philosophy. The first ripple, or wave, is one's childhood and the waves progress outwards from the dropped stone in chronological order. Her poetry travels through her family and her work, sees her grandchildren come into the world, and follows her thoughts on life amidst all these changes.

Sofia loves to be able to see the kids she works with forming their own opinions about the world and attitudes towards life. She focuses on helping children because they are still dependant on others and need guidance to form their own ideas and values. Many different forces make things difficult for these children and Sofia hopes to enrich their lives and give them the tools to continue on their own. **RT**

four graduates who are currently in universities and will be attending our Post-Orphanage Education Centre. Look for further details soon on our web site under the list of orphanages we work with. **RT**

### **Come Visit Us!**



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