

ROOF-tops ROOF

Newsletter of the Russian Orphan Opportunity Fund

October - November 2008

PROVIDING SUPPORT AND JOB OPPORTUNITIES FOR ORPHANED YOUTH IN RUSSIA

www.roofnet.org

We thank Campbell's Soup Russia, OOO «CII KAPO», the HERE & NOW Charity Fund and various private sponsors for supporting ROOF's 2008 Summer Camp!

THE NEWS IS IN FROM ROOF'S 2008 SUMMER CAMP!

A SCHOOL FOR THE CHILDREN — AFTER 9 YEARS!!

From 4 July to 2 August 2008 ROOF ran its 9th annual Summer Camp at Belskoye Ustye Orphanage for mentally handicapped children (Porkhov Region, Pskov Oblast). Among this year's participants were **27 volunteers** from England, Italy, Ukraine and Russia.

As in the past, volunteers conducted various classes and lessons which would develop the children's emotional and intellectual abilities. *This year these developmental goals had a new urgency for*

the orphanage administration, for in September they opened a daily school for these children who were previously considered uneducable! This is one of the first instances of a school opening at a psychoneurological orphanage in all of Russia, and is a real ROOF success story, as a primary objective of our annual summer camp has always been to prove by example that these children are capable and teachable.

This year's summer camp activities included talks, excursions, sports, collage making (paper and play-dough), origami, arts and

crafts from natural materials, and a wide variety of games.

The volunteers — who were paired off so as to enable 27 volunteers to work with nearly 100 children — worked 6 days a week. Each set of volunteers met twice a day with 2 groups of 8-10 children. Meeting locations were always different: walks in the forest and to the river, games in the open air, indoor developmental games.

SPECIAL THEME DAYS

In addition to meeting in smaller groups, volunteers organised **festivals and theme days** in which all the orphanage children were involved. For "Shopping Day" the children had to earn their "money" by participating in competitions in the morning, while in the evening they could spend it on toys, felt pens and other good things. This was good practice for budgeting in the real world!

Camp **festivals** were held twice a week and included:

- Animal Day
- National Holidays
- Friendship Day
- Pirates Day (Treasure Hunt)
- Shopping Day
- A Talent Show!



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Volunteers in front of the camp base at Baranovo.



ROOF-TOPS

THE CHILDREN!!

It's hard to remember, but life in a closed institution means the children of Bel-skoye Ustye aren't given the perspective necessary to learn some things we all consider basic knowledge. Spending money, dressing nicely/appropriately, and various social/communication skills are examples. This is not due to neglect on the part of the orphanage staff; it's the result of the children's isolated world, in which many of the tasks, goals and social situations we experience in our every-day lives simply do not exist.

The most significant challenges created by the orphanage environment are **a lack of personal communication and a dearth of new/original impressions**. Staff work in the same orphanage for years; the children have long got used to them and to one another. Out-of-town trips are difficult to undertake; no one can be left without supervision for even a moment, and everyone always stays in a single group.

Summer camps with a diverse group of volunteers give the children an opportunity to meet new people and to develop relationships over



Trying something new: yoga!

time (many volunteers return for the 3rd, 4th and 5th seasons). This gives the children a chance to express themselves in new ways and to try things they have not tried before.

CAMPING OUT.

This year we tried **camping out** for the first time. The orphanage was given tents and all the necessary camping equipment, and, at the administration's request we set about getting everybody ready for an adventure. This was no small undertaking for orphanage staff, either, as there was much preparation involved. We had to choose routes, put together groups of children (taking into consideration their physical capabilities, which was primarily the responsibility of their PE teacher and of teaching assistants). Teaching assistants had to be chosen and persuaded to go into the forest with children. Many TAs are

elderly people for whom this is not a natural choice, so here the administration helped out.

Many of the children have emotional difficulties of lack coordination or strength. Taking a group of 8-10 of these children into the woods can be a challenge, to say the least. Only two orphanage staff members (the PE teacher and one TA) would really have been up to this task by themselves; 2-3 strong young camp volunteers per group



proved great help. And though we only stayed a few hours in the forest, the children didn't miss any of the main aspects of camping. We had campfires, tents, and of course the whole experience of gathering together and venturing deep into the forest.

ISN'T THAT GREAT!

The volunteers put up a puppet show and took the children to the neighbouring farm to see the young wild boars.

Every year volunteers rise early on a couple of mornings and wade deep into a bog to help pick reeds for the or-



phanage arts and crafts club to use throughout the year.

Toward the end of the camp volunteers put on a "village festival" at which items the children had made during the course of the camp were proudly displayed.

Every Saturday there was a dance for children and volunteers together to frolic and have fun.

As this year's camp closed, the volunteers presented a play based on "The Aladdin" fairy tale.

The schedule for volunteers is a demanding one. Preparation for events and classes begins late at night after the volunteers return from "work". Bedtime is usually 2-3 o'clock in the morning and at 10am it's morning meeting/announcement time, back with the children.

Camp cook Volodya Spigul, who himself grew up in a closed institution in Moscow, was one of the most tireless workers of all. For him cooking is a hobby (and every volunteer will avow that he's excellent at it). Working nearly round the clock, Vova managed to feed a camp of 30 people with his wonderfully tasty dishes — and always with a smile!

But the children's eyes and words make all the hard work well worth it:

- you are beautiful...

- you are nice...

- We love you...



Camping out is not only lots of new impressions, it is also a chance to express yourself in a new way, not like at the orphanage. And, of course, you can try many things that you have not tried before!