

# ROOF-tops



Newsletter of the Russian Orphan Opportunity Fund

Issue 6, June 1999

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## Summer Programmes

From June to August, orphanages, like schools, have a summer break. Over the summer, ROOF is involved in several initiatives, including:

- sponsoring counsellors to go with orphaned children to their summer camps and continue educational programmes in a natural setting—7 highly qualified teachers were chosen from a group of 15, each of whom had designed and submitted their own summer programme,
- organising and sponsoring exchanges between orphanages (e.g. 10 children from Moscow 'switch places' with 10 children from Pereslavl-Zaleskii). This is a cost effective solution for orphanages that don't have any budget for summer holidays,
- actively looking for additional orphanages directors who will work well with us next year,
- continuing to work with students to have already graduated from orphanages to prepare them for entrance exams in the autumn,
- sponsoring internships for older children over the summer,
- further developing our social adaptation and psychological counselling programme in partnership with the Academy of Sciences of the Russian Federation—Psychology, Natural Sciences and Pedagogical Departments.



*Yuri Georgevich will be going to a summer camp just outside Moscow to teach his project, Physics in Nature*

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## Institutions for orphans in Russia

There are several types of institutions in Russia that we can refer to as 'orphanages'. These are some of the most common:

- 1) Det-dom—Home for orphaned school-aged children,
- 2) School-Internat—Also a home for orphaned school-aged children (often the children also attend school inside the School-Internat),
- 3) Uchebni-Vospitatelni Kompleks (UVK)—this is typically a large school, also attended by children in the surrounding area, which serves as a home to a group of orphaned children or children with other specific difficulties,
- 4) Correctional Home—this is an orphanage/board-ing school for children with learning difficulties,
- 5) Priyut—this is 'safe haven' where orphans and victims of domestic violence and abuse are sent (usu-

ally for only a few months) before being sent to the Det-dom,

- 6) Temporary Isolation Centre—this is the wing of the Ministry of the Interior that picks up street children and runaways.

It is difficult to imagine a complex system of different types of institutions taking care of hundreds of thousands of unwanted children in the west, where the individual approach to cushioning and solving personal tragedy is emphasised. But we are also very lucky that the general population of most western countries is wealthy enough to absorb the social shock that the system receives when children are left without anyone to care for them. In Russia, this is far from being true; at the moment there is simply no alternative to institutional care for the majority of orphaned children.

In the long term, ROOF's main goal is, of course, to work ourselves out of existence. Optimistically, this

could take 30 or 40 years—even with an economic upturn. Some older orphanage personnel are now working with their third generation of institutionalised children—social problems run in the family and die hard. But many teachers and directors are completely dedicated to children who are not their own. And all orphanage directors and staff think that adoption and foster care would be far preferable to institutionalisation. Negative and unhelpful attitudes among staff seem to arise more from feelings of desperation in front of an impossibly difficult situation.

Initiatives to develop adoption and foster care systems are beginning to appear in Russia and the government does support them. In parallel with this development, ROOF is here to support orphanage personnel in their quest to help prevent today's orphanage population from giving rise to another one. If we are truly successful we will support the orphanages out of existence.

## An example for the children *by Irina Pavlovna Ryazanova*

Each of the dozens of det-doms I've visited has its own problems, but when we get down to business the serious conversation is always about the same question—how do we prepare these children for life outside the institution? One orphanage director from Pereslavl-Zaleskii, Raisa Sergeevna, observes that only the children with a strong and positive self-image are able to survive, and that only one or two children in every group of 'graduates' could be described as self-confident in this regard. All others, she says, disappear into the criminal life.

Children who grow up in det-doms continue to apply the lessons learned there in the rest of life. People are comfortable with the principles and ethics of their childhood, and children who grow up in det-doms think fondly back to childhood in their own way. It is a well

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### Addresses for donations

Please use these addresses to post donations to ROOF. Cheques posted to Russia via Post International may be destroyed by customs.

#### *In the USA:*

Russian Orphan Opportunity Fund (ROOF),  
Box 2279,  
Peter Stuyvesant Station,  
432 East 14 St.,  
New York, NY 10009

#### *In Europe:*

Russian Orphan Opportunity Fund (ROOF),  
P.O. Box 1648,  
Cannock,  
Staffs, UK  
WS11 1YB

Please note our new fax number on the front page. This is a temporary number as we await a telephone line in the office, which we hope will appear before the next issue of ROOF-tops.

known fact that children do 95% of their development before the age of 5. So what are our chances with children who have spent their early childhood with alcoholic parents or in alleyways and at train stations—stealing in order to eat? Is that 5% of development enough to make a difference? How can we use it to the fullest? What sort of examples must we set as adults?

The questions are many, but one of the most important is: who should take care of these children? Who should be their 'vospitateli'? If someone decides to work in an orphanage despite the miserable pay (now about \$20 per month) and difficult, thankless working conditions, then it is, as a rule for one of two reasons. The first is an inability to find better paying work. Such people do exist, but this is a shame, because their insecurities and general lack of confidence rub off on the children. Thank goodness there is a second reason that people come to work in det-doms, and that is because of a real calling to do so. I know many such people who put their whole self into the work, following the children's lives with all their heart and soul. They worry about every victory and every failure. But these people have problems of their own. Working and sometimes living in det-doms for five to ten years or more, they begin to live and think in a special institutional fashion. This is not their fault, but their misfortune.

The solution to these problems is very well defined by the director of UVK no. 1843, Vyacheslav Yurivech Ramaikin. "In a det-dom it is imperative constantly to expose the internal staff to external expertise—to bring in a constant stream of highly qualified professionals from the outside: teachers, vospitateli, and psychologists. Moreover, the people you really want for internal staff are those who are always willing to develop professionally and spiritually, rather than those who easily get comfortable with their surroundings."

This year, ROOF has spent a lot of time choosing its teachers. We choose people who have teaching experience and a sincere desire to pass on their life's knowledge and share their love with children. No less important is the fact that most of ROOF's teachers have specific



*Irina Ryazanova, Assistant to ROOF's President*

goals in life and are working hard to achieve them. Many of them have thought of unique ways to pass on their experience to children. Take for example our psychologist, Mikhail Buryenkov. This year, in one of the orphanages where we work, he started a 'Family Council'. Children, teachers and the administration all take part in this council, and equal weight is placed on every vote. For the first time, children, vospitateli and the administration are all working as a team towards the same goal—to create a more peaceful, stable, and loving environment within the orphanage.

But it's not in all det-doms that we are welcomed at first with open arms. Sometimes we have to build relationships with the administration and vospitateli indirectly. This is one of the reasons that many organisations find it easier simply to supply humanitarian aid to orphanages. But meaningful contacts can come from indirect beginnings: one Moscow orphanage director learned of our programmes by seeing Mikhail Buryenkov's family council when on a visit to that orphanage. We received a telephone call the next day, with a request to expand our programmes into that director's orphanage.

Based on our experiences this year, we believe that next year we should focus on changing the approach to education and upbringing that is used in many orphanages. In our work we will depend heavily upon partnerships with various organisations, including the Russian Academy of Natural Sciences and the Psychology Institute. With the help of these two institutions we will be able to bring in many qualified people to work with both children and staff, increasing levels of motivation and self-esteem.