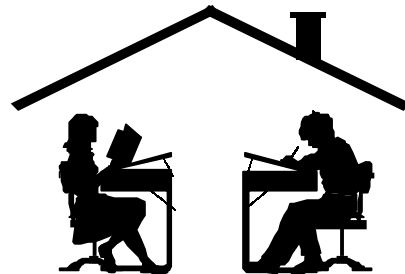


ROOF-tops



Newsletter of the Russian Orphan Opportunity Fund

Issue 2, December 1998

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British International Schools Team Up with Detskii Dom №6

It was earlier this autumn when ROOF received a telephone call from Lisa Pollen, assistant head of British International School №7 here in Moscow. Two of the BIS schools (№2 and №7) had taken a charity collection and wanted to sponsor one of the orphanages that ROOF works with. So, a couple weeks ago Lisa and some of the Russian-speaking children from schools №2 and №7 (Eugene, Tanya, Valeria and Ilya) came to visit Detskii Dom №6. Zhana Vasilievna, one of the directors at №6, gave the BIS representatives a tour and then spent half an hour answering their questions.

Then it was time to meet the children, who were just coming in from school. ROOF and BIS hope that through a series of activities in the future, the children will get to know each other and see each other on a fairly regular basis. BIS plan to co-ordinate with ROOF to arrange more events as the first step toward making new friends. Open days (where children could observe each other's educational environments) have also been discussed.

ROOF would like to thank BIS students and parents for their very generous donation towards ROOF educational programmes at Detskii Dom №6.

Detskii Dom, Internat – What's the Difference?

As explained to ROOF staff, the formal difference between an Internat and a Detskii Dom is the following: the children in a Detskii Dom live there permanently, that is, do not have parents who come and take them away for weekends or holidays. Internats, on the other hand, are meant to be for children who do have some relatives who visit and may even come to collect the children for periods of time.

In practice, this definition seems to have broken down. Many of the Detskii Doms and Internats are not used exactly to the purpose for which they were originally established. Today's reality is that the majority of children in both types of homes are social orphans, with parents or relatives who are unable to take care of them for one reason or another.



Internat №69, "Discovery"

'Friends of ROOF' Groups

Especially through our web site, we often receive questions about where we get funding for our projects. We are still a small organisation and the truth is that almost all of ROOF's fund-raising has occurred on a grass-roots level – our generous friends and acquaintances continually contribute enough to support our teaching staff. We depend on donations from you and from your communities.

In the second half of January, we are planning a fund-raising trip to the United States. If you live in the U.S. and are able to bring together a group of 20 or more potential supporters (a 'Friends of ROOF' group) or if you could help us to acquire one or more corporate sponsorships in your area, we would like to come to your city and make a presentation about ROOF activities. Just contact us on the telephone or e-mail on the front of this newsletter and we will schedule a visit. All donations to the Russian Orphan Opportunity Fund are tax-deductible in the United States.

Children – Our Best Teachers *by Michael Buryenkov*

Reflecting on the occasion when Jesus said, “Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven,” I wondered about the meaning of these words. Working in Detskii Dom №6 since the beginning of October, I think I’ve begun to understand their significance.

I’m a psychologist in my last year of study at Moscow State University – my focus area is ‘Social Psychology.’ The first thing we did at №6, as part of our diagnostic stage, was to ask each child to draw a

“Somebody drew the sinking ‘Titanic.’ Somebody else drew a picture of nuclear war... it went on and on.”

ROOF Opens an Office

In early December, ROOF began to move into its downtown Moscow office at Voznesenski per. 8, №46. St. Andrew’s parish of the Anglican Church has donated this room to ROOF. The employees of ROOF wish to express their gratitude for a wonderful location at the perfect price – something that is practically unheard of in this city.

The process of moving may take up to a couple of months, as the room is not yet equipped with a telephone line. We are, at present, working to rectify this situation. Until further notice, the main ROOF telephone remains 237-7861. If you wish to reach us during the day when we are not at that number, you may be able to find us by ringing 229-7728 and asking to speak to someone from room №46.



You can find the ROOF web site at <http://www.glasnet.ru/~roof/>

picture or write a paragraph that illustrated their current mood and feelings. Somebody drew the sinking ‘Titanic.’ Somebody else drew a picture of nuclear war... it went on and on. There were also a couple of *positive* responses, numbering only 1 or 2 out of 20, sadly. Anya, a 16 year old, wrote, ‘I want to love and be loved.’ The overall results speak for themselves. The children need to be surrounded by people with positive attitudes and outlooks on life – they need heart to heart relationships with such people.

What happens when the children begin to see and feel real interest from an adult? When I met Natasha (aged 7) she and her friend Masha (aged 5) sat and talked with me over a cup of tea. At the end of our meeting Natasha asked for my home telephone number and did, in fact, call me – to my very great surprise and delight. Having no communication barriers toward elders is very atypical in the Russian mentality. She called me at home in the evening, spoke with my mother a short time, then asked me how I was, told me she was just fine and that she was glad I was fine too. Then she said goodbye, quite satisfied, and put down the receiver. OK, I thought. I shall be a bit more flexible in the way I communicate with them, as well. I’ve started to call them in the evenings to ask after specific boys and girls – to see if they have any particular news from the past day. I really think that the telephone conversations have deepened our relationships and understanding of one another. There is real joy in association both from my side and from theirs.

Here’s another story from №6 that really, so to speak, ‘touched my soul.’ Upon my first meeting with Maxim, aged 11, he fought with his neighbours and shot the girls with rubber bands. I thought that he was going to be a really difficult child. I decided to take notice of his behaviour, and walked up to him. Maxim started to run away. I calmly followed, thinking, ‘whatever am I going to do next?’ He ran himself into a corner of the room, and stopped short. I, too, stopped. We stood there in silence for some time. The other children were watching a video-clip as part of our work that day, and Maxim couldn’t see anything from the corner. He stood, thinking about something, then, slowly but in a determined fashion, said ‘You are disturbing my career.’ I was trying desperately to understand which career he had in mind, when he spoke again, ‘You are preventing me from developing my career.’ (!!)

At last I understood that Maxim was quoting some film. But I also understood that he might be worried about the ques-



ROOF teachers at their monthly meeting. Michael Buryenkov is on the front row, left.

tion of his own fate, and what he could do about his future. Well, I thought to myself, this is an ambitious child. He may just do all right for himself. Finally the deadlock broke and Max said, ‘I’ll behave, let me go back to the group.’

Max has since become a disciplined pupil. When we had a competition and Max heard that the prize was to be a book from the publisher Dorling Kindersley (each of these books reviews a single subject, i.e. geology, or cats, or the solar system, in detail and with brilliantly coloured diagrams and photographs) he quickly entered the competition. His composition was by far the best and he won a book called ‘My First Atlas.’ He stood in the centre of our large study room and repeated over and over ‘I won, I won, I won... I got a 6!’ (of a possible 5 on the Russian scale). His eyes were wide open and he was looking somewhere into the distance; it was as if he himself didn’t believe what had just happened. He wasn’t looking at anything, just standing there examining his inner potential and being amazed that he had what it takes to win. A couple of times I’ve seen people just at that moment when they are hit by some major insight into their own character. I think that something of the fashion happened with Maxim at that moment. He continued to stand there for 2 or 3 minutes, gripping his prize tightly to his chest.

After that, Maxim became more serious – the result has been repeated acknowledgement by his teachers of thoroughly conscientious work. He continues to infect me with his delight every time he achieves something that he sets his mind to.

I have to thank all the children of №6 and children in general. Even in this self-contradictory century children often continue to listen to a simple, inner voice – the voice of the divine in creation – a thing which we adults tend to brush aside, or even deny, more often than we should.