

ROOF-tops



Newsletter of the Russian Orphan Opportunity Fund

Issue 3, February 1999

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(See story on page 2)

The Reuter Foundation Support ROOF Work

The first good news of the new year for ROOF was that we have received our first grant from a major international charity, the Reuter Foundation. The Foundation is the charitable giving arm of the major international news organisation, and funds local charity projects around the globe. The grant to ROOF is for \$2,500. ROOF wishes to express gratitude to the Foundation for their generous gift; this is a big step for a small charity and we hope that the precedent will help us to gain support from other, similar foundations with internationally recognised names. Thank you very much!

ROOF to work with the Logos Fund

After a January meeting with representatives from the Logos Fund, an educational charity established by one of Moscow's large publishing distributors, Logos M, the Logos Fund has agreed to supply ROOF with all manner of educational publications to which they have access – free of charge. Logos Fund will be able to supply ROOF with magazines on various subjects (sports, nature, hobbies), children's journals that include exercises (well disguised as fun games) in almost all school subjects, and beautifully illustrated children's books on everything from the history of the 19th century to nursery rhymes – the very type of thing that the children in our orphanages rarely get to call their own.

And, for all the complaining we Westerners seem to do about the Russians not being charitable enough to their own, the Logos Fund seems to be an excellent example of a Russian charity that is working hard to re-culture Russian society in this transitional period. They have many beneficiaries all of whom receive materials absolutely free of charge. Most beneficiaries are normal state schools, homes for the handicapped, hospitals and orphanages. Logos Fund tracked down ROOF for no other reason than to increase the circulation of their free educational material – they understand that we can reach a network of orphanages; easier for them than trying to contact orphanages one by one.

In the coming year, one of ROOF's major goals is to locate as many like-minded Russian charities as we can and form partnership arrangements like that which we have already established with the Logos Fund.

Annual Meeting/Report

ROOF's Annual Meeting for 1999 will take place in the Moscow office on Tuesday, 23 February at 7pm. Invited are all the trustees, members and others interested in ROOF's work. Our various promotional brochures will be available, as well as the 1998 Annual Report, which contains the accounts and details of ROOF's aims, organisation, achievements so far, and a brief sketch of plans for the coming year. At this meeting, there will be elections for the Executive Committee which oversees the charity's work. All members of the charity will be entitled to vote in these elections. Please contact us by e-mail/telephone if you wish to attend the meeting and need more detailed directions to our office (address at the bottom of this page) or if you wish to enquire about becoming a ROOF member. If answers are slow, it is because the trustees in charge of answering messages are away in America on a fund-raising trip until 10 February. Wish us luck – we hope to come home with a lot of good news to share at the first annual meeting!

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Learning in a ROOF lesson in Orphanage №69

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Human Longing *by Yelena Apratova*

I'm a Russian language and literature teacher who has enjoyed ten years of working with children and teenagers. I feel that my work is my calling and I have long wanted to concentrate my efforts on those children who have been deprived (for one reason or another) of parents and the comfort of family life. I've wanted to share with them the warmth from my own heart, my own love and my own knowledge. The opportunity to do exactly these things, thanks to ROOF, is the realisation of a long-standing dream.

At Detskii Dom №6 my students are 15 years old and should be studying in the 9th grade. But two of them are in the 7th grade and one only in the 6th grade. With these students we have a huge task ahead of us. During this academic year, we would like each of these students to complete two years of middle school and pass exams in these classes at their 'externat.' (Please see Nov. 98 newsletter for the definition of 'externat'.) Actually, this task seems more inspiring than daunting. The goal is clear – we simply have to get to work!

I will remember my very first class with the children. It was all timid, wary glances unable to make real eye contact. These children are not used to trusting people and they are not readily eager to show smiles upon first meeting. They evaluated me from afar although we were sitting across the table from each other. So I started to teach. It became clear by the end of the first lesson that all of the students had massive gaps in their knowledge of Russian and Russian literature, and that they didn't care *at all* for the subject I had been sent to teach them! Gathering up all my patience and love, I started to illustrate every point I wanted to teach with examples. I want to demonstrate that the subjects we are study-

ing are, indeed, approachable and that what now seems impossible is actually eminently achievable if they continue to listen and watch.

And then, the long awaited break-through was suddenly upon us. After about a month of classes, one of my students, Zhenya, pulled himself up by the bootstraps, gathered up his faith in his own ability and decided to pass his Russian exam at the externat. He succeeded. His eyes shone when he told me about what had happened and the success seems to have immediately given him new inspiration for future work. He got a new, clean notebook that he uses for penmanship and for turning in written work. It is these little things that indicate whether a child is taking any pride in his work – a healthy sign. He seems to have changed dramatically – he's an open, happy and confident child. (*Editors note: At the beginning, we were told that Zhenya was going to be the 'problem child' of the group – he was indeed a recluse of sorts when I first met him. One of the most significant lessons we have all learned is that the most troubled children often turn into the most interested children remarkably quickly.*)

In another two weeks Zhenya passed the next required Russian exam, and received a '4' (on a scale of 5) on a literature test. Zhenya, and a '4' in literature?! It sounded very strange to everyone concerned. Zhenya, for all his 15 years, still reads syllable by syllable, and has great trouble expressing many thoughts due to a basic lack of vocabulary. But here we'd spent several lessons reading, discussing, analysing Pushkin's "The Captain's Daughter," and all of a sudden – a '4'!

Zhenya's friend, Volodya, is known at the Detskii Dom as a 'difficult adolescent.' He distracts the other children, and is himself easily distracted. But he is, nevertheless, quite a bright boy. He grasps the material quickly when he sets his mind to it. What Zhenya managed to get done with hard work and a desire to learn, Volodya accomplished with a quick mind. But for a long time Volodya 'put off' passing exams (at the externat) in material that we had already covered. It turns out that he may be a bit insecure despite all his bravado. But after two and a half months, he also finally decided to take some of his exams. Straightaway he passed several tests in Russian and turned in two compositions in literature. I can see that he's finally getting some inspiration and that now he believes it within his capabilities to tackle these subjects.



Some of the children at Orphanage №6, and Zhana Vasilyevna (director of education)

At this point I'm confident that Volodya and Zhenya will finish their studies in the 8th grade in about four weeks, and we'll be able to move on to 9th grade. They have almost caught up with their age group! But there is still my hardest student – Alyosha. He has completed only 6 grades and he also works already, which means that he can study with ROOF teachers only once a week in a time slot arranged specially for him. The effort he puts into his studies, though, is impressive. He always gives us his full attention and prepares the assignment for the full week ahead, just as if he were studying with the other students.

It's important to mention that the vospitateli (Detskii Dom staff) constantly take an interest in the work of ROOF teachers. They ask whether the children are doing well in their studies, they want to know whether they've handed in their homework . . . and they are usually surprised when I praise the children for diligence and good behaviour. The vospitateli have known these children longer than a couple of months, and remember that half a year ago the boys hardly ever went to the externat when they were supposed to. Behaviour was also always a problem. Apparently, after having known these children in that context it is difficult to imagine that they are actually making progress in their studies – and fast.

I think that our classes have become something more than just repetition of grammar rules or interpretation of literature. Together we've created a zone in which it is possible to feel safe, trust the other person and act openly. And this makes all the difference. It's quite possible that these children don't really crave knowledge as much as they crave closeness and human contact. Goodness isn't around us – it's within us. When we open our goodness to others and they open their goodness to us, we suddenly discover the value of the human soul.

ROOF's web pages



<http://www.glasnet.ru/~roof/>