

ROOF-tops



Newsletter of the Russian Orphan Opportunity Fund

Issue 8, September 1999

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Summer camp on the Black Sea – more on the back page!

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Plans for the 1999-2000 School Year

Thanks to a tremendously successful summer programme which had ROOF teachers accompanying children to four different summer camps, ROOF finds itself with full academic programmes in no less than *nine* orphanages as we enter the 1999-2000 school year. Below is a summary of the subjects that ROOF is teaching and the orphanages where we work:

Orphanage #	Russian Lang. & Literature	Math	History	English	Geography & Biology	Chemistry & Physics	Computer Skills	Life Skills	Music	Cognitive Development	Library *
Moscow #6	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X			
Moscow #58	X	X	X	X					X		
Moscow #1843	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X			
Moscow #69				X			X	X			
Moscow #25	X	X	X	X	X	X				X	
Moscow #62	X	X	X	X	X	X				X	
Moscow #26		X		X							
Pereslavl	X	X		X		Q**	Q**	X			
Bykovo	X	X			X	X					
3 in Pereslavl											X

* ROOF has won a small grant to organize children's libraries in 3 orphanages in Pereslavl. The first funds for this project will come to ROOF at the New Year (2000)

** ROOF is looking for teachers to fill these positions, at the moment. Teaching will start as soon as we have found them.

In addition to the orphanage programmes, ROOF is opening an evening educational programme (The Post Orphanage Education Centre) designed to help recent orphanage graduates finish high school, get into institutes or evening schools and get jobs.

On the 18th of October, 36 students will start intensive tutorial sessions with some of Moscow's most talented teachers. In addition to these 36 students, there is also a waiting list that is getting longer by the day.

Broadly speaking, the enrolled students fall into three categories:

- Those who have a 5th grade education; Goal: Get into state run evening high-schools at the 8th grade level
- Those who have a 7th grade education; Goal: Get into state run evening high-schools at the 10th or 11th grade level
- Those who can finish high-school in the course of the next two years in parallel with preparation for college entrance exams; Goal: Pass college entrance exams.

More than half of the students fall into the first category, although they are over 17 years of age. The group of 36 students has been split into 6 smaller groups, each of which will be watched closely by a psychologist-curator. The psychologist will attend to the specific developmental needs of each student in his or her group and work with the subject teachers to make sure that these needs are being met. The general idea is to identify personal strengths and career desires early on. This process starts the moment a potential student comes for consultation and evaluation of academic level. From early on in the education process, each student will know the type of school for which he or she is aiming to pass entrance exams at the end of one or two years.

NGO Forum: Co-operation for Russia's Children

On September 10th, ROOF and Miramed Institute held the first of what we hope will be many monthly meetings for charities that help children in Russia. 19 organisations, foreign and domestic, attended the informal forum in September. It is likely that next month's meeting will be even larger. The group is putting together an informational and resource website with summaries of each of the charities' activities in both Russian and English (web address in next issue of ROOF-Tops). The website will also have bulletin boards dedicated to various issues that affect children in Russia and the work of children's charities in Russia. The agenda and results of past and up-coming meetings will be available on the website. Among the group's first initiatives has been the development of central lists of volunteers sources in Moscow and funding sources for charitable projects in Russia which will first be available to forum participants at the 26th October meeting.

A Hard but Rewarding Summer – Lessons for the Future *by Nona Kislinskaya*

This summer our team of two psychologists, an English teacher and a swimming coach went to summer camp with children from Moscow Orphanage #1843 'Nadezhda' ('Hope'). When we got to the pensionat *Gizel-Ders*, not far from Tuapse, on the Black Sea coast, it turned out that there were children from several other Moscow orphanages (4, 29, 50, 82) also spending their time at the camp. (Incidentally, as a result of our work at camp, ROOF now has programmes in orphanages 29 and 50, as well as in 'Nadezhda'.) *Gizel-Ders* means "A Beautiful

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Ravine". Nature is really magical here: sea, mountains, the smell of magnolias and miscellaneous flora of the Caucasus coast. The beauty of this place can cure human souls. In this respect the choice of this place was ideal.

However, from the first day we had a lot of problems to face. Entering the building to check into the rooms, we immediately felt a smell of urine and damp. The custodian, murmuring something about how unlucky we were, opened the door to the room. It was dark and depressing. The room was furnished with five beds with dirty mattresses. It was getting harder and harder to breath. We grabbed our suitcases and ran out of the building. The custodian followed us. She recommended that we talk to the director and convince him to check us into the double rooms that we had booked.

The director told us that the travel agency *Altair*, that had organised this vacation for the children, had

transferred to the pensionat's account less than half the amount paid by the orphanages. He also declared that he was fed up with the whole matter of these orphanages from Moscow and that he planned to stop feeding the children until the whole amount was received.

For five days we were renting private rooms, waiting for the *Altair* representative to arrive. After those five days we checked into nice rooms.

(Editor's note: It is not really clear why conditions did improve after the *Altair* representative arrived. The amount was never paid in full. In the city of Moscow, the government requires that orphanage directors send the children to specific summer camps and make arrangements through specific travel agencies. Much of the money allocated by the city for the children's summer camp never seems to have been spent on their holiday at all... one can draw his own conclusions as to what this means. Even if the travel agency does honour *our* request for a refund (for our teachers) we know that the orphanages won't get their allocations back for use on the children. It looks as if the system never really intended that money to be spent on the children and that ROOF has another issue to add to its list of complaints about which to lobby the Duma! The only way ROOF found out about the exact amounts spent and received was that all our teachers' places were paid for in cash. All transfers for orphanage staff and children are paid by the city of Moscow on behalf of the orphanage directors, so that the directors have little chance to detect abuses and no incentive to stop obvious abuses. We live and learn – and fight for improvement!)

Gizel-Ders is a wonderful place, but it does not have proper facilities and conditions for children. The beach is made of concrete blocks and does not have a separated zone for children. It is crowded with locals and other people from the pensionat, who are not always friendly.

But leaving the substandard conditions behind, let's proceed to the work we did over the summer. I worked mostly with the older children and can conclude that they all have fairly similar problems; they really needed me for a friend, more than anything else. They all have the problem of self-determination. They all fear the future, they cannot picture themselves in it. Some children – for their short lives – have gone through hardship that would not be bearable for most adults. There are not a lot of good memories in their pasts; their futures are absolutely



ROOF teacher Gennadi Efanov (left) and his colleagues from the Post Orphanage Adaptation Centre, who were much more fortunate with conditions at the camp where they worked. The costumes are for 'Greek Night' (Nikolayevskaya Oblast, Ukraine)

uncertain. Many of them have contradictory values and highly-strung emotions. To get over this they need to understand who they are, what they are living for, and how they should interact with the surrounding world. We have to teach them to interact with other people, to be in peace with themselves, and to see opportunities in the future. If they do not learn to establish their priorities, to see reason behind everything they do, than the world around them will be fearful.

To some extent a psychologist can help orphaned children with these problems, though a lot should be done by teachers because more of the children's time is spent with teachers. For this reason, I am now passing on what I learned about the children from orphanages 50, 29 and 'Nadezhda' to ROOF teachers who will be working with the children during the school year.

To a large extent the future of these children depends on our efforts today. Today they are desperate for mentors who are interested in their lives, whom they can trust and with whom they can share what bothers them or what makes them happy. They need people who will accept them as they are and who will give them warmth and love and help them to stay human in our complex and unstable world.



Digging for Greek artifacts (many were found!) in the Nikolayevskaya Oblast, Ukraine.



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