

ROOF tops



www.roofnet.org

Newsletter of the Russian Orphan Opportunity Fund

Spring 2012

Congratulations to Anton (left) – New Graduate of ROOF's Abilitation Center!



In May ROOF's Abilitation Center said goodbye to long-term resident Anton, who is graduating from the program after having been with us for 7 years, since 2005. When he came to us, Anton had spent 9 years in Belskoye-Ustye Psycho-Neurological Internat. Before this, he was given 3 years education before it was decided that he was "unteachable" and was transferred to Belskoye-Ustye. After his time at the Abilitation Center he can read and write absolutely competently and has plenty of practice at basic, practical math tasks, so that he won't be cheated at the shop!

During his time at the Abilitation Center, Anton proved particularly that he likes working with his hands. He enjoyed handicraft classes at the local museum and eventually became an invaluable employee at the lumber preparation and crate making enterprise in Porkhov, where he has now worked for

5 years. In the last couple years, our Program Manager, Sergei, has managed to secure a really nice, simple apartment for Anton in the Russian-Estonian border village of Belorusskaya, near Pytalovo. The apartment even has a beautiful and large balcony!

All of us at ROOF congratulate Anton on his graduation from the Abilitation Center program and on moving into his new home, which is his very own!

We also wish to congratulate and thank Sergei and Nadezhda, his wife, for all the hard work they have done to help Anton get to this point – and for their skill in dealing with the regional government to obtain the apartment for Anton. An apartment being given to a graduate of a psycho-neurological orphanage, as his very own, by the State – this is an unprecedented event in the Pskov Oblast. What is more, Sergei has succeeded also in getting an apartment for Nikolai (Kolya), another soon-to-be graduate of the Abilitation Center, who will be moving into his flat in Velikiye Luki at the end of the summer.

Congratulations, Anton! ROOF will be right beside you as you start living independently! Sergei will be visiting Anton regularly as he starts life in his new home.

Welcome to Alexei and Ilya – Two New Residents at the Abilitation Center!

As of early June we welcome two new residents to the Abilitation Center! They are Ilya and Alexei (or Lyosha, as everyone calls him). Both of these boys are still officially residents of the orphanage, as they are underage. Their coming to live at the Abilitation Center marks the first step in putting into action a new plan to extend Abilitation Center programs to younger children from the orphanage (finally, hurrah!). Many of us at ROOF have long been waiting to do this, but the orphanage administration (led by new and wonderful director Elena Nikolaevna) has only just agreed as of Spring 2012. Alexei and Ilya – at 16 and 17 – are not that much underage, but plans are that in the coming months many of the younger teens will also begin to spend several days at a time living at the Abilitation Center on a rotating basis, in order to enable a larger number of children to benefit from the program at a younger age – perhaps as young as 12. We can only hope that even more than five or six children (our



New Resident Alexei (16)

maximum capacity at the current Abilitation Center location in Porkhov) take well to living outside the orphanage on these rotating visits. If and when it becomes necessary to increase capacity, we will work hard to find a way to accommodate a greater number of children! R



New Resident Ilya (17)



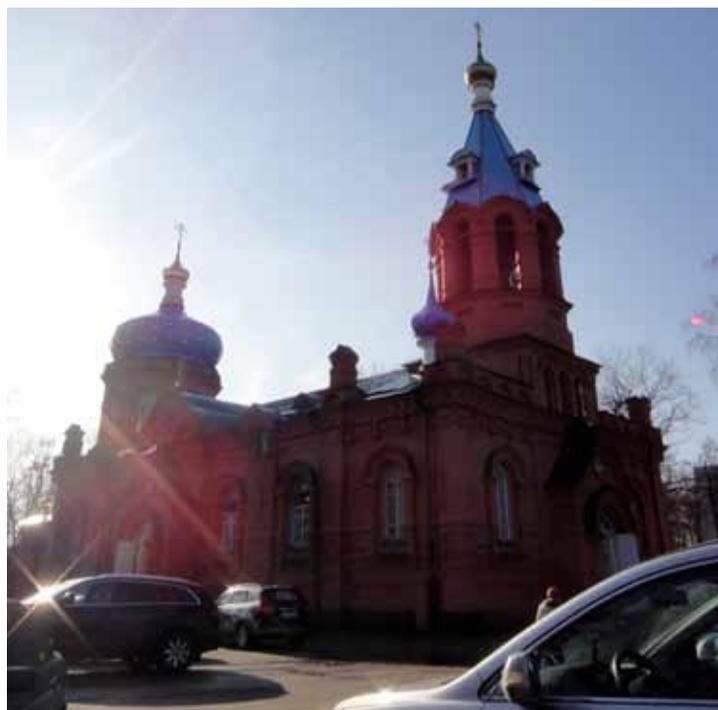
Volunteer trips to the little ones at the Belskoye-Ustye

This spring ROOF volunteers continued their trips to visit the younger children (Groups 2 and 10, aged 4 through 6) at Belskoye-Ustye Orphanage (Pskov Oblast). The pictures themselves speak much more effectively than our words ever could. This spring volunteers have concentrated principally on developing the children's fine motor skills. The children had never used soft play dough before; much harder "plastilin" is sold in toy shops, but this is not ideal for developing motor skills in children who are movement impaired. Among other things, ROOF volunteers made homemade play dough in several colors, which just thrilled the children. This homemade play dough is much softer than plastilin, and was enjoyed by all the children, including those in Group 10 who are significantly movement impaired. There is a need to work even more often and individually with all the children – but especially with one of the boys from Group 2, who shows signs of institutional autism, we think, and is terribly unable to concentrate with the noise of the rest of his group around him. Going forward we will be trying to get him off by himself into a quieter environment, as much as is possible within the orphanage grounds. R



A Bright Week Trip to Pskov!

In April, ROOF volunteers also made a Bright Week trip to Pskov with a large group of children from Belskoye-Ustye orphanage and with Abilitation Center residents. In Bright Week (the week after Easter) the Russian Orthodox Church holds weekday Liturgies every day, and we brought the children to a Liturgy where the Bishop of Pskov himself was serving. After the liturgy the Bishop kindly gave each of the children Easter cakes and sweets (!), which was the perfect ending to a day filled with bright Paschal colors, smells and the clear sound of Easter bells. R



Visiting Kolya: A Depressingly Typical Tale of Life for a Bright Child in the Orphanage System

Kolya (who's name has been changed) is a little boy – seven years old – in one of the orphanages where ROOF volunteers make visits. What happened to Kolya this spring is something quite typical for children in Russian orphanages; we want to share it with our sponsors, friends and readers as a glimpse into life in the orphanage system. When it was still winter-time, two ROOF employees went to take a few MGU (Moscow State University) students (volunteers) to the orphanage where Kolya lives. In the words of one of our employees:

“Kolya was the first child to meet us. He actively participated in all that happened, examined the gadgets that the volunteers had brought to show clever cartoons to the kids and was eager to talk. It struck us that everybody in the orphanage called him a fool, a moron etc., even the house parents. We could see that this was the usual way they treated him; they didn't even notice there was something wrong with doing so in our pres-

ence. But our MGU volunteers said that whatever they called him, it was such kids as Kolya that studied at MGU (widely held to be the best university in Russia). What they meant was that he was inquisitive, curious, daring and...inconvenient.

“The next thing we knew, a couple of weeks later Kolya was in a mental hospital with two other boys from the orphanage. My son and I went to see him. He was not as lively as before but still OK. We asked him if he wanted to dictate a letter to his house parents and the children in his group at the orphanage. He dictated: ‘Grandpa, I love you, Granny, I love you, Nastya, I love you.’ (Nastya is his sister, who is also at the orphanage). We brought him some developmental toys and he played well with them. We came to visit him every weekend and we saw that he was more sad each time. He said: ‘I don't know what awaits me. There has already been a commission (an examination

by a few psychiatrists to assess the patients' prospects) and they are not sending me back to the orphanage!

"Several other volunteers (through ROOF) began to come to visit Kolya. The nurses had promised that in good weather we could take him out for a walk. But then the doctor began refusing him visitors, saying that she would only talk to his legal representative (i.e. the orphanage). When the doctor and the nurses saw that so many people were not indifferent to Kolya's plight, they got scared and refused to let us take him for a walk.

"In March he was taken back to the orphanage, but the education director of the orphanage said he was to go to a special needs (correctional) type kindergarten in a town well outside Moscow. She says it is a really good one, and I believe her. She is a good woman. To be fair, I must mention what she told me about Kolya. Apparently once he attacked a little girl in the orphanage with scissors. Other than this, she thinks that he may grow out of his over-active behavior. She admits that in a family such behavior is easily channeled in a positive direction, but that it is very difficult to deal with in an orphanage. She also said that Kolya's mother is back from jail and wants to claim her parental rights back through a court procedure. Kolya has a big family and he loves them."

So we do not know what will become of Kolya, but his story is so typical. Unless his mother is speedy to claim him back (unlikely for a woman irresponsible enough to go to jail), he is going to an institution where he will get only the equivalent of five years of education, stretched to fill nine. And this is not because he is incapable; in fact, it is because he is too capable, and has got himself in trouble. Our volunteers are unlikely to be able to see Kolya very regularly if he is transferred far away, though they will, of course, try. The fact that Kolya's mother wants to reclaim him makes adoption an impossible alternative for solving the problem. If Kolya is transferred—as seems most likely—local mentors (and perhaps specific sponsorship) will have to be found to keep Kolya's active and inquisitive mind focused on wholesome, helpful and beautiful things. Please keep him in your thoughts and prayers! 

English Afternoon Tea with the Girls from Moscow Orphanage 22

This spring, the girls from Moscow Orphanage 22 (a special orphanage for teen mothers), have got in on the action of preparing the treats for and participating in ROOF's English Afternoon Tea program, run by Andrew and Penny Grenfell. The afternoon teas are run weekly at downtown Moscow Café Tsiferblat, which lends the premises to ROOF free of charge.

Program Manager Andrew Grenfell explains: "Our teas are not just in aid of appreciating English traditions, although that is part of it: we also hope that they will become part of an ambitious program being developed by ROOF to create opportunities for orphans and orphanage "graduates" to be trained by professionals. ***We want to say a special THANK YOU to professional chef Michael Janiga, who has come with us to Orphanage 22*** to teach a group of orphaned teenage mothers to bake English scones, Scottish shortbread, and orange drizzle cake (suitable for Russians observing the Orthodox Lenten fast). We also made French onion soup with



Volunteer Penny Grenfell (right) with the girls from Orphanage 22 the girls, which provided a delicious and healthy dinner for us all."

Because the girls have not been able to come with us to Café Tsiferblat, we have had parallel Afternoon English Teas with them at Orphanage 22, taking the remainder of their baked goods with us to Café Tsiferblat to be enjoyed by our guests the next day.



Andrew explains what happens at one of our typical English Afternoon Teas, "I explain the history, traditions and etiquette surrounding tea in England. Sometimes we discuss a particular topic, like the Act of Union between England and Scotland, or the life of artist John Constable. People are requested to look out for each other's needs before they satisfy their own, and of course talking with your mouth full is out of the question. At the Tsiferblat event we normally have around 5-10 people, including some regulars. By asking for donations from visitors who come to Afternoon Tea at Café Tsiferblat,



Volunteer Andrew Grenfell explaining English Tea ceremony!

we are able to cover the costs of transport and food for the volunteers. In the near future we will also use this money to invite the girls from Orphanage 22 to join us in Tsiferblat for a Saturday Tea, so that they can experience the elegance of the occasion at the cafe. As this develops, we hope to use this simple social enterprise business model to scale up its impact to orphanages around Moscow, either through similar Afternoon Tea events or simply through selling the baked goods. At the same time, we plan to develop relationships with local employers, inviting them to witness orphans' skills first-hand and hopefully some of these may take on the older teens as interns, which might even lead to job placements.

“If you would be interested in joining us as a volunteer, especially (but not only) if you have experience as a chef or connections in the catering/restaurant world, we’d love to hear from you! Contact us at andrewg@roofnet.org” 



www.roofnet.org