



Ecologia Trust

FROM THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE TRUSTEES

December 2000

Dear Supporters,

Although I have been involved with Kitezh for several years, meeting members of the community when they pass through London and discussing fundraising with Liza, I had not visited the village until this July. I wanted to tell you a bit about what I saw.

Leaving Moscow for the countryside is like time travel. You leave the bustling capital of a former super-power and within an hour you are in a strange place where nothing appears to be happening.

I would say third world but that is not quite it, for the ghost of a previous prosperity is ever present - more post-apocalyptic. Vast tracts of land which were once painstakingly cleared of forestry now lie unploughed and even ungrazed. Certain stretches of the road are crowded with clumps of people selling wild food that they have foraged in the forest - delicious mushrooms and berries. But when you stop to buy you see such malnourished faces and poverty in the clothes, and a sense of fear for the unknown future. Will it provide enough for these people to live on?

In town centres the municipal buildings, be they theatres, town halls, cinemas, are no longer working. Their doors are long barred, and an aura of wind-blown neglect whistles through their broken window panes.

Kitezh, by contrast, is like an ant's nest. I was there in the summer holidays so there was no school, but a summer camp of bright students from all over Russia brought a tremendous sense of intellectual activity to the place. The older children from Kitezh were joining in lessons on everything from aerodynamics to contemporary Russian poetry and evening lectures round the camp-fire on the history of world sexuality. Everywhere you look there are people moving about with a sense of purpose - children off to swim in the lake or making their way in chattering groups to the communal dining room. Women on their way to the banya, the communal bathhouse, or coming back from the kitchen garden with armfuls of greens. A tractor whizzes by on its way to the potato fields, while students and Kitezh children rake hay in the surrounding fields.

Here buildings are going up, by the half dozen, rather than falling into disrepair. Kitezh and its sister potato project, Kitezh Agro, are the largest employers in the Baryatino region. Some of the men building the church are not even being paid. They are given a roof over their heads, and excellent meals three times a day, but that is not what they are here for. As one of them explained to me "It's the atmosphere. The energy and enthusiasm they are putting into building a bright new future for these children. You don't find that anywhere else round here".

Most of the building frenzy of this year has been funded by your donations. A little goes an extraordinarily long way in Kitezh. But it is the families' exceptional commitment to fostering and adopting children and to trying to heal their wounds with love that is the really remarkable thing about Kitezh. Even the children who have arrived most recently at Kitezh are already finding a place for themselves in the community, learning to feel valued and loved.

The uniqueness of Kitezh's approach has been recognized by Madge Bray, a senior social worker in the area of child abuse in the UK, who after her first visit wrote that she felt the community "has the potential to lead the world". She also noted that "the atmosphere between the children themselves was as harmonious as I have seen in any care establishment anywhere in the world". It takes extraordinary courage and commitment to take these children into their lives, and I was profoundly humbled by what I saw. I hope you will feel able to continue to support Kitezh as it grows to offer the hope of a new future to more of Russia's abandoned children.

Rose Baring

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And from Liza Hollingshead.....

Good News from Russia for a change!

Kitezh Ecovillage Community for Russian orphan children is flourishing. In a time of economic crisis and political upheaval in Russia, Kitezh is a beacon of light and joy. The changes that have occurred over the past two years are astonishing, thanks to the dedication of the eight foster families who live in Kitezh, and also thanks to the concerted efforts of Kitezh supporters all over the world, who have empowered the residents to expand physically, spiritually and psychologically. All of us who are involved with Kitezh through Ecologia Trust, have reason to be proud of our achievements. The enclosed pictures will give you a taste of how your contribution has made a difference.

2000 was a very big year for Kitezh: in addition to support from Ecologia Trust, Kitezh also received an ecological grant from the Institute for Sustainable Communities, USA to install drainage and clean up the land which has made a huge difference, bringing beauty and order to the landscape. Kitezh-Agro, the farming project associated with Kitezh, harvested its first 2,000 tons of potatoes whose profits (and potatoes) will feed the community for the next year. By developing unused farmland into productive potato fields Kitezh Agro, the initiative of Andrey Stepanov, a Moscow businessman who has moved to live permanently in Kitezh, will provide a solid financial base to allow Kitezh Children's Community to be self-reliant in future.

Ecologia Trust and Kitezh: building and training

Thanks to the \$50,000 donations made via Ecologia Trust and the Hygeia Foundation, USA, **Kitezh village has physically doubled in this year.** The heart of Kitezh has to centre on the beautiful, well equipped communal kitchen and dining room, with summer dining room alongside: an open-air barbecue area with ample seating to feed the many summer visitors, students and volunteers. A new, spacious *banya* (bath house and sauna) is ready, four new houses are finished, and there is indoor plumbing to all the houses (a big change from outhouses and wells). Those of you who have visited Kitezh in the past will appreciate the change in lifestyle this brings! The 3-storey Ecodom (eco-house) is well on its way to completion, with a greenhouse in the tip of its pyramid roof. Kitezh is looking beautiful, not just functional as before: the forest in 'the Park' has been cleared, the ponds cleaned, paved pathways link the houses and Japanese-style curved bridges allow safe passage over drainage ditches. They have even sowed a patch of 'English lawn', for which they now need a lawn mower! It takes a long time to cut even a tiny patch of grass with scissors! The beautiful, traditionally carved wooden church is now finished and blessed, with icons painted by Kitezh artist, Sasha Lukyanov, and services are held regularly by Misha, the builder and priest in training. Two classrooms for the little children are decorated in pastel colours with hand-painted murals and soft cushions to curl up on at story time.

The first year of the British Social Work and Therapeutic Education Training funded by Charity Know How UK, has been completed, with great results. Our specialists Madge Bray, Barbara Smedley, Teresa O'Neill and David Dean have made a huge contribution to the awareness and professionalism of all in Kitezh. Working from the incredible base of love which the Kitezh parents offer their children, the added knowledge and understanding they all have given to the parents and teachers at Kitezh has been invaluable. We have applied for funding for the second year of the training, and are encouraged by Teresa O'Neill's excellent report that Charity Know How will be able to do this. If you would like a copy of the report, we will be glad to send it to you. Play Therapy is now part of the Kitezh way of life, with ALL the children lining up for their turn! Non-directive therapeutic work demonstrated so competently by Barbara Smedley allows the children to heal their early memories in a graceful and most effective way. The results with the children who have worked in Play Therapy are impressive. Igor's drawings a year ago were only in black, with images of violence and catastrophe. He sent a card for his Godmother, Diana, with hearts and flowers and clouds, coloured in pastel shades of rose and blue. Sasha plays with his brothers and sisters now. Lena stopped pulling involuntary ugly faces, and now is top of her group in maths. Nadya is 15 years old. In Play Therapy she played with dolls - she said she never did that when she was a child because she had none. Vasya finally built his castle with an open doorway - he had spent his babyhood in a cage. Good results.

The long-term aim is for Kitezh to become a residential Training Centre for Foster Families and Social Workers, where they can come and live for a while, learn how to be with children, understand their behaviour and receive support from the experience of the families in Kitezh. And of course, the even longer-term vision is to build Kitezh villages all over Russia. It will not be too long before that happens.

In early spring Liza Hollingshead and Rosie Turnbull from the Findhorn Foundation ran a Community Building Training, also funded by Charity Know How, for Kitezh adults, to give them the support they need to build their community and to nourish themselves and one another. It was useful to 'play' the Game of Transformation together, and one significant outcome was that Marina Maximova became the first woman as Head of the Community. Inter-personal conflicts were raised and cleared up, and the vision for Kitezh aired and clarified.

The Children

Thirty children live in Kitezh, most of whom have been rescued from orphanages and temporary shelters. They are adopted by the Kitezh families, and embraced by the whole community. Their teachers in the Kitezh school are also their parents, and every aspect of Kitezh centres around them. To create a 'Developing Environment' is the key to their philosophy of education, according to the founder, Dmitry Morozov, who gave up his job as an up and coming radio journalist to start Kitezh in 1992. He says, "the main idea of Kitezh is to create an oasis of love, harmony and cooperation; to give orphan children the feeling of belonging to a family, a community; to give them a good education and to prepare them to go out into the world to become valuable, effective citizens of new, democratic Russia. Kitezh school is a harmonious holistic approach - a School of Life."

Three new orphan children joined families at Kitezh last winter, and it is now evident that the integration of new children into this community is becoming easier and more trouble free. The children are so grateful to have been rescued from the terrible orphanages they were living in. Sasha, 13 years old, arrived in January. When he was 8 his mother sold him for 10 rubles (about 25 pence) at a metro station in Moscow. The man who 'bought' him, took him to an orphanage in Kaluga region. The children's rooms had either no light or no heat, so Sasha lived in the corridor for four years. When he came to Kitezh, the boy had never seen a television, and had huge gaps in his education. He is bright, he is intelligent, he is interested in anything mechanical. He cried bitter tears in every lesson because he couldn't answer questions put to children 5 years younger than him. He walked alone along the forest paths because he didn't know how to make friends with the other children. He had nothing to say, nothing to offer. So his teachers gave him lessons on his own to build his confidence, his new father took him to work with the bees, taught him how to chop wood, his mother showed him how to bake pies. In the summer, his eyes brightened when he saw me because he knew how to say in English "Hello Liza! How are you?" This child now has a home, two loving parents, he is beginning to be able to study at school with the other children, and to make friends with his brothers and sisters. It will be a long journey for Sasha, but now he has a future, and he will become someone.

Vasya is also new in Kitezh. He has a beautiful voice and great musical talent. Madge Bray taught him some English songs, and in June he and his adopted mother, Larisa, travelled to Bath where Vasya and Madge sang with James Twyman at a Peace Concert organised by the Creative Health Network. He took it all in his stride, and sang Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star, just for Madge. Thanks to all who sent donations as a result.

Valya, the third newcomer to Kitezh this year, was determined to move to Kitezh. But she had to wait for 6 months while she persuaded her grandmother to sign the documents giving permission for her to be adopted by Sasha and Lena Lukyanov. Her determination reaped its rewards, and now she is as happy as a lark.

There is room for 3 more children to join families in Kitezh this winter. The older teenagers who have graduated from school make room in the houses for new children. Plans for next summer include building a special house for the teenagers to live in on their frequent visits home from high school, university or army.

Education

The school programme is becoming more and more innovative - the teachers are experimenting with different styles of teaching - one they call 'plunging' works particularly well there. The children study one subject only, intensively for 3 days, and sometimes several age groups are combined so that the older children teach the younger ones. At Kitezh nothing stands still! There is always something new and the enthusiasm to create a model of excellent, innovative and heart-centred care and education is the key to all they do. David Dean's input during his stay this year resulted in a new building style for the Kitezh school: instead of one big school building, they now plan to build classrooms on to each of the family houses, so that the parents teach from home, and the children run from house to house, getting lots of fresh air and exercise. It reinforces the approach to integrate education with life. Kitezh is very proud that two of their girls, Irina Sergunina and Tatyana Popova were accepted into Moscow Universities this autumn, a very big achievement for orphan children raised and educated in a 'village'.

The 'Adopt a God-Child' scheme

Finding each child a foreign Godparent has been incredibly successful! It has brought a total of \$6,000 to the children this year. More importantly, the children are very involved with their Godparents, writing to them and wanting to know everything about them. Most of the Godparents are wonderfully attentive to the children, who adore receiving letters, and small gifts by mail or with travellers to Kitezh. Tatyana's American Godparent is helping to support her to live in Moscow which is the only way she could afford to go to University. Thank you Godparents.

Eight Kitezh children travelled to Australia in spring generously hosted again, the second visit, by the Reiki Community there. None had travelled outside Russia before, and they all returned with better English and impressed by the Australian lifestyle, weather and especially the warm-hearted people. Lucky orphans.

Volunteers

This has become a rich and valuable resource for both Kitez and our foreign volunteers. This year 15 energetic young, and a few not so young, volunteers went to Kitez, at varying times, enthusiastic to give of their gifts and open to receive much from the experience of being in the community. A comment from Mary Ellen Sheehan, an American who spent 2 months there in summer: "I was impressed by Kitez in so many ways. I have looked at a lot of US communities, being interested in being part of one or starting one in the future. And Kitez definitely impressed me the most, because of the huge commitment the families make to the kids, themselves, each other and the community, and also there is such a sense of normalcy and easiness there. Everyone seems to have this strong commitment but they are so low key about it. Kitez seems to be a wonderful place for kids to grow up in. They are very happy, well adjusted, and many of them express the interest to come back and teach at Kitez in the future. If that's not part of a successful community, I don't know what is! Two months was not long enough. I wish I had planned to stay longer. But I expect I'll be back."

Plans for Next Year:

* Build additions to each of the houses to incorporate classrooms - inspired by David Dean, our Scottish Education specialist. The classrooms all need to be re-decorated and furnished with tables, chairs, white boards, curtains and soft furnishings.

* Build a Play Therapy / Psychology House, complete with sand tray, water table, toys, musical instruments, sound and video system and soft furniture. With accommodation upstairs for visiting trainers from abroad.

* The Farm needs a new barn, with extended facilities for more cows. If there is enough funding, a good milking system will be installed, and we will build a cheese-making room. Kitez has 5 milk cows, raises about 50 chickens and has 50 beehives. A good cow costs \$200 and we need 5 more.

* 12-bedroom Guest house: so many visitors and volunteers come to Kitez now that the families are stretched to accommodate them in their homes. The ground floor of the Guest House was built this year and we hope to raise enough money to complete it next year. It will have indoor plumbing and hot showers! Our idea is to 'sell' people a room for life – if you would like to contribute to the building and have your 'own' space whenever you want it, please do let us know. It's a kind of time-share idea, without the structure or the strings attached!

Other news from Ecologia Trust:

Kinoschool: In addition to working with Kitez, we were delighted for the opportunity to re-connect with our environmental roots as partners with ISAR Moscow in the Kinoschool training for environmental film makers, held in the North Caucasus mountains in September. Two BBC Bristol filmmakers, Phil Fairclough and Steve Greenwood, were invited to teach at the Kinoschool with Russian filmmakers and an American, Bob Nesson. Autumn in the Caucasus was spectacular, and the intensive 2-week training produced some high quality and unusual films made by the 20 Russian students, two of whom will spend 2 weeks at the BBC Natural History Unit in Bristol in the spring. We hope to continue to work with ISAR on this project in the future as it provides the means for young environmentalists to educate the public, including the children, on this most important topic, caring for their natural environment, and for the planet.

Core Funding: At Ecologia Trust's base in Scotland we still struggle to make ends meet, although this past year has been easier than previous years. Core funding is a constant issue which we must address in order to be able to continue our work in Russia. If anyone would like to fund our core costs, or can think of any body that might, we would be eternally grateful. Our Independent Travel does provide some income to pay for our office and our staff, so if you know anyone who needs invitations, visas or private accommodation in Russia, please send them to us.

A big thank you to all who have helped, in large and small ways to build Kitez. It is so much appreciated, and in the present economic climate in Russia, such expansion would simply not have been possible without you. It is satisfying to know that a relatively small amount of money can do so much. There are 8 families and 30 happy children, building a community that is becoming a real beacon of light to many others in Russia. The enclosed card was hand drawn by a child at Kitez as an expression of gratitude to you for your help.

Please support Kitez again this Christmas. It is worth it.

Our love and blessings to you from all at Kitez and Ecologia,

Liza Hollingshead
Director, Ecologia Trust