



Ecologia News

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Ten New Children at Kitezh Looking for Godparents

IN the middle of a Russian forest there is a sign which reads: "Peace to those who enter the territory of Kitezh

Community—A place where children find a family and a home." Here one enters a village of foster families who adopt orphan children in the Kaluga region, 300 kilometres south of Moscow. Beauty is the key to healing the inner world. The fairy tale quality of the Kitezh Village draws out the beauty within a child.

Once the children come to live in Kitezh, they are no longer orphans. Each one has a home with loving parents, lots of brothers and sisters (40 at the last count) and each one has the opportunity to heal the wounds of abuse and mistreatment in their early childhood. At the Kitezh school their education is individual—each one is important and each one has an opportunity to fulfil his or her greatest potential. They have a future that would never be possible if they were raised in an institution.

Ten new children arrived in Kitezh this year from two families. The three Mashkov boys joined the Lukyanovs, bringing the total number of their foster children to seven plus their own two sons. They are from Baryatino and a few years ago a social worker asked Kitezh to take them but at that time there was no family able to take them.

The orphanage they came from is sponsored by Italians and every year some of the children go to Italy for a few months. The boys came for a week before going to Italy and they liked it so much they wanted to stay. They took the trip, however, and afterwards came to live at Kitezh at the end of August. Although the orphanage is a good one by Russian standards the boys were woefully undereducated. Valentin, the oldest boy, at 13 had a

reading age of six and knew virtually no maths or history. Nevertheless, the energy and intelligence of the three brothers was apparent and everyone could see that these boys had a lot of potential. Valentin, who insists that his name not be shortened to Valya because that can also be a girl's name, is calm and determined and has already shown leadership qualities. Only a month after he joined the Children's Council he offered to be a mentor to two boys with whom there had been some problems and he was allowed to do it. His brother, Kolya, 10, has a gift for languages and speaks beautiful Italian. The youngest Andrey, 8, is energetic and enthusiastic.



The Sinko family with Tamara

In addition, the seven Sinko brothers and sisters are reunited and all live together with earth-mother Tamara in her not very large log cabin. The three older brothers came first with the proviso that their younger siblings could join them. And they did! The youngest are five-year old twins Vadim and Ksenya and they range upwards to the oldest brother Volodya who turned 14 this year. Their parents were displaced from a former Soviet Republic and arrived in a remote village with no hope and no jobs. In their despair they turned to drink and of course the children suffered. Malnourished and neglected, all seven children were sent to a Children's Home not far from Kitezh. Unusually, the Director saw a positive future for them at Kitezh and released them all to live with Tamara Pichugina and her own two daughters. Tamara said: "Now I am happy because I have found my purpose in life—to love children. I know that what I can offer them is what they need. Of course it is very many clothes to wash but it is worth it to look into their eyes and see the need for love shining out from them."

A Happy New Year to you All!



Liza Hollingshead

HOW THE CHILDREN GET TO KITEZH

and what happens once they get there

In November three adults from Kitezh, Sergey and Julya Khlopenov and Marina Maximova were in the UK for a training programme that would improve their skills in working with the children. One day over lunch I asked Marina how are children selected to live at Kitezh. She replied that they liaise with social workers about which orphanages to visit and find out from staff which children would benefit most from coming to Kitezh.

The orphanages provide children with the basics of food, clothing and shelter but they do nothing to motivate them to study or develop themselves. The local schools also tend to write off orphanage children and don't encourage them. For the brightest and most intelligent children this is not a satisfactory situation. So the criteria for selecting children for Kitezh are: a) Do they want to come and b) are they eager to study?

Once a child is accepted the decision about which family he or she will live with is determined by which adults the child forms an attachment to and which families have space. The ages of the other children in the family are a factor as it is not considered a good idea to have children of the same age with the same needs in one family.

The daily schedule is very structured and very full. The children go to school until lunch at two o'clock. Then there is work, study, play rehearsals, meetings, other activities and family sharing, the latter usually half an hour before bed. Sometimes there are films, cartoons or movies that demonstrate positive values.

Rehearsals take up much time. There are many celebrations so there are many occasions to put on performances. But these are not just entertainments. They have a therapeutic purpose. The children learn to express themselves creatively in a cooperative situation and the applause and approval they receive builds confidence and self-esteem.

Another way in which the children are integrated into the community is through the Children's Council. Though no child is compelled to join, they all want to because it is important for them to be a part of things and to belong. There are different levels of responsibility within the group indicated by different coloured badges. All newcomers start out as 'Pups'. Once they have achieved some simple goals such as being able to study and being well-behaved in their family they are promoted to 'pupil'. The next stage is 'Mentor' where they take this role to the younger children. The final stage is 'Custodian' where they become caretakers of the spirit and values of Kitezh.

The Children's Council meets every other evening. It is a time for the children to share what has happened that day, what was interesting and what was good, to appreciate those who have done well and also to discuss difficulties. This group is very beneficial for the children because it gives them structure and a place where they can support and help each other. On other evenings they meet with their mentors. Older children have adult mentors.

What happens when someone behaves badly? The children manage it themselves in the group. For example, one day the blackboard had been slashed. Masha Pichugina, the head of the Small Council announced this at the next meeting. She said, "Somebody destroyed the blackboard. This is a pity because it cost a lot of money. It is also a pity because it is our blackboard. If someone is responsible will they say?"

Two boys admitted to it.

"Why did you do that?" asked Masha

"I was so angry." One of them explained. "I wanted to go to Baryatino and I wasn't allowed. I wanted to destroy something."

"How do you feel about it now?"

"I understand it was stupid."

"Next time you are angry, what will you do? Children, let's help them. Make some suggestions."

Instead of shaming and blaming the children try to think of constructive ways to channel this kind of energy. Nevertheless, even though there is no blaming, it is understood that the boys did destroy something valuable and they must make compensation.

Instead of working the usual one hour, they must work four hours for a couple of days. In this way they are

encouraged to take responsibility for their actions.

In Mentors' meetings they discuss how to react to the behaviour of the children—who needs appreciation, who needs stronger discipline. Appreciation for and recognition of all successes, however, small, must be acknowledged. This encourages them to continue to succeed.

Marina Maximova talking to Rhiannon Hanfman



Extended Lukyanov family with three new boys

Kids Take Charge

In Kitezh we have a group of older kids that is called the Small Council. The Small Council is the connection between the kids and the adults in Kitezh. Every year the children vote and we choose the people we want to represent us on the Small Council. They are just people whom the kids trust. Council members protect the kids' interests, help make the daily timetable and sometimes tells the kids what the adults want them to do. They can help a kid if he needs it. Besides lessons they think about what kids will do in the evenings, on weekends, and on holidays. In other words when we choose the members of the Small Council we choose what our future will be like.

This year the election and the week before it was unusual. Our target was to show how elections work in the real world so

Fun and Games and Learning

THIS past summer we invented a special programme for the children who live in Kitezh or come during the summer holidays.

We played two role-playing games. The first was called *Aguilon* and lasted for two weeks. The kids were separated into two opposing tribes which had their own houses, laws, and leaders. Our aim was not to have the kids fight each other but to teach them how to live in peace, not to stretch the limits of the game and above all to remember that we all live in a community. At the end of the game we wanted everyone to become one tribe. Surprisingly we achieved our goal faster than we thought.

Of course, in the competitions and battles the kids did not pity their enemies and did not hold back their powers. This was good because our other aim was to allow the kids find themselves and understand what each can and likes to do, and let them use all of their talents. There was a boy from Moscow named Sasha Zaitsev. After he worked on *Aguilon's* newspaper, he understood that he liked writing articles and now he wants to be a journalist. A Kitezh boy named Andrei Zhuber became a leader this way. Some of the children had good ideas for their tribe, and some were good at following commands. Everyone tried to take responsibility for themselves and for the whole tribe. Many children learned new things. Some learned that the leader cannot do everything. One good thing was that kids wanted to triumph over the other tribe and for that they would work a lot. After working, the kids celebrated with parties, a disco, and competitions.

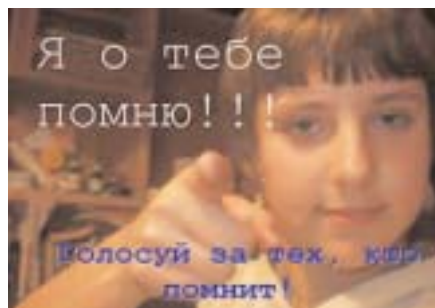
After two weeks of this role-playing game, everyone was very tired. We had a few days of rest, and then the second role-playing game started. It was called *Dune* after the book written by Frank Herbert. We took some ideas and some names from the book. We had two teams again. The boys were one team and the girls on another. But in this game there was little competition between the two teams and a lot of studying. Every team had strict laws. The kids had to control themselves and their emotions, had to think like philosophers, and had to answer difficult questions. There were fun things too. Once the boys came at night and stole the girls' shoes. Then the boys came in the morning and sang songs begging for the girls' pardon.

After the games, the children's consciousness was broadened. The summer program of role-playing games helps us very much, and, I think, we will continue it in the future.

Valya Kanykhina (15)

we tried to make everything real. On Monday, the first advertisements appeared on the walls of houses. The first party was called Girls Choice. The leaders of Girls Choice were Valia, Zhenia, and Masha. For two days only this party put up posters around Kitezh. But on Wednesday, there was an explosion of activity. On that day, the other party made a deal with Andrei Stepanov and together they organised a company to finance a new party. There began to appear advertising for the group called Generation. The leaders of Generation were Yegor, Dima, Lyosha, and I. The idea of the party was to introduce some fun and happiness into the children's lives in Kitezh. During the week before the election, this party put condensed milk on all the tables in the dining room with the slogan of the party: "We are answerable for our promises." The other group began to worry and advertisements with accusations against Generation began to appear. One of the advertisements claimed that Generation would try to buy the kids' votes and then forget about them.

Both parties did a good job with the posters....



.....But this was just words on paper and the kids did not know what each party really thought.

☞ **Dima Morozov thought that the best solution was to have a debate!**

The leaders of both parties dressed up for the debate. Beforehand each party handed out papers that described the party's programme. Both parties had similar programmes. This is not surprising because both parties want to see Kitezh become better. But Girls' Choice focused on education and Generation concentrated on economics. It was very hard to debate against my friends when I thought that they were right. But a debate is a debate. Both parties debated well, but it got emotional when it came to questions. The best thing was that the debate was not for the adults but for the children only. There was one day between the debate and the election. There was no advertising on that day because everyone needed to focus on making the right choice.

There were seven candidates for the Small Council. After the first round of voting, only one man was elected. It was me. In the second round, there were only four candidates because I had been elected and two other candidates got too few votes. I was still very nervous because two people from my party were in the second round. But the kids made their choice and both of the other candidates from my party were elected. We were so happy because all the people elected were from Generation. The new Small Council began to work on the next day. Now we meet everyday to think about the next day's schedule and about how to make our lives in Kitezh as good as we can.

Sasha Stepanov (16)

Rosie Runs the World—Latest News!

NEW Years Day—Rosie is in Lithuania and headed for the Latvian capital of Riga. She's come a long way since she started her run on October 2nd from Tenby, Wales. She has run through blizzards in Germany, camped under the stars, heard wolves in Poland, received a marriage proposal, and arrived in Lithuania at Christmas.

We hear from her every so often, brief but enthusiastic phone calls on crackley lines. Three months down the road her enthusiasm and energy are unabated. She's averaging about 25-30 kilometres a day. Not bad considering that she's carrying a 17 kg. pack on her back. Everything she needs is in that pack, her tent, clothing, food. She has no other back-up except the support of Ecologia, her friends and well wishers. Not least of these is Geoffrey Hall, a friend who is also a marathon runner. He has stayed in touch, directed supplies and equipment to where Rosie can pick them up, planned her route and will join her from time to time to run with her.

Rosie left the UK on schedule and on 17th October entered Holland. In Amsterdam she was greeted with intense media attention. Germany in November presented a few setbacks. Snow, the wind from the East against her and short days meant she had to slow down. On top of this she had a foot injury. The doctor told her she should rest it for a week. Rosie rested for a day. For a while she had to walk rather than run but she kept moving. Geoff joined her in Hamburg and walked/ran with her for a couple of days.

In spite of this Rosie seems to be having the time of her life. Sleeping in the virgin forests of Poland and breaking

through the frost on her tent in the morning exhilarates her. One day at 6:00 am she received a proposal of marriage. Not she believes on account of her beauty. "You are so strong," he said. "I need a wife like you."

In Gdansk Rosie made a pit stop to pick up supplies, especially new shoes. She's ordered 40 pairs for the trip. It seems even the best shoes only last 1000 kilometres.

Rosie on 6th January: "I'm now in Panevezys, two thirds of the way across Lithuania and 140 km. from Riga. It is 20 below freezing at night but I'm still managing to sleep outside even though the zip on my bivouac broke (my own fault). But it is so beautiful running in the pink light of the morning, its worth the cold and I am very excited about how its all going so well. It is so cold at night that I take my shoes to bed with me to unfreeze them so I can put them on in the morning. The water freezes instantly, and even paper and pens freeze, so I put them in my socks! I can only manage about 25km each day as everything is frozen solid. When I get up in the morning I have to unfreeze my feet and the tent before I pack it away. I send particular thanks to the tent manufacturers who are sending me a new tent, and to TerraNova and PHD and to P20—I really need that as the conditions are so hard on the face. Please tell everyone that I love you all! Bye." "

Last word. Rosie is 110 km from Riga and expects to get there on Tuesday, (13th Jan.). She says its very cold and good training for Siberia. We estimate that she will enter Russia in the first week of February and we expect to see her in Moscow around the 3rd March. Keep in touch with Rosie's progress by logging on to our web site.

Ecologia is proud to sponsor this extraordinary woman on her amazing adventure. So far she has raised over £1200 for the children of Kitezh. Please continue to sponsor her generously.

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From Moscow Girl to Kitezh Girl

BEFORE I came to Kitezh, I lived in Moscow. It was a terrible life. I was going to a bad school with bad kids from bad families. I never wanted to study. I also had problems with my parents. They couldn't understand me and I couldn't understand them. I was very angry. I led a bad life and I did some very bad things. Then I had the chance to visit Kitezh. In the summer of 2002 I was bored in Moscow. Suddenly my dad phoned me and said that a few days later some visitors for Kitezh would come to our apartment in Moscow. Masha Pichugina and Valya Kanykhina came to my family's home and then invited me to spend some time in Kitezh. I went there for two weeks. After my visit, I decided to stay longer because I thought that Kitezh was a beautiful and peaceful place with good people with good attitudes.

When I first lived in Kitezh, I still had some problems and I still acted badly. But soon after my arrival everything became better. I began to like school and I became happier. After I began to act better, the people in Kitezh thought about starting the programme for rehabilitating troubled children with parents who lived in Moscow. Kitezh's Moscow Programme allows parents of difficult and problematic kids who are leading bad lives in Moscow to send their children to live in Kitezh. After spending some time in Kitezh, these children return to Moscow with improved characters and behaviour.

So I was the first child in Kitezh's Moscow Programme. Although I do not know how long I will stay here, for now I feel like a girl from Kitezh and not like a girl from Moscow.



Dasha Kuznekova (17)