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Dear Friends,

Over the years you have supported Kitezh Children's Community in Russia with your interest, your visits and, in many cases, with generous donations. So much has happened with Ecologia Trust and Kitezh, we thought you'd like an update.

Last September I returned from Russia just after the financial crisis hit - it was dramatic to say the least. All state support for Kitezh, little as it was, stopped, and we were all worried how they would manage through the winter. Ecologia made a commitment to help: I wrote an e-mail appeal for Kitezh at that time, which some of you may have received, and soon afterwards founders Dmitry Morozov and Sasha Shubin came to Britain to make a presentation on Kitezh at the "Creating Sustainable Community" conference at the Findhorn Foundation. On their way to Findhorn they visited Rose Baring, our Trustee in London and Madge Bray, another committed supporter of Kitezh, making an important connection with the Orthodox Church in Shrewsbury. As a result of the good will generated, we have collected over £10,000 for Kitezh in only 9 months!

These funds paid for a new mini-bus, the materials to complete the communal dining room/kitchen this summer AND to build 3 new houses for families waiting to join Kitezh, in addition to keeping them all secure during a very hard winter, and buying clothes and gifts for the children. So a relatively small amount went a very long way.

Madge Bray's visit to Kitezh in summer '98 was a turning point for us all. Madge is world renowned for her work with foster families and the development of Play Therapy with children from disturbed backgrounds. In her opinion Kitezh is the best model for foster family care for children that she has encountered anywhere, and she reinforced our commonly held feeling that, although Kitezh is still very young, it has the real potential to transform the entire de-humanising system of institutionalised childcare in Russia.

Madge inspired us to design a Social Work and Special Needs Education Training at Kitezh. We are fortunate to have the active involvement of experienced professionals like Madge and Barbara Smedley, well known Social Workers, educator David Dean, founder of Raddery School in Scotland, and Jocelyn Jones and Teresa O'Neill of the University of Leicester Child Protection Centre. Intuitively, the adults of Kitezh have given the children unconditional love and security. It works wonders. However, they have little professional training nor do they have previous experience of the challenges of living in community. If Kitezh is to grow to meet their goal, they need training now in order to deal with the intended expansion in numbers. Where children are involved, there is no room for experimentation! We are very grateful to Charity Know How for their support for the initial stage of this training which includes a Community Building training with myself and a member of the Findhorn Ecovillage Community. We are seeking £4,000 matching funds for this project.

What is needed now at Kitezh is a special space for Play Therapy for the children: every inch of space at Kitezh is multi-purpose, and accommodation is very tight: to accommodate volunteers often the children are moved to sleep with their parents, and the resident Russian psychologist lives in a one-roomed house where he does his individual therapy work, he also houses the computers and Internet access, and is the classroom for Maths and Physics! We want to build a demonstration 'Ecodom' at Kitezh to provide a Play Therapy room and accommodation for visiting psychologists and the many volunteers who are making their way to serve at Kitezh.

'Ecodom' is a brilliant Russian-designed highly energy-efficient ecohouse that incorporates a greenhouse-waste water system, a winter indoor garden, active and passive solar heating. Ecologia is working with the Socio-Ecological Union to promote the concept of Ecodoms and ecovillages in Russia and we'd like to build the first in Kitezh. It will cost £15,000 to build and equip, so if you are inspired, please do contribute!

Kitezh Children's Community is indeed an inspiring spot on the globe, a model of family-based community care for orphaned, abandoned children, a new concept of how to cope with the tragic reality of homelessness amongst children in Russia. Possibly in the world. Kitezh has been in existence for 7 years. The small resident group, now about 20 adults, has built 10 houses, a schoolhouse and the organic farm is producing food for the community. The church will be ready to serve the local community very soon. Seven Kitezh families are now responsible for 30 children. The school is flourishing, recognised by the state up to Class 8. Many of the children who come to Kitezh have had little or no education and have learning difficulties because of their early childhood traumas. The teachers are working with 'heart-centered' education methods and the positive results are already evident. For my birthday, the children put on a magnificent rendering of the rock opera 'Jesus Christ Superstar' - in English!

Although Kitezh today is an extraordinary achievement, if Kitezh is to make the impact on the entire Russian childcare system that it deserves, it needs to grow more quickly. The foundations have been solidly laid and now it is ready to expand. We at Ecologia and at Kitezh, with the help of many friends all over the world, are committed to reach the goal of 30 families with 200 children within the next 5 years, then to create other Kitezh villages all over Russia. It will require major funding to build another 20 houses, a recreation centre, an extension to the tiny schoolhouse, and to develop the farm. While this is ambitious, it is absolutely essential. There are over 1 million homeless children in Russia, and something HAS to be done for them. Conditions in state institutions are appalling, with little understanding of the loving care and healing that all these children need to become well adjusted, contributing members of society.

Ecologia has begun to help: we are seeking support from the European Union, the National Lottery Fund, Charity Know How and international Trusts and funding organisations to help this centre grow. Although funding for skills training is relatively accessible, we do rely entirely on private donations to fund building. At the Findhorn Conference Dmitry Morozov was well received and established excellent links. A skills training exchange is underway. Findhorn Foundation staff will visit Kitezh, and a member of Kitezh staff took part in their Eco-Village Training earlier this year. Dmitry also attended the Human Service Alliance conference in North Carolina, USA this spring, where he was received with enthusiasm. We are certain there will be many positive results of this new 'alliance'.

Kitezh is also working towards this expansion, and taking steps to secure their sustainability. An exciting new development is the commercial potato farm project. A Russian friend of Kitezh has invested in land adjoining Kitezh for a large potato farm, managed by Kitezh personnel and run on a profit-sharing basis. Not only will it provide long-term funding for Kitezh, but also secure jobs for some of the Kitezh boys as they graduate into adulthood. Four Kitezh teenage boys are now studying at local technical colleges and soon will be equipped to earn a living as productive members of society. Five years ago these lads were living on the streets with pure survival as their only aim.

The children of Kitezh have also been travelling. In their wildest dreams they never imagined it was possible! The 1996/97 Findhorn Youth Project and Kitezh children Exchange broadened everyone's horizons. Last year ten children and adults went to Australia to train in Reiki. A Kitezh teenager spent a month in Sweden with Kim Larsen, and this year another lad will spend the summer on the West coast of Scotland with John Wyllie.

We have recently started an "Adopt a God-Child" scheme, and we have "God-parents" or sponsors for many of the Kitezh children. Our goal is to find a God-parent for every child at Kitezh. The children love the idea. This is not only about financial support, it is about connecting: sending and receiving letters, e-mails, birthday cards, small gifts, maybe one day to visit one another. If you would like a Kitezh God-Child, do let us know.

Kitezh welcomes volunteers of all ages to Kitezh. There is plenty of work to be done, building, gardening, cooking and teaching English, and it has proved memorable for all who have made the long journey there. Several young people from Britain and USA are spending their vacations at Kitezh this summer as part of the community, teaching English to the children. In Spring '99 Kitezh hosted a group of 10 American students from Concordia University, Wisconsin which was a great experience for everyone. Each summer we hold a camp for foreign and Russian students. There has been a steady stream of interested westerners to Kitezh this year. If you'd like to visit, please get in touch.

Finally, all at Kitezh have asked me to thank the many friends all over the world for your support of Kitezh. Your love and interest is as important as financial support. If you would like to volunteer some time to support Kitezh, either at home raising awareness of Kitezh, or by visiting Kitezh yourself, please do let us know. Personal fundraising amongst friends works exceptionally well! Warmest wishes to you from all at Ecologia and at Kitezh,

Liza Hollingshead

Ecologia Trust is a Scottish Charity, working with Russian NGOs in youth, ecology and education since 1988