



## Weaving Connections

Reflecting on the last 20 years, I am struck by the number of personal international friendships that have been built between the various cultures Ecologia works with. The common link has been the ethos of the Findhorn Community – its values of creating harmony and peace in the world.

Ecologia Youth Trust was founded in the era of Perestroika when barriers between the USSR and the West were breaking down, allowing people to get to know each other and become friends. In 1989, the first youth exchange that took place between the USSR, Europe and Botswana was a forerunner to the many cultural exchanges that Ecologia has organised ever since. From that first experience, we learned that by meeting people from other cultures, by living and working together, the prejudices built by propaganda fall away.

Being separated from one's parents, family or the world creates disadvantage. Our commitment to empower disadvantaged youngsters includes creating opportunities for them to make friends in other cultures. In Russia, Ecologia has contributed to building two innovative foster family villages for children who have been abandoned or orphaned: Kitezh & Orion Children's Communities. Over 350 volunteers and school children have spent time there, offering their talents and receiving a rich experience in return. The Kitezh and Orion children have in turn travelled to Scotland, Switzerland, London, and Australia.

Though it is of great benefit to those from the West to be welcomed into another culture it is important our partners meet and learn from each other too. In Kenya our partners share information and knowledge with one another as well as welcoming our volunteers. In Uganda, Sky Is The Limit benefits from the caring support of friends who bring resources to help educate the children. Being part of an African network of eco-villages also fosters their local connections.

Links between our partners in Thailand and Myanmar have strengthened as a result of our work with migrant workers from Myanmar living in Thailand and with young people in Myanmar, who are devoting themselves to improving social and environmental conditions at Inle Lake.

Enabling young people to realise their potential simply means responding to the need whatever it is and supporting them to become agents of change in their communities. We do our best to create opportunities for young people to do what they need to do to make a difference in the world. We very much value your support, which has allowed us to achieve so much over the past two decades.

Thank you.

Liza Hollingshead, Founder & Chief Executive

Our 20th Anniversary Appeal has just passed the half-way mark!  
Please give £20 and help us achieve our target of £20,000  
Donate via our website at [www.ecologia.org.uk](http://www.ecologia.org.uk)

## The Sinko Twins Are About to Spread Their Wings

Every family is proud of its successful offspring, the sons and daughters who 'make it', go to university, get great jobs; the ones who bring home the bacon, and the confetti of success. Kitezh is like a big extended family, and they too have their stars. But, what is success? Maybe it depends on where you start.



Alexey and Natasha Sinko\* are the youngest of seven children who came together to Kitezh in 2004. Their parents had lost their parental rights because of neglect, but Tamara Pichugina opened her arms and her heart to the twins and their brothers and sisters.

Now 18 years old, the twins are about to graduate from school. Kitezh will always be their home and, like any family, it is giving them the support they need as they take their first steps into the wider world. Natasha plans to train as a hairdresser and Alexey has enrolled in college, where he will study music technology.

Mark Sutcliffe became 'Godparent' to the twins in 2004,

when they were only 6 years old. He and his young family visited them in Kitezh and he has been a devoted supporter for them ever since.



*"Staying in touch, and providing some financial support has been very rewarding, because the whole ethos and approach of Kitezh has such tangible results - and both of them have clearly thrived, when so much was against them early on. It is wonderful to see children who, when they arrive at Kitezh having been through unimaginably difficult times, benefit so clearly from the family atmosphere of the community and all the opportunities it offers. The letters and communications over the years show that the link to a godparent - even one several thousand miles away - is important to them, just as it has been to me. I only wish I could have visited more often."*

Each year Kitezh and Orion families open their homes to new foster children. If you would like to become a 'Godparent' to one of them, or to one of the children cared for by our partners in Kenya and Uganda, please contact us. We wish Alexey and Natasha all the very best!

## Mending Broken Links...

Translator Melanie Mauthner returned to volunteer at Kitezh last winter. We asked her to describe the threads that draw her back and the rich relationship she has forged with her goddaughter, Nina.

*"I attend Russian classes in London, yet it's the voices of all the people I have met in Kitezh I hear echoing in my head. At the end of my stay, I was asked why I had returned. I talked of how my grandfather had worked in the Soviet Union in the 1930s as part of a team of architects building new cities, and how he had to leave when foreigners were no longer welcome. I said that for me, it felt as if something had been broken, and that being in Kitezh felt like a way of mending that broken link. For once my grandfather left, he never returned."*

*There was a respectful silence as I strung together these sentences. Nina was also there listening. She told me how my Russian had improved, that I was making fewer mistakes. Her praise made me glow.*

*Living at Kitezh gave me pause for thought, made me admire the way the children and adults devote their energy to learning. I feel an affinity with their endeavour and ethos. Sharing their daily lives, I felt myself to be constantly learning. What really made me happy were the moments I spent chatting with Nina as she helped me with my Russian. How grateful I was to be able to immerse myself again in the village in the wood."*



## Learning from Each Other

Our Volunteers Programme has created a worldwide network of ambassadors for Ecologia. We value the contribution volunteers make; they often tell us volunteering has brought a whole new perspective.

*Felicity, Orion, Spring 2016*

*"Orion is a place filled with laughter, joy and love. There are the normal sibling arguments, but Orion parents never cease to put in the effort to nurture and mould a stronger family unit, and it was a privilege to be part of that. Orion was more than I could have hoped for and I feel lighter and freer than I have in a long time. I was reminded of what love looks like and how important it is to work together to create a better world."*

*Ed, Kitezh, Spring 2016*

*"At times I've struggled to match up often tragic histories with the happy faces of the kids I see running around outside. The difference that Kitezh makes cannot be underestimated. This is what makes working here so simple, so rewarding. There is a great strength and vitality in the people; it is easy to put all your energy behind them. The simple tasks volunteers perform liberate everyone else to do things we cannot: inspiring and preparing the children for the life ahead of them."*

*Kitezh has shown me many things and I am a changed person for my wonderful time here. The intense nature of this charmed village makes you look inside yourself and wonder just which pieces you want to take back home, and which doubts and insecurities you can let fall by the wayside, to be lost forever in the waist-high grass and the lupins."*

If you would like to know more about volunteering or sponsoring a child, please contact us at [info@ecologia.org.uk](mailto:info@ecologia.org.uk)

## My Turning Point

Myanmar's Inle Lake is a beautiful heritage site with a unique eco-system. However it has suffered increasing environmental damage due to overuse of chemical fertilisers and the growth in tourism. Farmers are in debt to chemical companies and lack opportunities for economically and ecologically sustainable livelihoods. Young people have few options - many leave as migrant workers to Thailand.

As part of the 'We Love Inle Lake' project, funded by the Big Lottery Fund and delivered in partnership with local NGO Kalyana Mitta Foundation, Ecologia provides eco-farming training for young people like Ma Kyin Htwe. She explains how it has proved a turning point, for herself and her community.



*"I am Ma Kyin Htwe, a Buddhist from Pwe Zin village. Previously I knew little about agriculture but this eco-farming training provided a lot of practical knowledge. The most interesting topic was how to manage and use available local natural resources. I now understand the way to maintain a healthy soil and environment is to make natural fertilisers, the raw materials for which I can get from my farm and neighbours. This was a turning point that changed many things in my views, thoughts and practices.*



*My family relies on farming rice and sugarcane. We used to use a lot of chemical fertilisers to produce more. I didn't know about the impact of chemical products, but the training has shed a lot of light on how to live ecologically and be friendly with Mother Earth. It has dramatically changed my knowledge, attitude and practice regarding farming. I feel I am physically and psychologically living in a new world.*

*In my village, people assume that using chemicals for farming is good and profitable. Production is amazing but debt is a burden we have to bear every year. I have learnt several eco-farming skills, which I will share with others to sustain these methods from generation to generation. Thank you for this privilege to study eco-farming and gain new knowledge and skills!"*

Our second eco-farming course has now begun. Of the 26 participants, half are young women. All are eager to learn how to make positive changes benefiting both themselves and their communities.



## Sky Is The Limit Enjoys DEAR Day

April 12th is DEAR (Drop Everything And Read) Day. In Uganda, at Sky Is The Limit's school the day was a huge success, thanks to a donation of books by Carolyn Barstow, a former teacher, who volunteered there earlier this year. Everyone was reading - the pupils, the teachers, even the gate-keeper! She describes how SITL's founder set up the school and the support net being woven across two continents to help nurture it.



*"Rose is a wonderful lady. She worked as an AIDS nurse for many years and gradually took in more and more orphans. Now she has at least 45 and has founded a primary school for children whose parents cannot afford a normal school, or have been ostracised as a result of the stigma surrounding AIDS. She has struggled to build it up using her late husband's pension and by graciously accepting any aid she can get. So much work is required and I have vowed to help in any way I can - there is a magic there that is indescribable."*

With donations collected prior to her trip, Carolyn was also able to fund the roof for a new classroom block after termites demolished the old one.

**Thank you to Carolyn and all who contributed.**

## A Bright Future for Young Mothers

In Kenya, nearly 18% of teenage girls between the ages of 15 to 19 are mothers. Most drop out of school and many are forced into commercial sex work as a way to survive and provide for their children.

Our project with International Peace Initiatives in Meru, Kenya, aims to equip 20 vulnerable girls with beauty and hairdressing skills so that at the end of the year, they can secure an income without risking their future or that of their children. The course includes a mentorship programme during which they are taught sex education and other vital life skills.

Three months on and 33 girls are now enrolled, after the initial 20 girls recruited others who were also eager to learn.

IPI say, *"It is encouraging how these girls have the passion to learn new life skills and at the same time care about the future and health of their friends on the streets. We are so excited to report that 60% have taken an exit step from commercial sex work and begun looking for jobs at local beauty salons to earn their living and support their kids."*



To keep up to date with all our projects, news and activities, visit our website at [www.ecologia.org.uk](http://www.ecologia.org.uk)

## Just A Little Run Around Britain...



Weaving his own web of support across the length and breadth of Britain (and beyond) is our adventurous campaigner, Simon Clark.

When he dropped by Ecologia's office one chilly afternoon in early February to announce that he wanted to run the entire 5,000-mile length of mainland Britain's crinkly coast, and raise £10,000 in aid of the children and young people we support, we were lost for words. But by Easter Sunday, after a celebratory send-off, he was on his way, headed anti-clockwise towards Scotland's rugged, north coast in some of the coldest, windiest spring weather many can remember.

With only a bivvy bag and the bare essentials, Simon is now on his way down the west coast, with all of its majesty, bogs and midges! He has already run over 1,000 miles, whilst keeping up with work, and raised over a third of his £10,000 target.

To keep up with Simon's progress you can follow his blog at [www.facebook.com/remembersimon](http://www.facebook.com/remembersimon) and track him on the live map on our website. To donate and send messages of encouragement, please visit [www.uk.virginmoneygiving.com/fund/justaLittleRun](http://www.uk.virginmoneygiving.com/fund/justaLittleRun). And, if you live along the coast and can offer Simon a hot meal or a floor to sleep on as he passes by, please do get in touch - we would love to hear from you.

## Regional Commendation Awards for Orion Foster Mothers

On the International Day of Families, May 15th 2016, Orion foster mothers Tamara Pichugina and Ekaterina Shumeyko received commendation awards from Kaluga's Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare. It is a wonderful indication of change in the system that the local region recognises and appreciates their dedication to supporting foster children.

Since Tamara brought her daughters, Nelli and Maria, to Kitezh in 2000 she has fostered eleven children, including the Sinko twins featured in this issue. She moved to Orion after her daughter Maria, who is now Head of the Community, helped to found it and enjoys spending time with her granddaughter, Alexandra, who is five years old. Tamara's huge heart and immense patience make her loved by everyone.

Ekaterina has lived at Orion for eight years. With five children, including three foster children, and a baby on the way, her busy home is always full of energy! In between being a full-time Mum and primary school teacher, she still manages to find time to put on impressive drama and dance shows with the children all year round.



**Congratulations Tamara and Ekaterina!**

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\* Names of children have been changed in line with Ecologia Youth Trust's Child Protection Policy.

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