

Small Grants Scheme report

Innovative Portage training: ThePromise

Alison Payne reports on ThePromise, Ryazan, whose project concluded with a 'train-the-trainers' two-day workshop on Portage, and translation of the final five training modules into Russian.

ThePromise, a UK-based NGO, has been delivering Portage to disabled children in the Ryazan region of Russia since 2004. Portage is an early intervention model designed to support the progress of pre-school children presenting delays in their overall development. Following observation of the child a programme is tailored to meet their individual requirements. Activities are designed to boost the child's development in those areas where help is needed – from very early motor skills to the more complex task of using language. It breaks down developmental steps into minute sub-

sections, devising games and activities around each small step to help the child learn.

Although practised in many countries, Portage was unheard of in Ryazan when Sarah Settelen, founder of ThePromise, first visited. Having persuaded the director of the Ryazan baby home that there was a method of working with disabled children that would enhance their skills and improve their lives, individuals who could deliver this service had to be found and trained. So began the work of ThePromise.



Participants in role-play session

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run an annual workshop in English and Russian. In the long run, the aim was to train Russian Portage trainers to run workshops in Russian and translate all the materials into Russian. Thanks to The BEARR Trust our goal was finally achieved in June this year, when the first basic Portage workshop run by Russian trainers with Russian materials was held at Ryazan State University.

In Russian the course ran over 3 days instead of 5-6 days when working through an interpreter. More people could attend as it meant taking less time off work or study. 40 participants and trainers took part in the course, 28 receiving certificates (having attended the full three days). The majority were students from Ryazan State University (both the psychology and medical faculties) and people interested in becoming Portage workers for ThePromise's three main projects. It also included participants from the Yasenova Centre in Moscow, the Moscow Institute of Open Education, Our Home centre in Moscow and the Radnic Centre in Shilova. Our Home and the Radnic Centre are very keen to

establish their own Portage services. All those trained will use the skills learnt in their jobs and share their knowledge at their place of work or study.

The workshop consisted of 15 modules including the Portage model, teaching structures, designing activities, working with parents and professionals, managing behaviour and monitoring and supervision. All the trainers work for ThePromise apart from Elvira Samarina, a university professor in the Pedagogical Department. They all drew on their own experiences to illustrate the points they were covering, making it very relevant to those attending. Interaction between trainers and trainees was easier without an interpreter. Apparently it was an unusual experience for the trainers as in Russia courses tend to be very formal and run by one person. For many attendees this was their first experience of attending a participative training event with case studies and role plays. This course showed how effective working together can be.

As this was the first workshop run by Russian trainers, Mollie White

As there were no specialist Portage professionals in Russia, Mollie White, a member of the team that introduced Portage to the UK in the 1970s, agreed to run training workshops in Ryazan through an interpreter. The first courses were run in English, but since September 2007 ThePromise has **(Cont.)**

supervised the course. She said: 'The workshop was very well received. Input from the range of presenters, each with differing backgrounds and expertise, contributed to high levels of engagement throughout. Delivery of modules was good with all presenters drawing on their own experience to illustrate points covered. Active participation by every individual in group work was supported, good practice was illustrated and reinforced in role plays.'

The participants were not used to giving feedback but comments of those who did included 'Portage training has got a very friendly and positive atmosphere, you feel that you are learning with support rather than someone is preaching to you'.

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