

**Portage in Ryazan : Phase One**  
**A summary of the report and evaluation prepared by**  
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**The Portage teaching model**, designed to support the development of pre school disabled children, was introduced into the Ryazan Baby Home through a British based charity ThePromise in 2005. The needs of the children in the Baby Home had come to the attention of the founders of the charity, Sarah Settelen and Iona Sutherland through their experience as summer holiday volunteers at the Home. Their concern at the *limited expectations of the developmental potential of disabled children in Russia* was the beginning of a mission to establish a framework of support for these children within the Baby Home. The framework, developed in collaboration with Mollie White working with the trustees of the charity, was built around the Portage teaching model.

Together with the support of Tatiana Alexandrovna Gross the Director of the Baby Home and Karen Edwards appointed as Project Manager for ThePromise in Ryazan in 2005, a pilot Portage project was agreed to commence in October 2005. A report and evaluation of the six month pilot by Mollie White and Karen Edwards was published by ThePromise following the conclusion of Phase I of the project in March 2006 together with details of plans for a second and expanded phase of intervention. A brief summary of the report is given here.

### **Why Portage?**

The Portage Model has been introduced successfully into countries across the world. It focuses on the role of those in daily contact with the child recognising the critical importance of the interactions taking place between parent/carer and child dyad in promoting the early development of the young child. Research shows that support given to these interactions within the child's familiar daily environment is the most effective way of promoting the conditions necessary to enhancing the development of disabled children. The Portage model therefore operates in the day to day environment of the child: the family home, or in the case of the children in the Ryazan project, the Baby Home.

### **Portage in practice**

Portage practitioners, who visit the child's home on a weekly basis begin by working with parent/carers to establish a profile of the child's existing development using a detailed developmental schedule: the Portage Checklist. The aim is to investigate *what the child can do*, across social, self help, language, cognitive and motor development. Priorities for future development generated by this process become the focus of a programme of precision teaching activities designed for daily practice by the parent/carer child dyad. Each Portage activity is tailored to respond to the child's individual starting point targeting a *small incremental step* in learning towards a specific developmental target. Their *precision teaching design* offers the parent/carer a strategy that works for their child: gaining the child's attention; choosing appropriate materials; presenting the activity to the child; reinforcing the desired response

from the child; and guiding the child's response when necessary. The aim is to generate a positive experience for parent/carer and child during the practice taking place each day. Finally a record of the child's daily responses is maintained by the parent/carer for sharing at their weekly meeting with their designated Portage worker.

### **Portage in the Ryazan Baby Home**

The Portage model trialled in the Ryazan Baby Home draws on the Wessex Portage evaluation in the UK which established a model of intervention capable of replication in the UK and beyond. A key element, for UK practice, was the sharing of staff costs between agencies responsible for disabled children through the secondment of *existing staff in part of their time*. At the same time a network of advisory support from medical professionals informed the selection of appropriate developmental targets and contributed where appropriate to the design and delivery of the teaching programmes. In Ryazan the aim of the Pilot Project, funded by ThePromise, was to establish a model of practice in the context of the Baby Home that was capable of replication elsewhere in Russia and at the same time act as a resource for developments within the community.

**The Ryazan Portage Team** was composed of :

:- 4 members of staff selected by the Baby Home Director Tatiana Alexandrovna Gross to act as Portage Workers in part of their time

:- a full time Senior Portage worker appointed by ThePromise acting as Team leader / supervisor with responsibility for managing the Portage work of the team Support was also provided by ThePromise Project Manager in Ryazan Karen Edwards.

### **The Children**

24 children aged between 12 and 41 months were allocated to the pilot project. The range of special needs of the children covered global delayed development due to a range of disabilities including Down's Syndrome, foetal alcohol syndrome, cerebral palsy, and sensory impairments.

### **The Portage Training Workshop**

A Portage workshop led by Mollie White Portage Consultant to ThePromise with Galina Swarz as interpreter & co presenter, in September 2005, introduced the pilot project with the following aims:.

- to prepare staff at the Baby Home for a pilot Portage project to take place over the following 6 months
- to provide a framework for Portage team members to deliver Portage programmes of teaching activities to a group of 24 children residing in the Baby Home and record their responses
- to identify potential members of the community to participate in a Review Group, headed by the Baby Home Director Tatiana Alexandrovna Gross, to receive reports on progress of the pilot project from Senior Portage Worker and ThePromise Project Manager Karen Edwards

- to agree a framework for recording and disseminating results and identifying potential ways forward at the conclusion of the pilot

Representatives from statutory agencies responsible for disabled children participated in the opening day of the workshop.

### **Portage in practice in the Ryazan Baby Home**

Following the workshop each of the 24 children was allocated to a member of the Portage Team. Members of the team began by preparing a developmental profile for each child in their case load, followed by daily 1:1 individual teaching sessions lasting 30 minutes. Each session covered the practice of 3 or 4 teaching activities focusing on specific developmental targets selected for the individual child.

Support was given to this process through weekly monitoring Portage Team meetings, a vital element of the Portage model. Meetings were led by the Senior Portage worker and attended by The Promise Project Manager. The framework for the Portage team meeting is first to share the results of the daily sessions celebrating the success of each individual child and second to address, as a team, any problems encountered by particular children or a Portage team member. Support addressing problems can trigger requests for input from medical professionals within the Baby Home. The spirit of the meeting is one of positive support for the members of the team.

Records of the daily teaching trials are maintained for each individual child including suggestions / advice on teaching strategies used. Minutes of team meetings are maintained with reference to comment on problems encountered by individual children and action taken. These formed the basis for monthly reports to the Project Review Group.

### **Results**

At the end of the 6 month period data recorded during the teaching trials was used to establish details of newly acquired skills in each of the areas covered by the Portage Checklist. These were entered into the child's developmental profile.

Two measures were used as indicators of success.

**A** changes recorded in the child's developmental profile during the 6 month pilot project

**B** accelerated rates of developmental change

Results for **A** showed that every child made developmental gains during the 6 month period of the pilot project.

Changes recorded against **B** showed an increased rate of acquisition of developmental skills over the 6 month period averaging **3.5** across the cohort of children.

On a day to day basis comments from care staff outside the project registered their positive experiences of changes in children's behaviour during the routines of

their day. As a result of these changes disabled children were able to participate in group activities at festivals & special days, and the first adoptions of disabled children within the cohort were recorded.

Full details of research design together with discussion of individual gains across each developmental domain are given in the report. Discussion highlights areas for future staff training focused on specific developmental areas.

In general these results offer convincing evidence of:

- the effectiveness of the Portage model within the context of a residential Baby Home
- the ability of staff to work within the model framework
- the potential for the development of disabled children given appropriate conditions for learning and
- the power of the model to bring about change in the attitudes of staff towards the potential of disabled children in their care.

### **Where next? Phase 2 of the Ryazan Portage Project**

The successful results obtained from the pilot project and the forum for discussion represented by the Project Review Group informed decisions for Phase 2 of the project:

- to maintain and develop the work in the Baby home increasing the Portage team to 10 members and the number of children benefiting from the Portage intervention to 40
- to address the needs of Portage in the community through a collaboration with Ryazan University Psychology Department, enabling 4 students, and a second Senior Portage Worker appointed by ThePromise, to act as Portage workers delivering the Portage intervention to 12 children and their families at home
- to support an in house initiative at Yerlatma Closed Orphanage investigating the use of the Portage model with a small group of older children based there.

A framework for data collection in each of these projects was established in a second Portage Workshop in April 2006 at the Ryazan Baby Home led by Mollie White and organised by Karen Edwards.

The Report and Evaluation carries Appendices offering full details of the Portage Teaching Model together with illustrations of the teaching technology, a detailed bibliography, and details of Phase 2 projects.

The Report is available through ThePromise