

ThePromise Post



ThePromise works to improve the lives of disabled children in Russia; those living in orphanages and those living in the community with their families. We do this by promoting a highly acclaimed system of support (Portage) for disabled children in partnership with families and carers and by encouraging a more positive attitude to disability. The charity was founded in 2003 in memory of Ellie Settelen.

For further details of our work, please visit our website www.thepromise.org.uk

Hello Everyone

Welcome to our summer newsletter, in this, our 5th Birthday year! It has been a dizzying 5 years and I don't think any of us could have anticipated making quite such a life changing impact on so many children, so quickly. And your support through these 5 years has been crucial. Thank you!

We have recently seen an expansion in our team and are delighted to welcome Jo, Zina, Olga and Olya into the fold. We are excited by all the differing skills that you each bring to our work. Welcome aboard! We were also overwhelmed by the generosity of Jo, Naomi, Gev and Gids who gave up their leave and fundraised like mad to volunteer in Yelatma in May (see Jo's report below). Between them they provided physiotherapy and OT expertise and made specialist chairs for the children - thank you so much.

The astonishing successes of the children receiving Portage from **ThePromise** staff continues to delight and amaze us all. These achievements are easily recorded on camera and easily demonstrated by simply looking at each child's activity records that are so carefully filled out after every session.

What is not so easy to record, quantify or convey is the profound change in attitudes towards disabled children that is happening in the hearts of so many members of the Russian Authorities with whom we work closely. Through our gentle, daily presence in the lives of these children we are demonstrating that they have as much value as any other member of the community, with similar desires and rights. Through this "witnessing" and through supportive discussions with the Authorities, **ThePromise** is making a lasting and sustain-

able difference to the lives of thousands of children who we might never meet, but who will start to benefit from a more enlightened approach to provision and care for disabled children and their families. And who knows? Perhaps one day the work of ThePromise will no longer be necessary.

Thank you for all your help and support to get us this far! We are looking forward to our next 5 years with eager anticipation and will be celebrating our fifth birthday in the autumn - plans will be announced on our website very shortly so keep checking in! If you know of anyone who is celebrating a fifth (25th, 35th, 45th, 55th or above) birthday or anniversary who'd like to share it with us, just get in touch with janet.abbott@thepromise.org.uk **In the meantime, have a happy summer!**

Janet 

From Jo Wooster, volunteer physiotherapist

I re-visited Ryazan for a month in May. It was wonderful to see the change and progress in the children I had reviewed in my trip last summer, and exciting to meet our new children. In the community project, I reviewed 5 new children (as well as our existing families) who are starting to benefit from the community portage they are receiving. They were all so positive about it and have obviously developed strong relationships with their portage workers. Returning to the Baby Home was amazing, as though I'd never been away; I was welcomed with hugs from the portage workers and kids alike!

Going back to Yelatma was as emotional and exciting as arriving there last year, but for different reasons - the emotions this time were mainly joy and excitement at the obvious and amazing changes that have taken place since last September. The first two things that struck me on walking through the front door were the noises and feeling of energy and life - babbles, rattles, the sound of walking frames, songs and giggles - so much giggling! The energy and movement in the whole place was fantastic as I walked down the corridors, entered the children rooms and went into the portage rooms - there was so much going on. It was amazing to see and feel the difference the portage team are making.

I was able to spend time with all the children and their portage workers, who were desperate to show me what their children have learnt, what they are practising, ask questions and seek advice and reassurance about what they should be doing now. At times it was very difficult not to burst into tears seeing the progress of many of the children; seeing



Lena eating with portage worker Jo

Anya crawl independently when she wouldn't even lay on her tummy last year; watching Lena eat a whole bowl of food by herself even wiping her own mouth with her spoon after every spoonful!

The biggest change I noticed, in nearly every child, was their social interactions - the interest in people, their surroundings, their communication of emotions and the obvious affection they have for their portage workers or 'mums'!

One of the aims of my trip was to make as many items from ATP with the Portage workers as possible, and then help them to use them properly. ATP chairs are made from paper and cardboard, at a cost of about £2 each, to the specific requirements of each child.



The ATP Team

They enable a child who has never been able to sit on their own to do so, which opens up a world of possibilities for them - feeding themselves, interacting with toys, portage workers and other children and their surroundings, instead of spending their life flat on their back in a cot. We made 7 chairs, 2 tables, 1 standing frame, and 1 standing board: a great success!

From Nina, Senior Community Portage Worker

Let me introduce **Nikita and Denis**. It is the first time we have had twins to work with here in the Ryazan community project. It is difficult to begin to describe how much they and their gorgeous, courageous mother **Svetlana**, have gone through since they were born and she made the unusual decision to take her babies home with her. She is only 24, a tiny lady, and is struggling alone (with some help from her mother) to give her children all the necessary treatment and care. Her husband, as so often happens, left her when he got to know their children had a disability.

It was really difficult to choose what to start with – all areas were delayed, Denis and Nikita have Cerebral Palsy, epilepsy, they are blind and have feeding problems. Nevertheless, Liza – their Portage worker managed to organise the work and she has a Portage session with both of them every week. They have learnt to support themselves on forearms, grasping objects, and can sit up with support. They still have a lot ahead: their first cognitive skills, their first independent sitting, rolling and playing with toys using two hands.



Nikita and Denis

I visited them again, after one month, and had the honour of playing with Denis for half an hour! I can't tell you how much warmth and response I got from him and his mother, for whom the support of **Liza** and **ThePromise** is so vital. All four of them (the twins, their mother, and Liza) are trying really hard to learn and develop together, but the challenges they face ahead will be enormous.

Natasha

Some of you may remember **Natasha**, the 18 year old young adult with cerebral palsy who had spent all her life in a bed. It is with enormous sadness that we have to tell you that Natasha died in May, a month after being moved from the **Yelatma** orphanage into a home for the elderly, which is what routinely happens to young adults. She was one of 4 young adults moved, and they have all died. The stark truth is that these children chose to die; they simply gave up hope. Despite the lack of provision at **Yelatma**, it was the only home they had ever known. Here at **ThePromise**, Natasha's death serves as a cruel reminder that we need to continue to develop the scope of

our work. There is so much to be done. Her life will always matter to us and she will always be remembered with enormous love.



Sarah and Natasha

Bringing Portage to Ryazan; Where next?

My April visit to **Yelatma** was one of my most rewarding experiences of Portage in action. The eager and responsive faces of the children as they greeted their Portage Workers, in anticipation of the pleasure to come, was delightful. It was hard to imagine the quiet and passive children I had seen in the previous September. My delight was in the loving interactions at the heart of their work with the children.

The success I observed that day in **Yelatma** began with the Pilot Project in the **Ryazan Baby Home** back in September 2005. The commitment of **ThePromise**, with the Baby Home Director **Tatiana Alexandra Gross**, to changing the lives of children in the Baby Home became the starting point for replication elsewhere. Representatives of agencies and organisations concerned with disabled children, including parent support groups and the Ryazan State University, were able to share reviews of the Pilot Project as it progressed. Dissemination has been an integral and continuing process.

The pilot project at the Baby Home has subsequently been replicated by the Community Team, in partnership with Ryazan University, and in **Yelatma** and this greatly empowers the process of dissemination. The Community project generated the exciting opportunity to introduce the Portage Model into the curriculum for pedagogical students at the University – a major investment in promoting positive approaches to disabled children in the future.

And finally, our ongoing commitment to the development of a Portage Training Workshop, presented solely by local Russian trainers already experienced in using the Portage method, will complete a major stage in our vision of bringing Portage to children and families within the Ryazan region and ensuring that we are building local capacity for the future.

For me it has been a privilege and a continuing pleasure to be so closely involved in this work.

Mollie White, Portage Consultant

Thankyou

Our heartfelt thanks go to **Duncan Tatton-Brown** who did a triathlon in Windsor and has raised over £1,500, and to Rachel and her team at **Hair Disciples** who raised over £600 at the opening of their new branch in Battersea, London. **Greycoat Hospital School** in London have held various fundraising events including a play reading and a medieval fair raising over £600 and we were delighted that one of the teachers, **Anastasia Tolstoy**, came out to visit our programmes in Russia.

Thanks to the **Buckhorn Weston Ladies Club** who raised £200 and to **St Barnabas Church** who gave £584 to support **Naomi Hulford** (a volunteer occupational therapist) on her recent return visit to **Yelatma**.

A very special thank you to **Bandana Sabherwal**, who donated £300 from a fundraising evening in memory of her beautiful son, **Radhav**. Thank you so much, Bandana.

Also our sincere thanks go to all the charitable trusts that have supported our work and particular thanks go to the **Barbara Ward Children's Foundation**, whose support when we were just starting and their on-going support over the past three years has meant that we have been able to grow our programme and plan for the future.



Barbara Ward and Chris Banks

And finally... **William Hey** donated his pocket money for the week! Thank you William!

On their Bikes

We're delighted that two hardy supporters will be cycling from **St Petersburg to Moscow** to raise money for **ThePromise**. **George Watson**, a student at Trinity College, Cambridge and **June Thompson**, from West London, are joining the **Cycle Russia** expedition from 5th to 14th September and they hope to visit our projects at **Ryazan** and **Yelatma** afterwards. George and June are hoping to raise **£2500**. They'd love you to support them...

www.justgiving/georgewatson

www.justgiving/junethompson1

Over 240 Guests Enjoyed a Fabulous Evening

at
The Promise
Crystal Ball



The Ball raised **£27,000** - a fantastic amount which will enable us to support our **Volunteer Programme** for two years. Thank you so much to everyone who came to the Ball, donated prizes or gave their time as a volunteer. **Here's to our next fabulous event!** Go to **ThePromise** website to read more...