

ThePromise Post



ThePromise works to improve the lives of disabled children in Russia. We do this by promoting a 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 the work, please visit our website: www.thepromise.org.uk

Hello Everyone

Welcome to our summer edition of **ThePromise** **ThePromise** team in Russia.

Post. I am sitting here writing this amidst a dramatic thunderstorm and lashing rain. It's reminding me of the beautiful storms I used to witness during my first summer in Russia, with lightning crackling across the vast skies and huge billowing grey clouds rolling their way over the landscape. We are looking forward to returning to the Russian countryside this summer, to re-introduce our daughter to the land of her birth. It will be an emotional journey in many ways – but blended with enormous relief that so much has changed in the orphanage in the intervening years, thanks to the dedicated work of

Sadly, one highly valued member of our team has just left us, **Nina Davydova**. Nina has been supporting the community team since its inception back in 2006 and has worked hard to help it become an integral part of the lives of many families with disabled children in Ryazan. Nina is moving to the UK to join her husband James, so we are hoping that she can remain involved in **ThePromise** work! Thank you for all your wonderful work Nina, you will be really missed!

There is a lot happening on all our projects at the moment, not least that we are inching closer to

being a fully registered Russian organisation. This will be a huge step forward for us, and will open up many more doors for us.

Thank you to you all for your continued support of our work. We really appreciate your commitment to us, despite so many other financial pressures that we are all facing at the moment. We thought long and hard about whether to organise another **Ball next Spring**, but in the end we decided to bite the bullet and have a go. We hope some of you will be able to join us on **Saturday 6th March 2010**.

Many thanks again and have a wonderful summer!

Working with the mobile children in Yelatma - an update

"I did not believe that working with the children in Room 4 was going to make any difference to them at all but the changes I have seen are very big! Now I believe it is worth the effort" Quote from Maria, Head Nurse at Yelatma orphanage, Corpus 3.

I became very emotional when Maria said these words to me as this is exactly what I imagined all the staff had felt when we first started the project with the Room 4 children. This was my third trip out to Yelatma for **ThePromise** and it has been, by far, the most positive and rewarding of the 3.

When Jo Wooster and I first went to Yelatma in December 2008 to assess the 14 children in the 'end room' or Room 4, we were shocked and deeply saddened by what we found. The children were so deprived of any stimulation or human contact that they simply sat or lay on the floor rocking, self harming or twirling endlessly around. When we walked into the room we were literally mobbed, the children hanging on us, pulling our clothes and hair until the angry carers ripped the children off us. These carers spent all their time guarding the door to room 4 to ensure that the children would not 'escape' out into the hall way and very few actually ever tried to make a bid for 'freedom'.

Jo and I recruited 2 play workers (funded by ThePromise) on the first

trip called **Sveta** and **Lena**. We left them with instructions to take each child out of room 4 daily and 'get to know them'. We spent time assessing each child and set up some simple guidelines for working with them.

When we went out again in February 2009, we reassessed each child and set up some more formal therapy goals for them. We did some informal training with Sveta and Lena and they both really seemed to be enjoying what they were doing. It was apparent on this second trip that there were already some very noticeable changes in the children. Some of them were much more able to focus on the activities we were doing and the room seemed generally calmer. We also saw that some of the carers seemed to be engaging a little more with the children, though on the whole this was still an area of great concern.



Tanya with children from room 4 playing with a Ball Pond

My visit to Yelatma in June has really proven that these children's lives have been changed beyond what we could ever have imagined. And this is evident in **Nastya's story**:

Nastya is 16. When we first met her she seemed 'wild'. She would scuttle over to you and begin to pull at your clothes, talking at you, but not making any sense. When we first took her into the makeshift therapy room in the dining room, she went straight over to the suitcase I brought over filled with toys, pens, paper and other equipment. She began to frantically unpack the suitcase, throwing the toys out and randomly moving from one object to the next. She could not follow even simple instructions and became extremely distressed when she had to return to room 4. It was almost impossible to assess how much she understood and could communicate as she struggled to concentrate for any length of time. Nastya also spent a lot of time regurgitating her food over and over in an attempt to self stimulate and this was a distressing behaviour to observe as well as unpleasant to say the least.

The changes in Nastya over the last 6 months are beyond even the highest expectations. Her play worker has taken her out of room 4 daily and worked with her tirelessly. The goals we set up for her included ensuring she has some sensory experiences daily and to encourage

her to be able to focus on one activity at a time. The results are astonishing.



Nastya enjoying a swing with Olya - our Interpreter

Nastya no longer 'scuttles' about at great speed but walks with purpose to where she is going. She looks at you with clear blue eyes when you talk, completely understanding simple instructions and questions. She can answer you with understandable speech and can make her own choices and needs known. In all the time I spent with Nastya she did not regurgitate her food once. This form of self stimulation has stopped and that alone is wonderful for her!

Tanya Van Dalen
Volunteer Occupational Therapist

If you would like to make a donation towards our work with the **Mobile Children in Yelatma**, please visit the **Global Giving** website: <http://www.globalgiving.co.uk/pr/2700/proj2639a.html>

Hello from Nina

I've worked with **ThePromise** leading the **Community Portage Project** for more than 3 years. Though my work was full of surprises, it was very rewarding. We all achieved a lot, and the community Portage project has changed the lives of the children and families enormously. I can think of **Lera, Sergey, Kolya, Maxim, Nastya, Ann, Egor, Vanya, Vlad** and many more who now go to schools and kindergartens, whereas previously they were all excluded from society and all have "invalid" cards! The magic of just loving them and trying to give them some education made society accept them and see the personality and the child, NOT just the diagnosis.



Nina, Elvira Samarina and Nastya Gorelova with an award for The Portage Project

The main thing that has been started by **ThePromise** and community Portage project is changing these

attitudes. It's not a secret that people make children more disabled through their attitude: staring at them in the street, not accepting them in group settings, building pavements and houses which don't have access for those children. These children are a breath of fresh air in a society that is sometimes poisoned by negativity, disgust and hatred. The Community Portage project has made a really good start, now we need to continue with our success.



George and Nina

I want our children to continue to feel the pleasure of life with all my heart. I know, having moved on with my own life, a big part of my thoughts and hopes will always be with them..."

Nina Davydova Waddell



The Community Project - 3 years on

When **Nina Davydova** was recruited to run our Community Portage Project, little did we know how this project would evolve. As a graduate of **Ryazan State University**, Nina was able to establish excellent links with their **Psychology Department** and **Elvira Samarina** and **Galina Avenirovna**, who have been a great support to the community team. With the help of the University we recruited a small group of students to work as **volunteer Portage workers**, visiting two families each per week. These visits were a lifeline for the families who had never had any support for their disabled children, let alone support from someone on a weekly basis - in their own home.

Since the project began in 2006, we have trained 15 community Portage workers and they have worked with 38 families in **Ryazan**. When the students graduate from university, the majority of them have continued to work with disabled children either in kindergartens or government funded institutions. They have become life - long advocates, not only of the benefits of Portage but also of the rights of disabled children. The parents have told Nina that they are slowly seeing an improvement in the attitude of the specialists working with their children. As we continue to train the new generation of specialists, we know that little by little attitudes towards disabled children will change for the better.

We are very sorry to say goodbye to Nina (although she will continue to be closely associated with our work) and wish her well in her new life in the UK. We welcome **Nastya Gorelova**, one of our most experienced Community Portage Workers, who takes over from Nina as our **Senior Community Portage Worker**. We have strengthened our links with Ryazan State University and know that with their support, this project will go from strength to strength.

Help us to claim the tax on your donations!

As I am sure you are aware, charities can claim the tax on all donations made by UK tax payers. In simple terms it's an extra **28%** on top of the gift you donated. We can even claim back the tax retrospectively, on all donations received in the past 6 years.

In order for us to do this, we need you to sign a **Gift Aid form**. If you received this newsletter by post, please sign and return the cover letter. If you did not receive a letter, please download a Gift Aid form from our website or contact Janet - janet.abbott@thepromise.org.uk

In these tough economic times, Gift Aiding every donation makes a lot of sense. Please help us make every penny you donate count.

Volunteers' Update from Jo Wooster

This is a very fitting time to be writing about the developments of the **International Volunteer Project** run by **ThePromise** as I have just returned from accompanying four gap year students - **Susannah, Ruth, Phoebe and Emily** - from **The Grey Coat Hospital School** in London, to start them off on their volunteering experience in Russia. After a long overnight journey we arrived in **Sushki**, the Baby Home's summer camp, where we were greeting by smiling and energetic children. The girls settled in immediately and are, I'm sure, having brilliant fun running the activities and games they took



with them as you read this! They will be staying in **Sushki** for 6 weeks, accompanying the children back to the Baby Home in Ryazan, helping them to settle back in for a few days, before a well deserved week sight-seeing in **Moscow** and **St Petersburg**.

Earlier in the year saw another fantastic volunteer project get off the

ground in the form of a week long trip by **Gillian Slade**, a registered **Dietician**, who was able to spend time assessing the children in **Yelatma**. Despite this daunting task Gillian's persistence prevailed and she was able to assess the needs of most of the children, give advice to the carers and staff and assisted with specialist feeds for one of the children in particular. This was a really positive start to a big and ongoing project **ThePromise** will continue to focus on.

September and October will bring two busy months with 2 more volunteers going to Russia. Firstly **Jane Grayson** who, as well as spending some time with the children in **Yelatma**, will be accompanying Portage Consultant, **Mollie White**, as an assistant. Jane speaks fluent Russian and we know will be a great asset during the training courses. October half-term will then see myself and **Tanya Van Dalen**, Occupational Therapist, returning to review and progress the work we have started in both **Yelatma** and **Ryazan**.

A positive first half of 2009 and I'm sure the second half will bring as much progress and excitement!

Jo Wooster

Volunteer Project Manager
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Thank You

Thank you so much to everyone who has donated money or time to **ThePromise**. Special thanks go to **Murray Smyth** for his donation on behalf of **Louise** and to **Rosamund** and **Martin Lupton** for their particularly generous donations.

Many of you have been doing some wonderful fundraising events on behalf of **ThePromise**. **Jo Wooster, Gideon** and **Nicky** ran a half marathon along the Thames near Richmond and raised nearly **£200**.



Janet - Car Booting

Janet and **Wendy** did two car boot sales and raised almost **£200** and the **American Community School in Cobham** organised a charity fashion show and donated **£300** to **ThePromise**. Thanks also go to **William Hey** (aged 10) who is donating **£30** from his home based photocopy service. Contact:

williamhey@gmail.com A young entrepreneur in the making! Well done, William! These events not only raise money, but also promote our work. We can't thank you enough for all you do.



Jo, Gideon and Nicky

Up-coming events

Barbara Richardson and **Jo Chapple** are organising a **Family Fun Day** in **Northwood**, near **Harrow**, on **Sunday 20th September** to raise money for **Room 4** at **Yelatma**.

For more details please contact: janet.abbott@thepromise.org.uk **Vicky Foxton** is **Cycling Coast to Coast** on the **13th August** - see www.justgiving.com/vickyfoxton to help sponsor her marathon ride.

If you're organising an event, let Janet know. We can give you materials to use and also promote it via our website or newsletter.