

## News from our Community Portage Project in Ryazan, Russia

In November 2014 Obeshenye (our partner charity in Russia) managed to include more families into our Portage project. After attending our 3 day Portage Training Workshop, the new volunteer student Portage workers started visiting children with special needs who had been on the waiting list.



Alina Yeliseyeva (Portage Worker) started visiting **Nastya K** who is 3 years old. Nastya has CP and finds it difficult to speak, but Alina found a way to communicate with her and help her develop new skills more effectively.

Nastya has learnt to wave bye-bye, eat with a spoon and ask to use the toilet. Nastya is very pleased to see Alina every week and they continue to work hard toward new goals.

Alina's second child in the project is **Vova P**. He is nearly three and a half and has a very rare condition – Rubinstein-Taiy Syndrome – which causes a delay in development due to learning disabilities.

Having visited the family once, Alina was given advice by our special needs therapist to focus on encouraging speech development and motor skills and Portage was started.

Despite Vova's disabilities he can do a lot and his mother is trying very hard to work on his development: she walks holding him by both hands, teaches him to repeat sounds and plays with him all day. He can hold a spoon independently, but does not yet attempt to eat with it. We all agree that with an early intervention system in place hopefully this will change soon. Vova struggles with fine motor skills, so he has started working on that: holding a pencil, rolling clay balls (using soft play dough), eating with a spoon. The family has been advised to get all family members involved, including his older brothers and dad.



Yulia Tishina, another newly recruited Portage Worker also started visits to a new family. **Nikita A** is a very active, communicative and friendly little boy who will be 6 soon. Nikita has been diagnosed with autism. His portage sessions will be working on gaps in all areas of development, predominantly in his self-help skills and speech.

During the initial visit, one of our specialist (Anna Leyeva) found out that Nikita eats with a spoon, but will only take 2-3 spoonful's. Due to not being able to finish a full meal he is only allowed to spend a few hours in the special kindergarten he attends and is missing out on sessions. Anna was able to advise the family on ways to help develop Nikita's sensory perception and spacial awareness, and gave activities to help with Nikita's speech.



It was clear that Nikita would benefit from having Portage, as he would have a structured approach in developing his skills. Although he attends various centres, it is rare for children and their families to get support for self-help skills. The family joined our project in November 2014, and, having established a good relationship with their Portage Worker they are now working on independent drinking and eating and matching objects.



**Angelina T** has many complex needs. She is 6, can't hear or see anything and is very restricted in her movements. The current Children's centres available in Ryazan are not able to cater for children with such severe disabilities as Angelina so Portage is the only help available to her and her family. The family really appreciates the support provided by the volunteers funded by ThePromise and Obeshenye.

It is very important for Angelina to try different positions through the day, so Oksana, their Portage worker, pays special attention to exercises on the gym ball and is teaching Angelina to support her body on her forearms with a roll under her elbows. Oksana always tries to make Portage sessions pleasurable for Angelina: stroking and massaging her, and talking in a gentle voice.

Oksana and Angelina's mother decided to try out a new means of rehabilitation – a standing frame. They had to seek advice from one of the centres in Ryazan, as Angelina needed a standing frame tailored to her abilities. Thanks to all the help, the standing frame was chosen and purchased.

It has been several months since Angelina started using the standing frame. She attempts to practice holding objects of various sizes, mainly her favourite toys.

Her Portage worker is using different textures, wet, warm, cold materials to give Angelina different tactile experiences. They are also planning to get a speech therapist involved to try and improve the quality of life for Angelina.



In December our children and volunteers came together at our annual New Year's party. They met Father Christmas (Ded Moroz) and his granddaughter (Snegurochka) and were each given a gift kindly funded by a mother and her daughter in the UK.



*Report prepared by Armenui Gevurian, Executive Director, Obekhshenye Dec 2014*