

Ira's Holiday



Many of you will have read the book about Ira – ‘Living with Chernobyl’ and been inspired by her brave attitude to life.

Ira was born with very small and non-functioning arms and legs, just two years after the Chernobyl disaster. Her mother felt she could not cope and left Ira in a Baby Home. She then grew up at Zhuravichi Orphanage, where she spent many years lying in a cot.

CCP (UK) helped to get her out into a wheelchair, then on our sanatorium holiday and

eventually moved to a Boarding School for Children with Cerebral Palsy at Rechitsa.

Pat Marsh is the manager of a Respite Care Centre in Cheadle, Stockport. She has been to Gomel several times to advise on the setting up and operation of our



‘Mayflower Centre’, the first respite care centre in Belarus. Staff from the Mayflower have also been to Stockport and spent time at ‘Woodlands’ which is run by ‘The Together Trust’.

Early this year Pat invited Ira to come and have a holiday at Woodlands. This

was a wonderful opportunity for her

and she was very excited at the prospect. She came with Victoria, a carer from Rechitsa who speaks some English.

All the staff at Woodlands were wonderful and helped Victoria to care for Ira. Being lifted in the hoist was always a source of much amusement to Ira as they don't have one at Rechitsa.

Ira was taken on many outings – to the Blue Planet Aquarium, the Trafford Centre, the Elizabeth Svendson Trust Donkey Sanctuary where she was helped to ride on a donkey, to Chester Zoo and to see Moscow State Circus. On some trips she was accompanied by members of



Woodlands staff. But she was also visited and taken out by friends she has met on sanatorium holidays over the last few years, particularly Glenda Tracey from Littleborough.

Two days were spent at Francis House Children's Hospice where Ira was helped with all sorts of activities, but especially loved the Jacuzzi pool. Dawn Geddes and Kathy Cooper, two of the nurses at Francis House, have visited Belarus to give training to hospice staff in Minsk and Gomel. And it was Kathy who organised Ira's visit to Francis House.



As well as giving her a memorable holiday, we hoped that we would be able to provide Ira with a more suitable wheelchair. Her old one was a standard wheelchair which was becoming very saggy and offered no support for her back. Ira is not able to comfortably sit upright, and she was used to leaning very far back in her chair so she felt safe.



We made an appointment for her at Manchester Wheelchair Centre in Audenshaw. We were met by Peter Mitchell, the Managing Director of the Centre who had already found a lovely wheelchair for Ira in which she felt very comfortable and secure. We talked about electric wheelchairs and how wonderful it would be if Ira was able to steer and propel herself. So Peter put her in a chair with a chin control and Ira was delighted with her ability to move around.



But we could not afford to buy both the manual and an electric wheelchair and it would not be possible to send the electric one out till the September convoy, as it would be too heavy. The manual wheelchair was priced at £1,500 so it seemed we would have to leave thinking about an electric wheelchair for another time.

Then Peter Mitchell made us the most remarkable offer. He said that with the help of a friend of his, Alan Percival, the Wheelchair Centre would be able to give us the manual wheelchair! This will enable us to also purchase a beautiful electric wheelchair using some of the funds we received from the publication of Ira's book, and a donation from KeyMed.



We collected Ira's new wheelchair a couple of days before she returned to Belarus, just in time for the arrival at Woodlands of the Manchester Hatters, a group of Harley Davidson riders. They had raised funds to support CCP(UK) and had bought lots of nappies to send back to Rechitsa, Zhuravichi and the Home for Abandoned Babies. The bikers were all delighted to meet Ira and promised to give us more support in the future.

Ruth Owen is the person at Ticktock media who was largely responsible for the production of Ira's book in 2005. She had always said that this book had meant a great deal to her and she had always wanted to meet Ira. So although she lives in Devon, Ruth managed to arrange to come to Stockport and come out to lunch with Ira.



We are very grateful to The Together Trust, to Pat and all her staff and everyone who helped to give Ira so many happy experiences and memories she will treasure for the rest of her life.