

# Guidelines for Hosting Mothers and Children

***This document should be read in addition to the other guidelines – Organising a Group, the Role of a Co-ordinator, and Guidelines for Host Families. All host families need to have a copy of Guidelines for Host Families as well as Guidelines for Hosting Mothers and Children.***

The first step is to decide whether your group wishes to offer a holiday to children with cancer or children with disabilities.

**Children with cancer or leukaemia.** The children who come to stay are usually in remission. This means that they have finished their course of treatment and are currently well. Occasionally children are still on maintenance, the stage immediately following their major course of treatment. These children will still be regularly taking medicines and they may need to visit hospital once a week for a blood test. They would normally be accompanied by a doctor as well as an interpreter. We would inform you well in advance and make sure that your group is happy to take children on maintenance.

Generally the children are between 3 and 8 years old, but sometimes slightly older children are judged by doctors in Minsk to need the support and care of their mothers whilst on holiday. This is especially true for children who have had an operation for a brain tumour. These children may suffer loss of sight, or some loss of mobility or mental impairment. Children with such problems may still need to be accompanied by their mothers even in their teens.

**Children with disabilities.** Those families in Belarus who choose to keep their disabled children at home face a very hard time. They do get some extra financial assistance from the state but it is small. Although things are now beginning to change there is still little acceptance within society of children with disabilities and so travel, education and socialisation are extremely difficult.

In Rogachev we work with an association of families who have children with many different types of disability, including deafness, blindness, cerebral palsy and learning difficulties. They also include the families of children with cancer and diabetes.

1) Decide which type and age group of children you would like to invite to come with their mothers to stay with families in your group. 5 mothers is the minimum suitable size for a group.

2) Give the information as early as possible to the National Co-ordinator, so that we can make the invitations early and ensure that all the necessary paperwork is completed in time.

3) Make sure that you have some families who would be happy to take an extra child. Mothers who have to leave a small child at home cannot relax and enjoy their holiday.

4) Inform your local doctors about the children's visit. Make arrangements with your nearest hospital for blood tests if this will be necessary. If you are hosting children with disabilities, try to organise some therapy sessions if you have a special school or centre nearby.

5) Send some information, with pictures, about your area, your group, your families and your plans for the visit to the National Co-ordinator, so they can be passed on to Belarus for the families to see. We will try to get as much information as possible in advance about the mothers and the children – not just the medical information which is obviously very important, but information about how and where they live, their interests and anything they would especially like to do or see while they are in Britain.

We will make it clear to the mothers that the main purpose of the holiday is to improve the health of their children, and that they will not be going on major site-seeing tours. However there may be some things they would particularly like to do which you could work into your programme without difficulty.

6) If possible, arrange for the group to spend a few days together at the beginning of the visit. They may not have met before this holiday, so this would provide an ideal opportunity for them to get to know one another, exchange experiences, hopes and fears and form close friendships.

7) If the group are coming to Britain for four weeks you will probably need two host families for each mother and child. But if you prefer, you can invite them for three weeks and find host families who will have them for two and a half weeks, following a few days staying together at the beginning of the holiday.

8) Give the mothers £10 a week to spend or save. This will be changed into dollars if they wish to take it home. The interpreter will be given £120 for four weeks, or £90 for three weeks. This is usually best given half at the beginning and half at the end. Ask families not to give the mothers or the interpreter extra money as this would cause unhappiness if some were given more than others. Just as when the children visit in the Summer, we ask families not to buy expensive presents for their guests. Not everyone is able to do this. However, if you find that any of the children need expensive medicines or equipment such as a wheelchair, then we would like to try to supply these – with the help of families, local businesses or through CCP(UK). If you find there are needs which cannot easily be met by the group, please consult the National Co-ordinator or one of the Trustees. You should aim to keep your general spending on the holiday down to about £150 per mother and child, but this can be discussed in detail nearer the time of the visit.

9) Activities in the first week should be aimed mostly at entertaining the children. If the children are happy, then generally the mothers will also be happy. Once they have settled down then the mothers might like to go on

some outings on their own, whilst a group of you entertain the children. This will depend of course on the degree of disability or illness of the children, so you will need to be flexible.

10) You will find that the mothers like to get together as often as possible, either as group or in twos and threes. It is not necessary to organise activities every day but on quiet days they should have the opportunity to gather at someone's house, or in the park if the weather is good.

11) If you get the chance to take the mothers on a couple of evening outings, they will greatly enjoy a Karaoke, visit to a musical or just an evening at a typical English pub.

12) If you can, organise a 'Belarusian Evening', giving the mothers the chance to cook some Belarusian food and maybe sing you some traditional folk songs. You will probably find that they are very pleased to have the opportunity to do something for you in return for your generosity towards them and their children. They will need four or five hours to prepare the food – it's all much more elaborate than most of our food. You can use the opportunity to invite all your local supporters along to meet your guests and to learn a little about Belarusian culture. You will probably find that this is the highlight of the visit!