

# Organise a Local Group

A successful Project group will need at least a dozen potential host families and support from many parts of the local community. When individuals ring our office, saying they would like to host children, some are daunted by the idea of bringing together so much support in their town. But in most cases they find quite quickly that there are plenty of people out there who will be willing to help.

## Getting Started

Having read all the information you will be sent from our office, you should feel sufficiently confident to be able to talk not only to friends and colleagues but to the local paper and possibly the radio station about what you are hoping to do. Plan a date 2 or 3 weeks ahead, book a convenient venue and arrange for someone from the Project to come to talk.

An article in the paper, notices in local churches and invitations sent home to parents of children at one or more schools in the vicinity should create enough interest to produce an audience for your launch meeting. It might also be a good idea to invite representatives from Rotary or Lions, who may wish to get involved with your fund raising efforts. At the launch meeting the speaker from the Project will explain a little about the Chernobyl accident and its effects on the people of Belarus, and the work of the charity, and then go on to talk about the need for recuperative holidays. There will be photographs on display, a video may be shown and all present will be given newsletters and leaflets.

The initial launch meeting should be quickly followed up with the first practical planning meeting to decide how the group is going to operate.

## Structure of the Group

It is important that the host families are involved in the running of the group, but it is helpful to include within the group a number of people who will not be hosting and will therefore have more time to make sure everything runs smoothly. It is important that everyone feels involved and essential that all the host families attend at least three meetings before the children arrive.

It is important that a number of people take on specific roles in order to make sure that things get done. The most crucial is that of the Co-ordinator, who will maintain contact with the Trustees or National Co-ordinator and ensure the smooth running of the group. Just how much work the Co-ordinator has to do will depend on how many roles are taken on by other members of the group. You will need a treasurer and possibly a chairperson, and you could also appoint a press and publicity officer, a fundraising co-ordinator and someone to organise vetting and selection of suitable families. If separate people take on all these roles then the job of co-ordinator is simply to make sure that everything runs smoothly.

## **Fund Raising**

Ideally, all the events you plan should be an opportunity for group members and many others from your local community to come together and enjoy themselves as well as being fund raisers.

The group itself might like to organise some of the following:

***Ceilidhs, dances, concerts, promises auctions, pub quizzes, raffles, coffee mornings, jumble sales, book sales, race nights, duck races, fun runs, etc.***

If you can persuade some of the local schools to get involved the children may raise funds through: ***Sponsored events, non uniform days, cake sales, competitions, car washes, etc.***

Churches may hold collections for you; Rotary, Lions and other local organisations may just give donations. Local shops and businesses can be approached to make cash donations, offers of food, discounts for host families or other support whilst the children are staying in your town.

Some members of the group will have less time to get involved in fund raising than others, but you will probably find that most people have contacts that could be useful and ideas for events, even if they do not have time to organise them. Everyone can take tickets away to sell to friends and colleagues and can try to attend most of the events themselves. Try to spread the work so it does not all land on a few people.

## **The Host Families**

The Project's most important resource is the families who care for the children. They may come from a variety of social backgrounds, hold different political, religious or cultural views, but they will have in common a desire to improve the welfare of children. They find that the experience is not necessarily always as idyllic as they might have anticipated, but they have a determination that the short stay of the children will be a memorable event in their lives.

The families are also our best publicists. Their anticipation of the visit is very apparent to all their friends, neighbours and relatives who, on the children's arrival, will give tremendous support. Concentrating on nurturing families and planning events should bring the group together in a common purpose, and fund-raising should not be too big a problem.

Not everyone involved in the group will want, or be able, to offer to host children. Some people are very pleased to accompany the children on outings, to offer transport to events or to be a back-up in case of last minute illness. Host families with children of a similar age to the visiting children usually find the experience very worthwhile, but other situations can be equally successful. Some visiting children seem very pleased to be staying

with grandparents where there will be no other children actually staying in the house, and competing for attention. **Hosting the interpreter is an important role which should be taken on by someone who does not mind telephone calls at any time and who has a car and time to deliver the interpreter to at least some of the outings and family visits**, although other people may be able to help with some of the driving. It is probably ideal for the interpreter to change to a second home in the middle of the holiday, as the children do. Families who host interpreters should see a copy of our 'Guidelines for Interpreters' so that they are aware that the interpreter is not here for a holiday.

The children are always placed in pairs, except in exceptional circumstances, such as when one of the children in a group does not travel at the last minute. Families are generally only allowed to host for two weeks in the first year. We recognise that this causes unhappiness to some families but on the other hand we can never guarantee that personality clashes will not arise. The best solution must be to get to know another family with whom the children can be shared so that the transition is not traumatic. Families differ widely in their attitudes concerning discipline. It is advisable to ensure that, for example, a family which is laid back about bedtime, does not create a confrontational situation for a second family with stricter rules.

It is important that the homes of potential host families are visited before agreeing that children will come to them. It is best for two people, in or close to the group, preferably with experience in social work or health visiting to arrange to go and meet the whole family at home for a short chat and to see where the children will sleep. This is not to check that the family keep a tidy house or have lots of space but just to make sure that it feels like a happy home where the whole family will be welcoming to the children.

All adults, and young people of 16 years and over, who will come into regular contact with the children are required to complete a Disclosure Form which will be checked by the Criminal Records Bureau to ensure that we are able to exclude anyone who has a conviction for any offence against children. It is for this reason that it is not possible to accept new families at the last minute, unless they have already been cleared by the CRB in connection with their work. Another problem is that however well intentioned late comers might be, they won't have any depth of knowledge about what we are trying to achieve. The safety of the children is one of the reasons that we insist that they always be placed in pairs and that the interpreter meets them regularly to make sure they are happy. **Our child protection policy should be studied carefully by the group and must be adhered to.**

### **Requesting the Children**

We ask groups hosting children in the Summer Holidays to decide as early as possible in the year how many children they would like to invite. It may be possible to increase the numbers up till the end of April, if there is space on the flight, but they must not be reduced once you have given us an initial number. At the end of February, or earlier if possible you should let the

Project office know the numbers and the desired sex and age of the children. We recommend that groups should aim for children within a reasonably narrow age bracket – say 8 – 12, 11 – 14, or older teenagers from 14 upwards. This makes the organising of activities which will be enjoyed by most of the children much simpler. However some groups have found it successful to take a wider age range, with the older kids helping to look after the younger ones. There is also a great need for invitations for groups of very young children (2 to 8 years old) who either have disabilities or have been very ill and need to travel with their mothers.

It is important to stress to host families that they may not get exactly the age of child they wish and occasionally it is not possible to get the sex they had hoped for either. In the orphanages there are more boys than girls, and our partners 'Children in Trouble' say they have more boys with cancer on their books than girls. For a family with two girls of 9 and 10 it is obviously much better for them to have girls of a similar age, but where a family has older children or children of both sexes they should be asked to be flexible. Sometimes people are keen to host a boy and a girl. In our experience it is seldom successful to put a boy and girl together unless they are related. Boys and girls in Belarus do not play together as much as they do in this country. It is very much as it was here thirty or more years ago – few girls will join in with a game of football and certain activities are considered as suitable only for one sex or the other. Brothers and sisters can sometimes be placed together but this is not always successful. In future we will ask in advance if they would rather be together or with their friends.

At our Autumn Conference in 2005 we discussed the idea of including a small number of children with mild disabilities within the groups. Much of our work in Belarus involves creating better social and educational opportunities for children with disabilities, and helping to integrate them into society. So why not extend this to the holidays? It was decided that in 2006 we should encourage all groups, except those taking children with cancer, to include two children in the group who have mild cerebral palsy, mild learning difficulties or a sight or hearing problem.

We issue the invitations to the schools and children's homes and to our partner organisations in Belarus in March. This allows plenty of time for them to select children, for us to check that they meet our criteria and to ask for further information if necessary. Then we ask for detailed information to be provided which we can pass on to groups in June.

We have produced a leaflet for host families in Belarus telling them what to expect from their child's visit to Britain. This is partly to reassure them that their children will be well cared for, but also to tell them that the holiday is primarily to improve the children's health and they should not expect their child to return home laden with expensive western goods.

## **The Children**

Generally the children are friendly and polite but behavioural problems can of course occur and these must be drawn to the attention of the interpreter at once. We do not want either children or families to be unhappy and it must be one of the prime duties of the local organiser to ensure that alternative arrangements can be made in part or full should the need arise.

Although their country is very poor by our standards, not all the children live in dire poverty. However all the children who visit us live in a radioactive environment which is affecting their health. Regardless of their circumstances, without our help or the help of similar organisations in Ireland, Germany, Italy and Spain, they would not be able to leave their own country for a holiday. A fuller description of our criteria for selecting children is given in the document 'The Children who come to Britain'.

### **The Arrival**

Each year we charter a plane to Birmingham on about 20th July, returning four weeks later. Other children fly into Gatwick or Manchester. When you know which airport your children will come to and on what date, you should set about organising coach or minibus transport from the airport. Very often this can be arranged for free. If you have more than an hour's journey you may wish to bring some light refreshments for the children – fruit juice, fruit, crisps. It is best not to bring fizzy drinks and it is probably wise to bring sick bags, as many of the children are not used to travelling.

Where your group of children do not all come from the same school it is particularly beneficial if they can have the opportunity to stay together for the first two or three days. This gives them the chance to 'gel' as a group and enables you to make sure that the children are paired suitably and matched with the most appropriate families. We ask parents to be as honest as possible in telling us about their child, so that we can find an appropriate family to cater for any special interests the child may have or to cope with any behavioural problems. This should make it a lot easier to allocate the right children to the right families, but inevitably we do not really know what the children are like until they arrive. Many parents still write 'Pavel is quiet and obedient' when this is not the case at all!

If the children are going straight to their host families on arrival you will need to organise a meeting place in a suitable central venue. If possible all the host families should be there to meet the children when they arrive. The interpreter will introduce the children to the first and second families and then they can all sit down together to have a drink and a little food, before going to their new homes. Try to make this as relaxed and informal as you can. Everyone will be a little nervous, the families and the visiting children.

### **The Interpreter**

The interpreter has been chosen because he or she speaks good English and, just as importantly, is good with children. It is important for the interpreter to visit all the children as soon as possible after moving in with each family, to

make sure that both the children and the families are happy and to iron out small problems. Arrange a rota for families to host the interpreter for an evening meal. This will give them the opportunity to learn a great deal more about their children and also to have a chat about Belarus. We hope that in future interpreters will have learnt about the effects of Chernobyl on their country and be able to explain this to families and also to newspapers or radio stations who may want to interview them. The interpreter is expected to be available at any time a family or a child has a problem and needs help with translation. Try to find at least one Russian speaker in your area who would have time to help, as this would be very useful in ensuring cover for visits to the dentist or doctor and would mean that the interpreter could have three days off during the month.

If you find that your interpreter is not good with children, is not communicating well with the families or appears to think that he or she is on holiday, please let us know immediately. If an interpreter was totally unsatisfactory we would hope to be able to replace him or her, so we normally bring over at least one more than we need. If you read the guidelines for interpreters you will know what is expected of them.

The interpreters receive £120 for their work for the month. You should give them £60 at the beginning of the month and then the second sixty in the second half of their visit. They may prefer to have this in dollars to take home. It is important that groups do not make extra payments to their interpreter. They should all receive the same amount. There will probably be families who want to buy the interpreter a present, but the same rules should apply as with the children. Do not buy your interpreter very expensive presents. They are already privileged by being able to come here, see a different culture and enjoy a healthy month, when so many others in Belarus would love the chance to do so.

## **The Visit**

It is important that the children are able to meet as a group quite soon after going to their host families and afterwards get the chance to be together at least three times a week, preferably more. It is not acceptable for children to be taken away on holiday or otherwise isolated for more than a few days. Most of the children seem to enjoy outings where they can be active – sailing, canoeing, climbing, visiting an adventure playground or theme park. (Adventure activities need to take place under the supervision of qualified instructors, at centres which have their own insurance) The children all love swimming, and they may enjoy a visit to the zoo and to 'hands on' museums. The interpreters love to see as much as possible of our culture and heritage but as you might imagine most of the children have other priorities.

If possible all the outings and activities should be open to the host family children, and some of the parents. A theme park which offers tickets for your visiting children or a Rotary Club which offers to take them on a day out can often be persuaded that the host children should also be included. If not, this is the occasion to use some of the 'holiday allowance' which you will have to supplement the outing. A few weeks before the children arrive, an allowance equivalent to £75 per visiting child is placed in the local bank account of each group, to ensure a successful holiday. We do not recommend that this is given to the host families, although a few families may need a little financial help. Generally this allowance should be used for hire of minibuses, fuel, entrance to events, multivitamins, cost price fruit, inexpensive shoes and anything else which the group feel the children need and which cannot be acquired for free. If you are able to get many free offers, or if significant cash donations are made to the group while the children are here, please use this to replace part of your allowance.

If someone gives you £100 which they say they would like to be spent on the children staying in your town, you should spend that money on an outing or as a contribution towards purchase of shoes perhaps, but leave some of the allowance in your bank account that you would otherwise have spent, and return it to your sub-account in Manchester at the end of the children's visit. It can then be used to bring more children in the future or to send medicines to Belarus.

**Please impress upon parents NOT to buy expensive clothes or presents.**

The purpose of the children's visit is primarily for their health and to provide new experiences. If some families spend a lot of money on their children this can cause serious problems for those who are not able to indulge their visitors in the same way, and can create further problems when the children return to Belarus. Try to educate all the families about the work of the Project. They should be aware that we are always in need of money for life saving medicines, for the delivery of much needed humanitarian aid and for the provision of holidays in Belarus for children with severe disabilities. This will help to ensure that the children's visit is kept in perspective and money is not spent on unnecessarily generous gifts.

**Food** – it is important that host parents and all those who offer to organise outings, picnics and parties fully understand that this visit is about improving health and the more wholesome food the children can eat the better. Just like our children, they will probably love chips, hamburgers, coca cola and sweets and of course they should get these things occasionally, but families will really not be doing them any favours by letting them eat too much junk food. They are generally very fond of ice cream which many families cannot afford in Belarus, so this is perhaps one treat which they could have quite often.

Most children will eat lots of potatoes, especially mashed and like most types of meat. Vegetables may be more difficult, but that won't surprise most parents. Just try them with a variety of foods to see what they like. The first family can then pass tips on to the second family. The children will all have different tastes, so it is no good us trying to suggest a 'menu'.

**Doctors and Dentists** – Ask host parents to contact their doctor before the children come, just in case a visit should be needed during the month. If you have a supportive local dentist, get the children's teeth checked during the first week, so that if fillings or extractions are needed this can be fitted in before their return to Belarus. Dental care in some parts of Belarus is quite basic, with anaesthetics not always available, so many children are pleased to be able to get their teeth seen to here, once they realise that is relatively painless. **It is very important to have the interpreter present during dental treatment or doctor's visits.** The children will only be allowed to go to the dentist this year if their parents have requested that they would like this to be done. It is likely that most parents will make this request. And it is important to make sure that your dentists realises that routine treatment is not available under the NHS. Emergency treatment, at a dentist or doctor is free under a reciprocal agreement, but treatment for existing conditions is not. If you can find a helpful optician, have the children's sight tested as well.

### **The Departure**

When it is time to start packing for the children's return it is very important that families know that the limit is strictly 30 kilos per person. You can get a lot of clothes, toys and small gifts into 30 kilos, and under no circumstances should you exceed this limit. Make sure that all bags are well labelled in Russian and will be easily identified by the children when they get to Minsk Airport. The best plan is to restrict your children's luggage to nearer 20 kilos and to allocate the extra for other children in the same school, or from the Hospital or Association the children come from, or for brothers and sisters, if they are from a large family. You could put together some of the spare clothes which you have not needed for your visiting children, some of the toys and other gifts which your group will probably have been showered with during the children's visit and pack some bags for those children who have not been fortunate enough to have a holiday abroad.

Arrange a local send off point where all the families can deliver the children and wave them off on their journey home. There are often a lot of tears at this time, which is one of the reasons it is best not to let families come to the airport. Although the children may be crying when they get on to the coach they usually quite quickly begin to think about getting home, seeing their mums and dads and all their friends again, and thinking of all the stories they have to recount. It is best for them not to get upset again, just as they are about to board their plane.

Just a couple of people from each group should accompany the children to the airport, and help to get them through the check-in process. The group should aim to arrive at the airport about two hours before the flight is due to take off. Don't forget to allow for traffic hold-ups.

## **Financial**

Chernobyl Children's Project (UK) was registered as a limited liability company in July 1996 and as a charity in December that year. The level of donations we receive and our charity status require detailed accountancy records and annual auditing and we are fortunate to have an experienced company secretary as our national treasurer

Currently we ask groups to aim to raise £400 for every child who comes to Britain, plus the cost of bringing the interpreter, so for a group of 10 children your minimum fund raising target should be £3,500. If you are able to raise more than this then some of the money can be put towards sending aid to Belarus, supporting the Mayflower Centre or one of our other projects or providing holidays for some of those children who cannot come to Britain.

The flight for each child generally costs about £200 – £220. In addition to this we pay for coach travel in Belarus, visas for adults accompanying the children, the expenses and some salaries for our partner organisations in Belarus, the £75 per child group holiday allowance, £120 for each interpreter.

CCP(UK) is involved in many projects in Belarus – supporting homes for children with disabilities; setting up children's hospices and family homes; organising exchanges of doctors, nurses and special needs teachers; supporting self help groups of families; and organising holidays in clean parts of Belarus for some of those children who cannot come to Britain. We encourage groups to feel that they are part of all the work that we do, rather than just the hosting of children in the UK.

A separate paper about financial arrangements has been prepared by our treasurer. All treasurers and co-ordinators should have this information. It is very important that groups follow the correct procedures so that we comply with the requirements of The Charities Act (1993). All the money you raise needs to go through a sub account of the Charity's main account in Manchester. This is set up in the name of each group as soon as we have details of your treasurer.

## **Publicity**

We prepare Project publicity nationally and send newsletters and leaflets out for the use of our groups. Our calendar is also a useful source of information and pictures of the children we support.

Make sure you are accurate with statistics when you produce your own press releases and never exaggerate the situation in Belarus. Give your local paper or radio station copies of CCP(UK) leaflets and newsletters, as well as your own article or press release, so that they have as much background about the Project as possible. If national newspapers or media get in touch with you, please let the National Co-ordinator know.

## **Structure of CCP (UK)**

The Project has a full time National Co-ordinator, an honorary treasurer and currently four Trustees. It is the trustees who are legally responsible for all the major decisions which affect the spending of the charity's funds.

We aim for maximum involvement of local groups in assessing the effectiveness of our work and in making plans for the future. We have a National Conference every Spring, involving several representatives from as many groups as possible, and also a gathering in the Autumn. (In 2006 as there are so many conferences taking place around the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Chernobyl in April, we will hold our National Conference in the Autumn.) Currently the Trustees meet monthly to make decisions about the running of the charity.

Financial and policy decisions must be appropriate to the current situation in the Chernobyl affected regions of Belarus, based on the best information available. The Trustees therefore have to strike a balance between taking into account the views and wishes of the groups, and meeting the needs and requests of our partner organisations in Belarus.

The National Co-ordinator and the Groups Co-ordinator will endeavour to keep in contact with all the groups and local co-ordinators should not hesitate to ring either of them, or one of the Trustees, anytime they have a problem or a suggestion to put forward.