

# CHERNOBYL CHILDREN'S PROJECT (UK)

## ПОДДЕРЖКА ДЕТЯМ БЕЛАРУСИ

### History of Chernobyl Children's Project (UK) (1995 – present)

On January 20th **1995** Chernobyl Children's Project was launched in the UK by the Lord Mayor of Manchester. The Bishop of Manchester and Adi Roche, Director of CCP in Ireland gave moving speeches about the plight of the children of Belarus, and the City Council promised its support.

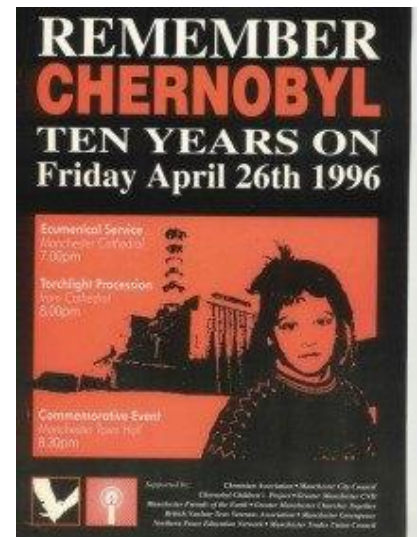


Within days two groups were launched – in Glossopdale, Derbyshire and Littleborough in Lancashire and planning began in earnest for our first groups of children to arrive from Belarus.

We took our first reconditioned ambulance to Belarus in the Spring of **1995**; brought our first group of children for a holiday that Summer; and by the Autumn we were able to fill a forty foot trailer with aid and deliver this to Belarus.

In April **1996** we joined forces with Manchester City Council to organise a

Commemorative event on the tenth Anniversary of the Chernobyl accident, beginning with a service in the Cathedral. On the Twelfth Anniversary we brought the theatre group 'Peace Child' from Brest to perform a deeply moving play in Westminster Central Hall. The group went on to perform for some of our groups in other parts of the country. In **1996** we were registered as an independent charity, and in the Spring of **1997** our work in Belarus was recognised when Linda Walker was one of the first foreigners to be made a member of the Order of Franciska Skarina, one of the country's highest awards. She was presented with the medal by the Belarussian Ambassador, and accepted it on behalf of everyone involved with the work of CCP(UK).



### Recuperative Holidays

Our first group of 38 children arrived at Gatwick Airport in **July 1995** and came to spend a four week holiday in Glossopdale and Littleborough. Fantastic help and support was given by the local communities, and both the children and the host families had a wonderful time.

By the Spring of **1996** we had set up new groups in Lancaster, Merseyside, Cardiff, South Lakes, Crewe and Evesham. We were able to invite 150 children for the summer visit, so we chartered our first plane into Manchester Airport. Most of the children were once again from village schools but we included two teenagers who were in remission



from cancer. We had been nervous about taking children who had been seriously ill but everything went fine with Natasha and Anton's visit, so in subsequent years we always included about a hundred children from 'Children in Trouble, the Minsk based charity which supports the families of children with cancer.

We brought groups of children at Christmas in **1996** and **1997**, some of them from Garadyets Special School. They stayed with groups in Derbyshire, Wales and Yorkshire and all had a wonderful time, but we were concerned about the tendency of families to go overboard on presents for the children. We have always stressed



to our host families that the holiday is primarily designed to boost the health of the children, not to shower them with expensive gifts.

In May **1997** we brought our first group of young children in remission from cancer with their mothers. Children in Trouble had told us that there were many very young children becoming ill and once they were well enough to travel they were still too young to go abroad alone. Also their mums had been through such a stressful time they were almost as much in need of a holiday as the children. All involved found it a wonderful experience and the mothers pronounced the holiday 'A Dream Come True'. The following May we hosted several more groups of young children with their mothers – some in remission from cancer and others with disabilities. *This is an article about our first group of mums and children in Glossop*

## Flying holiday to lift spirits of Chernobyl courage kids

By Adam Moss

WHEN Anna Kholopova was three her parents were told she must have a heart operation. Two years later, after coming through the operation safely, she developed a brain tumor – a direct result, doctors believe, of living in the shadow of Chernobyl, the world's most contaminated region.

Now, the little girl is seven and is one of a party of children from the Chernobyl area enjoying a recuperative holiday in Greater Manchester countryside.

Anna and five other youngsters are spending time with families in the Glossop area, having been flown to England by the Manchester-based Chernobyl Children's Project.

Andrei, Sasha and Elena all have leukaemia. Artum has soft tissue cancer and four-year-old Genia has lymph cancer.

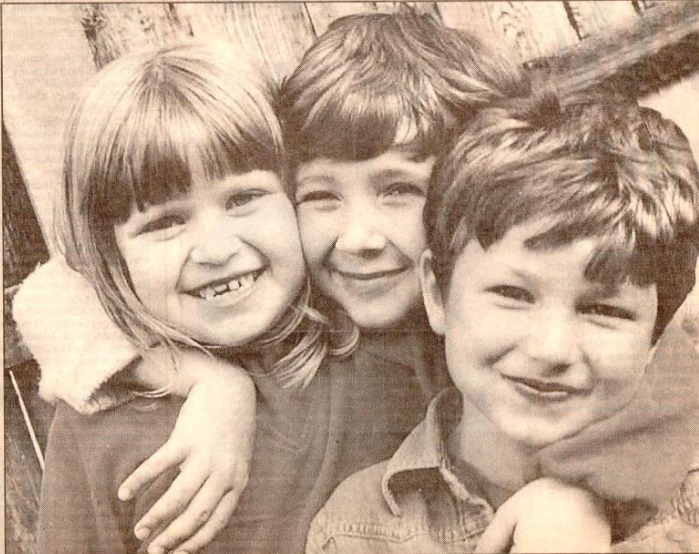
Little Genia became ill at 18 months. While having treatment in a hospital near Minsk he was photographed with his mother, Ira, 18.

That picture is now used all round the world to promote the charity's work.

Doctors believe the month the children will spend at Glossop is enough time away from the nuclear pollution of Chernobyl to significantly improve their immune systems and, in some cases, help them to make a full recovery.

They have another week at Glossop before flying home.

Linda Walker, of CCP, said: "They love coming here and we have another 250 arriving in July, of whom 20 or so will be staying in and around Manchester."



■ CLEAR OF CHERNOBYL: Anna Kholopova (centre), pictured with friends Liene (left) and Andrei

Picture: Helen Walker

By **1998** we had thirty groups around the country, all hosting children in summer. Children from Uvaravichi School stayed in Lancaster and Monk Fryston; Komarin School, less than 20 miles from the Chernobyl power station, provided children for Teifi Valley; Gloucester took children from the village school in Yurovichi; and Hoiniki School No 2 sent children to Tavistock and Totnes. Children from Mogilev travelled to Cardiff; from Gomel Regional Hospital to Glossop; and children in remission from cancer came to Aberystwyth, Llandinam, Dolgellau, Leeds, Craven and Littleborough.

Blantyre hosted children who had had bone marrow transplants who had to have a quieter holiday, and

be accompanied by a specialist doctor. Totnes and Teifi Valley found families who could take children with quite profound special needs and the groups in Teesdale, Glossop, Evesham and Crewe concentrated on young children and their mothers. Catterick hosted children from Korma School, for whom they also collected aid. Mid Essex had a long standing link with the Terekhovka Centre, from where they took about 18 children every Summer, and Moray also hosted children from this lovely after-school centre.



The Aberystwyth group hosted teenagers and Carmarthen, a group based at Queen Elizabeth Cambria School, invited young people up to twenty years old, most of whom have never had the chance of a holiday abroad before. When children fall ill in their early teens, by the time they are well enough to travel, there are few charities willing to invite them. And for these young people the holidays provide a great psychological boost which is almost as important for their future well-being as the physical improvement to their health of the fresh air and clean food.



The Endon and Stoke group decided not only to bring a group of young children from Veletin School but to invite a group of 18 teenagers in remission from cancer. These young people all stayed together at Cicely Haughton School in the Staffordshire Moorlands and the group organised a varied and exciting programme of events for them. The group has invited 16 – 18 year olds every year since then and they now divide their visit between families and the school.

Endon and Stoke often invite young children and their mums as well.

Buxton & Longnor hosted Diabetic Children, which they continued to do every year till 2015 and the children sometimes spent part of their holiday at Denis Moors' outdoor pursuits centre.

Denis also hosted groups of mothers and children every Christmas for many years at his Centre.

In **1998** we brought four hundred children to stay with 33 groups all over the UK, and chartered two aircraft to Cardiff and Manchester.



In **1999** Solihull group was launched and they soon developed a relationship with Svetlagorsk Orphanage, bringing teenagers to stay at Springfield House School.

When the orphanage closed down in 2012, (partly as a result of CCP's work in Belarus) the group switched to bringing young teenagers in remission from cancer, who spend half their holiday at the school and half with families.



In **2011** our Stafford & Stone Group was formed, and they hosted children in remission from cancer. Stafford group is still going strong; Gloucester continues to host, sharing with another group; Leeds hosted until 2017; Littleborough hosted for 18 years; and Glossop, where it all started, continues to host and has expanded into New Mills.



## Holiday Camp

Our first holiday at a sanatorium, or holiday camp, in Belarus took place in the Summer of **1998**. We arranged for fifty children from Zhuravichi Boarding Home and fifty from Garadyets Special School who had never had the chance of a holiday before, to travel across the country to Neman, a beautiful site on the Polish border, near to Grodno. Volunteers, mostly from an organisation called Outlook helped to raise the money for the holiday and flew out to work with the children and make sure they had a great time. Carers from Zhuravichi were able to see that the children were capable of doing much more than they had ever thought possible, and the children had the most memorable experience of their lives.



The next year we invited 300 children to take part in the Sanatorium Holiday! One hundred came from Zhuravichi and the others from four special schools. We had hoped to be able to integrate the children from the schools with the Zhuravichi kids, and held meetings in advance to try to plan this. But it proved to be very difficult and the volunteers were run ragged by trying to involve too many children in all their activities, so we decided to go back to smaller numbers and stick to the more disabled children in the future.

The children are given the opportunity to paint, draw, cut and paste, make masks, have their faces painted, play ball games, have races, dip their toes in the river, go for a boat ride, visit the park or the zoo, and from time to time to

have the one to one attention which is just not possible at Zhuravichi.

We have sent out many wonderful volunteers – medical students, physiotherapists, teachers, early years workers and many others who have raised their air fares and then given two weeks of hard work. The holidays have been a life changing experience not just for the children – who live off them all year round, according to one teacher – but for some of the volunteers who have changed their career plans as a result of the time they have spent with the Zhuravichi children.



There have been wonderful Belarusian volunteers too, some of them from the Pedagoical University in Minsk. Masha came several times as a volunteer before she worked for us in Gomel. It was a very long journey for the children to travel to Neman sanatorium so after the first few years we switched to Ptich, which is in a clean part of Gomel region. We also tried Nadezhda Sanatorium which is in a very beautiful region not far from Minsk. But we found that Ptich was more accepting of the

children and young people with learning disabilities.





## Holidays for Young adults

As the children we were supporting at Zhuravichi and Rechitsa Boarding Home grew up and moved on to adult institutions, we realised they would never again get the chance to go on holiday. So we started to sponsor a holiday for young people. Our volunteers raise extra funds above what is needed for their trip, so each of them funds the holiday for one young person. Over the years we have

also had sponsorship from Olympus KeyMed, Action for Disability and consistently from the Persula Foundation.

The young people love the holidays just as much as the children do. They come from four or five different institutions and have a wide range of disabilities. But they are all delighted to try new activities and to make friends with the volunteers.



In **2009** we began to send some of our more experienced Volunteers to **Zhuravichi and Vikov**. At that time Zhuravichi was a home for about 250 children with moderate to severe and multiple disabilities. Over the last few years the children have stayed on after 18, other young people have been brought back from other institutions and gradually the children have been moved out, so it is now an adult institution.



It was the arrival of a new and forward thinking Director at Zhuravichi which made the visits by volunteers possible. And, over the years since that first visit in 2009, the volunteers have been made to feel ever more welcome at Zhuravichi where they have noticed that the conditions and atmosphere has gradually improved for the residents, year on year.

Vikov is also for adults with severe learning disabilities and the volunteers divide their time every summer between Zhuravichi, where they stay, and Vikov. In the early years, the directors at Vikov were somewhat resistant to visits by the volunteers and the activities that the volunteers were allowed to engage in with the residents were quite limited. In more recent times, however, new directors have pleasingly been much more welcoming and now, each time they visit, the volunteers sense an improving atmosphere and conditions for the residents. The volunteers are now allowed to engage in the full range of their planned activities.



Two teams of volunteers make fortnight-long visits to these two institutions each summer so that the residents enjoy a whole month of attention. At both institutions, the volunteers try to provide as much stimulation and fun as possible to those residents whose condition means that they will never be allowed to travel to the sanatorium. The weather is usually hot and mornings are usually spent outside with the residents playing games with balls and balloons of all sizes, badminton, football, basketball, tennis, badminton and frisbees with the more able ones.



Sandpits and paddling pools have proven to be extremely popular with the less able and more autistic residents. And, at Zhuravichi, recent visits have also included a large scale water fight with water pistols, buckets and bottles and anything else the residents can







the residents stories, hugging them and simply giving the type of one-to-one attention that makes the residents feel valued and which, sadly, they never normally receive.



**Lynne Murphy** is our longest-serving volunteer, having volunteered every summer since 2009. In **2015** she took on the formal role of Volunteer Coordinator. She spends most of her spare time recruiting volunteers for both the holiday camp and the institution visits, organising an annual spring fundraising ball to raise funds for holidays for young adults and then, in May, organising the volunteer familiarisation and training weekend in Buxton.

Younger volunteers, who are often at college studying subjects that lead to work in the care sector, are usually directed to work at the holiday camp at Ptich. Those going to the institutions are general older with more experience, often already working in special needs schools in the UK or else are retired.

## Humanitarian Aid Programme

In April **1995** we bought our first ambulance and **Mags and Ken Whiting** of Glossop drove it out to Belarus with an Irish convoy. From the day they arrived in Belarus Mags and Ken became committed and crucial members of the charity, going on to drive five more ambulances, lead four convoys and be an important part of all our work.

Our first articulated lorry load of aid went to Belarus in Autumn 1995, after being packed and loaded in our warehouse just outside Glossop. When we lost this warehouse in **1999** the focus of our aid collection moved to Selby in Yorkshire.



**Mike Allison** took over the organisation of the aid programme, and it soon grew so that we were taking four aid deliveries every year of several large lorries and a seven and a half ton truck.

We were very lucky to have a free warehouse provided for us by **David Campey** and our vehicles serviced by his son **Paul Campey**.



None of this would have been possible without the work of the aid team who provided voluntarily, not just the hard work of loading vehicles and making the long journey to Belarus but also, through activities and their own personal donation, much of the considerable funds needed to meet the ever increasing cost of convoys.

We delivered disability aids, clothing, bedding, toys, furniture and many other essentials to schools, hospitals, orphanages and family associations.

In 2014 CCP reluctantly decided to bring our aid programme to an end and concentrate our resources on providing training programmes, educational exchanges and projects which contribute to changing attitudes and creating long term improvements in the opportunities available for people with disabilities in Belarus.



Mike Allison and his aid team were so enthusiastic about the job they were doing that they have since set up their own charity, Chernobyl Aid, and continue to make deliveries twice a year to Belarus

## Training Programmes and Educational visits

In **1998** the Head of Special Needs Education in Gomel, Elena Voloshinenko, came on a visit to the UK, with the Directors of two disability centres. We have maintained a relationship with Elena ever since and she now works for our partner organisation in Gomel.

In **1998** we also sent a Macmillan Nurse to a Conference in Minsk. We were thinking at that time of setting up a Macmillan type programme in Belarus, but decided instead to support and extend Home Hospice care. The following year we sent three nurses and social workers from Macmillan and CLIC Sargent to Belarus to give training and advice, and followed this with a visit to the UK for Hospice Nurses.

In 1999 we organised visits to the UK for Social Protection and Education staff in Rogachev and Gomel, and later in the year for the Directors of four orphanages and special schools.

These early visits were so useful in passing on ideas and methods of working, that they became a regular feature of our work.







In January 2000 Jean Holt visited Belarus and was asked by the Ministry of Education to set up a training programme on Fostering. Jean had been the manager of a children's home and then worked in fostering, and was used to delivering training. She ran her first training programme in Gomel in the spring of that year, and then was in Belarus two or three times a year for the next fifteen years delivering training programmes in Preparing and Supporting Foster Families, Management, Preparing for Change, Assessment and Planning, Child Centred Care and many aspects of child care and development.

We received significant funding from the

Department for International Development in the early years for our training programmes, until they decided to switch most of their funding to Africa.

Jean recruited many other social workers, mostly from Yorkshire, to training with her and share their expertise. In **2002** we ran a publicity campaign in Gomel about foster care which was very successful. Some of the early management training was carried out with Geoff Wright, who then went to



work for UNICEF in many other former Soviet countries, before returning to run our training programmes when Jean retired.

Most of the orphanages in Gomel region have now closed down and the children have moved into foster families or small family type homes.

In March **2001** we brought the Directors of Education and Social protection for Gomel region, and an even more senior member of the Regional Executive Committee on a visit to the UK to look at care and education for children with disabilities. This was an invaluable visit.

Sokorev, the Head of Social protection, was very supportive of every one of our projects for the next ten years until he retired, and did all he could to improve life for people with disabilities in his region.

In spring **2002** we brought four groups to the UK on educational visits! Staff from the Regional Rehabilitation Centre in Gomel visited many special schools and met early intervention specialists; staff from the Home for Abandoned babies look at early years care; representatives of the Health and Social Protection Ministries in Minsk and senior members of the Education and Social protection departments in Gomel came on visits to look at all aspects of care, education and work opportunities for people with disabilities.

It was this last visit which led to the setting up of the Mayflower centre.

Also in **2002** a training course in symbol communication was delivered at School No 5 in Gomel and a physiotherapist gave training and advice at Zhuravichi and several special schools. They were both involved the following year in delivering training at the Republican Rehabilitation Centre in Minsk.

In April **2003** we took three disability specialists to visit Zhuravichi and a number of special schools to give us advice and guidance about setting up the Mayflower Respite Care Centre and they took part in a round table discussion with many local professionals in Gomel.





The Director of Health for Gomel region visited the UK with the Chief Doctors of the two main regional hospitals, visiting many hospitals and special schools.

In **2004** we brought the Director of Special School No 5 on a visit, prior to our setting up of a wheelchair class in the school



The Manager of the Mayflower Centre and a colleague came to spend time at respite centres in the UK. Pat Marsh Manager, of Woodlands Respite Centre at the Together Trust, hosted most of this visit and subsequently went four times to Belarus to give training and advice at Mayflower.

As a result of the setting up the Mayflower centre, we were asked to organise a visit for senior officials of the Education, Social protection and Finance Ministries in the autumn of **2005**.

In **2006** we took a Diabetic doctor to Gomel to give training and advice to the Diabetic Association. His visit was followed up with the establishment of a small research programme at a nearby hospital.

There was a visit to the UK by Hospice staff from Gomel, Minsk and Pinsk and training visits were made to Minsk and Gomel by a nurse and a Palliative Care doctor.

Visits to the UK also included psychologists from Gomel University and the Advanced Learning Institute; senior adoption specialist; and the Chief Children's Doctor at the Psychiatric Hospital.

Foster care training during this year covered Assessing Foster Carers; Training the Trainers; Planning in Child Care; and Management for Directors of Institutions. And training also took place in the Children's Department of the Psychiatric Hospital.

In **2007** we brought a doctor from the Baby Home and nurses from Zhuravichi and Rechitsa Boarding home on a visit to look at special schools and hospice care.

In the autumn John Costello, our Palliative Care Consultant, delivered training in Minsk and Gomel and the Chief Doctor of the Gomel Regional Psychiatric Hospital came on a visit to the UK.

In **2008** we began a three year leaving care programme with an Italian charity funding the salaries of staff working with children in institutions and we provided the training.



In **2008** we took teachers and a consultant paediatrician to Gomel to give advice about our work with children with disabilities.

Several trainings took place in the Leaving Care programme and the 'mentors' working on the project came on an educational visit to Yorkshire, organised by Jean Holt.





In April training was delivered in Gomel on the Webster Stratton Parenting Programme. The training was given to hospital and polyclinic staff and was subsequently passed on by them to many other professionals.

Marie Owen, our Consultant Paediatrician made her second visit to Gomel to give us further advice about care and support for children with disabilities.

In **2010** training and visits for the Leaving Care and Epilepsy projects took place.

The directors of Zhuravichi and Rechitsa Boarding Homes came on educational visits to special schools in the North West.

We also brought representatives of the Health, Social Protection and Education Ministries on a visit aimed at improving their support for children with disabilities.

In March **2011** we brought three palliative care doctors on a visit to hospices in the UK. And in June we brought a psychologist from the Children's Cancer Hospital in Minsk.

In April a National Seminar was held at Ulookavye Orphanage where our Leaving Care project had been taking place over the last three years.

The Medical Director of the Belarusian Children's Hospice, Natallia Savva, came on a visit to the UK and began a three year distance learning course in Palliative Medicine at Cardiff University, for which we had received a grant from the Raisa Gorbachev Foundation.

Jean was joined by Eric Shedlow from Leeds in delivering training in many aspects of child care and development.

In **2012** our Gomel Hospice Doctor, Irina Kalmanovich, came to spend a week shadowing staff at Martin House Hospice, in Yorkshire.

In **2009** Dr. Rosemary Newton followed up on the first visit she had made the previous year with a seminar for neurologists in Gomel and consultations with parents. This visit resulted in the setting up of two pilot projects aimed at increasing rescue medication for epilepsy to Belarus.



Representatives of the National organisation of Parents with disabled children came on an educational visit.

Geoff Wright visited Gomel in the spring to deliver training and make plans for a new project.

John Costello delivered palliative care seminars in Minsk; Rosemary Newton visited Gomel to work with families involved in the rescue Medication Project; Social workers from Stockport visited Gomel and took part in a round table discussion in Minsk with the Ministry of Social Protection about moving people out of institutions



Representatives of the Education, Social Protection and Health Ministries came on a visit to Manchester.

In January **2013** leading representatives of the Institute in Minsk which provides advanced training for social workers came on a visit to the UK, in preparation for a training programme which Geoff Wright and others would deliver over the next few years. The idea is to upgrade Belarusian social workers and psychologists to have more of the skills of a western Social Worker.

Simon Saxton and Jacqui Raynor made two visits to Gomel to deliver training in Restorative Justice.

In March we organised a visit for the Deputy Minister of Social Protection and representatives of Disability NGOs in Minsk. Alexander Rumak had visited our two family homes and was interested in setting up new forms of living for young people in institutions, so this was what the visit focused on.

In June, Cleft Surgeon Victoria Beale hosted two facial surgeons from Minsk for a whole week at Manchester Children's Hospital, showing them every aspect of cleft palate and lip surgery and after care.



Training was given in the preparation of temporary foster families in Gomel by Sue Keidan and Alison Tribe, in the hope that fewer children will enter the baby Home in Gomel.

Erin King worked with Geoff Wright to deliver further training in Social Work in Minsk.

A group of disability specialists visited Minsk and Gomel, including Maggie Thomson, former Head of Bridge College in Manchester and Dr. Tom Fryers. His trust, 'Action for Disability' has provided wonderful financial support for CCP over the last five years!



*The British Ambassador organised a dinner so the visitors could meet representatives from several ministries.*

In June **2014** a visit to Yorkshire to look at Restorative Justice was organised by Simon Saxton for senior Juvenile Justice officials in Gomel.

Training was delivered in Gomel in finding and training foster families for children with disabilities; and further training was delivered in the Social Work development project in Minsk and Gomel.



In **2015** and the following year Geoff Wright gave training in Online Safety for school children, as part of a project supported by the British Embassy.



In **2016** we delivered training in Gomel in working with autistic children, and brought senior health and Education department officials from Gomel to learn more about the needs of children on the spectrum.

In July we brought the Director of Gomel Regional Diagnostic and Rehabilitation centre to spend the week at Pictor School and Inscape School.

Speech and language therapists from Inscape House visited Belarus to deliver training in the autumn and training was also delivered in working with young people with drug problems.

In December three psychiatrists from Pennine Care NHS Foundation Trust visited Gomel to advise on our Mental Health Project.

In early **2017** the Deputy Head of Special School No 5 in Gomel came to spend the week with Pictor and Inscape House Schools, and to visit the Seashell Trust's Royal school.

Gomel Regional Health Director came on a visit with the Chief Doctor of the Psychiatric Hospital to look at autism, and mental health care in the community.

In the autumn Early Intervention specialists from Polyclinic 19 in Minsk came on a visit to Manchester.



In February **2018** the Head of Inclusive Education in Belarus came to look at Special Needs Education and integration.

In the spring we hosted a visit from the Directors of Education and Social Protection in Gomel, and their boss on the Executive Committee, to look at all aspects of care, education and support for families with children with disabilities.

In the autumn a visit was organised to look at all aspects of pregnancy, delivery and post-natal care, in Manchester and Birmingham.



We have had tremendous support over the last 10 years from the True and Fair Foundation for our Training Programme and Educational Visits and for which we are truly grateful.