

# CHERNOBYL CHILDREN'S PROJECT (UK)

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## ПОДДЕРЖКА ДЕТЯМ БЕЛАРУСИ

### **Feb 2018 Report of Training Coordinator on visit to Belarus**

On the flight to Minsk I met the lawyer who has been working on the Embassy's Youth Justice Project.

Lionel advised that he had been training Judges and people from the Judiciary in Minsk on "Child Friendly Courts" and that he was nearing the end of his training. I understood from him that he would not be involved in the next part, the implementation and training of practitioners in early intervention and project development as it was out of his skill range.

The legislation also needs to change before anything else can happen and this will need the involvement of UNICEF. We talked a lot about what kind of interventions might be possible and potential target areas (more about this later)

I agreed that I would keep in contact with Lionel and share information with him concerning my thoughts on what might work. I also advised him I would be meeting with Lee Stone at the Embassy and with Gabrielle from UNICEF, also with Evgeny from Gomel City Executive to try and bring interested parties together to see if there was potential for a pilot project that could work even before the legislative changes were made.

The next three days are a bit of a blur! They were spent with Natalia and Gabrielle from UNICEF plus Larisa a Belarusian Consultant. We visited many officials and projects in the Gomel Region, seeking their consent to visit centres and explaining the proposed project. The plan is to work with three identified areas in the Gomel Region to support Children and Families where disability may lead to institutionalisation ensuring children can meet their full potential and protecting the rights of the child.

The agreed places were Rogachev, Rechitsa and Zhelezdanarozhny District in Gomel. There would be 3 teams who would be managed and supervised to ensure that they meet the requirements of the funding. Natasha and I worked from early morning until late evening during these 3 days. In addition to meetings we visited Zhuravichi, Rechitsa, Gomel City Social Protection Centre and the Polyclinic, The Correctional Centre in Gomel, Rodni Kut, Mozyr and Rainbow Centre. We spent a long time talking about the potential teams, issues like safeguarding, professional supervision, assessment, planning and evaluation, also the role of social workers and managing change. Implementing the concept of moving from a medical model of working to a more social model where families are no longer passive receivers of services but actively being able to make decisions was also discussed. I think Gabrielle will probably wish to explore other areas of work with us in the future on more than one occasion she pointed to me and said I want you (meaning work!) She had clearly been making enquiries

as she talked about my work in orphanage 19 in Moscow and my work in the Stans and Caucasus. I said we would help where ever we could and very diplomatically made it clear that I am with CCP and that any involvement should recognise them.

When we separated at the end of the visit agreement had been made that papers would be sent to Natalia at SCT within a few days and Natalia and I would write up an agreement which would be returned to UNICEF to release significant funding for the project, and that Linda would have some oversight of the final document. We eventually received the paperwork on the Friday and Natasha and I spent all day Saturday working on it and Natasha continued on the work at home all day on the Sunday. We had a final working document which I understand was finalised after I left.

I think this has been a fantastic achievement as a direct result of all the work that Linda and all the supporters of CCP have done over the past years. It was very rewarding to hear the acknowledgement of UNICEF who mentioned this many times during our time together.

I am sure it will be a big success and that it will help many young people and their families in a way which we have only been able to dream about in the past.

I visited Vocational School No10 in Gomel where most of the youngsters with Learning Disability end up when they leave institutional care. I spent a few hours talking to the staff asking questions about what they do in relation to sex education and social and life skills. I explained that in the past few years I had been visiting former care leavers to see what would help them and what was not helpful.

The response which I should not have been surprised about was all very positive tinged with a lot of denial.

Like many other places they do an excellent job on practical skills but very little about relationships. Sex education is taught but it is in biological terms rather than emotional. There is no teaching on how to look after a baby or the emotional and developmental needs of babies and parenting. They told me it was the job of the polyclinic not theirs.

Later I spent time with a group of students mainly girls and we talked about their needs and life in general; the issues were exactly the same as those who had left care earlier.

The school told me they had 400 students learning plumbing, building skills and agricultural skills and that all had working placements when they left the school. 63 of the students had learning disability, 11 physical disability and 15 were orphans.

I also understood that this group were taught for two years by 2 skilled teachers in a group of 12 and that there was protected work for those with learning disability.

This was a very interesting visit and it has to be said they are doing a good job but there is still a lot not on the curriculum which could better protect the rights of young people when they leave the system.

The next day I visited the Social Protection Centre in Gomel and spent some time talking to the psychologists on safeguarding and domestic violence. In the afternoon I visited Klimovka enjoying a meal with them and sharing many happy memories of earlier visits to see them.

There was a purpose to my visit. A young woman called Marina has been staying at Klimovka. She is 35 and pregnant She has come from an institution and was not allowed to stay there to have a baby. She wants to keep the child when it is born but fears it will be taken from her. The other problem is that she is seen as disruptive by the others and she does have some conflicts with Larissa the main carer.

I spent some time talking to Larissa and then to the rest of the household trying to find out what the situation was before talking to Marina on her own in her room. Marina admitted that she has some conflicts with Larissa not knowing what was expected of her and it was not intentional. We talked about what was happening and what support she felt she had from her family which was none from her mother but there is a potential aunt who she has lived with before. Marina was adamant that she wanted to keep the baby, that the father would not be part of this as he was an alcoholic and that she had no feelings for him.

She was scared about what might happen, we suggested she might go with us to Bobruisk to see a centre that may help her which she agreed to.

I was very surprised to learn that at one time Marina had been at Vocational School No10 which I had visited earlier in and she had not been found employment and had consequently ended up in the institution.

I undertook training in Rogachev for receiving families and staff at the centre. I was pleased to know most remembered me from a long time ago and one of my former trainees was now the Director of the centre and she said they still use all the things Jean and I taught them.

I was advised that they have some youngsters who are in conflict with the law and that they would appreciate some training in order to prevent a breakdown in placements. If it is felt appropriate by CCP management I would be happy to do some training with the staff and share my new proposed work book with them.

The foster carers have asked if I could do more consultations in the future and in addition to that could I work with a group of their youngsters to talk about the future needs and social and life skills. Perhaps the ideal and most effective way of delivering both sets of training in Rogachev would be to get two staff members to help me run a group for the children /young people who are fostered so they can learn by example rather than just reading about it and not putting it into practice.

I also undertook a workshop and consultation day for receiving families and two newly qualified psychologists at Vera`s centre in Gomel. We spent a long time talking about the social and emotional needs of young people, challenging behaviour and motivation of young people. Many parents spoke about deliberate self harm and were very open asking questions

that in the past they have kept to themselves. Like Rogachev If management agree it would be good to work with the inexperienced workers and run a group for youngsters on a Saturday and show them how to work with young people

The next morning at 8.00 am we travelled to Bobruisk with Marina and Larissa. They visited a centre run by a religious organisation who have agreed to look after Marina. She had a full medical check confirming the baby and Marina are okay. They will arrange to take her, she will have someone with her before and after the baby arrives and they will help her develop the skills she needs before returning to Gomel Region.

I did not attend this meeting as I was continuing the training that was outstanding from our last visit. This was related to safeguarding young people with disability, sexual and emotional needs and how to deal with challenging behaviour in centres and how to deliver this information to carers, and sexual decision making and capability guidance.

As before the training was well received and they were very enthusiastic which made it all the more enjoyable for Anya and me.

On the return journey Larissa and Marina came to where I was training and they were given food and hot drinks and the staff talked to them and I think they will monitor the situation for us if need be. On the way back Larisa and Marina were chatting away in a very positive way with Larissa saying she would be like a grandmother to Marina when she returns to Gomel region.

On my final morning I visited the city executive and met Evgeny to discuss Juvenile Justice. After a long discussion involving agreeing that professionals in Belarus were fantastic and that what was needed was someone to work directly with young people to divert them from crime especially in rural areas I told him that we may be doing just that close to Gomel and Rogachev working with Belarusian professionals as co trainers so they could train others. He said if we wanted somewhere to work from he would find it and he would identify schools where there is a big problem so we could run a pilot project. I was very clear to him that I could not promise but we would see what we could do. I outlined what the Embassy had been doing and that legislation with the help of Unicef would at some point be modified to encompass new ideas in justice reforms but for the moment there are things we could be doing if we have the opportunity.

I then travelled to Minsk arriving in the evening after going through really awful snow conditions.

I had intended to meet with Yuri from the Advanced Learning Institute on Friday evening but was unable to contact him so will have to negotiate with him once work in Gomel eases off.

Unicef had said they would contact me but again no success but I was not so worried as I knew that Linda and Natasha from SCT were meeting with them on Monday.

I will contact them from the UK to discuss Restorative Justice and law reforms. Gabrielle had already told me she wanted to talk to me about this and about social work in Belarus.

During our meetings she expressed a lot of interest in the work we had been doing in Belarus; hopefully this will hold us in good stead for future work with UNICEF.

I met with Lee Stone at the Embassy who was already aware of my meeting with Lionel Blackman. He explained that money may be available but they are waiting to see what they will get and what the priorities are. He confirmed that Lionel had nearly completed his work and that what comes next is a pilot area. I explained the work I had done in many other countries and agreed that I would write to him with the pros and cons of various potential models of working, and the structure of early intervention as well as restorative justice. I also suggested that next time I am in Minsk perhaps it would be good to have a three way meeting including UNICEF to see if there is any potential for doing a pilot in Gomel with our help. It would of course require funding but the planning and structure we have already and if they can support any of our projects then I would be happy to share what I have. Lee took copious notes and agreed it would be of great help to all.

What next;

I think with managements agreement I should contact our summer camp volunteer Lewis Greaves who speaks some Russian and understands the culture. He is a social worker based in Colchester working with Children and families with disability. He would be a good person to involve in the new project because he will have all the latest assessment and planning documents plus he will be up to date on all aspects of the work.

If he proves to be successful he might also be mentored into my role come the day when I fall by the wayside, not planned at the moment I might add.

I think for the project we will need to have the following in place quite quickly:

Terms of reference for all on the project

Supervision training and setting up regular supervision

Managing change and the role of social worker on the project as distinct from psychologist

Referral forms Assessment, planning and reviewing formats

Records and recording training

Evaluation forms

Safe guarding training

Confidentiality agreement with clear guidelines on what to do in the event we are made aware of someone being harmed or at risk especially a child or vulnerable adult.

I would be willing to do some of this work but I think Lewis would be better at some aspects of this than I would be.

Very big thank you to Natasha and Anya for all the hard work and the support and planning which made life so much easier

***Geoff Wright Training Coordinator***