

## **Report of Visit to Belarus by Dr. Kay Harvey and Sally Trowse to Deliver Training in Child Mental Health, June 2019**

In June 2019 I returned to Belarus with my colleague, Sally Trowse (ADHD Clinical Nurse specialist) to deliver training in child mental health. We had first visited Gomel in Belarus, in November 2017, so this trip was a chance to deliver more training to a wider range of professionals.

The trip was facilitated by Chernobyl Children's Project UK and supported by the trust we both work for, Pennine Care NHS Foundation Trust.

The trip was a week long starting with the flight from Manchester. We were unaware that our trip coincided with the 2nd European Games in Minsk, so we were surprised to find ten of team GB on our plane. We were sat amongst team GB canoeists, wrestlers and shooters.

We stayed in Minsk for our first day, helping at the CCP-UK stall at the Great British Festival. The festival was attended by thousands of people, enjoying the music, food stalls and the glorious sunshine. The stall was well attended with children particularly enjoying the balloon animals and the Union Jack tattoos. The stall holders spoke to visitors about the work of the charity, raising awareness.

The next five days were spent in Gomel delivering training to a mixture of groups; of parents and then professionals. On day one we spoke to a group of twenty parents about their children and the difficulties they face. The parents all had children with autism and learning disabilities, most having no speech. We discussed ideas for improving communication with their children using picture exchange communication systems (PECS) as well as other strategies. The parents were extremely appreciative of a chance to talk as a group and they all shared ideas.

The next two days were spent talking to a group of twenty doctors; psychiatrists and paediatricians. We covered various topics including Autism, ADHD, understanding and managing challenging behaviour in children with learning disabilities and trauma. We also gave an overview of some of the topical areas of interest in the UK including substance misuse in teenagers, using Mindfulness in schools and Gender Identity Disorder services. It was interesting to hear the similarities in practice, especially with the medications used for challenging behaviour and post traumatic stress disorder. In Belarus ADHD is now being diagnosed more frequently, but unfortunately the doctors do not have access to stimulant medication to treat it. This is a real shame as the treatment is so effective at reducing symptoms of hyperactivity, inattention and impulsivity and therefore improving a child's ability to function and achieve in school. In the UK 1-2% of children are treated with stimulant medication for ADHD.

The final two days were spent with large groups (around 40 people each day) of mixed professionals; teachers from special and mainstream schools, social workers, psychologists, doctors and speech and language therapists. We covered understanding and managing challenging behaviour and strategies to help children in school with ADHD or autism. Again

there was great participation from the groups with ideas being shared and friendships formed.

At the end of each day we did a fun quiz, showing the groups pictures from IQ tests used in the UK. The groups struggled to get the answers to some but had great fun trying to figure them out!!

The week was busy and intense with the 30+ degree heat but extremely rewarding and it was great to hear how the two countries are using similar approaches to help improve the lives of children and young people with developmental disorders (ADHD and autism), learning disabilities and mental health difficulties.

I always think when I attend conferences in the UK, that if you come away with one new piece of knowledge or one idea to put into practice then it has been worth it. I'm hoping the attendees at our training will all have one new idea they will put into practice when they return to their places of work. I hope that the next time they experience a child showing challenging behaviour (head banging or hitting out) they will stop and think..... what might have triggered this, what in the environment has increased their stress levels and how could we have responded differently?

Belarus is an amazing country with friendly, hard working people striving to improve the lives of the children they work and live with. Both Sally and I feel extremely honoured to have been able to visit again and share learning and experiences with them.

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