

CHERNOBYL CHILDREN'S PROJECT (UK)

ПОДДЕРЖКА ДЕТЯМ БЕЛАРУСИ

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Our First Twenty Five Years

In January 2020 Chernobyl Children's Project will celebrate the 25th Anniversary of our launch event at a Lord Mayor's Reception in Manchester Town Hall in 1995.



Within 3 months we had delivered our first reconditioned ambulance to Belarus; in July we brought our first group of children for a holiday to Glossop and Littleborough; and by the Autumn we were able to fill a forty foot trailer with aid and deliver this to Belarus.

Our aid and holiday programmes soon grew and we have hosted well over 5,000 children for 4 week recuperative holidays and delivered hundreds of lorry loads of humanitarian aid to Belarus.

In 1997 **Linda Walker** was one of the first



foreigners to be made a member of the Order of Franciska Skarina for our work in Belarus. In 2006 Linda received an MBE which she accepted on

behalf of everyone involved with CCP. (Pictured here with Mags and Ken Whiting, the first Trustees of the charity).



For the Chernobyl disaster's 20th and 25th Anniversaries charities in the UK came together to organise events, raise the profile of our work and highlight the ongoing effects of the disaster. In 2010 we organised a Folk Dance Tour with Chernobyl Children's Lifeline.

On the 30th Anniversary CCP worked



with anti nuclear campaigners to host an International Conference in Manchester, looking at the health and environmental impact of the Chernobyl and Fukushima disasters, and exploring sources of sustainable energy.

We work closely in Minsk with the children's cancer charity '**Children in Trouble**' and with the **Belarusian Children's Hospice**. The majority of our work is in the Gomel Region, the most contaminated part of the country. We have a wonderful team there, headed by **Natasha Samoilik**, who facilitate all our projects. In 2006 we and our colleagues in Gomel were registered in Belarus as an international charity, under the name '**Supporting Children Together**'.

Much of our work in Belarus focuses on raising the level of opportunities for children and young people with disabilities, and on providing training which has helped to get many children out of orphanages and into local foster families

Recuperative Holidays in the UK

Our first group of 38 children came to spend a four week holiday in *Glossop* and *Littleborough* in the summer of 1995. By the following year we were able to invite 150 children for the summer visit. At that time all the children were from village schools and did not have major health problems, and doctors in Belarus told us that the four week holiday would boost their immune systems and help them to stay healthy.



In May 1997 we brought our first group of young children in remission from cancer with their mothers. 'Children in Trouble', the cancer charity in Minsk, 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 mothers had been through such a stressful time they

were almost as much in need of a holiday as the children.

We have since hosted many groups of children under 8 and their mums, staying with groups in *Glossop*, *Endon*, *Teesdale*, *Crewe* and *Evesham*.



We have brought children with disabilities, diabetes or heart problems for holidays. But in recent years we have focused on children with cancer. Our *Endon & Stoke* group always invite a large group of teenagers, 16 – 19 years old, who stay with families for part of the visit and the rest of the time they all stay together at ***Cicely Haughton School*** in the Staffordshire Moorlands.

Our *Solihul* group used to invite children from an orphanage but now hosts 13 – 15 year olds in remission from cancer. In many cases these young people have never had a holiday abroad before and the experience provides a great psychological boost, which is almost as important for their future wellbeing as the physical improvement to their health from the fresh air and clean food.



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. 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 two or three large lorries and a seven and a half ton truck.

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.

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 other members of the aid team then set up their own charity so they could continue making deliveries to Belarus.

Over the years we have also delivered half a dozen minibuses for use in all our projects. Margie Haslop secured a Rotary Grant for a minibus which she and Kevin Edwards drove to Gomel in 2014. Margie is now working on the funding for another matching Rotary Grant for a minibus which we hope to deliver during 2020.



Zhuravichi Boarding Home



Zhuravichi is hidden deep in the countryside in the north of Gomel Region. Today it is home for around 300 young adults, but until 2010 it was a home solely for children with a wide range of disabilities.

We have supported holidays for some of the children every summer; brought the Director on an educational visit to Britain; delivered a great deal of aid including mobility equipment; specialist British volunteers have spent time there working with the children and staff every summer; we encouraged the local authority in Gomel to involve most of the children in classes; in 2006 we helped to get some of the children re-assessed and moved to more

appropriate institutions; we have sponsored the salaries of extra carers to look after the more disabled children and now we support teachers to work with young adults who have never had an education.



Vikov Home for Disabled Adults

Vikov is an institution hidden deep in the forest just outside Rogachev and is home to around two hundred adults with learning disabilities or mental health problems. The staff at Vikov have neither the time nor the knowledge to be able to occupy the more disabled and autistic young people. So we have been employing a teacher there since 2004. In 2008 we renovated one of the rooms to be used for classes and social activities and we take some of the young people on sanatorium holidays in the summer. We have provided training for some of the staff and in 2018 funded a psychologist to work with the residents.



We also have a group of experienced volunteers, organised by **Lynne Murphy**, who spend time at both Vikov and Zhuravichi in the summer, providing activities and one to one care and attention for some of the residents, both young and adult.

Family Home 2000 at Klimovka



In 2000 we were given part of a kindergarten by the Social Protection Department and we turned it into a well equipped comfortable home for Sasha, a young man with paralysed legs, Liena, who has spina bifida and Greesha, who has severe cerebral palsy. They had all grown up at Zhuravichi where they had never had the chance of an education and had never been allowed to make decisions about anything. In Family Home



2000 at Klimovka they learned to read, to cook, to look after themselves and to have fun, with the support of wonderful carers.

Sasha eventually moved on and now lives nearby but visits regularly. Sveta, the fourth person to join the house, had received an education at Rechitsa Boarding school. We employed her as a receptionist at the Mayflower Centre for 9 years and now she runs an animal rescue charity. Several other young people have spent a year or two at Klimovka and been helped to move on to independence.

Ira, who lived in Duyanovka, the large institution nearby, came to live at Klimovka six years ago.



Rodni Kut, our family home in Rogachev



In the Summer of 2002 we bought a house in Rogachev which was to become home for five young children with disabilities. Stas, Nazar, Anton and Anya had all been living at Zhuravichi, and Ira came from the Baby Home

We put in a bathroom and ramps and made the house comfortable; and employed a group of very caring women to be the children's 'aunties'. At the beginning of 2003 the children moved in to Rodni Kut and they have been very happy growing up there. As they became teenagers and needed more space we built an extension, doubling the size of the house. Sergei Gryn, the children's foster father, applied to be their guardian as each of them reached 18.



All the young people, now in their twenties, have spent time with families in Britain and Anya comes twice a year to stay with Joan Edward's family in Devon. She was a bridesmaid for Annie's wedding and now feels like an auntie to Annie's children..

Ira was born with very deformed feet. She had these removed at the *Royal Devon and Exeter Hospital* in 2003 and immediately adapted to being very active using her prosthetic legs. In 2008 we managed to put Ira in touch with her birth mother and very soon afterwards she moved back to live with her family.



When we brought senior members of the Education and Social Protection Departments to Britain on an Educational Visit in Autumn 2002, they were so impressed with a respite care centre they visited in Leeds that we decided this should be our next project. Social Protection gave us a large ground floor space in a Kindergarten; **Barney McElholm** through his Solihull company '*Elegant Homes Ltd*', funded and organised much of the building work; professionals from special schools in the UK helped us to

interview for the staff; and on 1st July 2004 the first group of six children came to stay at The Mayflower while their parents had a much needed rest. The Centre was later officially opened by the British Ambassador, **Brian Bennett**.



Natasha, the manager of Mayflower, and several members of staff came to the UK to spend time in respite centres, particularly Woodlands in Stockport, which is run by the '**Together Trust**'. Its former manager **Pat Marsh** visited Gomel several times to share her knowledge.

The Centre supports about forty families with regular stays and many more with occasional visits. The children and young people enjoy wonderful food, plenty of one to one attention and are helped to take part in

games and craft activities. For its first three years we were responsible for around 70% of the cost of running Mayflower, but at the beginning of 2008 the local authority decided to take over this responsibility. We continued to provide the transport until 2013 and then gave a minibus to the Centre. We are delighted that the Centre is acknowledged as a valuable resource and have been told by the Ministry of Social Protection that it provided inspiration for the establishment of day centres for young adults with disabilities.

The **Search Club** is a group of physically disabled young adults, who CCP has been bringing together for the last 13 years. They meet twice a month at the Mayflower Centre or in the park or at a local art gallery. Some of them are wonderful artists or poets, others are computer wizards, and all of them love the chance to be together to share their news and ideas. Lobbying from these young people has helped to bring about changes such as accessible buses and trains and a social taxi system.



Holidays in Belarus

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 to a holiday camp in a beautiful part of the country. Volunteers flew out to work with the children and make sure they had the most memorable experience of their lives.



It was such a success that we began supporting a holiday every summer for children from Zhuravichi, and other children with disabilities who live at *Rechitsa Boarding School*. The children are given the opportunity to paint, draw, cut and paste, make masks, play ball games, have races, watch films and live performances, take part in discos and from time to time to have the one to one attention which is just not possible at Zhuravichi.

Many wonderful volunteers have raised their air fares plus extra funds and then given two weeks of hard work. The holidays have been a life changing experience

not just for the children – who think about them all year round – 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.

Since 2005 we have funded sanatorium holidays for many disabled young adults, some from institutions and some holidaying with their mothers. The **Persula Foundation** has been generous in its support of this programme.

We have experienced volunteers going every summer to Zhuravichi and Vikov institutions and recently also to Rechitsa Boarding Home. This gives great support to all those children and young people who are not able to have a holiday.



Supporting Children with Cancer



We have worked closely with the Minsk based children's cancer charity '*Children in Trouble*' for over twenty years. In recent years we have invited all our children through this charity in the summer, and in the past have taken them humanitarian aid and helped with their ongoing costs. We have often delivered urgently needed medication for the Cancer Hospital, and we provide some support to the poorest families while they are staying in hospital. We help with gifts at Christmas and

have also sent wigs for some of the teenage girls



Children's Hospice Care

In 1998 we first met **Anna Gorchakova**, the founder of the Belarusian Children's Hospice. Anna had built up a wonderful team of staff who were supporting about fifty families with children in the last stages of cancer or with chronic disabilities, mostly in and around Minsk.

We decided that we would like to help to set up hospice care in other parts of the country and in 2000 we established Gomel Home Hospice Team. With just a one year break we have provided home support to around 30 families with palliative children ever since.

We have brought hospice nurses and doctors to the UK to spend time visiting hospices in Britain.

Francis House in Manchester and **Martin House** in

Yorkshire have been very supportive and Palliative Care lecturer *John Costello* has delivered training in Belarus.

This was our Hospice Team in 2014, but we are now able to fund a smaller team as some of the care in Gomel is provided through the Regional Health Department.



Special School No 5

In 2004 we set up a class for children in wheelchairs in this lovely special school in Gomel. We put in ramps, wider doors and toilet facilities; brought the Director on an educational visit to Britain; and then provided the transport for nine years, enough to see one group of children right through their school years. In 2014 we gave a minibus to the school and they are now organising the transport themselves for a new group of children.

Since 2015 we have worked closely with the school to develop their teaching of children with autism, delivering training in the school and bringing the Deputy Head on an intensive study visit to schools around south Manchester.



Medical Support for the Children of Belarus

In 2008 we brought 8 year old Allesia Chueva to *Alder Hey Hospital* for a major operation on her back. We are very grateful to surgeons **Paul May** and **Neil Buxton** who raised the funds for this and made a profound difference to Allesia's life. The Chief Surgeon from Gomel Regional Hospital came over to observe the operation. Allesia also had a shunt fitted and was catheterised to protect her kidneys.

Since then we have developed a close relationship with surgeons in Gomel, providing them with shunts and gastrostomy equipment.

Consultant Urologist **Malcolm Lucas** had treated Liena in Swansea Hospital before she came to live at Klimovka. Later he visited Gomel and decided that urodynamic testing equipment was needed. With support from **Olympus KeyMed** and **Albyn Medical** we were able to deliver this equipment in 2008 and provide training in its use.



In 2013 **Royal Manchester Children's Hospital** organised a wonderful week-long visit for cleft palate surgeons from Minsk and Gomel, and the hospital has hosted many other visits for health professionals from Belarus.

In 2018 we brought senior doctors from Gomel Region to visit hospitals in Manchester and Birmingham to look at all aspects of pregnancy, delivery and post- natal care.



Early Intervention

We have supported early intervention for children with disabilities for over 20 years. For many years we funded a wonderful Early Years worker supporting families in Rogachev until this work was taken on by the Education Department. In 2013/14 we enabled two psychologists to work in the Maternity Hospitals in Gomel with new mums whose babies were born with a disability or major health problem. In 2017 we brought a doctor and psychologist from the leading Early Intervention Centre in Minsk to look at work with young children in the UK.



Child Mental Health Project

After working for many years with the Children's Department at the Psychiatric Hospital in Gomel we started a project in 2015 to de-medicalise the care and education of autistic children and to improve the treatment for children with mental health problems. We sent a group of psychiatrists from the UK to Belarus in 2015;

organised training for medical and educational professionals in working with children on the autistic spectrum; brought the Chief Paediatric Psychiatrist from Gomel Region and then the Chief Doctor of the Psychiatric Hospital to Britain; and a Child Psychiatrist and ADHD Nurse from **Pennine Care NHS Foundation Trust** have made two training trips to Belarus. In 2017, with a grant from the **BEARR Trust**, we ran a project to support children with mental health problems and keep them out of the hospital. Using a mixture of group and individual work and including body therapy, this programme made a significant difference to the lives of almost all the 20 children who took part.

Nuclear Free Future Award

In October 2018 CCP Director Linda Walker was presented in Salzburg with a Nuclear Free Future Award for her work with children affected by the Chernobyl Disaster and her campaigning for a future free from Nuclear Power. This Austrian postage stamp was produced at the time of the awards event.



Training Programmes and Educational Visits

Our first educational visit to the UK took place in 1999 and we have since brought dozens of teachers, doctors, psychologists, managers of centres, local government officials and ministry representatives on visits here. They have been an extremely effective way of bringing about change, particularly for children with disabilities, and we are very grateful to all the education, health and social care professionals who have helped to make these visits so useful. Pictor Academy in Altrincham and Inscape School in



Stockport have played a big part in many of these visits. Jacqui Wheble, who was Head Teacher at Pictor till 2019 has also made many trips to Belarus as a volunteer and a trainer in working with children with autism.

In 2012 Deputy Social Protection Minister Alexander Rumak visited our Family Home 2000 and Rodni Kut and the following year we invited him with colleagues to visit the UK to look at the social and educational opportunities for young people with disabilities. One of our recent visits was for Vera Khitruk, the Head of Inclusive Education in



Belarus. **Natasha Samoilik**, who runs all our projects in Belarus, has accompanied many of these visits as interpreter.



It was in January 2000 that **Jean Holt** first visited Belarus. She had been the manager of a Children's Home and Family Placement Officer and was experienced in training. By April that year Jean had initiated a training programme in Gomel, at the request of the Education Ministry, and we were awarded a three year grant by the **Department for International Development**. This was followed for several years by grants from the **British Embassy** in Minsk. For twelve years Jean led or co-ordinated dozens of week-long training sessions with the support of a team of



social work professionals. Directors and staff from Orphanages, Children's Shelters and Social Centres throughout Gomel Region have benefited from these. The training, accompanied by publicity campaigns, has helped to bring about a complete change in attitude in Belarus to institutional care for children. Hundreds of children are now living in foster families and many of the orphanages have closed.

With dozens of professionals giving their time and expertise, we have carried out trainings in many aspects of child care and development. We have initiated a number of projects around 'Leaving Care' – first for children in the mainstream orphanages; then for children with mild disabilities at Ulookavye Orphanage; and later, in an 'Independence skills' project sponsored by the **US Embassy**, at Zhuravichi and a number of other institutions.



We have delivered a series of trainings in 'Restorative Practices' and launched a project designed to keep children out of custodial schools, funded by the **British Embassy** and the **Bearr Trust**. This was led by our current Training Co-ordinator **Geoff Wright**, who has also conducted a long series of trainings, mostly in Minsk, on the Principles and Practices of Social Work.

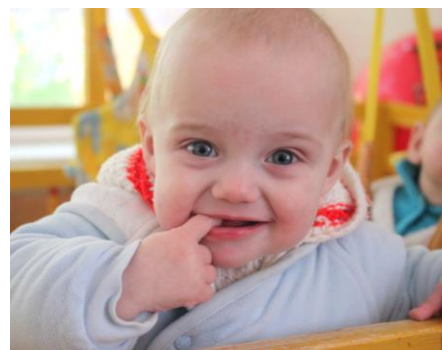
With another grant from the **US Embassy** we ran a project in 2014/15 aimed at finding foster families for children with mild disabilities, with excellent trainers from the UK taking part.

Managers from **Essex County Council** have recently delivered training in Gomel as part of a project funded by **UNICEF**. This took place in 2018/19 with 'Supporting Children Together' as the implementing partners. The purpose of the project was to support families with children with disabilities, helping the children to reach their full potential, and making sure that they do not end up in institutional care. Geoff Wright also delivered training and consultation for this very successful project.



Gomel Baby Home

We have been supporting the Baby Home since almost our first visit to Belarus – with deliveries of aid, educational visits to the UK for the director and senior staff and training programmes for other staff in Gomel. We have also provided training in temporary foster care, and worked with staff in the Baby Home to reduce the numbers of children living there. The Health Ministry are keen for this to happen and for Baby Homes to



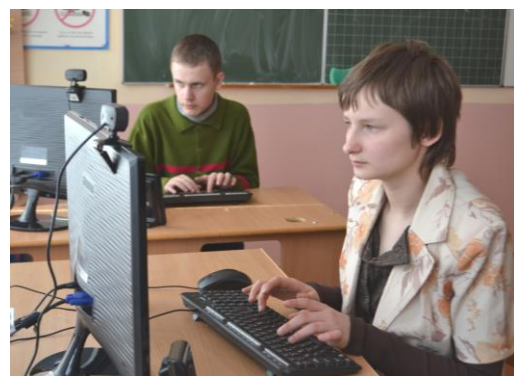
focus on severely disabled children and Palliative Care. And we are delighted that in 2020 our partners 'Supporting Children Together' will be working with **UNICEF** on a new project designed to prevent all reasonably healthy children from entering the home. Hopefully this will be followed by a further project to establish the home as a Palliative and Respite Care Centre.

Wonderful Godel!

For the last five years we have received fantastic regular support from Godel Technologies. Based in Manchester, the company also has offices in all the major cities in Belarus. Godel helps to fund the work of our Hospice team and our carers at Klimovka, and they have also sponsored the purchase of many computers for special schools and orphanages.



In 2018 we brought the Directors of Education and Social Protection for Gomel Region on a study visit to the UK with the region's Deputy Governor. They were delighted to visit Godel's headquarters in Manchester and meet their directors so they could thank them in person for their support for the children of Belarus.



Our Charity Shop in Crook

In 2011 *Chernobyl Children Crook*, a small charity in County Durham, passed on to us their charity shop on the town's high street. The shop already had a dedicated manager, **Gerald Hirst**, a great team of volunteers and a loyal customer base, so we were delighted! The shop is always busy, has a high turn-over and is a good source of regular income.

Since 2013 our Endon & Stoke group has run a very successful Market Stall in Stoke with volunteers staffing it three days a week.



Visit our website: www.chernobyl-children.org.uk Secure Donations can be made online

We are very grateful to all the individual donors, businesses, trusts and foundations, local authorities, church and peace groups, our own group co-ordinators and host families, convoy drivers, trainers and sanatorium volunteers who have given so much time, energy and financial support to the children of Belarus.

Special Thanks to Tom and Barbara Fryers and their 'Action for Disability' Trust which has given us generous funding to support projects to change the lives of people with disabilities every year since 2012.

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