

The Russia Review

August 2007 Volume III Issue 2
A publication of Comfort Foundation, USA

Comfort Foundation, USA
...financially and emotionally supports the staffs of Comfort Foundation, Russia and Living Word Bookstore as they minister to orphans and underprivileged children in the Vologda Oblast of northern Russia. By God's grace we are working to create a network of prayer and financial supporters from churches, organizations and individuals in the USA who will partner with us in long term ministry and enable us to meet the needs of our Russian staff and the children they serve.



A Note from Sherri.....

Troika is a Russian word for a carriage or sled drawn by three horses. Three horses pulling the load in the picture at the left would be appropriate; for children, it is an incredibly heavy load. This famous 19th century Russian painter, Perov, makes his point well. Sometimes adults saddle children with burdens they were never meant to carry. Wouldn't it be great if we could change the look of this picture? What if we had the Comfort Foundation Russian staff as the first horse? Wouldn't it be great if the second horse was the local church? What if the third horse was the government agency for children's rights? I am beginning to see this picture forming in Vologda and Cherepovets. Just this summer, after almost 10 years of ministry, Comfort Foundation staff received recognition and approval by the administrations of both cities. Local churches sent their members to help us visit the children in orphanages and put on camps. Individuals, churches and organizations in America provided financial and prayer support. None of us bears the whole burden. God does that. Let's keep bearing our load by providing the salaries for our Russian staff so they can work with churches and Russian agencies to free children to be children. *"The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the broken hearted, and to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn..."*

Isaiah 61:1-2.



"Troika" Vasily Perov, 1866

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THE PLIGHT OF CHILDREN AT RISK IN RUSSIA



An Epidemic of Hopelessness

Each child in a state-run orphanage is diagnosed as either normal or disabled at the age of four. Research has found that more than two-thirds of the children in Russian institutions have been wrongly diagnosed as mentally deficient and given the label "imbecile" for the rest of their lives with little hope for change. Those children classified as normal usually re-supported orphanage until they are approximately 16-17 years of age. Typically, they are ill-equipped for life on their own, and many fail to successfully make the transition from institutional to independent living. As the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Russia (AIDS in Russia is growing faster than in any other country), orphans become an increasingly at-risk group.



According to the 1998 Human Rights Watch Report entitled *Abandoned to the State*, of the more than 15,000 children who leave orphanages each year:



- 6,000 will be homeless
- 5,000 will be unemployed
- 3,000 will turn to crime
- 1,500 will commit suicide within a few years

More recently, the Russian Ministry of Education found that of those orphans aging out of institutions:

- 50% fall into a high-risk category
- 40% become drug users
- 40% commit crimes
- 10% commit suicide

Text taken from **Comission for Children at Risk Website**. <http://www.comission.org/go/plight>
Pictures taken from **Comfort Foundation in Vologda and Cherepovets**

COMFORT STAFF HELPED THESE CHILDREN DEFY STATISTICS...



Yana Gulaeva, 18
Orphanage 1
Vologda

Yana has just been accepted into the Pedagogical University as a Psychology major. She will be living in a hostel.



Illya Kuznetsov, 18
Orphanage 4
Vologda

Illya has successfully completed his first year of chef vocational school. He found a job this summer and is living with his grandmother.



Nikita Mustafyaev, 16
Foster Home
Cherepovets

Nikita attended Light of Hope programs and the staff found a foster home for him. He is currently playing guitar with the church praise and worship team.

NEWS FROM VOLOGDA



Laura, Ruslan and Christine at summer camp.

At the end of camp Ruslan and Zhenya visited Laura and popped in a DVD of famous Christian athletes talking about their faith and then a version of the Jesus film. Well, Ruslan asked if he could take the DVD with him to the orphanage to show the younger boys. He is passing on what he is learning about God to the younger children. I am very excited about that!!!!!!

Maxim and Pasha lived with Sherri for two years and have lived with a Christian family for 6 years.

The Department of Education has started a new foster program to try to place children in homes. Officials requested that Comfort staff ask pastors if they would find people from their churches to take these children. They commented that their best chance of finding people with pure motives would come from the Christian community. That is such a great example of how God has been honored and glorified in the consistency of the Comfort Foundation staff.



Living Word Bookstore Director, Olga V. recently told me this story. “One day at work I prayed that God would send people to buy Bibles. We had sold a lot of other books but I really wanted people to buy Bibles.” That day in a period of four hours she sold 13 Bibles. Since the store has moved to its new location in the center of Vologda there has been a dramatic increase in book sales.

Building Update

The current owner of the building failed to secure the state before adding the second floor. The until the owner produces the permit and three to it. We have raised 91% of the \$130,000 needed right. We need \$12,000. More in September!!!!



a building permit from building sale is on hold other documents related to buy the building out-

Van Update

It’s almost dead as in “Princess Bride” almost dead. We will sell it for what we can and thanks to the generosity of a donor we are getting a newer, bigger and better van.



NEWS FROM CHEREPOVETS

Comfort Foundation and Light of Hope Children's Center have been recognized as one of the most consistent and genuine children's non profit organizations in Cherepovets. The outgoing administration recommended Comfort and Light of Hope to the new administration and things have been going very smoothly.

Over the last year Light of Hope has encouraged over 180 children at their center with an average monthly total of 25-35. They have begun extensive work with the families of several children and really are standing in the gap in a neighborhood where terrible things happen. Our new ministry in New Corners has been helped greatly by several parents who do not necessarily believe in God but want their children to be involved with Christians because Christians spend their own money and time to help these children grow emotionally and spiritually. Recently 5 parents submitted a letter of request to the local administration asking that the Comfort Foundation be allowed to work with their children and asking the city mayor to find them a place to meet.



Comfort Foundation and Light of Hope presented a program to the mayor's department. The program was written by one of our staff members and has been determined to be one of the best programs submitted for the 2007-2008 school year. The program is about teaching school children to respect ecology. The good news is that it gives the Comfort Foundation a good reputation and lets people know we are interested in helping children respect God's creation. I am very excited for our staff in Cherepovets and thankful for the children who are receiving encouragement, love and respect in the name of Christ.

Comfort Foundation, Russia has a new Director...

Meet Katya Labinsteva, the new Director for Comfort Foundation, Russia in Vologda. Katya loves God, attends the Methodist Church, is a Sunday School teacher, loves children, has organized camps, speaks fluent English, is a lawyer and is familiar with computer technology. Katya's church has also supported orphanages and she is experienced in working with orphans. She is 25 and married to Yuri who also speaks fluent English. Katya is very grateful to work for the foundation and we feel (all the staff including Lena Z. from Cherepovets) that she is an excellent person for the job.



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Building Blocks of Comfort Foundation...

Comfort Foundation, USA, Board Members:

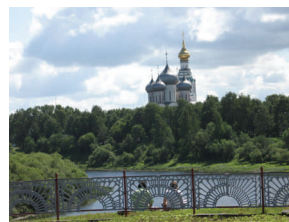
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Sponsoring Churches:

Central Presbyterian	St. Louis, MO
Greentree Community	St. Louis, MO

Churches who visited Comfort Russia in 2007:

Bonhomme Presbyterian	St. Louis, MO
Grace Bible	Wallingford, PA
Bethel Baptist	Wilmington, DE



Partnering Mission Agency:

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RANDOM THOUGHTS AND COMMENTS

For first time readers of this newsletter this section has no real purpose so read at your own risk.

1. I had the stomach flu when I flew to Russia in June.
2. I was in the middle seat of my row on the plane.
3. My suitcase didn't arrive.
4. I still had the stomach flu when I got in a cab at the airport for my two hour, rush hour ride to the hotel.
5. The hotel couldn't find my name on the registration list.
6. The bank in the hotel was closed so I had to crawl off the premises to change money and look for water.
7. I felt sorry for myself.
8. I forgot to take my debit card with me on this trip so the couple whose wedding I attended got **one** skillet for a gift. Oh well. It was a nice skillet but it was just **one** skillet and not a nifty little set of three.
9. I really enjoyed watching our staff work together as they served the kids.
10. I really missed being a part of the team.
11. I really missed doing the ministry.
12. I felt sorry for myself (again).
13. Before leaving for Russia I went to the Basilica in St. Louis. The beautiful mosaics and the smell of incense remind me of Russia and I wanted to "feel" Russia. I sat and prayed asking God to help me find a verse on the frescos that would inspire me and set the tone for my upcoming trip. So I looked up and there it was, "Unless a seed falls and dies..." Not **quite** the inspiration I wanted but that is exactly what God wanted to say to me. "You are done here, Sherri. Let the others do what I have asked **them** to do. Why don't you just do what I have asked **you** to do. It's not about you, Sherri. Why don't we make it about My Son, Jesus and what is best for the Kingdom?"
14. So, I cried and died in Vologda and Cherepovets.
15. Then I came home to Kirkwood, my church, my friends, my condo, and my job with the Comfort Foundation, USA. It feels good. I am glad to be home.
16. The ministry in Russia is God's. That's my message to myself and to all of you. God is in it and let's do what we can so that our Russian friends can walk with orphans, encourage them to respond to God's love and help them live productive lives.