

Small Group Home Project



There are many thousands of children growing up in orphanages in Belarus. 'Leaves of Hope' has been working in Belarus since 1999 to try to help some of these children. You will see from other reports on our website that we set up a Fostering Project to get some of the children out of the orphanages and into Belarusian foster families, and also a project offering help and support to families struggling to keep their children, in order to prevent them from being abandoned. Both of these projects have been very successful.

We take groups of young people from the UK and, with the help and support of some adult volunteers, to paint and decorate the orphanages to try to improve the lives of the children still living there. We also run a summer play scheme each year in an orphanage to inject a little fun into the lives of these children. This is of huge benefit to the orphans but also for the young people taking part in the trip.

All these projects have helped many Belarusian children. However, there is still a great problem for children with disabilities who have a particularly difficult time in Belarus and are destined to spend their whole lives in an institution unless we can help them.

We have for a long time thought about the possibility of trying to set up a small group home to enable a few of these disabled children to have the experience of some normality in their lives and the individual love and care of family life.

We have been very lucky that a foster carer, Natasha Yanushkevitch, who came on one of our very first courses, has also felt a calling to help children with disabilities and approached the Belarusian government for accommodation so that she could open a small group home for up to 7 children with disabilities.

Natasha and her daughter



A flat in Minsk was available but it needed a lot of work to make it suitable for these children and we knew it couldn't happen without our help.



We were very fortunate that Sean Holman, a young man from Bexhill, who is a self-employed plumber, tiler and painter and decorator, together with Nick Martin of West Coast Access Property Developers, an electrician and general builder from Aberystwyth, volunteered to come over to Minsk for 2 weeks and use their time and skills to refurbish the flat.

So, in September Val, the director of 'Leaves of Hope', and I drove over to Minsk with them for two weeks and together we made a very good start on the work needed.

Sean and Nick built a wall to make an extra bedroom, plumbed in a small extra toilet in the bathroom, a bidet for the hygiene of the children (some of them may not be toilet trained), tiled the bathroom and toilet and did various plumbing electrical jobs.



Men at work





Oleg Tagay, our interpreter for the fortnight, and I painted the new bedroom which we are hoping will be for



Vova, a young boy of 8, who is profoundly deaf and has other disabilities and whom you can see featured in another article on this website.

Vova



The results of the team's hard work.

The new bedroom.....



the newly tiled bathroom.....



..... and toilet



Now some disabled children will have the chance to leave their orphanages and live in a small group home with Natasha, her husband Andrei and their family.



Here is the foster carer, Natasha, with the "workers", her own two children, and in the front Vika and Misha, two of the children from the orphanage who will be moving in with her.



Nick, Sean and Barbara

Natasha will need ongoing support from 'Leaves of Hope' to sustain this project, providing some extra help to enable her to work individually with these children and to supplement the medical needs of the children, as the help from the government for children with disabilities is very limited.

So, we need to increase the momentum of raising money.

Helping 7 children may seem a drop in the ocean when there are over 25,000 children currently living in orphanages in Belarus. But any help you can give will make all the difference to the lives and futures of these 7.

We also hope that the success of this project will encourage the government to view children with disabilities more positively and see that they deserve a future too. Then, hopefully, we will see more children with disabilities moving out of the orphanages and benefiting from the experience of family life in the future.

Leaves of Hope will, of course, continue with its other work of refurbishment, play scheme and involvement of young people from the UK.

Barbara Messenger
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You can make a donation towards this project by sending cheques made payable to Leaves of Hope to 39 Okehampton Avenue, Llanrumney, Cardiff. CF3 5QY or by going to www.justgiving.com and typing in Leaves of Hope.