



“LEAVES OF HOPE” FOR BELARUSIAN CHILDREN  
REGISTERED CHARITY NO. 1077872

## ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

6 November 2010

### Chair's Report

It has been another busy year. Working with our Partners in Belarus we have concentrated our efforts on consolidating our various initiatives to ensure that principles of good child care practice are embedded in routine mainstream provision.

We have continued to fund the salaries of the two specialist prevention project workers based with our partner NGO, BelAPDliMI, until July this year and they provide regular written accounts of their work. They have responded to the reducing number of requests from maternity hospitals where there is a threat of abandonment, particularly of children with disabilities, and are sustaining their relationships with national policy makers and locally professionals. Their work continues to feature in newspaper articles, radio and television, and they have continued to lecture on foundation courses in social pedagogical education institutes.

Our work in Zhodina Orphanage has continued to flourish. The staff and the children look forward to our visits. The summer play scheme and the Christmas parties have provided wonderful opportunities for fun, love and laughter. They have provided a powerful demonstration of how important this is for children if they are to develop into healthy adults capable of loving their own children. Looking back it is hard to remember how just how sad and contained the children appeared when we first met them.

The changes have been underpinned by staff training and the example set by our volunteers in their interactions with the children. It has been quite moving to see how wholeheartedly staff have embraced this approach to care and the extent to which it is now embedded in routine practice.

We were very grateful for our grant of £5,000 from an anonymous donor. Two of our experienced trainers were able to provide another course in March for 30 participants on "Professionals and foster carers working together for children with disabilities". This was very well evaluated and very successful. Attitudes are indeed changing in every level of society. Efforts are being made to provide substitute families for children who cannot be cared for by their own parents. There is very clear evidence of moves to include children and young people with disabilities in the mainstream life of families schools and communities.

Work with individual children has continued using the ring fenced money from the sponsorship fund. We detail their individual stories in other parts of our website and will continue to support them for as long as we can. We are delighted that one of most experienced foster carers (she attended our very first course in 2000) has agreed to befriend a child from Zhdanovici Orphanage with a view to fostering. He is a profoundly deaf child whom we first met in the abandoned baby

unit of Borovliani Hopsital. We will continue to support this placement professionally and financially. He is a child with very special needs and although the State will pay a fostering allowance it is likely that he will need significantly more by way of special equipment and specialist health care.

Leaves of Hope is a small Charity with very limited resources but we feel we use every penny to maximum effect. We have no paid staff in the UK everyone contributes as a volunteer. By careful management of our finances, a very favourable dollar exchange rate, and some magnificent fund raising efforts we have been able to maintain all our projects beyond our original expectations. In the current economic climate we cannot be sure that even this modest level of funding can be sustained but provided we are cautious and realistic in taking on further work are confident we can maintain current commitments.

Overall we are confident that we have achieved what we set out to do and that what we have done is fully sustainable. Our success is due to the efforts of many able and willing UK based volunteers, and importantly, a close and mutually respectful relationship with our in-country partner BelAPDIIMI. Leaves of Hope has worked very closely with them for 12 years and have contributed a lot to their development as an independent authoritative organisation. While their situation will always be somewhat precarious, support from various European and American organisations and Trusts has secured short term viability. We will continue to work with them in securing and embedding fundamental policy changes for children and young people with disabilities.

Much remains to be done and the financial uncertainties will always be difficult for us but we will continue, within the limits of our finances, continue to work with our in-country partners to raise awareness of the needs of children and young people with disabilities and their families, and to develop resources for their care in their local communities.

I end as always by saying an enormous thank you to everyone. There are too many people to name individually, but to everyone who helps us raise money, who gives their time freely, who continue to support us and work for us, our wonderful trainers and sponsoring organisations, our tireless Trustees, our invaluable Treasurer who keeps our accounts in excellent order, our secretary, our trainers, our co-ordinators in Minsk – Valentina and Luda, Lienna Titova, president of BelAPDIIMI, and of course again, a very, very special thanks to Val without whom none of this would have happened.

Thank you everyone

Margaret Bamford  
November 2010

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