



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

## **ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

24 January 2012

### **Chair’s Report for the year 2010 - 11**

This is an aggregated report of the work of the Charity. This year, as before, we have continued to focus our activities on consolidating and embedding principles of good child care practice in routine mainstream in Country provision.

We have continued to work closely with our partner NGO, BelAPDiMI (Belarusian Association for Handicapped Children and Young People) and our proud to have been instrumental in encouraging and supporting the appointment of the current Director of that organisation. She has proved to be a most effective leader working tirelessly to promote the needs of children and young people with disabilities in Belarus. She has established excellent working relationships with key Ministries, including the previously elusive Ministry of Health, and they are all now beginning to work together producing important joint strategic policy statements. The Association’s views on proposals are sought and respected. One such joint statement was issued following a ‘round table’ conference organised by BelAPDiMI in October 2011. It espoused commitment to a model of an integrated approach to planning and practice for babies, children and young people with disabilities, that it would be hard to better.

Of course, the gulf still exists between aspirations and funding but it is a significant development and provides a very real sense of achievement for all of us who have worked so hard to change attitudes and practice towards disability and the rights of children to a family.

An important contribution to culture change is the work done at ground level in Zhodina Orphanage. We reported last year that ‘the summer play schemes and the Christmas parties provide wonderful opportunities for fun, love and laughter. They provide a powerful demonstration of how important this is for children if they are to develop into healthy adults capable of loving their own children’. This remains the case. It was regrettable that the heavy snowfalls in Britain prevented Christmas travel this year but the summer scheme was very successful and it was good to note the extent to which staff are now allowing themselves to show their emotions and the positive impact this has had on their relationships with the children.

This was the first year of air travel for the summer play scheme with all participants funding their own flights. We have taken a decision that we will no longer travel overland; it is expensive and potentially dangerous. We have had

some narrow traffic escapes and the camper van has become increasingly unreliable. While it was a very successful play scheme it was not without its problems and some valuable lessons were learned. It was a large group and catering was more of an issue than had been anticipated. The larger numbers also required more interpreters who, in future, if inexperienced, will undergo an induction session by the in-country co-ordinator emphasising the importance of boundaries.

The Continuing prudent use of our resources together with modest fund raising has enabled us for, yet another year, to continue funding the salaries of the two specialist project workers based with BelAPDiMI. This means we have been able to 'stretch' three years of funding to nine! It has meant that our two workers have been able to continue visiting other parts of the country promoting the concept of prevention of abandonment of babies with disabilities; they have been able to participate in national conferences; promote their work through radio and television appearances and newspaper articles. Their lectures on foundation courses in social pedagogical education institutes are now a standard part of the curriculum. We will continue to use the Prevention project's remaining funds to support their efforts for as long as the fund lasts.

As the threat of abandonment in Minsk is now rare and there are very few referrals from the maternity hospitals the project workers have concentrated more on work with individual children and foster carers. The profoundly deaf child in Zhdanovich Orphanage whom we had hoped to place with one of our most experienced foster carers in a small group home did not materialise in spite of very careful and thorough preparation. Volunteers travelled from England to Minsk to carry out structural adaptations to her flat, and one of the project workers worked hard on introductions, accompanying him on weekly visits to the family, and taking him to a speech and behavioural therapist.

Sadly as the plan progressed it became clear that this child's needs were more complex than had been appreciated at the outset. He needed constant supervision and care and would have required a full time carer for the placement to succeed. We could not be sure that we could sustain such a long term commitment, and we could not rely on the State to assume responsibility. But it has taught us, and BelAPDiMI, so much about the about the challenges facing the Government in implementing meaningful change for children with special needs. That knowledge will be put to good use and we will continue to support, financially, efforts of all our foster carers to care for children with special needs.

Recognising the significant progress that has been made in securing and embedding fundamental policy changes for children and young people with disabilities, and the very deep respect in which we hold our in-country partner, we have agreed with BelAPDiMI that they will take over the day to day case management of the individual children with whom we have been working. Leaves of Hope will continue to provide the funding and access to external medical support to which we are committed. BelAPDiMI will provide regular 6 monthly written reports and reviews of individual children following a simple structure which has been provided along the lines of reviews of Children in Care in this country. This is an entirely appropriate decision in view of what was expressed in last year's report about our confidence that we have achieved what we set out to do twelve years ago and that what we have done is fully sustainable.

The future remains uncertain politically and economically but we will continue to do all we can to continue offering fun and friendship for the children who remain in orphanages; and to support our projects workers and in-country partner in their continuing efforts in the field of disability and the rights of children to a family.

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 anonymous donors, 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, Elena Titova, president of BelAPDIIMI, and of course again, very, very special thanks to Val without whom none of this would have happened.

Thank you everyone

Margaret Bamford  
January 2012