

Kolichiev Orphanage Service Project—2005



In 2004 Marjorie Pryce-Jones was invited to address the Network Meeting at Huish in Somerset. Her chosen subject was to explain the plight of the Street Children of Russia. Marjorie successfully managed to stun everyone at this meeting. Shortly afterwards, Eric Chapman made approaches to see if the Network could contribute anything in a tangible way to assist Marjorie's work in Russia. So, a service project was borne.



The Network Russia Scout Fellowship makes frequent visits to Russia and nearby territories who were formally part of the old USSR, but the visit in July of 2005 had a different reason for

Network members and Explorer Scouts travelling to the Russian Federation.

For the first time, we were to visit with a view to carrying out volunteer work, which in this case was to be at a children's orphanage south east of Moscow. South-east of Moscow by the way is a three hour train journey! The concept of volunteer work is somewhat of a mystery to most Russian authorities since it does not really form part of their cultural base.



Network Russia has always supported the Street Children of Russia through charities based in the UK. They are the beneficiaries of the proceeds

from raffles and various collections made at meetings and events. Most members understand the fact that there are between 1 and 2 million street children in Russia however, most do not understand the underlying problems that these children have and the lack of opportunities to regain their position in society. (For a fully resume of the Street Children of Russia, log on to the Network Russia web site – networkrussia.org.uk).

So July saw some eleven Leaders and ten Explorer/Network Scouts departing for Kolichiev Orphanage, some two and half hours train journey south-east of Moscow. At Kolichiev, they would be joined by Marie Revenko (Masha) who would stay with the group until they returned to the UK.

It's probably fairly safe to say that not many in the party knew what to expect when they arrived, least of all Eric Chapman, the party leader, who soon found out that not many arrangements were in place for one reason or another. Eric's headaches continued throughout the week, however, they were alleviated by everyone doing what was possible and just 'getting on with it'.

We had not really expected the children to be at the orphanage. We understood them to have left for their summer camp which we would visit after carrying out some refurbishment at the orphanage. Surprise! They were all there!.. And would be for the next day and half.

Also, they were not going to the expected summer camp site and our visas did not allow us to travel to the new site. On reflection, this was probably fortuitous since the new site was ten hours away in the opposite direction from St. Petersburg, where we would end up at the end of the visit.

So in true Scouting tradition, it was all hands to the pump and change everything. Just like that! We would use our craft items that we had brought for the summer camp at the orphanage whilst the children were still there. Some refurbishment work would start at the same time, but the real work would start once the children left the orphanage. Eric would feel the affects of a road journey to Moscow for a long time, to see if was possible to change rail tickets for later in visit. It wasn't and there are potholes in Russian roads!! Ask Eric!

The handicraft bases were excellently received by the children and I think everyone, children and ourselves thoroughly enjoyed our time with each other.

On the second day, the children departed for their summer camp and I think we were all amazed at their patience as they had to wait two hours for their 'coaches' to arrive. Whilst they were waiting, we took the opportunity of presenting them with a full football kit which we had taken out from the UK. No time to play



Kolichiev Orphanage Service Project 2005 continued

now, but we are sure they will appreciate it at a later date. Once there, loaded up, a cloud of diesel exhaust, and the two 'coaches' were off with all of us waving them on their way.

Then everyone got very dirty, very hot and very sweaty! Several projects got under way. Paul and Malcolm undertook the job of putting us in the

dark by renewing electrical distribution boxes in the building and ran the

gauntlet with the kitchen staff—'just one more time—it won't be off for long!'

Peter Hobson and 'his gang' started to rip off the old wall cladding in the stairwells and the team then proceeded to dust off the walls which resulted in 'fog in the stairwells—not forecasted!' This is not a poor photograph—rather an excellent



find did not materialise, however the whole event did make for lessons in lease-lend on ladders and hammers! You had to be there to appreciate the limitations.

Nevertheless, the work continued and we were all committed to finishing what we had started before we left. We did finish and everyone felt that it looked much better at the end than when we had started. Job well done!

During our time in Kolichiev, the local civil Administration invited us to visit their new impressive leisure

centre where we tested out the various items in the gym and viewed the remainder of the building. Later in the week we visited the nearby ancient

town of Kolumna and had a guided tour of the various buildings, a visit to the local museum and to a monastery. A lot of effort had been expended on the town and they were rightly proud to show it



photo of a dust storm!

The electrical team also ran

cable to the refurbished shower room so that the new shower could be powered up.

Whilst all this was going on, the remainder of the team were continuing with renewing the wall cladding in the corridors and recreation area. This proved to be a real challenge since the tools we expected to

off. On the last night, the orphanage gave us a party. It was supposed to be a BBQ but for once the weather dictated that BBQ's were not a good idea! After all the hard work and the problematic conditions that had prevailed earlier, this provided a vent for everyone just to simply laugh and enjoy themselves. There was one brief moment of seriousness when we were told about the uncorroborated second 'bombings' in London, but we decided to continue on the basis that we couldn't do anything about it in deepest Russia anyway.

So it was time to leave the orphanage and we were seen off by the local civil dignitaries who presented us with some souvenirs of Kolumna. In turn, we presented all our remaining craft materials and electric drills and routers (shipped ahead) to the orphanage. Friendship beads were also presented to all the orphanage staff and civil visitors.

Then we were off to St. Petersburg via the overnight sleeper from Moscow. Our tickets only went to Novgorod so we had to re-book on to a local feeder train at 5 am in the morning. We arrived at St. Petersburg and were met by Natalia Skorokhodova who had made extended hostel arrangements for us there. Adjusting our arrangements made more time available in St. Petersburg and there was time to take late night



river trips, visit all those places you had not seen before, and enjoy this city of culture. No matter how many times you go there, there is always something new to see again and again.

In St. Petersburg, we 'took over' the Sleep Cheap Hostel which is just around the corner



Kolichiev Orphanage Service Project 2005 continued



from Natalia's home and whilst the hostel was not spacious, it did provide the minimum at a very reasonable cost. It was clean and well kept, and did test relationships at times!

The return to Manchester was relatively uneventful apart from the baggage handlers at Paris going on strike whilst

we were boarding, Matt also lost part of his luggage and heavy rain at Manchester greeted us on arrival!

Despite the problems, all of which were overcome one way or the other, I think everyone will recall experiences that they will remember for a long time. Lessons learnt off this visit will undoubtedly be taken heed of for the next one and at the end of the day, the

visit did succeed in meeting its purpose in providing some tangible help to some young people much less fortunate than ourselves—hopefully they will remember us as those people who turned up with funny uniforms—a source of private amusement apparently. Well done everyone !

Graham Hall
NRSF ☺

