



May 2012

I returned to Belarus in May 2012 for a visit of a week, accompanied by my mother, Sheila. We both covered all our own expenses and were delighted to be allowed to stay with the Kartuzov family again. Lena and Sasha are well and all five of the children are doing well in terms of health and education.



Ludmila and daughters

Luda is a lady whom I met for the first time during my visit to Belarus in September. She has two daughters of her own and two daughters who she has adopted. Luda and her husband split up last year and Luda was forced to move out of the family home with her daughters. Since this time, she has been living in her brother's dacha (summer house) on the outskirts of Rogachev, which has no heating and minimal facilities. The youngest daughter, Katya, has now had her squint surgery which has improved her eyesight.



We provided school uniforms and warm clothing for the family over the winter months and this has helped them greatly. They all work hard at the dacha, growing many different types of fruit and vegetable in order to try to provide for themselves. However, they are struggling and we are going to continue to support them.

Kolya, Tonya and children

It was wonderful to see Kolya, Tonya and their five children again. This is a family whom we have supported for many years now. Their children, including Maxim who is adopted, are all doing well. They are provided with school uniforms and vitamins for the children every winter as well as a winter food package.



Oksana and Serousha

Serousha is now ten years old and I have known him since his birth. He was born with a severe heart disease (coarctation of the aorta with ASD and VSD) and has, against the odds, survived multiple operations and appeared to be thriving in September, when I last saw him. Unfortunately, he had been admitted to hospital prior to my arrival. The investigations had been so far inconclusive but he was being investigated for hepatitis C. This is a serious concern for his health and may even prove fatal.

Working alongside Oksana, Serousha's mother, we have arranged for him to be transferred to Minsk hospital for further investigation and management of his condition. I will be keeping in close contact to monitor his progress.

Alla and family

I met with Alla and her four sons, Gleb, Kane, Ronan and Guerman and husband Kolya for the first time in September. All four of the boys have problems with radiation-induced fibrosis of the lungs, which causes them to have asthma-like symptoms. Alla had lost a baby previously due to rhesus incompatibility, a type of blood disorder where the mother's blood attacks the baby's blood. Alla was pregnant when I saw her in September but unfortunately, this baby also died. The rest of the family is doing well and recovering from their loss.

Artom

Artom continues to amaze me, as he has for the last fourteen years! His on-going heart problems are stable and the problems that have left him mostly blind are also stable. He is no longer at school as he is now seventeen and his health is precarious so he has not been able to pursue education any further. He helps his parents with their craft and artwork which is sold to try to support the family. His parents continue to work for the local traditional craft school just outside Rogachev.

Alicia and family



Alicia and her four children are all relatively well. The repairs to their house are gradually being completed. They now have two rooms which are finished and able to be heated to a degree. Over the last eight months, we have provided school uniforms, warm winter clothes, a large wardrobe and winter food provisions. The two of her children who have renal (kidney) problems, Arina and Ruslana, have only had mild infections over the winter, which we have paid for treatment for and vitamins to try to prevent further problems.

Larissa and Peter

In September, I met Larissa and Peter for the first time. Peter had a stroke when he was 24 years old and now is paralysed on the right side of his body (hemiparesis). Larissa escaped a violent marriage in Russia and is now living back in Rogachev, where she grew up. Larissa has one son, Sasha from her first marriage and Larissa and Peter have a daughter, Lena, from their marriage. Due to his disability, Peter has struggled to find work but he works part-time for the local orthodox church and Larissa works in a shop. They have received help with the repairs to their home which were necessary to help Peter and because he was not able to undertake all the work himself. The repairs are now mostly complete and the house is looking fantastic. We will continue to support the family where required.

Slava

Sadly, Slava, who we had supported for many years, died in October, aged just 21 years old. He had bone marrow suppression caused by radiation which caused him to have minimal functioning immune system, impaired clotting of the blood and many other problems. Before his death, we had transferred him to a hospital where pain relief was available for him and he was kept comfortable. We visited his grave with his parents to pay our respects to him.

Irina and Andrei

Andrei is Slava's brother and has three delightful daughters with his wife Irina. We have supported the family for several years now by providing furniture for their home, which is still undergoing

repairs, warm clothing for the children during the winter, vitamins and winter food packages. The family are doing well and the children's health appears to be relatively good.

Natasha, Misha and children

I first met Natasha and Misha over ten years ago. Misha had an accident whilst working on a railway which caused him to have his leg amputated. They had five children of their own at this point and we provided them with a washing machine in order to help them.

Since I had last seen them, they have adopted two more children, Olya and Maxim, and their oldest daughter, Marina, has had a baby with her husband. Marina and her husband live with the family as they cannot afford their own house currently and their baby, Milana (Mila), is now two months old. The family also have Natasha's grandmother living with them, who is ninety years old and in poor health.

With so many people living in the house, they have had to take out many bank loans and extend their house. Misha works from home sewing different products for companies but this does not bring much money to the family. Natasha works in a local shop but this is also not well paid.

One item that they really required before the summer was a large fridge. With eleven people in the household, this is clearly essential, so we bought this for them before we left. Unfortunately, there was not enough time to take a photo of the family with the fridge but I shall rectify this in August.



Grammar school

We were very pleased to have the opportunity to visit the grammar school again during our time in Belarus, where we met with many of the pupils who study English. Two lessons of conversational English were enjoyed by everyone.

The printer-scanner-copier that we provided previously is still in good working order and we shall purchase another printer cartridge and a year's supply of paper during our visit in August.

Disabled people's centre

The centre for young adults with various disabilities, which we have been supporting for some time, was a real high point of our visit. The staff and young adults performed an amazing concert for us, which we really enjoyed. They also showed us their impressive art work, which had been made possible by our support of the centre, enabling them to purchase art materials.

The washing machines that we had purchased previously are in good working order and are regularly used to teach people who attend the centre how to perform basic household chores. They are also taught to cook and garden as well as having the opportunity to take part in fitness classes, dancing, acting and art projects.

The centre currently has no hot water and this is something that they would benefit from in term of teaching the users of the centre further household skills but it would also be useful with running the centre during the cold winter months. During our visit in August, we will be purchasing a water heater for the centre.

Anna, Sasha and Sofia

Anna is Galina Bordukova's fourth child of six and she got married to Sasha in September last year. They have had a beautiful daughter together who is called Sofia. Unfortunately, at her birth, Sofia passed meconium (her first stool) before her delivery and inhaled a significant amount of this, causing her to have birth asphyxia. She was very unwell following her birth and kept in hospital for several weeks. This is going to cause her long-term health problems.

Sofia has now recovered sufficiently that she is at home with Anna and Sasha, who now live in Minsk. However, it is expected that she will have long-term health problems as a result of her traumatic birth. I was very honoured that Anna and Sasha have asked me to be Sofia's godmother and the baptism will be arranged in August.



Conclusions

I was pleased to meet with some of the families that we have been helping over the last few years. During our visit in August, our summer school project will be launched by Sheila and Ellie whilst I shall continue to visit families and meet new members of the organisation.