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ORPHANS IN CONTEMPORARY RUSSIA: THE RUSSIAN ORPHAN OPPORTUNITY FUND

Long before we met in 2007, *Road to Emmaus* staff had heard reports of ground-breaking work by a young Orthodox English-American couple with Moscow orphans and street children. Andrew and Georgia Williams had started the Russian Orphan Opportunity Fund a decade earlier, as a newly married couple, to create educational and vocational opportunities for children and youth in Russian orphanages, as well as for young people who had previously been institutionalized. Founded in 1998, ROOF focuses on creating a supportive community—a place where relationship becomes transformative as orphans, staff, and volunteers offer their talents and resources to help one another overcome the disadvantages of past experiences and to become the people God created them to be. In the following interview, Andrew and Georgia describe the fund's continuing work with orphanage administrators and care-takers to improve the lives of institutionalized youth, including those in the so-called 'psycho-neurological' orphanages, and ROOF's highly successful post-orphanage education community.

RTE: Andrew and Georgia, please begin by telling us about yourselves and how you began working with orphans in Russia.

ANDREW: I'm from Staffordshire in England, and visited Russia for the first time when I was studying music at Oxford. While at Oxford I began attend-

Opposite: Orphans and volunteers at ROOF's Belskoye-Ustye summer camp, 2011.

ing an Anglican Church and after working as a schoolteacher in Oxfordshire for a year, I saw an advert for a teaching position at the British International School in Moscow. I applied for it and got the job. During the year I taught for them, I was in the Metro one day and saw a very bedraggled boy who was obviously living on the streets. I thought then that if I were to stay longer in Russia, I would like to do something for the kind of children who were unable to go to an expensive school—although of course, the children of diplomats and wealthy businessmen have their own problems. I didn't have a way to do that until Georgia stepped in. We had both arrived in August of 1996, although we only met later at St. Andrew's Anglican Church in Moscow, where I had become director of music.

GEORGIA: I was raised in Racine, Wisconsin with an evangelical Protestant background, and have been interested in Russia and Eastern Europe since I was very young. I played piano and violin and did gymnastics, so all of my heroes were Russian and Eastern European, and I began to learn Russian at a very young age. I studied Economics with a minor in Russian Studies at Princeton and by the time I graduated in 1993 I'd spent several summers working in Russia. After graduation, I went into strategy consulting for investment banks in London. By 1996 I was having a crisis of conscience over ethical issues in the trade and decided that the best way to settle this was to quit my job and leave, so I bought a car and drove to Russia, where I took a job in a Russian bank. That crisis of conscience had also led me back to Christianity after considering myself an atheist for fifteen years. I began attending an Anglican Church in London, and continued at St. Andrew's after I moved to Moscow.

After living in Moscow for close to a year, I began looking for a charity project to get involved with because I needed to do something about the difference between my standard of living and what I was seeing on the streets. At St. Andrew's, I met a retired American teacher who wanted to start a charity for orphans. His mother had been an orphan from the Ukraine who had emigrated to the United States, and he wanted to give something back. He prayed for help one day to get this started in our Bible study, and I went up to him afterwards and said, "Listen, I write business plans." We began working together and he helped out financially for the first few years of ROOF's existence, though his commitment didn't end up being what he initially hoped since he was badly hit by the 1998 market crash. My contribution

was to come up with a plan that included finding out what orphans needed. I started using lunch hours at the bank and weekends to interview orphanage directors and figure out what wasn't being done by corporate sponsors.

RTE: What was being done at that point?

GEORGIA: Two types of things. The first was supplying things such as paint, furniture, or playground equipment, where you could see the result. The second was when a company would do something like sponsor thirty orphans on a trip to Spain for a month. This was generous but actually not helpful, because the kids would come back having seen a much higher standard of living that they couldn't have. The orphanage directors repeatedly told us that the psychological effect of this was very negative.

ANDREW: In a sense they were saying, "We've got all this money and can check you into this place with a beautiful beach, where everything is very nice and it looks like no one has to work, and then we will take you back. This isn't for you. This is for us. Sorry."

GEORGIA: It became clear that there were two things orphanage directors needed help with: the first was support to keep the kids from falling behind in school. The Russian standards for elementary and high school education are much higher than in the U.S., and in much of western Europe where parental help with homework is assumed and essential. We found that about 80% of the orphans are two years behind in school by the age of twelve; after twelve that gap just snowballs, and they can't get through high school. You end up with a situation where the kids leave at eighteen with less than an eighth-grade education. The second need was for help with the transition between the orphanage and life after the orphanage. The traditional links between the Soviet industries who hired the orphans after graduation were severed in the early 1990's with the privatization of national industries.

This is where Andrew and I met because after I understood that the thrust of the charity needed to be educational, I began to cast around for teachers. When I approached him at St. Andrew's, he agreed to be on the first ROOF board of directors. That was how we got to know each other.



Georgia and Andrew Williams, Long Island, 2006.

The Russian Orphan Opportunity Fund

RTE: How did ROOF take off?

GEORGIA: We decided that we should open programs to tutor kids in as many orphanages as possible on the small budget that we had. In 1998 after the market crash, teachers were not paid very well, and for \$4.00 an hour we could hire very good teachers who would also be mentors to the children. We looked for people who could contribute both head and heart to get around the problem of Soviet mentality.

ANDREW: If you are working within a system, you become used to a certain way of working, and even though the system is gone and you didn't particularly support it, you've still been formed by it. That is the way you're used to teaching.

GEORGIA: I have to say that this attitude was a bit of hubris on our part because now, fifteen years later, it's clear that the Soviet educational system was a lot better than the one that's been developed since on Western models. I think what we were rightly keen to avoid was the old Soviet determinist



Andrew and son Theo, Russia, 2011.

attitudes that stigmatize people based on their backgrounds. And, of course, we wanted to avoid atheistic attitudes.

ANDREW: In the Soviet Union they really did care about having well-educated people in all positions. Now people just want the qualifications to get the best jobs, and these qualifications aren't always come by honestly.

GEORGIA: Andrew and I were married in 1998, just before the program began. The market, which had been a little sluggish, crashed while we were on our honeymoon, and in the fallout we lost our sponsor. But that year, with the money we already had, we hired eight teachers, mostly young graduate students, and we worked in four orphanages, teaching all school subjects to over 200 students.

ANDREW: After one year, the results were very good and word got around quickly. None of the children in the four orphanages we'd been working in had fallen any further behind and most were beginning to catch up. This was extremely unusual.

GEORGIA: When I first went to the orphanage directors, they were skeptical. They thought I was a lunatic crazy American who wasn't going to come

through, but by the end of that first school year when it was clear that this was an effective program, they were very pleased.

ANDREW: After the Moscow orphanage directors' meeting at the end of the year, where they had obviously talked about us, the phone just never stopped ringing. We couldn't even get through dinner. We ended up with a huge number of orphanages asking for the program. The second year we took on twelve orphanages with fifty teachers and about 600 students. This was huge growth and put an enormous fund-raising burden on Georgia who quit her bank job and for the next three years worked from early morning until late at night, at first without a salary, and later for \$500 per month. Like me, she taught a few private English lessons on the side to help with our personal expenses, but her only real break was theology classes a few nights a week once she discovered Orthodoxy.

GEORGIA: Also, by the end of that year it was obvious that some of our students would soon be eighteen year-olds and no longer living in the orphanages. We wanted to continue working with them, so in 2000 we opened a post-orphanage education center which eventually grew to around one hundred students. It is located at St. Andrew's Anglican Church in the center of Moscow. St. Andrew's generously gave us the space for a nominal rent and we've been there for a decade.

RTE: What does the post-orphanage center do?

ANDREW: When somebody leaves the orphanage at seventeen or eighteen they may want to either get a job or go to an institute or university. However, there is almost always a gap between the level of education they have and the level they need to achieve their goal. The post-orphanage center helps them fill that gap.

In 2000, we also started working in the Pskov region in northwest Russia, including our summer camp staffed by both foreign and Russian volunteers who work with children from a psycho-neurological orphanage in the village of Belskoye-Ustye near Porkhov. This opened up a new line of work for us because these children had all been diagnosed as unteachable and unable to live in society. These are closed orphanages and people from outside (especially foreigners) were not usually permitted entry, so what we were doing was considered very unusual in Russia.

It has always seemed to us that most of these children's problems are caused by a combination of psychological trauma and the nature of institutionalization. Some children arrive with things like Fetal Alcohol Syndrome and other problems related to their parents' behavior and lifestyle before they were born, and some have physical handicaps or learning difficulties, but many of the children we deal with at Belskoye-Ustye have some kind of psychological difficulties.

Russian Orphan Demographics

RTE: How have these children lost their parents, and how many orphans are there across the Russian Federation?

GEORGIA: For around five percent of orphans, both parents are dead. A good 95% are called social orphans because their parents have been deprived of parental rights for various reasons or because they have given up their children. Often for social orphans it is essentially social strife that causes the breakdown of family. People get into situations where they can't support their families. They may become depressed and begin using alcohol or drugs, or are thrown into prison for stealing. If there are children in the mix, they end up in orphanages.

ANDREW: There is also a cyclical effect in that when orphans who have been institutionalized grow up and leave, they have children of their own, but they don't have the skills to take care of them. Their children in turn end up in orphanages.

GEORGIA: Although we have also seen the opposite, where the younger generation is responsible specifically because their parents weren't. It works both ways.

In answer to your question about orphan populations, right now Ministry of Education numbers say that there are about 700,000 children in the Russian Federation who do not have parents with parental rights. As of 2009, only 113,000 of these are in orphanages run by the Ministry of Education. I believe there are another 30,000 or so in children's homes run by the Ministry of Health and Social Development, although these numbers are less clear. Speaking again of Ministry of Education numbers, what has happened with the other 587,000 isn't perfectly clear: based on our experience I would

say that they are either cared for by relatives, in foster care, or are on the streets. In 2009, 115,000 new children came into the system, but during that same year the Russian Federation cleared 87,000 out of the system. Of these, 65% went into permanent foster-type situations, in which the state gives the foster-parents a monthly stipend to help support the child. There is also a less permanent foster-type situation (21% of the 87,000) where if the placement doesn't work out the parents can return the child to the orphanage. Of this 87,000, 9.9% of those who left the system were adopted by Russians and 4.2% by foreigners.

In 2004, the total number of adoptions peaked at over 16,000 in the Russian Federation. At that point there were fewer Russians adopting than foreigners: about 7,000 Russians to 9,000 foreigners. However, as cases of abuse of adopted Russian children began being reported, particularly from the U.S., federal legislation clamped down on foreign adoptions. In 2009, adoptions by foreigners had dropped 25%.

RTE: How does Russian society look at these orphans? Are there other factors that hinder adoption, such as fear of taking in children who may be predisposed to drug or alcohol addiction through their parents?

GEORGIA: As we said, Russians do adopt to some degree, but by the end of the 90's there was a wall between orphans and the rest of society, and an expectation that many of them would turn out to be criminals. There were always rumors, sometimes backed by fact, about how orphans steal. There is some basis for this, especially with orphans who have ended up on the streets, but these negative attitudes were also driven by frustration. With the collapse of the Soviet system, everybody felt hard-done by, so the psychological incentive for adoption was small although the state is now pushing the idea of adopting babies.

ANDREW: Many orphans on their part distrust the rest of society because they haven't been through the hard-knock life. For orphans, society is like a completely foreign culture, because orphans come from a very institutionalized setting where every basic need has been provided until suddenly they have to make their way in the world. They've never had to do simple things such as going to stores to buy their food; the way other people live is a closed book to them. They also have a culture of expectation. Because everything is delivered to them from early childhood it seems logical that this should just

go on. They grow up feeling that they are owed—that everything they need should simply be provided.

RTE: How is the orphanage system structured? Do they include all orphans in a given locale?

GEORGIA: Although the intention is clearly to provide different types of institutions to cater to different types of children, the average orphan without specific physical disabilities experiences the system as three-tiered. In 2008, there were 1,347 orphanages under the Ministry of Education, with an average population of 57 children per orphanage. Some of these are just homes for children who attend local public schools (what I believe is experienced as the top tier, “tier 1”). Other Ministry of Education orphanages (also called “internats”) provide special educational programs for orphaned children. The most common type of internat is the so-called “type-8” educational institution with a special program that gives children the equivalent of only five years of mainstream education over nine years. When children living in what I am calling “tier 1” orphanages fall irreparably behind in school, they are often transferred to these internats—“tier 2”. Many others start in “tier 2” simply because they don’t show “normal” intellectual development at four years old when they are transferred into the orphanage system from baby houses. However, given the low carer-to-baby ratio in the baby houses, underdevelopment due to lack of stimulation is very often taken as mental handicap, causing children’s developmental horizons to be tragically and systemically cut off from the moment of their entry into the orphanage system.

Another 30,000 orphans are in what were previously called psycho-neurological orphanages and are now called children’s homes for the mentally retarded or institutions for children with severe physical disabilities. All of these institutions are under the Ministry of Health and Social Development rather than the Ministry of Education, and most often there is no effort made at education of any sort. If children do not get on developmentally at “tier 2”, they are placed here in the last tier. Again, a child showing an even lower degree of potential at 4 years old might be immediately placed in this type of institution. The difficulty, of course, is that interpreted “lack of potential” might be very many different things. Even now, parents sometimes feel that they simply don’t have the resources to care for a child with cerebral palsy for example, and during the Soviet era, parents of children with Down’s Syndrome or other disorders were encouraged to place these children in institutions.



Georgia and daughter Elizabeth at Post-Orphanage Centre outing, 2006.

RTE: How does this tiered system help prepare orphans for careers or trades?

ANDREW: We would estimate that about half of the orphanages with so-called “normal” educable orphans provide the children with pretty much the same opportunities as any Russian child. They go to the same local schools, and if they can keep up academically (though many can’t) they may go on to institutes or universities. The main difference is that children from the orphanage don’t have someone to help them with their homework—which is quite a significant difference. Those who fall behind can go to trade schools. You can call this the ‘top tier’—these orphanages are under the authority of the Ministry of Education.

Some other orphanages under the Ministry of Education (which Georgia has called “tier 2”) are for children with mild learning difficulties. These have educational programs inside the orphanage and, as we said, provide the equivalent of five years of mainstream education over nine years. Here, the expectation is that they will go into a trade job, and this is where you saw serious problems after the break-down of the Soviet system, when the state-owned factories that the orphans trained for closed down. Although the jobs went away quickly, the technical schools remained, and rather than simply sending orphans away at eighteen, the directors would often enroll them in



Three-year olds at Belskoye-Ustye summer camp with Anna Williams, right, 2011.

one technical school after another, so that they could get dormitory housing, food, and a stipend. In a series of succeeding years, a single orphan could be trained as a cobbler, a plasterer, a cook, and a machinist.

The psycho-neurological orphanages (which Georgia has called “tier 3”), are under the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare and are for those children classed as uneducable because of physical or mental problems. Even here, without official educational programs it was commonly understood that some basic education would be provided. However, with most of these orphanages being located in rural locations and lacking skilled help, the education would often be cursory—in some cases they would just be taught the alphabet over and over again. In many instances no education or developmental input is provided, although exceptions do sometimes occur through the personal initiative of dedicated employees.

Historical Philanthropy in Russia

RTE: Today, I increasingly hear of local initiatives to work with orphans by Russian priests’ families and women’s monasteries. What do you know about the history of orphanages in Russia and the Orthodox Church’s involvement?

GEORGIA: A few years ago, when I tried to do background work, I found that the story being told is that Russian philanthropy started during the time of Peter the Great. In fact, the monasteries were forced out of philanthropy, including care of orphans, by laws instigated by Peter the Great, who wanted to systematize everything and have it run centrally by the government.

ANDREW: Peter, in fact, was anti-Church. He did many things against the Russian Church including abolishing the Russian Orthodox Patriarchate. He wanted to make the church a section of the state, and shunted aside whatever monastic charity was going on.

RTE: Yes. Church-run orphanages that later resurfaced were closed in the Soviet era and sadly this also has happened in Greece, where the local orphanages run in a very personal way by Orthodox nuns were dismantled from the 1970's on by succeeding socialist governments in favor of state institutionalization. In many ways, orphans in Greece are worse off than they were thirty years ago.

Soviet Orphanages

RTE: Beyond the more obvious political and ideological problems how did the orphanages fare under the Soviet regime?

GEORGIA: The basic principle in the Soviet Union was that everyone was educated and employed and this included the orphans. After grammar school, orphans who had special needs would be trained for a specific trade and they would feed into a specific factory. Each orphanage was allocated a trade and they would all go to work in the same place. In this way their needs were taken care of and they weren't separated from the people they'd grown up with. Although that was the principle, we don't know what the actual conditions were.

RTE: So these were like American trade schools, with perhaps less choice in what trade you pursued?

GEORGIA: Yes, and paradoxically, until recently orphans at Belskoye-Ustye took part in the agricultural work of the village, which they tell me they very much enjoyed, but that came to be seen as taking advantage of them as free labor, and so in most recent years they have not been allowed to work. Now

employees don't have permission to take children into their homes or onto the farm to help with the domestic economy—so the children sit bored. Of course, I'm sure these rules do help in some cases of actual exploitation, but probably in the majority of cases the children are even less stimulated than in the past because of the new rules.

ANDREW: One of my earliest memories of Belskoye-Ustye is of watching a group of orphans trying to catch a spirited horse that had gotten loose. It was like watching an old slapstick movie where people are running in and out of doors on either side of a hall. Here the horse would trot across the road with the children in pursuit, and disappear behind a house, only to reappear a little way off to cross the road in the other direction with the children still running behind him. It was quite funny.

RTE: When English-speakers hear the word orphanage, we tend to think of the caricature of *Oliver Twist* asking for more gruel. Can you talk about the conditions of the orphanages you've seen?

ANDREW: I would have to say that the first time I went to a psycho-neurological orphanage, it probably didn't look much different from what I would have imagined in *Oliver Twist*. The children weren't exactly in rags, but weren't that far off, and the conditions of the orphanage didn't seem so different from those of a workhouse; the orphans weren't necessarily forced to work, but in practice a lot of them were used for unpaid or barely-paid labor in the village. There wasn't even running water, only a single rusty tap with a thin trickle of cold water in a shed used as the bath house. Fortunately, the other types of orphanages weren't so badly off and even the worst conditions weren't usually the fault of the staff who were often heroic in their efforts to make do with what they had. In poorer regions there simply weren't the resources; many village homes lacked such facilities as well.

GEORGIA: My general impression is that many Soviet orphanages—and I speak here exclusively about those under the Ministry of Education—were fairly well-run. The life was ordered. There was a natural rhythm and harmony and a certain amount of beauty in it. The kids sang well, they did drama, they did all of the Young Pioneer activities that children from families were expected to do. The interesting thing to me is that, yes, this was atheistic, but it was also Byzantine in the best sense. These kids would come to-

gether to show their talents in an attempt to reach the apex of Soviet society. If it hadn't been atheistic, it would have been a good model for Christian institutions.

RTE: Yes. We forget about the traditional excellence of orphan choirs. There are many comments in Byzantine literature about orphan choirs singing for feast days or being given gifts by the emperor.

GEORGIA: Yes, and during the Soviet period they did excellent work in the arts. You can still see this, although the quality has fallen a little with the breakup of the Soviet Union. Although we can't speak first hand, we can say that the orphan directors of the 1990's and today perceive a degradation in the new system and have something of a nostalgia for the Soviet era where everything was well-ordered. People's needs were provided for.

RTE: What caused the downturn of the orphanage system after the Soviet era?

GEORGIA: Many of the problems that we encountered were due to the failing 1990's economy and despair in the wake of that disaster. In 1993, there were over 12,500 adoptions by Russians while in 2003, there were only 9,000. Just from this you can see that society took a plunge that it is only now recovering from.

Russian Orphanage Directors and Staff

RTE: What is your impression of the Russian orphanage staff you've met?

GEORGIA: We've found administrators and workers who have given their last kopek in order to help the children in their institution. The worst we've encountered are people who dismiss us because they think that we're jokers, but we've never been faced with an orphanage director who was not trying to do the right thing. Ever. We have never seen a director be mean or evil to the children, though we have encountered staff with drinking problems and who deal in magic.

ANDREW: Some directors make great personal sacrifices to help the children. When we first started going to a psycho-neurological institution, the director took a great risk by letting us into the orphanage. This was technically illegal and the last people he should have let into this closed institution were

foreigners, but he allowed us in anyway and we were able to work with the children. That orphanage became a model for others and has attracted a lot of attention because of its good results.

This is remarkable because once the children receive a diagnosis of being unteachable, it gets stamped into their internal passports and they are placed in a psycho-neurological orphanage. Historically, this has meant that they are eligible for institutional care for life and when they reach the leaving age for the orphanage they will be put into an adult institution. In extremely poor regions they are sometimes even put into old folks' homes, because there is no other place for them, and they end up helping take care of the old people.

GEORGIA: You know, this afternoon in preparation for this interview I looked up "Psycho-neurological Institutions," in the Russian Wikipedia. It describes these institutions in general, and then it has a section called, "Interesting Facts" in which there are two bullet points. The first bullet point says, "Somewhere in Pskov Region, since 2000, an orphanage director on his personal initiative began trying to prove that these children could be socially adapted. The outcome of this is still ambiguous." I was in shock because this is a clear reference to our program. The ambiguity it mentions is because local courts haven't been able yet to clearly determine that these children are mentally sound, but it is a huge gain that this work has been noticed.

ANDREW: When we realized that there was no particular reason why many of the children from this orphanage couldn't learn to live independently, we opened our half-way house (sometimes called a "social hotel") as an alternative for those who would normally go to adult institutions at the age of eighteen.

GEORGIA: The fact that this director took a huge personal risk in letting us in led to his being fired a little over two years later. I don't believe it was because he took the legal risk, but as the orphanage became a high-profile place, other people with greater standing in the community wanted the job. As a former builder, he was shunted to the side and now works as a local insurance broker. He sacrificed himself and the result of letting us in has been hundreds of thousands, maybe millions of dollars worth of programs, including E.U. and U.S. Aid monies. This was not all because of us, but included charities that were spawned off of programs that we began. There are four social hotels to keep the children from being institutionalized afterwards,



Inspiration Orphanage and Farm Community near Ruza, Russia.

continuing education programs, and volunteers from Moscow and foreign countries who come out year-round. The life of this orphanage has been totally revolutionized and it is the result of this man's personal sacrifice.

RTE: And how about the orphanage workers who live with the children?

GEORGIA: They range from wonderful, competent motherly people deeply dedicated to the children to workers I would describe as brain-dead and even dangerous. When we first came, the greater number were of the second type (specifically brain-dead, not dangerous). Now, the greater number are of the first type.

ANDREW: Things are now dramatically better. You would hardly recognize the orphanage after a decade. The workers wanted more for the children, but they had no way to get it. Now it looks much more like a school, with pictures and crafts on the walls. It smells much better because the children now have indoor toilets and running water.

RTE: What benefits does the state provide normal, educable orphans when they reach adulthood?



Winter scene at Inspiration Community.

GEORGIA: Theoretically they can go on to get higher education if they can qualify for it, and they are eligible to receive an apartment. In practice, that happens more in Moscow, because there are great variations in what local administrations are able to accomplish. If they go to trade school, which is the majority, they live in dormitories with other orphans and with people from the larger society who are not high achievers.

RTE: If they are given apartments when they leave the orphanage, do they have means to sustain themselves in these apartments?

ANDREW: No, and this is one of the reasons we first started ROOF. The orphanage directors were screaming for transitional programs to help. In the 1990's when you got out of the orphanage in Moscow, you were usually given an apartment or room, but had no experience of living independently. You may not be interested in trade school, but you also didn't have a job as you would have had under the Soviet system, so what do you do? After a few months, you'd sell your apartment because that was the only way to get money. Then you'd have nowhere to live, and once you spent your money, you'd end up on the streets with nothing.

GEORGIA: Also, these young adults were not used to living alone, so they would all move into one apartment and sell the others. They would spend the money and then it would be gone. People quickly realized that giving these young people apartments without education and significant mentoring just didn't work, and as I said earlier, poorer regions don't provide apartments.

Because of this transitional problem, many orphanages have received permission to keep the orphans until they are twenty-three or even twenty-five, especially if the local government can't give them an apartment. It is usually local initiatives that find employment for these young adults, and these initiatives are often informal arrangements that orphanage administrators and workers themselves set up to take care of these children that they have been mothers and fathers to. They scramble right and left to find something that will work for these children. It is quite common to find orphanage employees personally organizing a child's future.

Non-governmental organizations have also stepped into the gap, and I'm sure there are many untold stories about churches and monasteries doing the same. There is personal initiative all across Russia to help deal with this problem.

Personal Charity

RTE: So although the larger society is generally wary of orphans, there are also people trying to help?

GEORGIA: Although there is general societal fear and failure to deal with the problem, there are also a small but dedicated minority who give their all to personal charitable initiatives, and some of these are thinking about the plight of orphans. If you were to try to go online and find Russian programs for orphans, you will find far fewer than actually exist because many initiatives are personal rather than through an organization. There are many things going on, but most are under the radar.

One attempt that is completely amazing is called "Inspiration". It was begun by a village priest and his wife outside of Moscow who began helping the patients of the local children's psycho-neurological hospital and branched rather quickly into being a support community for orphans and for families with disabled children. This is a beautiful place, which runs its own farm, and these families now come for courses of therapy and to support each other in

learning how to help their children. Also, there is no Dom Rebyonka, (“Baby House”) in the Ruza region where the Inspiration Center is, so Inspiration takes the unwanted babies who have been left by their mothers in the maternity hospital and cares for them until they find families. They also bring in children from state-run orphanages for shorter periods to experience a loving community life close to nature. They live there as one big family with a staff that is part of the community—people who just care about other people and are really Christian. They are doing what the state promises it can do, but without their spirit, it’s much harder for the state. This place cares about every single person.

Generally you find either substance, people wanting to help with good caring hearts, or form, an institution of good intent which doesn’t really take care of people’s real needs. You almost never find the combination. Inspiration has both and it has grown organically. It’s not fancy on the outside and disorganized on the inside. It’s organized and neat and full of substance.

Inspiration shattered my belief that a successful community doing this kind of work could only sustain about fifteen or twenty people. Here there are hundreds. They are not here all at one time, but they come and go while living as a close-knit community that shares a pure common spirit. There’s no pretence, there’s no insistence that people have a certain kind of faith... nonetheless, real faith is here strongly, and almost because there is no insistence. This is an example of people really being free and the love that results from that freedom.

There is a humorous expression in Russia, “the 101st kilometer”, which implies that all of the dross of life, everything that is tragic or has gone wrong, can be found there beyond the 100 kilometer mark from Moscow. Inspiration is located precisely at 101 kilometers from the Kremlin, but it is a proof of hope in life.

RTE: In my experience there is also a remarkable amount of spontaneous personal charity in Russia.

ANDREW: Yes, I noticed this my first year there. One day a man knocked on my door and told me that he lived two floors above me, and that an elderly man on the floor above him had died. There was no money for the burial, so he was going around the whole building collecting 100 rubles from everyone. People just do this for each other.

GEORGIA: As an organization we want to humbly enable more of this personal response to happen. Even if it's only 2% who can respond this generously, that 2% is far beyond us American charitable types. I say "beyond" us because they just keep giving. There is no end. They give to their last breath.

RTE: I remember an early interview that *Road to Emmaus* did with Natalia Ustinova, a St. Petersburg math teacher, who in 1991 picked up a dozen homeless boys off the street, created a home, and raised them all to adulthood.¹

GEORGIA: Yes. We know a married priest, Fr. Pavel Adelheim out in Pskov, who started taking in orphans soon after he was ordained. He took in one after another and they all became his kids. He and his wife just emptied out the local orphanage. Now they are all adults.

ANDREW: Not many people do this, but some do and they do it all the way. It's a widow's mite, because it's not necessarily the wealthy, but the poor, who then give everything they've got. Absolutely everything.

RTE: Speaking of personal charity, you do this work while having to earn your own living to support yourselves and your three small children. How do you manage? Are you able to include them in the work?

GEORGIA: Our children were at the month-long 2011 summer camp with us and came in to work in the Belskoye-Ustye Orphanage with me almost every day. We sometimes joke that we have the only children in the world who beg to go to the orphanage. For them it means fun and games and working with volunteers as well as playing with other children.

In terms of supporting ourselves while doing this work—it is very difficult. We do live day by day because we do not take a salary and we both also have related academic work that does not yet generate income. At present, we are almost fully dependent upon personal gifts from people who support our work and don't want us to have to turn our talents away from these important projects in order to feed ourselves. Of course, when we are travelling and working for ROOF some of our expenses are paid by the organization—just as is the case for other volunteers. Last year during the month of July we didn't have to spend a penny of our own on food because we were working at the ROOF summer camp the whole time.

¹ "Petersburg Street Kids Find a Home: An Interview with Natalia Ustinova," *Road to Emmaus*, Winter 2001 (#4). Order a back issue from *Road to Emmaus*, or access online at: http://www.roadtoemmaus.net/back_issue_articles/RTE_04/Petersburg_Street_Kids_Find_a_Home.pdf

The Post-Orphanage Center's Success

RTE: Can you describe some of the successes ROOF has had, for instance with the post-orphanage center?

ANDREW: The great thing about the post-orphanage center is that you see these people coming as young teenagers and then developing into adults. One I always think of is Vanya², who first arrived at the center as an unkempt, dirty, smelly young teenager. Even so, the ones who come to the center are the motivated ones. They're either out of the orphanage or soon to reach the leaving age, and they want to find a way to get somewhere with their lives rather than just ending up on the streets.

GEORGIA: In Moscow they can be living in orphanages while getting into trouble at the same time, because there's a lot of potential for earning money on the street. We have tried to help several young people who have been working as prostitutes on the streets of Moscow—both girls and boys. In at least one case, somebody went back to prostitution because there was no other way for him to earn enough money to continue with the lifestyle he had become used to, but others have been glad of the opportunity to pursue education and the chance of a career.

ANDREW: When Vanya arrived he hardly spoke, was very turned in on himself, and over the five years that he was with us, kept dropping out and coming back. When he finally finished high school, he got an internship with the local office of a major western accountancy company as a courier, and later as an IT computer technician. He has ended up an extremely well-turned out, smartly-dressed, articulate, charming person. It is an astounding change.

We've also had one post-orphanage student come out of a psycho-neurological orphanage, go through high school and then through seminary.

RTE: Has this seminary graduate become a priest?

ANDREW: (*Laughing*) We can't tell you because if they've come out of a psycho-neurological orphanage that can be considered an impediment to ordination.

GEORGIA: About thirty-five graduates of the post-orphanage center have gone onto college and university. Trade school is one thing, but higher edu-

² Names of orphans in the interview have been changed.



Christmas sleigh-riding at Inspiration Community, 2010.

cation is very rare for these kids. Last year, in 2010, we had our first graduates of colleges and the university. There was a lawyer, an accountant, a business school graduate, and several qualified teachers. This is huge, and there will be more in the future.

Government and Private Sponsorship

RTE: You've mentioned this in passing, but what kind of support do you receive from private sponsors and the Russian government?

GEORGIA: We have not sought Russian government support because we have wanted to remain independent, although political parties have tried to court us.

ANDREW: Although we have received direct moral support from the Russian government. Not long after we started in the late 1990's, we were sitting in the office and a sixteen-year-old teenager came in and asked, "Is this the orphan charity?" We said, "Yes," and he told us that he'd been in an orphanage in St. Petersburg when his mother, who had lost her parental rights, had died. She had owned a three-room apartment in the center of St. Petersburg, and when



Horse therapy to assist children with motor development, Inspiration, 2011.

he came out of the orphanage he inherited this. Unfortunately, someone who knew this had cooked up a plan to deprive him of the apartment, and one night when he came out of the door he was kidnapped. His abductors put a bag on his head, drove him out of the city, and told him that if he didn't sign a paper giving over the rights to his apartment, they would kill him. So, he signed it over and they dumped him outside the city. Though he was penniless, being an enterprising young chap he made his way to Moscow with the thought, "I'll go and talk to people at the Duma," the Russian parliament. So he came straight to Moscow, went to the Duma and told one of the department secretaries his story. She said to him, "Well, we don't really know what we can do, but we do know of an orphan charity just down the road who might be able to help you, and they told him exactly where we were!"

At that time, we didn't know anyone official. We were this little charity that hadn't been around long and we weren't yet officially registered in Russia to do anything. We were basically illegal. Suddenly we find out that the Duma knows all about us and that they don't seem to have any objection. So, this was certainly a type of support.

RTE: How about private sponsors?

GEORGIA: Our fund-raising plan went like this: In the beginning we were nobody and we had no name, so we just tried to get generous people to give money. They gave enough that we were able to run programs for the first year and a half, and then we had enough of a track record to start asking companies. The first year we had a budget of \$22,000. By the second year, it was well over \$100,000, and a few years later, it was \$300,000 a year. After we received some \$5,000 or \$10,000 corporate donations, both from Russian and foreign companies, we began to apply for grants. Unfortunately, after the first few grants we realized pretty quickly that the amount of paperwork you have to do before and after receiving a grant from a western governmental source isn't worth it. We almost had to hire someone full-time just to keep up with the paperwork for one U.S. Aid grant. It was a nightmare. Now we only do corporate and individual fund-raising and sometimes apply for foundation or church grants. These people just want to see that you are doing something useful with the money and have a good and exact accounting of the funds and the purposes for which they were used.

ANDREW: What we like best is to have a close relationship between the project, the donor, and us as the people who help the project happen.

Right now we are looking for a broad-base of concerned Orthodox people to make a monthly pledge of \$25.00, which they can do on our website at www.roofnet.org. We are also starting an initiative where we pair an American or English or European parish with a Russian parish and a local orphanage close to the Russian parish, so that we can actually bring people together in this. We hope this will not be as difficult as it sounds. There are many parishes in Britain and the U.S. with Russian speakers in them, and many in Moscow with English speakers. If one or two people from each parish actually come here as volunteers or to visit, and those at home can hear about the results, that's great.

GEORGIA: Our summer camp attracts many foreign volunteers, some Russian-speaking, some not. It doesn't necessarily require Russian language skills, and it establishes links between people. This aspect of personal charity is the key to real longevity. The giving is never one-way, and doing this is our salvation.

Anton

RTE: Can you tell us about any orphans you've been particularly close to?

ANDREW: We've known Anton, one of the orphans from a psycho-neurological orphanage in central Russia, since he was fifteen. He is now twenty-six. When we met him he had never learned the alphabet, despite having been taught it for ten years, because it had no context or meaning. Even among the local villagers, reading was not very significant because everyone was doing some kind of agricultural work. When we met him, Anton smelled, he was a bed-wetter, and because they didn't have changes of clothes or any effective facilities for washing at that time, it was difficult to keep clean even if you wanted to. Anton was also awkward and had a reputation for being difficult, but he was very keen on not being institutionalized for life. That was his main interest.

GEORGIA: When we arrived the second summer, I was shocked because I knew Anton, I knew his reputation for being demanding and always telling everyone the way things should be. But when we pulled up he was waiting for me and said, "I need to talk to you. Sit down." He proceeded to interrogate me like a lawyer; his thought process was absolutely clear and linear. "I've only got a year or so before I reach the leaving age. How do I avoid going to the next institution? I need to know exactly what to do." I told him, "You probably need to stop wetting the bed. If you do wet the bed, wash your clothes right away and don't smell. You also need to make sure that you don't have temper tantrums."

The fact was that the orphanage psychologist determined who went into the alternative programs and she really didn't like Anton. He was a difficult loudmouth and she liked the easier children. Another thing is that Anton is a bit of the holy fool at times. (At other times not so holy.) He can see exactly what's going on in a person and reveals it to them, and he'd been doing that to her, as well. In any event, he did everything I told him to do. Starting that week he never again wet the bed in his sleep, which meant that he had enormous will power and great motivation.

Although he'd done all of these things, he was still disliked by the psychologist, and when he turned eighteen, she refused point-blank to recommend him for anything except institutionalization: "He's not socializable, there's no way he could ever live independently." This was tragically unfair, and he

was sent to the adult institution because we couldn't do anything about it in the short time between her decision and his transfer. Within several months, however, we came up with a plan. We personally took him out of the adult institution, telling the director that we would take responsibility for him. We can be very persuasive.

ANDREW: (*laughing*) Yes, picture this. Foreigners turn up at random mental institution in the middle of nowhere and say, "I want to take this person away."

GEORGIA: Of course, by this time the director of the adult institution knew not only who we were, but he also knew more about Anton. He knew that he wasn't hopeless. He was psychologically difficult, perhaps bordering on schizophrenic, but very bright. We stayed until we argued the director down and signed that we were taking responsibility for him. At first Anton stayed in several different places outside of St. Petersburg, and then Moscow—so that he could study at the post-orphanage education center—which never really worked because of his own difficulty in groups and his personal conflict with one of the key staff members.

However, he did gain a certain amount of maturity and chose to leave Moscow and return to village life because he realized that the city temptations were too great for him. He understood that he had to limit his expectations in order to have a healthy lifestyle, and he decided this for himself. Now he works as a salaried caretaker at one of our projects. He keeps everything spotlessly clean and can take care of himself very well: we trust him completely. Anton is a different person than eleven years ago, and he is so perceptive on the human level that we now consult with him about any of the practical and inter-personal issues that arise at the project where he works. It would have been an amazing waste for him to be institutionalized for his entire life.

An Orthodox Ethos

RTE: Have you tried to introduce an Orthodox tone into your programs?

ANDREW: We were interested in having church ties from the beginning, but we weren't yet Orthodox ourselves and didn't have any connections, so the world of Russian Orthodoxy was a bit of a mystery to us. We knew that there were Orthodox people who despised westerners, and we knew that there

were people who tried to make friends with westerners too readily, but we didn't know how to tell one from another or how to negotiate that. We'd had some contact with pious Orthodox people who wanted to volunteer, but who weren't terribly healthy, and so by default we ended up with very good teachers who were secular or only nominally Orthodox.

GEORGIA: Hiring mostly bright young secular teachers wasn't our ideal, but being Anglicans we didn't know how to find the right kind of practicing Orthodox teachers. Personally, I'd had a question for some years about where authority lies in the Church, because there are a great number of people and churches who call themselves Christian, but who have a great divergence of opinion on ethical, theological, and even basic moral issues. That bothered me. If I was going to identify as a Christian after years of not identifying as a Christian, I needed to know who I could trust. I'd read a lot of theology and talked to people who were supposedly knowledgeable in the Protestant and Catholic worlds, but I wasn't getting satisfactory answers.

In 1998-99, the opportunity came for Andrew and me to study at St. Andrew's Biblical-Theological Institute in Moscow. At that time the library was in the cold, damp, poorly lit basement of a church complex. I was sitting there the first week in my coat, studying for the Introduction to Orthodoxy class doing the proscribed reading for the section, "What is Holy Tradition?" The professor had us reading Alexander Schmemmann's *For the Life of the World* (which I was reading in Russian translation and was later shocked to discover had been originally published in English!), sections from Sergius Bulgakov, and some Lossky. I had not previously seen writing on the question with anything like the same authority. I sat there with tears streaming down my face, thinking to myself, "I knew it—I knew that if Christianity had any truth about it had to be like this." But no one had ever spoken these things to me before and perhaps I couldn't even have heard them in English because of the loaded meaning so many religious words already had for me in my native language. Because of these things, I couldn't possibly have believed that the Church really exists visibly before that moment—but then I saw so clearly that it does. Suddenly the imperative for organic Christian unity that we so clearly find in the New Testament was no longer a notional ideal to me, but a command which could be obeyed. This was very much a second charismatic conversion experience—the first one having been three years before to the person of Christ. My faith in the Orthodox Church was



Post-orphanage center produces Lermontov's play, "A Hero for Our Times" 2010.

at that moment immediate, but I didn't know how to get from there to the Orthodox Church; and in all truth, I didn't have the immediate imperative to convert—although I became increasingly impelled to sample Orthodox worship, which was difficult as both Andrew and I had active roles in the life of the Anglican Church in Moscow.

ANDREW: We were already married at this point, but we had different opinions. I had decided even before moving to Russia in 1996 that I wanted to be Orthodox before I died, but my aim was that the whole Anglican Church would become Orthodox before I died. And if that didn't work out, then I'd just do it myself on my deathbed. (*Laughter*) Soon after the St. Andrew's course finished, we moved back to England from Russia so that I could go to an Anglican seminary and Georgia could do a theology degree. Georgia finished her theology degree although I didn't finish seminary, and after a year as catechumens we were received into the Orthodox Church by Fr. Stephen Platt at the Moscow Patriarchate church in Oxford. This was 2004.

GEORGIA: Because we started ROOF in this unsure spiritual place, the organization bears the mark of our uncertainty. Eighty percent of the original organization was constructed at a time when we didn't yet have the clear



Hiking from Belskoye-Ustye summer camp, 2011.

conviction that we should be Orthodox. Although we were very convinced that we wanted to work with Orthodox people, we had no idea how to go about it. Now we do have connections who can point us toward reasonable, and business-like Orthodox.

ANDREW: Not that we had much more luck with people who weren't Orthodox. We'd tried to walk the tightrope of being a Christian-minded secular organization after the model of church-schools in England, which are church-managed, while being a part of the state education system. They don't require teachers to be members of the church, but ask that they be broadly in sympathy with the Christian ethos. We tried to do that but it was a great failure as we constantly had terrible cultural misunderstandings. People working with us had completely different assumptions about what they were doing. One year, we ended up with a board of directors who thought in such a systematized, secular way that we didn't feel that there was anything left that was our own. We had a vision of being personal and grass-roots, and they wanted a depersonalized organization. We finally gave them an ultimatum: either we leave and you can run the organization yourselves, or we do it our way. They all resigned.

RTE: Are children in Russian orphanages usually baptized, do they have access to sacraments, and is there ever anything like church-school classes?

ANDREW: It depends entirely on each orphanage director and the situation with the local Orthodox church. If the director is an atheist, he might let a priest or catechists in, but the overall culture in the orphanage won't reflect that. Also, local clergy might not be available to help, or as in Belskoye-Ustye, there was no priest for decades. Thankfully, the children had been baptized—several as many as three times—by Lutherans, Evangelical Protestants, and Orthodox. (*Laughter*) In the 1990's, any random passing missionary would baptize them.

Even atheist directors wouldn't stand in the way of the children being baptized and in the last decade many of them have begun working with local priests. Until now, sacraments and catechism have been rare, but certainly, some orphanage directors are willing to have catechesis if local people volunteer and the idea has the blessing of the local priest. As an organization we need to think about how to better foster ties between parishes and local orphanages.

GEORGIA: As volunteers, we are there both to teach and to learn. Foreign volunteers are helpful on the level of practical, personal charity, and there is something unique to Russians on the level of deep personal charity. We can learn from each other.

Our experience in Belskoye-Ustye is that a certain explosion occurs when there is a mix of cultures. You can't predict what or when, but it always has huge positive consequences. People develop entirely new enthusiasm for a project when they are fascinated, and this is what happens when you have foreign volunteers together with Russians. It's not competition as much as it is mutual fascination and this causes the atmosphere of creativity to become radically greater. Can you imagine how much greater this effect will be if we have foreign Orthodox working with Russian Orthodox volunteers and staff?

Tutoring, Social Hotels, and Jewel Girls

RTE: What programs are you developing now?

GEORGIA: The deeply successful orphanage tutoring programs are what allowed the tremendously successful post-orphanage education center to come

into being. Over the last seven years the orphanage tutorial programs have suffered because, with more graduating orphans in need with every passing year, the entire management focus has been on funding the post-orphanage program. It's important to reach these children at that younger age, and this concern led us to register the Post-Orphanage Center as an independent local charity. ROOF's priority now is to refocus on orphanage education programs near Moscow and beyond, and to replicate the successes of the Post-Orphanage Center for a wider audience—those who can make it to the center of Moscow to participate in its programs. We hope to do a greater percentage of our work in the future on a volunteer basis, which will make it possible to do more with the same budget.

RTE: What other programs does ROOF have?

GEORGIA: In the Moscow Region we have tutorial/mentoring programs for the Podolsk City Orphanage, and are just launching similar programs in Vnukovo and Tuchkovo. Our hope is to expand each of these programs in 2012, working especially through club activities that help to build community. The Post-Orphanage Center has a popular chess club, a film club, a Saturday literature club that many people and not only our orphan students come to—staff and volunteers alike, flock to the literature club, especially. A few years ago the Center's drama club put on Lermontov's play, *A Hero of our Times*, with costumes loaned by the Bolshoi Ballet. We believe that we need to be recreating some of these community-building club activities further from the center of Moscow—perhaps with the participation of volunteers from church parishes, or even in and around the parishes themselves—to reach a larger number of young adults than the Post-Orphanage Center can on its own. We are also a partner in a program called Jewel Girls, which I will explain in a moment.

In the Pskov region we have a year-round educational program in the psycho-neurological orphanage in Belskoye-Ustye. We also have our summer camp, which draws about thirty volunteers from Russia and abroad, who put on an amazingly fun one-month camp for orphans with arts and crafts, sporting activities, singing, dancing, hiking, and trips to the local monastery. Then there is our "Abilitation Center", which is a so-called "social hotel", an alternative accommodation for those who have left the Belskoye-Ustye orphanage and are trying not to go to the adult institution. The social hotel program is an experiment to see if we can help these young people live inde-

pendently or at least outside the institution, as adults. For now, the ROOF staff and “Abilitation Center” house parents find places for the kids to live when they are ready to move out on their own, but then continue to visit them on a regular basis to make sure that they are alright. The kids are moving on, but are still in a larger program.

In the Pskov region we also have Baronovo House Volunteer Base, the base for the summer camp and a very large house where up to twenty-five or more people can live at one time. It’s a kilometer from the orphanage in a beautiful wooded area on the delta of a pristine river, and we use this as a base where volunteers or specialists coming to do medical or educational work at the orphanage can stay.

RTE: Will you tell us now about Jewel Girls?

ANDREW: Jewel Girls is an organization that is dedicated to helping teen-age girls who are trafficked or at risk of trafficking. It was piloted in Serbia, and now partners with ROOF in Russia.

RTE: By trafficking, do you mean girls being used for prostitution?

ANDREW: Yes, or as domestic servants, which often involves an element of prostitution. It’s not technically prostitution because they usually don’t get paid for it. It’s actually slavery. Obviously, orphan girls are in this risk category and the idea of the project is that these girls are helped to use their creativity in making jewelry. Young people from orphanages who have moved on to live in dormitories and attend vocational training often don’t have anything to do in the evenings, and this helps them to stay off of the streets. The girls have exhibitions and displays and sell their jewelry. This is a way to help them learn to support themselves, and in the course of this, they are also taught about social dangers. So, they are aware that if someone makes a suggestion that sounds too good to be true, it probably is. “We’ve found you a beautiful job in America. All you have to do is to give us your passport and we will sort it out.” There are also a few boys involved in the project. We call them Jewel Boys.

GEORGIA: This is also a way to teach people practical skills for life, like budgeting, and it’s a form of art therapy. Local managers get these girls together several times a week to make jewelry, which can also be bought through the internet. We have a lot of pieces on display on our website at

www.roofnet.org. They have shows where the girls who sell the jewelry earn money for themselves but also for the whole group. A bit of that profit goes to each of the girls personally, but most of it goes towards building the business. As they accrue capital, they can buy better materials and do more complex pieces. In this way they learn to work together, they learn basic business planning and life skills, and they have volunteers who inspire the girls on a personal level as mentors. The girls probably won't be able to make a living with this, but it's a way to keep them off the streets as we help them develop life skills.

Break-Aways

RTE: Recently, you've had some break-aways from ROOF, where you've cut programs free to be more independent. How did that come about?

ANDREW: Well, first of all we think that small organizations are better than large ones for this kind of job because everything has to be personal. Second, it has to be grass-roots; that is, specifically designed for the local group you are working with. When a project is established enough to make it on its own, that is, there is a committed staff and it has continuing financial support, there is no reason why we have to be involved in running it anymore. Let it run itself.

GEORGIA: Andrew is saying that one of the best ways to grow is by break-aways. Our first break-away was in 2002 -- our U.S. AID-funded project which was a social hotel and a weekend fostering program for the kids from the Belskoye-Ustye orphanage. The funding for that program was fully taken over by a Moscow businessman who has worked out there ever since. He also started his own local charity which includes a group home for Belskoye-Ustye's former orphans that is also a craft center, which partly sustains the home with local weaving, basketry, and so on. He also runs the first social hotel which was started under the auspices of ROOF, which is a transitional home for orphans from the psycho-neurological orphanage who can be a little more independent.

The second break-away was our former education director starting her own post-orphanage education center in a different section of Moscow. She has been very successful and has around fifty students, some of whom have also gone to college or university. Her support comes from Moscow businesses and it has worked very well.

The third major break-away is the large ROOF Post-Orphanage Education Center, which until a year ago was 80% of ROOF's budget. Although this year we still sponsored it to some degree, it is now its own organization called Step Up. The director, who has been very successful, has her own vision for how she wants to do things, and it's best to let people have their creative freedom. Her ideas will be best blessed if they're not hampered by our slightly different ideas.

RTE: Where do you see yourself going now?

GEORGIA: Our immediate plans are to redevelop the orphanage tutoring programs and to replicate the successes of ROOF's post-orphanage programs for a wider audience, whether that be near Moscow or in other Russian cities. We'd also like to work with the people from Inspiration, the wonderful center I spoke of for disabled children and orphans outside of Moscow, and we hope to develop more programs around Belskoye-Ustye. This is extremely important because this is the only psycho-neurological orphanage in all of the Russian Federation that has shown that its children can effectively learn. In 2008, they were given permission to open a state school inside the orphanage. This is unique in the whole Russian Federation. It shows that when you keep banging your head against the wall for a long time amazing things can happen.

ANDREW: It gets bloody, but the wall does come down.

GEORGIA: We can't take credit for that directly, but on the other hand just chipping away at this mentality has results. Now we are in a transition period where we have to figure out how to keep more and more of these children from going into adult institutions. We also need to think about doing the same things at other psycho-neurological orphanages. We need to reach more kids.

The two post-orphanage programs in Moscow are hugely successful, but they only have a capacity for 150 kids at any one time. There are three hundred or so orphanage graduates every year in Moscow, and some of them stay in the centers for a number of years, so the need is great.

ANDREW: When we again have children coming out of the orphanages who have been tutored at this higher level, they will want to finish their education so that they can move on into life.

RTE: Wonderful. How can we assist you as volunteers or with donations?

ANDREW: You can contact us and make donations on our website at www.roofnet.org. These children very much need your help, and in the end, we are all saving each other. ✦

Donations to ROOF can be made online at www.roofnet.org, or by check or postal money order to: Russian Orphan Opportunity Fund, 5200 Wind Point Drive, Racine, Wisconsin 53402, U.S.A.