

ThePromise Post



ThePromise works to improve the lives of disabled children in Russia. We do this by promoting a system of support (Portage) for disabled children in partnership with families and carers and by encouraging a more positive attitude to disability. The charity was founded in 2003 in memory of Ellie Settelen. For further details of the work, please visit our website: www.thepromise.org.uk

Hello Everyone

A very happy New Year to you all and I hope you enjoyed a peaceful Christmas!

I made a short trip to Russia, together with **Vicki**, one of our Trustees, at the beginning of December and continue to be inspired by all the wonderful work that is going on out there. We are so lucky to have such a dedicated Russian team who are so keen to learn new skills and pass them on to the children. We spent some time at **Yelatma** (the orphanage with older disabled children) with **Jo Wooster**, our physiotherapist and volunteer coordinator, who was working with **Tanya Van Dalen**, a volunteer Occupational Therapist, who drew on her sensory integration training to create programmes for the older ambulant children. Thank you to **Tanya** for all your time and commitment to the children. Your input was invaluable.

Vicki and I spent some time with **Igor (3)**, a lovely little boy on our community Portage project. His


mum, **Lena**, told us how well Igor is doing, thanks to the input of **Anya**, his Portage worker.



Igor with his portage worker, Anya

Igor had been diagnosed as Autistic. He used to be very shy, didn't connect with other people well, but although he had been given this diagnosis by the "commission", Lena was reluctant to actually register him as disabled. If she did this, it would

mean he would never be able to drive, attend mainstream school or vote. However, by not registering him, it means she is not entitled to the small allowance given to families of disabled children. It's an impossible situation for her, but she has faith that Igor can develop sufficiently for him to be re-assessed. She has every chance of doing this. Igor is now talking more, is much more independent in the house, is eating with a spoon and now enjoys the company of other children. We wish the family well and hope that Lena is able to realise her dream. All our projects put on small children's parties to celebrate our **5th birthday** with us! We had great fun watching the children and it was a wonderful opportunity for us all to celebrate the achievements of the past 5 years. Thank you to everyone who has played a part in our success, both in Russia and the UK. The difference you are making is life-changing!

Dash 

Working with the mobile children in Yelatma

I'm **Tanya Van Dalen** an Occupational Therapist. I work with autistic children and have experience of dealing with adults with learning disabilities and challenging behaviour.

In November I volunteered to visit the orphanage in **Yelatma** to work with the older children who are not receiving Portage. **ThePromise**, through **Jo Wooster**, prepared me fully for the trip. Before I knew it I had a visa, a plane ticket and had seen all the children, via DVD, to help me begin assessing them.

Jo and I went to **Yelatma** to assess the children in room 4, where the older disabled but mobile children are kept. They are put into the room after getting out of bed in the morning and are left there all day, every day - till bedtime. They are not given toys or played with and most of them will sit and rock to stimulate themselves. Some of them display distressing self stimulatory behaviour such as self harming. Sadly there are also a few verbal children in there who are able to interact and learn, but aren't given the opportunity. We learned that some of them had been kept in the room for most of their lives - some for more than 13 years. The aim of my short trip

was to assess all 13 of the young people in room 4 and to recruit 2 play workers to begin working with them daily.

What struck me most when I first walked into the orphanage was the smell. It seemed a contradiction - the floors were gleaming and I saw people mopping and cleaning but the air was heavy with the smell of urine and faeces. The children looked small, mal nourished and were all confined to bed. Many times during our few days there, Jo and I had to ask the carers to change a child - they would be lying in bed in their own mess and unable to do anything about it. There were also children that were tied to their beds or who were restrained in other ways. The answer for the staff is restraint, not trying to establish the motivation behind the behaviour and nor to find the solution to stopping it. But in between all of this heartache and suffering I watched the team of Portage workers taking children out of bed one by one. It was so wonderful to see their faces light up as they got to play and be held and loved by these woman. But the children in Room 4 are not appropriate for Portage and have received no input. Jo and I spent most of our time play-

ing with these children, whilst assessing their abilities and needs. We put together goals for each child, some as simple as getting them used to leaving Room 4 to come to the room we had set up for playing. Some couldn't understand what was happening and found it difficult. Some of them ran down the corridor, into the 'play room' and refused to leave when their time was up!



Children in room 4. Nikita is lying by the hot pipe for heat.

Two local women (**Sveta and Lena**) were recruited to work with the children in Room 4 - they had both attended the 3 day portage workshops run by **ThePromise** in October. We spent time with them, discussing what our assessments for each child were and giving goals for them. They

began work the day we left and are spending 4 hours a day, 5 days a week working with the children in Room 4, taking each child out individually for one to one sessions.



Nikita enjoying playing with new toy with Tanya and his new support worker Lena (left)

Jo and I will go back in February to assess progress and offer further training. I have not cried as much as I did on this trip. The children are so beautiful and so sad. **ThePromise** is small but powerful - changing lives and bringing hope. Most of us are unable to go to Russia, but we can all support **ThePromise** in some way, so they can continue to bring hope to the children in **Yelatma**.

Tanya Van Dalen
Volunteer Occupational Therapist 

5th Birthday in London, Ryazan and Yelatma

We celebrated our 5th Birthday on Thursday 16th October at the Headliners comedy club in Chiswick. Over 150 people attended and were entertained by the highly acclaimed **Shakespeare Revue Company**, who performed "RSVP" - a show specially devised to celebrate our birthday. Sincere thanks to the Shakespeare Revue Company for giving their time and talent to **ThePromise** and to our guests who helped us raise over £2,000 from the event.

At the beginning of December, we held three birthday parties for the children receiving Portage in Russia and their carers.



The children had great fun playing with balloons and bubbles and enjoying a birthday 'tea'. At the community

Thankyou

Thank you so much to everyone who has donated money or time to **ThePromise**. Special thanks go to **June Thompson** and **George Watson** who completed the epic and gruelling 500 km bike ride from St Petersburg to Moscow. In spite of some truly terrible conditions, they both completed the ride and raised an amazing £5,600.

Thanks to **Sarah Bernstone** and her daughters for raising £100 at their annual Easter Egg Hunt. Not only did the girls enjoy hunting for the eggs and playing 'Bunny Bingo' but they also did a second hand clothes sale on our behalf. Thanks also to **Mo Davey** who has been knitting beautiful jumpers for the children in Russia and to **Katie Froude** for organising a 'sponsored snoop' at her recently renovated house and raising £350.

We were very grateful to **Mary Riddle** and her prayer group for their donation of £100 toward the cost of a Kaye walker. This piece of equipment (which costs about £600) will help our children to walk. We now have a Kaye walker in both the Baby Home and the community and hope to get one soon for the children in **Yelatma**. Also our thanks to **Jill Walker** for her generous donation, and to **Colin Martin** from **Natural Expressions** for donating to **ThePromise** this year instead of giving Christmas gifts, and to **Brian Walker** for asking friends to donate to us instead of giving him gifts for his 80th Birthday.

Thanks also to the **Dalneigh and Bona Parish Church** for their continuing support through their prayer

event, it was a great opportunity for the parents to meet each other and provide mutual support.



Maxim at the Birthday Party
Our first Community Portage Child

The party at the baby home included live singing and dancing (by the children) and was a chance for us to meet up with those who have been involved with our work over the past five years.

In **Yelatma**, the children enjoyed being out of bed with their Portage workers and were intrigued by the sight and sounds of all the other children who they'd never seen before.



partner fund and from their Sunday School children who again made a "congregational" Christmas card for everyone to sign and make a donation, instead of sending individual cards to everyone. And our thanks to the carol singers of Ellesmere Road in Weybridge, who organised a carol singing evening.



The Ellesmere Road
Carol Singers

Residents were invited to either join the singing group, or bake cakes for them and stay at home and enjoy the carols. Around 25 singers raised £155. And finally, our sincere thanks go to **Clare McKeown** and her new husband **Chris** and **Julia Recht** and her new husband **Steve**. Both couples asked their wedding guests to donate to **ThePromise** in lieu of wedding presents. Thank you



Welcome to Joanie Speers, Trustee

We are delighted to welcome Joanie to our Board of Trustees. Joanie has significant experience in the charity sector including four years as Executive Director of the Theodora Children's Trust - a programme bringing fun and laughter to sick children in hospital through specially trained clowns. She is also a published author in the area of charity governance and recently completed a Masters in Voluntary Sector Management. Thank you so much, Joanie, for giving up your time to join our Board. We are looking forward to working with you!

International Volunteering & Jo's Work

I'm really pleased to report that **ThePromise International Volunteer Project** is taking shape and growing at an alarming, but very exciting rate! I've been inundated with people interested and pleading to volunteer in Russia and have already supported **Tanya Van Dalen**, on a trip recently, focusing on a new project working with the children in **room 4** (see Tanya's report) and the plans for this year are gathering speed fast.

The project aims to support both professional and non-professional volunteers. We try to tailor each volunteering experience individually - to meet both the needs of the children and the Portage teams, as well as the volunteers. We've been working hard to identify and prioritise the needs of the children in Russia, so as to have a clear idea of some of the people we would like to support as volunteers in the coming year. This will include a **Dietician, Speech and Language Therapist** and **Orthotist**, as well as further **Physio** and **Occupational Therapists**.

We are also really keen to support non-professional volunteers and I'm very excited to be putting in place a trip for three **gap year students** from the **Greycoat School** in London, this summer. They're busy fund-raising, so they can spend up to two months with children from the **Baby Home** in **Sushki Summer Camp 2009**. They already have fantastic sounding plans of providing games, crafts and music for the children during the summer. If you have the skill, experience or simply the enthusiasm to volunteer in Russia, please get in touch.

Jo Wooster
Volunteer Project Manager

jo.wooster@thepromise.org.uk



Sponsored Events

Here are **June Thompson** and **George Watson** having arrived in **Moscow** after their gruelling sponsored cycle ride from St Petersburg to Moscow. Well done George and June!

Why not get a group of your friends together to take on a challenge...and make a huge difference to the lives of disabled children at the same time. If you feel like having a go at a sponsored event please email:

janet.abbott@thepromise.org.uk



Calling all Angels!

Angels are a vital part of the **ThePromise** family. They are people who give a regular monthly donation to help our work. Many of our Angels have been supporting us since we starting working in Russia over 5 years ago and their donations have meant that we've been able to make longer term plans, secure in the knowledge that we have a regular source of income to pay for it.

As we look to the next 5 years, we would like to ask new supporters to consider donating to us in this way and maybe our existing Angels to consider increasing their monthly donation as our work continues to grow in its success. If you feel you can help, please print off an Angels donation form from our website...

http://www.thepromise.org.uk/ThePromise_Donation_Form.pdf