

ThePromise Post



ThePromise was set up to support the needs of disabled children in Russia: those living in orphanages and those living in the community. Our first project was to pilot an internationally acclaimed pre- school education system called 'Portage' to one baby home in Ryazan. This has been an enormous success and our work has now expanded to take Portage to many more disabled children in the Ryazan region. **ThePromise** is wonderfully supported in this vision by a growing band of fundraisers called 'Ellie's Angels', so called in memory of Ellie Settelen, who helped inspire the birth of **ThePromise**.

For further details of the work, please visit our website www.thepromise.org.uk

Hello Everyone

Having just returned from a project trip to Russia I wanted to update you personally on the remarkable changes you are enabling **ThePromise** to bring about and also to thank you for bringing so much light to so many little eyes.

The week was an extraordinary mixture of exhilaration at the absolutely unequivocal success of **ThePromise** and our work, and the enormity of the work still to be done to continue to improve the lives of these children.

The expansion at the baby home (orphanage for children aged 0 to 4 years) has been a huge success and **ThePromise** is now firmly embedded in the life of the home, typified by the fact that Portage is now part of the baby home's brochure! All disabled children over one year old now receive Portage and I saw gargantuan leaps in development in many of the children - for example, **Dasha** with Cerebral Palsy, who, a year ago, cried whenever she was taken off for Portage, could only slither around on the floor commando-style, and who was very nervous of new things. Now she never stops beaming, is affectionate, inquisitive and engaged with life. She is also starting to walk holding on to the hands of her Portage Worker. A far cry from the child I met a year ago.



Dasha

The success of the **Community Project** is overwhelming (see Karen's report) and everyone involved is totally committed to exploring ways of expanding this service in a way that allows the local authorities to take ownership of it, as well as finding other ways of supporting families to keep their disabled children at home and ensuring they receive the best package of care possible. This all helps limit the number of children being handed over to State care.

At the end of the trip, we spent a day at **Yelatma**, the orphanage for older disabled children. It's very hard to see these children confined to their cots, with no stimulation or toys and no one-to-one attention - the gentle low

moaning, the screaming, the noxious stench that pervades the orphanage, the rocking, the biting, the lost faces and empty eyes. I witnessed incredibly upsetting self stimulating behaviour that many of these children engage in. And I was horrified to learn that children I thought were aged between 4 and 6 were actually aged between 14 and 16. **This photo speaks for itself.**



But for those on our pilot project in this orphanage, life has improved beyond description. They are making huge strides forward every day. For these children we are making a huge difference.....and we are committed to making a difference to many more, as are the wonderful people with whom we work at **Yelatma**.

So much still to do, but thanks to your help, we have made such a powerful impact already, in such a short time. Please know that your support, in whatever form, is really transforming lives. I can personally vouch for that, having seen the smiles, the progress and the hope that has been kindled in so many eyes.

Thank you!
Have a very peaceful Christmas,

Sarah
Sarah Settelen



Comings and Goings

It is with enormous sadness that we say goodbye to **Karen Edwards**, our **Programme Manager** in **Ryazan**. She is leaving us to return to the UK, and we simply cannot thank her enough for the all she has done in taking a dream and turning it into a reality. We salute her amazing capacity to nurture her growing team of dedicated portage workers, at the same time as tirelessly networking throughout the community and establishment in order to reach those who can help to make a

difference. Thank you Karen, from the bottom of our hearts. We could not have done this without you.

We also wish to warmly welcome **Wendy Tabuteau**, who joins us from **RedR** (another larger international NGO) in January 07 as our new **Director**. She will be responsible for liaising with and managing our Russian team, and managing the organisational and fundraising aspects of our rapidly growing charity. She has already visited Ryazan and seen for

herself what has been done, and how much there is still to do, and is looking forward to getting her teeth into it all. **Welcome aboard Wendy!**



Wendy

Proof of the pudding...

Our Portage advisor, **Mollie White**, along with **Karen Edwards**, have recently published their research report on the pilot Portage project. In it they show the children who receive Portage develop 3.6 times faster than before they went on the project. That's an incredible increase, and just shows how valuable Portage is to these children. Copies of their report are available from post@thepromise.org.uk and a summary will soon be available on our website.

Letter from Russia

Hello from snowy **Ryazan**. I thought I'd concentrate on telling you a little about our community Portage project in this newsletter.

The project is going extremely well; we now have five part-time, and very enthusiastic, community Portage volunteers and a senior community Portage worker, **Nina Davydova** who works full-time. All our community volunteers are students at the Ryazan state university where they study in the psychology department.

Home visiting is something new in Ryazan. At the beginning, parents were a little apprehensive about Portage workers visiting them. Now parents have got to know the Portage workers better they see them as a friend they trust and see the weekly visit as an important opportunity to share their child's successes, discuss progress and talk through problems. It is refreshing for the families to have someone who talks about their child's achievements rather than about what the child is unable to do.

Since the community project began three of our Portage children now attend pre-school. This is a big accomplishment as the general attitude of such services is to exclude children who are different in any way. Because this has happened, two of our mum's have been able to return to some form of work which has a positive effect on the family as a whole.

I'd like to finish by sharing with you some of the children's progress. **Sergei** is a lively little boy who has cerebral palsy. He is starting to clap



his hands copying his mum. He can now hold and drink from a cup using both hands despite having some

problems controlling his head. **Sergei** is now learning to show what a big boy he is by raising his arms as high as he can.

Vanya also has cerebral palsy and made his mum's life much easier by mastering how to eat food with a



spoon independently. Now that his winter he has learned the much needed skill of taking a hat on and off his head. He is having fun learning how to drink using a straw.

Dennis is a little boy who has Downs syndrome. He can now entertain his

brother and sister by pointing at his nose when he's asked where his nose is. He has now learned to push 3 cubes as if they were a train which



he enjoys and he can now pick up objects individually and put them in and out of containers.

Karen



Sitting Pretty

In September this year, **Karen** invited **Jean Westmacott** to come out to Russia from the UK and run a course on **Appropriate Paper Technology (APT)**. We were concerned that none of the children who were receiving Portage had any specialist seating, and many were finding it hard to participate fully in the portage activities. This was particularly true for those children at Yelatma. APT is an extraordinary system whereby furniture and special equipment is made from paper, cardboard and glue, resulting in structures that are not only as solid as wood, but that are also made to measure for each child. Not only that, a typical APT specialist chair costs about **£2** to make, whereas a new chair just like it would cost up to **£1000!** We think this is quite something! Everywhere we work, many children are now sitting beautifully in perfectly fitting chairs and our Portage

team is continuing to make chairs, balance boards and standing frames for even more children! Thank you Jean, and well done Karen for a great idea!



Nastya and her APT chair

Our Huge Thanks!

To **The Ian Mactaggart Trust** and **The Barbara Ward Children's Foundation** for their ongoing support, to **CIBC World Markets** and to so many of you who continue to support us in so many different ways, including **Buckhorn Weston Ladies Group**, the **Peppers** in their delicatessen and



Mollie Ward and **Megan Gerrard** who raised £33.00 making and selling jewellery on the street where they live. Also to **Surbiton High school** who raised an incredible £586.07, and to the **Chislehurst Rotary Club** for their wonderful support. You are all amazing!

Our Christmas Appeal

Nastya is just 5½, has heart problems, a learning disability and is unable to walk. She lives in the orphanage at **Yelatma**, deep in the countryside, hidden from society. Because of the social stigma attached to disability, and the lack of state support, she was abandoned at birth. As a result of her inability to walk, she has been confined to bed all her life. She has no toys to play with, and is even fed in bed. Due to a severe lack of resources, she has never experienced the loving attention or stimulation she so desperately needs.

Since bringing Portage to 10 bed-bound children at Yelatma 5 months ago, **ThePromise** has witnessed astonishing progress. Now Nastya, who had no skills whatsoever before, is a smiling, responsive child walking with a frame, feeding herself with a spoon, eating solid food for the first time and is starting to make babbling sounds. This star-

ling progress is typical of the giant leaps forward made once these disabled children receive Portage.



Nastya Walking

This Christmas, **ThePromise** has launched an Appeal to raise **£10,000** in order to bring Portage to more profoundly disabled children in the former "closed" orphanage where Nastya lives. **Can you help?** Please contact us if you can.

Our DVD

We now have a wonderful new DVD to help in our fundraising and communications.

"**Promising Children a Future**" is 16 minutes long and shows with astounding clarity the power of Portage and the remarkable changes that we have been witnessing both in the children and in the attitudes of people involved in their lives. **Mary Sprent**, who filmed and directed it, is a long time supporter of **ThePromise** and donated 100's of hours to make this happen. So thank you Mary for being so generous with your time and huge talent. The film is beautifully narrated by **Barbara Flynn**, to whom also many thanks for giving your time so willingly. And thanks to everyone else without whom this project would never have succeeded.

Why not organise a coffee morning or dinner party where you can show the film and spread the word? Or encourage your children's school to watch it in the hope that they may nominate us as their charity? You can obtain a copy of the DVD and ideas for fundraising events by contacting us at:

post@thepromise.org.uk

Christmas cards

Well done, and thank you to **Millie Wolter** (aged 4½) and **Sophie Hey** (aged 9) who designed our fabulous Christmas cards this year having won our competition. They each won Argos vouchers for their efforts! And thank you to all of you who supported us by buying them. We will run another competition next year so get your thinking caps on!

